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Cabinet: Cybercafes not subjected to restrictions

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - In line with the Government's promise to avoid censorship of the Internet, the Cabinet has decided that cybercafes will not be subject to any restrictions other than the normal rules applicable to restaurants.

Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Dr Ting Chew Peh said today that the Cabinet had decided this last week after considering negative reaction from investors about restrictions on the information technology industry.

"The Malaysian Government has promised that it will not control or restrict the activities of the IT industry, including the use of the Internet," he told reporters before his Ministry's post-Cabinet meeting.

The Cabinet's decision, which took effect immediately, would mean an end to the steps taken by local authorities to control cybercafes, including requiring customers to fill in a register.

Ting said these initial measures were taken after concerned parties had urged the Government to control cybercafes because of the easy availability of pornography on the Internet.

As a result, in December last year, cybercafes were required to register their customers or risk losing their permits. The register must contain details of a customer's name, identity card number and home address. Ting said it was now up to parents to monitor their children's activities and if the Internet was used to spread defamation, this would be countered by reasoned arguments.

He said this decision would be conveyed to local authorities immediately.

In the Bill of Guarantees for the Multimedia Super Corridor, the Government had agreed not to impose, among others, any censorship or licensing of Internet usage.

Yesterday, Multimedia Development Corporation executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah had said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had given the directive to remove restrictions on cybercafes after he heard the concerns of MSC companies.

However, Othman had said that if any unlawful material was downloaded and disseminated, the person would be subjected to existing laws.

Earlier, before Ting's Press conference, the Malaysian Fire Protection Association president Tay Hao Giang briefed reporters about the association's Outstanding Fire Protection Industry Award.

The award, to be launched by Ting tomorrow, was aimed at raising standards in the fire protection industry and to recognise the achievements of the industry.

It is opened to installers of fire protection systems and manufacturers of the systems. There is also an award for high quality equipment.

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