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Dr M proposes council for IT development in public sector

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday proposed the setting up of a council to formulate integrated strategies and vision for the development of Information Technology in the public sector.

He suggested that the council, to be named Government IT and Internet Council, serve as the main mechanism for the implementation of national IT policies and strategies as well as inculcate the IT culture in the public sector.

Speaking at the Prime Minister's Quality Award presentation and a national symposium on electronic government at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Dr Mahathir expressed the hope that the Malaysian Administrative, Modernisation and Planning Unit, which handled public sector IT development, would consider his proposal.

Dr Mahathir said one function which could be incorporated into the proposed council's terms of reference was planning and determining security measures and applying appropriate standards.

"The proposed council could also serve to expand and regulate public sector use of the Internet."

This was because of the unlimited exposure to the Internet and the government had agreed not to have a censorship policy on Internet content, he said.

The Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Abdul Halim Ali and Mampu director-general Datuk Dr Muhammad Rais Abdul Karim said later that they would take up the Prime Minister's proposal.

Dr Mahathir also said the electronic government flagship required each civil servant, from the highest to the lowest level, to acquire sufficient understanding of IT and develop the capacity to apply the technology efficiently.

The Prime Minister said an electronic government would reduce time-consuming bureaucracy.

"Through the sophistication of IT, the Government can deal with customers electronically. The customer will only need a smartcard with his own PIN (Personal Identification Number) to carry out transactions with the Government. "There will be no need to fill up forms."

Dr Mahathir said bureaucratic procedures which emphasises on the distribution of duties according to functions, would no longer be relevant.

"The focus will no longer be on functions but the process itself. Multi-tiered hierarchy can be reduced.

"Files do not have to be moved from one officer to another for decisions. This method will not only expedite decision-making but will also be more transparent.

"Transparency will prevent malpractice," he said.

Dr Mahathir said transformation from bureaucracy to "seamless Government" would need re-engineering and not confined to the use of computers and automation.

This, he said, would mean that planning and implementation mechanism should be reviewed and modified to suit the changes.

The Prime Minister said it has been decided that all government departments and agencies set up their own homepage to improve their management and administrative efficiency.

Dr Mahathir said another vital element which could be a catalyst in the implementation of the Electronic Government was the use of the Internet technology.

"I am happy to see an increasing number of government agencies using the Internet technology for instance in setting up their respective homepages and benefiting from the Internet facility to enhance management and administrative efficiency," he said.

He said it had been decided that all government agencies and departments should develop their own homepages before the year 2000 to ensure the success of the "Civil Service Link" which functioned through the Internet.

He said the National Institute of Public Administration had drawn up a comprehensive training programme on electronic government.

Initially more than 130,000 officers and staff would be trained up to the year 2000.

Dr Mahathir also said some 50 proposals had been received from private companies in response to the government's call to them to submit proposals on the appropriate ways of implementing the Electronic Government.

The proposals were being assessed and the name of the successful companies would be announced in February next year, he said.

Mahathir also launched the "e-link Kiosk Awam Malaysia", which enabled users to obtain the latest information and make payments to various government agencies.

The four agencies involved in the pilot kiosk project are the police, Immigration Department, Information Department and Telekom Malaysia Berhad.

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