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Lokasi : DEWAN TUN HUSSEIN ONN PWTC, KUALA LUMPUR
Tarikh : 26-07-2001

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, First of all, I thank MAMPU and COMNET-IT, the joint organisers, for inviting me to officiate at the closing of this Conference as well as to congratulate them on their successful collaborative effort in hosting this event.

2. I am sure as participants in the proceedings of the Conference over the last two and a half days, you would have found the discussions on the various topics and issues to be highly insightful and informative. I am aware that the scope of the Conference has been very comprehensive, covering a host of areas where information and communications technology (ICT) strategies can be effectively leveraged in meeting our desired objectives. I also think that the participants have been very fortunate to have an extremely knowledgeable and expert set of speakers to offer their views and thoughts on the critical issues related to the various topics that have been featured during the Conference. Consequently, I am sure that the essential themes regarding the strategic opportunities, major hurdles and possible action plans have been panned out and identified at the final wrapping-up session.

3. Considering the level and scope of discussions that you would have had since the start of the Conference, it is not my intention here to delve once again into the various aspects of ICT-based strategies and initiatives that governments and other components of society need to embark upon. On the other hand I would be remiss, if I were not to reiterate the Malaysian Government's commitment to the ICT agenda for sustaining socio-economic development and meeting national aspirations. I know that I speak for fellow member countries of the Commonwealth in stating this commitment. Let me just outline a few areas that we consider important to focus on.

4. The first is the commitment to a national ICT vision. Malaysia has, as a first step, formulated its ICT vision in meeting national objectives through the National IT Agenda or NITA. The strategic agenda of NITA in ensuring Malaysia's migration to the e-World rests on the tripartite partnership between the public, private and community-based sectors. It addresses the digital or electronic dimension in the five critical areas of community, public services, learning, economy and sovereignty. The focus is on the development of people, infostructure and applications to create value, ensure equity and access to all Malaysians, encourage a learning culture and to qualitatively transform our society into a values-based Knowledge Society by the year 2020.

5. As a strategic initiative, Malaysia also implemented the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) as the lynchpin to fast forward the nation into the information age by encouraging the development and utilisation of information, communications and multimedia technology to accelerate economic growth.

6. Even as we set about putting our ICT agenda in place under NITA and implementing the MSC strategic initiative, the revolutionary changes in technology and a new economic paradigm driven by knowledge called for a different set of policy considerations and strategies. Thus, the recently announced five-year Eighth Malaysia Plan and the longer term Third Outline Perspective Plan have realigned the national focus towards the development of a knowledge-based Malaysian economy. Needless to say, like Malaysia, other Commonwealth countries such as Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, Jamaica, New Zealand, South Africa, Singapore and Malta, to name but a few, have all adopted strategic ICT-driven policy initiatives designed to ensure national competitiveness, empowerment of their citizens and sovereignty of their nations.

7. Like others too, Malaysia is concerned with the question of access and the digital divide. Ignore this and we invite dire consequences for our society including the negation of the progress that we have made in working towards the objective of an equitable society. In Malaysia, we will continue to focus on programmes and projects that will help bridge the rural- urban divide as well as address similar gaps in terms of the regional divide. In this regard, the development of telecommunications infrastructure will be a cornerstone of the strategy to improve access to ICT facilities and installations. The potential for

connectivity and access that is presented by alternative means such as wireless technology is also being actively pursued. Concomitant with this is of course the need to ensure a prudent telecommunications regulatory regime that enables the provision of efficient services at reasonable cost.

8. At the citizen level, strategies aimed at enhancing access and empowering the individual will continue to be part of the overall ICT agenda. Programmes such as the Employees Provident Fund personal computer (PC) ownership scheme and personal tax deductions for purchasing PCs are examples of action plans to empower the citizen. In tandem with the focus on the individual, we are equally concerned with community-based initiatives that seek to bring communities, in particular those in the interior, closer to the ICT world and at the same time help diffuse ICT knowledge and skills through innovative partnerships.

Ladies and Gentlemen

9. As you may have discussed in some of the topical discussion streams in this Conference, Malaysia has prioritised the areas where we can best support the enabling effects of ICT strategies. E-commerce for example has now emerged as the new electronic market place that promises renewed economic growth, expanded opportunities for consumers, new commercial activities and more importantly, a whole new range of jobs. While e-commerce is going to be market-driven, there will be a corresponding need for an appropriate legal, regulatory and infrastructure framework for its promotion and development. A critical element of this framework will be to sustain a structure that will enforce rules governing the conduct of transactions, prevent abuse and maintain trust in the market system while addressing the demands of electronic communication systems that transgress international borders. The development of suitable cyber laws that support the electronic market place is a crucial part of this framework.

10. Action is being taken to bridge some of the gaps that have been identified based on an e-commerce readiness assessment for Malaysia. These include requirements related to the hard aspects like infrastructure and connectivity as well as soft provisions related to intellectual property rights. Of course the Government, as the single largest procurer of goods and services, can be a major contributor to the development of e-commerce by implementing e-commerce solutions within its agencies. In the case of Malaysia, the e-procurement project under the e-Government flagship aims to do just that.

11. Education, including training, is another focus area where ICT-based strategies can provide the desired impact. The use of ICT enables the introduction of smart schools, open universities, lifelong learning, distance learning, learning and training-on-demand, just-in-time training and various other innovative methods that bring information, skills and knowledge to students and teachers in schools, employees in the workplace and citizens at home.

12. We too want leading edge ICT tools to make the educational sector serve our needs in the knowledge era. As education will, in the final analysis, impact the quality of our human resource, we need to ensure that our schools, training institutes and other providers of educational and training services adopt effective curricula, content and delivery approaches that emphasise knowledge about real world components and the benefits of value-add.

13. We are equally committed to the utilisation of ICT in enhancing the health of our citizens. The implementation of ICT-driven healthcare programmes is still at an early stage in Malaysia. The Telehealth projects as well as several hospitals that have begun to operate within the electronic environment represent our first foray into electronic health services. If the evaluation of these early efforts indicate viability, then the prognosis for wider scale adoption of ICT-based healthcare programmes is good. Furthermore these programmes can be targeted more easily at specific disadvantaged groups that have been identified under the overall health plans.

14. The push for more effective approaches in leveraging ICT for scientific and technological development is another area that will continue to be given emphasis. This is particular true in the context of the knowledge-based economy where innovation and creativity are key elements for success. The use of innovative ICT applications in itself will contribute strongly to the science and technology sector. More

importantly, new research and the building of new knowledge in areas like biotechnology, genomic and tissue culture as well as cutting edge ICT technologies must be supported if the benefits of science and technology are to be converted to support sustainable development. Malaysia has committed itself to increase gross expenditure for R&D to at least 1.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product by the year 2010 while promoting R&D through its Intensive Research in Priority Areas (IRPA) programme with particular emphasis to intensifying market- oriented R&D.

15. We have long realised that Government and ICT will influence and be influenced by each other. Thus, as Head of the Malaysian Civil Service, I cannot overemphasise the important role of the public sector in catalysing and showcasing ICT-based initiatives that can bring real benefits to citizens and businesses.

For Malaysia, the E-Government flagship aims to transform administrative processes and enhance service delivery so that the Government's services are accessible in an efficient and timely manner and through a variety of ICT and multimedia channels. At the same time, the public sector in Malaysia plays a leading role in promoting and steering the implementation of all the other MSC flagships such as Smart Schools, Telehealth, Multipurpose Smartcard and E-commerce. And these are of course carried out in partnership with the private sector, community-based organisations as well as other expert groups who can provide ICT-driven solutions in all of these areas.

16. While the focus areas that I have highlighted here may seem neatly packaged according to their peculiar requirements and considerations, the truth of the matter, as we all know, is that there are many cross- boundary linkages within and between each one of them.

The complexities get bigger as we move from the national to the international platform. All of these call for careful analysis and suitable action plans.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

17. We are indeed honoured that the Commonwealth Secretariat and COMNET-IT have selected Malaysia as the Asia Pacific Operations Hub in developing and sustaining a local and regional focus for ICT development programmes in the Asia-Pacific region.

Malaysia will support this noble initiative and we will seek to expand our collaboration with international and regional partners in carrying more programmes with focused objectives in the future.

18. I am quite sure that the proceedings of this Conference have helped you appreciate the challenges and issues we face in formulating effective ICT strategies that truly address the needs and concerns of our stakeholders and citizens. Our common experience in utilising ICT for achieving our objectives may not have always proven successful in the past. In fact many question if indeed our investment in technology has brought the returns that it promised. However, it is my view that if technology did not deliver in the past it was because its enabling capability was not pervasive enough. Today however, the landscape is far different. The ubiquity of ICT in the way we work and live, our education, our healthcare systems, our commerce and even our leisure is there for all to see.

It is a challenge that we need to embrace and I believe this Conference is but a part of the response to that challenge.

19. With that Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to declare the RIFICTS 2001 Conference officially closed.

Thank you. Wassalamualaikum wbrkt.