The last time I visited Myanmar was before the reforms started. At that time, I had a bit of a struggle connecting to the Internet, with access being slow and intermittent at best, even in what I was told was Yangon’s finest hotel.

Before my return to Myanmar the other week, I had a quick look at what the current statistics said about the country. And while the most current statistics available are slightly outdated, estimates of Internet penetration were hovering around the 1 percent mark.

As Myanmar enters a period of rapid development, there are challenges with infrastructure availability. And this impacts many sectors, each with a potential follow-on effect. However, I believe Myanmar has a unique opportunity to be a world leader when it comes to Internet infrastructure.

Due to the very low user base (and its corresponding low level of infrastructure), Myanmar can make a significant technology development leap. Instead of deploying new Internet architecture using IPv4 (Internet Protocol version 4, the technical standard on which the Internet runs), it can use IPv6, the next generation standard. IPv6 is seeing rapid uptake in the more mature Internet markets -- in the last year alone adoption has doubled.

Mobile devices are also becoming a common platform for Internet access globally, and I understand Myanmar is the same. Again IPv6 offers the only truly scalable end-to-end solution for the mobile platform, particularly for 4G networks. The availability of IPv4 addresses is scarce -- the Asia-Pacific region has already run out of any new allocatable addresses -- and therefore presents all the more reason for Myanmar to invest in the future, and not the past.

As ASEAN integration plans move towards the implementation phase, robust Internet infrastructure will be critical for success. Internet infrastructure for each economy will have a bearing on how systems and services can be integrated and made available across ASEAN - be they government services, financial services or corporate IT systems.
Each ASEAN member economy will have an important role to play, and I look forward to Myanmar becoming the leader when it comes to next generation Internet infrastructure -- and in doing so, setting a chain reaction in motion that positively contributes to and enhances many other sectors.

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