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Adopt technology

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Moving to IR4.0 means embracing Internet of Things, artificial intelligence and Big Data Analytics

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PETALING JAYA: Malaysia has to embrace Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR4.0) wholeheartedly and not in a piecemeal fashion if the country wants to move into a 21st-century-based economy.

Universiti Tun Abdul Razak economist Dr Barjoyai Bardai said when people speak about IR4.0, it may seem confusing to them, but to put it simply, it is about adopting technology which can help them move onto the next stage.

He said the government has been talking about a 21st-century economy for a long time, but it has been very slow in adopting and promoting it.

"IR4.0 is about the Internet of Things, artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data Analytics. The country lacks the expertise and manpower to quickly implement IR4.0.

"The bulk of the workforce, or about 60%, are unskilled. So, the government needs to upskill them while simultaneously introducing IR4.0. The country needs to invest in digital skills if it wants to move forward."

Barjoyai said to cut reliance on foreign workforce, for example, plantations and the government can invest in robots to harvest oil palm brunches, adding that huge investments are needed to build, operate and maintain such robots, and many companies are reluctant to make such investments, which are part of IR4.0.

"They feel they can continue to rely on cheap labour, which can be dangerous in the long term. As the world moves forward, we too need to move in tandem by placing importance on technology."

He pointed out that 3D printers can help companies reduce costs. Machinery parts need to be imported from abroad, but with a 3D printer, the foreign supplier can simply send the parts as a programme that can be downloaded and produced using the 3D printer.

Barjoyai said today, changes are happening fast with IR4.0. With simple instructions, a programme can develop a webpage for content and marketing.

Economy Minister Mohd Rafizi Ramli said Malaysia needs to shift to a 21st-century economy based on digital technologies, added value, creativity, and innovation from an economy based on commodities and low-value manufacturing.

On Monday, he expressed hope that within the next five years, we can shift the government's dependence from only a few financial sources to a combination of stronger, sustainable, diverse and progressive sources of income.

Mohd Rafizi said Malaysia needs to build an economic ecosystem that is fair to workers and offers wages that are commensurate with qualifications and experience so that the country has mobility and marketability opportunities up to the international level.

SME Association of Malaysia president Ding Hong Sing said his association realises the importance of IR4.0 but many SMEs are small-scale operations that do not have the funds to invest in it.

He said state-of-the-art machines can take SME production to a higher level, but the cost of such machines is about RM500,000, which is beyond the affordability of SMEs.

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SMEs need govt financial aid to acquire right tools

"The government must help SMEs transit to IR4.0. At the moment, most SMEs are at 1.0 and need to move to 2.0 before getting involved in IR4.0, which could take a few years."

Ding said the government needs to provide finance to SMEs to help them buy IR4.0 machines and tools.

From front page

Universiti Utara Malaysia economics professor Dr K. Kuperan Viswanathan said IR4.0 technologies are developing at such a fast pace that at present, it is a catch-up game for not only Malaysia but also many other countries.

He said the pace of technology development is so fast that even highly educated people and those who know about IR4.0 are finding it hard to keep up with the changes.

It is important for the Education Ministry to determine how it can help students embrace IR4.0 and its rapid advances.

"The 21st-century economy is all about the digital economy and how a country can harness it and sell services created by IR4.0 to a worldwide audience. The digital economy can cover the medical, education and services sectors too. If the country has specialised tutors in certain fields, content can be created and sold to those who lack such expertise."

He said today, it is all about doing things in real time, which forms the core of IR4.0.

Kuperan added that to get Malaysians to embrace the digital economy, the government needs to improve workers' skill sets to help meet the coming challenges.

"The government needs to make funds available to SMEs to help them enter the IR4.0 age and ensure the funds reach those who need them.

"The cost of investing in IR4.0 technology is very high. Therefore, SMEs must find ways to share the machines when there is downtime to help reduce purchase costs."