

'FREE SPEECH NOT A LICENCE TO ABUSE'

Internet freedom has to be within scope of Malaysian law, says Dr M

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PRIME Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said while Malaysia advocates a free and open Internet, it has to be within the ambit of its laws and cannot be unfettered.

Freedom of speech, he said, was not a licence to abuse, but a responsibility.

"The rule of thumb is simple — what is illegal offline is almost always illegal online.

"Freedom of speech is not a licence to abuse, it is a responsibility. Freedom of speech without any concern for good human behaviour would be a disaster for any society.

"In enforcing our laws to protect the public, all stakeholders need to work together to overcome technical challenges, as well as address the need for greater information sharing towards the disclosure or discovery of information to help law enforcement agencies carry out their duties effectively," he said at the launch of Facebook's new expanded office here yesterday.

Present were Communications and Multimedia Minister Gobind



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the launch of Facebook's new expanded office in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. With him are Communications and Multimedia Minister Gobind Singh Deo (second from left) and Facebook Malaysia director Nicole Tan (second from right), bernama pic

Singh Deo and Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission chairman Al-Ishsal Ishak.

Dr Mahathir urged Facebook and other platform providers to continue to collaborate with the government and law enforcement agencies to ensure that social media remained a platform that generated positive change.

On another note, Dr Mahathir said the government was committed to moving forward by focusing on the digital economy to help people communicate and stay connected, as well as see businesses compete positively as they develop into global brands.

"Both large and smaller companies need to embrace digital

connectivity, use of data analytics and digital skills to explore opportunities to build digital businesses.

"SMEs (small- and medium-scale enterprises) are essentially a vibrant push-factor in our economy, and technology could ensure businesses become more effective, which in turn could yield an increase in productivity and

output as well as wages for the workers.

"For SMEs, it can be exciting to have thousands of 'friends' on Facebook driving lots of extra traffic to their websites or retail locations," he said.

He recalled that in 2016, some 18 million Malaysians were active on Facebook monthly, which translated to about 81 per cent of Malaysians on the Internet.

"Amazingly, 94 per cent of Malaysians discover products and brands on Facebook and significantly, 62 per cent make a purchase after discovery.

"Up to March 2019, the numbers have gone up to 26 million Malaysians active on Facebook," he said, adding that SMEs could take this opportunity to expand their businesses online and penetrate the global market successfully.

Facebook Malaysia celebrated the opening of its new expanded office space in Q Sentral and announced new investments in local programmes and partnerships to support business growth and community-building.

Operating since 2016, Facebook Malaysia reaffirmed its commitment to support Malaysia's ongoing efforts to progress in its digital focused economic development path through a long-term initiative called Fast Forward Together.

It will focus not only on helping businesses grow and transform at home and abroad, but also enabling improved internet connectivity and supporting community building efforts.