Bill Gates says Lanka poised for greater growth

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President commends ICTA, Microsoft for removing language barriers in computer applications with the launch of Sinhala interface pack Microsoft founder Bill Gates on Monday expressed his optimism that Sri Lanka “is poised for greater economic growth and development” and expressed the global giant’s support since much of future prosperity would be fueled by the use of software and the power of IT.

Positive sentiments by Gates, one of the world’s richest entrepreneurs, were conveyed to none other than President Mahinda Rajapakse via a special audio visual message at a ceremony to handover a plaque incorporating the first copy of the Sinhala Language Interface Pack (LIP), from Microsoft and ICTA, paving the way towards making significant progress in Rural ICT adoption in Sri Lanka.The presentation was part of Microsoft and ICTA efforts to mark the “Year of English and IT Services” this year.Gates said he was “very excited to learn about plans for the year which have a clear focus on IT, because this initiative demonstrates” that President Rajapaksa, and his government recognize the extraordinary potential that information technology has to dramatically improve people’s lives in the country. “Sri Lanka has an advantage though, with a government that’s committed to investing further in IT, as outlined in President Rajapaksa’s vision statement. Like President Rajapaksa, I am optimistic that the country is poised for greater economic growth and development and much of that will be fueled by the use of software and the power of IT. Sri Lanka’s high literacy rate, at over 90%, and its high standards of education and healthcare give it a strong economic foundation. The country’s IT literacy rate is nearing 20%, which represents a significant jump from 8% only a few years ago. English language speaking skills are also a crucial part of the foundation for future growth. I am pleased to see that the government has identified the importance of English language skills by declaring 2009 the Year of English and IT Services,” Gates said in his message.He also emphasised that on its part, Microsoft stands ready to fully support the initiative and Sri Lanka’s broader IT-objectives over the long term. The theme of the work we do in Sri Lanka is “Creating Employability.” Through our Partners in Learning and Community Technology Skills Programs and our other initiatives, Microsoft has partnered with educational and non-governmental organisations in Sri Lanka to bring IT skills and training to over a million people across the country. These efforts have reached students, teachers, academia, rural communities, IT professionals, and migrant workers. To date, Microsoft has invested over 450 million rupees in Sri Lanka towards these programs and plans similar investments over the coming years. We have already made Windows Vista Sinhala enabled, and we are currently localizing our Office Suite for Sri Lanka,” he said. “Microsoft’s presence in Sri Lanka continues to grow in many ways, and we are committed to deepening existing partnerships and building new ones. Working together, there is a lot we have already achieved, and much more that we’ll accomplish in the future,” the Microsoft Chairman said.At the same ceremony, President commended the ICTA for removing the language barriers in computer applications.Being impressed with the first copy of the new local language interface software to him the President said that it was the intention of the Government to further enable the rural people to use the computer particularly in local languages.The President also emphasised the importance of increasing indigenous contents available through the computer.Through the e-Sri Lanka programme the Government intends to ensure that the benefits of ICT accrue to every citizen of this country. The President pointed out the importance of enabling every citizen to have access to the benefits of ICT without language being a hindrance. The President also commended Microsoft for the steps taken by it for making the local language software freely available to all Sri Lankans.

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