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PM: Distance learning vital for the future

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed.- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today spelt out the role and significance of distance learning which will be as common as fulltime and part-time study modes in the future.

This comes at a time when there is a great need and desire for lifetime education.

Dr Mahathir said with the need for 40 per cent of the population to have access to tertiary education as against 13.9 per cent now to achieve fully-developed status, Malaysia had to resort increasingly to distance learning.

He said this was because the number of teachers or trainers would increase at a lower rate than students, adding that the numbers and level required in a fast-emerging knowledge-based society could not be delivered through conventional learning modes.

Signifying the importance of distance learning, there had been special mention about it in the Budget since 1995 while the Seventh Malaysia Plan put its promotion at an even more crucial level.

With the greater emphasis, the university-going 19-24 age group who otherwise would not be going to universities, and those already working, would be able to get a university level education through distance learning courses.

"There will also be short courses aimed at upgrading the knowledge and skills of the workforce including those at the managerial and supervisory levels.

"The programmes will be better structured, more organised and carried out on a larger scale through closer co-operation between the institutions of higher learning and the commercial sector.

"New areas of study, particularly in science, technology and management, will be introduced."

Dr Mahathir was speaking at the 11th annual conference and exhibition of the Asian Association of Open Universities at the Putra World Trade Centre.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak was also present.

The serious efforts in this sector reflected the current world-wide trend, characterised by distance learning programmes gaining momentum.

"And the years leading to the next millennium promise to be the most challenging period for the application of new and innovative technologies and methods of teaching so as to make the whole world a challenging period for true knowledge societies."

With the emerging knowledge-based society, Dr Mahathir said the methods of teaching must also be changed, besides making tertiary education available to more people.

He added that distance learning would require ways of making understanding even more easy for those less capable of reasoning and logical thinking.

On the Multimedia Super Corridor, Dr Mahathir said it was hoped that all local institutions of higher learning would be linked to a host university located within the MSC.

"Let the host university act as the administrative centre serving other institutions as participative members."

He said based on the business plans submitted by 131 companies, MSC alone would need 7,000 specially trained workers in its first year of

operation, with the number increasing to 12,000 in its fifth year.
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