Many not ready for impact of AI, 5G, says bosses’ group

By Robin Augustin - June 6, 2019 11:00 AM

PETALING JAYA: The country’s largest employer group has warned that many workers will be rendered obsolete by technological advancements like artificial intelligence (AI) and 5G.

Speaking to FMT, the Malaysian Employers’ Federation (MEF) said it expects massive job losses once companies have fully embraced and invested in these technologies.

“In 2006 and 2007, as banks started to introduce online banking, in Malaysia alone we saw over 20,000 job losses as banks consolidated their operations and closed branches,” said MEF executive director Shamsuddin Bardan.

In the insurance industry too, he said, companies are using AI to replace workers in lower-skilled jobs.

He said the World Bank estimates that disruptive technology will see seven million jobs lost worldwide by 2023, although it will also create five million jobs.

“Tech can be very attractive to employers despite the high capital investment because it is, in the long run, cost-efficient, efficient and sustainable.”
"Jobseekers and graduates must realise that they will be competing with tech."

Shamsuddin said the key to remaining employed is to be relevant to employers, which means that those in the current and future job market must have the right attitudes.

He said employees must be willing to take the initiative to learn new skills, and should be productive with skills and knowledge in various disciplines.

Giving the example of foreign broadcast journalists, Shamsuddin said many of them could play multiple roles, from that of a journalist to recording and editing video stories.

"Here, sometimes you will see four people putting an interview together: There will be the broadcast journalist, a cameraman, a driver to drive them around and a video editor in the office."

He said given the greater emphasis on productivity, employees must be ready to do more.

"If you are able to do more things within your working hours, you will be seen as more productive, and employers will be open to paying higher wages.

"The days of coffee breaks and fixed wages are numbered," he said. "But many Malaysians have not woken up to the reality that this is the order of the day."

However, he said the country’s laws must keep pace with these developments to protect both employees and employers.

On the education front, he said the government must work more quickly to ensure graduates’ proficiency in English.

"English is the key to mastering these technologies. It is the language of technology."

Economist Yeah Kim Leng said 5G, coupled with other new technologies, would enable the creation of a borderless world through unparalleled internet connectivity.

"Middle and low-skills jobs with repetitive tasks are at risk of being replaced by robotics and automation. Skilled workers also face the threat of being displaced by AI," said Yeah, who is attached to the Sunway University Business School.

"Most occupations with the possible exception of artists, artisans, researchers, scientists and engineers involved in advanced technology are substitutable. It’s a question of need and necessity."

For Malaysia to prepare a digital-savvy workforce, he said, the quality of education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics must be improved.

He also suggested more emphasis on subjects such as information and communications technology, coding, data science, robotics, and AI.