# STEAM-ing to the future of education

## Applying classroom education to the real world

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The future requires talent who can combine technical knowledge with creativity, human values and practical application, says Tan Sri Chan Kong Choy.

The Tunku Abdul Rahman University of Management and Technology (TAR UMT) Board of Governors chairman said challenges such as digital transformation, artificial intelligence, smart cities, sustainability, food security and emerging technologies require interdisciplinary thinking, making STEAM education more important than ever.

STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics.

Chan said this yesterday when announcing the inaugural STEAM@TAR UMT festival, to be held from Nov 13 to 15 at the university's campus here.

He said the event reflects the government's move from STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to STEAM, as outlined in the Education and Higher Education Blueprints 2026-2035.

Held under the theme "STEAMing the Future Beyond Education", the three-day festival will feature exhibitions, technology showcases, talks, forums, workshops and competitions aimed at inspiring greater interest in the related fields.

Chan thanked the Kuala Lumpur Education Department for supporting the initiative, with Silent Foundation named the festival's main sponsor.

The festival targets a broad audience, including students at all levels, educators and industry representatives.

Among the highlights are STEAM innovation exhibits, industry technology showcases, university research demonstrations, hands-on science, coding and robotics activities, a robotics challenge, an e-sports tournament, and forums on future technologies and careers.

A key attraction will be the STEAMverse Contest 2026, a poster and prototype competition that challenges students to develop innovative STEAM-based solutions to real-world problems aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The contest features six tracks across four themes: AI Urban Living, Agri-Innovation, EcoChem Nexus as well as Creative Futures: Human Expression and Intelligent Experiences.

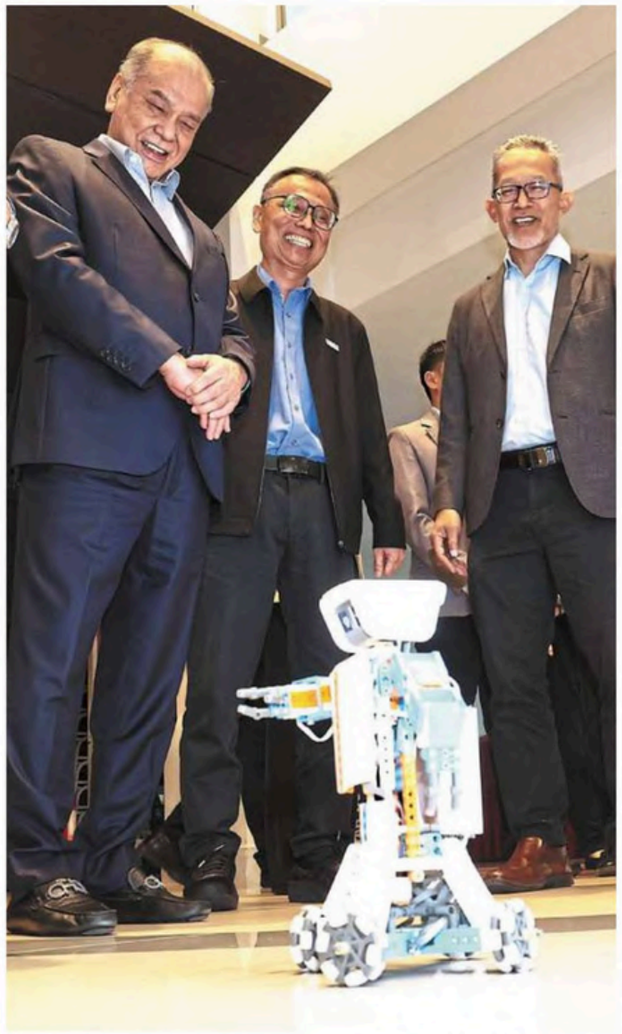
Participants may compete individually or in teams of two to four, with shortlisted entries to be announced on Oct 14, before the final round on Nov 14.

TAR UMT president Prof Datuk Dr Lee Sze Wei said initiatives such as STEAM@TAR UMT are crucial in reversing the long-term decline in interest in STEM.

"From what I hear from children, parents and teachers, many see science and mathematics as tough subjects. As a result, students tend to avoid them," he said.

Prof Lee said the festival aims to rekindle students' interest by demonstrating how STEM knowledge is applied in everyday life and across various industries.

"When students see how these concepts are used in sectors such as petrochemicals, technology and engineering, they can better connect what they learn in school with real-world applications," he said.



**Ready for the future:** Chan (left) looking at a robot at the STEAM @ TAR UMT festival at TAR UMT in Kuala Lumpur. With him are Prof Lee (centre) and Digital Economy Corporation Sdn Bhd Digital Talent and Entrepreneurship Digital Adoption director Nik Naharudin Mohd Nasir. — ART CHEN/The Star

He added that promoting STEM and STEAM should not be left solely to educators.

"We need support from industry players, professional bodies and other stakeholders to help students appreciate these core subjects, which many currently find challenging," he said.

Prof Lee noted that TAR UMT graduates remain highly sought after by employers, with the university recording a graduate employability rate of more than 95% in STEM-related fields over the past five years.

The university hopes to attract at least 10,000 visitors to the event and is working with education authorities to reach schools across the Klang Valley, Perak, Melaka, Selangor and, potentially, Pahang.