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Digital economy and improving public service delivery

by News Desk

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THE state government will continue to focus on transitioning to a digital economy and improving on its delivery of public services.

Minister for Finance and New Economy, Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Abang Johari Tun Openg stated that the key initiatives in the 2023 Budget for this included enhancing digital connectivity, delivering better services through digitalisation and developing digital talent.

In the efforts to widen the internet coverage and connectivity especially to rural communities, he said 7,000 towers were required to achieve 99.9 per cent internet penetration throughout Sarawak.

He said presently 3,471 towers had been completed whereas 1,043 towers would be built in stages by the end of 2023 and the remaining would be constructed and completed before 2030.

“In spearheading the digital connectivity for greater urban-rural economic integration under the Sarawak Linking Urban, Rural and Nation (SALURAN) initiative, the following measures are implemented, namely construction of SMART 600 tower project, provision of broadband facilities under the WIFI Saluran via Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) Technology throughout 250 sites in rural areas.

“Besides that, the expansion of Sarawaknet services through Digital Socio Economy Programme to 60 sites throughout Sarawak, the expansion of 130 km fibre optic at Sebauh, Bintulu through the Sebauh Rural High-Speed Open Broadband Network Pilot Project to connect 49 longhouses, six schools, two higher education institutions and three state government offices in Sebauh District.

“In addition to that, the installation of Point of Interconnect (PoI) to provide internet services for nine national parks and implementation of wireless broadband services via Sarawak Rural Broadband Network (MySRBN).”

He said this when tabling the Supply (2023) Bill, 2022 at the Sarawak Legislative Assembly (DUN) sitting on yesterday (Nov 21).

Abang Johari pointed out that the state government recognised the opportunities provided by digital economy to act as a new driver for economic growth.

He said the rollout of the State Digital Economy initiatives had enhanced the state's digital transformation in key economic sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, e-commerce services and digital government.

Under the 2023 Budget, an allocation of about RM48mil would be made available under the Alternative Funding for Smart City projects whereas the Digital State Government Services would be allocated RM25mil.

“Over the last five years, Sarawak has produced several successful outcomes in its digital transformation, among others, SPayGlobal, SMART300 telecommunication towers as well as Digital Village and 11 Innovation Hubs throughout the state.

“Moving forward, we will be implementing the new Sarawak Digital Economy 2030 Blueprint to quantum leap our digital economy. This blueprint will further enhance our public service delivery, create new business opportunities, provide access to the global market, generate jobs, and improve social wellbeing.”

On the digital talent development initiative, he said investment in digital talent was critical to meet the needs of new industries.

As such, the state government through the establishment of Digital Economy Testbeds for several key economic sectors such as Centre of Excellence (CoE) 5G & Smart City Open Lab and IR4.0 Prototyping Lab & Testbed, would accelerate the adoption of digital technologies by various industries.

“Besides that, the Digital Community Centres (DDC) have been set up to enhance digital skills and talent capacity of the local community. To date, 45 DCC have been in operation since 2020 with 2,963 programmes having benefitted 79,955 participants.”

In addition, the state government is setting up a new entity to spearhead semiconductor chips design in Sarawak in partnership with players.

Abang Johari said the new entity would play a crucial role in completing the semiconductor eco-system in Sarawak and moving the industry to a high value chain.

“This thereby creates highly skilled jobs for our local talents. Initially, RM3mil will be allocated for the setting up of this outfit.”