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Mahathir-Technology

REJECTING NEW TECHNOLOGIES WILL REDUCE COMPETITIVENESS

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 6 (Bernama) -- Rejecting or even delaying new technologies will reduce the competitiveness of the Malaysian economy, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

He said with e-commerce and k-economy demanding ever faster communications, the country cannot afford to delay or reject new technologies.

Besides, there was the problem of convergence, he said when opening the 40th Commonwealth Telecommunications Council meeting here.

Dr Mahathir said it was no longer practical to separate communications from broadcasting, even less between telephony, faxing and Internet transmission.

Hence different licences cannot be given for separate services and one licence would cover all, he said.

"Obviously, new technologies cannot be licensed separately from old technologies. The obvious answer is to have one licence for everything," he said.

The rapid advances in technology, he said, had sometimes created difficulties for government and politicians as they would be faced with a dilemma -- to reject new technology would be bad and if accepted it would cause much loss to large old companies.

He said this was because technology had moved faster than application, causing billions of dollars worth of investments to be lost.

"Nevertheless Malaysia will make full use of technology for its growth and development and thus we have the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC)."

Today more than 60 per cent of the companies including world-class companies were located in the MSC although there were three more years to go to achieve its full target.

Investments by local and foreign companies had increased significantly from RM196 million in 1997 to RM1.7 billion in the 1997-1999 period.

Total investment in the MSC was expected to exceed RM20 billion by 2005 with the creation of 35,000 jobs compared to only 5,500 between 1997 and 1999.

On digital divide, Dr Mahathir said technology should not be a privilege of those in the urban areas or in the rich countries only.

He said the use of information technology must be democratised and that everyone, whether urban or rural, rich or poor must be able to share in this knowledge.

The Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) could play a meaningful role in narrowing the digital divide by committing funds, resources and computer and internet training to the less developed countries to check them from slipping further behind in technology and wealth.

He said for a number of years successive Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) had articulated support for a Commonwealth Network for IT Development (COMNET-IT) forum.

However, beyond this high level lip service, there was a total void by way of any explicit resourcing or programming in Commonwealth functional cooperation and programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat, Dr Mahathir said.

While the council meeting might not be the exact forum to champion this cause, he said, CTO could serve as a platform for action in the spirit of making the Commonwealth truly an association of countries where wealth was common.

The Information Age provided an opportunity for all countries to start together whereby countries, big and small, had potential markets for

telecommunication.

Howeve it was true that the rich and technologically advanced countries were in a better position to exploit the technology worldwide.

Dr Mahathir said there was now a rush to gain shares in the telecommunication industry in all the countries of the world by the major international players.

"I do hope that the big international companies will not try to