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Steps to ensure security to IT systems on cards

By Our Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD, April 20: Minister for Information Technology Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari on Wednesday said his ministry was in close contact with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to address IT security in an organized manner.

A number of other initiatives, details of which could not be disclosed for obvious reasons, are under consideration to ensure that our national IT systems are not at risk," said Mr Leghari in his address to a seminar on "IT Security" held at the Comsats Institute of Information Technology (CIIT).

"Suffice it to say that the government and the ministry are fully cognizant of the critical nature of this expertise and are taking all necessary steps to ensure that our IT systems, whether in private or public sector, are adequately protected," he said.

The minister said only secure information being stored and processed through information technology, could ensure accuracy and transparency in transactions. "Pakistan's IT industry with an annual turnover of above \$600 million urgently needs to address issues related to security of information that is being stored and processed through IT-based systems," he said.

"Pakistan's financial and telecom sectors in particular have now become heavily dependent on the use of IT-based solutions that gives them a competitive advantage to improve the quality of the service being provided to the end consumers.

"Deregulation in both these sectors has resulted in massive investments being made in the use of information technology in these companies," the minister said. He said without a corresponding effort being made to ensure that security and integrity of the data being processed was indeed up to the same standards of accuracy and tamper-proof arrangements like paper-based systems have, there would be severe risks associated with moving towards automation.

Today's enterprises viewed their IT assets as critical to their businesses, therefore, securing these against outside attack is of utmost importance to the government, he said.

The IT minister said he was happy that two of the foremost professionals in the field of IT security were Pakistanis - Dr Aftab Rizvi and Dr Manshad Satti, who had decided to contribute to their country in the form of knowledge transfer.

Managing Director Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB) Dr Aamir Matin said the Pakistani IT industry had yet to fully realize the implications of what IT security entailed.

He told the participants that the BS 7799 certification was the equivalent of the ISO 17799 certification and it had found widespread acceptance world wide given that security issues were the same across boundaries and industries.

