

ICT vital to end poverty

PM: It helps create wealth, spurs economy

PUTRAJAYA: Failure to embrace Information and Communications Technology (ICT) may lead to a country's stagnation and eventual decline, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

"It is imperative to embrace ICT as it can help eradicate poverty," he said.

He said developing countries including Malaysia had shown that ICT and innovation could play a significant and meaningful role in eradicating poverty and helping to create wealth and spur economic growth.

"For many under-developed or developing countries, poverty remains the single-most fundamental challenge to be addressed," he said after launching the two-day United Nations inaugural global conference on ICT, themed *Global Alliance for ICT and*

Development, here yesterday.

"Once it is effectively addressed, other development objectives become easier to achieve.

"The digital divide, which describes the gap between those who have access to and possess the skills to use ICT and those who have limited or no access, reflects the broader problem of inequalities in the international social and economic relations between and within countries," he said.

Abdullah said many nations were still too poor to take advantage of these development tools as Internet penetration rates were 10 times higher in developed countries than in developing countries.

He said people were also hampered by other barriers such as lack of relevant content,

poor technological support and the English dominance of the Internet, although only a small fraction of the world's population understood the language.

He urged developing countries to work closely together to implement ICT projects to achieve the United Nations' millennium development goals (MDG) by 2015.

He said Malaysia, having achieved all but one of the MDG, could share its experience and provide important lessons for other developing countries.

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Mark Malloch Brown, who was also present, commended Malaysia's efforts in reducing poverty and said smart public, policies were needed to ensure that the poor also benefited from ICT.