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## Revised PC loan scheme for Penang civil servants

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PENANG, Wed. - The State's plan of creating an e-community has taken a leap forward with the State Government revising a computer loan scheme by introducing low interest rates and longer repayment period to transform its entire civil service into knowledge workers.

Under the revised scheme, effective next month, the present four-year repayment period will be extended to a maximum of seven years and those who have repaid their loans could apply for new loans.

This is in contrast with the original scheme which was only an one-time loan.

The computer scheme, introduced seven years ago by the State Government to its staff at all levels involved a RM5,000 loan, payable over four years at four per cent interest.

However, under the revised scheme, manual and industrial workers will enjoy interest-free loans while support staff comprising clerical staff will be charged an interest of two per cent.

Management and professional civil servants will still repay their loans at four per cent interest.

Under the previous scheme, of the 427 civil servants who took loans to purchase home computers, only 45 per cent, or 69 people were professionals or in management positions.

There are 1,079 Category I support staff (comprising clerical staff) in Penang. Only 24 per cent, or 257 people applied for loans, along with 101 out of 2,081 Category II staff (manual and industrial workers) who did so.

Announcing the revised scheme at his monthly address to State Government workers at Komtar's Geodesic Dome here today, Chief Minister Tan Sri Koh Tsu Koon said he was not satisfied as only 13 per cent of the State's 3,312 employees had joined the scheme which was introduced in 1993.

He wanted more than just his senior officers to become computer savvy.

"If we want to make Penang a centre of excellence in information communications and technology, IT must be a culture among the entire civil service," said Koh.

"We will begin with all State departments and as chairman of the Penang Development Corporation and Penang Water Supply Board, I will also advise their agencies to follow suit (introduce similar scheme)."

The Penang Island and Seberang Prai municipal councils were also expected to introduce similar loan schemes to their staff.

The loan scheme is also an effort by the State Government to reduce the digital divide in the country, a concern which had been raised by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on numerous occasions.

Dr Mahathir, who had described Budget 2001 as for the people, said the Government would spend a lot on IT to reduce the digital divide between the urban and rural folks.

Besides the scheme, Budget 2001, among others, also encourages EPF contributors to make withdrawals to purchase personal computers and that civil servants be allowed to apply for a computer loan once every five years.

Penang's efforts to create an e-community have also been boosted recently by Intel, the world's biggest computer chip maker, which launched a home personal computer programme worldwide which saw 8,000 of its Malaysian employees getting free computer and Internet access.

Meanwhile, Koh, in his address also said, higher standards of service to

Penang residents should be accorded by all civil servants.

The clients' charter found in each State department, he added, should be re-evaluated in keeping with the times.

The public, he said, was more sophisticated and discerning now, owing to higher education levels attained and that they demanded more competent services from the civil sector.

"They now have higher expectation of us and the Government they have chosen."

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