

# Bridge digital divide, Dr M tells IT council

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Nst 24 APR 2002

PUTRAJAYA, Tues. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called on members of the Third National IT Council to work hard in bridging the digital divide during their term.

The Prime Minister also stressed the urgent need for all Malaysians to master English as well as other languages which could help in efforts to bridge the divide.

Dr Mahathir made the remarks when addressing the 25 newly-appointed members of the council at its first meeting at the Prime Minister's Department today.

The new members will serve until 2004.

Dr Mahathir also thanked members of the previous council for their dedication and service.

The council at its meeting today

was briefed on programmes aimed at narrowing the gap in ICT, and on the TIGeR 1 project. (TIGeR stands for technology, industry and government for e-revolution).

The project is being undertaken in Penang.

NITC was established in 1994 and functions as the primary adviser to the Government on matters pertaining to information and communication technology in Malaysia's national development.

Among members of the Third NITC are seven Ministers, one Chief Minister, academia, representatives of unions and non-governmental organisations and senior executives of IT-related companies.

Its permanent members are Dr Mahathir, who is the chairman, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (deputy chairman), Mimos Bhd president

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# Dr Mahathir wants all on board IT bandwagon

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and chief executive Tengku Datuk Dr Mohd Azzman Shariffadeen (secretary), Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri Samsudin Osman and Multimedia Development Corporation executive chairman Tan Sri Dr Othman Yeop Abdullah.

Briefing reporters on the meeting, council member Professor Datuk Dr Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin said the PM made it clear that no one should be marginalised in receiving IT education.

Dr Mahathir, she said, stressed the importance of "bringing everyone on board" the IT bandwagon.

He also emphasised on using knowledge gained on ICT positively, she said.

"Dr Mahathir noted the use of languages would enable people to be innovative and creative, and this would help bridge the gap," said Sharifah Hapsah, who is Professor of Medical Education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

On whether any target had been set for the council, she said three strategic areas had been identified.

These are e-Competitiveness (to improve national economic competitiveness), e-Public Services (to ensure the efficient and effective delivery of public good) and Social Digital Inclusion (to address bridging the digital divide issues for various communities in the country).

Sharifah Hapsah said the communities identified included business, women, youth, urban poor, disabled and geographically-isolated communities.

She said NITC decided to adopt a holistic approach in implementing programmes to bridge the divide.

On how serious the gap was, Sharifah Hapsah said it was quite difficult to arrive at a figure because the divide did not only apply to only those who had no access to information and knowledge. It also applied to those who had access but did not know how to utilise ICT to better their lives, she added.