

Affordable broadband technology for rural folk

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PEKAN: Affordable wireless broadband technology will play a vital role in bridging the digital divide between the urban and rural areas.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the introduction of wireless broadband would make it easier for people, especially in rural areas, to access the Internet and other information and communication technology (ICT) services.

"The use of such technology will help ensure the benefits of ICT reach all the way to the grassroots segment of our society, instead of being restricted to a privileged few," he said at the launch of the Siemens Digital Lifestyle Awareness Showcase programme here yesterday.

Najib described the existing digital divide as a factor contributing to the "new poverty" among those left out of the advances of the information age.

"Promoting ICT usage as a culture in this country would enrich our society as a whole, including people such as farmers and petty traders who could benefit from the information they can get from the Internet."

He lauded the move by Siemens Networks Malaysia and its partner in the programme, Telekom Malaysia Bhd, for providing an affordable broadband to rural areas.

Siemens was represented by its chief executive officer, Joe Doering, and Telekom Malaysia by its group chief executive officer, Datuk Abdul Wahid Omar.

Also present was Siemens Malaysia Sdn Bhd chief executive officer Rainer Althoff.

Najib said the programme would significantly contribute to improving broadband usage in the country from the current 2.5 per

cent among Internet users.

The programme demonstrated the world's first showcase of integrating the Flash Orthogonal Frequency-division Multiplexing (Flash OFDM) high-speed, mobile broadband wireless access technology with nano-Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) picocell base stations.

The integrated broadband solution enables mobile network operators to offer cost-effective GSM-based mobile phone coverage and data services in hard-to-reach areas.

It is expected to have 13 million global users by 2010.

Doering said the purpose of the programme was to create an awareness that people outside urban areas could still afford the benefits of ICT through the use of advanced wireless technologies.

"With the integration of these two highly successful technologies, suburban and rural folks, particularly in deep remote plantation areas, can now receive basic voice and data connectivity which were previously not available to them."

Doering also said that Malaysia was seen as a good "landscape" for the advancement of mobile telecommunications system since the country had introduced a full-fledged digital cellular communication system 13 years ago.

He said Malaysia had made tremendous progress in its advancement of mobile telecommunications infrastructure to a point that the country was on par with developed nations.

"That is why we have chosen Malaysia as it is a good landscape in terms of challenge to Siemens."

Doering said the government and Telekom Malaysia had been open and ready to try out new technology especially in remote areas and this would help the nation's mission to

narrow the gap that once existed between advanced countries and developing countries.

He said Malaysia had made it a point to make ICT available to all people including those in suburban and rural areas through wireless connections to gain connectivity to the rest of the world.

Wahid said the telecommunications company was looking at various technology options to provide affordable programmes to people and trying it through a technology showcase.

"We try out the technology together but with no commitment. It is proven but it has to be cost-efficient."

Flash OFDM can be used to enhance everyday life in areas that are usually not reachable by conventional telecommunications means.

It is a superior wireless technology that offers mobility and scalability in rural areas and one of its chief advantages is the use of the lower 450Mhz frequency spectrum, which gives greater coverage due to the low-loss properties of the frequency band compared to other broadband wireless access systems.