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Another affordable PC scheme

By Rina de Silva

WHEN another affordable PC campaign is launched, stories of previous efforts are usually recalled, especially if the past ones did not progress favourably. Remember the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) Computer Withdrawal Scheme which was unceremoniously scrapped by the Government? Or the PC Gemilang: PC Mampu Beli programme launched last year with much fanfare which fell sharply short of target?

The recently launched IT For All campaign, spearheaded by Intel Electronics (M) Sdn Bhd and Samsung Malaysia Electronics Sdn Bhd, will undoubtedly be scrutinised closely, where prices of PCs under this campaign are retailing from RM1,198 to RM2,398. The campaign is also supported by the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry (Mosti).

As with the previous affordable PC projects, the aim of the IT For All campaign is to increase the PC penetration rate, bridge the digital divide, and build an information technology-enabled knowledge society in Malaysia. The PC penetration rate in Malaysia is currently close to 17 per cent. Mosti aims for that standing to double by 2010.

According to Mosti Minister Datuk Seri Dr Jamaludin Mohd Jarjis, the Government realises that buying a PC is not yet a top priority among families here. "This is the case despite an overall increase in the awareness and exposure to computers through their usage at the workplace and schools."

Jamaludin suggested that more efforts should be made to increase the Internet penetration rate rather than PC penetration rate. He has proposed a plan to connect 50 communities under the Felda scheme through wireless fidelity and the upcoming WiMax technology with the use of shared networks. All the consumer needs to have are a keyboard and monitor, thus reducing the overall cost of owning a PC system.

With the poverty level sitting at RM500 per household, buying a PC may not be the top priority for the marginalised society even if the industry is pushing the message that IT can bridge the digital divide.

A study made on the EPF Computer Withdrawal Scheme by a consultant appointed by the EPF in 2002 revealed that there were cases of swindling and misuse of the fund. Former Prime Minister Tun Mahathir Mohamad said in late October 2002 until July 31, 2002, RM2.35 billion had been withdrawn under the scheme.

The spearheaders of the IT For All campaign seem to have taken a safe route in announcing their target buyers. Intel Technology Asia Pte Ltd's director of Southeast Asia and country manager of Singapore Lai Yit Loong said the campaign is not limited to consumers only, but also targets small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs). "In Malaysia, consumers and SMBs constitute a high percentage of the total IT spending."

He added that the PC packages under this campaign offer a comprehensive solution for education and small businesses that will enable them to purchase quality, affordable PCs from more than 100 retailers throughout the country.

There are two choices of PC packages to consider. First, the Internet Multimedia PC, which comes with an Intel Celeron 1.8-gigahertz (GHz) processor, a Samsung 40-gigabyte (GB) hard disk drive, a 17-inch cathode ray tube monitor, 52X CD-ROM drive, built-in 56K modem and 10/100 LAN Ethernet, Fedora Linux operating system, MYOB Business Basics/Accounting/Premier and Bestari Ed Smart School/Multimedia

Educational courseware, and one-year local limited warranty. It retails at RM1,198.

And second, the Home Entertainment PC, which comes with an Intel Pentium 4 2.4GHz with Hyper-Threading technology, a Samsung 40GB hard disk drive, 16X DVD-ROM drive, remote control and TV tuner card, built-in 56K modem and 10/100 LAN Ethernet, Microsoft Windows XP Home Edition, and the same bundled software as in the first package. It is priced at RM2,398.

Those looking to buy PCs under the IT For All campaign should look out for the IT For All logo. The logo has six computer mice to represent IT, and each mouse carries a face to demonstrate that technology is for everyone.

With the relatively low PC and Internet penetration rates in the country, it comes as no surprise that schemes, programmes and campaigns to boost PC ownership are continuing with the efforts of both public and private sectors. Hopefully this latest campaign will move smoothly without any glitches.

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