

15 FEB 1996

Mahathir-telephone

FAIR TO TIME LOCAL CALLS, SAYS PM

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 15 (Bernama) -- The new rate for local telephone calls at three sen per minute with a minimum charge of nine sen is fairer than the present flat rate of 13 sen, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said the new tariff structure would benefit more people because local calls generally lasted not more than four minutes.

"Currently one minute also costs 13 sen but under the new structure it is only three sen. If you use (the telephone) for four minutes, it is only 12 sen," he told reporters after recording his Hari Raya message at Angkasapuri here.

Yesterday, the Cabinet decided that from this June 1 local calls will be charged according to duration.

When announcing the decision yesterday, Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister Datuk Leo Moggie also said the rates for calls to 31 countries would be reduced by between six and 31 percent.

Dr Mahathir said the time-based calls would have some effect on people using the telephone for long periods per call, like subscribers of the Integrated Services Digital Network, Internet and computer users.

"If you want to use a computer for 24 hours and pay 13 sen, it is unfair to people who use the telephone for only one minute and yet have to pay 13 sen," he said.

He said intensive users of telephone could get leased lines where they could use it for as long as they like at fixed charges.

Dr Mahathir said the cheaper international calls showed that the government wanted to be fair by ensuring that if the charge for one service was slightly increased, that for another would be lowered.

The lower rates for international calls were also to help Malaysia compete with other countries in providing efficient and cheap telecommunications services, he said. -- Bernama

AH YBY