

# Access Centres in rural schools

KLUANG: Internet-ready Access Centres costing more than RM70mil are being set up in 1,500 schools throughout the country.

Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein said the Access Centres would be similar in concept to cybercafes, although their usage would focus on learning and enabling students to work on their assignments.

"It is different from the existing computer labs, which are used to teach certain subjects. The centre will be a separate room from the labs, which will be needed to conduct lessons," he said.

Hishammuddin said that under the first phase, 1,500 schools would be provided with 15,000 personal computers, 1,500 printers as well as the necessary furniture and infrastructure.

"The programme is being rolled out as we speak," he said, adding that another 12,900 computers would be provided to 1,290 schools next year.

He said that with the Access Centres the ratio of computers to students in

schools would be reduced, allowing students to be more exposed to information and communication technologies.

Hishammuddin said the Ministry decided to go ahead with the programme after launching a pilot phase in 10 schools in the Kalabakan parliamentary constituency in Sabah early this year.

He added that to date, 84 primary and secondary schools in the rural area in Sabah and Johor had been equipped with Access Centres.

"The focus is on rural areas first, as I believe the exposure (of students) to computers in the city is high," he said, before breaking fast with the residents of Felda Ulu Belitong here on Saturday evening.

Hishammuddin added that with the Access Centres, students without computers or Internet connection would not have to frequent cybercafes.

He added that when fully expanded, the Access Centres could even be opened for public use thus making it an ICT centre for the local community.

Asked if the number of computers would be sufficient as each school would only be provided with 10 computers, Hishammuddin said this amount was more than enough.

"Combined with computers in the labs and those supported by third parties, I believe it is more than enough. I am not worried about the lack of equipment, but the lack of usage," he added.

He said his Ministry had learnt from the mistakes, when they initially set up computer labs in schools.

"We set up computers but then we realised they had no electricity. But I am worried about security issues.

"We have to study the insurance aspects, whether to lease, buy or upgrade computers and so on. It took us two years to solve the problem with computer labs," he added.

He said he had been assured that all schools would have round-the-clock power and water supply by 2010, and would have their generator sets upgraded during the interim period.