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US firm unfazed by Asian currency woes

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INVESTMENTS in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) are long-term and not likely to be affected by recent currency problems in Asian countries, according to a member of the MSC International Advisory Panel (IAP).

Silicon Graphics World Trade chairman Bob Bishop said the company expects to see a substantial gain from its involvement in the MSC only after three to five years.

"As a long-term investor, the currency problem will not jeopardise our plans to team up with training organisations in Malaysia to train people to use the latest technology to improve their products.

"The problem is a financial issue and not an economic issue. It will not hinder Malaysia's capability, especially in the design and manufacturing sector," he told reporters in Cyberjaya yesterday.

The currency problem, Bishop said, is not expected to affect the environment and the capabilities of Malaysia in using technology to produce high-quality cars and electrical appliances.

"We will be only concerned if this problem continues for the next two to three years. However, the currency problem might cause a slowdown and a stagnant period of growth in business for us.

"In the long term, we are not worried as revenue from the investment will only be realised after three to five years," he said.

The company, which is active in digital content production, is now working with Universiti Telekom Malaysia and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak on content production and product design training.

"Currently, Asean is a very small contributor to the group but it is getting significantly more important. The Asia-Pacific region contributes between 20 and 25 per cent of Silicon Graphics' overall revenue. Asean countries only make up to 10 per cent of Asia Pacific's contribution," he said.

Bishop hopes to increase Asean countries' contribution to the group's revenue to 5 per cent of overall business in five years.

This, he said, is because there is no shortage of brains and motivated people in Asean countries who are interested in and understand high-technology.

Bishop is here to attend the Second IAP meeting, which begins today. The two-day meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will update members on the status of MSC infrastructure development.

The meeting is also expected to debate the second phase, which deals more with implementation and the practical side to get "things rolling and moving".

When asked if the meeting is expected to come up with a consensus, Bishop said the meeting is aimed at informing Dr Mahathir about ideas which are good and can be implemented in the MSC.

"The Information Technology field is not geared this way; we will share our ideas and it is up to Malaysia to decide and choose the best to leapfrog the country ... Malaysia has to be bold enough to grasp the leading edge," he said.

His company, he said, is willing to transfer knowledge to locals. However, he said, to retain knowledge workers, there must be motivation and the environment must allow an open flow of resources.

Founded in 1982, Silicon Graphics has 10,000 employees and four offices in Asean nations and several others worldwide. Headquartered in Mountain

View, California, the company's manufacturing facilities are in California, Wisconsin and Switzerland.

Silicon Graphics' stock is traded on the New York Stock Exchange, and the firm is said to be the world leader in high-performance computing technology.

The company's systems range from desktop workstations and servers to supercomputers. In addition, Silicon Graphics provides innovative software for design, Internet and entertainment applications.

The key industries served by the company include manufacturing, government, entertainment, communications, energy, science and education.

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