

Building Cyber Valley

What makes the Multimedia Super Corridor

ARIF NUN HEADS MALAYSIA'S Multimedia Development Corp., an agency set up to spearhead the development of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). He holds a Ph.D. in electrical and electronics engineering, and also advises the government on telecommunications. Arif, 52, spoke recently with Asiaweek correspondent Steven K.C. Poh. Excerpts:

How will the MSC propel Malaysia into its next phase of development?

The word 'propel' is very appropriate because the MSC is a booster to Malaysia's information technology (IT) and multimedia development program. We need to mobilize resources in a very short time to jump-start the project. The first phase is expected to be in full swing by mid-1999.

What is the MSC all about?

The MSC is designed to be a global community. We liken it to a Japanese bento box, with four compartments. The first section is real estate -- a place to work, live and play. There won't be any skyscrapers; it will be eco-friendly, with 30% reserved for green space. Otherwise, people might as well be in other parts of the world. The second compartment contains a world-class IT network and infrastructure. The third, soft infrastructure, includes the cyber law package, a Multimedia University and a 10-point Bill of Guarantees. The laws are unique in that it's the first time a country has tried to draft bills on aspects of operating in cyberspace. The fourth is the Multimedia Development Corp., which is not only a super one-stop agency but also an overseer of the other three.

How many companies have received MSC status to date, and how many of those are local?

We are processing 500 applications, and expect another 400. But not all will be accepted. We are selective in terms of getting companies that will actually help investment in new areas of IT and multimedia. We initially thought that only the IT big boys [like Intel or Microsoft] would come in, but the ratio of local to foreign companies has been about 50-50. The reason is the project is actually content-driven. So we are talking about animation people, Islamic banking software people, special effects guys and CD-ROM developers.

What's the worst-case scenario for the MSC? Are you worried about it not succeeding?

I have not been waking up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. We have a good record for delivering projects on time. We also have the support of the Parliament's backbenchers. If you package it right, people will not be turned off. Who doesn't want to develop a transaction kiosk where you can renew your driver's licence and passport without the hassle of queuing?