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ASEAN Issues Guide on AI Governance and Ethics

Introduction

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence ("AI") has shone a light on the pressing need to manage its development and inherent risks. While AI solutions bring significant transformative potential, governments have been seeking to establish national frameworks within which AI development and deployment can be duly monitored and controlled, so as to align such AI solutions with security standards and broader ethical and social norms. For example, Singapore has established a Model AI Governance Framework, and has more recently released a draft Model AI Governance Framework for Generative AI (see our Legal Update on this [here](#)).

One of the challenges of such AI frameworks is that they are often jurisdiction-specific, while the propagation of AI commonly crosses national boundaries, resulting in potentially differing standards and requirements. Governments have thus been looking towards greater cooperation in AI framework building and standards equivalence to provide for more efficiency in cross-border AI deployment.

In this regard, the ASEAN member states have issued the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics ("**ASEAN AI Guide**"), which was unveiled at the 4th ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting on 2 February 2024. The ASEAN AI Guide establishes common principles and recommends best practices on the implementation of trustworthy AI in ASEAN. It seeks to help promote consumer confidence and facilitate cross-border deployment of AI services and solutions throughout the ASEAN region.

The ASEAN AI Guide is a welcome development in the industry, as it recognises the importance of building interconnected frameworks and the potential of leveraging on the power of AI as a region. AI developers and businesses utilising AI solutions would be well advised to be aware of the standards and recommendations set out in the ASEAN AI Guide to ensure compliance and to enable entry into regional markets.

This Update provides a summary of the key elements of the ASEAN AI Guide, including the guiding principles, the key components, and the national-level and regional-level recommendations.

Overview

The ASEAN AI Guide is intended to serve as a practical guide for organisations in the region looking to design, develop, and deploy traditional AI technologies in commercial applications. It focuses on encouraging alignment within ASEAN and fostering the interoperability of AI frameworks across jurisdictions.



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The ASEAN AI Guide encourages local government authorities to refer to the guide when formulating their AI policies. While the framework is voluntary, organisations are also encouraged to use the guide to assess the risks associated with AI and take measures to design, develop, and deploy AI responsibly.

Guiding Principles

The ASEAN AI Guide set out seven guiding principles which aim to ensure trust in AI and the design, development, and deployment of ethical AI systems:

- Transparency and Explainability
- Fairness and Equity
- Security and Safety
- Robustness and Reliability
- Human-centricity
- Privacy and Data Governance
- Accountability and Integrity

AI Governance Framework

The ASEAN AI Guide provides guidance on measures promoting the responsible use of AI that organisations should adopt in the following key areas:

- **Internal governance structures and measures**
 - Multi-disciplinary, central governing body to oversee AI governance efforts
 - Develop standards, guidelines, tools, and templates to help organisations design, develop, and deploy AI responsibly
 - Clearly lay out the roles and responsibilities of personnel involved in the responsible design, development and deployment of AI
- **Determining the level of human involvement in AI-augmented decision-making**
 - Conduct relevant risk impact assessments to determine level of risk
 - Three broad categories of human involvement based on level of risk – human-in-the-loop, human-over-the-loop, human-out-of-the-loop
 - Mitigating risks helps build trust towards the acceptance and greater use of AI technologies in the region

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- **Operations management**
 - Conduct risk-based assessments before starting any data collection and processing or modelling
 - Mitigate risks of unjust bias due to insufficiently representative training, testing and validation datasets
- **Stakeholder interaction and communication**
 - Develop trust with stakeholders throughout the design, development, and deployment of AI
 - Provide general disclosure of when AI is used in products and service offerings
 - Put in place measures to help employees adapt to an AI-augmented work environment

National-level Recommendations

The ASEAN AI Guide includes national-level recommendations to ensure responsible design, development, and deployment of AI systems.

- **Nurturing AI talent and upskilling workforce** – Work closely with public and private sectors to ensure that the workforce can adapt to new ways of working and possesses enough digital skills to interact effectively with AI systems.
- **Supporting AI innovation ecosystem and promoting investment in AI start-ups** – Work closely with public and private sectors to create a supportive environment for AI development, where companies are able to access and leverage data, digital technologies, and infrastructure.
- **Investing in AI research and development** – Keep up to date with the latest developments in AI and encourage related research to ensure the safety and resiliency of AI systems.
- **Promoting adoption of useful tools by businesses to implement the ASEAN AI Guide** – Deploy tools to enable the implementation of AI governance in operations and ensure that documentation and validation processes are more efficient.
- **Raising awareness among citizens** – Raise awareness of the potential risks and benefits of AI so citizens can make informed decisions about the appropriate use of AI and take appropriate actions to protect themselves.

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Regional-level Recommendations

The ASEAN AI Guide also includes regional-level recommendations for policy makers, namely:

- setting up an ASEAN Working Group on AI Governance to drive and oversee AI governance initiatives in the region;
- adapting the ASEAN AI Guide to address governance of generative AI; and
- compiling a compendium of use cases demonstrating practical implementation of the ASEAN AI Guide by organisations operating in ASEAN.

Concluding Words

The ASEAN AI Guide is an important tool and serves as a best practice guide for AI developers and organisations seeking to deploy AI technologies and solutions, particularly in the ASEAN region. It provides an indication of the measures that should be adopted in order to meet the standards across the relevant jurisdictions. It also sets out practical recommendations regarding the implementation of AI and the establishment of national-level and regional-level policies.

The ASEAN AI Guide is intended to be a living document to be periodically reviewed and assessed by relevant ASEAN sectorial bodies, in consultation with industry partners. We will keep you updated on the latest developments on this front, as well as wider developments in the field of AI and technology.

The full ASEAN AI Guide is available [here](#). For further queries, please feel free to contact our team below.

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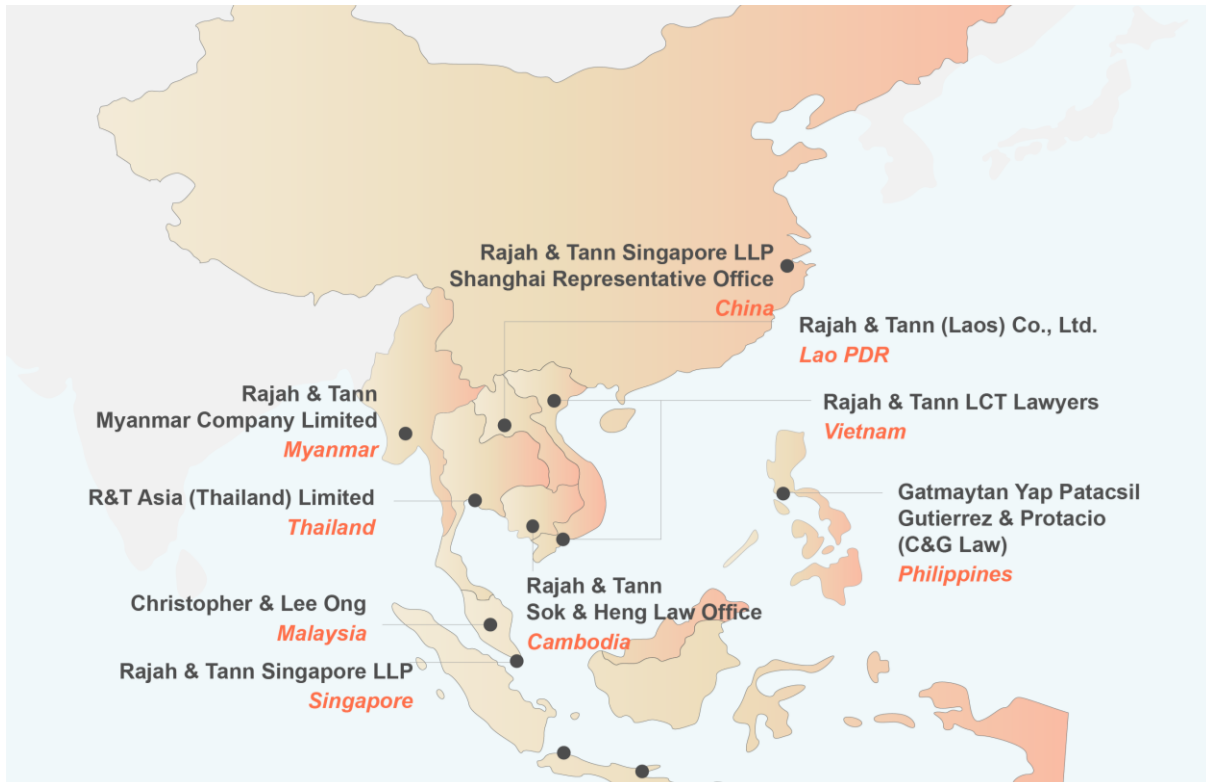
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