Trade Digest
Vol. 5 Issue 20
12 Dec 2018

Thailand's Digital Transformation Master Plan

On 21 November 2018, at the Bangkok Post International Forum 2018 titled "Asian Transformation: The Changing Landscape", Dr. Pichet Durongkaveroj, Minister of Digital Economy and Society, announced that the Ministry is currently preparing the digital transformation master plan for ASEAN connectivity to serve as set of practical guidelines for digital collaboration among ASEAN countries. In response to the need for moving towards becoming a Digital ASEAN and placing the bloc in the best position to take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, all ASEAN countries need to be active in adapting to the changes caused by digital disruptions and implementing strategic plans that enhance the capacity and competitiveness of each member state's digital ecosystem.

In accordance with Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship for 2019, which was designed under the theme of "Advancing Partnership for Sustainability", the Master Plan is purposed to facilitate and further develop intra-ASEAN cooperation with a focus on a wide range of areas, including smart city development, cyber security, connectivity and mobility, harmonization and alignment, as well as manpower and society. Dr. Pichet also added that achieving advancement in these five major areas would assist the government's objectives of accomplishing its three critical targets within 2020, namely, the modernization of rural areas, the reduction of income disparity, and capacity building in the digital age.

To this end, the government is promoting access to affordable digital infrastructure including free Wi-Fi access in all villages nationwide; providing digital literacy training; and building a quality digital workforce, an essential element for the development of the country's digital economy. The government's aim is for all Thai people to be equipped with basic knowledge of technology, with Thai ICT businesses then being able to develop more upstream technology capabilities.

Cybersecurity Threat among Top Concerns in ASEAN and Thailand

Having become such an essential factor in most people's daily lives, cyberspace can play a huge role in economic growth as well as economic development. Between 2015 and 2020, Southeast Asia is the fastest-growing region in the world in terms of connections to the internet. According to an estimation by Google-Temasek, there are projected to be 3.8 million new internet users in the region each month over this period. The region's online economy is also estimated by the same source to reach 240 billion USD by 2025. This skyrocketing growth, however, can increase the risk of cyber-attacks. As identified by the World Economic Forum's insight report on the Regional Risks for Doing Business 2018, cyber-attacks are now the leading risk for doing business in the East Asia and Pacific region, including many ASEAN countries.

This threat has been recognized by the ASEAN countries themselves. During the "International Cyberspace: The New Frontier of Peace and Cooperation" forum held jointly by the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council (APRC) and the Electronic Transactions Development Agency (ETDA) on 27 November 2018, Air Chief Marshal Prajin Juntong, Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice, stated that cybersecurity, data privacy, internet governance, and e-commerce are the key topics of 2019 among the ASEAN countries. Upon assuming the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2019, Thailand hopes to lead the region in formulating regional norms in cyberspace and promoting regional and international collaboration.

To lower and protect against the cybersecurity threats, Thailand, with the cooperation of the Japanese government, recently established the ASEAN-Japan Cybersecurity Capacity Building Center (AJCCBC) to develop a cybersecurity training program for ASEAN countries. In terms of legislative measures, Thailand has also been preparing a national legal foundation, which it plans to have in place by late 2019, based on the Draft Personal Data Protection Bill and the Draft Cybersecurity Bill. These will create confidence in Thailand's cybersecurity infrastructure which can in turn lead to an efficient and sustainable business environment in the long term.

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