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`Ensure local firms gain from MSC'

reports on "Dewan Negara" by Ramlan Said; Hayati Hayatudin  
THE Government has been urged to ensure that local companies, especially small and medium enterprises, benefit from the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor.

In making this proposal, Senator Datuk Ghazi Ramli said foreign and multinational companies awarded the MSC's flagship applications should be asked to get the involvement of local companies and the SMIs.

"The experience gained in developing the country's economy where the locals benefited from their partnership with foreign companies should be continued," he said while debating the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission Bill 1998.

Ghazi said the time had also come for the Government to develop major projects in multimedia like the creation of a national website, which could be called the Malaysian Integration Action On-Line.

"Creating a website containing a complete information of the country in various fields will help, including countering the spreading of rumours."

He said opposition from critics should not hinder any plan to venture into giant multimedia projects as the success attained would silence them, citing as example the bold move by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in developing the country's automobile industry through the establishment of Proton many years ago.

He said giant projects were crucial due to the spin-off they created.

Ghazi urged local expertise and capabilities in information technology be pooled and not allowed to "mushroom on their own" as a comprehensive and integrated approach would have a bigger impact.

On the powers vested in the commission, Ghazi said they were too vast, thus the importance of proper supervision by the government through the Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Ministry.

Senator Datuk Dr T. Marimuthu wanted to know whether the Bill contained provisions to deal with quarters who spread malicious rumours like using the Internet.

He cited Friday's incident in which the city was gripped by rumours of disturbances in the Chow Kit area.

However, he argued that if the Bill had provided certain powers to the authorities to censor information, it would run contrary to the assurance by the government that the Internet would not be subject to any form of censorship.

Senator Kamalia Ibrahim felt the five-member composition of the commission was too small and needed to be enlarged.

She said as multimedia and communication were industries which encountered rapid changes, the commission needed the service of many experts to ensure it could function efficiently.

Kamalia suggested the commission enlist the service of experts by appointing them as members of its technical sub-committees.

Senator Dr Yeow Seng Huat warned everyone to be on guard against attempts to recolonise the country through the use of multimedia and communication technologies.

He also said emphasis needed to be given on research and development in the industry.

On the commission, he said it faced a daunting task especially in making all Malaysians computer-literate, and issued a caution over the negative elements of the IT to the young generation.

Senator N. Marimuthu praised the government over its commitment in IT despite the economic downturn.

But he said the advancement in IT and multimedia technology would be a setback to the country if they were not utilised accordingly or misused.

"For instance, it can lead to the outflow of national secrets," he said adding, however, that "the penalties (for such offences) are sufficient to deter offenders".

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