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Southeast Asia AI Brief

What happened in AI across Cambodia and the region, and what it means for you. Covering 6–12 November 2026.

THE SHORT VERSION

- Cambodia's education ministry, the Francophone university agency AUF and Metfone signed an agreement on digital tools and AI skills for universities.
- IMD's new digital and AI ranking puts Malaysia 27th, Vietnam 37th and the Philippines 53rd out of 70 economies.
- Thailand's cabinet backed rules that limit data-centre power use, noise and water, and Singapore warned consumers how to use AI agents safely.

FOCUS Cambodia

Cambodia, AUF and Metfone agree on digital skills for universities

On 11 November, Deputy Prime Minister and Education Minister Hang Chuon Naron, the Rector of the Francophone university agency AUF, Slim Khalbous, and Cao Manh Duc, CEO of Metfone (Viettel Cambodia), signed a cooperation agreement in Phnom Penh. It was signed at the Institute of Technology of Cambodia during the first Asia-Pacific Francophone Science Forum. It covers four areas: digital administration, including links to the national education information system; digital learning, with AI explored to support decisions, track performance and guide students; training in telecoms, IT and AI for lecturers, staff and students; and internships, jobs and scholarships. State media report that no budget, timeline or number of universities has been published.[1, 2]

Why it matters: AI is entering Cambodia's university system as a skill and a management tool, so students who can show practical AI and data skills will have a head start.

What to watch: which universities join first, and what is offered to students.

REGION Across Southeast Asia

IMD ranks Malaysia 27th, Vietnam 37th in digital and AI

IMD's first World Digital and AI Ranking, reported on 11 November, covers 70 economies. Malaysia rose seven places to 27th, second in ASEAN after Singapore, and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said its AI adoption rank rose 21 places to 14th. Vietnam placed 37th with 78.09 points, and IMD's Arturo Bris named high AI-tool costs, a talent shortage, cybersecurity and governance as its weak points. BusinessWorld puts the Philippines 53rd (up three places), Thailand 43rd and Indonesia 47th. The reports we read give no rank for Cambodia.[3, 4, 5]

Why it matters: neighbours are being measured on AI adoption and talent, and the weak points named for Vietnam are ones Cambodia's employers share.

What to watch: IMD's full tables, and how governments respond to their ranks.

Thailand backs tougher rules for data centres

On 10 November, Thailand's cabinet backed new data-centre rules, announced by Deputy Prime Minister Ekniti Nitithanprapas. The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society will run a one-stop service centre and a screening committee. Sites are sorted into seven tiers by electricity use, from under 0.5 MW to 200 MW and above, with stricter rules from 20 MW. Generator noise is capped at 70 decibels at the site boundary, nearby temperature rise at 1–2 °C, and cooling water must be recirculated. Projects with a permit or investment-board promotion before 14 August 2026 may continue, with about a year to comply. Details for smaller sites follow public consultation. In September, the government asked nearly 50 developers to pause construction.[6, 7]

Why it matters: data centres serving the region now face limits on energy, water and noise, so companies in Cambodia choosing cloud providers can ask where, and under which rules, their data is processed.

What to watch: the consultation results for smaller sites.

Singapore tells consumers how to use AI agents safely

On 6 November, Singapore's Cyber Security Agency, GovTech and the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) issued a joint advisory, "Using Personal AI Agents Safely and Securely: What Consumers Should Know". It names tools such as Dots, Hermes, Muse, Grok Bot and OpenClaw as examples, and warns that agents can reveal sensitive data or be tricked by hidden instructions. It advises users to limit access (no banking, government or health accounts, and no passwords or one-time codes), start read-only and approve anything sent, deleted or bought, check how data and memory are used, and watch for scammers. It says users remain responsible for what their agents do. It is guidance, not law.[8, 9]

Why it matters: students and staff who use AI agents can follow the same steps today.

What to watch: whether Singapore turns this advice into rules; in October it was studying stronger safeguards for high-risk AI agents.

Coming up: DEFA, the ASEAN digital economy agreement, is reported for signing in Manila on 14 November, before the 49th ASEAN Summit on 15–17 November as reported. We will cover the outcome next week.[10, 11]

FOR YOU What this means

Students
Universities are adding AI to teaching and administration. Build skills you can show, and learn the safe-use steps for AI agents.

Founders
Rankings and rules show what the region values: AI talent, secure systems and responsible data-centre use. Plan for them early.

Companies
Ask your cloud and AI providers where data is processed, and give staff written rules for using AI agents.

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, took place at the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.
- **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**

catalyst-ai.net · t.me/catalyst_aiacademy

SOURCES

Read more

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