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Malaysia's IT heart beating strongly

reports on "Malaysia's IT heart" by Anthony Raj  
THE Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), the vehicle that has been designed to turn Malaysia into a knowledge-based society that will help the country attain developed nation status, did not come about by accident.

It is the result of a deliberate, well researched plan, taking into account the success and progress the nation has enjoyed so far and the direction that has to be taken if the nation is to progress further.

"The success of Malaysia is attributed to the careful formulation and implementation of appropriate strategies by the Government at each phase of our development over the years," notes Abdullah Kadir Bacha, the Chief Knowledge Officer with MDC.

"After Independence and in the 60s we were dependent on the export of agricultural commodities and tin, then in the 70s we went into manufacturing. The manufacturing sector is, in fact, still a very important component of our economy."

Looking back critically, we could see the trend, Malaya, exporting tin and rubber.

Then Malaysia exported timber and palm oil, and then into manufacturing, and having our own oil to fuel our development.

It was and is still going good. But the vagaries of world commodity prices, the depletion of natural resources like tin, timber and oil, and the dictates of others do not favour developing nations.

Then came 1991 and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed launched his Vision 2020 for the nation, a vision for Malaysia to attain a developed nation status by the year 2020.

Besides being a visionary, Dr Mahathir is also noted to be a pragmatic man.

The Government, through the Economic Planning Unit in 1992, commissioned international consultants McKinsey to undertake a study on the direction that the country should take.

The McKinsey people looked at facts and figures on Malaysia from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank figures on Malaysia as they went to work on their report.

The study called a spade a spade: Malaysia would not be able to attain developed nation status by the year 2020 if it continued to be dependent on the manufacturing mode.

It was noted that:

- \* Malaysia was losing its comparative advantage in its traditional economic sectors;

- \* There was a need to drive the economy towards higher productivity through technology and high value-added economic activities;

- \* A knowledge economy (k-Economy) and converging technologies presented the best opportunities for socio-economic transformation;

- \* There was a need for the adoption and application of ICT to enhance national competitiveness and to help bridge the Digital Divide.

The MSC was thus conceived.

What you see now is in one Super Corridor which is the 15x50km corridor that stretches from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), and the aims of this corridor have been achieved in Phase One which ends this year.

The MSC project is in three phases taking us right up to the year 2020 when the entire nation becomes a Super Corridor.

What makes the MSC different from other hi-tech parks around the world are the flagship applications.

The MSC is often seen by many as a technology park project. Looking at activities in Cyberjaya and the other cyber cities (KLCC, KL Tower, Technology Park, UKM-MDC), this view is understandable.

But the MSC is not a technology park project per se.

Many fail to realise that the MSC is a long term, strategic socio economic transformation plan for the nation, says Abdullah.

To accelerate the objectives of Vision 2020n ( which is to transform Malaysia into a knowledge-based society and raise the livin), a path has already been defined through seven innovative Flagship Applications.

These applications are engineered to jump start the MSC initiative and create a multimedia utopia for innovative producers and users of multimedia technology.

Consortia of both local and foreign companies are working with various government agencies to enhance the socio-economic development of Malaysia.

There is a peoples agenda in the seven flagship applications.

It is the flagship applications that put the MSC above the hi-tech parks, says Abdullah.

The flagship applications have been designed to change the way Malaysians live and work, and to drive the development and growth of the MSC.

These flagship applications are also helping to jump start the development of MSC, provide business opportunities for ICT companies, especially Malaysian ICT SMEs, and to spearhead the transformation of Malaysian society into a knowledge society.