

BOOSTING connectivity

More needs to be done to improve our Internet connectivity, especially in the new normal and beyond. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission is widening 4G coverage nationwide to provide the foundation for the switch to 5G.

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THE dust has settled on the case of Veveonah Mosibin – the 18-year-old student from Sabah who climbed a tree to get better Internet coverage to take her online examinations.

But the work has just begun to address bigger, underlying issues: the need to boost Internet connectivity and close the digital gap between rural and urban areas.

This is especially if Malaysia wants to embrace the era of 5G in the future.

The fifth-generation rollout was targeted for this year, but now, it is expected to be ready by 2022 at its earliest, say reports.

At this stage, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) admits it still receives many complaints about connectivity in the country.

Fortunately though, steps are underway to make things better.

By this year, 940 new cell sites will be built in urban and suburban areas nationwide – a move that will boost quality and indoor coverage.

"There are also plans to set up 1,661 new sites across Malaysia to extend mobile 4G coverage in rural and remote places by 2022," says MCMC, adding that this is part of the Jalanan Digital Negara or Jendela initiative.

"The movement control order period has shown that there is still a lot that needs to be done to improve coverage and quality of service, and to prepare for the new norm going forward," it says.

Hence, the MCMC's immediate task now is to renew focus on strengthening the infrastructure.

"This includes expanding fibre rollout especially to towers, and upgrading equipment to provide 4G with a ready position to switch to 5G without huge incremental cost."

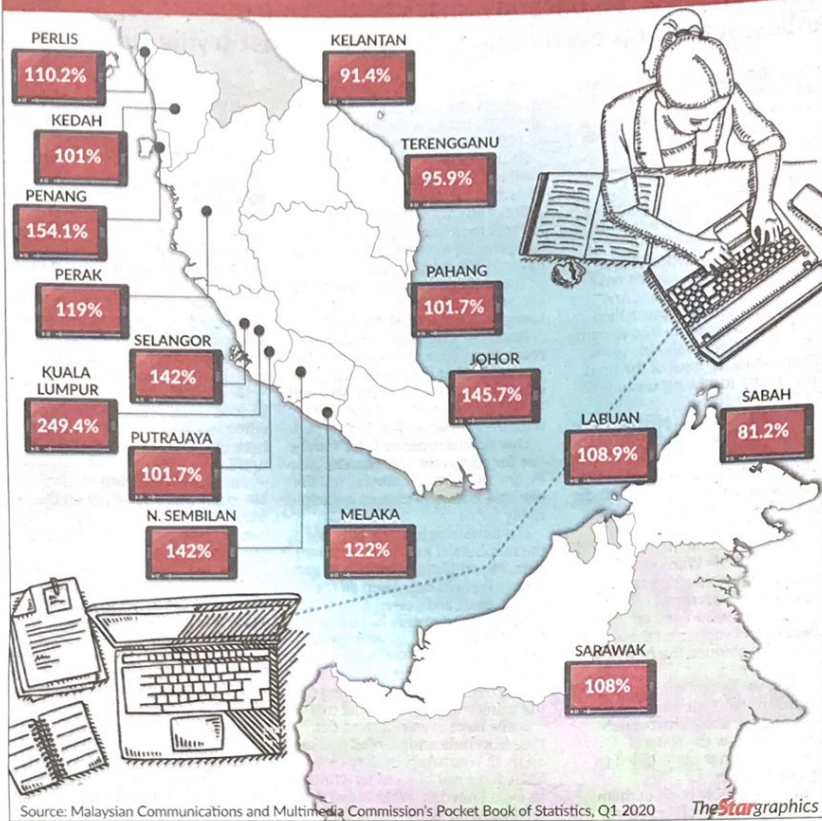
The measures will aim to improve the quality of services, review regulatory tools while ensuring access to infrastructure is made easier for all service providers.

Previously, it was reported that Malaysia's 5G services are likely to be available earliest by 2022.

With 5G, there will be much faster transfers of data, paving the way for various products

Broadband penetration rate per 100 inhabitants by states (%)

- > The broadband penetration rate is a measurement of Internet subscriptions in a population.
- > It is the total subscriptions divided by the total population and multiplied by 100.
- > A penetration rate of over 100% can occur because of multiple subscriptions.



Source: Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission's Pocket Book of Statistics, Q1 2020

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and services, ranging from self-driving cars to "telemedicine". Another example is that it will allow users to download a high-definition movie in a few minutes, compared to about an hour currently.

On Aug 29, Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin unveiled the Jendela plan, which aims to provide 96.9% of populated areas with a 4G mobile broadband network by 2022.

The digital infrastructure plan will be done in phases, and will provide a platform for the transition to 5G under the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025).

The speed of the mobile broadband network will be increased from 25 megabit per second (Mbps) to 35Mbps.

This will also involve the end of the 3G network in phases until 2021 to put up 4G as a platform for 5G.

Phase Two of

Jendela will be the transition to 5G.

By next year, MCMC hopes to upgrade 4,589 existing 2G/3G cell sites to 4G to expand 4G coverage and increase the speed.

"The technical requirement for a 5G rollout rests on a strong foundation of 4G coverage and fibre rollout.

"Without them, the 5G rollout will not realise the optimal benefits of the new technology," MCMC explains.

The MCMC has also engaged

with industry players, which have now provided more affordable Internet packages.

But there's room for improvement in balancing out Internet access and usage across the states in Malaysia.

Overall, the broadband penetration rate per 100 inhabitants in Malaysia in the first quarter of this year stood at 127.4%. This means there were 127.4 broadband subscriptions for every 100 people.

But the rates differ according to states in Malaysia, according to MCMC's statistics.

The state with the highest rate was Kuala Lumpur (249.4%), followed by Penang (154.1%), Johor (145.7%), Selangor (142%) and Negri Sembilan (141.9%).

The state with the lowest rate was Sabah (81.2%), while other states that had less than 100% were Kelantan (91.4%) and Terengganu (95.9%).

Now, Internet connectivity has become an increasingly crucial element in the new normal, especially with virtual learning in schools and higher learning institutions.

However, about one in three students or 36.93% (329,918) of students do not have any devices, based on a recent survey by the Education Ministry.

This means that nearly 40% of our students will not have access to online learning.

So far, the MCMC has developed 873 community Internet centres nationwide that are available for anyone to use for e-learning.

It says it is seeking feedback as to where students face challenges for e-learning so that temporary solutions can be taken.

"It is important to understand that infrastructure rollout is not something that can be done overnight as it has numerous challenges.

"This is more so in places where the terrain in itself poses a huge challenge, both in access and in its physical aspect," the MCMC says.

It adds that embracing 5G should also not be regarded as a race of which nation adopts it first.

"Instead, the real winner is the nation that could harness the technology most effectively to bring the best impact in building a sophisticated nation in the long run," the MCMC says.

