

**PM: E-mel 1Malaysia projek swasta
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While much has been said about how the heavily criticised 1Malaysia Email project will be of no cost to users and is free from public sector funding, a statement from the project's main proponent, Tricubes Bhd, hints at the possible imposition of 'incidental charges'.

These charges would be for "data encryption" and "value-added services".

The admission came after the IT firm was bombarded with media inquiries and public questions as to its funding, project details and the firm's ability to implement the RM50 million project.

In an e-mail reply to a list of questions from Malaysiakini, Tricubes' CEO Khairun Zainal Mokhtar affirmed that its "base service" of providing 1Malaysia emails would be "at no cost to users"

Users will initially be able to use their email accounts to receive government notices such as income tax assessment, driving license renewals and quit rent reminders as well as Employee Provident Fund (EPF) statements and notices of summons.

However, while the email services would be provided free of charge, the receipt of the bills and other notices would incur some costs, said Khairun.

In fact, said Khairun, the company will source for revenue from such value-added services as bill and notice presentments, job boards and online registration, advertising revenue and access to an 'online market place'.

On the bright side, such provision of services as the e-versions of bills and other such notices would allow the government substantial savings on what would otherwise go towards "postal and printing costs", said Khairun.

Khairun's explanation notwithstanding, it remains unclear as to who will be paying for such costs - the end users or the government agencies in question.

Another category of items that Khairun said will generate money for Tricubes' MyEmail system are its proposed 'job boards' and online registration to government agencies that currently uses e-forms freely available and integrated into the websites of the government agencies that uses them.

Again, however, Khairun made no mention as to who will pay for such service.

Nor did he state whether government agencies, once MyEmail is fully online, will accept only transactions from the official 'secure' email account.

If so, then Tricubes will have over 17 million Malaysians above 18 as its captive consumer base - while all government agencies would be its captive clients.

While the government and Tricubes continue to claim that opening an account is voluntary, making it the only online communication channel for government business will indirectly

force everyone to subscribe to the service and all government agencies to be clients.

Paying to encrypt?

The MyEmail account, explained Khairun, also has an authentication service which includes a MyKad-based authentication service layer to ensure that government notices reach the correct recipients and reduces incidence of compromised personal information.

This added security, Khairun contended, is needed because users will be receiving sensitive personal information contained in their income tax returns, EPF statements, notices of summons and driving license renewals as well as quit rent payments.

While no method was given as to how this extra security authentication layer will be implemented, Tricubes' background in card-reader authentication technology suggests a separate device to read biometrics or digital information from MyKads may be on the cards.

A similar case would be the card based authentication system for government procurement portal e-Perolehan, which requires contractors to purchase cards and card readers for authentication purposes.

With such added cost, will users ultimately be the ones to foot the bill?

Big Brother's prying eyes

Khairun assured that MyEmail would be safe from the prying eyes of the government or other interested parties as Tricubes will provide the option to enhance the security of entire sessions with data encryption.

On this matter, Tricubes will be working closely with Microsoft to make sure the integrity and confidentiality of the users are ensured.

The government's only role, said Tricube, is as a facilitator for certain information and processes such as data validation from agencies like the National Registration Department. The government will also constantly monitor the progress of the project.

No mention was made about the possibility of a company refusing a government order to provide access to user data.

The 1Malaysia Email project was announced yesterday by Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak.

The beta test portal for the email system is already up and running, although it simply states that it is called MyEmail with no reference at all to the 1Malaysia concept - the pet project of the PM.

Mere hours after the announcement, the project came under fire from the online public and opposition leaders who questioned the need for - and the actual intended beneficiaries of - such an expensive system for a service that is freely available elsewhere.

But Najib, Tricubes and Pemandu CEO Idris Jala have defended the project as being a purely private sector-driven endeavour with no public funding.

Previously, the 100-storey Menara Warisan was also disavowed by Najib mere hours after proudly announcing it, as public criticism of the RM5 billion project came flooding in.

Like the anti-Menara warisan movement, a Facebook page was set up to protest the 1Malaysia Email project.

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