

Malaysia ill-prepared for IR 4.0, employers group agrees

By **Nurul Azwa Aris** - August 17, 2019 11:47 AM



The Malaysian Employers Federation says the country will no longer be competitive if it is not able to embrace Industrial Revolution 4.0 quickly. (Bernama pic)

PETALING JAYA: The Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) says the country is ill-prepared for Industrial Revolution 4.0 (IR 4.0), warning that Malaysia will no longer be competitive if it is not able to embrace it quickly.

MEF executive director Shamsuddin Bardan said IR 4.0 was already creeping in and, as such, students completing studies, whether at degree, diploma and even Form 5 level, must be urgently equipped with the right IT and technology knowledge.

"This is so that they are employable and fit the requirements of employers who need more agile employees. It is important for the new set of employees to be more agile to keep pace with the ever-changing technology.

"Also critical is for current employees, about 8 million in the formal private sector, to be up-skilled and re-skilled so that they are able to keep pace with the changes arising from the introduction of IR 4.0," he told FMT.

Shamsuddin was commenting on a study conducted by industry research firm International Data Corporation (IDC), which found that Malaysia's future workforce was unprepared for IR 4.0.

The study found that more than 63% of students and fresh graduates failed to articulate what IR 4.0 was, with 30% of students saying they felt completely unprepared for an IR 4.0 work environment.

More than half of the graduates surveyed also felt that organisations were not ready for a new generation joining the workforce, citing the unwillingness of companies to adopt new frameworks.

Shamsuddin said it was critical for the government to assist in certifying the skills of the employees, especially those at the lower level, so that they could be encouraged to upgrade and

re-skill themselves.

He said employers, especially the small and medium employers and micro employers, needed to be assisted in introducing technology and automation in their operations to keep pace with the changes that were currently taking place.

"Without the necessary assistance and incentive from the government, the smaller employers will not be in a financial position to acquire the latest technology to be implemented in their operations," he said.

Federation of Malaysian Manufacturers (FMM) vice-president Nathan Suppiah said IR 4.0 was new and fresh graduates especially might not be familiar with it.

"It will take time for the industries in Malaysia to adopt the latest cutting edge technologies as immediate adoption means we need the right human assets and finance to invest in new hardware and software, including modification to factory facilities," he said.

"Also, our manufacturing sector, which accounts for more than 80% of SME companies, is quite satisfied in the way it has been operating and that's one reason it is slow in adopting robotics, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and such."

Nathan said the initiative of the government in giving more weight to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) would help address the skills gap.

Parent Action Group for Education (PAGE) secretary Tunku Munawirah Putra said IR 4.0 was a fairly new buzzword in the education sector and it aimed to prepare people in the world of automation, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data and such.

"Human creativity and skills play an important role, humans cannot compete with computers in terms of knowledge. Universities especially are struggling to find new ways to keep abreast with the requirements of IR 4.0.

"Universities would have to have a connection with industry and corporate players in order to understand the needs of the industry and how to prepare the human resources required," she said.

Tunku Munawirah said although no country had yet developed and implemented the perfect national education policy, a few countries were well on their way while many others already had strategic plans in place towards that goal.

She cited a report from the World Economic Forum which said Singapore, Japan, and South Korea were among the countries that were best at preparing children for the jobs of the future.

"When Singapore announced that it was reducing the number of examinations and assessments in schools for lower primary, we knew that it already had plans in place to replace the old system and that its children of 15 years and under were at the top of the charts of those who were best at collaboration and problem-solving.

"While we agree that our lower primary should have fewer exams, we are unsure if the system replacing it would be effective or have data to prove that it can be effective."