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The multimedia opportunity for a smart partnership

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MALAYSIA and the Australian State of Victoria talk the same language when it comes to recognising the huge potential multimedia has to transform their economies.

Victoria's Minister for Multimedia Alan Stockdale is on record as having described Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's plans to implement the Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor as a "bold and significant" initiative.

"Dr Mahathir's prescience in recognising the potential which the multimedia revolution has to benefit Malaysia will certainly drive the country's efforts to stake a claim for itself as a major player in what is one of the world's fastest growing industries," Stockdale told Business Times.

Stockdale, who was instrumental as Victoria's Treasurer (Finance Minister) in managing a major turnaround of the state's finances, is now recognised as one of Australia's leading multimedia advocates.

Since being appointed last year as Minister for Multimedia by the Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, Stockdale, who still holds Victoria's Treasury portfolio, has immersed himself in the industry.

The appointment and creation of the new portfolio signals the Victorian Government's placement of multimedia as one of its top priorities.

As Malaysia now moves to implement its Vision 2020, so too is Victoria moving ahead with its Victoria 21 strategy, which aims to ensure its citizens benefit from the development of knowledge-based economy which has arisen with the take-up of new multimedia and information technology applications, the convergence of communications, broadcasting and computing, the development of the Internet and globalisation of industry activity.

Not unlike Dr Mahathir, Stockdale has made it clear that he also recognises the importance of regional cooperation in making South-East Asia a global information and communication centre of excellence.

A major focus in his address to the Malaysia Australia University Alumni Convention in Kuala Lumpur last October was the importance he attached to Victoria's increasing role in enhancing the relationship between Malaysia and Australia through the use of multimedia technology.

"There are real opportunities for Australia and Malaysia to join together as the catalysts in promoting a neighbouring network in which all the Asia-Pacific share beneficial outcomes," Stockdale said.

He pointed to a number of linkages that already exist between Malaysia and Victoria, particularly in the area of education, including the Adorna Institute of Management - a joint venture project between Adorna and Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).

A consortium of Australian universities led by Melbourne-based La Trobe University is currently working closely with the Peladang Kimia Bhd group to establish the Nilai International College.

"What these ventures provide is the opportunity to increase electronic educational interchange between our two countries," Stockdale said.

In other areas, Australian software companies are actively seeking out joint ventures and investment by Malaysian companies for the development of education content, games and entertainment software.

The opportunities, through "smart partnership", to expand the innovation, creativity and intellectual property of both parties are

enormous. The logic supporting communications and multimedia partnerships between Malaysia and Australia, particularly Malaysia and Victoria, are compelling.

"Like Prime Minister Dr Mahathir, we believe that collaboration can lead to a mutual enrichment that easily outstrips the short-term, opportunistic benefits of the unnetworked world," Stockdale said.

There are a number of similarities between the Malaysian and Victorian governments' strategies to embrace multimedia. "Dr Mahathir has described a paperless government to operate in the new administrative centre of Putrajaya. In Victoria, we aim to deliver all government services electronically by the year 2001," he said.

Victoria's Electronic Service Delivery (ESD) project aims to provide the world's first fully accessible state and local government service to the citizens and businesses of Victoria using multimedia and telecommunication applications.

The Victorian Government is working with the private sector for the on-line delivery of government services through avenues such as multimedia kiosks, the Internet, cable television in the home, and the telephone. Trials have already begun, and an initial 30 multimedia kiosks are scheduled to be in place this September.

Stockdale believes that there is also enormous potential for collaboration between Malaysia and Victoria in the development of a "paperless government". Telemedicine is another area where collaborative ventures can provide mutual benefit.

Victoria's health infrastructure capabilities already include communications between patients in rural areas and centrally located medicine specialists, supported by computing power to view and transmit X-rays, magnetic resonance imaging and CAT scans.

The establishment of networks between hospitals in Melbourne and Malaysia could result in the formation of international clinical testbeds for the development, trial and commercialisation of innovative multimedia-based health care products and services.

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