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`Virtual Commonwealth' on Sept 29

THE first "Virtual Commonwealth" video-conferencing dialogue session, inter-connecting six cities, to be launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on Sept 29, has the potential for future cross-border discussions.

The National Information Technology Council permanent secretary Tengku Datuk Dr Mohamad Azzman Shariffadeen described the session as a "dynamic idea".

"The session will improve everyone's understanding of the cross-border issues involved in information technology..."

"Just imagine a Virtual Commonwealth which would have discussions on global issues whenever necessary."

Themed "Governance in an Internetworked World: Towards a Global Civilised Society", the session will be held in conjunction with the Multimedia Asia '98 - an annual National Information Technology Council conference and exhibition for the Multimedia Super Corridor - in Kuala Lumpur between Sept 29 and Oct 2.

The six cities, in three time zones, are Washington, New York, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Brussels, Geneva and Kuala Lumpur.

Dr Mahathir mooted the idea last year in anticipation of the dramatic impact of information technology on global governance.

The 90-minute session will be conducted in an open and transparent forum with worldwide access.

The onsite panel and international personalities include World Bank vice-president Jean-Michel Severino, European Commissioner for industrial affairs, information technology and telecommunications Martin Bangemann, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development Rubens Ricupero, dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University Dr Joseph S. Nye and the Scholar-In-Residence at the Ford Foundation Brian Urquhart.

Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee will be the moderator while local panelists will include Tengku Azzman and the executive chairman of the Multimedia Development Corporation Tan Sri Othman Yeop Abdullah.

The areas and issues of discussion include Global Governance: Rights, Roles, Responsibilities and Relationships, Citizenship, Politics and Leadership: Whither the Nation State, Poverty, Socio-economic Justice and Human Dignity, Media, Culture and Con-text: Is Diversity at Risk? and Ethics, Morality and Spirituality in the Information Age.

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