

19 DEC 1996

Mahathir-IT

MALAYSIA FORCED TO VENTURE INTO INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 19 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today Malaysia has no choice but to venture into the Information Technology (IT) industry to prevent the people and the country from being left behind in this age of rapid IT development.

The prime minister said that if Malaysia did not participate in the IT development, the people and the country would not only lose out but would be "re-colonised" by those in control of IT.

"We have to enter this field. I admit that it has its good and bad side like a knife that can be used to carve beautiful sculptures as well to kill.

"It is up to us to decide what is good and what is bad. If we abuse it we should not blame IT," he said when replying to a question raised at a video-conference in conjunction with the opening of the Infotech Malaysia '96 conference and exhibition at the Putra World Trade Centre, here.

The video conference sponsored by Telekom Malaysia Bhd connects Dr Mahathir to seven locations outside Kuala Lumpur -- Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) in Skudai, Johor; Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) in Sintok, Kedah; Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM) in Bandar Jengka, Pahang; Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) in Minden, Pulau Pinang; the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (Mampu) brach in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah; Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) in Kota Samarahan, Sarawak and Kolej U gama Sultan Zainal Abidin (Kusza) in Kuala Terengganu, Terengganu.

Present were Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie, Science, Technology and Environment Minister Datuk Law Hieng Ding and permanent secretary to the National Information Technology Council Tengku Datuk Dr Mohamed Azzman Shariffadeen, who is also the president and chief executive of Mimos Bhd.

Sabah Chief Minister Datuk Yong Teck Lee was hooked up to the conference at the Mampu office in Kota Kinabalu while Perlis Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Shahidan Kassim was connected via the UUM in Sintok.

Replying to a question from a UUM student, Ismail Yusof, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia need not draft a new policy like the Human Development Policy to enable the people to adapt themselves to IT as IT was not something new.

"What we need is for every strata of society to retain the pure values and ethics to ensure that the rapid development does not destroy the existing good values," he said.

On the emphasis to be given by the local universities to realise the government's objectives for the IT industry, the prime minister said attention should be given to understanding how to use IT effectively.

He said it was pointless for the government to set up the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) if the people did not benefit due to their inability to use IT effectively.

He said IT students were lucky to have a chance to acquire IT-related knowledge while they were still young whereas the older generation had to re-orientate their minds to adapt to the sophistication of the IT age.

To a question from a participant at the Mampu office in Sabah, Dr Mahathir said every state in Malaysia would benefit from the MSC which covers a 15km by 50km areas stretching from the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) to Putrajaya and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) in Sepang.

"What's the use of being able to communicate with New York if we cannot

communicate with Sabah. Hence, Sabah itself must be prepared to link up with the MSC," he said. -- BERNAMA

AH JK