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Mahathir-Multimedia

MAHATHIR CALLS FOR FORUM TO FORMULATE GLOBAL FRAMEWORK FOR INFORMATION AGE

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 16 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called for the establishment of a virtual forum, the Virtual Commonwealth of Nations, to formulate a new global framework for information age governance and towards nurturing a global civil society.

He said the widening gap between the information poor and the information rich society pointed to the need for a new framework of governance where the concerns of distributive justice existed alongside a free market system for the digital economy.

"The information age, the new basis for power, wealth and influence, will be knowledged. No one has the monopoly of knowledge and wisdom, meaning no one can have all the power, wealth and influence," he said.

Dr Mahathir was addressing some 600 delegates and participants of the Multimedia Asia 97 Conference and Exhibition at the Mines Resort City, here.

The prime minister said market forces rewarded the efficient and punished the inefficient and the less able. Efficiency and equity did not go hand in hand.

Therefore, leaving the digital economy to a self-regulating market would only widen the gap between the information rich and information poor, he said.

Dr Mahathir said that in the virtual commonwealth of nations, multimedia technology such as videophony and teleconferencing could be used as a means to communicate and discuss issues of concern and problems with each other.

With multiculturalism said to be the culture of the future, he said: "We need to make adjustments so that our closeness to each other will not result in our stepping on each other's toes too frequently."

Instead, the global society's closeness and more frequent exposure to each other and to information about themselves should enable the development of a strong sense of neighbourliness, he added.

He said the MSC, using the concept of smart partnership was an invitation for the world community to together shape a common future.

"We invite collaboration instead of confrontation, enrichment instead of exploitation, sharing instead of grabbing.

"These should remain the watchwords, these should provide the basis towards evolving a just and equitable global society." the prime minister said.

Dr Mahathir said the Multimedia Super Corridor, as the country's investment for the future, was "the seed that will sprout the civil society" in achieving the 2020 Vision.

He said the 2020 Vision in itself was an effort "to reinvent" the future, which means setting in motion certain agents of change now, taking into account current realities and future uncertainties.

"To our minds, the break from the past will be the most crucial -- and the yawning gulf to the future must be bridged -- the MSC is our tentative first bridge," he said.

He said: "Through the electronic government flagship we hope to reinvent governance, through the smart school flagship we hope to reinvent education, through telemedicine we hope to reinvent healthcare and through the borderless marketing flagship we hope to reinvent business practices."

Dr Mahathir said the idea of an electronic government was the second

stage in the ongoing quest for right sizing... governance which followed the Malaysia incorporated concept.

The prime minister said that recognising that reinventing existing realities was not easy, Malaysia was willing to learn from the experience and knowledge of other countries.

"Our spirit is willing; our bodies are strong; our economic fundamentals are right; and we are willing to work with others and to learn, and to learn fast." he said.

He said Malaysia had successfully undergone transition from an agro-based economy to an industrial one within two decades and had done that without ignoring concerns for distributive equity.

"We now have time-tested techniques -- we are confident they will stand us in good stead for a repeat performance." he said.

The Multimedia Asia '97 with the theme "Moving MSC From Vision to Reality; Benchmarking Smart Solution " is an annual gathering of experts and investors to discuss on the MSC programmes.

The MSC is a designated 15km by 50km multimedia hub encompassing the Kuala Lumpur City Centre, the Kuala Lumpur International Airport in Sepang and the new administrative capital in Putrajaya. -- BERNAMA

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