

AIDING SMES IN ASSESSING IR4.0 READINESS

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Shoring up on tech: Top Glove invests about RM10mil in IR4.0 technologies for each new factory, says Lee.

ABOUT 300 companies have sought the help of the International Trade and Industry Ministry to gauge their readiness for Industry 4.0.

Ministry deputy secretary-general (trade) Datuk Seri Norazman Ayob said the ministry had earlier extended to 3,000 mid-tier and SME companies its online Industry4WRD Readiness Assessment which was set up to help them assess their capabilities to adopt Industry 4.0 and to recommend strategies.

Last October, the ministry launched its Industry4WRD: National Policy on Industry 4.0 to drive digital transformation of the manufacturing and related services sectors in Malaysia. So far, 300 companies have submitted to the online assessment.

Norazman said the ministry had targeted to assist 500 SMEs to undergo the assessment by the end of the year, and support 60 of them by providing a 70:30 matching grant of up to RM500,000 for each firm.

He added that RM210mil has been allocated for the period between 2019 and 2021 to support the adoption of Industry 4.0, and that eight programmes would be implemented this year.

Besides the free online assessment, the programmes include matching grants for SMEs which have undergone the assessment and are adopting recommendations from the exercise; improving last mile connectivity in high impact industrial and training areas; improving the quality and skills of trainers in terms of pedagogy in relation to Industry 4.0; promoting strategic collaboration between MNCs and SMEs to improve proliferation of smart technologies and boost company productivity and business growth; and, providing SME manufacturers operation technology and information technology shared services infrastructure to improve their

production, innovation and management processes.

Norazman was one of four panellists in the forum on Capturing Growth Opportunities in Asean at the recent Export Excellence Awards 2019 Klang Valley roadshow held at the New World Petaling Jaya Hotel.

The other panellists were LH Plus Sdn Bhd managing director and chief executive officer Callum Chen, PwC Growth Markets Centre leader and partner David Wijeratne, and Standard Chartered Bank (Asean and South Asia) chief economist Edward Lee. The session was moderated by Standard Chartered Bank Malaysia Bhd managing director and chief executive officer Abrar A. Anwar.

At the forum, Norazman said Asean has an economic community blueprint for a single production and market base that would create a competitive business environment and promote sustainable development and trade by the year 2025.

“It is to make Asean the sixth largest economy in the world by 2030,” he said.

He highlighted that there is an Asean agreement on e-commerce between 10 countries to promote a digital economy and facilitate cross-border e-commerce.

In the meantime, free trade agreement negotiations between 16 countries are ongoing and expected to be concluded by end of this year, he added.

Wijeratne, in urging companies to adopt 4.0 solutions to enhance productivity, said a market survey conducted by Asia IoT Business Platform showed that Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia are the leading markets in Asean in adopting IoT.

Top Glove Corp Bhd managing director Datuk Lee Kim Meow who spoke on The Secrets of a Successful Exporter at the roadshow said his company has embarked on Industry 4.0 implementation through the application of IoT, robotics and an automated real time manufacturing

system. Currently the world's largest manufacturer of gloves, Top Glove has 40 factories in three countries, 648 glove production lines and glove production capacity of 60.5 billion pieces per annum.

Lee said that Top Glove started digital transformation pilot projects four years ago, and began the journey in earnest from 2017.

“We are great enthusiasts of new technologies in manufacturing and always strive to be early adopters. Our tech-savvy team has already picked up cloud systems, IoT, autonomous robotics, and artificial intelligence.”

He said that Industry 4.0 is about empowering his employees and innovating machines to work smarter and more efficiently to unlock new potentials in manufacturing.

Top Glove builds one to two new factories every year, he said, and “for each new factory we invest about RM10mil in IR4.0 technologies.”

On personnel, Lee said that “new higher value roles such as data scientists and robotics engineers are expected to emerge.”

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