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Malaysia set to become hub for AI development and innovation

By AMALIA AZMI - May 16, 2024 @ 9:00am



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim (Third from right) at the launch of the Malaysia Artificial Intelligence Consortium on Friday. Anwar says the growth of AI in the country must be pursued through the consortium.

KUALA LUMPUR: The Higher Education Ministry remains steadfast in fostering collaborations with industry players to enhance the skills of students and engineers, particularly in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

To expedite the effort, the ministry recently launched its first AI faculty at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) at the Malaysia Artificial Nexus 2024 (My AI Nexus), held at the World Trade Centre on Friday.

Besides inaugurating the faculty, Prime Minister Datuk Seri An war Ibrahim also launched the Malaysia Artificial Intelligence Consortium (MAIC) and the AI Talent Roadmap for Malaysia 2024–2030 as part of the My AI Nexus.

Also in attendance during the launch was Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Dr Zambry Abd Kadir.

In the Malaysian context, Higher Education director-general Professor Dr Azlinda Azman highlighted a declining interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.



Higher Education director-general, Professor Dr Azlinda Azman said that Malaysia should not just be striving to leverage existing AI technologies but must also innovate and develop its own AI solutions.

"The primary challenge lies in motivating more students, particularly at the school level, to explore Science, Mathematics, Technology, and related fields," she said.

Azlinda underscored that only by doing so would the country witness a surge in the number of engineers and scientists.

To address this challenge, she said, would require cooperation and intervention from all stakeholders, especially at the school level.

"Although our (the ministry's) focus revolves around students applying for university, our primary initiative involves organising exhibitions to educate parents and students about the significance of STEM subjects.

"Hence, our endeavour is to increase the array of appealing programmes based on STEM subjects and AI to captivate the interest of the younger generation.

"For this reason, we ensure our curriculum remains pertinent as it continually evolves to align with industry demands. The talent is with us… we have to push it to meet the demands," Azlinda said.

She said there were also collaborations with tech giants, including Google, Ericsson, Microsoft and Huawei, that provide courses online aimed at upskilling in AI-related fields.

She said the goal was to equip students with the skills required by the job market, thus enhancing their employability and addressing the shortage of engineers.

"Malaysia should not just be striving to leverage existing AI technologies but must also innovate and develop its own AI solutions," she said.

Meanwhile, acknowledging the alarming shortage of engineers in the country, Higher Education Department Industry Relations Division director Datuk Dr Mohd Sharil

Abdullah said, however, the ministry's focus remains on the quality of engineers produced.



Higher Education Department Industry Relations Division director, Datuk DR Mohd Sharil Abdullah, said that the AI Faculty acts as a hub for all AI research. And they anticipate this faculty to comprise three pillars: industry, universities and government agencies.

He highlighted that by focusing on AI, every engineer will be equipped with the latest technology, which will have a significant impact on the country's economic development.

Sharil lauded the government's initiative to build a faculty that will serve as an umbrella for all research on AI.

"The government's initiative to establish the faculty is the most suitable approach, despite not introducing something novel. Instead, this faculty acts as a hub for all AI research.

"We anticipate this AI Faculty to comprise three pillars: industry, universities and government agencies.

"By consolidating them under one umbrella, cooperation becomes simpler, fostering unified efforts for the nation's future," he said when met on the sidelines after the event.

Sharil did not rule out the possibility of other universities and colleges hosting the programme in the near future, thereby expanding the reach and impact of AI education across Malaysia.

During the launch, Zambry announced the setting up of MAIC, which consists of public and private universities in Malaysia, each with its own specific focus area and concentration.

Zambry said AI development in the country would involve an entire related ecosystem, including private institutions of higher education, government and private agencies, as well as industries.

"The integration of AI into various sectors in Malaysia, spanning education, social systems, agriculture, food security, the digital economy, and tackling complex challenges like climate change, underscores our nation's commitment to innovation and progress.

"Through a comprehensive governmental approach, Malaysia is charting a course towards a new era, determined not to lag behind but to lead the global AI agenda, establishing itself as a prominent hub for AI development and innovation," he said.

This consortium is an initiative of collaboration among academic institutions, government agencies and industries in Malaysia, aiming for the advancement of AI excellence, knowledge exchange, collaboration and innovation.

The significance of the MAIC is measured in terms of accelerating progress, cross-pollination of ideas, industry adoption, and education and capacity-building aspects.

This initiative aligns with the Malaysia AI Roadmap 2021-2025 under the AI Talent Strategic Initiative, which aims to offer comprehensive and inclusive AI education to meet the demand for AI talents in the country.