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Sharing of towers benefits operators

By Roziana Hamsawi

KUALA LUMPUR, Sun. - They are everywhere - along highways, atop buildings, in residential areas, behind trees and even on billboards.

And they are there for a good reason: to provide the best possible mobile phone coverage, as claimed by the providers or owners of these telecommunications towers.

However, on Monday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said some of these towers were ugly and efforts should be made to make them less displeasing to the eye.

He suggested that owners and cell phone service providers combine forces and share such infrastructure.

Dr Mahathir was not alone. Such sentiments have been expressed many times not just by ministers but also the public.

Last year, Energy, Communications and Multimedia Minister Datuk Amar Leo Moggie told cellular telephone companies to share communications infrastructure to reduce wastage resulting from under-utilisation of assets.

He said the ministry aimed to encourage such co-operation by issuing permits for new telecommunications towers only to those who allowed other cellular telephone operators to use them as well.

This is to reduce the cost of setting up new telecommunications towers, which runs into millions of ringgit.

In a response to Dr Mahathir's comment, Celcom corporate public relations officer Tunku Teh Mazni Tunku Yusuf told the New Straits Times that Celcom agreed that the sharing of infrastructure reduced capital expenditure, expedited operations and preserved the aesthetics of the environment.

Speaking also on behalf of TM Cellular, with which Celcom is merging, she said Celcom and TM Cellular had 120 shared towers and they planned to increase this number to 200 by the year's end.

"Towers in the shape of trees have been erected at Putrajaya and Cyberjaya to improve the skyline. However, there is additional cost involved in this," she said, without elaborating.

She also said that operators had indeed been sharing towers since 1998.

Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission guidelines state that roof-top towers in residential areas must not be more than half the height of the building on which they stand.

In commercial areas, towers under 45m should be at least 10m from other buildings, while those over 45m should be at least 15m away.

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