

Malaysia to host global partnership

By JOHAN FERNANDEZ

NEW YORK: Malaysia has been chosen to host the secretariat of the Global Knowledge Partnership, a partnership of public, private and non-profit and non-governmental organisations around the world dedicated to promoting information and knowledge for development.

Permanent Representative to the United Nations Tan Sri Hasmy Agam said that through the partnership, Malaysia hoped to enhance South-South co-operation as well as North-South co-operation in bridging the global digital divide and nurturing the global information society.

Speaking at a UN General Assembly meeting devoted to information and communication technology for development, he said that sustainable development on a global scale required accelerated transfer of knowledge and technology from developed countries to developing ones.

"The United Nations is well positioned to take the lead role in shaping the global information and communication technology vision for development."

Hasmy said the challenge for the international community was not only to bridge the existing global digital divide but also to avert widening the gap.

He said that although it was heartening to note that there were 400 million Internet users, only 5% of them were from developing countries.

"Clearly, the developing world is lagging.

The international community must address this digital divide if it is serious about helping them, he added.

Hasmy said that Malaysia was interested not only in bridging the information and knowledge gap between Malaysia and other nations but also among its local communities.

The number of Internet

users in Malaysia had increased four-fold from 1.6 million in 1998 to 6.5 million last year.

"We expect the number to surge to 10 million next year," he said.

He said the country had identified five segments of the population - senior citizens, youth, women, people with disabilities and geographically isolated people - who faced being marginalised by the move into the Information Age.

In March, together with the UNDP and Coca Cola, the Education Ministry embarked on a partnership and pilot project called "e-learning for life" to spearhead efforts to bridge the digital divide between the technology "haves" and the "have-nots."

Hasmy said the project was an example of how the United Nations and the private sector could support a government's vision of building a knowledge-based society.