iFACTORS: The Malaysian Company Connecting the Region, One Cable at a Time

In 2007, an engineering team was called out to fix a submarine cable fault near Sumbawa Island, Indonesia, roughly three kilometres below the surface. The client, XL Axiata, needed the line restored quickly; a fault at that depth leaves little margin for delay or error. The repair was completed within 40 days.

That single job did more than restore a connection. It became the foundation for a long-term maintenance contract covering 3,500 kilometres of network through to 2014, and it marked the beginning of iFACTORS Sdn. Bhd.'s journey into one of the most specialised corners of engineering: submarine cable infrastructure.

Building a Niche Capability from the Ground Up

iFACTORS was founded in 2005 with roots in telecommunications. In 2007, it moved into submarine cable work, an industry that demands a different scale of technical capability altogether, from marine engineering and offshore logistics to precision cable handling at significant ocean depths.

Nearly two decades on, the company has laid between 5,000 and 6,000 kilometres of submarine cable, with projects spanning from the Caspian Sea to Indonesia and Malaysia. What distinguishes iFACTORS in this space is the breadth of its capability: the company manages the full project lifecycle in-house, from feasibility studies, marine surveys and route design, through to cable delivery, laying, protection, commissioning and long-term maintenance.

This end-to-end model allows iFACTORS to serve a wide range of clients, from oil and gas operators requiring high-bandwidth offshore connectivity to telecommunications companies building national network infrastructure.

A Portfolio Built on Precision

Since that first project near Sumbawa Island, iFACTORS has taken on a steady stream of turnkey engagements across the region. These include the Bali–Java fibre optic link for Indosat, offshore cable infrastructure for Petronas in the Caspian Sea, submarine connections to Tioman and Perhentian islands for Telekom Malaysia, and the Angsi cable project in 2022, delivered under a 20-year service model.

Each project has added to the company's track record in a field where technical execution, not scale of marketing, is what earns repeat business.

Staying Agile in a Capital-Intensive Industry

Submarine cable work is inherently capital-intensive, requiring specialised vessels, equipment and crews. Rather than owning vessels year-round, iFACTORS operates on what it describes as a "vessel of opportunity" basis: retaining the machinery and technical expertise in-house, while partnering with vessel owners as individual projects require. This approach allows the company to manage cost and vessel availability without overextending its balance sheet.

As the industry moves toward more advanced repeater systems, used at intervals of roughly 100 to 120 kilometres to strengthen signals transmitted over long distances, the technical requirements continue to rise.

"We have repeaters every 100 to 120 kilometres, and that is one approach. However, cables with repeaters require different equipment, such as proper Universal Joint (UJ) jointing and a different setup. That means we have to collaborate more closely with vessel owners and manage higher costs. One of our main challenges is deciding how to expand into these new technical areas while managing logistics and partnerships," says Chief Executive Officer, Abu Bakar Sutan Taharudin.

A Financing Partner That Understood the Business

Like many project-based businesses, iFACTORS' early growth depended heavily on cash flow timed to individual contracts, a common challenge in capital-intensive industries. Malaysia Debt Ventures Berhad (MDV) became a key financing partner to iFACTORS during this stage, having first engaged with the company in the mid-2000s.

"I might not remember precisely how we connected, but what I do remember is how much MDV helped us. In that first tranche of financing, the process and requirements were straightforward. We had a project, and MDV provided the funds for it. That was critical for our cash flow, especially as a start-up," Abu Bakar recalls.

Abu Bakar Sutan Taharudin
Chief Executive Officer

What set the arrangement apart, he notes, was its structure. Unlike conventional financiers that often require heavy fixed deposits, MDV's approach gave iFACTORS the flexibility to execute projects without that added strain.

Beyond financing, Abu Bakar also appreciated MDV's collaborative approach and its understanding of the unique needs of specialised engineering businesses. This flexibility enabled iFACTORS to execute projects more efficiently while supporting the company's long-term growth.

"That flexibility was a huge help to us in getting projects off the ground," he adds.

Reducing Reliance on Foreign Providers

Today, iFACTORS is likely the first, and remains one of very few, Malaysian companies offering full turnkey submarine cable solutions domestically. Before this capability existed locally, businesses requiring such work often had to engage international providers. iFACTORS' presence has enabled faster, more cost-effective infrastructure deployment, particularly for Malaysia's oil and gas sector, where offshore connectivity is a core operational requirement.

The company has also pioneered an OPEX-based model for its clients, deploying submarine cable systems upfront and offering them through long-term service contracts. This structure eases the capital expenditure burden for clients while maintaining long-term reliability of the infrastructure.

Looking Ahead: Power Cables and AI-Driven Demand

iFACTORS' next phase of growth centres on two developments. First, the company aims to extend its OPEX model into submarine power cables, supporting a more stable and greener energy supply for Malaysian islands. Second, it is positioning itself to meet growing connectivity demand driven by AI-powered data centres and expanding international bandwidth requirements.

From a deep-sea repair off Sumbawa Island to a growing role in Malaysia's digital and energy infrastructure, iFACTORS' trajectory reflects what focused technical expertise, paired with the right financing support at the right stage, can build over time – and what it can still become.