

Regional telecoms firms adopt common vision

By Rashid Yusof and Azrin Azmi

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Thirty telecommunications organisations from seven Southeast Asian countries today signed a "joint statement of vision for the telecommunications community".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad witnessed industry executives from Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Brunei and Cambodia signing the statement in a ceremony at the Crown Princess Hotel.

The event is described as the first step towards a unified and structured stand aimed at developing a strategic and cohesive telecom-

munications body for regional co-operation.

The idea for the regional body — Southeast Asian Telecommunications (Seatel) — was explored at a round table meeting held here in November last year.

Among the goals of Seatel is to pool resources in research and development projects with the results to be shared by members.

The body will also take steps to establish industry practices and guidelines that will eventually lead to standards that can be adopted by the region.

Other objectives include the formulation of mechanisms for the development of technology and transitional flow of information of knowledge, the creation of

capital markets to allow free flow of investment in the region, and the promotion of education and training of human resources for the industry.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was looking at ways for a fairer distribution of revenue among telecommunications network operators to encourage them to go into the less profitable services.

He said with the liberalisation of the industry, there has been increased competition among the operators in the more lucrative domestic long distance and international services.

He added that nobody wanted to provide telecommunications services in the less profitable rural areas,

but the Government wants these services to be extended to the rural areas.

Dr Mahathir added that the present number of telecommunications network operators was sufficient.

He said the Government found the industry "a little bit confusing" as it did not understand the technology.

"We will have to go to school first before we can make a policy," he said.

Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu was also present at today's signing ceremony.

Seatel pro tem committee co-chairman Datuk Tajudin Ramli said in view of the competition from more established companies from the developed world, it is

imperative that the region's telecommunications firms consolidate their resources.

According to Tajudin, such a move is intended to "if not to gain a stronger foothold in the global arena, at least to have a significant say in this region".

Tajudin said in his speech at the ceremony that in initiating the group, the industrialists were aware of the growth potential within the Asia Pacific region.

"We are also aware of the major governmental efforts such as the formation of the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) which serves as a loose consultative forum for open regionalism as well as a platform for exchange of ideas and information on trade."