

Hitch highlights Sabah's broadband woes

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KOTA KINABALU: The Internet outage suffered by UMS Professor Datuk Kassim Mansur when presenting his input online recently for the 12th Malaysia Plan at the "Stakeholder Engagement Forum 2020" was an example of how unstable Sabah's broadband could be and still is affecting thousands of students in their online studies in the state due to Covid-19 lockdown.

The virtual event was organised by Institute of Strategic Analysis & Policy Research themed 'Sustainability, Shared Prosperity, Competitiveness' in which the UMS Dean of Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy advocated the sustainable need for reliable broadband connectivity for Sabah to be competitive as part of shared prosperity within Malaysia.

It really brought home the point that the federal government has to urgently address the issue, as the professor had to apologise for the loss of visual and sound during a part of the live feed on his speaking slot, and he took the opportunity to regale to the online audience with Sabah tales of students on trees and a hanging bridge that collapsed as the students sought out optimal spots for Internet access in rural areas of Sabah in the year 2020 when Malaysia was slated to achieve developed, high income nation status.

Prof Kassim said, "Even in my place (residence) near UMS, the Internet connection is not very stable, what more in the rural areas."

As a researcher on poverty issues, he warned against the danger of Sabah's



Professor Kassim

poverty rate rising to 20 per cent if poor Internet connectivity, poor infrastructure and land transport, utilities like clean drinking water and electricity woes remain unsolved for the 5.97 million population of East Malaysia. Investors are needed to create job opportunities but would not invest if the costs of doing business are unprofitable.

He pointed out that Sabah's Kinabatangan District is bigger than Pahang, but is only represented by one MP compared to few MPs in Pahang; Lahad Datu is bigger than Perlis but Perlis has more than one MP, and Pensiangan is bigger than Penang, Malacca and other states. Funds are needed to improve infrastructure to boost agriculture output and export, as well as to promote tourism development for more employment opportunities.

"Even Sarawakians living in Sabah acknowledge that funds are needed for the development of Sabah's rural areas," he opined, on the need to improve on healthcare and lower the high costs of living in improving the living standards of the rural community with youths facing unemployment prospects.

On the Healthcare issue, the ratio shows that there is one medical professional to serve 13,129 people in Sabah; 1:11,687 people for Sarawak and 1:5,000 plus for West Malaysia's largest state of Pahang.

The UMS professor acknowledged that many of Sabah's graduates have to move outside the state for jobs or to advance their career prospects leading to a brain drain situation that needs the state's economy to be developed to alleviate the lack of employment opportunities.

This is in addition to the need to improve the educational facilities and standards, as advocated by other speakers. As for the Malaysian universities to be Univer-

sity 4.0 standards, Prof Kassim Mansur said in Sabah, there are institutions of higher learning that are not even at the level of University 1.0, what more to aspire to be at the University 4.0 level.

It was reported for public understanding that University 4.0 is a fitting description of the ways that universities around the world need to respond to the new globalised economy and associated trends such as digital disruption and radically changing labour markets. Universities must undergo revolutionary change if they are to stay relevant. University 1.0 would be the metaphysical university that first emerged in medieval times. The early stages of this university resolved around specialist communities that eventually evolved into the tradition of a liberal arts education.

Version 2.0 is positioned as the research university that emerged in post-industrial societies, whereby universities became the focal point for research-driven technological advancement. The great post-war expansion of universities has a clear research orientated focus in service of economic development.

The rapid change with digital technologies is rendering obsolete traditional approaches to qualifications and pedagogy. Version 3.0 is described as the entrepreneurial university, as a university 'for itself', serving many diverse functions and communities but first and foremost concerned with optimising its self-interest.

A new approach to University 4.0, as the 'ecological university', or the 'university for others' outward looking, deeply connected to industry and the communities around it, and committed to serving the needs of its students in these fluid times.

Automation will make many current occupations obsolete and working life are changing dramatically, with many of the

workforce disappearing; and the shelf life of skills and qualifications acquired through formal education at school and university is reducing very quickly. The rapid change with digital technologies is rendering obsolete traditional approaches to qualifications and pedagogy.

On rethinking the role of a university lies in expectations concerning universities and economic development and growth. Research in universities has been an important source of innovation ever since University 2.0, but simply assuming that university research will somehow find its way into useful hands is no longer enough. More generally, a university's social license to operate is increasingly dependent on its ability to demonstrate that it gives back to the community around it more directly than through the production of graduates.

The result will be a much more active pursuit of applied university research, through deep industry partnerships, accelerator programmes, incubators, and the like. This is reinforced by the fact that technological innovation now happens much faster and at a smaller scale than in the past the old methods of translating university research into commercial outcomes just take too long. This creates a need, and a space, for the rapid stimulation of ideas and their translation to commercial outcomes.

Universities are uniquely well placed to play this role their combination of smart people, sophisticated research infrastructure and, often, extensive real estate like UMS big land size, position them well to act as the centre of precincts or innovation hubs involving physical co-location of the industry as well as fostering start-up businesses.

The final reason is digital technology itself, which is actually a significant driver

in the developments stated. It also increases expectations about the availability and flexibility of the learning experience, while creating opportunities to respond to these challenges in new ways, and opens up other opportunities previously undreamt of.

So, in light of all of this, what does University 4.0 look like? There are four features that will come to define University 4.0. First, universities will provide on-demand learning in multiple modes, with a seamless handoff between those modes.

Second, there will be a move away from degrees as the only form of credential offered, towards a more mixed offering of degrees plus shorter cycle qualifications and credentials.

Third, there will be a much stronger focus on career management for students, both while they are at university and when they become alumni, and this will go beyond 'careers advice' in its traditional forms of the past, and will include things such as the ability to 'top up' standard university qualifications throughout a working life.

Finally, universities will become physical sites for co-location and research collaboration with industry, and as brokers of relationships between young entrepreneurs and potential mentors, supporters and funders.

The advent of University 4.0 is in an era in which the traditional status hierarchies of universities will be challenged. The universities that are best able to adjust to change will be able to transform perceptions of their prestige and desirability, perhaps very quickly that may see the emergence of new models for what it means to be a great university in the modern era.

It is hoped that the 12th Malaysia Plan can promote standards of University 4.0 concepts for local universities.