

Taiwan's Hon Hai looks to robot industry

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A visitor walks past Taiwan's Hon Hai Precision Industry Co's headquarters as a security guard looks on in Tucheng, New Taipei City, in June 2011. The parent company of Taiwanese tech giant Foxconn plans to mass produce industrial robots as part of its efforts to cope with labour shortages and rising wages.

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The project, which is initially forecast to cost the Taiwan-based Hon Hai Precision Industry Tw\$6.7 billion (\$223 million), was unveiled Saturday when Terry Gou, chairman of the conglomerate, broke ground for the construction of a research and development unit in Taichung, central Taiwan.

"The investment marks the beginning of Hon Hai's bid to build an empire of robots," the Central Taiwan Science Park authorities said in a statement.

The investment will be made through Hon Hai's subsidiary Foxnum, a company focusing on the manufacturing of automation facilities and equipment, it said.

Foxconn, hit by a spate of suicides at its Chinese plants, plans to replace 500,000 workers with robots in the next three years, official media earlier reported.

[Foxconn](#) -- the world's largest maker of [computer components](#), which assembles products for Apple, Sony and Nokia -- plans to use one million robots to do "simple" work, China Business News quoted Gou as saying in August.

At least 14 workers have died in apparent suicides since last year, most of them in the southern Chinese city of [Shenzhen](#). Activists blamed the deaths on tough working conditions and have called for better treatment of staff.

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