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PM: Cyberthreats no small matter

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KUALA LUMPUR: Modern societies and governments cannot afford to ignore cyberthreats, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said yesterday.

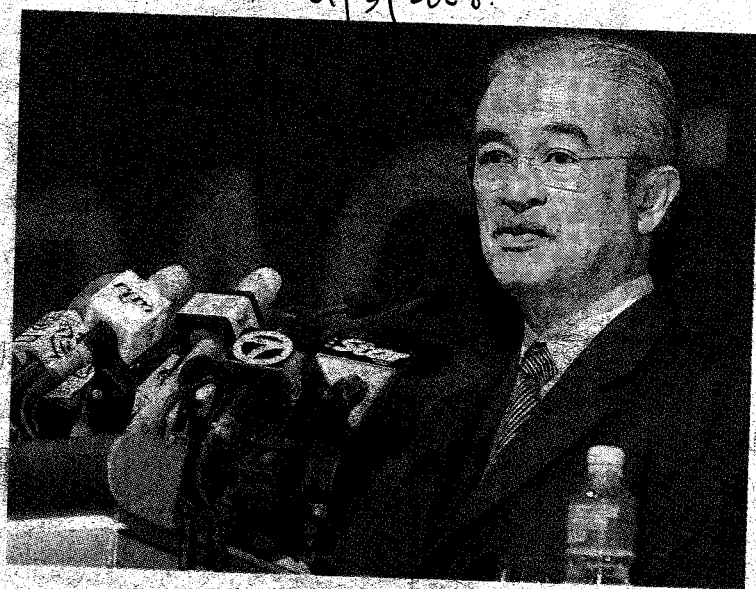
He said cyber threats were different from common Internet crimes like identity theft and money fraud.

"It involves the use of technology to divert or destroy systems and infrastructure, causing injury or death and even undermining economies and institutions.

"It is frightening to imagine the possible human and economic toll if the computer systems that control telecommunications networks, emergency services, nuclear power plants or major dams were to be brought down or thrown into disarray by perpetrators in cyberspace."

Abdullah said this in his keynote address at the opening of the International Multilateral Partnership Against Cyber Terrorism World (Impact) Cyber Security Summit 2008. The three-day summit, which started yesterday, had attracted representatives from 30 countries.

Even if one discounted the risk of human casualties, he said the economic loss that could be caused by cyberdisruption or attack should be reason enough for governments to sit up and take notice.



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi delivering his keynote address at the opening of the Impact Cyber Security Summit 2008 yesterday. — NST picture by Ghazali Bujang

A cyberdisruption that caused a nationwide blackout or a collapse of financial trading systems could undermine even the strongest of economies.

To add to the complexity, Abdullah said a cyberdisruption could be planned and executed from anywhere in the world, without the perpetrators having to set foot in the target country.

"Ironically, the more wired a country is, the more vulnerable it is to massive harm."

As part of Malaysia's commitment towards Impact, the first global public-private initiative against cyberterrorism, he said the government had approved and disbursed a US\$13 million (RM42.1 million) grant.

"More than half of this initial funding is being utilised by Impact to build its secretariat in Malaysia's high-tech city of Cyberjaya."

Abdullah also appealed to the private sectors and academia of other nations to assist and contribute to Impact.

"These contributions need not be financial, they can be in the form of equipment, expertise or people."

To guide the activities of Impact, a high-level international advisory board has been established and its inaugural meeting chaired by Abdullah took place here yesterday.

Among the members of the board are John W. Thompson, chairman and chief executive officer of Symantec Corporation; Dr Vinton G. Cerf, chief Internet evangelist of Google; Dr Hamadoun Toure, secretary-general of the International Telecommunications Union; and Professor Howard Schmidt, a former White House security adviser and former chief security officer for Microsoft and eBay.