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Singtel partners A*STAR, NTU to spearhead R&D in emerging technologies

By: Michelle Zhu
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SINGAPORE (Dec 4): Singtel today inked partnership agreements with **Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Singapore** and the **Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR)**, respectively, to spearhead research & development (R&D) efforts in emerging technologies.

The first agreement is a five-year partnership which will see Singtel work with NTU Singapore and the **National Research Foundation (NRF) Singapore**, a department within the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), to establish a \$42.4 million

corporate lab called Singtel Cognitive and Artificial Intelligence Lab for Enterprises (SCALE@NTU).

The lab will see the development of applications for use in the areas of public safety, smart urban solutions, transportation, healthcare and manufacturing. Its research aims to resolve various challenges faced by cities in keeping their infrastructure facilities in tip top running condition.

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The partnership is also expected to expand the product range of Singtel and its regional ICT subsidiary, NCS, through collaborative research and training activities conducted by Singtel and NTU at the lab. Some 100 researchers from both Singtel and NTU have been engaged to work at SCALE@NTU, while another 200 research engineers and graduate & undergraduate students will also be trained in the lab.

According to Bill Chang, CEO, Group Enterprise at Singtel, the collaboration with NTU and NRF Singapore to build SCALE@NTU was initiated by Singtel as the telco intends to re-shift its focus on technology beyond the telco industry.

Singtel may invest in further in the tech IPs that come out from this collaboration, he adds.

Separately, Singtel and A*STAR have agreed to work together on projects including smart building automation systems, robotics and Internet of Things (IoT) applications that could help boost operating efficiencies in various industries.

One given example is the automation of biohazardous waste handling which would allow companies to deploy their employees to undertake higher value-added jobs – with the testing of such technologies to be conducted on Singtel's NarrowBand-IoT and 5G mobile network, in a model factory to be set up by A*STAR next year.

Singtel has yet to settle on a location for the partnership.

In a Monday joint announcement between Singtel, NTU Singapore, A*STAR and NRF Singapore, the four entities say they aim to accelerate innovation in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI), advanced data analytics, robotics and smart computing via their collective expertise and resources.

In their view, these emerging technologies will support Singapore's transformation into Smart Nation and help enable the country's digital economy.

Smart sensors embedded with AI, for instance, would allow city governments to analyse data from infrastructure facilities and can decide to conduct maintenance works only when necessary to achieve optimal performance for these assets.

This would help cut operating costs for cities that currently spend significant amounts on routine maintenance without compromising on infrastructure quality and performance standards, say the partners.

“As businesses face the rising threat of technological disruptions, companies are constantly seeking innovative ways to gain deeper insights through data analytics, better engage their customers and transform their operations through digitalisation. To help companies address these challenges, we are stepping up our R&D efforts to develop deep capabilities in these focused areas,” comments CEO Chang.

The signing ceremony for both agreements was held this afternoon, and was attended by Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

“Industry research expects rapid growth for IoT in the next three years, with connected devices climbing to 21 billion globally by 2020 from about 6.4 billion this year. While this presents significant opportunities for the telecommunications and technology industries, this also means we need to fast-track our innovation initiatives so that we can deploy more applications to power these devices,” said Singtel Group CEO Chua Sock Koong at the welcome address.

“To achieve this, we are also constantly building our talent pool so that we have sufficient manpower to work on these new growth areas. We are recruiting fresh graduates and retraining our existing employees in our Cyber Security Institute and the 5G Centre of Excellence that we recently set up with Ericsson,” she added.

As at 4:30pm, shares in Singtel are trading flat at \$3.74.

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