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The Jakarta Post



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Education technology still top of RI's list: Govt

Alpha Amirrachman and Irawaty Wardany, The Jakarta Post, Kuta, Jakarta

Indonesia is striving to maintain its commitment to information and communication technology (ICT) for the education system, a top government official said.

"Seventy percent of our vocational high schools, 30 percent of senior high schools and 20 percent of junior high schools are equipped with computer laboratories," Education Minister Bambang Sudibyo announced at the opening of the sixth International Symposium on Open, Distance and E-Learning in Kuta, Bali, on Wednesday.

The government has also distributed television-based *Televisi Edukasi* equipment to some 35,198 junior high schools, and has developed thousands of programs comprising on and offline learning activities, TV broadcast materials and audio programs throughout Indonesia.

"Globalization has pushed the development and utilization of information and communication technology in the education sector," Bambang said.

He said experts campaigned for the use of the latest ICT needed to improve equality, quality and management of education, in a vast and archipelagic country like Indonesia.

"Currently, the ICT-based National Education Network has connected 1,104 spots in provinces and districts throughout Indonesia," said Lilik Gani, director of the ICT Center for Education (Pustekkom) at the Education Ministry.

He said the government had allocated Rp 500 billion (US\$54.2 million) for ICT development in high schools

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and junior high schools in 2008.

Despite efforts to improve ICT in the education system, Indonesia still faces problems of low awareness and low Internet penetration due to minimal supporting infrastructure.

The cost of Internet access is higher in Indonesia than in other countries. Research conducted by LIRNEasia in 2006 revealed annual Internet connection costs in Indonesia were up to 48 times higher than in India.

An Indonesian communication provider can charge \$108 for an international connection, while in Denmark they charge \$37 and India \$30.

In Jakarta, deputy chairman of the executive team of the Indonesian National ICT Council, Kemal A. Stamboel, said the government had promised electronic learning would spearhead the education system in the future.

"So the government is working to close the national education gap any way it can, including speeding up the development of the national fiber-optic network," Kemal announced in a seminar on transforming education in Indonesia.

The national fiber-optic network, known as the Palapa Ring project, aims to provide integrated telecommunication infrastructure throughout the country.

Around 35,280 kilometers of undersea cables and 21,807 kilometers of land cables will be installed so the network can reach all 33 provinces, 440 regencies and cities.

Asked whether Indonesia's workforce is ready to utilize the technologies, Kemal said the latest technology available made it easier for people to work. "Besides, people's ability to adapt to new technology is improving."

"If infrastructure is provided and can be utilized comfortably, I believe it will evolve on its own," he said.

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