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Artificial Intelligence
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ASEAN AI Governance Roundtable #1: Bangkok, Thailand

How is Thailand approaching the challenges and opportunities presented by Artificial Intelligence? Where are they taking inspiration from? What concerns do different stakeholders have?

*This is the **first** in a series of regional [roundtables](#) convened by AI Singapore for representatives from industry, government, and academia to discuss responsible AI within ASEAN. Such discussions are typically too narrow and too broad. Too narrow in that a few voices dominate the discussion—notably those in the United States and Europe, with China sometimes included. Too broad in that discussion is often limited to generalities and principles. This project aims to address both aspects of this problem, involving a wider set of stakeholders—in particular those from Southeast Asia—in more focused discussions of specific challenges in the application of Responsible AI to particular questions.*

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Executive Summary.

This roundtable in Bangkok, Thailand, is the first AI Singapore roundtable to take place outside of Singapore and aims to begin addressing the unique challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence (AI) within the broader context of the ASEAN region. This report synthesises key insights from the discussion, specifically focusing on Thailand's approach to AI governance.

Some of the key challenges highlighted by the discussants are:

- **Regulatory frameworks:** Thailand still needs to adopt a clearly defined regulatory framework for AI despite having a national strategy prioritising areas like finance, healthcare, government services, and agriculture. Concerns about overregulation,

inspired by debates and discussions surrounding Thailand's previous decision to adopt the European Union's GDPR act, highlight the need for regulatory frameworks tailored to a Thai context, all the more important in the wake of the EU's AI act.

- **Sectoral alignment:** It is crucial to ensure that AI's benefits reach all sectors, especially given the significance of MSMEs within the ASEAN region. Otherwise, there is a risk that only certain sectors will adopt AI, leaving others behind and creating a 'new digital divide'.
- **Enforcement:** Effective regulation requires the law and the capacity to enforce it. In a Thai context, administrative capabilities to enforce AI regulation will be just as crucial as any regulatory framework the country adopts.
- **Infrastructure & standardisation:** Many areas in Thailand lack the necessary digital infrastructure to fully use AI's capacities. Expanding such infrastructure in a systematic and targeted approach that aims to expand both infrastructure and standardise processes will be crucial for effective deployment.

However, Thailand does not merely face challenges but also ample opportunities for AI adoption. By framing the discussion around healthcare—one of the critical areas as identified by Thailand's AI strategy—the discussants identified crucial opportunities for Thailand:

- **Healthcare:** AI presents significant opportunities in healthcare, particularly in emergency medicine, resources management, and telemedicine. AI can help make the Thai healthcare sector more efficient and improve services and delivery both in urban and rural areas.
- **Smart adoption:** Focusing on areas with high benefits and low barriers for adoption—"low hanging fruit"—can lay the foundation for cross-industrial growth and help foster more widespread AI adoption. This requires a broader approach than just focusing on one industry, but to rather to aim to adopt AI across several industries and sectors.
- **Standardisation:** Ensuring standardised processes and infrastructure will support the effective implementation of AI solutions. This would include establishing data centres, expanding internet coverage, as well as implementing consistent data handling, management and governance practices.

This report suggests four possible solutions in Thailand's approach to AI implementation:

- **Tailored Regulation:** Emphasize the need for AI regulations that are specifically designed for Thailand's unique context, rather than adopting foreign frameworks that may not align with local realities.
- **Infrastructure and Standardization:** Before rushing to implement AI solutions, Thailand should focus on establishing robust infrastructure, such as data centres and internet coverage, along with standardized processes like regular audits, data formatting, and security protocols to ensure sustainable AI integration.
- **Effective Enforcement:** Highlight the importance of not only creating regulations but also ensuring their effective enforcement. This requires political will, sufficient resources, and clear guidelines to make AI governance in Thailand impactful.

- **Human Augmentation:** Advocate for the use of AI to augment human capabilities rather than replace them, particularly in critical sectors like healthcare. This approach will help in gaining broader acceptance of AI as an opportunity rather than a threat.

These points are to emphasise strategic and context-specific approaches to AI adoption, focusing on long-term benefits and careful planning to overcome the specific challenges Thailand faces, and the unique opportunities Thailand can leverage.

Based on the roundtable discussion, here are some suggested future directions that Thailand could take with regard to the country's governance approach:

- **Targeted and specific policies:** Deciding between AI-specific regulation or a sector-driven approach to reinforce existing frameworks is critical. Thailand must determine what infrastructure is necessary, where it needs to be implemented, and how to finance and prioritise these steps.
- **Flexibility for the future:** International AI developments—both in technology and international/regional governance frameworks—need to be actively and purposefully adapted to fit Thailand's specific societal, economic, and political contexts.
- **Safety & cybersecurity:** Active safety and cybersecurity measures will be integral to the success and efficacy of Thailand's AI strategy. Ensuring certain areas are insulated, partially or completely, raises additional important but difficult questions.

This roundtable underscores the need for a holistic AI strategy tailored to Thailand's needs. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities, Thailand can develop a smart adoption strategy that maximises the benefits of AI applications across a diverse set of sectors, healthcare among them. The insights from this roundtable can serve as a jumping-off point for effective AI policies and governance frameworks that are both ambitious and context-specific.

Introduction.

There has been much discussion around national AI strategies over the past couple of years. Though many countries have begun important conversations on several issues and concerns pertaining to AI, there is only so much that single countries can do on their own to effectively strategise and regulate the development, use, and deployment of artificial intelligence. In light of this, AI Singapore is organising a series of regional roundtable discussions with our ASEAN neighbours to better understand the international cooperation component of any policy initiative.

Though [many have laid down some formalised national strategy](#)—a kind of roadmap—for effectively adopting this emerging technology, few countries have yet to enact clear

regulatory guidelines or frameworks, with the exception of the [European Union’s AI act, set to enter into full force 2026](#).

This report focuses on Thailand’s place in this global discussion. Based on a roundtable held in Bangkok, the next few pages will outline what the participants discussed, what concerns emerged, and what clear opportunities are in sight, as well as provide some thoughts on how these challenges can be met.

1.1 Thailand’s landscape.

Thailand, like many other countries, still need to formalise a clear regulatory framework for AI, [though there exists a national strategy](#) to help set the policy direction for adoption, development, and regulatory frameworks. The Thai strategy foregrounds finance and healthcare as two priority areas, one of which—healthcare—will be discussed in some detail later in the report. It has also been reported that the Thai [Electronic Transactions Development Agency \(ETDA\) have closely studied regulatory frameworks from the EU and Brazil over the past two years](#), presumably to lay the groundwork for Thailand’s approach. However, this raises concerns about overregulation, especially in light of Thailand adopting the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) in 2019, heavily influenced by the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) from 2016. More recently, the Draft Royal AI Decree, heavily influenced by the EU AI Act, has indeed furthered these concerns. Furthermore, and as will be discussed in this report, there exists prevailing concerns of “misregulating”, AI; that is to say, that Thailand will adopt a regulatory framework that is not fit for purpose; that does not match the Thai context.

2 Understanding the Challenges.

Thailand, like other jurisdictions, will face challenges when it comes to effectively and successfully regulate and govern the AI-space. These are, on the one hand, common or shared challenges—such as [responsibility](#), [transparency & explainability](#), or [sustainability](#). These have been discussed in previous AI Singapore reports. Other challenges are specific to Thailand and a Thai context. Perhaps the biggest challenge at the moment that the roundtable showed was uncertainty about what might happen in the short term. Such immediate challenges cannot always be wholly separated from the ‘macro’ challenges mentioned, they are still worthwhile to consider, specifically, from the Thai perspective.

2.1 Thailand’s challenges.

A big concern across many territories is that AI solutions should benefit more than just large industry players. [Within ASEAN, 97% of all private sector activity is generated by MSMEs](#)—as discussed in our report on sustainability—this is a crucial concern, and [Thailand is no](#)

[exception](#). However, ensuring that the potential benefit of AI reaches as many people as possible, there is a need to go beyond the private sector, and ensure effective deployment within the private sector, too. This latter point was brought up as a point of concern, and a potentially major challenge within the Thai context by the roundtable participants, particularly the risk that only certain sectors would embrace AI solutions, whilst others lag behind.

Finding a regulatory balance so as to neither under- nor overregulate is another challenge which, whilst not unique to Thailand, must necessarily be tackled within a Thai context. A key concern was that regulators will ‘copy’ regulation from other regions, without adequate localisation. [This concern is not wholly unfounded as Thailand’s personal data protection act was heavily inspired by the European Union’s GDPR](#). With the EU recently passing its AI Act, there is concern that this act will heavily influence Thai regulation—[especially as the Draft Royal Decree on AI already suggests a similarly risk-based approach as the EU AI act](#). Whilst the effects of the EU act within the European Union is a discussion for elsewhere, the Union’s considerations are likely to differ substantially from Thailand’s. To paraphrase one roundtable participant: Thailand is acting like a rich country when it is not yet rich; in other words, Thailand risks regulating for a different socioeconomic reality than the one in the country. There exist concerns that a similar approach to the Personal Data will be taken to AI regulation will lead to overregulation and a stagnation to Thailand’s capacity to develop and deploy AI solutions, specifically *because* such regulation does not come from a Thai context, with regards to its [demographics](#), infrastructural considerations—as will be made clear in the upcoming discussion on AI within Thailand’s healthcare system—[economic makeup](#), or political system. Put bluntly, Thailand is a very different place than the European Union.

Yet, overregulation on paper can result in underregulating in practice if the regulation is not enforced; or worse, if it is unequally enforced. New regulation for entirely new technologies requires more than just a will to pass laws; it also requires an administration capable of enforcing the laws, a challenge that Thailand is not alone in facing, as large tech corporations typically find themselves at an advantage in resources compared to many governments. On the one hand, this clearly ties into matters of transparency and explainability—definitions, expectations, purpose, etc.—which are questions perhaps better solved through international cooperation. Nonetheless, it would also require that Thai stakeholders are willing to effectively enforce whatever regulation they embrace, even if this comes with its own challenges and concerns. The will of Thai decision-makers to pass laws pertaining to AI, but without the will to enforce them, was another challenge identified by the roundtable discussion.

2.2 Thailand’s opportunities.

Thus far, this report has focused heavily on the challenges that Thailand face around AI regulation and governance. Yet, Thailand has many opportunities, not least for specific sectors. An AI adoption strategy that focuses primarily on areas with high benefits and

comparably low barriers—a smart-adoption strategy aimed at maximising resources— offers the opportunity for laying the foundations for cross-industrial growth and development, which are all opportunities for Thailand, as for many other countries. To ground a potentially wide and abstract discussion in clear examples, this section will hinge, predominantly, on a specific case study: the implementation of AI into Thailand’s healthcare system (*Box 1*).

Box 1: Healthcare as a case study.

Healthcare is a popular case study for how AI can be effectively, and sometimes with relative ease, integrated into a current system. However, less discussed are the implications for individual countries with their own challenges, contexts, and opportunities. Healthcare is a priority as outlined in Thailand’s AI strategy, alongside government services and food and agriculture. Here, the report will outline the challenges and opportunities of the Thai healthcare system, as discussed by the roundtable participants.

Healthcare in the Thai context: Opportunities.

Thailand’s healthcare system has a lot to gain from AI, particularly due to its varied requirements: from highly urbanised areas to remote and rural ones. While radiology, dermatology, or drug development are often upheld as areas AI will revolutionise, the roundtable participants foregrounded benefits to emergency medicine and resource management. The capacity to more effectively triage emergency rooms, plot ambulance routes through highly trafficked areas, or use image analysis in conjunction with telemedicine to assist volunteers in remote areas with diagnostics and initial treatment whilst waiting for a medical professional to arrive were all upheld as critically important to what AI systems could bring to the Thai healthcare systems. In effect, it was hoped that AI can help make the healthcare system more effective, and get ‘more for less’, rather than working specifically with diagnostics, development, or highly specialised care.

Furthermore, participants noted that the healthcare system provides plenty of space for AI use to grow. There is low-hanging fruit within the sector; small improvements and changes that can have a very large impact. Simultaneously, there is also a lot of space for growth: from medical devices and robots, more effective (and sophisticated!) screening and diagnostics technologies, as well as long-term infrastructural improvements and changes. In essence, healthcare is a space where there is space for short-term interventions, and long-term expansion.

Healthcare in the Thai context: Challenges.

Yet, for all the potential in the industry, the participants also identified a number of challenges Thailand can be expected to face. Firstly, a wider question will emerge for how to integrate the whole industry. Though healthcare is typically spoken of as a monolithic space—and often from the perspective of healthcare provision—there are structural and administrative differences between private and public hospitals, as well as adjacent industries, like the

insurance industry. Deploying AI solutions in this space requires more than just hospitals investing in equipment. Instead, it necessitates a broad-industry approach.

Indeed, this touches on the issue of trust, which comes in two primary guises. Firstly, healthcare providers—doctors, primarily—will need to trust the technology in order for it to be used. It is often said that physicians are a conservative group and are generally adverse to using new technologies until they have been proven beyond all doubt. Such high requirements could cause unnecessary delays in adoption.

Yet, the same tension is likely to emerge for patients, too: trusting another human is much easier than trusting (what might be perceived as) a detached robot, even if the ‘robot’ in question is much more accurate than a human. This is especially true in patient-facing practice. So, whilst some doctors embrace AI solutions, many patients will likely remain sceptical. Indeed, some of this will shift over time, but such a shift cannot be taken for granted. Vaccines, for example, have existed for more than two centuries, and significant hesitancy still exists surrounding their use, at least in some spaces.

Finally, there is the challenge of infrastructure. AI will be comparably easy to deploy in highly digitalised spaces, where data is easy to deploy, and where data protection and cybersecurity measures are already in place. Yet, in significant areas of Thailand’s healthcare topography, patient records have yet to be digitalised. To effectively deploy AI across Thailand’s sector, there must also be a push to expand on data infrastructures. This might be as simple as improving internet connectivity, to something as abstract as standardising data formats, and data handling practices.

2.3 Future expectations.

Though all participants agreed that attempting to set any clear expectations for the next few years was folly due to how unpredictable the development of AI can be, some participants could nonetheless agree on some things.

It was suggested by some participants that within the next five years, Thailand will have created and implemented sustainable data-sharing guidelines as a first step in a longer process of data process standardisation. Furthermore, as some others mentioned during the discussion, such data-sharing guidelines could exist as a part of a more general set of ethical guidelines used to govern the development and use of AI within a Thai context.

The above might sound somewhat unclear and limited, but Thailand, like many other ‘rule-takers’, are weary of regulating too soon, for the risk of ‘getting it wrong’. Foresight in this space is extremely challenging, and there are no magical crystal balls.

3 Possible Solutions

This report has highlighted several challenges that Thailand is facing when it comes to implementing AI solutions—challenges they are by no means alone in facing. However, there are some solutions worth considering to at least some of their predicaments.

3.1 Thai regulation for a Thai context.

As mentioned previously, Thailand has a history of studying and borrowing regulations from elsewhere and applying them to the Thai system. What became clear among the participants of this roundtable was that Thailand must prioritise Thai regulation fit for a Thai context, in order to maximise its opportunities, and to meet its challenges. After all, the context of each country when regulating something like AI is different—different economies, demographics, political systems—and thus, the regulation must fit the realities on the ground.

3.2 Standardisation, then integration.

The adage ‘measure twice, cut once’ summarises another one of the takeaways from this discussion. Rather than focusing solely on implementing AI solutions as fast as possible, ensuring sufficient infrastructure—such as data centres or internet coverage—and standardised processes—monthly audits, data formatting, and security procedures—is just as important as implementing the actual AI solutions.

3.3 Political will—from regulation to enforcement.

While much emphasis is often placed on how to regulate, and to what extent, it is equally important to remember that regulation is only as effective as the will and capacity to reinforce it. Thailand must not just focus on regulation, but also foreground the need to enforce the regulation, whether that is through independent agencies, or some other structures, by providing sufficient resources and clear guidelines for enforcement. Effective governance is an ongoing project.

3.4 Augmentation, not replacement.

Finally, while it is often emphasised that AI can automate—i.e. replace—human actors, such an approach can be more disruptive than anything else. As with the example of the Thai healthcare system, focusing on augmenting human capabilities, such as assisting doctors in finding treatment plans, or streamlining the bureaucratic process for hospital administrators, rather than framing AI as a threat to their livelihoods, will be an essential step in ensuring that AI solutions are embraced as an opportunity, and not rejected as a threat.

4 Next Steps

AI development and deployment is still in its infancy, and while some more optimistic people might see this as frustrating, this is a good thing for policymakers and regulators. It means that there is time to think carefully, and plan out how AI is implemented, and to what extent. Thailand has time to prepare its political system, society, and economy for more and more artificial intelligence. What are some worthwhile questions to continue to work through, given what has been discussed in this report?

- (1) Does Thailand need AI-specific regulation (like the EU AI Act), or should it take a sectoral approach and reinforce existing regulatory frameworks instead?
- (2) What critical infrastructure does Thailand need to build to prepare itself for artificial intelligence? How will this be financed? How will it be prioritised?
- (3) How can AI developed internationally be adapted to cater to Thailand's unique societal context and user base?
- (4) What role will active cybersecurity play within Thailand's strategy? Are there some areas that must be insulated entirely from these new technologies? How will this be ensured?

5 Conclusions

This roundtable discussion in Thailand presented many diverse ideas for AI application, and how to shape the nation's strategy for AI policy and governance. Some will be more difficult to implement than others, some will likely meet unexpected issues when attempted due to limited foresight, and some will be mutually exclusive. Due to this limited foresight in Thailand—and elsewhere—there is no clear direction for Thailand's policy landscape. However, what clearly has been articulated during this roundtable is a need for a clear Thai strategy, and a strategy tailored to Thailand, to reap the benefits that AI will bring to state administration, industry, and public goods and services; not least healthcare. In a phrase, Thailand needs to build a strategy for smart adoption. This strategy will need to be holistic, to think about infrastructural development, standardisation, and other such areas adjacent to AI, but not always taken into account when spoken about in public. Currently, it remains unclear what direction Thailand will take, but Thailand presents a lot of potential in the area.

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