

NATIONAL



JUST CHECKING . . . Abdullah looking at how computers in the Mobile Internet Unit, which is housed in a RM605,000 bus, functions. Standing behind him are Saleh (foreground) and Mimos Berhad chairman Tan Sri Azman Hashim. — NST picture by Shukor Rahim

Efforts must be made to further develop ICT

By Sarban Singh

PETALING JAYA, Fri. — There is a need to intensify and further develop the country's information and communication technology to bridge the gap between the "information rich and information poor" Malaysians.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said despite various efforts by the Government to develop the sector, there was still a wide gap in terms of knowledge and computer literacy among the people.

The Government, he said, was also aware that the number of Malaysians who owned personal computers was low.

Data compiled this year showed that the PC "penetration rate" in the United States stood at 450 sets per 1,000 people.

In Japan, it was 228 com-

puters per 1,000 people, 316:1,000 in Singapore while in Malaysia it was only 65:1,000.

"I hope we will not be taken aback by these figures . . . however we have to properly plan and increase these figures to more satisfactory levels," Abdullah said.

He was speaking after launching the country's first Mobile Internet Unit at Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Seafield in Subang Jaya here.

Abdullah said although the number of servers in the world totalled 43.2 million, only 0.1 per cent were in Malaysia.

He said the Government's objective was to ensure all Malaysians were mentally ready to face the challenges of the "electronic world".

The launching of the MIU, he said, was a positive effort to help create aware-

ness among students and teachers on the importance of being computer literate.

The MIU will be a "vehicle" to allow teachers and students to have access to information and gain experience in the field.

This pilot project is a joint effort between the Education Ministry, Mimos Berhad, the United Nations Development Programme and the DRB-Hicom Group.

A luxury bus equipped with ICT facilities and 20 computers will provide an "electronic classroom" experience to 20 schools in Selangor.

Two facilitators from Mimos would provide training to teachers and students.

The UNDP provided a US\$75,000 (RM285,000) grant while Automotive Corporation (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, which comes under the Hicom stable sponsored the RM605,000 bus.

Findings from this six-

month project would be used to gauge the viability of introducing similar programmes elsewhere.

Schools chosen were those not included in the Government's Smart School programme, Computer In Education programme or other similar ICT initiatives conducted by non-governmental organisations.

A memorandum of co-operation was also signed today between the Education Ministry, UNDP, Mimos Berhad and the ACM to establish a smart partnership in developing the MIU programme.

Also present at the launch were National Information Technology Council alternate chairman Professor Datuk Mohd Zawawi Ismail, who represented Education Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Mimos president Tengku Datuk Dr Mohd Azzman Shariffa-

deen, UNDP resident representative for Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Phillip Young and DRB-Hicom Group chairman Tan Sri Mohd Saleh Sulong.

Tengku Azzman said Mimos would donate a multimedia computer and a Jaring account to each of the 20 schools

This was to encourage schools and parent-teacher associations to create a fund to build proper computer labs at schools.

Said Abdullah: "I suggest that this programme be studied thoroughly. If the project is successful, we will then seek funds under the Eighth Malaysia Plan to expand the MIU concept."

He said Mimos was also willing to provide advice to other States which were interested to implement the MIU scheme.