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Call to automate, invest in robotics

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THE manufacturing sector, which was struggling with labour shortages before the economic downturn, can expect the problem to return once the economy recovers.

To prepare for this, companies should take steps to automate and invest in robotics to enhance competitiveness, said Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (Might) co-chairman Tan Sri Dr Omar Abdul Rahman.

Omar said Malaysia had to hire foreign labour due to shortages in several sectors of the economy during the boom time.

"When our economy is back on track, the problem we had before in terms of labour shortage will return. The need to increase productivity and be more competitive in the market will be as urgent as ever," he said.

He said Might feels it is timely and appropriate to talk about enhancing national productivity through automation and robotics as it will reduce cost production and eliminate human errors.

"We have to go into automation ... but that doesn't mean we have no need for labour as we still need knowledge workers to manage automation and robots," he told a press conference in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

He also said that Might Consultation 98, the company's annual meeting, will focus on industrial automation and robotics. It will be a dialogue and is scheduled to be held on May 26 at the Pan Pacific Hotel in Kuala Lumpur.

"The topic was chosen based on our meeting with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad recently when Might was directed to look into the issues of labour and productivity for the country's sustainable development."

Might Consultation '98 will have two pre-consultation meetings before May 26 to narrow down the issues to be discussed so that urgent matters could be dealt with on that day which will lead to specific action plans and proposals, Omar said.

International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz is also expected to deliver a keynote address on "Enhancing National Productivity Through Automation and Robotics" at the opening ceremony.

"The consultation normally results in activities such as immediate action by the private sector, specific recommendations to the Government or issues that need to be looked more closely in greater detail," he said.

Besides creating public awareness on the importance of automation and robotics, he said results could also lead to more input for Government policy decisions and recommendations for more research and development projects.

The dialogue will be divided into three sessions: Application of Automation and Robotics, the Need for a National Automation and Robotics Industry and a Plenary Interactive Session.

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