

# Whither 12th Malaysia Plan?

**T**HE 12th Malaysia Plan Kick-off Conference started on Monday. It was a privilege to speak at a session entitled Digital Impact on Government, Industry and Society - a timely topic but a challenging one because much has been said about it. Especially in the context of the so-called Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) which many regard as identical to Industry 4.0. Hence, the confusion.

This is because the word "revolution" has been taken for granted, and trivialised as just another "change" or at most a "transformation". Not surprising the assessment of impact too has been left wanting. But we only need to gauge the previous IRs to realise how mistaken this has been. For example, the current threat of global warming and climate change could be readily traced to the earlier revolutions more than 200 years ago. Yes, it lasted that long and counting.

Despite the many subsequent innovative advances, the issues remain as life-threatening as ever. In the same way, the structural dislocations and disparities that were brought about by the then emerging ideologies, namely capitalism and Marxism as a counter response. This gave rise to major global socio-political upheavals that have lasted until today.

The word "boss" was said to have been introduced during the IR2.0, so too the exploitation of children and women as a means of production which is still with us. There are more examples but suffice to indicate that the IRs were not all bright and rosy as often painted by those with vested interest or viewed through myopic lenses.

Similarly for IR3.0 which is littered with "(mis)information scandals" and abuses as notorious as those exposed by "WikiLeaks" involving the rich and famous. The cases include several giant technology companies jostling to monopolise and commoditise the "knowledge industry" by hook or by crook.

The threat of IT "war" between world powers looms bigger as the latest IT platform becomes the turf for a bitter geo-political wrangling. And it looks as though it will continue to "heat up" the already erupting global situation, like how the "heat wave" has been "warming

up" the world for centuries. All to our detriment.

So to the discerning: in what way is IR4.0 any different? Despite all the hype trumpeted by those who have the most to gain from it, what lessons have been drawn from previous painful experiences?

Based on the argument that transport, mode of production and communication, social stratification, labour and workforces, ecological imbalance and instability, new disease patterns, etc. were "negative" outcomes of the IRs, what can be deduced about the digital impact of IR4.0?

There are many but the one that is least articulated is its impact on the "human being". Not merely the extrinsic ones as accounted for, but more worrying are the intrinsic and invasive consequences.

It has been shown that humankind remains vulnerable, and its destiny is shrouded in uncertainty.

What is more worrying is that like all the previous (negative) experiences, once the line is transgressed, there is no way to reconcile or revoke. The price to pay is hefty.

Worst if this results in some "deep" intrinsic scarring that could, like never before, "distort" the very existence of being human.

Albert Einstein once expressed his fear that technology would produce a generation of idiots. Perhaps, not literally but more metaphorically in that humans would become malleable to their algorithmised creations (robots).

Stephen Hawking had warned that the rise of robotics could lead to the demise of the human species as we know it.

This can be best illustrated by what happened at the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) between the short span of 2016 and 2019.

The former saw a strong advocacy of IR4.0 almost single mindedly leading to countries like Malaysia jumping on the bandwagon almost unthinkingly.

Just three years later, it was almost a U-turn when the Fourth Social Revolution (which the Japanese are already ahead with their Society 5.0) hurriedly came into the picture.

Why the change of heart within such

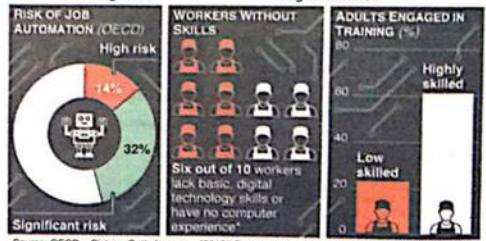
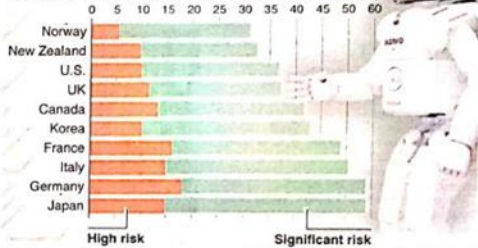


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## Changing face of global employment

Technological advances are transforming the workplace and nations must act quickly to prepare for the effects or face increasing tensions, warns the OECD

JOB AT RISK OF AUTOMATION OR SIGNIFICANT CHANGE (%)



Source: OECD Picture: Getty Images \*2012/15 survey of 29 OECD countries © GRAPHIC NEWS

a short period? This can be gleaned from what the founder of WEF Davos and proponent of IR4.0 has to say: "We are now in some ways in a battle between robots and humankind. We don't want to become slaves of the new technology." This succinct response said it all as to the overall digital impact based on the IR4.0. Taking these into consideration, together with the hindsight that has been highlighted, we must now be wiser in making up our minds in shaping the future, not just for a country but humanity.

The next cycle of IR is beyond just a change, transformation or even a

revolution per se because our very "human-ness" is at stake. To view it as an isolated episode of economics before we can arrive at the detailed and comprehensive understanding of its full impact to humanity is unacceptable, if not morally wrong.

Likewise we must be equally mindful and accountable in developing the 12MP so that the future is not dehumanised. Good luck.

**With some four decades of experience in education, the writer believes that "another world is possible". Comments letters@thesundaily.com**