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Gates: MSC a far-sighted initiative

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - Bill Gates, co-founder and head of software giant Microsoft Corporation, has lauded the Multimedia Super Corridor as a far-sighted initiative that will enable Malaysia to "move to the forefront of modern industry".

In an opinion piece he wrote for the New Sunday Times (see Page 12), Gates noted that Malaysia was putting technology at the centre of its plans to become a fully developed nation by 2020.

Gates, who will make a one-day visit here on Wednesday, said he was excited by the MSC's potential to revamp bureaucracy, businesses, education and lifestyles.

He said the project's flagship applications were part of the "digital nervous system" and "web lifestyle," which would allow the Government and businesses to use technology to provide better and richer information.

He singled out Tenaga Nasional Berhad's Call Management Centre, a power outage reporting and tracking system as an example of how IT could improve the quality of life.

Gates, acknowledged by many to be a technological visionary, is a member of the MSC's International Advisory Panel, which is headed by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

Gates also welcomed the Government's continued commitment to the MSC despite the current economic situation.

"The Malaysian Government's commitment in proceeding with both the Electronic Government and Smart School flagship projects despite the current economic turmoil is very commendable."

"It sends a strong signal to the foreign community on the national will to use IT in the broader economy, and will encourage further participation and investment in the MSC."

Gates predicted the MSC initiatives would bring changes that would also encompass the level of Malaysia's competitiveness globally.

"I anticipate that over time, these initiatives will help to stimulate local businesses and enable (them) to compete in the region and worldwide."

"They apply not just to large ... or high-technology businesses. They can help small businesses become much more efficient and productive, and expand - without having to invest substantially - to reach new customers."

Gates, however, urged the Government to continue being on the helm of dealing with several issues which, if left unresolved, could thwart the growth of the Internet and personal computer technologies.

Among his concerns were for anti-piracy assurances to protect intellectual property on the Internet and encryption standards to safeguard confidentiality of financial transactions and private information on the Internet.

He called for telecommunications deregulation to bring down costs and encourage competition, and also said that innovation had to be allowed without heavy government regulation.

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