The Seduction of the Virtual City

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Introduction

"The theme of the 2010's World Tele-communication and Information Society Day (May 17) was "Better City, Better Life with ICT". The theme was in keeping with the overarching theme of the World Expo 2010 - Better City, Better Life. Shanghai, China, was the venue for the global observance of the memorable day," said Dr. Hamadoun I. Toure, Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a United Nations specialised agency based in Geneva, Switzerland (ITU News, 2010).

According to the special edition of ITU News, Sweden, with 88 percent coverage of household Internet access, is recognized as the world's most networked and the most connected economy. Sweden's capital Stockholm was recognised by The United States think-tank, the Intelligent Community Forum as one of the "Top Seven" intelligent communities of 2009 for having excelled in all five identified categories: broadband deployment, the ability to create and sustain a knowledge-based workforce, digital inclusion, innovation, marketing, and advocacy. Stockholm is an exemplary digital city. It provides an impressive list of online services – such as planning permission, parking permits, wedding packages, and kindergarten registrations – all via the city's very own fiber-optic network infrastructure that aims to benefit citizens and businesses directly.

In the future, the digital city will be our favourite playground

Other than a report on Stockholm, Sweden, the ITU News also published an interesting report on another digital city - Seoul, the capital city of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Seoul, according to the report, is the world's fifth biggest metropolis with a population of over 10 million people and some 95 percent of homes are equipped with broadband Internet connection. It has a reputation of being the most wired city in the world. Seoul residents are able to get the information they need at home and at work such as real-time updates on traffic and jobs, all on the move. They can even

contribute ideas about city policies and discuss suggestions directly with city officials using an online policy suggestion system.

Like Stockholm and Seoul, many cities all over the world have gone digital. This wave of digitalisation has not spared Malaysia. In fact, Malaysia's Prime Minister Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Razak is one the winners of the 2010 ITU World Telecommunication and Information Society Award, for his efforts in making connectivity one of his priorities and developing a high-speed broadband network capable of offering speeds of 10 Mbit/s to 100 Mbit/s through a public-private partnership in Malaysia.

On 24 March 2010, during the occasion of the official launching of the High-Speed Broadband (HSBB) programme, Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak announced five initiatives for implementation as part of The National Broadband Initiatives (NBI). These includes creating Community Internet Centres and Mini Community Broadband Centres, distributing one million netbooks to poor students nationwide, setting up E-kiosks, Community Broadband Centres to the Home, and expansion of cellular coverage. As of the third quarter of 2009, there were 16 million Internet users in Malaysia and 4.3 million fixed line subscriptions (MCMC, 2009). Malaysia's cellular phone subscriber base was predicted to expand by nine percent to 32.8 million, achieving a penetration rate of 112.5 percent by the end of 2010, compared to 8.8 percent or 30.1 million and a penetration rate of 105.4 percent in 2009 .

The penetration target for NBI is 50 percent by December 31, 2010 and the Malaysian Commission on Multimedia & Communication (MCMC) stated that broadband is one of the enabler for a knowledge-based economy. Consequently, with the implementation of NBI and achieving the 50 percent target will create 135,000 new high value jobs in the ICT sector. The implementation of broadband services will also create spin-off effects in other sectors such as engineering, local content development and broadcasting (MCMC, 2009) .

The Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin announced that Malaysia's broadband penetration had exceeded the 50 percent target for 2010, ahead of schedule with a 53.5 percent penetration as of October 29, 2010. As a comparison, broadband penetration was only at 22 percent in 2008 and the target is to reach 75 percent penetration by 2015 . He also said that the achievement was contributed by the efforts by

both private and government sectors especially in developing community Internet centres at rural areas. Six Kampung WiFi (WiFi village) were been implemented in 2010 with 3100 more Kampung Wifi Centres expected to be completed by 2014.

In addition to the National Broadband Initiatives (NBI), the Malaysian public services has been digitalised through the myGov portal www.malaysia.gov.my, which serves as a one-stop online service centre for the public to utilise the services of various government bodies and ministries.

Prime Minister Najib Razak was quoted as saying this: "In our outreach to the rakyat (people) wherever they may be, bridging the digital divide through the delivery of modern facilities and services to various parts of the country via the approach in creating digital districts is a step in the right direction. Everyone everywhere should and will be able to enjoy the benefits of ICT and broadband so that Malaysia can move towards becoming a high-income nation. The digital district strategy employs a 'building block' approach — working on the smallest units. With the integration of these units, we get to build up 'digital states' and thereon towards a 'digital nation'." (ITU News, 2010)

The Prime Minister's statement clearly demonstrates the way forward for Malaysia's digital district strategy. Digital districts will be created and will become the building blocks for digital states. The integration of digital states will eventually result in a digital nation.

This is the future: all cities will inevitably go digital

On April 19, 2011 a private company informed reporters at a press conference in Putrajaya that all Malaysians who are 18 years old and above will be assigned an email account each in order to receive statements, bills and notices from the Government. The initiative is called the 1Malaysia Email project. The company hoped the project would allow direct and secure communication between the public and the Government. The company would also spearhead the development of a web portal, which would include social networking services, online bill checking and payments. According to reports by The Star Newspaper, the company is still running stress tests for the portal and it hopes to get the portal ready by July 2011. This is just an example of the extent of digitalisation in Malaysia. A host of other services are also being computerised.

Another example is the linked database system between the Road Transportation Department (RTD) and the Traffic Police Department (TPD),

which enables RTD to deny renewal of road tax for motorists who have unpaid summons with the TPD. The Government also keeps a record of each Malaysian via the National Registration Department (NRD). All this points to the digitalisation of the nation and demonstrates just how crucial it is to have a strong information security management infrastructure in the country.

As we embark on a journey towards becoming a digital nation, Malaysia requires a national cyber security agenda and a specialised agency to oversee the safety of digital communities and the security of digital infrastructures. There is a need to invest in cyber security facilities to address cyber security threats from 'technology', 'process' and 'social' aspects. In serving the growing number of Internet users, there has to be enough human resources with ICT knowledge and expertise, specifically in the cyber security arena. ∎

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