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# Breeding the next generation of job creators

**Datuk Seri Panglima Wilfred Madius Tangau**

The National Transformation Programme (NTP) Annual Report 2016 was released last Tuesday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak highlighted in his speech that Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has shown an average growth of 5.1 per cent since 2010, a figure that doubles the average global economic growth.

Notably, we managed to reduce our dependency on oil revenue from 41 per cent in 2009 to 14.7 per cent last year by diversifying our nation's income sources.

He also added that one major strategic goal of the government is to grow the economy from the current RM 1.3 trillion to RM 2 trillion within eight years by 2025.

In terms of job opportunities, Prime Minister had earlier announced that the NTP created 1.8 million jobs between the period of 2010 and 2016, of which more than one million were high-income jobs.

During the report launch, he said that Malaysians could expect 60,000 high-income jobs created by the Digital Economy, which would contribute more than 20 per cent to our GDP.

These are very encouraging economic outlooks for Malaysians. At the same time, we as citizens of the Digital Age should be fully conscious of the limitless potential digital technologies can empower us with.

I had my second 2050 National Transformation or TN50 dialogue last weekend with students of Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris, especially those of Sabah and

Sarawak-related associations.

Many participants of the dialogue through post-it notes wrote that they hoped for more job opportunities to be provided by the time of their graduation.

A soon-to-be teacher during the dialogue also expressed her concern on whether technology would replace teachers in the classroom in the near future.

Rather than being over-worried about the perceived shrinking role of mankind in the workforce, we can choose to look on the bright side at how the digital revolution has empowered each individual to solve problems and to be entrepreneurs.

In my opinion, technology would not be able to completely replace teachers; instead, they are great tools in education, help complement current curriculum methods and can benefit far higher number of people compared to the conventional teaching confined to a physical classroom.

Online platforms that offer free educational courses such as Coursera, edX and MIT OpenCourseWare for example, create a borderless classroom where anyone in the world could "attend" classes at a place and time of their own convenience.

Students who pass these online courses can also obtain certifications with a minimal fee.

Therefore although this digital era poses disruption, at the same time it empowers us to be adaptable in acquiring 21st century skills such as the case of self-learning and to be increasingly independent problem solvers and entrepreneurs.

Various studies around the globe show



With participants of the TN50 Dialogue at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris.

that the age children get their hands on their first mobile device is getting younger and the number of these children is also increasing. One study said that the average age is 10 to 12 years old!

Speaking like a digital veteran, times have certainly changed. I got my first mobile phone only in my early thirties. It was then a newly introduced mobile service by Telekom Malaysia called the Automatic Telephone Using Radio (ATUR) 450. Phones back then had a black-and-white screen and only the basic functions of calling and messaging, let alone connecting to the Internet!

Interestingly I officiated a conference "Strengthening Industry-Academia Partnership" at UCSI University, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur last week. The conference theme this year was "Shaping the Malaysian Industry for the 4th Industrial Revolution".

Having being an advocate for the new economy known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and participated first-hand in the World Economic Forum dialogues in Davos, I was pleased to share my views and

the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation's direction in talent development and smart manufacturing.

I am also delighted to learn that USCI would be one of the pioneering universities to offer Data Science programmes to their undergraduates and postgraduates. In this age of Big Data, there is an increasing demand from the industry for Data Scientists to explore and make sense of the available data.

Students of this course would learn machine learning, data analytics and visualisation, data mining and statistical methods. They would then be able to interpret the data to aid managers of organisations or the government in decision-making.

The Data Science programmes would also be complemented with essential business-related modules such as business communication.

This new course is in response to the technological revolution and new demand from the industry.

Partnerships between academia and in-

dustry, and new formulation of policies such as TN50 show that Malaysia is gearing up to face the future.

TN50 town halls have helped me and my Ministry to better understand the anticipation of fellow Malaysians especially in the field of science, technology and innovation. Aspirations and comments gathered from such engagements would then be fine-tuned into a document by a group called "Circles of the Future", comprising of 84 youths and 60 mentors from various academic and professional backgrounds.

This Phase Two of the TN50 Dialogue initiative was launched by Prime Minister on Friday, after an up-close engagement with the group.

With good progress being made in TN50, I hope that the young ones see this as a great, unique opportunity to be part of the policymaking process in Malaysia. They should also realise that in this digital age and towards 2050, they are evermore empowered to be creators of jobs and opportunities, rather than merely seeking them!