

HOME / MALAYSIA

PM: There is urgent need to increase digital-ready MSMEs across Asean

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In his keynote address during the Asean Business Investment Summit 2021, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob said MSMEs that are lacking in access to technologies are facing the greatest risk of being left behind in this post-pandemic era. — Bernama pic

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 25 — There is an urgent need in increasing digital-ready micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) among the Asean community, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob.

In his keynote address during the Asean Business Investment Summit 2021, Ismail Sabri said MSMEs that are lacking in access to technologies are facing the greatest risk of being left behind in this post-pandemic era.

“In the light of this summit, the existing ecosystem of all Asean states must also be strengthened, while some areas are in dire need of streamlining on certain policies,” he said.

Therefore, he urged fellow Asean countries to work closely in ensuring digital technologies will benefit all.

"In achieving such aspirations, the wealth of experience, technological capacity and innovative approach of private sectors could be further consolidated via public policy.

"I firmly believe that through capitalising on those synergies, we would be able to pave the path for an inclusive digitally-enabled Asean in the near future," Ismail Sabri said.

He said while digital integration has enabled Asean to harness its collective competitiveness in the global economy and foster domestic growth, divergences in technological readiness and connectivity remain elusive.

Hence, the region cannot disregard the speed and scale of changes that have implicated society, of which in due process had widened inequalities across nations.

"The essential question - how do we harness these technologies for future preparation of our businesses and people, while cushioning disruptive transitions?

"Thus, we need to reshape our digital ecosystem in a way that ensures inclusive, sustainable and resilient growth. On this note, allow me to share three key points of suggested resolutions," he said.

Ismail Sabri said it is imperative for every Asean state to foster a truly accessible and affordable digital infrastructure for all, hence there are needs to build inclusive digital infrastructure.

He said Malaysia has taken efforts to improve the foundational infrastructure, with the launching of the Malaysian Digital Blueprint (or MyDIGITAL) initiative early this year in tandem with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0).

"Our aim is to transform the nation into a digitally-enabled, technology-driven high-income economy, while enhancing digital infrastructure for seamless and extensive connectivity.

"This aspiration is currently being actualised by the National Digital Network (or JENDELA) action plan, with an allocation of approximately US\$6.7 billion (RM27.8 billion)," he noted.

Malaysia also aimed to improve broadband quality and coverage while paving the way to 5G technology, to enable the country to enhance the preparedness of the nation as well as catalysing a conducive ecosystem for an innovative economy.

He said Asean also needed to promote inclusive digital literacy, and to this effect, Malaysia has emphasised developing future-ready digital talents as one of the outlined strategies under the recently tabled 12th Malaysia Plan.

Under the plan, continuous measures in upskilling and reskilling digital literacy will be undertaken in ensuring the relevancy of the workforce at all times. Malaysia is also consistently expanding industrial trainings, which include technical and vocational education training, research and development, as well as commercialisation and innovation.

Ismail Sabri said that via various initiatives, the persistent gap in digital skills across the Asean region could eventually be brought closer.

"This is essential for better cooperation and prosperity among Asean states, considering the fact that some Asean members are having more than 90 per cent of digital penetration, while some only by 40 per cent," he said.

Ismail Sabri said Malaysia has also intensified policy interventions which specifically target to expand the breadth and depth of digitalisation adoption by MSMEs.

“This approach is imperative for Malaysia, as our MSMEs accounted for more than 90 per cent of businesses in Asean economies.

“Without due preparations and measures, we could be among the most hard-hit by the pandemic post repercussion,” he said.

Therefore, he said successful adoption of digital technologies is crucial for consistent revitalisation and sustainable economic recovery.

“Digitalisation and technological innovation have been embedded in the initiatives and action plans, including in some of the free trade agreements.

“The recently endorsed Bandar Sri Begawan Roadmap has aspired many in propelling Asean’s transformation into a sustainable digital future. This initiative is in accordance with the past Global Survey, which had ascertained Asia in becoming a home to the largest number of digital platform companies,” he said.

In 2016 alone, Asia’s market capitalisation had reached over US\$930 billion, whereas for South-east Asia it was US\$7 billion. — Bernama