Security R&D next niche

Security advancement in online computer systems and databases is new niche that we can participate in: CM

By Samuel Aubrey

KUCHING: Research and development (R&D) in security of online computer systems and databases is the next niche area for Sarawak, said Chief Minister Pehin Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud last night.

"Sarawak is committed to the advancement of security R&D and we think that this is a niche that we can participate in," he said here at a banquet held after the conclusion of the International Conference on the Theory and Application of Cryptology and Information Security (ASIACRYPT 2007).

His text of speech was read by Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Dr George Chan.

Hoping that ASIACRYPT 2007 would be the start of bigger things in this field, he said the State government became the major financial supporter behind the conference by allocating over US$20,000 (RM76,000) to fund its organisation. Part of the funding was also used to assist local researchers and students to participate in the conference.

"I believe that Sarawak has an important role in Malaysia's security R&D advancement. Besides being developers and implementers of security, Sarawakians need to be generators of knowledge and initiators of homegrown cryptologic techniques of national and international significance," he said.

Cryptology is the science and art of encoding and decoding information and messages in order to secure them.

In Sarawak, the Information Security Research (iSECURES) Lab at the Swinburne University was set up to spearhead research in cryptography and authentication protocols as well as to engage in collaborative research work.

Taib said information security had become a bigger issue following higher dependence on computer systems to maintain and keep records.

The threat is becoming greater as personal computers became increasingly more powerful to crack even the most difficult codes and security systems, thus making online computer systems and databases more open to hacking and other forms of attacks.

Taib pointed out that it was even more critical for the government which was the biggest manager, collector and user of information and the guarantor of information validity and legality in the society.

This is because if information kept and used by the government such as land titles and ownership records is being compromised, it may result in the breakdown of law and order.

"As such, cryptology has an important role to play in the safe keeping of important and legal information and communication, thereby ensuring a stable, orderly and functioning society," he said.

More than 170 delegates from 30 countries attended Asiacrypt 2007, which is one of the world's three top cryptology conferences in Kuching.

IMPORTANT READ: Dr Chan holds up the ASIACRYPT 2007 journal, which was presented to him by Swinburne Sarawak vice chancellor and chief executive Prof Helmut Lueckenhausen (centre) and IACR vice president Prof Bart Preneel. – Photo by Jeffery Mostapha