

17 OCT 2000

MAHATHIR-DIGITAL

GOVT DOING ITS BEST TO REDUCE DIGITAL DIVIDE

PETALING JAYA, Oct 17 (Bernama) -- The government is trying its best to avoid a digital divide among Malaysians as the country moves into the knowledge-based economy, the Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad told a K-economy conference here today.

Measures like the smart school programme would narrow the digital gap but providing hardware and software to all schools can't be done overnight, said Dr Mahathir.

Replying to a question from the floor at the conference organised by the MCA English-speaking membership bureau here, he said, although Malaysia was not the worst of it, "there will always be a digital divide between the rich and the poor countries."

Dr Mahathir suggested that one way to reduce this digital divide would be to produce cheaper hardware and software.

He said many Malaysian information technology experts tended to migrate as the facilities and laboratories for research and development were costly and only available in the rich countries.

However, Dr Mahathir said this brain drain which was also faced by other Asian countries might be temporary.

"There have been a notable number of Asian IT expert who started new industries in their motherland when they have mastered the new technology and accumulated the capital overseas," he said.

To a question, he said, the Multimedia Super Corridor would not really be competing with other multimedia centres in the Asian region.

Instead it would like to co-operate with similar centres in the region in their research activities.

"But we do claim that MSC is the biggest single project of its kind with a 15 times 50km area...almost the size of Singapore. We have special provisions like cyberlaws, all the necessary infrastructures and the government is friendly to investors in the corridor," said Dr Mahathir.

When asked if Malaysia is ready to reposition itself when the straight line separating consumers with producers collapse under K-economy, he said, "It has always been that all consumers are producers and all producers are consumers."

"You must produce something to earn money," he added.

But consumers' associations in Malaysia appear to think that they are only consumers and others are all producers who must bring down prices of their products all the time, stressed Dr Mahathir.

"I believe in being fair to both sides (consumers and producers)," he added.

He also warned that as the world embraced K-economy, products would be made available more easily and at greater speed.

"We need to teach our people how to make use of knowledge and information available on the internet to speed up whatever that they are doing," he said.--BERNAMA

MAD KTC