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## Getting youngsters primed to fly high



Dr Adham (centre, in blue) flanked by Norliza and Md Razalee at the Fly With Meraque programme launch in Kulai, Johor.

A NATIONWIDE effort to nurture young talent in drone technology has kicked off with three schools in Johor.

Drone tech company Meraque Services Sdn Bhd is sponsoring educational drones and basic drone awareness modules to be implemented at the schools as part of its "Fly with Meraque" programme.

More than 600 students from SMK Sultan Alauddin in Felda Bukit Besar, SMK Seri Pinang in Bandar Tenggara – both in Kulai –and SMK Taman Scientex in Pasir Gudang are expected to benefit from the donations.

The corporate social responsibility programme by Meraque is in line with the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry's DroneTech initiative to generate 100,000 jobs by 2030.

Present to launch the programme at Kota Tinggi District Council Hall in Bandar Tenggara, Kulai, was Science, Technology and Innovation Minister Datuk Seri Dr Adham Baba.

“Fly with Meraque” is a partnership with the School Drone Squad initiative by the Malaysian Air Youth Club (KRUM), a curricular club that aims to create awareness of drone technology among secondary school students.

The programme is supported by the Malaysian Research Accelerator for Technology and Innovation (MRANTI).

As part of Meraque’s ongoing local drone talent development, the programme intends to spark an interest in drone technology and its application among students.

The syllabus will equip, support and enhance student capabilities through innovative courses and new-age skills, priming them for future employment opportunities in the drone space.

Also present at the launch were Felda chairman Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh, Johor education, information and communication committee chairman Norlizah Noh and state Education Department deputy director Omar Salleh.

Speaking at the event, Dr Adham said his ministry would work with Education Ministry as part of government efforts to streamline the syllabus and attract more interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects.

“I was informed that Education Ministry will bring the Cabinet memorandum on STEM and its use to the government soon and there, we will suggest that drone technology, such as design, use and Artificial Intelligence (AI), are included in STEM... in the school curriculum and co-curriculum,” Dr Adham added.

Aside from the drones, Meraque’s sponsorship includes drone training modules, career opportunities, intensive classes, study tours and club activities.

More than 7,000 students are registered with KRUM.

“Meraque has always been committed to activities for community betterment through drone education programmes,” said Meraque chief executive officer Md Razalee Ismail.

“We believe in investing in students to inculcate a passion for drone piloting.

“According to a recent study by MRANTI, Malaysia’s drone economy is expected to contribute RM50bil to the GDP by 2030.

“To be able to tap this growing opportunity, we must increase the number of skilled workers in the drone sector.

“By providing students with early exposure to drone technology through a safe and guided curriculum, we hope to equip them with the necessary skill sets to become industry-ready and eventually, expose them to career opportunities in the field,” he added.

Meanwhile, KRUM president Azhar Selamat said: “This initiative by Meraque will have a positive impact on Malaysia’s journey to develop a new generation with a passion for drone operation and an aptitude for its technologies.

“This is merely the tip of the iceberg of a long-term strategic plan that KRUM and Meraque have tailored specifically for the School Drone Squad.

“The sharing of expertise and hands-on guided syllabus will generate exposure for participants, significantly enhancing their drone knowledge to catapult their drone career trajectory,” he added.