



A skull-and-crossbones symbol is placed on a keyboard



IT chiefs warn of cyber-terrorism threat

5 days ago

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) — The threat of cyber-terrorism is growing and most countries are vulnerable to attacks that can shut down critical infrastructure, global experts told a conference here Tuesday.

"The hard reality is that (information technology) has become a tool for cybercrime and cyberterrorism," said Hamadoun Toure from the United Nations' International Telecommunications Union.

"Cybersecurity must be the cornerstone of every aspect of keeping ourselves, our countries and our world safe," he told the conference, which the Malaysian hosts are billing as the first on cyber-terrorism and security.

Toure dismissed as a dangerous myth the idea that events in the virtual world have only a limited impact on the physical world, saying that technology has "changed the dynamics of terrorism".

Small groups or even individuals are capable of gaining control of millions of computers "which can be used, for instance, to launch denial-of-service attacks on a nation's critical infrastructure," he said.

Malaysia said it was launching a global centre to combat cyber-terrorism which will provide an emergency response to high-tech attacks on economies and trading systems around the world.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the centre, which is expected to be built by the end of the year at the nation's IT hub of Cyberjaya, south of Kuala Lumpur, will be funded by governments and the private sector.

"Every aspect of our daily lives, from communications, public utilities, financial networks to national defence... are highly dependent on information and communications technology to function," he told the conference.

Abdullah said the threat of cyber-terrorism could no longer be ignored by governments, especially in the most "wired" parts of the world.

"The extent of harm and damage that these cyber-threats can pose to our societies and nations should never be underestimated. Any vulnerability can easily be exploited to bring about truly catastrophic consequences," he said.

Eugene Kaspersky, founder and CEO of Russian-based anti-virus experts Kaspersky Lab, said the number of cyber-criminals had leapt more than tenfold since last year.

"This means the Internet environment is getting more dangerous... there's nothing to stop them," he said.

David Thompson, chief information officer of anti-virus systems manufacturer Symantec Corp., said that the risk of cyber-terrorism grew as nations became more developed.

"Most countries are vulnerable to cyber terrorism, it's just that some are more prepared than others," he said.