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MAHATHIR-ASEAN

ASEAN ECONOMIES MUST LEARN TO COMPETE

KUALA LUMPUR, July 12 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said that Asean economies must learn to live and compete in a market made increasingly competitive by the forces of globalisation and liberalisation.

Asean governments, in particular, have to face up to the challenges posed by the rapid expansion of electronic business (e-business), he said in his foreword in the First Asean Telecommunications Ministerial Meeting (TELMIN)/Second Asean Telecommunications Senior Officers Meeting (TELSOM) souvenir programme book.

The Asean Telecommunications ministers will meet here tomorrow. Yesterday, the Second TELSOM was held where senior Asean telecommunications officials met to discuss several issues relevant to the development of the communications sector.

Dr Mahathir said: "We need to address issues such as the taxation of goods and services sold electronically, consumer protection, harmonisation of regulatory frameworks and the creation of a trusted environment for trade to flourish."

The prime minister said that Asean economies must strive to create competitive network tariffs and cheaper access devices as well as rapidly increasing the number of people who have access to the Internet and thus creating the critical mass necessary for e-business to flourish.

Asean groups Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Dr Mahathir said that by effectively addressing these issues, Asean can significantly contribute towards reducing the digital divide and provide the pre-conditions for moving towards a knowledge-based economy.

He said the Asean Telecommunications Ministers Meeting can play a vital role in addressing and resolving many of the issues.

"The task is heavy but with the spirit of cooperation and collaboration that has guided all deliberations in the Asean forum so far, I am sure we will be able to overcome many of the constraints that may come our way."

In the long run, Dr Mahathir said, it will be to Asean's benefit to meet the challenges and remain competitive to keep abreast of global progress.

On the inaugural meeting, Dr Mahathir said it was not only timely but relevant given that Asean as a region was focusing on how to transform itself into a knowledge-based economy.

He said the explosive growth of the Internet, coupled with the convergence of information and communications technology (ICT), is rapidly changing the economic and societal landscape of nations including Asean.

"This digital revolution is inscrutably altering the way businesses are transacted and the way governments, businesses and the people are interacting," he added.

The idea of an Asean Telecommunications Ministers forum was first mooted in March 2000 during an informal meeting of Asean Telecommunications Ministers at the APEC TELMIN in Cancun, Mexico.

Following the Cancun decision, the first Asean TELSOM was convened in Brunei in October 2000. The first TELSOM laid the foundation for the First TELMIN to be held in Kuala Lumpur. -- BERNAMA

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