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Abdullah-Asean

ASEAN COMMITTED TO HELP IN ICT DEVELOPMENT IN NEW MEMBER COUNTRIES

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 (Bernama) -- Asean is committed to help new member countries Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam in their information and communication technology (ICT) development to overcome the digital divide that can cause them to be left behind, said Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The deputy prime minister said that different countries in Asean had been assigned to specific tasks to help these countries so that it could be done on a joint basis.

"We also believe that under the Asean+3 arrangement, perhaps some kind of help can be extended to these countries," he said in an interview with four Asean journalists on the "In Conversation" programme aired over TV3 tonight.

He was asked to elaborate on his statement at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa recently that the digital divide between the developed and developing countries will be the future cause of poverty, in the context of Malaysia and Asean.

Abdullah said that vast development of ICT will have an influence in the economic development, and countries without these technology would be less competitive and would suffer as the result.

He said that some countries were blessed with having all the facilities and become information rich, while some were not, and countries without ICT would be left further behind, creating a new gap between the rich and the poor.

"ICT is seen as the new way of doing things, in managing things, of enhancing the economic development and creating greater growth. In this situation, countries which are poor today, they can become poorer in the future because of digital divide," he said.

He said that the government was already looking at this as a problem that needs to be addressed in Malaysia and this must be equally true in other places.

"ICT development is something that no country can run away from. All of us are going to be influenced by it and a lot of people are doing in the ICT way, and (if) you are not, then you are going to be less competitive and suffer as a result of that," he said.

Abdullah was the fifth Asean leader to appear on the hour-long programme which saw him being interviewed by four Asean journalists.

Dr Mahathir appeared as the first Asean leader, followed by Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and Indonesia's People Consultative Council Speaker Dr Amien Rais.

The production is the result of collaboration between Malaysia's TV3, Thailand's iTV, RCTI of Indonesia and ABS-VCBN of the Philippines.

An estimated 300 million people in the region watch the programme which gives Asean leaders the opportunity to air their views on various matters.

-- BERNAMA

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