

Digi to improve Internet coverage in rural areas

BY NATASHA JEE

KUCHING: Digi, one of the fastest growing telecommunication (telco) service providers plans to invest more on its Internet infrastructures and equipment to ensure better connectivity to the people.

The focus is in line with the State government's plan to transform Sarawak into a digital economy.

Digi Chief Digital Officer, Praveen Rajan said Digi understands the State Government's plan, with that the company sees one of the core importance is to invest hugely in infrastructure and equipment, including providing other digital services.

"We have invested in the State for the last 20 years, but to reach digital economy status, it takes a lot of time, investment and education," he said during an exclusive interview here, recently.

He explained that 79 per cent of the population in Sarawak uses smartphones, and 75 per cent have Internet connection, but cashless payment was still a new thing and needed time to embrace.

"This is where Digi comes in, we have implemented a cashless transaction app called VCash which has already started in the

Klang Valley," he said, adding that by end of this year, Sarawak will be able to use the app too.

He further revealed that Digi's other initiatives are to look into how it can help Small Enterprise Business (SMEs) in Sarawak by addressing challenges in logistics and transportation, especially to improve the efficiency of their fleet of commercial vehicles.

"Therefore, we have created DigiFleet, a system that enable SMEs in Sarawak to track and manage their fleet of vehicles, and improve business efficiency," he said, adding that more than 100 vehicles in Sarawak already have the system installed.

He highlighted the system is a low cost investment and provides many advantages.

"These are among the investments Digi have embarked on, with an aim to help more SMEs grow their business with high speed Internet connectivity and advanced digital solutions," he pointed out.

He said other new services Digi is providing include Ihuai, a mobile based order management and sales system; mudah.my, an online marketplace; enterprise solutions such as connectivity, wireless payment terminals (mPOS), M2M, IP VPN, Leased Lines and Omni PABX which is

a cloud communication solution for small businesses that are always on the go.

"Since 2015 to 2017, Digi has invested more than RM135 million in capital expenditure over these three years in Sarawak," he said.

"We have been progressing from providing 1G to 4G coverage. And now we have a higher coverage speed technology called LTE Advance (LTE-A), which is known as 4G Plus that has a speed of 150 Mbps," he added.

As of July 2018, Praveen said Digi's 4G LTE network has reached 74 per cent of the State's population, with LTE-A coverage reaching 34 per cent. Digi is working hard to improve its coverage.

"Digi is also part of a team in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Myanmar, studying the technology of 5G.

"5G is on trial in Norway now. Due to limitations of technology, it cannot be fully used yet. Once it is smoothly run, we will bring 5G to Sarawak," he said.

Praveen explained that in ensuring better connectivity for Sarawak's rural areas, the main challenge is due to the vastness of its land size.

"In the last two to three years ago, we never had enough to give



In an exclusive interview with New Sarawak Tribune, Digi Chief Digital Officer Praveen Rajan shares his views on Digi's plans to improve Internet connectivity in rural Sarawak.

a lot of high speed coverage. But since a year ago, we have more of it. It is a low band spectrum with

900 megahertz. We hope to have more of this spectrum set up so it can cover wider areas, especially

in the rural areas," he said, adding that Digi would continue to take up more initiatives.