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Parliament-Debate

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MASTERPLAN URGENTLY NEEDED, DEWAN RAKYAT TOLD

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 23 (Bernama) -- A government backbencher told the Dewan Rakyat here today that an information technology masterplan is urgently needed to ensure that the country is capable of facing challenges in the IT industry.

Datuk Ahmad Husni Hanadzlah (BN-Tambun) said that the government would be better able to plan and stimulate the IT industry if the masterplan, planned earlier, became a reality.

"Matters like the rate of computer literacy, the percentage of computer ownership, frequency of internet access, IT utilisation in the industries and the public sector and the means to expedite the marketing of local software could be looked into," he said during the debate on the 2002 Budget.

He said that the shortage of IT experts should not be cited to hinder the progress of the industry because local IT experts could still contribute towards the progress of the IT industry through venture capital projects.

He proposed that the government send academics in the IT field to deepen their knowledge and experience abroad especially in the Silicon Valley.

Local universities with lacklustre record in the IT field was among the factors hindering the country's aspiration to produce more expertise in the field, he said.

Referring to the allegation by Abdul Rahman Yusof (Keadilan-Kemaman) that many IT projects like the E-Village had failed, Husni said that such projects were at the initial stage and it was premature to say that they had failed.

He was confident that the IT projects including the E-Village were feasible and would show progress in the future.

Meanwhile, Datuk Ruhanie Ahmad (BN-Parit Sulong) said that the action by PAS to politicise the Islamic state issue had confused the people and had induced some Muslims to hate Umno and the Barisan Nasional.

"What is even more serious are the differences among Muslims ignited by PAS which has led to the emergence of what is known as the Kumpulan Militan Malaysia (KMM) aspiring to set up an Islamic state in Malaysia by force," he said.

He said that PAS had claimed to be a party which "opposes any form of violence and terrorist tendencies" but was cynical when the government arrested several KMM members under the Internal Security Act (ISA). PAS needs to state its stand on the KMM, he said.

Ruhanie also said that PAS had alleged that Malaysia was a secular state but recently Dr Syed Azman Syed Ahmad Nawawi (PAS-Kuala Terengganu), when proposing a motion on the retaliatory attacks on Afghanistan by the United States, acknowledged that Malaysia was an Islamic country.

"The statement by the Kuala Terengganu MP came out of his sub-conscious mind. This shows that Malaysia being an Islamic country has always been on the mind of the Kuala Terengganu MP," he said.

Ruhanie also raised the issue of the publication of "mosquito tabloids", taking advantage of the loopholes in the Home Ministry procedures that permits are not required for periodicals, and creating frictions within the community.

He said that the publications would have different heading each time

but they are produced by the same printers.

"I call on the government to impose stricter conditions for such publications. It is not to curb freedom but such reports must be responsible," he said.

Dr Tan Seng Giaw (DAP-Kepong) proposed that the government think of ways to successfully implement the policy for the diversification of products, exports and markets so that the country would not be overly dependent on oil, commodities and electronics products.

He said that in the tourism sector, the government should upgrade facilities at tourist destinations including the tourist information centres to achieve the target of 12 million tourists.

With the 2002 Budget allocation of RM200 million for tourism promotion activities, he said that information at tourist information centres should be coordinated by the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board.

Hoo Seong Chang (BN-Kluang) said that drafters of policies and business leaders in Asia should be cautious in the wake of uncertainties in the global economy at present to avoid other problems.

He said that the decline in foreign demand for export goods would hinder economic growth in most countries in the region.

Hoo also said that the Education Ministry should encourage private institutions of higher learning to expand their capacity by setting up new campuses to provide adequate educational opportunities for school-leavers.

Datuk Seri Joseph Pairin Kitingan (PBS-Keningau) said that the declaration by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad that Malaysia was an Islamic country and an amendment to the constitution was not necessary was a guarantee that the government would continue to allow freedom of worship as enshrined in the constitution.

"There is no problem because the decision (declaration of an Islamic country) provides a guarantee that freedom of worship in Malaysia remains," he said, while supporting the government's initiatives to curb religious extremism and fanaticism.

The Dewan will sit again tomorrow.

-- BERNAMA

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