

02/06/1999

## Preparing for the change

THE Information Technology revolution is irreversible. Two years after Malaysia's quantum leap into the IT Age with the take-off of the Multimedia Super Corridor, the introduction of an all-in-one smart card is an expected development. It is part and parcel of the seven flagship applications being developed for the MSC, notably electronic government and a national multipurpose smart card. The move is a clear and urgent signal to all Malaysians that this reality is already at their doorstep and they must be prepared for the change.

While the Government Multipurpose Card to simplify transactions with the administration is not mandatory and will initially involve just the two million people living in the MSC and Kuala Lumpur, it is advisable that all get used to the idea of having such a smart card as soon as possible. For a start, it will be mandatory only for first-time identity card applicants and those seeking replacements for loss or damage to this vital document. But the plan is that the card will not only incorporate the IC, driving licence, passport and other personal data but will also act as a E-cash card.

Exhorting Malaysians to make a head-start in embracing IT began with the launch of the MSC, a pilot project for harmonising the entire nation with the global forces shaping the Information Age. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has been tirelessly impressing upon Malaysians that it is imperative they be conversant with IT lest they be left behind. To ignore the change will be both counter-productive and self-deluding as it is impossible to stop the cyberwaves. Now that the country is well into the process of expanding information technology in all spheres, it would be disastrous if the people were way behind.

As the competitive millennium nears and only those with knowledge will advance, the importance of computer literacy cannot be overemphasised. All should master the technology and derive maximum benefits from it. It is quite obvious that with the increasing integration of IT in all areas of the people's lives, from work to play, the day will soon come that those who are ignorant will be left out. Worse, they may find themselves not able to go about their daily lives as IT plays a significant part in it. For instance, it will not be preposterous to suggest that the day may not be that far away when electronic banking is the norm and banks no longer have counter services. It is an apt advice that executives at higher management levels should not rely entirely on secretaries to perform technical tasks. They should learn at least basic computer operations.

Despite the economic slowdown, it is a step in the right direction that the Government is boosting the allocation for the development of the MSC under the Mid-Term Review of the Seventh Malaysia Plan. In tandem with this, it is heartening to see that the authorities emphasising the need to promote electronic literacy. Nothing short of a big national push to aggressively develop IT in all States and in the public and private sectors would suffice. Meanwhile, the people should not fall prey to some Western efforts to put a damper on this vital national technological advance. Those who glibly echo the unsubstantiated criticisms, should not lose sight of the fact that Dr Mahathir's vision of a knowledge-based society is also the collective vision of Malaysians. Thus, the project should not be allowed to fail.

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