

25/07/2002

Local ICT sector on par with well-known hubs

M.K. Megan

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - The Government's efforts to develop the Information, Communication and Technology sector has paid off with Malaysia being placed on par with other well-known international ICT hubs.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the United Nations Development Programme placed Malaysia in the same category as the Silicon Valley and Boston in the United States, Stockholm-Kista in Sweden, Dublin in Ireland and Bangalore in India in its annual report last year.

"Although Malaysia has achieved encouraging development in ICT, we have to identify the areas where further attention is needed so that ICT development could be intensified," the Prime Minister said.

Launching the national personal computer, Komnas (Komputer Nasional), at the Mid Valley Mega Mall here today, he said one area that needed to be looked into was the digital gap which existed in two forms.

One was the gap between those who could afford computers and those who could not and the other was between the computer literate and illiterate.

"Indirectly, the gap also exists between the rural and urban people. The affordability among urban people is higher than the rural people."

He noted that 65 per cent of computer owners in the country lived in large cities like Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baru and Penang.

Although several factors contributed to the digital gap, Dr Mahathir said an important reason was the price of personal computers which was directly linked to affordability.

He said the operating and application system, currently being monopolised by several international companies, made up between 25 and 40 per cent of the cost of a computer.

"We have to pay licensing fees to all types of operating and application systems to these companies which raise the price of computers. The end users will eventually have to bear the cost."

He commended DRB-Hicom Info Tech Sdn Bhd, which produces the national personal computer for using an open source based on the Linux system and not the operating and application system monopolised by international companies.

He said some of the large international ICT companies such as IBM, Intel, Sun Microsystem and Oracle and several Government agencies in the US, Germany and France had started using the Linux concept.

He said the Linux concept gave the freedom to use any operation and application system without having to pay licence fees.

"I have been informed that by using this concept, DRB-Hicom can sell its computers for below RM2,000, a price which is affordable to many Malaysians. I am also happy that DRB-Hicom has made loan arrangements with several financial institutions for potential buyers, especially civil servants and co-operative members who only have to pay RM50 on monthly instalments."

Dr Mahathir said Komnas was available in English and Bahasa Malaysia, used a flexible application system, was user-friendly and had Internet access facilities.

"The application system also has some local elements such as family values in it."

He said the PC concept was mooted by some local ICT qualified people and entrepreneurs to help the Government reduce the digital gap.

He proposed that DRB-Hicom carry out programmes in rural areas to

develop ICT facilities.

He also urged the company to introduce its computer through pilot projects in rural schools.

"By doing so, we will know the software and applications needed by these schools," he said.

Dr Mahathir noted that the number of computer owners had increased from 610,000 in 1995 to 2.5 million last year while Internet users increased from 13,000 in 1995 to 1.2 million in 2000.

He said the Government was working with the private sector to reduce the digital gap between rural and urban areas besides achieving the one home one computer concept.