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Mahathir-Internet

MISUSE OF INTERNET CONFUSES PEOPLE, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 29 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said tonight the misuse of the Internet of late has caused confusion to a lot of people.

"While I welcome the Internet, unfortunately of late it is being misused," he said at a live video conferencing during the Virtual Commonwealth Dialogue in conjunction with the Multimedia Asia '98 at a hotel here.

The Prime Minister highlighted the case of how some Internet users had reported that there would be some kind of uprising by foreigners in Malaysia, which resulted in people rushing to stock up essential goods.

The session themed "Governance in an Interneted World: Towards a Global Civilised Society, cuts across time zones and was conducted in an open and transparent forum with worldwide access, live via the Internet and on television.

"We got a lot of rumors put in the Internet. It can lead to confusion. Instead of better informing it confused people. We don't know which one is true and which one is not," said Dr Mahathir.

He said everyone must ensure that the Internet, as a tool to inform the people fast, served its purposes.

"And that means not ending up with wrong information," he said.

Dr Mahathir, who had earlier launched the Virtual Commonwealth, was participating as a panelist in the dialogue session along with six others including from Washington, Geneva and Brussel.

Panelists from Boston and New York could not be linked in the video conferencing.

Answering to a question from session moderator Tan Sri Razali Ismail, who is the former UN general assembly president, Dr Mahathir said he would not like to predict the impact of the Internet on political forms and leaders.

"I believe any new instrument we have, it can always be used in two ways - good and bad.

"Politicians, of course, like me, would like to have the biggest audience possible, but we want the audience listen to us and not to talk back to us.

"But when you have an audience that has enlarged into millions of people in the country and all want to talk back and give their opinions to you the result can be very confusing," he said.

The Prime Minister said people have always been wrong in their predictions, like during the industrial age when they thought that they could buy cheap clothing while the workers thought they would lose jobs through mechanisation.

"For a time people don't like the industrialisation, but naturally of course people adjusted to industrialisation," he said.

Dr Mahathir said with the information age now, everybody thought that it was going to be great.

People thought that it would bring all the nations and everybody close together into a village in a small world where everybody rubbed shoulders with everybody else.

"But already they are not rubbing shoulders. They are fighting each other. Yet, before they did not have enemies.

"The enemies are at the most their neighbours, but now everybody have

become their neighbours and they have more enemies than ever before," he said.

The Prime Minister also spoke on the need for the world to practice tolerance when dealing with different cultures and ways of life.

He said everyone must recognise the fact that there were great similarities between people and countries.

The problem of today was that some media moghuls were so rich to the extent that they bought everything and thus created the tendency for print and electronic media to reflect the thinking of the media owner, he said.

"It is the time to break up some of the chain control of these people's thinking.

"I would like to see the return of the old broadcasting, confined to town where you got varieties. Getting the same news is very boring," he said.

Dr Mahathir said attempts to create universal values could sometime create problems as not all the values were acceptable.

He said the values of today were not much different than the Victorian age where the gay movement was not only tolerated but considered normal.

The Prime Minister said he read with horror that the British National Health Services would supply viagra pills to gays.

Other panelists were Dr Chandra Muzaffar (president, International Movement for a Just World) representing social, cultural and community interests, Tengku Datuk Dr Mohamed Azzman Shariffadeen (secretary, National Information Technology Council Malaysia) representing technology interests, Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah (executive chairman, Multimedia Development Corporation) representing the private sector, Mark Malloch Brown (vice president for External and United Nations Affairs, World Bank Group) representing global development interest.

Martin Bangemann (Commissioner for Industrial Affairs, Information Technology and Telecommunications, European Commission) representing Europe, Rubens Ricupero (secretary-general, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) representing South America and global trade interests.

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