

The Pathway to Digital ASEAN

ASEAN is the 5th largest economy in the world with a less-than-30-year-old population of more than 300 million eager to join the digital revolution. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), ASEAN has great potential to go digital due to its sizable economy of US\$2.8 trillion, demographic dividend, and accelerating regional integration. With the exception of Singapore, however, ASEAN still trails behind China, Japan, and Korea in terms of moving towards a digital economy due to the partial lack of internet access in some member nations.

To develop the digital economy within the region, the ASEAN Telecommunications and Information Technology Ministers (TELMIN), the Secretary General of ASEAN, and delegates from 10 ASEAN Member States gathered on the 28th and 29th March 2019 for the ASEAN Digital Ministers' Retreat in Phuket, Thailand. The meeting was hosted by The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand with the key topic of discussion being moving ASEAN towards becoming a fully digital ASEAN by adopting the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, with a focus on digital transformation and the digital economy.

To support the development of digital ASEAN, the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 covers five key areas: (1) stronger cybersecurity to enhance the readiness and capacity to handle cyber threats, (2) the continuous implementation of Smart City projects to develop intelligent cities in the ASEAN region, (3) the development of data network linkages and the mobility of people in the region, (4) the adoption of a digital economy and digital information governance to attract investment in ASEAN, and (5) the development of human capital by promoting digital activities and adopting new education system to match workers' skills to new demand in the digital economy era. The meeting concluded with agreement on the need to develop guidelines for information exchange and operational-level coordination among member states.

BOI Approves Three Science Parks in Thailand

Established in 2002, the first Thailand Science Park (TSP) was founded with the aim of being a hub for science and technology in Thailand and to encourage R&D activities and innovation in the private sector. Since its establishment, TSP has also boosted the creation of new technology businesses through entrepreneurship and Incubation programs. It offers strong infrastructure, comprehensive support, world-class R&D facilities and skilled manpower and resources to accelerate research and development activities. It also provides space leasing opportunities for both domestic and international companies. Other than TSP, regional science parks are now also being operated by several universities, although they only provide local companies with 'soft' services such as technological consultancy, training and contract and collaborative research projects. They have no physical infrastructure or 'hard' facilities such as laboratories or rental space.

To encourage further development in science, technology, and innovation, the Board of Investment recently approved new investments in three regional science and technology parks. Located in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen and Songkhla, these new regional parks will serve to extend industrial research, support growth, generate additional investments, foster scientific R&D, promote innovations in diverse regions of the country, and improve the competitiveness of Thai businesses.

The Thai government plans to promote these three regional science parks as centers of science, technology and innovation in Thailand. The parks will not only provide production and service development for the private sector but will also cooperate with entrepreneurs and educational institutions. These developments are expected to help expedite all R&D projects and innovation while at the same time lowering costs.



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Previously, Thailand Science Park was the country's only designated science and technology park. The recently confirmed investments in the development of three regional science parks will provide an opportunity for regional entrepreneurs to strengthen their capabilities in research and development and increase revenue generation opportunities in Thailand's more remote provinces. The new parks are also expected to act as a catalyst for regional economic development and facilitate the creation and development of new technologies based on the transfer of knowledge to enterprises in a variety of sectors and industries.

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