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Master new telecoms technologies: Dr M (HL)

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MALAYSIA's prospects for economic growth and progress are tied to its ability to master new telecommunications technologies, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad says.

These technologies will dramatically improve Malaysia's capacities in every field of business and industry as well as life in general, he said. "Wireless technologies and the Internet represent the convergence of two of the fastest growing markets and developing technologies in the telecommunications field," Dr Mahathir added.

As a result, there will be tremendous growth in demand for products such as personal video-conferencing systems, voice and even video e-mail, the Prime Minister said when opening the 1999 International Wireless and Telecommunications Symposium/Exhibition (IWTS 99) in Shah Alam yesterday. IWTS 99, held in conjunction with World Telecommunications Day, is organised by Institut Teknologi Mara's Faculty of Electrical Engineering and the Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia.

The three-day event is attended by 250 participants from 20 countries.

Dr Mahathir said the Government realises that Malaysia's telecommunications industry must become an active participant in the global marketplace, and therefore expects it to play a proactive role in transforming the Malaysian economy into an information-based economy of the 21st Century.

Several measures have already been taken to realise Malaysia's potential as a major global hub for telecommunications and multimedia services.

"These include further liberalisation of the industry through the introduction of competition in 1990. This will eventually lead to full-fledged competition through the Equal Access Policy which became effective early this year," Dr Mahathir said.

Indeed, Malaysia has become one of the most liberalised and open telecommunications services markets in the region, he said.

The Prime Minister noted that Malaysia has also introduced the new Communications and Multimedia Act 1998, which was passed by Parliament in its July session last year.

"The Act is the first legislation of its kind in the global effort to address issues arising from the convergence of the telecommunications, broadcasting and computing industries," Dr Mahathir said.

The measures are specifically aimed at positioning the country as a competitive telecommunications service provider and a world class market player.

"The challenge faced by the local players is to ensure that they can measure up to the foreign competitors. The challenge faced by the regulators meanwhile is to ensure that competition will be free without leading to a situation where the country's overall infrastructure development will be compromised," Dr Mahathir added.

Malaysia's telecommunications industry will continue to exert an enormous and dynamic influence for change in the country. In the coming century telecommunications will be digital, mobile and personal, he said. The demand for faster information, anywhere, anytime is also stimulating an unprecedented growth in the telecommunications industry.

Dr Mahathir said as societies become increasingly information-based, consumers everywhere hunger for more, faster and better information. The challenge for the industry is to adapt to these changes, to provide the

new form of services that the customers want - efficiently and effectively.

Consequently, the strategic thinking of the future will be towards integration of services; whether it is fixed telephone lines, TV entertainment, access to the Internet or mobile telephony.

"Customers increasingly want a breadth of services from a single service provider. Logically, why should telephone, TV, data, the Internet and the rest all come down differently from different service providers when it all consists of the same fundamental digital bits?

"Instead of having a satellite dish, a TV aerial, a fixed phone line, a mobile phone and another for the Internet, all from different service providers, the question that begs to be answered is why not have all these services from one single supplier?" he asked.

Already, service providers are already advocating seamless global telecommunications networks so that they can better meet the needs of their customers around the world, Dr Mahathir said.

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