

18/07/2000

IT principles to be part of Eighth Plan

Shamsul Akmar; Raynore Mering

KUCHING, Mon. - The Government will incorporate several information technology-related principles in the Eighth Malaysian Plan to ensure the absence of a glaring digital divide within Malaysia.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the principles would emphasise the need for IT education, the use of IT and e-government in the administration.

"We were also briefed on the need for e-commerce by small and medium businesses," he told reporters after chairing the 10th National IT Council (NITC).

He said it was too late to incorporate the principles into the Seventh Malaysian Plan.

"We need to draw up these principles so that the digital divide within our country and between us and other countries will not be too glaring," he added.

According to an Associated Press report, the digital divide issue is expected to be addressed when leaders of the Group of Eight (G8) meet in Okinawa, Japan, this week.

G8 leaders are expected to address mounting concerns that developing countries lacking the resources to benefit economically from the information and communications technology will be further marginalised by the networking revolution.

At the Press conference, Dr Mahathir also expressed hopes that the private sector would lead the initiative on e-commerce.

"Big corporations may have the ability to promote their products and services through the Internet or e-commerce.

"However, for small and medium companies, this expertise may be limited or non-existent. Apart from that, they may not have the capital to embark on it," he said.

The Prime Minister suggested that the SMCs introduce their products and services through a single portal.

"Those who manage this portal will then channel all the information necessary for e-commerce on the website.

"Anyone interested in purchasing the products or seeking the services would then be able to do so based on the data made available through the portal," he added.

Dr Mahathir said the Government was aware that numerous companies would set up their own portals which may result in their not being serviced well.

"The Government will also not be able to regulate and licence all of them. We are also worried that if we try to place restrictions, these companies will then conduct their dealings from abroad.

"We hope these companies will practice good business culture and ethics so that we will not get a bad reputation. The reputation of our companies will erode if they are badly managed," Dr Mahathir said.

The meeting, among others, also discussed the need for a commodity exchange.

"Nowadays, the place of the exchange is not important. Anyone can set up an exchange anywhere because the Internet is accessible from everywhere.

"There is a possibility that a non-producing nation becomes the trading centre for the commodity," Dr Mahathir said.

If that happened, commodity-producing countries would suffer losses, he

added.

"We are of the opinion that we have to be cautious on how to handle these possibilities."

To overcome this, Dr Mahathir said it was important that Malaysia set up its commodity exchange as soon as possible.

"On whether our exchange or that of others is going to be used, it depends on the services rendered.

"It is a matter of what we have and how fast we manage things. Today, we cannot avoid competing," he added.

Dr Mahathir also commended Sarawak for taking the initiative in IT.

(END)