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New institute zooms in on smart car systems

Lester Hio

In the near future, BMW cars may boast technology developed in Singapore that can tell when a driver is getting sleepy and alert him before an accident happens.

It is being worked on here at Fraunhofer Singapore, a new research institute at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

Launched yesterday, the institute is a collaboration between NTU and Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, a German institution for applied research.

The institute is currently working with the German carmaker on smart car systems that can improve driving safety, which include cameras that can detect drivers' emotions, attention span or fatigue based on facial expression. The data can be projected live on the car's windscreens, which can highlight to drivers their condition and prevent potential accidents.

The institute's research focuses on digital technologies such as virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR), and human-machine interfaces. It is supported by funding from industry partners, with the National Research Foundation funding up to \$23 million until 2020 for research and development projects.

Minister for Trade and Industry (Industry) S. Iswaran, who launched the institute, said such digitisation technologies will be key in helping local companies capture new opportunities and remain relevant in the fast-changing global economic landscape. "Fraunhofer will build on the existing applied research in interactive and digital media... to develop cutting-edge technology solutions and collaborate with our companies to tap new opportunities in the digital space," he said.

Its projects include VR and AR technology that could let engineers run diagnostics on machinery using tablets, virtually see the insides of engines using AR, or view products in VR from different angles using VR glasses before starting production.

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MINISTER FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY (INDUSTRY) S. ISWARAN,
on how the institute will be key in helping local companies.