



25 telephone lines for every 100 rural dwellers

By Wilson Luke

KUCHING — Sarawak is aiming to have 25 telephone lines for every 100 people in rural areas by the year 2020, said Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud.

He said the present ratio of about three telephone lines for every 100 dwellers was inadequate to cater for the telecommunications needs of the dispersed population.

The Chief Minister said about 5,000 longhouses and villages each with 20 to 30 families were scattered throughout the state.

To achieve the objective, he called on telecommunications companies to extend their network and provide cheaper services to rural subscribers.

"Telecommunications companies must not only be profit-oriented but should provide the needy with cheaper facilities as part of community service," he said.

He made these remarks when opening the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers' (IEEE) three-day National Conference on Telecommunications Technology (NCTT '96), which is jointly organised with Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas).

In urban areas, the State has recorded a 75 per cent increase this year in telephone subscribers from 114,000 (last year) to about 200,000.

This means that there are about 11 telephone sub-

scribers for every 100 people in urban areas and it is hoped that this figure will be increased to 50 telephone lines per 100 persons by the year 2020.

In Peninsular Malaysia, there are 16.6 telephone lines for every 100 persons.

The State has about 67,000 cellular telephone subscribers - there are 870,000 nationwide.

Datuk Patinggi Taib disclosed the State government was placing emphasis on setting up modern telecommunications infrastructure, saying such facilities were important to support Sarawak's industrialisation process, which included the development of internationally acclaimed high-tech industries.

On the Seventh Malaysia Plan, the Chief Minister said the private sector was expected to invest RM25.4 million in the telecommunications industry during this period to build infrastructure such as fibre optic cables, land and submarine cables, earth and satellite stations, wireless technology, cellular technology and broadband technology.

"I am confident that with the participation of Unimas and support from the government as well as the local industry, Sarawak can become a Research and Development (R&D) centre for telecommunications technology," he said.

The conference brings together telecommunications engineers, scientists, planners, managers, designers and users from both the academic arena and industry. They will present their work and share information on new technology and issues.

The three-day conference has attracted about 100 delegates.

An exhibition is being held in conjunction with the event.



Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Haji Abdul Taib Mahmud pointing to something interesting on the computer screen at one of the exhibition booths. Second from the left is Unimas chairman Tan Sri Datuk Amar Haji Bujang Mohd Nor. PHOTOGRAPH: TH LU

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