

Making MSC more relevant

By S.Jai Shankar

The Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) project must expand to continue to be relevant to all segments of the society. It has to step up the rollout of society-centric ICT projects. This is one of the main messages that emanated from the recent MSC International Advisory Panel (IAP) meeting chaired by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

'ICT should not be elitist and should meet the daily needs of the people,' says Abdullah. He says people-relevant projects such as AgroBazaar are the types of ICT projects that should be launched in the country. All IAP members agree that ICT development should cover every sphere of the society. To begin with, the MSC has already moved away from the initial corridor encompassing Cyberjaya and the Petronas Twin Towers. Two new

cybercities, namely Kulim High-Tech Park in Kedah and Bayan Lepas in Penang, are now in place as part of the MSC's second phase of development, which runs from 2004 to 2010. Terry Cutler, the managing director of Cutler and Co, agrees that this is the way to go. 'We need to turn away from cybercity to cybercountry,' he says.

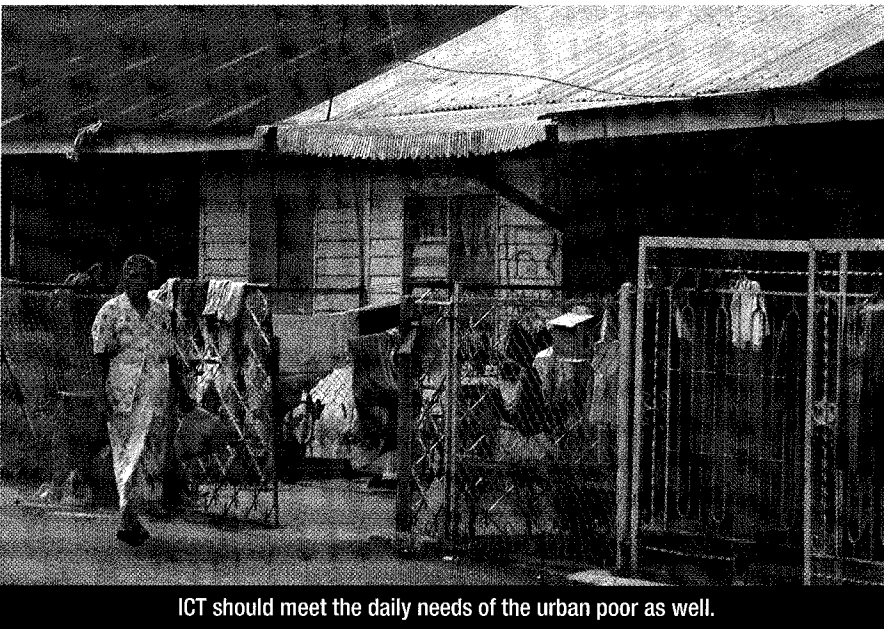
Another vocal supporter for this added emphasis on people and country is Narayanan Murthy, the chairman of India-based Infosys Technologies Ltd. He says Abdullah's call is relevant as most often the benefits of ICT development within a nation is not felt by the poorest of the poor. 'The call by the Malaysian Prime Minister is relevant not only for Malaysia but for all developing nations such as India, China and Brazil,' says Narayanan. He adds that beyond job

creation, ICT should also add value in terms of lifestyle.

On a macro level, Abdullah says that that to be internationally relevant, the MSC project must ensure that its products and services remain globally competitive. 'In order to achieve this, the country needs to find significant niches in which it can invest its resources,' he says. The Prime Minister adds that the country will focus more on niche projects, such as biotechnology and business process outsourcing (BPO) services, to ensure that the MSC stays relevant in the fast moving ICT landscape. Some of the areas that will be given due prominence include healthcare, biodiversity and agriculture. 'Moves to find strong niches will ensure the MSC as a brand will remain relevant,' Abdullah says.

Furthermore, Malaysia expects to start leveraging on existing ties with Asean, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and Non-Aligned Movement countries to further sell the brand as well as products and services from MSC companies. The Multimedia Development Corporation is expected to set up offices in Dalian, China and Jeddah, Saudi Arabia by the end of the year.

This ability to move along with the times is applauded by many of the IAP members. According to Prof Dennis Roberson of the Illinois Institute of Technology, the good thing about the MSC vision is that it continues to evolve to remain relevant. 'The importance of any vision is to ensure that it stays dynamic and moves with time,' he stresses. **mb**



ICT should meet the daily needs of the urban poor as well.