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Microsoft

A PEEK INTO THE FUTURE WITH BILL GATES

By: Haryati Karim

KUALA LUMPUR, March 8 (Bernama) -- Malaysians will have an insight into Bill Gates' vision of the community of the future from the Microsoft founder himself when he makes his first visit here on March 18.

Gates will be sharing three concepts of a Connected Learning Community, Web Lifestyle and Digital Nervous System with an expected 3,000 audience at the Putra World Trade Centre.

"The three visions are really about transforming our current economy from the industrial base to the information age and Bill wants to help people understand what opportunity the information technology can offer," said Microsoft Malaysia general manager Benedict Lee in an interview with Bernama.

"Bill is very excited about these ideas. The Connected Learning Community is the most exciting vision he ever had," he said.

Lee said during his one-day visit, Gates was also very keen to see developments in Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) of which he is a member of its International Advisory Panel (IAP).

The 42-year-old Gates who topped the Forbes list of richest men for 1996 and 1997 from his world-wide software empire did not attend the second IAP meeting held here recently.

While here, Gates will also have a meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who is chairman of the IAP and the primary force behind the MSC.

Lee explained that the Connected Learning Community is specially designed for education and it provides interactions within and between schools, homes and the larger community of learning resources via the Internet and an online personal computer.

A project was conducted by Microsoft in Harlem, New York last year and it yielded positive results.

It was found that schools were able to get youths off the streets by getting them hooked to the computer.

"The students were allowed to take the Notebook home to do their school work. It kept them occupied and it even got the parents involved in as well," Lee said.

The key players of the concept are teachers, students and parents as well as the broader community.

"For these three to optimise their contribution and efforts, they need to be well-connected. We are talking about connecting the parents, teachers and students. When everything is connected, you will find the interaction is better," said Lee who is optimistic of its success.

"As a parent I can come home at night and log on to the computer and keep tab of what my son has studied today," said Lee.

Information of their children's assignments, projects and tests would even be accessible to parents. More importantly, participation from the rest of the family could be brought into the learning process of a student.

"When we say people tend to be hesitant about new technology, just look at the behaviour of young children. They have absolutely no fear," he said.

On the Digital Nervous System, Lee said it was designed to help management and government use technology to provide more efficient services.

"If you are a CEO, how do you get all your employees coordinated and work on a common business objective? The concept is that rather than

relying on telephones and meetings, we just tie them up into a digital nervous system and through a personal computer," said Lee.

This would help the government sector improve its services when dealing with the public.

Asked if senior managers would be willing to revolutionise its internal operations, Lee answered: "Senior managers would not dispute that change is a way of life. As the economy deregulates and becomes more liberalised, our businessmen would start coming into contact with others globally."

Lee lauded the Malaysian government's move towards an electronic government.

"If the government hadn't announced electronic government as one of the seven flagships in the MSC, we would all be disappointed.

"The fact that the government had actually put their own faith in themselves, to use technology that would allow Malaysians enjoy better level of service shows that there is real leadership in action in our government," he said. -- BERNAMA

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