

Human Robotics, World Record Hackathons, and Exploration of AI Take Spotlight at Black Hat MEA

RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA, November 27, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The positives and perils of Artificial Intelligence (AI) were the focus on the second day of Black Hat MEA at Riyadh Exhibition and Convention Centre, Malham, while thousands of hackers convened in an effort to break the Guinness World Record for the largest Capture the Flag Hackathon, further strengthening Saudi Arabia's status as a hub for cybersecurity safety solutions.

Insights from Industry Leaders at Executive Summit

Day two of the event's Executive Summit opened with an engaging keynote from Dr Kevin Jones, Group Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) at international pharmaceutical leader Bayer. He analysed the adoption of AI in pharma and highlighted how Bayer is leveraging the technology to transform healthcare and agriculture. Jones also told attendees how AI is assisting in reducing product development time by up to two years and improving detection for patients globally through Bayer's 'My Genesis' platform.



Dr Kevin Jones, Group Chief Information Security Officer (CISO) at international pharmaceutical leader Bayer



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"The age of AI is finally here, but what does that mean for cybersecurity?," he asked. "As

companies all over the world strive to become AI-enabled enterprises, we are seeing the rapid adoption of new technologies. This includes traditional methods such as machine learning and the recent revolution, which is generative AI.

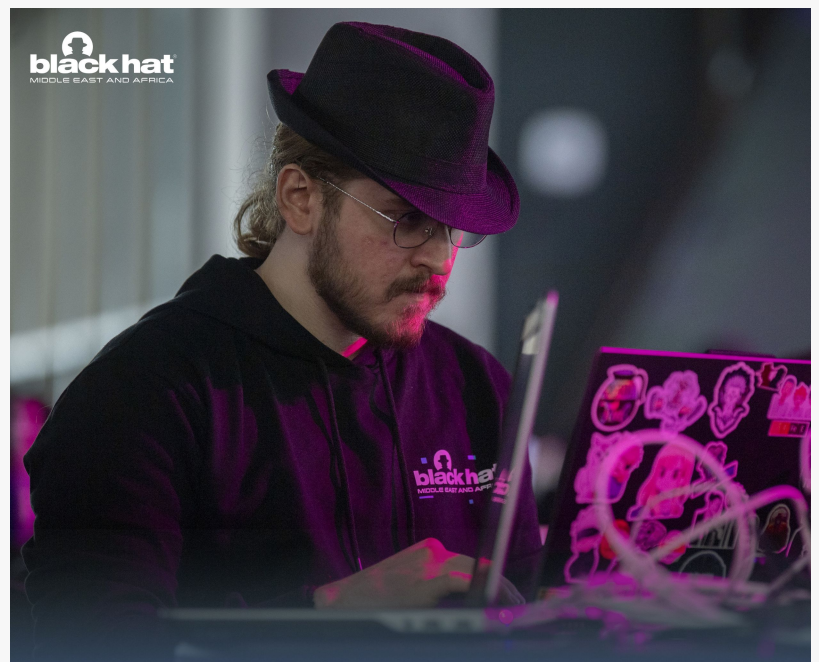
“For companies that want to survive, adopting AI tools such as the ones we created around healthcare and life sciences – which have the ability to transform an industry – is a must. In life sciences alone, global consultancies are predicting generative AI will bring an opportunity anywhere between US\$250-US\$450 billion, meaning it will revolutionise the way development and research are done.”

When asked about his predictions for the future, Jones responded: “I can't come here without talking about regulation. The global regulatory landscape is exceptionally complex and is becoming more complex with cybersecurity and AI at the heart of it. For global organisations, being compliant is an exceptionally large effort, and we're seeing this need for more federated environments as companies and countries try digital and data segmentation, which can only be good for the security world.”

Human and AI Collaboration: Perspectives from a Former Digital Innovation Director at the CIA
Jennifer Ewbank, Former Director of Digital Innovation at the CIA, meanwhile, painted a compelling vision of a future where human ingenuity and artificial intelligence seamlessly intertwine. She emphasised the transformative power of human-machine collaboration, demonstrating how it is already revolutionising various sectors, from healthcare to cybersecurity. However, contrary to popular belief, she cautioned against viewing AI as a replacement for human intelligence. Instead, she advocated for a relationship wherein AI augments human capabilities, enabling people to tackle complex challenges with greater efficiency. She stressed



Jennifer Ewbank, Former Director of Digital Innovation at the CIA



World record 'Capture The Flag Hackathon' attempt featuring 1,000 hackers enters second day as competition heats up

the crucial role of human expertise in guiding AI systems, ensuring their ethical development and deployment.

“By highlighting the strengths of both humans and machines, we can unlock unprecedented opportunities and address pressing global issues, such as climate change, poverty, and disease,” she said. “As we navigate this rapidly evolving technological landscape, by embracing AI as a partner rather than a competitor, we can shape a future where technology serves humanity's best interests.”

Cybersecurity Challenges and Solutions with LLMs

With Generative AI and Large Language Models (LLMs) increasing in popularity, self-taught cyber specialist Kiran PP, a two-time NASA hacker and Security Assessment Engineer, gave a topical presentation on the dangers lurking for individuals, corporates and networks using LLMs.

Kiran ran through scenarios whereby hackers will be waiting to strike to “poison” machines and LLMs. He cautioned users to be mindful to “sanitise LLM inputs and outputs,” while warning of an over-reliance on the technology by urging people to adopt more “human-in-the-loop controls” and limit permissions, while stressing the importance of monitoring the model behaviour for signs of poisoning.

World Record-Breaking Capture the Flag Hackathon

Day two also saw the continuation of Capture the Flag (CTF), a Jeopardy-style, team-based competition that has brought together more than 1,000 participants from 250 teams following a qualification round in September that attracted 5,000 participants. The competition challenges participants in diverse categories, including Web, Reverse Engineering, PWN, Cryptography, and Forensics, with players competing for a share of a total prize pool worth US\$266,000.

Exciting Competitions and Bootcamps at Black Hat MEA

The CyberSurge Bootcamp, a collaborative effort between BlackHat MEA, Tahaluf, and the Centre for Finance, Technology, and Entrepreneurship (CFTE), continued to equip participants with the essential tools and knowledge to navigate the complex world of cybersecurity entrepreneurship. The intensive programme guides participants through the entire startup journey, from ideation to launch, providing mentorship, hands-on exercises, and insights into the Saudi cybersecurity market.

"The impact of advancing technologies such as Artificial Intelligence on the future of cybersecurity is a hot topic and it's testament to the stature of Black Hat MEA that we have had global experts engaged in high-level dialogue on another action packed day for technology in the region," said Annabelle Mander, Senior Vice President at show organisers Tahaluf."

"Our expanded Activity Zone is also buzzing with energy as we head into an exciting final day and hopefully a world record-breaking hackathon. Our partners SAF CSP have done an incredible job of delivering the activation, and the enthusiasm of the participants from around the world is

inspirational. We look forward to crowning the winners."

Opportunities for Startups in Cybersecurity

Meanwhile, a key highlight on Thursday will be the final of the Cyberseed Pitch Competition. Eight selected startups will compete for a grand prize of US\$30,000, presenting their groundbreaking solutions to a panel of industry leaders from KAUST, AVMS Capital, Taqnia, and AKA Identity. The platform offers a unique opportunity for startups to gain visibility, secure funding, and accelerate their growth.

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