Up to S$150m boost for Singapore's artificial intelligence push

Partnership among government agencies aims to deepen Singapore's grasp and use of AI and help businesses ride the digital wave

By Jacquelyn Cheok
jaccheok@sph.com.sg
@JacCheokBT

Singapore

UP to S$150 million will be committed to AI.SG, a new national programme that seeks to boost Singapore's capabilities in artificial intelligence (AI).

The National Research Foundation (NRF) will invest the amount over the next five years.

Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim said on Wednesday that AI and data science are among key frontier technologies the Singapore government will harness as part of its "enhanced growth strategy for the digital economy".

He was speaking at Innovfest Unbound 2017, a two-day innovation festival celebrating digital disruption and which has attracted more than 8,000 global entrepreneurs and representatives from government agencies and corporates.

Dr Yaacob said: "The potential gains from an enabler technology like AI are massive."

AI.SG has three objectives. The first is to harness AI to address critical challenges affecting society and the industry, such as to improve traffic flow during peak hours and manage the ageing population.

The second is to invest in deep capabilities to "catch the next wave of scientific innovation". This may include next-generation AI systems that exhibit more human-like learning abilities, and adjacent technologies such as computing architectures.

The third objective is to broaden

Minister for Communications and Information Yaacob Ibrahim at Innovfest Unbound 2017. He said in his speech that it will be "all hands on deck" for the government to help businesses succeed in the digital economy.

the adoption and use of AI and machine-learning in the industry. One goal is to deliver 100 "meaningful AI projects and proofs-of-concept to solve real-world problems quickly for end-users" – starting with ideas for the sectors of finance, healthcare and city management.

AI.SG is a government-wide partnership comprising the NRF; Smart Nation and Digital Government Office; Economic Development Board; Infocomm Media Development Au-

thority (IMDA); SGInnovate; and the Integrated Health Information Systems. It will bring together Singapore-based research institutions, startups and firms with AI solutions.

Dr Yaacob said more government-driven initiatives can be expected down the road. "It will be all hands on deck for the government to help businesses succeed in the digital economy."

The NRF, together with the four local universities and the Agency for

Science, Technology and Research (A*Star) will launch the Singapore Data Science Consortium. This grouping will aim to boost collaborative research linkages between institutes of higher learning, research institutes and the industry for data-science R&D.

NUS Enterprise and Ascendas-Singbridge will jointly set up NUS Enterprise@Singapore Science Park, a 5,000 sq ft space that will incubate deep-technology companies; the facil-

ity will also house a prototyping studio and provide access to technologies, talents and startups from the National University of Singapore (NUS).

IMDA, through its Accreditation@IMDA platform, will partner the three local banks to offer its accredited companies information on real-life problems and opportunities to work on fintech projects within the banks and expand globally. The partnership will also support DBS, OCBC and UOB in driving fintech solutions within their organisations and sector.

GovTech, the government digital services agency, will extend the use of MyInfo to the private sector, namely four banks: DBS, OCBC, Standard Chartered and UOB. Through MyInfo (which automatically fills out government e-forms), customers can open bank accounts without having to submit copies of their identity cards and income statements or have bank staff manually verify their details, as these would already have been verified by the government.

Head of the Civil Service Peter Ho, who announced the MyInfo development at the Digital Government Exchange on Wednesday, said that a partnership between the government and the private sector marks the best of both worlds. "Businesses bring their best practices, while the government helps through regulations and building platforms."

Dr Yaacob affirmed this in his keynote speech at Innovfest Unbound: "The Singapore government will be industry's partner-in-innovation for the digital economy."