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Distance learning 'educational wave of the future'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - By being able to penetrate the most far-flung places and economise valuable resources, distance learning has earned itself the reputation as being the educational wave of the future.

Propagating this concept, Datuk Prof Gajaraj Dhanarajan, president of the Vancouver-based Commonwealth of Learning, said governments around the world were recognising the benefits of distance learning.

"Technical innovations enable courses to be run from the Internet, while information dispensed through radio programmes can teach rural villages community education, such as on water safety.

"Distance learning," he said, "uses technology that is new as well as familiar, is cheap and makes education open to everybody."

Gajaraj said that distance learning enabled governments to overcome the problem of having to build enough educational centres to cope with the growing population.

The COL, created by the Commonwealth Heads of Government after their meeting in 1988, is an inter-governmental agency that works to make distance learning accessible to all.

"We carry out five major functions: advocacy, training, availability of information, liaising with different countries to exchange educational packages and identifying new technologies and improvising it so that even low-tech countries may use it.

"Our ideal is that anyone anywhere in the Commonwealth should have access to any course that's available in the Commonwealth grouping," he said.

The organisation is also taking part in the upcoming 11th annual conference and exhibition of the Asian Association of Open Universities that kicks off at Putra World Trade Centre on Nov 11.

Themed, "Quality Assurance in Distance and Open Learning", the four-day conference will be hosted by the Mara Institute of Technology and opened by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. The New Straits Times is the official newspaper.

In conjunction with the conference, an exhibition will be held to provide the industries with the opportunity to showcase their latest products in the field of distance education and instructional materials.

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