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`MSC not affected by country's turmoil'

Malcolm Rosario

THE current economic and political turmoil will have little effect on the country's ambitious Multimedia Super Corridor, said Sun Microsystems Inc chief scientist John Gage.

Gage, who is also on the advisory committee for the MSC, said the project is not simply about the Malaysian Government investing in a series of fancy pilot projects but a change in the attitude and involvement of Malaysians in IT, something that has already taken place.

"I don't really know about the extent of economic or political stability, but I believe none of this will have much of an effect on Malaysia's transformation into a technology economy," Gage told Malaysian reporters at Sun's press symposium held in Bangkok over the weekend.

He credited Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad for having done a good thing by initiating the MSC, an area dedicated to the development of IT in all aspects, including education, administration, business and leisure.

"...but it is not the Prime Minister's or the Malaysian Government's role to actually do the work which involves creating new companies, educating the people and coming up with new ideas - elements that are crucial for the development of information technology," he added.

"Certainly what the Government does or fails to do can slow the people down, but it cannot stop the hundreds of thousands or maybe even millions of Malaysians who now believe that technology is their future.

"This is why I believe that no one can stop the transformation of the Malaysian people. I believe they will continue with projects such as increasing education, increasing network connectivity and increasing the use of electronic commerce and other things that are necessary to achieve their goal," Gage said.

Commenting on whether foreign companies are as confident as he is as far as the MSC is concerned, Gage said the investment plans for foreign companies are determined by some degree by the economic and political climate.

"Although this is so, no one out there has a real fear of doing business in Malaysia because no matter what the country's current problems are, it does not alter the base of the talent of the people and their dedication to creating something.

"It is unprecedented that the chairmen of the world's largest computer, communications and high technology companies have all come to Malaysia to spend two full days at a hotel, talking to a country's head of state about the technical directions of the country," he added.

Gage said that if the country continues to invest in education, which is the primary and most critical investment, Malaysians will find themselves in some of the top high technology companies around the world and possibly even forming some of these companies themselves.

He said all it takes is for someone with the required capabilities to create something new.

"The networking of all educational institutions is a critical step forward in the training process and this should continue in spite of the economic difficulties."

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