

'DIGITAL ECONOMY KEY GROWTH AREA'

PM says govt can use this to generate sustainable growth while ensuring fair wealth distribution

KUALA LUMPUR

THE Covid-19 pandemic, which affected the world's economy since early last year, has accelerated Malaysia's digital economy growth.

Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin said that since the pandemic began, "things have changed drastically on a daily and, sometimes, hourly basis".

"The government has identified the digital economy as one of the key economic growth areas to achieve our national commitment of elevating the country to be a nation of sustainable growth while ensuring fair and equitable distribution across income groups, ethnicities and regions.

"We will drive forward the promise of shared prosperity for all by focusing on empowering Malaysians with digital skills, enabling digitally-powered businesses and driving digital investments," he said in a keynote speech at the Asean Digital Ministers' Meeting and related meetings here yesterday.

He believed the pandemic had given Asean states the unanticipated nudge to move faster down the digital road.

Undoubtedly, he said, Asean had seen progress in the digital

environment although the level of advancement might differ between each member state, as well as between areas within the countries.

"As you may all be aware, the Asean Economic Community Blueprint 2025 (AEC 2025) recognises information and communications technology (ICT) as the key driver in Asean's economic and social transformation.

"It states that AEC 2025 will aspire to propel Asean towards a digitally-enabled economy that is secure, sustainable and transformative, and to further leverage ICT for an innovative, inclusive and integrated Asean.

Muhyiddin said it might be useful to bear in mind the outlined key ICT strategic measures, with emphasis on the importance of centralisation and unity in the efforts to develop the Asean Community in the areas of cybersecurity, personal data protection, 5G, and promoting innovations and e-commerce.

He said Asean countries could consider setting up a fund as a means of improving digital and Internet infrastructure among member states.

Asean countries, he said, could also come up with an online platform to connect small and medium businesses, and artisans in the region, selling original goods directly to consumers, thus easing transactions.

"A board of trustees with members appointed from Asean countries can determine the company that will be set up, maintain and run the platform.

"As a community and as a region, Asean is more important than ever. For countless gener-



Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin delivering his virtual keynote speech at the Asean Digital Ministers' Meeting and related meetings yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

ations, we, the people of South-east Asia, have traded and worked with China and Japan, as well as the United States of America," he said.

He added that these were the world's biggest economies and the most developed and sophisticated in the digital era.

"There may be differences and tensions across the Pacific between the United States and China, but we are happy to work with them all.

"In so doing, we stand to gain from each of these partner countries.

"While we hope they could cooperate better together, we should also cooperate more with each of them," he said.

By working through Asean Plus Three, Muhyiddin said Asean could promote digital engagements and encourage ICT investments from China, Japan and South Korea, while the best digital advances now in Northeast

Asia could be writ-large for the larger East Asia.

And with key Asean Dialogue Partners in North America, he said Asean could spread global digital best practices into the region.

"We should leverage strategically on these facets of Asean to provide the best possible opportunities for our people, in particular for our future and our younger generation," he added. **Bernama**