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Operators aim for blanket coverage

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MOBILE phone users can look forward to better services in time to come, following the pledge by local mobile telecommunications operators to collaborate and work towards providing a blanket coverage nationwide.

While agreeing that a nationwide mobile phone coverage is not impossible, the operators nevertheless feel that major issues such as approvals for the establishment of cell sites and the feasibility factor will need to be addressed. In most cases, approvals are either extremely difficult to get or take too long, while operators have to invest millions of ringgit in equipment, transmission lines and rental to support only a few customers in many remote areas.

Celcom (M) Berhad's group chief executive officer Datuk Ramli Abbas said as it is, mobile operators are already co-operating and collaborating efficiently to share infrastructure such as the telecommunication towers; which helps reduce capital expenditure, expedite executional activities and preserve the aesthetics of the environment. "In fact, Celcom is currently sharing more than 50 per cent of infrastructure with other telcos wherever is possible/applicable," he told Computimes.

Celcom currently also has the widest coverage that spans over 95 per cent of all total populated areas in the country, added Ramli.

Celcom's coverage has also expanded with the launch of the first phase of joint domestic roaming (DR) between TMTouch in October last year and the second phase (covering the North-South Expressway, parts of the East Coast and Sabah and Sarawak) in November last year.

"As a result of the merger with TMTouch, we are in the midst of rationalising and sharing infrastructure to expand coverage, including relocating of redundant transmission towers to new untapped areas and patching areas (where there are drop calls) so that there will be seamless coverage," Ramli said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last week had called on mobile phone operators to work together to ensure that not a single area in the country is excluded from their coverage.

A Maxis Communications Berhad's spokesperson said since the tower sharing memorandum of understanding was signed in November 2001, between 40 and 50 per cent of all new towers are being shared by at least two mobile operators.

"Nevertheless, timing and other operational considerations are still challenging issues. While in some cases, DR is perhaps the most appropriate solution; some sort of universal service provider (USP) should be considered to provide services to even more remote areas."

Meanwhile, DiGi Telecommunications Sdn Bhd's chief technical officer Jon Eddy said the company's rollout of its network expansion and upgrade programme covering buildings, town centres, housing and industrial estates and commercial areas nationwide is on track.