

**March 15, 2010 - Leaving Korea's lightning-fast Web**



If you like this post, please **subscribe to the RSS feed**. *N.B. ? This was published in the March 15, 2010 issue of JoongAng Daily, an English newspaper based in Seoul, where the Philippine Resource Persons Group (PhilRPG) has a weekly column (Pinoy Voices). The full text of my article may also be retrieved from [!\[\]\(666e09182d4cd268646ea700ea60dcdf\_img.jpg\)The logo for JoongAng Daily, featuring a stylized 'J' inside a yellow circle, followed by the text 'JoongAng Daily' in a bold, black serif font, and 'English JoongAng Ilbo - IHT Partner' in a smaller, black sans-serif font below it.](http://joong</a></i></p></div><div data-bbox=)*

**Korea's Internet connections are a luxury not shared by most Asian countries.** Many Koreans perhaps do not realize that their Internet connections are the fastest in the world, and other Net-savvy Asians have every reason to be green with envy.

Coming from a country where dial-up connections and 56K modems are not yet a thing of the past, I am, not surprisingly, amazed by the lightning-speed Internet connections in Korea.

Since they are exposed to high technology in their everyday lives, some Koreans may not appreciate what they have until they travel to other less developed countries and see for themselves technology there that pales in comparison to theirs.

Some visiting Koreans I know have every reason to criticize the slow Internet connections in the Philippines, among other things. Internet surfing in my country, after all, requires patience and anger management given the sometimes intermittent signals. The current rotating brownouts make access to the Internet even worse even in the supposedly more developed cities like Manila.

From my experience, gigabyte-plus files that take minutes to download in Korea take days in the Philippines. Logging on to Web sites proves to be a breeze in Korea as they load almost instantly. For someone like me who enjoys watching high-definition streaming videos, Korea is indeed an online paradise!

And take it from someone who has executed online remittances from Korea several times: Internet banking in Korea is safe and secure, not to mention quick and

efficient. Aside from the security plug-ins automatically installed in one's Internet browser, my bank (Nonghyup) requires the use of two passwords (one for logging in, the other for money transfers), a digital certificate (normally stored on a flash drive) and a card with numbered codes.

Of course, the downside here is the bank charge in Korea (\$20, as of my last transaction) which is expensive by Philippine standards. Then again, who says that high-technology security and convenience are cheap?

I take consolation in the fact that I only paid a fixed monthly fee of 20,000 won (\$18) for the Internet connection in the apartment I occupied on campus when I was still a visiting professor at Hannam University in Daejeon.

At our house in the Philippines, I am currently paying 999 Philippine pesos (\$22) monthly. Needless to say, my Internet connection in the Philippines is very slow by Korean standards.

In a study by Akamai Technologies, a U.S.-based network provider, South Korea, Hong Kong and Japan are said to be "the best wired in the world with the highest number of fast broadband connections to the Internet."

According to a news article published on [Inquirer.net](http://Inquirer.net), "South Korea boasts the world's highest average connection speed at 14.6 Megabytes per second (Mbps) and also has six of Asia's 10 cities with the fastest link-ups, all with average speeds above 15 Mbps." Akamai's study also showed that 74 percent of Internet connections in Korea are classified as "high broadband," which means speeds of 5 Mbps or above.

For a webmaster like me who uses search engine optimization tactics to drive traffic to my Web site ([www.dannyarao.com](http://www.dannyarao.com)), Internet speed is necessary to conduct experiments with codes, plug-ins, widgets and other content written in static HTML pages and database PHP files.

Modesty aside, the "techie evidence" of my stay in Korea is the boost in my Web site's global traffic rank in Alexa ([www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com)), currently a major indicator of a Web site's influence online. Thanks to Korea's lightning-speed Internet connections, my Web site was, at one time, ranked second in Alexa's "Journalists" category.

Of course, the celebration was short-lived as my return to the Philippines late last year resulted in my Web site eventually losing its high traffic rank. As of this writing, its global traffic rank has fallen to 411,668. When I was still in Korea last year, its

global traffic rank reached as high as 68,952.

Indeed, there is reason to be envious of the technological infrastructure in Korea. Data from Internet World Stats (<http://internetworldstats.com>) show that in Korea, the Internet penetration rate is 77.3 percent, while in the Philippines, it's 24.5 percent. This means that almost eight out of 10 Koreans use the Internet, but only two out of 10 Filipinos.

Korea has the highest Internet penetration rate in Asia, followed by Japan (75.5 percent), Singapore (72.4 percent), Hong Kong (69.2 percent) and Taiwan (65.9 percent). Those with the lowest Internet penetration rates in Asia are Timor-Leste (0.2 percent), Myanmar (0.2 percent), Bangladesh (0.4 percent), Cambodia (0.5 percent) and Turkmenistan (1.5 percent).

In the context of the entire continent, only 114.3 million out of all 3.8 billion Asians use the Internet, which translates to a low penetration rate of 19.4 percent for Asia, a figure that is slightly below the Philippines'.

Aside from Korea, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, two other Asian countries have more than half of their citizens as Internet users: Malaysia (65.7 percent) and Brunei Darussalam (55.9 percent). Their virtual paradise is obviously not shared by most countries in Asia.

One can easily understand the digital divide among different countries, but it takes an actual visit to developed ones like Korea to realize the magnitude of the disparity. Just like other returning professionals whose line of work requires everyday access to the Internet, I had my reality check, as I now readjust to an Internet speed in the Philippines that, by Korean standards, is Jurassic to say the least.

**By Danilo A. Arao**