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Guarantee on non-censorship of Internet stays

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has reaffirmed that there will be no censorship of the Internet as pledged in the Bill of Guarantees, Multimedia Development Corp (MDC) executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir also reiterated that the licensing provisions under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998 do not apply to Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) status companies.

In addition, the Prime Minister has given instructions that the practice of cybercafes registering their customers be stopped.

This, Othman said, is proof that Malaysia "has not reneged on the Bill of Guarantees relating to censorship of the Internet".

The Housing and Local Government Ministry had issued circulars in December compelling cybercafes to register their customers in order to keep tabs on cyber rumour-mongering.

Speaking at a news conference to clarify the March 22 Business Week article on the MSC, Othman said the Prime Minister last week directed all relevant government agencies to put together the necessary legal and administrative arrangements to strengthen the enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPRs).

Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Leo Moggie is expected to issue a statement on this matter later this week.

Othman said a major concern voiced by industry players through its monthly dialogues with MDC was the enforcement of IPRs and the censorship of the Internet.

"The industry has also voiced concern over the stringent and over regulation of information technology and multimedia under the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998," he said.

The industry had voiced concerns on licensing provisions, content regulations, including local content requirements, which may stifle creativity and innovation and the impact of certain provisions of the Act on the development of new technology, for example, call-back provisions which inadvertently prohibit Internet protocol telephony, he elaborated. While there will be no censorship of the Internet, Othman stressed that "existing laws will apply the moment (information or pictures) from the Internet is downloaded or disseminated."

\* SEE ALSO p2

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