

08/09/2000

MSC, Dr M's vision to transform country

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SIX years ago, the whole world sat up and listened when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said: "I have a vision".

That vision, now more popularly known as Vision 2020, was in 1995 deemed as too ambitious and exceedingly bold. For that vision is to help catapult Malaysia, then an agriculture-based economy, into a rising star in the digital information age.

And to realise this "dream", the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project came into being.

As a major operational vehicle to achieve Vision 2020, it aims to harness the full benefits of the Information Age and propel the nation into jumpstarting a stage in the country's development process.

The MSC, measuring 15km wide by 50km long, stretches from the Petronas Twin Towers at the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) in the north to the spanking new Kuala Lumpur International Airport in the south.

It is envisioned to be the nation's technological hub, the global test bed for multimedia development and the digital heartbeat of the nation.

Entrusted with the task of developing and managing the MSC is the Multimedia Development Corporation Bhd (MDC), a Government-owned company.

One of the MDC's tasks was to draw up a master plan that sees the MSC development being implemented in three stages.

The first stage involves the actual creation of the MSC where 50 world-class companies are to be located there.

To date, 327 companies are already operating out of a total of 362 MSC-status companies.

To kickstart the major applications development from the MSC, seven flagship applications have been identified.

They are four web-enabled applications to enhance public services - smart schools, electronic government, telemedicine (now telehealth) and the national smartcard.

The other three - e-commerce or borderless marketing, worldwide manufacturing web and research and development cluster - are meant to support the creation of an environment to enable the earlier set of applications.

As a result of the establishment of the MSC, Malaysia has become one of the few countries in the world to have set up a single body to regulate and license players in the telecommunications, broadcasting and multimedia industries.

The Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 (CMA) came into force on April 1, 1999. It is the world's first set of enabling laws to encourage electronic-commerce (e-commerce) and other multimedia initiatives.

It includes a comprehensive framework of societal, commercial and technological cyber laws covering copyright, digital signatures and computer crime among others.

It marks a new approach to legislation and regulation in Malaysia. It also establishes an entirely new approach to regulation as it emphasises active industry participation and input in both the processes as well as decision making framework of the Act.

The MSC is also home to two world-class "intelligent" cities - Cyberjaya and Putrajaya. Cyberjaya is slated to become the world's leading intelligent city while Putrajaya is the new administrative capital of Malaysia.

Both cities are equipped with state-of-the-art multimedia technology that makes them perfect models for future cities.

The infrastructure support for both cities are impressive and includes a 2.5 to 10 gigabits per second digital optical fibre back bone using the latest Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM) switches.

Located in an environment-friendly setting, Cyberjaya will be an intelligent garden city and home to multimedia industries, R&D centres, residential, commercial and public precincts.

The other two stages will see the MSC working towards its objective of linking the MSC to other cybercities in Malaysia and to the global information highway. Most of the world-class infrastructure are already in place in the MSC.

Training and educating the masses are also part of the MSC's roles. At present, there is the Multimedia University in Cyberjaya, the first of its kind in the Asean region.

Wholly-owned by Telekom Malaysia, it aims to be a world leader along the lines of Disney's Pixar University, offering multimedia specific programs and catering to the skills requirements of companies located in the MSC.

Entrepreneurs are also not left out.

The MSC Incubator, which began operating in July 1999, nurtures budding entrepreneurs and start-ups by providing them with a comprehensive physical infrastructure in an environment with optimum conditions for growth and development.

Companies can stay there for up to 24 months and will be strategically linked to a ready pool of talents, technology and capital.

A one-stop recruitment centre for knowledge workers for the MSC, the Knowledge Workers Exchange (KWX) has also been set up.

Its aim two years ago, as is now, was to identify job opportunities with MSC-registered companies and match the right skills workers with their new employers.

Another interesting component of the MSC is the entertainment village (e-village).

The e-village has been envisaged as a premier hub for arts and entertainment with plans for a theme park and film production.

In a nutshell, the MSC has evolved tremendously from its original blueprint and will continue to evolve as the Internet and telecommunications development marches on relentlessly.

The Asian currency crisis has not succeeded in derailing the strategic plans as envisioned in Vision 2020 and the MSC is right on track, contrary to what some critics may claim.

Sceptics who doubt the viability of this monumental project are many. They see the MSC as just a development zone that is in direct competition with other development zones in Asia.

They cite Singapore as having a broadband digital network and a thriving electronics hardware industry, Hong Kong is spending US\$1.7 billion (RM6.5 billion) on its Cyberport technology park, Thailand is setting up its Software Park and the Philippines as well as Indonesia are making greater efforts to develop their IT industries.

They believe Malaysia should fear the rising tide of Asian IT development as each country embarks on its own developmental agenda to wire their respective homelands.

On our part, we say, "Well and good". We welcome the entry of our neighbours into the IT arena because it is good for us.

It helps improve telecommunication infrastructure and can stimulate national growth.

It promotes a better quality of life, cuts down unnecessary and time-consuming travel, allows manufacturers and producers to seek out new

markets and obtain better prices from the comfort of their homes, facilitate inter-Asian trade, encourage greater foreign investments and ultimately brings enormous economic benefits for all of us.

Malaysia recognises the wisdom of interconnection and has no wish to be involved in the game of playing one technology park against another.

Malaysia prefers to back the call for greater regional co-operation in the area of IT development for the mutual benefit of all.

It is Malaysia's vision to be interconnected to its citizens, to its Asian and Asean neighbours and ultimately to the furthest corner of the globe.

The MSC is there to try and put Malaysia if not head and shoulders above its neighbours then at least cable for cable, bandwidth for bandwidth, to be at par with the best of them.

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