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Microsoft totally supportive of MSC

IN conjunction with the visit of Bill Gates to Kuala Lumpur tomorrow, we invited readers to submit questions to be answered by Gates.

Below are five questions answered by Gates.

Another five will be answered personally by Gates during his keynote address at the seminar themed The Connected Community tomorrow. The five who submitted the questions will also be invited by Microsoft to attend the seminar.

All the 10 winners will also be receiving a hamper each comprising these Microsoft items:

1. Encarta 98
2. Home Essentials
3. Microsoft Puzzle Collection
4. Greetings Workshop Delux
5. PictureIt!
6. Age of Empires
7. Internet Explorer 4.0 CD-ROM
8. IntelliMouse
9. Mousepad
10. T-shirt
11. Car Sticker

Q: How is the MSC expected to help propel Malaysia to its next level of development and what is Microsoft's role in the MSC?

- Huza Radzi Mohamad, C1-3-1 Desa Pandan, Kuala Lumpur

Gates: The MSC is a critical initiative in bringing Malaysia's industrial economy into the information or knowledge economy via its focus on creating and facilitating a test-bed for the new knowledge-based products and services.

The challenges are immense when one considers the social, cultural and national transformations implied. The MSC vision has addressed all these dimensions via its flagship applications, its special physical and legal (soft) infrastructures and the free flow of knowledge workers.

Microsoft is totally supportive of the MSC and we are finalising our involvement in it. Our deliberate approach is to ensure that we are able to synergise our heritage and resources with the local partners and community.

One of the areas we are exploring more deeply is how we can help Malaysia supplement the MSC's demand for IT professionals. We are identifying the skills needed by graduates to excel in the MSC environment, and supplement their curriculum content to ensure they acquire the necessary skills to participate in the MSC.

Another area we are looking into is the possible localisation of existing technologies. Once identified, we can structure a skills transfer programme to local developers, thereby enabling the growth of a local software industry.

Q: It is hoped the MSC will be the R&D centre for information-based industries. But what would attract IT companies from other parts of the world to physically locate their R&D facilities here? How will MSC turn Kuala Lumpur into a hub of East Asian software development?

- Khor Poh Hoon, 4 Jalan Sarjana 2, Taman Connaught, Cheras

Gates: This is a good question. Malaysia faces a great deal of competition in this goal worldwide, and it is not something that happens overnight.

I think there are several "ingredients" that must work together. Government support to create the environment through laws and infrastructure is the most important, and the MSC is a good example.

The Government also needs to make sure the right IPR laws are in place, and that multinationals have the right incentives to make the large investment required.

Another element is education. Any country that wants to compete in this area must focus on producing the skilled workers needed. That's a very long-term commitment.

Lastly, like any company in the industry, countries need to have an environment where companies can be nimble to react to market changes.

Q: The term 'Digital Nervous System' sounds like nothing more than a slick marketing term to push MS products. How will it help me, a businessman and an entrepreneur?

- Mohd Azlan Amran, 17A Jalan Rusa, Kampung Klang Gate Baru, Setapak  
Gates: The digital nervous system is the concept that information technology can empower business by improving its core processes and improving its response to the business environment.

It's important to have a concept to enable people to visualise and internalise the idea, much like Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's Vision 2020. 'Vision' conveys a future and '2020' conveys perfect eyesight. Combined, it conveys a future state in which Malaysians will enjoy a higher quality of life.

Concepts are valuable because they crystallise an idea, so that in time, people will come to associate it with its potential and benefits. In the same way that people associate Vision 2020 with a developed and mature Malaysia, people will soon associate the DNS with an organisation that is fast, responsive and proactive due to its IT infrastructure.

Technology can also help bring all the best minds of a company together to provide more innovation and solutions, and it can bring companies closer to customers. It's really about the digital revolution.

If you focus on providing a great flow of information to your employees, your ability to act, react and adapt to the business environment improves enormously.

You could build a great DNS from a variety of technologies. Microsoft has focused on building an architecture specifically to enable companies to develop a DNS.

Q: What is your advice to a country like Malaysia which wants to set up smart school initiatives? The PC penetration rate in schools is quite low here.

- Lee Yung Tyng, 110 Jalan SS25/4, Taman Jaya Mewah, Petaling Jaya  
Gates: The single most important use of technology is in education. If we all accept this, it is clear that the Smart School initiative is more than a right initiative: it is an imperative.

It is a daunting task, but one that will reap benefits a 100-fold.

Wiring up schools is a tremendous task, not only in Malaysia but in other countries. As with any large task, breaking it into smaller and achievable tasks ensures success.

The low PC penetration can be viewed as an opportunity as current investments can buy multi-media and Internet-enabled PCs, that in earlier years would have seen fewer functionalities.

With a transformation in the teaching process to one of learning and facilitation, that involves students, teachers, parents and the broader community, the Smart School initiative can only gain a momentum that is un-stoppable.

Q: Do you think Malaysia has moved closer towards a connected global community? Other than the MSC, what else should the government and

business do to make this a reality?

- Liew Wai Kuen, 14 Jalan Jintan Manis, Taman Supreme, Kuala Lumpur  
Gates: Malaysia, like any country, is already part of a connected global community, as recent market events have shown. One key lesson from recent events is that management and communication of information is paramount.

A quality Digital Nervous System is invaluable as it gathers information, analyses and projects various scenarios, before pro-actively adopting defensive or offensive strategies.

Being connected into the global community is the first step. To really leverage and participate (globally and in the MSC), governments and businesses need to acquire an internal DNS that prepares and enables them to be electronic participants. That DNS can help create a corporate culture that excels in this new environment.

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