

PM: Cheaper PCs can help close digital divide

STAR
SEP 2001

KUALA LUMPUR: There is a need to ensure competitive network tariffs, cheaper access devices, incentives and adequate support for the masses for acquiring PCs, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He cited a UNDP study, which indicated that North America with less than 5% of the world's population, had

more computers than the rest of the world combined.

"The study also found that 80% of the world's websites are in English which is spoken by less than 10% of the world's population," he said.

Thus, governments need to address the digital divide problem in order to evolve into a truly knowledge-based economy, he said at a conference

dinner in conjunction with the Asia Pacific ICT Awards presentation last night

The text of his speech was read out by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Dr Mahathir said that developing countries would have to weigh the costs versus the benefits of liberalisation.

"On the down side, trying to

accelerate one's move into the global economy has its risks," he said.

Accelerated liberalisation, he said, might cause a nation to lose the profitable segments of economic activities on the value chain to foreign hands.

"For instance, full liberalisation of priority sectors such as telecommunications, whilst critical for capital injection

and technological innovation, may cause unprepared national incumbents to collapse in the face of foreign competition."

Also, he said, countries might be exposed to systemic risks, as capital outflows could cause massive economic and social disruptions, as was illustrated during the Asian currency crisis.