

PM: Telecoms technology vital for our progress

By K.P. Waran

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Malaysia must invest and participate in the expanding international telecommunications industry, failing which the industry will become a monopoly of giant corporations from developed nations. **Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad** said today.

The Prime Minister said if local companies did not have a share in the globalisation of the industry, Malaysia would not only lose revenue but would be flooded with services and information which might corrupt local cultures.

Therefore, he said, Malaysian companies had to invest and be involved in the process of formulating the global village concept and together control the technology and the international market for products and services.

He said that under the global village concept of a borderless telecommunications network, the capability of telecommunications included the transmission of voice, data and images quickly and efficiently via satellites and cable links.

Dr Mahathir was launching the National Telecommunications Policy at Istana Hotel which outlines the objectives of the telecommunications industry as a prime mover of the nation's development.

The policy, valid until 2020, will ensure that Malaysia progresses well in the field of telecommunications to support its vision to achieve the status of an industrialised nation by the year 2020.

Also present at the ceremony were Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister **Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu**, his deputy **Datuk Ta-**

jol Rosli Ghazali, the Ministry's secretary-general **Mohd Ali Hassan** and deputy secretary-general **Dr Mohd Yusof Ismail**.

Dr Mahathir said another positive attribute of the globalisation process was Malaysia's involvement in the international trade for telecommunications equipment.

He said that in 1991, value of worldwide exports for the equipment reached US\$64 billion (RM166.4 billion). A major portion of the market was controlled by European nations and Japan.

"The telecommunications equipment market is lucrative. Unfortunately, few companies have the foresight to seek new markets overseas.

"Equipment manufacturers and suppliers of telecommunications services must be more aggressive in seeking new markets and business overseas," Dr Mahathir said.

He said that for them to succeed in the telecommunications industry, entrepreneurs should have strategic vision and tie-ups with others in the international market.

"Malaysia must take the effort to become the regional and international telecommunications hub for East Asia.

"We should turn Malaysia into a centre of telecommunications activity so that it would be known as the teleport of the region.

"To become the telecommunications hub, Malaysia must have an integrated telecommunications system offering various services through state-of-the-art technology at reasonable prices.

"The launch of the Malaysia East Asia Satellite (MEASAT) in 1995 will be the first step towards allow-

ing the country to offer satellite telecommunications services," he said.

He added that the great changes in the telecommunications industry had resulted in various problems on how to manage the changes and all these had to be handled carefully "if we are to develop an industry that benefits the consumers".

Dr Mahathir said regulatory bodies of telecommunications services must be two steps ahead of the private sector on technological improvements to ensure that only state-of-the-art equipment and services were introduced in the country.

Dr Mahathir said licences were presently technology-based rather than service-based and were issued upon request and submission of proposal by individuals or firms.

"In the future we should approach the licensing issue from the point of view of service rather than technology, and regulators should be alert to the latest innovation and take the initiative to announce the need to update the nation's telecommunications services.

"This therefore calls for bidders to undertake improvements through proper licensing," he said, adding that this required regulators to keep abreast with worldwide technological improvements.

Dr Mahathir said in the race for economic progress, the basic needs of the rural people should not be overlooked although telecommunications services in the town generated more profits.

He said appropriate social responsibility should be given towards raising the standard of telecommunications services in the rural areas.