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Enthusiasm high among new IT council members

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KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Enthusiasm about information technology and awareness of its social benefits and challenges run high among the new members of the National IT Council.

NITC chairman Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad announced on Sept 24 the new line-up comprising representatives from the public, private and community sectors. The 26-member panel will serve from 1999 to 2001.

Several of the new NITC members spoke to the New Straits Times recently on their intentions and expectations about contributing to the realisation of the National IT Agenda, or Nita.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health president Datuk Lee Lam Thye, a relatively new convert to IT himself, hoped to create greater awareness about the importance of Nita and establishing a knowledge-based society.

"The fact that the Government decided to include representatives from the community clearly shows the importance it places on participation from all strata of society," he said.

Lee said Nita's message of interaction between the three sectors of society emphasised the need for shared rights, roles and responsibilities, especially in thrust areas like e-community and e-public services.

"IT can help bring about decentralised service which is efficient and effective, and the Government should help people get the services essential to them."

National Council of Women's Organisations vice-chairman Prof Datin Dr Sharifah Hapsah Shahabudin said the most important challenge will be organising the "key component" - people - into actual networked communities.

"The potential is there and the communities are out there.

"It is just a matter of linking them up more effectively," said Sharifah, who is also alternate chairperson of the e-community working group.

Groups which can benefit from and contribute to society through IT, she said, included non-working women and senior citizens, who in the United States had been identified to be the largest users of IT after children/teenagers.

"Those aged from 30 to 55 years old, the so-called productive group, are in the driver's seat of life and in control of the steering wheel, but do not have the same hand on technology, perhaps because of time constraints," she said.

Southern Bank Bhd chief executive officer Datuk Tan Heong Hean hoped to draw on his experience in a highly information-intensive and transaction-intensive industry, to benefit others.

"We are critically dependent on computers and IT - we leverage a lot on information and communication technologies to raise revenue and lower costs.

"For storage, access and transfer of information, IT is extremely cost-effective and increases your competitive edge," he said, adding that decision-making hinges on the availability and timely manipulation of information.

Tan, who has been using computers since the "pre-Apple days", said the length of time one has been exposed to IT is no reflection on how well one

uses it.

Rather, he said, it is how fast one can learn to apply the benefits of IT to bypass traditional channels and liabilities in doing business.

International Movement for a Just World president Dr Chandra Muzaffar said he hoped to address issues like the challenge of globalisation, global politics and economics with an IT perspective.

"One of my main concerns is the lack of justice in the present global system. Malaysia is a Southern hemisphere country and the South in general has not benefited from globalisation as much as countries of the North have.

"Now, with IT and information an area heavily dominated by certain parties and regions, people are talking of a new gap between the information haves and information have-nots," he said.

The tie-up between information and power, Chandra said, was an important issue for discussion to avoid creating a large population grossly disenfranchised due to lack of information.

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