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French multinational Thales to launch AI centre in Singapore

Zhaki Abdullah
Correspondent

French aerospace and defence giant Thales will set up a new artificial intelligence (AI) centre in Singapore to develop AI solutions for critical environments and strengthen its research and development capabilities.

Solutions that are developed at the cortAIx (pronounced "cortex") centre will benefit the company's global network, said Minister for Digital Development and Information Josephine Teo at the France-Singapore Frontier Technologies Forum, held at the Fullerton Hotel on May 30.

The Singapore centre will be Thales' fourth cortAIx site, after France, Canada and Britain, said Thales cortAIx factory vice-president Mickael Brossard. Launched in 2024, cortAIx is an initiative by the French firm to accelerate the development of artificial intelligence for aircraft, armed forces and critical infrastructure, bringing together experts in the sector.

Thales, which has operated in Singapore since 1973, also signed a deal with the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore on May 30 to set up an International Avionics Lab here in 2026, to develop and test new solutions for air traffic management and airport operations. These agreements were among several between French and local organisations unveiled at the forum.

Mrs Teo announced that France's National Centre for Scientific Research, through its centre at the National University of Singapore's Create facility, will participate in Singapore's National Robotics Programme to strengthen research in embodied AI. Embodied AI is the integration of artificial intelligence with physical systems.

The collaboration will be supported with funding of $20 million, Mrs Teo said.

Meanwhile, French start-up Mistral AI will partner with ST Engineering on applied AI engineering, she added. This comes on top of a tie-up between Mistral AI, the Home Team Science and Technology Agency (HTX) and Microsoft to enhance Home Team operations, announced on May 26.

Mrs Teo also announced that aerospace giant Airbus will work with Singapore's Economic Development Board and the Infocomm Media Development Authority to jointly develop potential applications for a 5G-non-terrestrial network, in which satellites and other high-altitude platforms are used to extend 5G coverage and functionality. "They aim to reduce time lag and quicken responsiveness of AI systems, so they can be deployed in more scenarios," she said.

French energy company Engie will also partner with transport operator SBS Transit on reducing the carbon footprint of public transport, Mrs Teo said.

Singapore and France are both strong proponents of multilateralism, she said. "While tariff-induced uncertainties persist, French businesses operating in Singapore can continue to benefit from the Asean Free Trade Area, which makes it more cost-effective for French businesses in Singapore to export and source goods from this region," said Mrs Teo.

Ms Clara Chappaz, France's Minister Delegate for artificial intelligence and digital technologies, said the two countries had a common mission not only to see technology develop, but to see it used for the common good.

Speaking at the event, Minister-in-charge of Energy, and Science and Technology Tan See Leng noted that ties between the two countries were "underpinned by strong economic cooperation that has grown steadily over the years".

France is currently the Republic's second-largest goods trading partner and third-largest investor among EU member states, Dr Tan said, adding that more than 2,600 French firms operate here.

azhaki@sph.com.sg

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