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DEVELOPING artificial intelligence (AI) literacy and fostering a degree of familiarity with the technology among the people has taken centre stage in Malaysia with the launch of the 'AI for Rakyat' programme.

Launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, this initiative is the outcome of a collaborative effort between the Economic Ministry and giant chipmaker Intel.

Available in four languages – Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin and Tamil – it comprises two main modules that can be completed within four hours.

The two modules are "AI Aware" and "AI Appreciate". The first is an introduction to AI, dispelling common misconceptions about the technology, while the second further explores its real-world applications while delving into the ethical and responsible aspects.

The lessons are presented through a combination of text and videos and are complemented by quizzes to assess participants' comprehension of the concepts.

In a bid to enhance accessibility, the programme also includes recorded audio and Braille versions of the modules that can be downloaded and printed.

AI and machine learning specialist with Taylor's University, Shee Tze Jin, hopes that the programme will help demystify the subject and address false perceptions.

He says that the website is a good starting point for the public to gain a surface-level understanding of AI technology, particularly benefiting the segment of society that doesn't use AI regularly.

"Ideally, this initiative should increase awareness and foster a positive perception of AI among the general population," he says.

The programme explores AI concepts like computer vision, focusing on machines' ability to interpret and understand visual information, and natural language processing, addressing how machines comprehend and interact with human language.

Upon completion, participants will be awarded two digital badges for each module, which can be shared on various social media platforms.

"Such self-driven programmes are actually pretty common in corporate employee learning programmes.

"Usually we do see a good percentage of people going through

Mastering the machines

Is the 'AI for Rakyat' programme, designed to promote AI literacy among Malaysians, the way forward?



them, since the programmes give some form of digital badge to showcase on social media.

"For learners, the next step would be to encourage them to explore further into AI if they find the topic interesting," he says, adding that the website currently lacks resources for those who have completed the course and want to go further.

In the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section of the AI for Rakyat portal, participants are encouraged to formulate a self-driven learning plan in an area of their interest for future development.

However, to cultivate a workforce proficient in AI, Shee says that additional support for education initiatives should come in the form of incentives and collaborations with industry players.

He emphasises that offering more resources and support would enable educators to integrate AI concepts into their teaching methodologies, potentially involving workshops, training programmes, and the creation of educational materials.

"Once the public has some basic understanding of AI, they will need a skilled educator who can guide them further and show them how to apply it in their day-to-day work.

"Judging by the current online

content of AI for Rakyat, engaging in this programme may provide a foundational understanding of AI, but it might not be sufficient for comprehensive AI literacy.

"Full AI literacy demands ongoing learning, practical experience, ethics, diverse subfield understanding, and active community engagement," he says.

This is pertinent to the goal of positioning Malaysia as a global and regional hub for AI, which Economic Minister Rafizi Ramli outlined in his welcome address during the AI for Rakyat inauguration ceremony.

Rafizi quoted a report saying that there is a potential to generate US\$113.4bil (RM534.96bil) in Malaysia if AI technology is used in all sectors.

"This is a quarter of the gross domestic product of Malaysia," he said.

The government, according to Rafizi, aims to have one million Malaysians achieve mastery in AI skills within three years.

During the launch, Anwar said the programme and those like it are valuable in addressing the digital divide, elitism, and ensuring that none are left behind.

It was also announced last June that the Higher Education Ministry would not restrict the use of ChatGPT at institutes of higher education, provided that guidelines are followed.

ChatGPT's capacity to produce comprehensive articles within seconds sparked both excitement and apprehension, as educators were concerned it could be used to cheat.

Furthermore, RM20 million was allocated for the establishment of an AI faculty at the University of Technology Malaysia during the presentation of the 2024 Budget in October last year.

Ideally, this initiative should increase awareness and foster a positive perception of AI among the general population.

Shee Tze Jin

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