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Movie-makers in the region get their own E-Village

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FIRST there was Hollywood. Then came Bollywood. Will there be a third "film village", this time somewhere in Asia? Look no further than the quiet and sleepy town of Dengkil in Selangor where Entertainment Village (M) Sdn Bhd is developing e-Village, a mega-billion ringgit project as the hub of the Asian film industry.

E-Village, according to Entertainment Village chairman Tan Sri Dr Awang Had Salleh, said will mark Malaysia's full-scale entry into the film production and entertainment industry.

"We hope to capture part of the international film market while developing and promoting the growth of the Malaysian film industry at the same time," Awang told a press briefing at the project site.

The three-phase project will take seven years to complete. Phase One is already 96 per cent completed and will be fully completed when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad officially launches the project on September 8, 2000.

Phase One includes a main studio called a sound stage studio, one virtual studio, an events plaza, the gateway plaza, an administration block and a man-made island called "Mini Malaysia".

The main studio, Sound Stage One, stands at 16m tall and a floor area of over 200 sq m. The studio will accommodate big productions handling big stunts and special effects such as helicopter shots and stunts and a snowing street.

By design and size, Sound Stage One will rank as Malaysia's and Asia's biggest. Seven more such studios will be built.

The virtual studio will have 3-dimensional and computer animation, special effects and post production facilities, fibre optic link, motion capture animation and motion analysis. It can be used for television commercials for the local and international advertising industry.

The studios are also equipped with a revolutionary truss and rigging system, providing film makers with the ability to light their productions at varying heights.

This is the first time that Malaysia is acquiring all these equipment. The last time the country ever came close in using all these technologies was during the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur.

The two studios are located in an area called The Studio Precinct, spanning 131 acres, which will also include a giant film sound stage taller than the recently opened 20th Century Fox Studio complex in Australia.

Mini Malaysia, as the name implies, will consist of a scaled model of Malaysia with all the landmarks in place particularly those in the Klang Valley.

The yet to be completed Phase Two and Three will consist of a multimedia centre, wetland, theme villages, convention centres, virtual parks, hotel, resort, health farms, shopping bazaars, an academy of Dramatic Art, world-class post production studios, parking lots, conference rooms and offices.

Entertainment Village executive vice-chairman Datuk Ibrahim Abdul Ghaffar said one film production company in England has expressed interest in using the e-Village facilities.

"This facility is totally very new to the country. We hope to benchmark the industry by comparing to Fox Studios which charges A\$600 (A\$1 = RM2.20) per day to any film company using the studios," he said.

Entertainment Village wants to be a service provider to the local entertainment industry and hopes that there will be a "spillover" effect to other industries as well such as recording industry, music and theatre performances.

Pollard Productions, a leading Australian entertainment and special effects production company, are the event producers for the opening ceremony. Pollards coordinated the amazing water-borne display during the re-unification of Hong Kong with China in 1997.

The opening event co-executive producer, Barry Newman is enthusiastic about how the production is coming together. "It will be the most exciting event staged in Kuala Lumpur with over 100 performers," he said.

The launch will also coincide with the presence of IT dignitaries attending the fourth meeting of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). They will be among the VIP guests invited to the launch.

"We have also invited movie stars to the launch. So far only Jackie Chan has confirmed his attendance. We are still trying to get Shah Rukh Khan and Juhi Chawla," Entertainment Village director Lt Gen (R) Datuk Hashim Mohamed Amin said.

While the shareholders of Entertainment Village - Malaysian individuals hold 70 per cent equity while the remaining is taken up by British Aerospace president Steve Grace - acknowledged that there can be no substitute for Hollywood, they believe that there can be other alternatives.

E-Village will strive to position itself as one.

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