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Comprehensive R&D framework for nation

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MULTIMEDIA Development Corporation (MDC) has formalised a Strategic Trust Area Research (Star) programme under the Research and Development (R&D) cluster, one of seven flagship applications of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project.

Star has been designed to put Malaysia on a comprehensive R&D framework that will take the country's emerging technologies to a higher level and will focus on six primary areas - wireless mobility, advanced software development, advanced microelectronics, design technology, bio-informatics and nanotechnology.

According to MDC's chief executive officer Datuk Dr Mohamed Arif Nun, the programme is aimed at establishing the creation of an innovative research culture, crucial for the long-term success of the MSC, and for Malaysia to become a knowledge economy (k-economy) nation.

"The programme is targeted at multinational companies such as the likes of Bell Labs which would be sourced, sought after and lured to conduct R&D activities in Cyberjaya; the prototypes of which will then be commercialised by local companies," he said.

"This will ensure the intellectual property rights (IPR) of the end (commercialised) products will benefit the country and ensure greater capitalisation of the economy once the research is completed. Building upon the IPR assets is fundamental for the creation of a k-economy," he added.

One or two early recipients of the Star programme are expected to be announced by the Science, Technology and Environment Ministry soon. Meanwhile, more beneficiaries of the programme are already in the pipeline.

Arif said other activities being planned to spur R&D among the private sector, in particular, which include building an entire entrepreneurial ecology involving researchers, financiers and commercialisation companies.

"We are already working towards this through collaboration with our network of international partners and venture capitalists," he said on the sidelines of the 4th MSC R&D Grant Scheme (MGS) gathering in Seri Kembangan on Tuesday.

On the MGS, Arif said a total 194 applications had been received to date, of which 100 have been assessed. So far 47 projects had been approved to 44 MSC-status companies amounting to a total of RM96.58 million.

Of this amount, RM52.86 million has been disbursed, and 22 companies have successfully completed their projects, which include having filed for patents and trademarks and two even successfully listed on the Malaysian Exchange of Securities Dealing and Automated Quotation (Mesdaq). And of the RM165 million allocated for the MGS under the Seventh and Eighth Malaysia plans, RM65 million is still available for disbursement.

Arif said the expanded role of MDC as announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in Budget 2004 will now mean MDC will focus on more k-intensive services and those with a high value-added components.

"The details (of our new and added responsibilities) are currently being finalised and an announcement is expected to be made in the next few weeks," he added.