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Moggie: Investment in IT vital for future

reports on "Dewan Rakyat" by Alex Choong; Cheah Chor Sooi; Aion Mohd THE Government is confident that the big sum of money spent to develop information technology infrastructure is justified because it will be an investment for the future.

Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Leo Moggie said in order not to be left behind, Malaysia needed to be equipped with IT facilities.

"Although we are faced with economic hardship, the RM600 allocation for the industry is worth every sen as we require sufficient infrastructure to ensure the success of our Multimedia Super Corridor project.

"We are welcoming Malaysian IT experts to return home and together participate in the development of MSC," he said when winding up points raised by MPs in the debate on the Communications and Multimedia Commission Bill 1998.

Moggie also reiterated that the people should not be "panicky or pessimistic" about the adverse effects of the millennium bug (Y2K) on businesses.

"There is no country in the world as yet which can determine the actual impact of Y2K. However, we do not want to get caught with our pants down either," he said, adding that a steering committee had been set up to look into the Y2K problem.

Earlier during the debate, Chia Kwang Chye (BN-Bukit Bendera) said the establishment of the Communications and Multimedia Commission was vital in the light of electronic commerce.

He added that electronic commerce - carried out either through the Internet or other available electronic methods - would determine the economic growth of the country.

"A study carried out by the World Trade Organisation shows e-commerce through the Internet is expected to reach RM1.1 trillion by 2001 from the present RM40 million."

Chia expressed fear of problems arising from the implementation of e-commerce in its initial stages and hoped that the Appeal Board provided under the Commission would resolve such problems.

On the issue of Y2K compliance, he said if the computer could not recognise "00" come midnight on Dec 31, 1999, a host of problems would beset major government agencies or departments and private companies.

"This problem is not only confined here but is a universal one," he said, adding that steps must be taken now to address the problems.

Wan Junaidi Tuanku Jaafar (BN-Batang Lupar) said the setting up of the Commission would not only address problems related to multimedia and information technology but would also be entrusted with the task of looking into the social, educational and technological aspects in this industry.

He also urged the Commission to pay particular attention to the computer language that was being used at present.

"We see that English is the main computer language and there is fear that Bahasa Malaysia will be scrapped," he said, adding something had to be done whereby computer users would be able use Bahasa Malaysia as well.

Wan Junaidi also touched on possible major worldwide recession if countries set aside huge amounts of money to tackle the Y2K problem.

As such, he suggested that the Malaysian Government withhold computerisation programmes until after the year 2000.

"This will go a long way in avoiding being caught by the Y2K bug."

For the proposed fund under the Act, he hoped that telecommunication providers would contribute to it and that the Commission would use this fund to provide better communication facilities to the rural areas.

Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) proposed that a Valuation Board be set up to evaluate companies which have been given MSC status, particularly those which have failed.

At present more than 180 companies, he said, had applied for MSC status and more than 110 had been approved.

Dr Tan said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had been reported as saying that these companies would invest RM4.3 billion in the first five years and they are expected to earn more than RM13 billion on their investments.

"The economic problem will in some way affect those who have invested in the MSC," Dr Tan added.

He also proposed that a government-supported scheme be initiated to help Malaysian companies in the MSC.

Such a scheme, he said, would help small companies to develop and become major players.

"It is not impossible that a local company will become the next Microsoft in the world," Dr Tan added.

Mohamad Sabu (Pas-Kubang Kerian) urged the Government to relax its stringent stand on confidentiality of information.

Without some degree of openness, he said, the Government would be seen as hiding the truth, thus evoking the curiosity of the people to turn to foreign news reports.

Referring to the riot at the Semenyih camp for illegal immigrants in May, he said: "The people were attracted to reports by the London Observer as the newspaper carried stories that were not carried by local media.

"Similarly, local businessmen tend to place their faith in economic reports provided by Singapore or Hong Kong-based analysts.

"Although the content of the reports are at times radical, there is always some degree of truth in them."

He said censorship should exist side-by-side with freedom.

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