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Southeast Asia AI Brief

What happened in AI across Cambodia and the region, and what it means for you. Covering 23 October – 2 November 2026.

THE SHORT VERSION

- Malaysia's Prime Minister says SoftBank's Masayoshi Son plans about US$50 billion of AI and data-centre investment in Malaysia; SoftBank has not published details.
- In Indonesia, Telkom, Danantara and PLN agreed on 27 October to develop a national AI data-centre hub based in industrial estates.
- Singapore committed about S$150 million to MARVEL-AI, a platform that uses AI and automated labs to develop new materials, and Thailand's central bank credited AI-linked exports for a better growth outlook.

REGION Across Southeast Asia

Malaysia: Anwar says SoftBank plans about US$50 billion of AI investment

Speaking in Melaka on 24 October, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said SoftBank's Masayoshi Son intends to invest about US$50 billion in AI, new technology and data centres in Malaysia, and has chosen sites in Kuching, Sarawak, and in peninsular Malaysia. Anwar said the two had spoken by video call that week. Reports say no timeline or breakdown was given, and press coverage found no statement from SoftBank confirming the figure. Earlier in October, SoftBank signed a framework agreement with Grab and PETROS to explore AI infrastructure in Sarawak (covered in issue 02).[1, 2, 3, 4]

Why it matters: if it goes ahead, this would be one of the largest AI investments in the region, and it confirms Malaysia's position as a main site for AI data centres in Southeast Asia. For neighbouring economies, including Cambodia, the effect is indirect: more regional computing capacity, and more demand for people who can build and run AI services on top of it.

What to watch: a statement from SoftBank with amounts, sites and timing, and the roadmap from the Sarawak framework agreement.

Indonesia: Telkom, Danantara and PLN plan a national AI data-centre hub

On 27 October, at Danantara's Technology Innovation Investment Forum in Jakarta, Telkom (through its data-centre unit NeutraDC), Danantara, the state power company PLN and industrial-estate operators signed a memorandum of understanding to develop a National AI Data Center Hub based in industrial estates. PLN and Telkom also signed a separate agreement on power supply. Coverage stresses that the MoU is non-binding: it sets out shared intent, not investment amounts, capacity or timing. Danantara's forum ran from 26 to 28 October; more data-centre and AI investments are expected to be announced at the New Asia Forum in Bali on 3–4 December.[5, 6, 7, 8]

Why it matters: Indonesia is linking AI data centres to power supply and industrial zones from the start, which addresses the main constraint on data centres in the region: reliable electricity. Together with the Malaysia item, it shows that the region's AI infrastructure race is now about power and sites, not only money.

What to watch: the investment figures and partners announced at the New Asia Forum on 3–4 December.

Vietnam: AI should move from pilot projects to the whole economy, minister says

Vietnam International Digital Week 2026 took place in Quang Ninh from 28 to 30 October, organised by the Ministry of Science and Technology under the theme "Smart Connectivity: AI Governance, Building AI Transformation", with around 500 delegates from nearly 30 countries. Minister Vu Hai Quan said AI adoption should move from isolated projects to change across the economy, and that success should be measured by better lives rather than by the number of projects. At the event, the ministry received the GSMA's 2026 Government Leadership Award on behalf of the government.[9, 10, 11, 12]

Why it matters: Vietnam already has an AI law in force (covered in issue 01) and is now stressing practical use over showcase projects. That points to demand for people who can put AI into everyday work in government and business, a skill set that transfers to Cambodia and the rest of the region.

What to watch: new programmes or funding from the Ministry of Science and Technology that follow from the event, and the ASEAN digital economy agreement, due to be signed at the ASEAN summit in November.

Singapore: S$150 million for AI-driven materials research

At the opening of the Singapore Week of Innovation and Technology (SWITCH 2026) on 27 October, Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong announced about S$150 million for MARVEL-AI, a platform led by the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR). It combines AI models with automated laboratories that make and test candidate materials, with the aim of shortening the path from discovery to industrial production. It is anchored at A*STAR's Institute of Materials Research and Engineering and funded under Singapore's RIE2030 research plan, with Enterprise Singapore, the Economic Development Board and the National Research Foundation as partners. Singapore also launched its Champions of AI programme the same day, for companies that make AI a core part of their growth and commit to training staff and redesigning jobs.[13, 14, 15, 16]

Why it matters: this is AI used for research and industry, not chat tools: AI suggests materials and robots test them. It shows where public money in the region's most advanced economy is going, and that new jobs combine domain knowledge, such as chemistry or engineering, with AI and data skills.

What to watch: the first companies and results from MARVEL-AI, and which firms join Champions of AI and what they commit to on training.

Thailand: central bank credits AI-linked exports for a better outlook

On 28 October, the Bank of Thailand kept its policy rate at 1% for a fourth straight meeting and raised its growth outlook, pointing to stronger-than-expected exports and investment linked to the technology and AI cycle. It also said growth remains below the economy's potential. The next rate meeting is on 23 December.[17, 18, 19]

Why it matters: as the World Bank noted in issue 02, AI is lifting growth in economies that make and export AI-related hardware. Thailand's central bank now says the same, while also noting that the gains are not yet spreading through the wider economy.

What to watch: whether export strength continues into 2027, and the bank's next assessment on 23 December.

FOR YOU

What this means

Students

Governments are asking for AI that improves daily work, not pilots. Practise applying AI to one real task and show the result.

Founders

Large data-centre plans in Malaysia and Indonesia will need software, services and skilled staff around them. Watch for partner and supplier openings.

Companies

Move from AI experiments to one process that runs every day, and measure what it changes.

ABOUT US

What is Catalyst AI Academy?

Catalyst AI Academy teaches practical AI skills across Southeast Asia, from its base in Phnom Penh. Students, founders and company teams learn AI tools by building a real project with a coach, in short workshops, sprints and longer programs. For companies, we also build AI automations and train teams to use AI safely and productively.

News from Catalyst

- **8 November:** KHNOG 8, a talk on applying AI in cybersecurity, at the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Event details.
- **28 November:** Simplified AI Governance, a one-day workshop for decision-makers on using AI safely at work, with Proseth Informatics in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The first 3 sign-ups on catalyst-ai.net get an early-bird code for $100 instead of $180; after that $144 until 16 November, then $180. Book a seat.

See upcoming courses | **Contact us**

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Read more

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