

13/11/1997

Boost borderless distance learning programmes: PM

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in promoting more distance learning programmes in the country, urged Asian "open universities" to consider making the concept cross the national boundaries of countries in the region.

"I do believe that distance learning concept of the future would be without borders," he said at the launch of a four-day 11th annual conference and exhibition of the Asian Association of Open Universities in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said he believes that in the year 2020, institutions of higher learning that offer distance learning programmes will be linked on a national and global scale by telecommunications technologies.

"The educational systems of distance learning will be globalised by the emergence of telecommunications technologies, making distance learning a definite choice, apart from full-time and part-time study modes.

"This will be encouraged by the desire of every individual for lifetime education," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said he believes that distance learning programmes offered by the local "open universities" should be opened to Asian countries.

"Since the quality of the local education system will be of the world standard, Malaysians should expect students from all over the world.

"After all, in the next century, people will no longer be confined to their own countries. They will work anywhere and everywhere," he said, adding that studying at a university with students from all over the world will prepare them for the global environment they will live and work in.

On "open university", Dr Mahathir said the concept will be made more effective if all institutions of higher learning allow credit transfer between one another's distance learning courses.

"The system can be made even more efficient if the distance learning programmes consist of modular curriculum design and partnerships can be developed between member institutions.

"It is even possible for the qualification to be awarded not by a particular institution but named after a particular and prestigious course conducted by a group of institutions," he added.

Dr Mahathir also urged all local institutions of higher learning to link themselves to a host university located within the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC), a 15km by 50km zone for the development of information technology and multimedia industries in the country.

"Let the host university act as the administrative centre serving other institutions as participative members. Through such collaborative effort concentrating on distance learning programmes, the Government will effectively create a huge open university without actually building a separate institution.

"This is tantamount to one of the cost-saving measures on the part of the Government while an extensive distance learning programme is implemented expeditiously," he added.

Dr Mahathir also said he hoped that part of the MSC will become a collaborative cluster of universities and corporate research and development centres, using distance learning techniques to produce world-class graduates," he added.

Later, the Prime Minister witnessed the signing of a partnership

agreement between the Open University of the UK and two local companies - Time Multi Media Sdn Bhd a wholly-owned subsidiary of Electronic Data Interchange Malaysia Sdn Bhd, and Time Telecommunications Sdn Bhd.

At the signing, the Open University was represented by its Vice-Chancellor Sir John Daniel, while Time Multi Media and Time Telecommunications was represented by its chief executive officer Indra Gunawan Alamshah and executive vice chairman Kamarudin Abu Bakar respectively.

Through the agreement, the three companies will offer technology-based supported distance learning programmes in Malaysia by next year.

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