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Senators concerned over negative side of IT

reports on "Dewan Negara" by Ramlan Said; Hayati Hayatudin
THE Dewan Negara yesterday endorsed the Government's aggressive promotion of information technology. However, many senators were concerned that the negative elements of the cyber world could corrupt the younger generation if supervision and enforcement were lacking.

Debating the Communications and Multimedia Bill 1998, they urged the authorities and parents to ensure that the young had proper supervision and guidance so that they were not diverted from reaping the many benefits of IT.

Senator Mastika Junaidah Husin said it was unfortunate people, especially in rural areas, had formed a negative perception of IT that led them to oppose the Government's campaign.

Taking a swipe at the Opposition, especially Pas, she said the party had influenced their supporters into believing that IT and the Internet had only pornographic materials.

"Pas has been saying in its campaign that IT will only expose our children to sex and pornography. Do not use social reason to reject IT," she said, expressing surprise that the party's representatives in the House had chosen to support the Bill.

She hoped their backing was sincere.

Mastika Junaidah also called on the Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Ministry to be wary of the possibility that the cyber world may be turned into a tool to defame others, or for spreading poison-pen letters.

To drive home her point that technology could result in disaster if manipulated by undesirable elements, she spoke about how a tape on a meeting on Islamic affairs between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Menteri Besar and Chief Ministers had been doctored, to discredit the Government during the recent Arau parliamentary by-election.

"Technology is just a medium ... if it is used wisely, we will gain the benefits. But IT is also opening the door for exploitation," she said, adding that it was hoped that the Bill had taken the matter into consideration.

Senator Jamilah Ibrahim from Kelantan expressed worries that if not curbed, the Internet could corrupt the minds of the people.

She hoped the introduction of the Bill would result in communication and multimedia facilities being provided fairly to all.

Jamilah said multimedia could spur the quest for knowledge but wanted the Government to ensure that human development was not neglected in the eagerness to promote IT.

"Computers and multimedia, for instance, can be utilised to counter lies on Islam, besides enhancing the image of the religion."

Datin Wan Intan Tajuddin touched on the content of television programmes which were dominated by foreign productions, which contained many negative aspects.

On the mushrooming of cyber cafes, she said as many operators did not carry out any censorship at all, activities like the duplication of pornographic materials by schoolchildren for distribution was rife.

She also called for stern action against those involved in producing pirated software.

Senator Datuk Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahman called on the Government to ensure that new computers in the market were not affected by the millenium bug.

He said dealers must be required to inform consumers if the computer

units they were about to buy were not able to handle the problem.

On IT promotion in rural areas, Abdul Aziz said it was paramount that the necessary infrastructure was made available first.

He proposed that the Government come out with a blue print, covering programmes from the school level to industries and government as well as follow-up measures. This was to ensure that all of society would benefit from computers and multimedia.

"We do not want a situation similar to the United States where there was a big gap in the ownership of computers among its citizens."

Senator Datuk Chet Singh Karam Singh suggested that the Government aggressively promote smart partnership with foreign IT companies, besides encouraging Malaysian IT experts working overseas to return home and give them control of IT or multimedia companies.

"A strategic programme should be established for IT and multimedia as it is going to be the country's economic catalyst," he said.

Senator Datuk Abdul Majid Baba asked about steps taken to censor the contents of the Internet, its borderless concept, and measures to fend off foreign competition from more advanced countries.

Agreeing with Abdul Majid was Senator Datuk Abu Bakar Ismail who said a clear concept of IT, the multimedia and Internet was required, especially for the rural areas.

"We cannot prevent IT from coming to the country but what we must do is react positively," he said.

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