The technology industry is generally pleased with Budget 2003, which they said showed strong commitment on the part of the government to take the country into the knowledge-based economy and bridge the digital divide in an effort to accelerate economic growth and global competitiveness.

Industry leaders lauded the government’s emphasis on information and communications technology (ICT) in education, especially with the allocation of nearly RM5 billion between 2002 and 2008 to implement the teaching of science and mathematics in English in schools, to train teachers, and purchase educational aid, basic facilities and physical ICT infrastructure.

The Budget gave a clear indication of the importance the Government placed in the development of ICT as one of the country’s key engines of growth. Multimedia Development Corp (MDC) chief executive officer, Dr Mohd Arif Nun said.

IBM Malaysia managing director Voon Seng Chuan said at first glance, the Budget might not seem to have many provisions for ICT but ICT is everywhere “as it should be because IT is only a tool”.

“We’re encouraged that the government is investing in skills development. It’s all about people and competence. It is preparing the generation on globalisation and ICT skills. Projects like the smart school and equipping all schools with computer labs cannot be achieved in just one year. The Budget shows the government’s continuous commitment,” Voon said.

MDC fully applauds the Government’s move through the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia (MECM) to implement the Internet connectivity programme into 250 schools in the interiors of Sabah and Sarawak under the first phase of the programme to reduce digital divide among Malaysians.

Cisco Systems Malaysia Sdn Bhd said that would be a very good start in bridging the digital divide in parts of Malaysia that currently don’t enjoy high-speed connections to the Internet.

“In such areas, there is also an opportunity to utilise technologies such as wireless local area networks (LANs) and IP Telephony to provide quick and reliable communications,” managing director Johnson Khoo said.

“PCs are important educational and research tools, and combined with the power of the Internet, it helps pave the way for building a knowledge society,” Richard Teo, country manager of Intel Electronics (M) Sdn Bhd said.

MDC said consistent with the thrust of the budget, the achievements of the MSC and its Flagship Applications had set a firm foundation for the establishment of the knowledge economy (K-Economy) in Malaysia.

“The national rollout of the MyKad into the mainstream of the Malaysian life, as outlined in the Budget, will further spur the transformation of Malaysia into a knowledge based society,” Mohd Arif said.

All Malaysians are to possess MyKad, a government-backed multi-purpose identity smart card, by 2005.

Association of the Computer and Multimedia Industry of Malaysia (PIKOM) chairman, Looi Kiam Leong welcomed the introduction of MyKad free of charge to the nation.

“This in turn will encourage the churning out of more applications for smart cards and will also provide more business opportunities for local software developers,” he added.

Voon Seng Chuan

The Master Builders Association Malaysia (MBAM) welcomed the government’s continued allocation for public expenditure in various sectors, such as the building of single-session schools, higher education facilities, new government hospitals and clinics, and low-cost housing.

“We are also appreciative of the government’s effort in strengthening rural development by providing a RM2.5 billion allocation to improve basic amenities such as power supply, health services and other infrastructure,” MBAM president Ir Lau Mun Cheong said.

On the export incentives for professional services proposed in the budget, the MBAM urged contractors to take advantage of the double-tax deduction incentive to provide project management services abroad.