

Unimas enters MoU with two international institutions

KUCHING: Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas) entered a memorandum of understanding (MoU) each with two international institutions, to pool skills for projects that introduce information and communication technology (ICT) to rural communities.

The two institutions are the Information Society Institute (TISI) which is a multi-stakeholder partnership and an initiative of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa, and the Localisation Research Centre, Ireland.

Deputy State Secretary Datuk Wilson Baya officiated at the MoU signing ceremony held in conjunction with the two-day International Symposium on ICT for Rural Development 2006, which ended yesterday.

Vice Chancellor of Unimas, Professor Dr Abdul Rashid Abdullah said TISI aimed to improve the circumstances of communities of all kinds, including those with special needs, by appropriating ICT for local benefits.

“With this MoU, we hope to tap into the network of experienced practitioners in TISI to expedite exchange of ideas and collaboration

into projects which are beneficial to both countries,” he said.

TISI was particularly relevant to Unimas’ involvement in the E-Bario project, an award-winning pilot research project that applied ICTs to the rural and remote community of Bario, to sustain social and economic programs, he said.

The award-winning e-Bario project has realised a diesel-powered computer laboratory equipped with computers and internet access, and a solar-powered public community telecentre, both of which were well-utilised.

The second MoU was between Unimas and the University of Limerick, Ireland’s Localisation Research Centre (LRC), which has a global initiative that aims to ensure everybody has access to computers and information in their preferred language.

“This is well in line with the Ninth Malaysia plan, whereby the government will initiate programmes to promote Information Technology literacy and further encourage the development of content in Bahasa Malaysia and other local languages,” Dr Abdul said.

By collaborating with the Localisation Research Centre, and

potentially with ICT Unit in the Chief Minister’s Department, Dr Abdul hoped that such initiatives would support information development, promote public awareness, and more local computing.

Currently, open source software development efforts are being promoted by the ICT Unit of the Chief Minister’s Department and Sains, with the support of institutions of higher learning in Sarawak.

Meanwhile, the collaboration between LRC and Unimas was also to explore more projects that would allow local and cultural content to capture indigenous oral knowledge in some of Sarawak’s 63 languages, to add value to the richness of Sarawak’s cultural diversity.

“The provision of technologies in local languages will not only promote increased access and usage, but also play a vital role in preserving the unique cultures of Sarawak,” he said.

Among those present were Unimas chairman of the Management Board Tan Sri Bujang Nor, Professor Dr Khairuddin Ab Hamid who is chairperson of International Symposium on ICTs for Rural Development and Deputy Vice Chancellor.