

Building a 'digital workforce'

Malaysia to create pool of talent for tech-driven future

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PETALING JAYA: With more jobs at risk of being "replaced" in the near future by the advancement of technology, Malaysia is set to nurture a "digital workforce".

To tackle the challenges of disruptive technology – advances that replace and make existing tech obsolete – steps to build industry-relevant talent are to be carried out this year.

This digital workforce, a labour pool that integrates technology to connect all elements of the supply chain, is tailored to meet the digital economy's demands.

Upskilling the future's young, undergraduate and professional talents will ensure employability in a soft economy where workers are threatened by disruptive technology.

By working with schools, institutes of higher learning and digital tech sector, the holistic move would create a sustainable pipeline of dig-

ital workers, said Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) CEO Datuk Yasmin Mahmood.

"We want to create 10 premier higher learning institutes for digital tech and simplify the approval process for such courses.

"Some 1,000 undergraduates and graduates will get industry placements this year. This is on top of the 500 spots for SPM leavers keen on matrix and pre-uni digital tech courses," she said, adding that 200 scholarship commitments have already been secured for the students.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak and Alibaba founder Jack Ma launched the Digital Free Trade Zone (DFTZ).

Mooted by Najib under Budget 2017, the DFTZ would create 60,000 jobs, a new Kuala Lumpur Internet City to house 10,000 Internet firms, and 25,000 tech professionals in Bandar Malaysia.

Allocations from the Human Resources Development Fund would be used to develop critical

ICT skills as part of the Digital Talent Strategic Intervention Roadmap for a sustainable industry-led development model, Yasmin said.

"Disruptive technology may force corporations to tap into a talent pool with tech skills but it doesn't mean that corporations have started reducing their workforce. The numbers have instead increased, especially for tech-skilled workers like graphic designers, data analysts and data engineers.

"With such demand, our youths must embrace the trend and start looking at acquiring tech skills to remain relevant," she said.

National ICT Association of Malaysia (Pikom) chairman Chin Chee Seong said disruptive technology improved the way things were done.

"We must start preparing the country's future leaders to be on par with our Asean counterparts and ride the challenges it brings to the workforce," Chin said.

On Feb 23, the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF)

warned that the introduction of disruptive technology in a weak economy would result in more people getting axed from their jobs this year due to the current economic challenges.

MEF executive director Datuk Shamsuddin Bardan said multi-skilling and multi-tasking were needed for more efficient use of human resource.

"This will lead to greater productivity and competitiveness. The Government must invest in building and developing skills linked to science, technology and design, so that our talent can work alongside machines, and be augmented, not replaced, by technology," Shamsuddin said.

On March 12, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh told *Sunday Star* that public varsity lecturers would be sent to various companies, including technology-driven organisations, for industry exposure so they could experience disruptive technology in the real world.