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MSC places KL among world's cities of the future

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"MALAYSIA has done in one year what it takes five years for other countries to achieve," Dr John Gage of Sun Microsystems and a member of the International Advisory Panel (IAP) summed up the progress of the Multimedia Supercorridor (MSC).

"You are on the way. It's a long way but Silicon Valley, as it is known today, took several decades to get where it is," according to Professor William Miller of Stanford University, US.

Malaysia is leading the way in "vision, dedication and implementation", according to an IAP member. But this may not have been the case as according to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Malaysia would have been very backward in terms of new technology and IT development without the MSC.

Even though Malaysia has made tremendous progress with the MSC and IT applications, the success story remains largely untold and unappreciated.

One has to come here to see and believe what has been achieved in such a short time. And this, despite the Asian financial crisis.

A Spanish architect, Alfonso Vegara, who heads a Madrid-based firm, Fudacion Metropoli, is scouting the world for a project called "Proyecto Cities" (Project Cities). He was suitably impressed with Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Cyberjaya, Technology Park and the MSC to include Kuala Lumpur in his list of 20 "Future Cities" of the world.

The criteria for selection of the cities include: visible components of success; the cities seek to participate in the global world; demonstrate a profound vocation for innovation and share a willingness to cooperate with similar cities around the world in order to reach greater levels of excellence.

During his short visit, Vegara was convinced that Kuala Lumpur had to be one of the cities. There was no hesitation and no second thoughts.

But it almost did not make it. Kuala Lumpur, he admitted, would not have been included in the "Future Cities" if not for a friend who insisted that he come and see for himself before finalising his list of cities. His only regret was that he "should have come earlier".

"If we have this (in Spain) we would not want to go anywhere," he said of the various facilities including the infrastructure, adding that while many countries and their leaders talk about wanting to do something, Malaysia has actually implemented the plans for all to see.

Alfonso's advice is that Malaysia needs to shout about its achievements much more than it has done thus far. Admittedly, Malaysia does not do a very good public relations and marketing job.

The MSC has made considerable progress but it is not sufficiently publicised to the world. There certainly is a need to market the MSC more aggressively abroad. "Scream and shout if you have to. And there is much Malaysia has to shout about," Alison Moses, an American visitor said.

The MSC is the only green field of its kind with special rules and regulations operating in the designated area with world class infrastructure and environment. It offers both local and foreign companies and entrepreneurs a gateway to the world.

And as pointed out by one of the IAP members, there is no other leadership or government that is "as committed and driven" to ensure that the MSC gets off the ground. No leader of a nation will sit in a room and seek advice from the experts on a regular basis. But it happens here.

While the "top-down" planning and commitment is clearly evident with assistance from the best brains in IT worldwide, there is still a long road for Malaysia to travel in its pursuit of new technologies and to make a mark in the IT world.

To be able to do this on a sustained basis, Malaysia must attract the best brains to power its economy and especially, the MSC, as well as to meet the needs of the k-economy.

Malaysia currently employs close to two million foreign workers but they are all in the lower-skilled categories. Malaysia must attract and entice IT and knowledge workers and as Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee says, the country needs to ensure that "we get the biggest bang for the buck".

Malaysia need not "reinvent the wheel". Malaysians can learn from the experts and accept the offer of assistance from the experts.

With Malaysia moving into the next stage of economic development and into the IT era greater, emphasis must be placed on skilled workers, training them, retraining them and attracting the best brains from abroad.

Without the brains and the manpower, the MSC will just remain a well-conceived project. The education and immigration policies need to be closely scrutinised to ensure that the country is not deprived of the necessary "brains" and expertise to power its future growth and development.

It does not make sense to have two million unskilled foreign workers in the country and to encourage more in this category when the country is pushing ahead and promoting IT with the MSC.

Policies must be designed and implemented to ensure that well thought-out plans do not fail due to poor execution and followthrough. The digital and IT economy calls for new ways of doing things which includes forging new alliances to move ahead. The MSC offers an opportunity and provides a test bed for such alliances. It must not be squandered. Its progress and development must not be hampered by short-sightedness, poor followthrough and implementation of policies and projects.