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Digital divide saves us from the Love Bug

Jeff Ooi

READING a recent issue of Time magazine, I was inspired into some reflections.

When the Love Bug paralysed computers around the world, Malaysia was shielded from the menace. But, it wasn't because our Internet security was more superior than the West.

It is because we are less wired up to the Net. For a population of 22 million, our Internet account holders barely reach 10 per cent.

More than 45 million computers around the globe have been infected by the Love Bug, according to a California research firm.

It is an irony that such a digital divide could safeguard us from the virus.

So the saying goes: Ignorance is bliss. But in the Internet Age, doing things in real time is way too slow.

Futurists say in three years the Internet is doomed to play to the rules of the jungle: survival of the fittest.

When Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad initiated the Multimedia Super Corridor in 1995, China, for example, was an outpost compared to our country in the K-model, I-model, E-model - or whatever fashionable term one may use to identify oneself with the Net explosion.

In China, there wasn't a Multimedia Development Corp or Mimos Bhd. Even its "Silicon Alley" - Zongguanchun - is no better than Chow Kit Road in terms of merchants and merchandise.

But now the tables have been turned and the jarring gap between us and them may seem irreversible.

What went wrong, really?

Jack Ma of www.alibaba.com says: "We never wait for the infrastructure to be ready. No rule is good news. Five years from now, there won't be as many Internet companies. A lot will disappear - that's the way of life."

Charlie Shi of Softbank China Venture Capital says: "No government, not even the US, is fully prepared to cope with the changes. The question is, are you embracing or rejecting it?"

Edward Tian of China Netcom says: "We are going to see a very different landscape. A large percentage of the GDP is going to come from the Internet industry. It is going to be a different China. The Internet Age - new infrastructure, new entrepreneurs, new companies, new models, new products."

Mimos president Tengku Datuk Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen said: "Today, one of the major implications of ICT-enabled business lies in the way it is organised. We no longer compete on products, but on business models of the web enterprise."

Hence, it is amusing to see our State Governments and municipal councils having to shut down their websites as they have difficulty in updating even the static content.

It is equally amusing to see politicians monkeying around to decide who among the residents and companies should participate in funded projects.

It is also amusing to hear so many fashionable phrases hanging on the lips of socialites having a fun time at corporate cocktails.

Terms like B2B, B2C and C2C are the buzzwords that raise eyebrows. Little do they know that Internet models change so fast that they have "mutated" into B2B2C and C2B2C along with the e-commerce models.

In the industrial revolution, the outcome could be anticipated. But, in

the Internet revolution the outcome is unknown.

Meanwhile, the digital divide has cut a chasm so deep that you don't realise you have fallen into the abyss.