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ASEAN-TELECOMMUNICATION

CALLS FOR A MORE WIRED AND INTERCONNECTED ASEAN

KUALA LUMPUR, July 13 (Bernama) -- Asean telecommunications minister concluded their inaugural meeting calling for greater cooperation to ensure that the region is more wired and more interconnected to attract a fair share of global investments and boost sustainable growth in the area.

Wrapping up their First Asean Telecommunications Ministers Meeting (TELMIN) here today, they said they recognised Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a growth enabler for economies of Asean member countries and as a potential tool to compete in the increasingly global economy.

In a joint statement issued at the end of the meeting, they also acknowledged that ICT allows access to information sources worldwide, promotes business and network transcending borders and helps in spreading knowledge about best practices and experiences.

The ministers underscored the importance of the e-Asean framework agreement signed by the Asean leaders in November 2000 to provide greater momentum to collectively address the digital divide issue and enhance the connectivity of member countries by improving their national information infrastructure.

The ministers also acknowledged that e-Asean could effectively promote economic growth, social development and better governance as well as enhance access to information and news, enlarge employment opportunities, increase economic output, provide more efficient access to a range of governmental services, make distant education and training more effective, improve delivery of health services, including the application of tele-medicine.

They emphasized the need to intensify collaborative efforts in advancing e-Asean, particularly in facilitating the early realisation of the Asean information infrastructure (AII), promoting universal and affordable access to information and communication services including the Internet and the building up of human resources capacity.

They urged an industry-led resolution of the problems posed by the current international charging arrangement for Internet services and called for a fairer and more sustainable arrangement including cost sharing.

They urged member countries to set a culture of partnership competitiveness, innovation and entrepreneurship to support and sustain the development and growth of the telecommunications sector.

The ministers also urged member countries to create responsive policies and regulatory environment for investment, infrastructure development, and technology development and to continue working collaboratively in promoting capacity for Asean citizens to communicate in the information age.

They reinforced the importance of developing Asean content on the Internet.

They also agreed to work towards bridging the capacity gap between the old and new Asean members with the more advanced members sharing their expertise, training and educational resources, with the less advanced members.

The ministers collectively shared the view that the AII's successful implementation depended on the strong commitment and cooperation of the member countries.

They agreed that member countries should assist one another in the development of the AII, including network infrastructure, applications and

services and in regulatory and investment policies.

The ministers expressed support for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call to address issues on narrowing the digital divide and enhancing human capacity through the establishment of regional centres of excellence in ICT and promoting networking security through a proposed Asean network security coordinating centre.

They agreed to further explore the proposal.

The ministers also signed the ministerial understanding on Asean cooperation in telecommunications and information technology today.

The ministerial understanding formalised the Asean resolve to, among others, move forward Asean's cooperation in the telecommunications and information technology sector by establishing the AII and further advancing the e-Asean initiative, bridging the digital divide through capacity building and human resource development programmes and facilitating intra-Asean trade and investment in the ICT.

To advance Asean cooperation in the ICT sector, the ministers agreed to the formation of five working groups, namely, for Asean information infrastructure, capacity building, universal access and digital divide, trade and investment facilitation and positive use of the Internet.

The second TELMIN would be held in Manila in July-August 2002.

-- BERNAMA

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