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50 lucky youngsters picked to be club's pioneer members

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - Applicants for the Microsoft-New Straits Times Young Programmers Club should check their e-mail over the next few days - they may be among 50 lucky youngsters chosen to be the club's pioneer members.

MyPC organisers, who received more than 2,000 applications for membership, have selected the club's first 50 members based on the applicants' experience, knowledge and ideas.

Ten outstanding applicants today received two multimedia edutainment software packages and a Microsoft T-shirt from New Straits Times Press group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin, in a ceremony at Suria KLCC shopping complex here.

The top 10 MyPC pioneers were Adrian Mahalingam, Ahmad Fariz Hanapiah, G. Anandasurian, Jasmin Kaur Sidhu, Ng Ben Jinn, Predeep Nambiar, Syed Muhammad Muaz Syed Abdullah, Tengku Nizam Tengku Maruan, Teh Kung Hwah and Teoh Wei Chin.

Ahmad Fariz, of Klang, said he hoped to improve his programming skills and get to know other IT enthusiasts through the club's activities.

The 14-year-old enjoys designing web-pages and has set up a web-site for his entire family, as well as a soccer web-site at <http://members.xoom.com/Selangor>, which has attracted more than 2,000 visitors since January.

One of the youngest applicants, 10-year-old Jasmin, of Jalan Ipoh, won over MyPC organisers with her knowledge of Visual Basic programming.

"I like exploring new things over the Internet, but I also like experimenting with office set-up programmes," said Jasmin, who hopes to develop an office software package for her late father's clinic.

Although she admires Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, Jasmin's main role model is her mother, freelance IT consultant Nermal Kaur.

"My daughter has been interested in computers since she was seven years old, but she really got serious about it last year and spent a lot of time on it during her holidays," Nermal said.

Ng Ben Jinn, 14, of Batu Pahat, combined his IT skills and concern for the environment to come up with a song for an environmental web-site, www.geocities.com/siliconvalley/3390/rainf.html.

"There is a lot of euphoria about IT now, and programmes like MyPC will help develop the skilled IT workforce Malaysia needs to move into the Information Age," said Ng, whose other interests include tennis.

Proud mother Teh Phei Choo, whose son Kung Hwah was among the 10 pioneers, said parents should let their children become confident in handling the computer on their own instead of making rigid rules and schedules for them.

"I am a bit particular about what sites my son visits, but otherwise I think parents should let children experiment with the computer on their own.

"After all, to be good programmers, they need to be exposed to different kinds of programmes.

"Nowadays, children know where they are going better than we do," she said.

Another MyPC pioneer parent, Dr Syed Abdullah Syed Othman, agreed, adding:

"I encourage my son to develop his interests instead of what I want him to be interested in.

"Of course, I want him to have a well-balanced life, so it is good that he also enjoys soccer and doesn't spend all his time sitting in front of the computer."

MyPC co-ordinator Daniel Tsen said the 40 other members would be notified within the next few days.

Earlier, Kadir said the 10 pioneers were Malaysia's best hope to leap into the Information Age, adding that it was important to identify and guide the development of their IT skills from an early age.

"With us today are talented and bright young Malaysians who have proven their ability in the field of programming and software development.

"With their help, Malaysia may emerge not only as one of the world's biggest software users, but, more importantly, among its biggest content providers.

"With help from these talented and bright young citizens who have proven their ability in programming and software development, Malaysia may emerge not only as one of the world's biggest software users, but also among its biggest developers," he said.

"Who knows, in the year 2000, these youngsters may not only be using Windows 2000 but among those creating it."

Kadir said the Government, in establishing the Multimedia Super Corridor as a catalyst for the growth of local IT and multimedia industries, had also opened up many opportunities for the public to contribute towards its success.

"The involvement of the people is important, as the MSC will need many IT experts and we must be ready to fill the many vacancies to achieve the national goal of becoming a developed nation by the desired date," he said.

MyPC is a programme to discover and nurture young programming talent in Malaysia and will complement the Multimedia Super Corridor with its mission to promote software development as one of the key careers of the future.

Aimed at giving the next generation of software developers a head start, the programme was launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Microsoft chairman and CEO Bill Gates on March 18.

MyPC's activities will largely be conducted through e-mail mentoring.

However, there will also be field trips to selected IT companies and meetings with professional software developers.

Hewlett-Packard Sales Malaysia has pledged to contribute RM1 million worth of computer hardware and software over the next three years, as well as the services of 150 to 200 of its engineering staff to act as mentors.

The programme is managed by Brave & Bold Sdn Bhd CEO Derrik Khoo.

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