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Digital economy of Felda trader improved

JASIN: It was quite hectic at Zulkarnain Ramli's stall in Felda Tun Ghafar Baba Kemendor, last Saturday.

He had to get his stall's specialty – the kerang rebus and tauhu bakar – ready for customers who would be flocking in that night to watch the live screening of the AFF Suzuki Cup 2018 finale between Harimau Malaya and Vietnam at the My Dinh National Stadium in Hanoi.

As he arranged the tables and chairs, his eyes flitted to his smartphone which displayed a number of WhatsApp messages coming in. It was from the WhatsApp group 'Anak Kemendor Perihatin'.

"Is everything on tonight, Abang Zul? What are the specials?" a member of the group messaged.

"The specials are as usual, kerang rebus and tauhu bakar. Don't forget to come and watch the game here tonight because we have a giant screen. Come a bit earlier so that you'll get a seat," the 50-year-old's fingers deftly typed in response.

Internet changing lives

Zulkarnain is a second generation settler at Felda Tun Ghafar Kemendor. He said business has been good since he started a WhatsApp group to attract more customers to his stall to watch the live screening of major football matches like the AFF Championship and the English Premier League matches.

Without the Internet, his eatery would be just like any other rural food stall that depended on business from settlers who come in for breakfast.

The Felda was selected by the National Fibreisation and Connectivity Plan (NFCP) as the site for its pilot project and is set to bring Felda Tun Ghafar Baba Kemendor as well as his business

into the era of digital economy.

Zulkarnain opened the stall in 2016 but the response was rather lukewarm at first as it was located a distance from the city.

Business started picking up, however, after he promoted his business through Facebook and WhatsApp.

"It can get quite overwhelming whenever there is a football match as customers would throng in – not only from within the Felda but from the surrounding areas as well," he said.

He decided on installing a giant screen at his stall after seeing how it boosted sales at mamak restaurants across the country, especially on the nights of major football matches.

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The need for speed
Zulkarnain wants to make his stall a venue for youths to engage in competitive gaming like eSports. However, he said, he had to defer the desire due to low Internet speed in the area.

At the moment, the average Internet speed at the Felda was 4Mbps and that made it difficult for him to turn his stall into an attraction for youths to surf the Internet and play online games.

"I hope that when the Internet speed is improved through NFCP, youths would be able to spend their free time at the stall instead of engaging in less favourable activities like rempit competitions and such," he said.

He hoped that the youths



ZULKARNAIN Ramli taking a picture of his daily menu to be shared with his customers through WhatsApp at Felda Tun Ghafar Kemendor in Jasin. Photo: Bernama

would use the Internet as a medium to gain information and earn extra income through online businesses.

"I think that if utilised correctly, the Internet will bring a lot of benefit to the settlers, especially to the Felda youths," he said.

If the NFCP project reaches the desired level of service, Zulkarnain said that he planned to work only nights to allow the public to access free Wi-Fi at his stall.

NFCP to open a new chapter
The implementation of NFCP this year is set to open a new

chapter in the country as it traverses the digital era.

It is a move by the Pakatan Harapan government to connect the entire country with high quality and world class infrastructure at a reasonable price.

The Communications and Multimedia Ministry has been tasked with carrying out the plan and its minister Gobind Singh Deo, wants internet connectiv-

ity to be a privilege that can be enjoyed by every person, from wherever they are in the country.

Gobind was reported as saying that in the digital age, Internet access is no longer a luxury but a necessity and tool for survival.

The NFCP, which combines the usage of fibre optics and wireless connectivity, is targeting 98 percent baseline broadband coverage in populated areas by 2023, with a minimum broadband speed of 30Mbps.

Three locations have been selected for the pilot project, namely Taman Merbau, Taman Maju and Felda Tun Ghafar Baba Kemendor.

The project's infrastructure would be developed by Tenaga Nasional Malaysia (TNB) and is

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set to benefit some 1,100 houses within the locations.

Use Internet as reference, to connect

Zulkarnain said that high speed Internet have brought a lot of benefit to the children of Felda, especially in assisting

them with revisions and to completing their homework.

"Education today is vastly different than what it was back then. The terms used today are also different, and sometimes this leaves parents at a loss when trying to answer their children's queries.

"I have encountered a situation where I was unable to properly answer my child when asked the meaning of the term isipadu (volume). With the Internet, I was able to understand and explain to my child the meaning of the term as it is used in the Science subject," he said.

The Internet has also changed the way he communicates with his children, particularly those who work a distance away and are unable to return home for the holidays.

"Last year, my son who works in the Royal

Malaysian Navy in Lumut, Perak was on duty during Hari Raya. However, I was still able to communicate with him and my grandchild through a video call on WhatsApp. It helps relief the pain of missing them," he said.

- Bernama