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## Need to work at IT literacy

IT is an understatement that the information revolution is rapidly changing our world. Clearly, this revolution, the base of which is information technology, is accelerating the process of globalisation, reshaping economies and affecting our way of life at a speed never seen before.

A recent market research report said that the number of personal computers connected to the Internet will rise 71 per cent this year to 82 million driven by business demand to stay in touch with their customers.

Malaysia is going to great lengths and pains to harness the power of information technology, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed in launching the IT awareness campaign some two months ago.

Indeed, "with our future at stake, we cannot afford to be a mere spectator of the information revolution."

To do so would of course be at our own peril. We would be swept aside by the great tidal wave of the information revolution. Especially in these economically challenging times, when the emphasis is productivity and efficiency, all the more Malaysians should respond to the call to support the nation's initiative in harnessing IT.

It cannot be overemphasised that crucial to this goal is the people's participation - young and old, rural and urban. But reports of the online growth is not as fast as we would like it to be. Compared with just a few subscribers to the Internet when we first started, the base of about 70,000 users quoted in August this year is not bad. But the growth has fallen far short of the Government's initial projection of 150,000 subscribers by last year.

This week's report that a study on computer literacy among 200 final year local undergraduates revealed that less than 30 per cent of them know how to use e-mail or the Internet is not encouraging. The study conducted early this year by two Universiti Sains Malaysia lecturers showed that the students' general and practical knowledge on computers was "below expectations". The results are cause for concern since tertiary students have more access and exposure to computers compared with the general public, said one of the lecturers.

The root of the problem has to be identified and addressed immediately. So is the slow on-line growth. The Government will no doubt look into all the obstacles such as user-fees, supply of computers and other related problems in its move to promote greater IT literacy.

Meanwhile, the Malaysian business world is steadily stepping up the use of IT. Many of the professional firms, from the building industry to the lawyers and accountants' offices will attest to IT enhancing their efficiency, accuracy and quality of work. Making business deals is another important use. Moreover, e-mail is faster, more economical and facilitates instantaneous international communication.

While Malaysia is justifiably proud that it has made a big step forward in embracing IT, much remains to be done in terms of promoting the people's participation and human resource development. With the Multi-media Super Corridor, the Malaysian test-bed for IT development taking shape, there should be no let-up in creating even greater IT awareness and literacy in all spheres of Malaysian activity. The task is arduous but the efforts are certainly worth our while for the benefits are indisputably immense.

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