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Experts: MSC a 'miracle' that progressed beyond expectations

CYBERJAYA, Thurs. - The Multimedia Super Corridor today received high endorsement and praises from members of the International Advisory Panel who described it as a 'miracle' that has progressed beyond all expectations.

They said the MSC, launched just seven years ago, had defied all odds and criticisms and was well on its way towards becoming a regional hub for information and communications technology.

The list of its successes so far has been impressive - more than 900 MSC-status companies, of which 59 are world-class entities; the roll-out of seven flagship applications; world leading framework of cyberlaws; and the establishment of Cyberjaya and Putrajaya as intelligent cities.

The IAP members are here for the two-day seventh MSC IAP meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Cyberview Lodge here. It will be his last participation in the meeting as chairman before his retirement next month.

Dr Mahathir, at a Press conference at the end of the first day of the meeting, acknowledged the endorsements of IAP members.

"The discussion today was very good and members said the MSC has done very well. We covered a lot of areas and received a lot of views, which will be very useful for its future development."

He said among the areas touched on included the need for more research and development, greater involvement of universities in the MSC and the need to intensify promotions on the project.

The Prime Minister will be holding one-on-one meetings with members of the IAP tomorrow.

The MSC is a 750 sq km area from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre running south to the KL International Airport in Sepang. It is Malaysia's version of the United States' Silicon Valley.

Under its development plan, Phase One (1996-2003) envisions the creation of the MSC, which includes one corridor, 50 world-class companies, launch of seven flagship applications, world leading framework of cyberlaws and the establishment of Cyberjaya and Putrajaya as intelligent cities.

Phase Two (2003-2010) aims to create a web of corridors, 250 world-class companies, set global standards in flagship applications, harmonised global framework of cyberlaws and four to five intelligent cities linked to other global cybercities.

Phase Three (2010-2020) will see the transformation of Malaysia into a knowledge society with 500 world-class companies, global test bed for new multimedia applications, an International Cybercourt of Justice in the MSC and 12 intelligent cities linked to global information highway.

Silicon Graphics Inc chairman and chief executive officer Bob Bishop said Phase One of the MSC had been very successful and all goals had been achieved.

"I do not think the world has realised how successful Phase One has been given the challenges that the MSC had to face such as the regional economic crisis of 1997, the global economic slowdown and the recent Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome," Bishop told reporters at the sidelines of the meeting.

He said at the end of Phase One, the project had attracted over 900 companies, which created jobs for 18,000 workers.

"The good news is that the MSC is creating jobs faster than the number

of IT workers churned out by the education system. At present there are 3,000 job vacancies which is good because we can create skilled workers much faster and attract the best students of Malaysia to train and join the MSC," said Bishop.

Bishop said he did not see Dr Mahathir's retirement being a 'hindrance' to the MSC's overall success.

"In fact, IAP members will be more committed. When you climb the K2 mountain, you can see the valley below and you find out that Mount Everest is much higher."

Another IAP member Prof William F. Miller of Stanford University described the progress of the MSC as "remarkable".

"All developments are ahead of schedule. People do not expect miracles to happen overnight but if we compare the MSC to the Silicon Valley and Taiwan, the MSC has developed much faster than all that.

"Now we are looking forward to the launch of the MSC's second phase of development."

Miller, however, said there should be more publicity on the MSC as "knowledge on it needs to be spread widely".

"People here are modest about the MSC's accomplishments. Knowledge on it needs to be more widespread so other companies can know what's happening."

Miller also expressed confidence in Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's leadership on matters concerning information and communications technology when Dr Mahathir retires.

"The Deputy Prime Minister has assured us and given his commitment that he will continue giving priority to the development of the MSC when he becomes Prime Minister."

He said in order for the MSC to further succeed, Malaysia needed to build a strong scientific base.

"This needs to be developed and it is up to the country's education system to do it."

Another panel member, IDtrack president Robert Madge said Malaysia's leadership transition would have little impact on the MSC's future.

He said IAP members were confident of Abdullah's commitment to the MSC.

"Abdullah has publicly said he believes in the MSC project. The MSC has so much momentum now, there's so much commitment and many companies. I don't think the leadership change will cause any major impact, certainly not in the short-term."

He said the MSC was entering its second phase of growth which he described as more ambitious.

Madge said the MSC's development to date had put the project "in very good stead", and its first phase of growth had been successful beyond the panel members' expectations.

"It's been more successful than any of us expected, particularly how it has been able to carry on despite the problems, particularly the financial crisis some years ago."