

# Internet as the third utility

KUALA LUMPUR

THE recognition of the Internet as the third utility in the 2021 Budget will pave the way for better Internet connectivity nationwide.

Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah said in a press release that the 2021 Budget presented by Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Tengku Abdul Aziz would boost the ministry's work in terms of Internet connectivity, digital economy, creative economy and cyber security.

"With Internet connectivity recognised by federal and state governments as a 'third utility', this new policy is a step forward and an important benchmark in accelerating the ministry's work of strengthening the country's digital infrastructure," said Saifuddin.

He said one of the major problems faced by the agencies under the ministry, namely the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and telecommunication companies was the delay in approvals from the local authorities for the provision of telecommunication infrastructure.

"Today, developers need to prepare their plans for two utilities, namely water and electricity. It is not necessary to provide planning on Internet connectivity, because Internet connectivity is not regarded as a utility. Planning for Internet connectivity only arises after the development is completed. This is the main factor why digital infrastructure work takes too long to complete."

With this, the approval process and the construction of telecommunication infrastructure can be sped up.

Saifuddin said the matter was presented at the 36th meeting of the National Physical Planning Council, which was chaired by Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin in October. This will also be tabled in the Prime Minister's meeting with the Menteri Besar and Chief ministers in December.

"This is part of our proposal to be included in the Infrastructure Planning Guidelines (GPP-I) to facilitate the provision of digital infrastructure. First, it requires the preparation of standardised guidelines to facilitate the provision of national digital infrastructure. Secondly, it needs immediate coordination and consultation for the preparation of the guidelines at the state level, namely through sessions involving management and discussions with stakeholders," he added.

The guidelines are expected to overcome three challenges faced in digital infrastructure planning today, namely the lack of reference sources for digital infrastructure planning for new developments; delays in the provision of communication services; and high cost, delays and consumer dissatisfaction.

This will also allow the people to get faster communication services, a higher broadband capacity and better quality of experience.

Local authorities will have better planned developments that make it



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more competitive and sustainable to attract investors because communication services are already available, while service providers will be able to attract more investment opportunities.

The usage of the Internet in e-commerce, the gig economy and in online education has also increased significantly at every level of society, which in turn has accelerated digitisation towards Industrial Revolution 4.0.

With Internet connectivity recognised as the third utility, the ministry will be able to implement the National Digital Infrastructure Plan (Jendela) 2020-2022 to the best of its ability.

These include a telecommunication credit assistance of RM180 per person for the B40 group amounting to RM1.5 billion; free Internet data by telecommunication companies amounting to RM1.5 billion; Internet connectivity for 430 schools nationwide amounting to RM500 million; the expansion of broadband services for the period 2021-2022 via MCMC amounting to RM7.4 billion and Internet connectivity in



Ahmad Faisal Mohamed Fiah

25 industrial areas amounting to RM42 million.

To assist the country's economic recovery process, the focus is on continuing to boost digital economic activity through Skills Enhancement and Re-Training Programme by the Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) amounting to RM100 million to facilitate the transition of existing workforce

talent into the field of ICT; RM1 billion Industrial Digitalisation Transformation Scheme which aims to revitalise digitisation and automation activities until Dec 31, 2023; and Shop Malaysia Online incentives implemented by MDEC amounting to RM150 million to encourage online spending and is expected to benefit 500,000 local entrepreneurs including halal and handicraft product operators.

"At the same time, the more we increase our online activities, the more we need to improve our country's cyber security controls. In this case, Cyber-Security Malaysia (CSM) was given an allocation of RM27 million to deal with cyber crime," Saifuddin said.

Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Faculty of Com-

munication and Media Studies senior lecturer Ahmad Faisal Mohamed Fiah said Internet connectivity was extremely important for communication especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Employees who work from home need access to high-quality telecommunication network access and affordability.

He said it was the responsibility of the government as well as telecommunication service providers to improve and provide more digital infrastructure facilities in the country especially in the rural areas, which required more attention.

Document controller Azi-

zah Mochamad Abdul Latif, 38, said life without the Internet was difficult.

"Internet connectivity is now very important. In everyday life, many things are done online including learning, payment, shopping and ordering food.

"Even though Malaysia enjoys a 4G network, it is sometimes still slow. I hope that we can see better speeds with the allocation announced in the 2021 Budget."

Online entrepreneur Nor Azila Ramli, 34, said she was highly dependent on the Internet for her business.



Azizah Mochamad Abdul Latif

"As an online merchant who uses social media platforms, namely Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, the Internet is very important. Without the Internet, it would be difficult for me to do business.

"Currently, the children are also learning online and their school work is given through WhatsApp.

"The allocation provided in the 2021 Budget will help to alleviate the burden of the people, especially the B40 who were affected during the Covid-19 pandemic," she said.

Postgraduate student Nurul Najihah Mohd Zain said to further develop the Malaysian economy the government needed to prioritise Internet connectivity.

"Besides making the Internet on a par with electricity and water, the government should add more telecommunication infrastructure and at the same time not burden consumers. This investment is important to facilitate the people who now rely heavily on Internet access for their daily affairs, and also to allow more transactions to move towards a 'contactless' platform.



Nor Azila Ramli



Nurul Najihah Mohd Zain

## INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE THE COUNTRY'S TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Telecommunication credit worth RM180 per person for the B40 group amounting to RM1.5 billion
2. Free internet data by telecommunication companies amounting to RM1.5 billion
3. National Digital Network initiative (Jendela) for the connectivity of 430 schools nationwide amounting to RM500 million
4. Expansion of broadband services for the period 2021 - 2022 via the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) amounting to RM7.4 billion
5. Internet connectivity in 25 industrial areas under Jendela amounting to RM42 million.

## INITIATIVES TO BOOST THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

1. Skills Enhancement and Re-Training Programme by the Malaysian Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) amounting to RM100 million to facilitate the transition of existing workforce into the field of ICT
2. Industrial Digitalisation Transformation Scheme worth RM1 billion to revitalise digitisation and automation activities until Dec 31, 2023
3. Shop Malaysia Online incentives implemented by MDEC amounting to RM150 million to encourage online spending, to benefit 500 thousand local entrepreneurs including halal and handicraft product operators



Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah