

INDUSTRY 4.0

ACADEMICS MUST TAKE THE LEAD

THE media has given much coverage to issues concerning the role of academics in the country.

A recent discourse aired on television was on the role of professors in Industry 4.0. Many regard academics as among the valuable assets of the country. This is especially true in a global economy increasingly driven by knowledge.

The host interviewed two professors from public universities on a range of topics. Many issues related to academics were discussed, though, occasionally, the professors were hesitant to share views on sensitive matters.

One concerned the low level of media engagement by professors on societal topics. Academics must engage the media more.

The government has long recognised knowledge as a crit-

ical asset in charting the nation's socio-economic progress. In fact, we had a well-crafted blueprint on knowledge economy for the country. This was developed by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies.

Unfortunately, not many are aware of the plan, except those directly involved in implementing it. This is one of the weaknesses that we have – not much publicity on the actions taken.

Some of our blueprints have been adopted by other countries. And, many have made a success of them. So much so that we have gained the reputation of being very good at generating ideas and plans.

Now, with the emergence of Internet-related technologies, including smart manufacturing and intelligent health, the country is, once again, challenged.

Whether we like it or not, we

are in an era of globalisation, where competition is intense. The only way to survive such an environment, fuelled mostly by business-disruptive technologies, is to embrace such technologies.

One recent phenomenon that has become a hot topic in the country is Industry 4.0, or as some call it, the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Many have debated about the wisdom of embracing this Industry 4.0. Are we ready? What impact will it have on the social fabric of the nation? Will it threaten humanity?

As expected, the discourse has been intense among the nation's academics. As for the industry at large, many are still clueless about this new animal.

But, the government is ready to move. A blueprint is in the offing. The government is proactive, which is good.

In fact, in the recent tabling of the 2018 Budget, Industry 4.0 was mentioned a number of times by the prime minister. Whatever it is, other countries around the world are joining the bandwagon, too.

A recent report in the United Kingdom strongly recommended the adoption of Industry 4.0 by Britain as part of its post-Brexit plan.

It suggested that contrary to concerns over jobs being taken over by robots, Industry 4.0 may, in fact, create more new jobs.

Many agree on the three key success factors of Industry 4.0 – intensiveness of knowledge, leadership and collaboration.

These were adopted as the main topics of discourse at a recent Asean forum on Industry 4.0, hosted by the Academy of Sciences Malaysia. And, undeniably, in all the three factors, the

role of academics is critical.

Society has always looked up to professors as a source of knowledge. Some questions raised are: is the credibility of academics eroding in the eyes of society? are professors reaching out enough, through media, to society? are they giving more attention to their peers, publishing in difficult-to-understand academic journals? and are professors forthcoming in commenting and advising on policy actions, which, in the long run, would benefit the nation?

Academics need to address these if the nation is to truly harness its knowledge assets. The industry is hoping for the academics to take the lead in embracing Industry 4.0.

DATUK DR AHMAD IBRAHIM

Fellow, Academy of Sciences Malaysia, UCSI University