

24 JUL 2002

Mahathir-Computer

MALAYSIA INCLUDED IN LIST OF LEADING ICT HUBS, SAYS MAHATHIR

KUALA LUMPUR, July 24 (Bernama) -- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has included Malaysia in its list of the world's leading information and communications technology (ICT) hubs, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said that according to last year's UNDP report, Malaysia's position in the ICT field was comparable to that of the Silicon Valley and Boston in the United States, Stockholm-Kista in Sweden, Dublin in Ireland and Bangalore in India.

"Although the progress achieved by our country in ICT has been encouraging, we should look at the gaps that need to be filled so that our ICT development is even more rapid," he said when launching Komnas, the national computer produced by the DRB-Hicom group.

Dr Mahathir said the number of personal computers owned by Malaysians saw a marked increase to 2.5 million last year from 610,000 in 1995, while the number of Internet users jumped to 1.2 million from 13,000.

The prime minister said he was, however, not satisfied with the situation as a large number of people in the rural areas did not own a PC or have Internet access.

He said the government, with the cooperation of the private sector, would carry on with its efforts to ensure that the rural areas were provided with ICT infrastructure to narrow down the digital gap among Malaysians.

Dr Mahathir said one main reason for the digital gap was the price of computers which was beyond the reach of some sections of the population.

"The cheaper the PC, the higher the number of people who is able to own a computer," he said.

The Komnas PC is priced at RM1,899 and uses two languages -- Malay and English.

DRB-Hicom has also made arrangements with several banks to provide loans where the monthly instalment is less than RM50, especially for government servants and members of cooperatives.

Dr Mahathir called on DRB-Hicom, and its subsidiary DH-Infotech, to launch a programme to expand ICT infrastructure and facilities in the rural areas.

They could implement pilot projects in selected schools and introduce new approaches in computerisation, he said.

"Through these pilot projects, DRB-Hicom will be able to have a better idea of the needs of schools in terms of software," he added.

-- BERNAMA

RZS LIB MAM SK