

The AI domino effect

Formulate pragmatic strategies to avoid spectre of mass layoffs

TWO separate but related mass layoffs in the United States rumbled across the world, seen as the spectre of an encroaching dystopia. Amazon's retrenchment of 16,000 corporate workers was followed by deep cuts, including 300 journalists, at *The Washington Post* — the newspaper that exposed Watergate. It is no coincidence that billionaire tech titan Jeff Bezos is at the helm of both retrenchment exercises. His manoeuvre represents a domino effect of artificial intelligence — a strategy many multinationals may soon emulate to erase the essence of human work. Bezos's retrenchment philosophy is simple: streamline operations to free up capital for AI dominance. Recall the prophecy by 2024 Nobel Physics laureate Geoffrey Hinton, the so-called "Godfather of AI". In transitioning from pioneer of neural networks to a global messenger warning of AI's existential threat, Hinton described AI as a "double-edged sword" that would provide revolutionary so-

lutions to all human endeavours while posing significant, unstoppable risks to humanity.

Hinton's words resonate in Malaysia, where AI is projected to erase 685,000 jobs, a stark warning that the domestic labour market is on the brink of profound transformation across multiple industries. The fear is clear: AI

automation will hollow out stable, well-paying jobs, forcing humans to scramble for precarious, low-value work. Can AI's progress be tempered while we prepare for the inevitable? Perhaps with some workarounds.

We must formulate strategies for lifelong learning, digital literacy and adaptability that map future jobs and match workers with targeted training. Employers, including SMEs, and universities should design curricula that emphasise workplace training for "jobs of tomorrow", fully embracing AI-driven analytics and technologies. Social safety nets must be broadened to shield displaced workers — covering income support, retraining, career transition assistance and apprenticeship. At the same time, employers must resist emulating Bezos's ruthlessness by choosing long-term productivity over short-sighted cost-slashing.

For now, we must leverage the human strengths beyond AI's reach: empathy, critical thinking, complex problem-solving and creativity. AI, for all its wildfire-like invasion, only kills tasks but not necessarily jobs, so work must be reshaped by stripping away mundane tasks to enhance truly human capabilities. Malaysia has a narrow window of opportunity to prepare before AI becomes ubiquitous. If we fail, the alternative is unthinkable: a human revolt so desperate that the objective is to reset the world. What that reset entails is anyone's guess.

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