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Plan to change cyber laws to benefit ICT sector

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THE Government will re-study existing legislations, especially those relating to cyber activities, with a view of making amendments to them.

Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Leo Moggie said the proposed amendments would make the laws more relevant and effective to the needs of the information and communications technology (ICT) sector.

"We realise most of our current legislations were enacted some time ago, and did not take the ICT into account.

"Hence to make the laws more relevant and effective, the Government is prepared to make amendments which include introducing provisions to existing laws," he told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Leo Moggie hinted that even recently enacted cyberlaws may be amended to take into account new developments in the industry. Laws enacted as recent as three to four years ago would also be reviewed and updated.

The Minister was commenting on an earlier statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who said the Government was considering making amendments to the legislations, such as the Printing Presses and Publication Act, as they were not effective.

Leo Moggie said most of the laws that would be reviewed would most likely be those that relate to cyber activities, but added that it would be a difficult process.

"The strength of the Internet lies in its openness, but because it is this very issue that makes it extremely difficult to control. There are many who choose to abuse the Internet and we must find ways to prevent this," he said.

In its effort to draft proper legislation, the Government will make the proposed amendments readily available to the public to get their feedback before proceeding to table it in Parliament.

"We are already doing that with the current Data Protection Bill. The Bill has been made available for some time now and we have received interesting feedback from the public. The Bill is now scheduled to be tabled by year-end," the Minister said.

The Data Protection Act is intended to complement efforts to maintain the integrity of the data transacted through the electronic medium.

Once approved, the Act should give a boost to electronic transactions as it will ensure all data, including those of a personal nature, are fully protected.

Also on the drawing block is the Multimedia and Communications Act which is being designed to improve the efficiency of the existing telecommunications industry and to facilitate the development of the new information technology and multimedia services in the country.

The Government's decision to re-study the impact of ICT on existing legislation and enact new ones was based on the growing importance of ICT in a knowledge-based economy. While wanting more individuals to adopt ICT, the Government intends to have an effective mechanism to prevent its abuse.

According to Leo Moggie, ICT development was central in the pursuit of productivity-driven growth and a knowledge-based economy, as it would become a significant determinant of competitiveness for organisations and countries, stimulating increasing reliance on value-creation of information knowledge.

"Because of its importance, priority will continue to be given to the

expansion of ICT infrastructure and infostructure, in order to bridge the issue of digital divide and to enable equitable access to information and knowledge to all," he said.

The minister also gave an assurance that the Government would work on enhancing the country's capacity in other areas which it feels were fundamental to the success in building Malaysia's knowledge economy.

These include building the country's knowledge manpower base, intensifying science and technology and research and development initiatives, increasing knowledge content and local content development, and enhancing the Government's facilitative role in providing the appropriate environment and in encouraging greater private sector participation.

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