

6 major achievements by Surina Shukri during her 2.5 years as MDEC CEO

Surina Shukri stepped down as MDEC's CEO on August 31, 2021. Her resignation came premature, as her contract was supposed to expire in mid-January 2022.

While she's received criticisms on her ability to lead Malaysia's shift into the digital world as she's been called an outsider to the local tech ecosystem, her efforts in guiding local SMEs to shift online amidst the pandemic are still commendable.

So, we take a look back at some of Surina's achievements during her tenure as MDEC's CEO from January 2019 to August 2021.

1. Helped SMEs shift online through MyDIGITAL

As MDEC CEO, Surina played a vital role in establishing digitalisation and the use of technology as the way forward through the Malaysia Digital Economy Blueprint (MyDIGITAL) and the National 4IR Policy. One of her most notable efforts was in helping Malaysian businesses move online during the pandemic.

Of the digitalisation efforts led by Surina in 2020 was eRezeki. This programme enabled citizens, especially those from low-income groups, to earn additional income by doing digital projects via online crowdsourcing platforms.

Through eRezeki, 339,000 participants collectively earned an income of RM1.1 billion after participating in the reskilling and upskilling programmes hosted by MDEC.

Under Surina's leadership, the same source reported that 489,000 SMEs adopted e-commerce platforms, while 378,000 SMEs were trained to utilise them. To add, companies that utilised e-commerce had grown from 1,800 to 27,000. It also saw an investment worth RM1.5 billion in the establishment of regional e-fulfilment hubs.

2. Opened up local businesses to the global market

Through the Go-eCommerce programme, MDEC has actually been trying to help businesses embrace the online space since 2017. It's an online learning platform with curricula catering to beginners, intermediate learners, and advanced entrepreneurs.

The project was then adopted by Surina upon her appointment as CEO. By Q2 2020, a total of 112,803 participants in Malaysia benefited from this initiative.

Under this programme's scope, the agency also launched Project DESA, which encouraged rural-based merchants to shift their businesses online.

To add, SMEs were also advised to look beyond Malaysia, in search of new markets to expand into. Through the Digital Free Trade Zone, 4,367 SMEs were able to engage in cross-border e-commerce.

Meanwhile, The Global Acceleration & Innovation Network (GAIN) helped grow 130 local digital companies into global players.

3. Educated thousands of businesses on the benefits of digitalisation

In an effort to speed up digitalisation amidst the lockdowns, MDEC hosted the e-Dagang Expo (eDX) under Surina's leadership.

The five-day virtual event aimed to educate 500,000 micro-sellers, local businesses, and exporters on the benefits of e-commerce. This was achieved through webinars and panel sessions focusing on providing practical advice on how to succeed on online marketplaces and expand globally.

As a result, the eDX campaign attracted over 23 million participants over the course of 2 weeks. Of the millions, it consisted of 50,167 micro-entrepreneurs as well as small and medium enterprises.

There was also eUsahawan that ran from January to June 2020. A digital entrepreneurship programme to onboard micro-enterprises onto various e-commerce platforms, it saw 41,789 entrepreneurs trained with a total sales value of RM65.4 million generated.

4. Provided financial services to the underserved

Under Surina's leadership, MDEC also launched eBerkat, a platform to increase the awareness of digital financial services like loans and investments available to SMEs and B40s. Through eBerkat, 2,000 micro SMEs were onboarded, where 13% of them successfully secured funding.

5. Pushed for the enhancement of cybersecurity

The adoption of digital solutions brings into question cybersecurity awareness, which was something Surina tackled under her tenure. MDEC began working with SME Corp to help businesses adopt cybersecurity solutions.

It also collaborated with the necessary industries to provide cybersecurity startups with access to technical mentoring, business support, and advice.

The agency then partnered with universities to provide training programmes in areas such as Big Data Analytics (BDA), cybersecurity and e-commerce. This was meant to build up human capital in the field of digital technology.

A reskilling programme called Empowering Women in Cyber Risk Management was also conducted in 2019 to encourage women to return to the workforce. From it, 136 of 232 applicants became qualified as industry partners, and 26 women were trained in 7 different sessions, resulting in 42% ultimately returning to the workforce.

In 2020, MDEC helped cybersecurity professionals upskill in domains such as Cloud Security, broadening the areas within cybersecurity that women could aspire to.

6. Recognised as one of the World's 50 Most Influential People Revolutionising Governance

In December 2020, Surina was named as one of the World's 50 Most Influential People Revolutionising Governance in the Agile 50 list in January 2019. The list was compiled by Apolitical and the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Agile Governance in 2020.

Surina was chosen from over 300 nominations consisting of individuals from international governments, international organisations, NGOs, and companies. This list is meant to recognise the work of those aiding their country's government in adopting digital solutions, and Surina's efforts had landed her a spot.

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According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM), Malaysia's digital economy contributed 19.1% to the national economy in 2019, making it the highest among all other ASEAN states. No doubt Surina and her team had a hand in achieving this and overall bringing change to Malaysia's business ecosystem.

From the get-go, Surina has had judgemental eyes on her, and over her 2.5 years of leading MDEC, she's had her own shortcomings too, which she was then criticised for. At the end of the day, however, it's clear that she'd done what she could during her tenure, and her achievements are by no means something to scoff at.

To add, she had to lead the agency and strive for positive outcomes during the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic, something she and many other leaders would have been unprepared for. Yet she still worked towards achieving MDEC's vision and mission.

"As CEO, I am thankful to be able to serve the nation during arguably the most challenging and historical times the country has seen. Digital is now a national agenda and its impact and importance is beyond doubt," Surina described in her farewell message.

While it is not known where Surina will go next, we wish her all the best in her future endeavours. Her successor for MDEC CEO is now Futurise's Mahadhir Aziz, and all eyes will be on him to see how he will lead the agency.

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