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Mahathir-Communications

BONDS CAN FINANCE COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE, SAYS MAHATHIR

BANGI, May 17 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said bonds should be considered as a non-traditional source of financing communications network facilities in developing countries.

This was in view of the difficulties in getting funds for such facilities in many markets, especially in developing countries, the prime minister said.

He said the use of bonds for this purpose could be considered in view of the long-term and strategic nature of investments in communications infrastructure.

"The relatively long lives of network infrastructure and their potential to generate steadily rising revenues over time can make them attractive investment vehicles," he said in his speech at the opening of the World Telecommunications Day 2002, here, today.

His speech was delivered by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

The theme for this year's World Telecommunications Day is "ICT For All: Empowering People To Cross The Digital Divide".

The prime minister said the bonds model could be extended to pay for network infrastructure development in remote and rural areas to supplement existing funding mechanisms for the provision of universal communications services.

"We must not forget that many of our towns that thrive with commercial activities were once sleepy hollows before they were provided with the basic utility services that linked them with the rest of the country," he said.

He also suggested that property developers be encouraged to invest in providing last mile access infrastructure within their property boundaries to speed up the access to information communication technology (ICT).

They should regard their investment in the last mile infrastructure as their developmental and marketing costs because the readily available good communications infrastructure would stimulate sales and make their properties more attractive to potential buyers, he said.

Last mile facilities refer to final connectivity leg between the core broadband backbone and individual customers or that which connects a particular network to end-users.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia wanted ICT for all of its people and was providing the technology as a first step to empower them to cross the digital divide.

He, however, stressed the need for the people to have the desire to do things differently and the will to learn new ways of doing things to enable them to cross the digital divide.

"You haven't crossed the digital divide if you have an e-mail address that you never access; you haven't crossed the digital divide if you still rely on your secretary to access and print your e-mails for you; your organisation hasn't crossed the digital divide if the information on your website is seldom updated," he said.

The prime minister said that he was also saddened to see that there were countries that badly needed ICT and yet could not afford to pay for them while there were other countries that could afford them and yet said the money was needed somewhere else.

"Millions are spent on weapons that take the lives of innocent

civilians as warring factions fight for territorial control.

"But there's no money to provide basic communication facilities for the people who desperately need them. Where are our priorities?" he said.

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia had gone a long way in putting the infrastructure for ICT and under the Eighth Malaysia Plan had allocated a sum of RM5.159 billion for ICT-related programmes and projects.

He also hoped that network facilities players in the country would now focus on what they do best because the full-service providers that they aspired to be in the past were becoming an anachronism.

"Given the convergence of technologies, there is a strong case for some of the existing full-suite service providers to pool their backbone and access infrastructure companies then can become global network providers in support of growing numbers of Malaysian and Asean businesses operating internationally," he said.

-- BERNAMA

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