

VOICE OF THE MALAYSIAN TECH INDUSTRY

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**WCIT 2022
WELCOMED
DELEGATES
TO ITS
LARGEST
TECH EVENT
EVER**

**WITSA
HONOURS
2022 GLOBAL
INNOVATION
AND TECH
EXCELLENCE
AWARD
WINNERS**

THE X FACTOR

Dato' Dr Munirah Looi
Founder of Brandt Business Services

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Founder of Brandt
Business Services

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REINVENTING PIKOM FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

Digital economy currently contributes 22.6% to the country's gross domestic product and is set to hit 25.5% in 2025. PIKOM's new Chairman, Ong Chin Seong tells **RACHAEL PHILIP** that the association will do all it can to help the country reach this number earlier.

Ong Chin Seong's first one hundred days as PIKOM's Chairman will see him tackling a number of priorities which are pertinent to the association and to the course the country is heading in.

"This country has clear direction where digital economy is concerned, and we must do all we can to support this," said Ong, soon after assuming his role as the Chairman of the National Tech Association of Malaysia.

The Muar-born entrepreneur and MD of PWS Group Sdn Bhd said digital economy has emerged as one of the country's key economic pillars as it now contributes 22.6% to the country's GDP.

"By 2025, digital economy is expected to make up one quarter of the country's GDP. To hit this figure, we need robust digital infrastructure such as data centres, 5G, dark fibre and cloud services for digital enablers.

"Hence, government policies are crucial as they benefit businesses and the country's economy. The government should look at long-term policies that would benefit the industry. While short-term policies may bring in quick results, some may hurt us in the long run," said Ong.

STARTING STRONG

Ong has marked out his first 100 days as Chairman of PIKOM with four main tasks. First is an industry survey that will help his team understand what members want.



He promised that the questions will be carefully crafted and that members can be honest with their problems, frustrations and suggestions.

Next is a closed-door strategic planning workshop for newly elected office bearers and council members to plan projects and events for the coming year, all the time focusing on realising and capturing digital opportunities in the market.

"Using the data from the industry survey, our events will address the pain points that our members are facing."

One of the top tech issues facing the nation is the talent supply-demand mismatch, which is slowing down Malaysia's race towards the fourth industrial revolution. Collaborations and partnerships

with private and public universities is important to bridge the talent gap Malaysia is facing, Ong explained.

Another issue concerns the roughly six-month learning curve a fresh graduate undergoes after being hired.

"Fresh graduates need time to learn the job before they can start performing. But if universities and industries work together – with industries constantly updating the universities on their requirements – we can save those six months.

"Currently each councillor is assigned to one university. But to make it more effective, I feel it is important for us to form a committee or even a chapter so that we can regroup after our meetings with the universities to see what is lacking, and then to go back to the universities with solutions. I believe this will make the initiative more effective. If we can supply the correct talent, then we can reach our 25.5% goal earlier."

MAKING AN IMPACT

The third thing the Chairman wants to do is to promote the environmental, social and governance, or ESG agenda in the industry.

"ESG is actually not new to PIKOM or even the tech industry. Many companies have already adopted reduce, reuse and recycle in their businesses but we need to up our game by looking at the social and governance facets of ESG, and how these can impact our corporate direction.

“PIKOM must contribute and influence discussions in ESG and digital technology. Being the largest tech association in Malaysia, we can make a difference in this area,” he said.

Fourthly, Ong is looking at further collaborations with WITSA and ASOCIO. The national tech association has a strong representation in both the international bodies. The current Chairman of WITSA and the Vice Chairman of ASOCIO are both PIKOM council members. The relationship with these two regional bodies has been valuable to PIKOM members especially in networking and engaging with other member economies, and discussing business opportunities.

“PIKOM members should feel that they can easily approach us and talk about getting involved in WITSA and ASOCIO projects to expand their businesses overseas as these associations are a good platform to the world,” he said.

DRIVING TRANSFORMATION

Looking at the bigger picture, Ong said that his main objective is to see how PIKOM can drive digital transformation and support the national digital economy landscape under the new government.

“We want to push for policies that can benefit the country, companies and individuals. We also want to look at incentives and tax exemptions for IT companies.

“We would like to propose meaningful tax exemptions. For example, a 10-year-old company needs to reinvest in their business but there are no tax benefits available. Tax benefits are important as it can encourage innovation.

“We are also looking at our Chapters. We will enhance them so that they can benefit the members. The last two years were quiet but now is the time to rebuild.”

“The team will continue to organise the Digital Summit, Future

of Cybersecurity and Members’ Dialogues, and recognise members and agencies that have made an impact in the industry through the PIKOM Unicorn Tech Awards. Towards the end of 2023, we have the 27th WCIT in Kuching to look forward to.”

NEXT BIG THING

The industry, meanwhile, looks forward to a number of emerging technologies in 2023 such as metaverse and Web 3, as well as Cloud, AI and cybersecurity all making the news as it changes the way we do business and live.

“We have to work with all stakeholders to support and train our members. A lot of work needs to be done. Can I increase the number of councillors? This may take time but in the interim we can start something – perhaps, a new Chapter,” he said.

As an association, PIKOM must remain open to changes in order to grow and remain relevant to the industry, he said, adding that he is looking forward to the results of the survey to see what the members want, what values they hold dear, how best the association can support them.

“In this way we can justify our motto: The voice of the industry,” he said.

TIME MANAGEMENT

He said dividing his time between his business and PIKOM work is not a problem for him as he has observed how the other leaders have served at PIKOM.

“As the Chairman, I know that I need to spend a lot of time at the association.”

“I must put in the commitment as a leader. But I know that I do not have to go it alone. I have three office bearers, eight elected councillors and six appointed councillors. All of them are capable leaders in their own right. Each will handle different assignments and, together with the

secretariat, I will be able to lead the association well,” he said confidently.

When asked if he is easy to work with, Ong said: “With me, what you see is what you get.”

“I say what I think and I have no hidden agenda. I am all for the industry and our members.”

BACKGROUND

Another point that was highlighted in the interview was the importance of members coming out and playing an active role in the association. Recalling his early days in PIKOM, Ong said he signed up as a member in 2000 when he started Powerware System, an enterprise specialising in data centre consultancy, design, build and turnkey development.

Today he also operates HDC, a data centre operating company, and is the Managing Director of 10-year-old PWS Group, which has designed and built over 1 million sq ft and 150MW of data centre capacity. It serves top local and foreign IT outsourcing providers, multinational companies, including Malaysia’s top two largest financial service institutions, government institutions and telco providers.

He said PIKOM was instrumental in bringing his group of companies to where it is today.

“PIKOM gave me the opportunity to network with the captains of the industry. Ten years ago, I was invited to serve as an appointed councillor, then as an elected councillor. Later I was elected as Treasurer, then Secretary, deputy Chairman and now Chairman. It is truly an honour.

“I would love to see all our members coming forward to participate in our projects and events. Only when they participate actively can they realise the value of the association. As a team, we are able to scale higher.

“If they are not engaged, and only receive our monthly emails, they will not see the benefits of being a part of PIKOM.” ■



ELECTRICITY TARIFF SURCHARGE TO EFFECT ECONOMIC GROWTH, INFLATION

The electricity surcharge could increase the cost of operation for businesses and this will trickle down to end users.

With the imposition of higher electricity tariff surcharge on Imbalance Cost

Pass-Through (ICPT) from a rate of RM0.037/kWh to RM0.20/kWh, effective 1 January 2023, the cushioning effect of government measures on prices of goods and services will be negated.

“As we are emerging from the pandemic and finding our footing, the surcharge adds a burden on businesses to survive. It also increases the cost of operation for businesses and ultimately the impact will cascade to end users by overall price raising,” said Ong, Chairman of PIKOM.

It is estimated that medium and high voltage users can expect an increase of about 40% in electricity charges as a result of the increase in ICPT. Heavy power users such as a data centre operators or cloud service providers, meanwhile, could see a significant impact on their operating expenses.

The 5.4 times increase in ICPT rate from the present rate RM0.037/kWh to RM0.20/kWh will result in a 40% increase in overall electricity cost.

“PIKOM is cognisant of the

prevailing high fuel prices that has a crippling effect on the growth of the economy. However, we appeal to the government to implement the hike in stages to allow for the industry and economy to adjust and absorb some of the increases in a progressive manner,” added Ong.

PIKOM is the largest digital and tech association in Malaysia representing more than 1,000 members, including tech SMEs and MNCs, cloud hyperscalers, software developers, telecommunications companies, data centres, cybersecurity companies and shared services companies.

“As a sector providing over 1.1 million jobs in the country, the technology industry is concerned that our competitiveness vis-à-vis our regional peers will be curtailed. This is the time to assist our industry and not hamper the recovery,” said Ong. ■



“The impact to increase the surcharge is ill-timed as the country is battling the twin effects of rising inflation and weakening of the ringgit.”

PIKOM Chairman Ong Chin Seong

The ICPT mechanism caters for the movement in global fuel prices. The electricity tariff is computed as follows:

(kWh x fixed Tariff rate C, D, E) + (kWh x ICPT rate) + (maximum demand kWh) + 1.6% KWTBB

brandt
INTERNATIONAL



and

THE X FACTOR

For Brandt Business Services, CX + EX+ DX = consistency, speed, efficiency and business impact. With technology as a universal function, CEO Dato' Dr Munirah Looi tells **RACHAEL PHILIP** that it is vital to push for real human connections.

Brandt Business Services Sdn Bhd, the outsourcing outfit based in Bangsar South, has got it right with the adoption of its new tagline: The Experience Company.

While business value and operational excellence are important, what brings these to life in today's context are customer experience (CX), employee experience (EX) and digital experience (DX).

"Today's economy revolves around experience. A positive customer experience is more valuable than just a good product or service. Likewise, it is important to empower and engage employees to make them feel valued and heard. Digital experience is like the icing on the cake, providing personalisation, speed, and seamless, frictionless and real-time information to empower CX," said Brand Business Services CEO Dato' Dr Munirah Looi.

While customer experience is much talked about, Munirah said that employee experience and satisfaction must not be neglected as employees are the frontliners dealing with customers.

"The millennials and Gen-Zs – digital natives for whom the internet is ubiquitous – is the powerhouse of the GBS business. It is important to understand their profile and needs.

"They have different expectations from the organisation. They thrive on flexibility; they want to be involved, they want an enriching and empowering job. They value recognition and rewards besides a monthly salary," said Munirah, sharing her insights on the topic. Prior to founding Brandt, Munirah was a corporate executive for 25 years. At her peak, she held the New York-based global role as Customer Experience Director for Citicorp.

Last year, Munirah received the Distinguished Women Entrepreneur Lifetime Achievement Award by KSI Strategic Institute for Asia Pacific. In February, she was conferred with the degree of Doctor of Law from the University of Nottingham Malaysia.

THE NEW WORKPLACE

In today's workplace, it is common to see four generations in the workforce. A large portion of them are millennials, followed by Gen Zs. Munirah said it is their job to manage these different generations.

"Both these generations are

digitally savvy people. We want jobseekers to come to us not just looking for a job but for a career.

"When employed, we want to make sure that it is easy for them to carry out their tasks. All of them are provided with laptops. We have automated and digitised all our human resources and back office services to the cloud. The more digital the workplace is the more connected we are.

"The contact centre job can be very demanding. It requires mental strength and focus. Our employees face complaints every day. It is easy to get stressed and burned out. As such we organise meaningful and stress-busting activities. Our team leads have budgets for team building activities that are fun and help us connect with one another. As a team, they celebrate festivities, go out for movies, trips and food outings.

She said on average, employees in this industry have a two-year tenure while the annualised attrition rate averages 35%. However, because of the investment made in their employees, Brandt scores a low attrition rate of between 8-10% annually.

AN AGILE MINDSET

Munirah also attributes the success of Brandt to the company's flat organisation structure and the agile mindset of its leaders. She explains that agility – to be able to pivot and transform under short notice – is what saw the company through the challenging financial, economic and pandemic times of the last 20 years.

Brandt, founded in 2004 as a CX and business transformation consulting firm but, looking at emerging trends in the industry, evolved into customer management outsourcing and HR solutions provider to support the needs of the time. Prudently, the company invested in emerging technologies including RPA, AI, chatbots and automation in a bid to digitise its entire business just before the pandemic hit.

In the past 11 years, Brandt achieved a CAGR of 29%. Its two BPO sites serve clients from Malaysia to Singapore, Hong Kong and China. In 2020, it recorded a revenue of RM45 million, a 35% YOY revenue growth, its highest ever. By 2024, the company expects to double this figure.

Workforce, meanwhile, has swelled to 1200 from 500 just three years ago, while its clientele base doubled in the same period, prompting management to increase its operational floor from two to four, in addition to further investments into emerging technologies and process improvements. On average, it records 50,000 customer interactions daily, that's 15 million per year.

"We carried out an organisational alignment prior to the pandemic which helped greatly and in the pandemic years. We constantly adapted, quickly pivoted and grew because the team knew what they needed to do. They felt empowered to do," said Munirah.

Within the next five years, she



expects Brandt to double down on its BPO services, especially in the higher value customer experience and robotic process automation category, targeting high-growth Internet sectors such as e-Commerce, fintech and health tech.

ENHANCED EXPERTISE

With the upgrades in IT infrastructure and emerging technologies, Brandt has also appointed a handful of new leaders, one of them is Cheah Kok Hoong, its new Chairman.

Cheah is the former CEO of Hitachi-Sunway Information Systems and Group Chief Information Officer of Sunway Group. A household name in the ICT and GBS community and a thought leader, he will also serve on Brandt's Board of Directors. He is also the Chairman of Digital Vision Group.

This appointment is strategic for Brandt as the company is looking at enlarging its ecosystem by collaborating with Digital Vision companies.

Cheah said the GBS sector is finding it increasingly difficult to find and develop talent.

"The GBS sector performs the function of people, process and technology. The workforce post-pandemic requires new skills to get the job done. Training, skills upgrade and talent management are crucial," he said.

"A big part of Brandt's GBS work comes from MNCs. These three years, MNCs are looking at cost reduction and right sizing.

"If the last two years saw rapid technology growth especially with e-commerce, today businesses are normalising. Companies are looking at cash preservation especially with the uncertainties caused by the Russia-Ukraine war and the China and US situation."

He said MNCs are being astute and are looking at multi-location, cross border outsourcing as a strategy to manage costs. Malaysia has a resilient workforce and world-class infrastructure allowing workers to quickly pivot and work from home if the need arises. The country is ranked as the third most competitive GBS location behind India and China, he noted.

"Malaysia is definitely on the radar. We are a good alternative to

the top 2 countries. Here is where experience becomes a defining moment, a key differentiating factor for companies in the market. Our clients, echoing the needs of their customers, want humanised customer experience and interaction,” he stressed.

EXCITING TIMES

The GBS industry is growing exponentially. The International Data Corporation (IDC) estimates that the global market for offshore-based Business Process Services will hit USD17.5 billion in value by next year, with a five-year CAGR of 6.6%.

In Malaysia, the industry market size was valued at USD4.95 billion end of 2020. The IDC anticipates a healthy five-year CAGR growth of 6.2% for the local industry.

Munirah said government policies should take into consideration domestic direct investments as well as foreign direct investments for a more sustainable growth.

“I’m optimistic because Budget 2023 emphasises on investing back in local businesses.”

GBS companies in Malaysia are bent on firming up their business development capabilities by strengthening infrastructure and value-added service offerings. Munirah supports the 1% levy imposed by the Human Resources Development Corporation as it further strengthens local talents though it may cause profit erosion in the short term.

“The cost of doing business is increasing. Hence it is important to foster dialogue going between industry players and policy makers, and improve processes and adopt more automation” she suggests.

She said that while the country has benefited from good investments in digital infrastructure, it also needs governance and regulatory bodies to pivot to the digital age.

HELPING SMEs GROW

Most of the clients of Brandt Business Services Sdn Bhd are multinational corporations. But founder Dato’ Dr Munirah Looi feels that SMEs too can benefit greatly from Brandt’s offerings.

“Looking ahead, SMEs have great potential but also great challenges. They stand to face more uncertainties and volatility but also much success if they can remain agile and pivot quickly in the face of uncertainties. This is where outsourcing can help SMEs to grow with minimal risk,” she said.

“We have some SME clients who are able to pivot, adjust their costs and deliver great customer service with minimal investment. Customer experience is often overlooked in this sector so is training.

“Many SMEs see training as a cost but we believe in investing in people as they are ultimately your best asset and your unique value. It’s easy to copy a product or service but tough to copy good people.

Brandt is creating awareness among SMEs on the benefits of outsourcing. According to Dato’ Munirah, they are also relooking at their business and pricing model of their services to attract SMEs. By Q2, they hope to have some products ready for SMEs.

“For example, insurance, retirement benefits or medical insurance for gig workers are now being looked at. Flexible working arrangements are also becoming the new normal so it is important to study other aspects of development in order to grow the digital economy. SMEs form the backbone of any economy and more investments such as grants, growth funding and incentives can help.”

OUR BEST YEARS

Early last year, Brandt obtained the ISO 27001 certification – a step towards better process improvement, structure and governance. Munirah said that Brandt has always peaked in the face of difficult times.

As a “transformational leader”, continuously learning and staying in the know is important in order to adapt to the changes in the workplace and to remain ahead of the curve.

“Staying close to industry specific news, online sources of

information, studying global trends are things which a leader should be doing constantly. Networking with colleagues and industry players are also important.”

Munirah is currently the Vice-Chairman (Outsourcing) for Digital GBS Malaysia, a chapter of PIKOM. She is also an elected councillor for PIKOM and member Board of Trustees of Yayasan Tunku Abdul Rahman, a foundation set up under the Tunku Abdul Rahman Foundation Fund Act 1966 to assist underprivileged Malaysian students. She is also an appointed Director of MyDigital Corporation.

A highly accomplished leader and entrepreneur, she has plans to realise Brandt’s aspiration to go regional and global but stresses that her focus now is on value creation.

“There are lots of opportunities in this sector. While our clients are currently mostly multinationals, we are keen to support the local SMEs too. We are also looking at expanding delivery centres in preparation for US and UK markets.” ■

BUDGET 2023: MIXED REACTION FROM PIKOM

Re-tabled in late February 2023, the budget may provide relief from the economic slowdown but may fall short on the country's transformative capacity.

PIKOM views Budget 2023 with mixed reaction. The National Technology Association of Malaysia welcomes the relief measures for the lower and middle-income groups to cope with the rising costs of living especially amid a volatile economic landscape. But the association feels a more radical plan is needed to accelerate Malaysia's push towards a high-income economy.

The budget's allocations for digitalisation, human capital development, infrastructure spending and start-up capital, while expected, were underwhelming from PIKOM's perspective.

PIKOM Chairman Ong Chin Seong said the budget does not address the country's long-term digitalisation growth plan.

"While the association applauds the Government for taking steps to address the economic uncertainty that is enveloping the globe, it seems to be a business-as-usual approach in digitalisation and is no game changer that can spur digital growth for the country," he said.

"This is what is needed as we look to the future."

Where investments are concerned, Ong would have liked to see a more balanced distribution of incentives.

"FDIs received a slew of incentives to attract investments and create jobs for Malaysians. This is commendable but incentives for domestic investments is also needed to ensure local players, the



"We are looking forward to more clarity and further details on the definition of large companies that will be impacted by the increase in electricity tariff and the quantum of reduction in subsidy."

Here is his wish list:

RM1.5 billion

investment for local innovative startups via Khazanah and KWSP, and another RM10 billion in loan facilities for SMEs by Bank Negara Malaysia



RM50 million

matching grant to support automation in agriculture through the use of robotics and AI



RM100 million

SME automation and digitalisation matching grant



MAMPU to improve MyGovCloud function by combining Public Cloud-by-Cloud Service Providers in public sectors



RM725 million

for the Jendela digital infrastructure project



RM1 billion

for training by HRDCorp



RM300

for training for each gig worker



key drivers of the Malaysian digital economy, remain competitive and grow into global players.

"It is our hope that the government would give as much support to the local players as given to FDIs," said Ong.

PIKOM looks forward to a speedy roll out and minimal bureaucratic

process in implementing the various measures.

There were also some concerns that while inflation is taking its toll on the economy, the increase in electricity tariff will have a knock-on effect, negating the price and cushioning measures by the government. ■

BUDGET 2023 HIGHLIGHTS



INDIVIDUAL

1. Personal income tax reduced by 2% for those earning between RM35,000 to RM100 annually.
2. Income tax for those earning between RM100,000 to RM1 million a year is raised by 0.5% to 2%.
3. 20% discount on PTPTN loan repayments for three months from 1 March 2023.
4. PTPTN borrowers earning less than RM1,800 given six-month loan moratorium.
5. Income tax exemptions for medical expenditure increased from RM8,000 to RM10,000. Scope expanded to cover neurodevelopmental disorders.
6. Government to contribute RM500 to EPF Account 1 of members aged 40 to 54 with less than RM10,000.



COMPANY

7. Income tax for micro-SMEs reduced from 17% to 15% for the first RM150,000 starting 2023.
8. Will obtain 100% exemption from penalty for self-declaration for income tax arrears start 1 June 2023 to 31 May 2024.
9. Tax incentives for manufacturers to move operations to Malaysia will be extended and 15% tax rate to the C-Suite to 2024.
10. Tax exemption for employers who hire former athletes to work in their company.
11. Government proposes tax cuts for contributions to the Community Film and National Film Development Fund under Finas.
12. Tax incentives for employers who provide childcare will be extended.
13. Employers who hire inmates, including former residents of the Henry Gurney school and other institutions, eligible for additional tax deductions.
14. Tax incentives for aerospace industry will be extended to 31 December 2025.
15. Government proposes extending the Green Investment Tax Allowance (GITA) and Green Income Tax Exemption (GITE) incentives until 31 December 2025.
16. Capital Gain Tax on unlisted share disposable by companies starting in 2024 and will be introduced at a low rate.



INDIRECT TAX

17. Luxury goods tax will be imposed for luxury goods include watches and fashion.
18. Excess duty for liquid, gel which contain nicotine (vape, cigarette) the amount from excess duty, 50% of it will be given to Ministry of Health for improve the quality of healthcare services.

WCIT 2022 WELCOMED DELEGATES TO ITS LARGEST TECH EVENT EVER

The event was attended by more than 4,000 delegates from over 60 countries.



The long-awaited 26th World Congress on Innovation and Technology 2022 (WCIT 2022), a three-day event which concluded on Sept 15, 2022 in Penang, Malaysia, was said to be of Malaysia's largest technology and innovation conference.

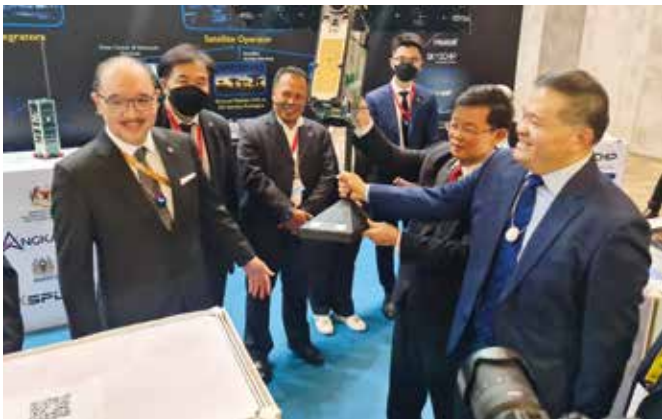
It was attended by more than 4,000 delegates from over 60 countries, among them were influential global tech industry leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, academicians, industry visionaries, government officials and the media.

The participants of the WCIT 2022 – both locals and foreigners – found the event valuable. It was a time to gain knowledge and network with









tech personalities from all over the world in order to grow and advance themselves.

TECH INVESTMENTS

More than RM46 billion worth of foreign and domestic digital investments were announced here through the inking of Memorandums of Understanding among some of the biggest companies in the global technology and digital arena.

These agreements are set to further progress Malaysia's technological advancements, as the country aims to grow and strengthen its tech space not only within Southeast Asia, but also the rest of the world.

Among the MoUs signed were between Angkasa-X and Ideal Property Group; iHEAL Medical Group and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste; Digital Penang and Microsoft; and between Securemetric and AVM Cloud. PIKOM was also successful in signing MoUs with the Centre for Sustainability Intelligence, the Russian National Software Developers Association, ASSESPRO Brazil, 88 Captains, Huawei and the Asean China RCEP Chamber.

PROUD HOST

In his welcoming address, YAB Tuan Chow Kon Yeow, Chief Minister of Penang, said WCIT 2022, with its list of extensive programmes, is set to ignite the creation of innovative technologies and effective solutions.

He assured investors of unwavering support through InvestPenang, Penang Development Corporation and other relevant state ministries.

"Penang has been clocking in strategic investments from the digital economy industries over the past

years. The most recent investments include those signed with Lattice Semiconductor, Luxoft and UST," he said.

"With Penang's leading position in advanced manufacturing coupled with our strong engineering talent pool, I am confident that Penang can play a prominent role in the national digitalisation agenda."

The second smallest state in Malaysia, Penang – the economic powerhouse of Malaysia – is also known as the Silicon Valley of the East. It is seen as a partner of choice for top-notch global technology companies.

"Penang is also known as an entrepreneurial state that provides a conducive environment for homegrown technology companies to scale and prosper, gaining recognition in the international arena," said Mr Chow.

TIMELY EVENT

Meanwhile, former PIKOM Chairman Dr Sean Seah said Malaysia hosting the WCIT 2022 is both timely and opportune as the country undergoes economic recovery, pushing boundaries towards aggressive digitalisation.

"We are proud to welcome the world to experience and enjoy Malaysian hospitality through technology, innovation and our beautiful culture," he said.

He also said that he is confident the MoUs signed during the three-day conference will serve Malaysia in multiple ways.

"The success of WCIT 2022 cannot be overlooked as we have minimised the technological divide between Malaysia and some of the most developed countries in the world. We have also secured more

than 25,000 new job opportunities through foreign and domestic digital investments.

"We will continue to improve infrastructure, increase employment, foster technological innovation and, ultimately, advance as a nation actively pursuing technological excellence," he said.

Other guests of honour at the opening ceremony were Dato Sri Ismail Sabri Yaakob, Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak, The Yang di-Pertua of Penang, Yannis Sirros, WITSA Chairman, Datuk Seri Saravanan Murugan, Minister of Human Resources, Tan Sri Annuar Musa, Communications and Multimedia Minister.

INSPIRING SPEAKERS

Leading speakers at the conference included the co-father of the Internet and Google's Chief Internet Evangelist, Dr Vint Cerf; NASA's Daniel Lockney; Hock Tan, CEO of Broadcom Inc; Jamaluddin Ibrahim, Chairman of Prasarana Malaysia; Dr Soumitra Dutta, President of Portulans Institute, Chair of Global Business School Network, and Dean at the Said Business School at Oxford University; Lucas Lu, Head of Asia Zoom; Audrey Plonk, Head of Digital Economy Policy Division at OECD; and Strategic Futurist and author, Nancy Giordano.

The event showcases four stages that involves business forums, roundtable discussions, interactive panels and keynote speakers, centred around topics such as new innovative technology, NFTs, smart city development, SpaceTech, Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, 5G, EduTech, Blockchain, HealthTech, e-Commerce and the development of Asean's economic growth post-pandemic. ■



WITSA HONOURS 2022 GLOBAL INNOVATION AND TECH EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

This year's winners demonstrated excellence in improving human lives and everyday tasks through digital innovation and public-private partnerships.

On the sidelines of the WCIT 2022, the World Innovation, Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) – the leading voice of the global digital technology industry – awarded 20 private and public sector organisations from four continents the 2022 WITSA Global Innovation and Tech Excellence Awards.

It also presented the special WITSA Chairman's Award, two WITSA Eminent Person Awards, two lifetime achievement awards as well as an inaugural WCIT MVP Award. The WITSA Awards recognise the persons and organisations that made the significant contributions to mankind in 2022.

"The selection committee for the 2022 the Global Innovation and Tech Excellence Awards reviewed over 100 well-qualified, unique and remarkable award submissions," said WITSA Chairman Yannis Sirros.

"I would like to congratulate all winners for the superb job that they are doing in bringing the benefits of digital technology to children, citizens, governments, education, science, healthcare, the environment, industries and societies; thus, contributing to WITSA's vision of Fulfilling the Promise of the Digital Age as well as the theme of this congress Connecting and Transforming the World," said Sirros.

DIGITAL INNOVATION

The WITSA awards also recognised a number of developments in the industry. Among them, a mobile wallet and payment gateway that improves the way we make payments and solve the fundamental problem of access to finance.

There is also innovation seen in an electronic invoicing application allowing users to easily and instantly create digital invoices which can then be sent out via emails. Also celebrated was a software developer that digitises and automates site processes for the building and infrastructure industry that revolutionised field management with digitisation and construction







digital technologies such as AR and simulation animation for teachers and students to use in and after class and closing parent-teacher distance as well as reducing the workload of school administrative staff.

GLOBAL EVENT

According to WITSA's Secretary General Dr Jim Poisant, the entry submissions for the awards came from a variety of organisations and industries, from all over the world.

"We are delighted that we recognised some of the best ICT solutions from governments, institutions, individuals and industry," continued Dr Poisant.

The WITSA Global Innovation and Tech Excellence Awards is one of WITSA's most popular event. Started over 20 years ago at the 2000 World Congress on IT in Taipei, WITSA has enjoyed unprecedented reach into the digital industry in over 80 countries, from Australia and New Zealand to Bangladesh and Malaysia, to South Africa and Nigeria, to Argentina and Canada, in order to select impactful and innovative candidates from every corner of the world.

Over the past 22 years, WITSA has recognised its award winners on the world stage, starting in Taipei, to Adelaide (Australia), Athens (Greece), Austin (Texas), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Montreal (Canada), Guadalajara (Mexico), Brasilia (Brazil), Hyderabad (India), Yerevan (Armenia), Penang (Malaysia), Dhaka, Bangladesh, and now Penang, Malaysia.

"What makes the Global Innovation and Tech Excellence Awards unique is that nominations are made by experts who know the industry best, that is the national and regional WITSA tech industry member associations," said WITSA CEO Dato' Dan E Khoo.

"With unparalleled insight, the

utilising AI, as well as an IT management system for renewable energy sources production licensing.

On the digital health front, is a digital health quality management platform delivering core infrastructure needed to introduce digital health safely.

Where the public sector was concerned, governments were recognised for hosting the world's largest public web portal, for their outstanding contribution to information and services, and delivery of services in an accountable, transparent and inclusive manner.

Also recognised was a city adopting diverse information technologies in order to transform

itself as a sustainable, low carbon emissions, green and people-centric smart city with a data-driven governance and economy.

Also a recipients of the WITSA Awards is a local authority that built a sustainable transportation system through mobility-as-a-service (MaaS); a government body that embarked on a multi-phased, long-term plan taking advantage of advanced IoT and analytics technologies to build a holistic Smart City; a laboratory and project implementation using smartphones and an IOT platform for enriching home-based teaching and learning; and a corporate open online course (CooC)-cloud that breaks through traditional blackboard-based teaching methods by introducing



most innovative and impactful solutions are brought before an independent panel of judges, consisting of select industry leaders and luminaries from key international organisations, corporations and government entities, who spent countless hours reviewing submissions from all around the world.”

CELEBRATING ACHIEVERS

WITSA’s highest award, the Eminent Person Award was bestowed upon Dato’ Hock E Tan, one of this generation’s technology pioneers and a significant philanthropist, and Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, Malaysian politician, author and

physician who served as the fourth and seventh Prime Minister of Malaysia.

WITSA’s Lifetime Achievement Awards recipients are WITSA Chairman Yannis Sirros and WITSA Secretary General Dr Poisant

Sirros and Dr Poisant were recognised for their dedication and contributions to WITSA and the digital industry. For more than 20 years, Sirros and Dr Poisant have worked tirelessly growing WITSA as the voice of the global tech industry, and have made the WCIT the must-attend “Olympics” of the technology and innovation industry.

Finally, The Right Honourable Chow Kon Yeow, Chief Minister of

Penang, was awarded the 2022 WCIT Most Valuable Person Award, which recognises the leadership and tremendous strides made by an individual in advancing the ideals embodied by the spirit of the WCIT.

The 2022 WITSA Awards received a large number of highly qualified nominees, amassed though WITSA’s network of ICT industry associations across the globe. WITSA therefore decided to also recognise seven noteworthy runners-up and six merit winners. While not being selected as winners of one of the award categories, these nominees nevertheless displayed first-rate use and innovation of ICT. ■



THE 2022 WITSA AWARDS WINNERS

- **WITSA EMINENT PERSON AWARD** - Dato' Hock E. Tan, President and CEO of Broadcom
- **WITSA EMINENT PERSON AWARD** - Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, former Prime Minister of Malaysia
- **LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD** - Yannis Sirros, WITSA Chairman
- **LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD** - Dr Jim Poissant, WITSA Secretary General
- **WCIT 2022 MOST VALUABLE PERSON AWARD** - The Right Honourable Chow Kon Yeow, Chief Minister of Penang
- **THE CHAIRMAN'S AWARD** - Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme, ICT Division.
National Portal Framework (Bangladesh)

INNOVATION AND TECH EXCELLENCE AWARDS

- 2022 Chairman's Award: Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme, ICT Division.
- 2022 Digital Opportunity/Inclusion Award (Private Sector/NGO):
 - Khalti Digital wallet (Sparrow Pay Private Limited)
 - Epsilon Smart: On Cloud Platform for SMEs
- 2022 Digital Opportunity/Inclusion Award (Public Sector):
Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC)
- 2022 Smart Cities Award (Private Sector/NGO):
 - Novade Solutions by Novade
 - Chipside Ltd
- 2022 Smart Cities Award (Public Sector):
 - Taoyuan City Government: Smart Sustainable City – Constructing Taoyuan Digital Citizen Ecosphere
 - Taipei City Government: Smart Taipei Living Lab – Social Innovation Ecosystem
- 2022 Sustainable Growth Award/Circular Economy Award (Private Sector/NGO):
 - cosmoONE: IT Management System for Renewable Energy Sources Production Licensing
- 2022 Sustainable Growth Award/Circular Economy Award (Public Sector):
 - Kaohsiung City Government: Towards Sustainable Transport through MaaS
 - INTRACOM TELECOM: uiTOP™ Unified IoT Orchestration Platform and Smart City Solutions suite
- 2022 Innovative E-Health Solutions Award (Private Sector/NGO):
ORCHA
- 2022 Innovative E-Health Solutions Award (Public Sector):
 - COVID-19 National Dashboard (Bangladesh)
 - IDIKA SA: E-Government Centre for Social Security – MyHealth app
- 2022 Public/Private Partnership Award (Private Sector/NGO):
 - THETA TECHNOLOGIES SDN BHD: Accrual Accounting System for State Government (ISPEKS)
 - Acer e-Enabling Service Business Inc. (AEB) and Taiwan Ministry of Culture: Taiwan i-Registration Platform of Cultural Events
- 2022 Public/Private Partnership Award (Public Sector):
Directorate General of Highways, MOTC, ROC:
The 3rd Generation Motor Vehicle and Driver Information System (M3)
- 2022 E-Education and Learning Award (Private Sector/NGO):
InterBrain
- 2022 E-Education and Learning Award (Public Sector):
 - Lab@Home with ThingsSentral: Laboratory and Project Implementation Using Smartphones and IOT Platform for Enriching Home-Based Teaching and Learning
 - Department of Education, Taipei City Government
- 2022 Emerging Digital Solutions Award:
nvbird offshore, Bird Detection and Monitoring System

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE SEADragon TOP 8 WINNERS AT WCIT 2022

After months of mentoring, assessment and grooming, eight companies emerged as the winners of the 2022 SEADragon Series.

Last year the SEADragon Series organised by PIKOM received over 150 applicants from tech start-ups and scale-ups looking for investments, growth and global market expansion.

PIKOM together with SEATech Ventures Corp, GreenPro Capital Corp, Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) and a number of local start-up and scale-up ecosystem partners have carefully assessed these participants, and whittled the list down to 20 companies.

Last September, former PIKOM Chairman Dr Sean Seah who also Chaired the Venture Investment Chapter said the team will prepare and bring these top 20 Malaysian tech companies to Penang where they will pitch before global tech leaders, venture capitalists and investors.

THE SEARCH IS ON

The eight companies picked as winners last September at the WCIT 2022 stand a good chance of being groomed as the next Malaysian tech unicorns.

VIABLE LOCATION

“We are proud of these companies. Their leaders are bright with innovative ideas. They have worked hard to prepare themselves to hit

the global market and to face tough global investors,” said CS Chin, CEO of SEATech Ventures Corp.

Now the search is on for a Malaysian unicorn. MDEC as the strategic partner of SEADragon believes that the digital economy ecosystem, comprising of a strong digital infrastructure, robust policy and regulatory frameworks, skilled and knowledgeable digital talents and strategic collaborations, make Malaysia a viable location for global unicorns to land and expand regionally.

The platform is one of the many initiatives to boost the tech industry under five chapters headed by PIKOM, namely CIO Chapter, GBS Malaysia, e-Commerce Malaysia Chapter, PIKOM Cyber-security Chapter and Venture Investment Chapter. ■

The eight winning companies are:

- AngkasaX Innovation
- iHeal Medical Group
- Magnus Games Studio
- Reskills Edtech
- RunningMen.my
- SkyeChip Sdn Bhd
- Swift Bridge Technologies (M) Sdn Bhd
- WeAssist Sdn Bhd



FIREWORKS LIT THE SKY AS CURTAINS FALLS ON WCIT 2022

The event was a raving success, looking at the short time it took to put it together after the many postponements due to the pandemic

At the grand Closing Ceremony and Cultural Night of the World Congress on Information Technology (WCIT) 2022 held in September last year, Kuching, Sarawak, was announced as the host of next year's event. This will be Malaysia's third time hosting the WCIT – a testament to the country's adeptness in organising events on a global scale.

It was reported that the 2022 event ranked as among the largest innovation and tech gatherings not only post-pandemic, but also pre-pandemic. It recorded more than 4,000 conference guests from over 60 nations.

When the conference ended, TechFest 2022, a five-day experiential technology festival exposing the public to innovative and new technology, remained open at Setia Arena, Penang, until September 18. It saw more than 500 brands featured.

Here, participants experienced interactive exhibits, games and demonstrations using robotics, drone technology, 5G zones and space technology.

At the closing ceremony at the Esplanade, which saw a street party with food, music and cultural performances, one big attraction was the 688-light and music drone show that preceded the countdown to Malaysia Day Celebrations.

A production of hometown company, Drone Sifu, the performance was viewed on the island and even on mainland

Penang. It was followed by fireworks display at the stroke of midnight on Malaysia Day.

According to PIKOM, some 100,000 spectators witnessed the aerial display, with the Penang Port Cruise Terminal being the best spot for an unhindered view.

SPURRING GROWTH

Penang Chief Minister Chow Kon Yeow said he was confident WCIT 2022 would spur the development of the state.

He said the island is home to 39 Fortune 1,000 companies, 300 multinational corporations and over 1,000 thriving tech startups.

"This year Penang celebrates its 50th anniversary of industrialisation. With our tagline '50 Years of Excellence and Beyond', we hope to enhance our resilient ecosystem into one that is capable of stimulating the advancement of strategic industries for the next 50 years, ensuring Penang's continued contribution on the global technology map," Chow said.

"WCIT 2022 has lived up to its promise to serve as a catalyst to sustain the recovery of Malaysia's digital and national economy post-pandemic with the investment announcements that I was privileged to witness."

PIKOM's Immediate Past President Sean Seah expressed his gratitude to all for the success of WCIT 2022.

"We are extremely appreciative of the support provided by the Governor of Penang, Chief Minister of Penang,

Penang lead agencies, our industry partners, MDEC and HDRD Corp as our strategic partners and everyone involved in making WCIT 2022 a grand success," he said.

FRUITFUL DISCUSSIONS

At an appreciation dinner held in December to honour and thank the countless people who have supported the WCIT 2022 event, Sean noted that the WCIT 2022 was successful in serving as a platform on the world stage for discussions between key opinion leaders within the tech industry, policymakers and creators of the future.

"There were positive reports from the participants who attended the Global Leaders Dialogue that was held on the second day of WCIT 2022. The dialogue explored platforms of economic collaboration between Malaysia and countries such as Cambodia, Nigeria, Estonia, Greece, South Africa and Indonesia, to name a few.

"On this note, I would like to thank state executive councillors YB Zairil Khir Johari and YB Datuk Abdul Halim Hussain for being instrumental in leading the discussions at the Global Leaders Dialogue," Seah said.

Apart from that, Seah also thanked Penang Governor Tun Ahmad Fuzi Abdul Razak, Chow and his team, the state government and other agencies for their support.

"Thank you for the commitment, patience and perseverance of waiting three years, since 2019, to present Malaysian hospitality to the world. ■

