

MALAYSIA'S government agencies and think tanks, as well as multinational firms in the country, are committed to preparing the country's workforce for the large-scale adoption of artificial intelligence.

At the launch of global tech solutions firm Cognizant's white paper titled "Unleashing the Power of Malaysia's Human Capital in the AI Age" recently, industry leaders delivered a clear message, AI is no longer coming; it is already here and transforming how Malaysians work, learn and live.

The event, co-developed with InvestKL, TalentCorp and the National Artificial Intelligence Office (NAIO), underscored Malaysia's growing role as a regional digital and AI hub.

BRIDGING THE AI SKILLS GAP

Cognizant's vice-president for Asean and Greater China, Thomas Mathew, said Malaysia must move quickly to close its widening AI talent and skills gap to remain globally competitive.

He said that while Malaysia's digital infrastructure and policies were strong, fragmented AI adoption and workforce readiness continued to hinder large-scale deployment across industries.

"Only 11 per cent of Malaysian C-suite leaders feel very confident in their workforce's AI capabilities, even as 86 per cent of employers worldwide expect AI to transform operations," he said.

"Malaysia's next leap forward must centre on people, not just technology. AI should empower people, not replace them. To lead, Malaysia must evolve from being an AI user to becoming an AI producer and innovator."

Mathew added that local culture and values were incorporated into the white paper to ensure Malaysia's approach to AI development reflects its social and ethical context.

The white paper identifies AI readiness — not just digital adoption — as the key metric defining Malaysia's future leadership, with 63 per cent of employers citing the skills gap as the



(From left) Cognizant geo delivery lead Kaldip Singh, TalentCorp Group COO Sivakumaran A. Narayanan, National AI Office head Sam Majid, InvestKL CEO Datuk Muhammad Azmi Zulkifli, Cognizant vice-president (Asean and Greater China) Thomas Mathew, Cognizant head of social impact A.P.J. Pratibha Kurnool, and Cognizant consulting principal Lew Ko Chin. PIC COURTESY OF COGNIZANT

Malaysia must bridge AI talent gap to stay ahead

top barrier to AI transformation.

MALAYSIA'S STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

InvestKL chief executive officer Datuk Muhammad Azmi Zulkifli said Malaysia's strategic position, talent pool and thriving tech ecosystem make it a natural base for multinational AI operations.

He said that Cognizant has been an investor in Malaysia since 2003 and reaffirmed its commitment in 2023 by

selecting Kuala Lumpur as one of its strategic regional hubs for innovation across Asia-Pacific.

"Southeast Asia is on track to become the world's fourth-largest economic zone by 2030. With 680 million people, rising income levels and a tech-savvy population — that's the sweet spot Cognizant saw," he said.

Beyond business operations, Azmi praised Cognizant's community work by supporting women returning to the workforce, fresh graduates and chil-

dren — efforts which he said demonstrate responsible investment.

He said because 90 per cent of Cognizant's employees here were Malaysians, there was a sense of belonging driving the commitment to nurture local talent.

Azmi added that AI adoption in Malaysia was not just about transformation, but also a mindset shift.

"Transformation is often misunderstood. Going digital doesn't just mean turning manual steps into digital ones — it's about rethinking processes to improve productivity," he said.

He said the collaboration between InvestKL, Cognizant, TalentCorp and NAIO reflects a whole-of-nation approach — aligning government support, industry demand and education — to ensure no one is left behind, especially small and medium enterprises.

PREPARING MALAYSIANS FOR AN AI-DRIVEN FUTURE

TalentCorp chief operating officer Siva Kumaran said Malaysia's talent readiness in AI must be accelerated to match the pace of technological change.

"AI is no longer a nice-to-have — it's a necessity," he said. "We need to prioritise AI adoption if we want Malaysia to become an AI nation."

He said around 620,000 jobs across 10 major sectors, including electronics, ICT and retail, would be impacted by AI.

"Some traditional roles will be replaced, but many will evolve. For

example, call centre agents are transitioning into roles like dispute resolution officers," he said.

Siva highlighted TalentCorp's MyMahir platform, which helps workers understand how AI might affect their current roles and what new skills are needed to remain employable.

"You can log on to MyMahir, look up your job, and see the potential AI impact and what skills you need to reskill or pivot," he said.

"We want Malaysians to take charge of their own future."

He added that the upcoming AI Readiness Index, to be launched in November, will help organisations assess workforce preparedness and guide upskilling efforts.

SKILLS ARE THE NEW CURRENCY

"Skills-first is the way forward. Malaysians must continuously reskill, upskill and new-skill themselves because in today's world, skills are the real currency," said Siva.

He also said that TalentCorp was finalising a new initiative aimed at ensuring Malaysian talents are better matched with market needs and employment opportunities.

As Malaysia moves towards becoming an AI-driven economy, the message from industry and policymakers alike is clear — success in the AI age will depend not only on technology, but on how well Malaysians are equipped to harness it.



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