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Focus on network security, says PM

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KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today urged Asean Telecommunications Ministers to give greater attention to two important issues concerning network security - the rising incidence of cyber-crimes and the increasing use of the Internet for misinformation.

He said it was imperative that adequate measures be taken to formulate a comprehensive and fool-proof regulatory and legislative framework, particularly for the conduct of e-commerce activities.

In this regard, he suggested that the Telecommunications Ministers establish an Asean Network Security Co-ordinating Centre which can serve as the focal point for management of information and network security issues.

Dr Mahathir said the centre can play an important role in assessing the e-security readiness of Asean member countries and facilitate training and exchange programmes for network security enforcement.

While many countries have attempted to address the issues through legislative and regulatory measures, these have largely been ineffective due to the global character of the Internet, he said in his keynote address at the official opening of the first Asean Telecommunications Ministers meeting today.

His speech was delivered by Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie.

"Those responsible for disseminating offensive information on the Net cannot be prosecuted in a particular country, if the website is hosted outside its border.

"I would therefore urge the Asean Telecommunications Ministers' forum to not only deliberate on this issue from the perspective of the region, but also to develop a consensus in addressing the problem at the international fora," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the misuse of the Internet for propagating and disseminating information detrimental to both national and societal interests are on the rise.

The number of websites dedicated to "hate information" and pornography is also mushrooming and becoming more easily accessible, especially to the younger generation, he said.

"While Governments, multinational corporations and other interested institutions are doing everything possible to jump-start and push their k-economy plans forward, there are also many people, organised or otherwise who are trying to do everything possible to disrupt and thwart these efforts," he said.

He also urged the Ministers to give particular attention to some key areas of concern in the context of transforming Asean into a knowledge-based economy.

Firstly, he said the Ministers should look into the issue of accessibility as there was an urgent need to narrow the digital divide among the Asean countries by ensuring that there was a more equitable distribution of communications and information infrastructure.

There was also a need to further enhance inter-connectivity and inter-operability among Asean countries by promoting and establishing common regional standards and information infrastructure.

In this regard, he said, it would be good if there were intra-Asean investments by the telcos of the region.

According to Dr Mahathir, another critical issue was the need to develop skills and expertise that can promote and enhance the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as there was significant opportunity for Asean countries to co-operate and collaborate in this area through the establishment of regional centres of excellence in the field of ICT as well as expanding the opportunities for tele-education and distance learning using satellites.

He said the third area of focus should be on developing local and regional content for the Asean region. "With common cultural linkages, developing a common regional content should not be insurmountable - in fact, it can contribute greatly towards making Asean a regional information hub," he said.

The final area of concern was the need for ensuring a well-co-ordinated network security system, which is especially critical in ensuring adequate checks and balances on issues concerning security, he said.