

Keynote Address

by

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and 24th South East Asia Regional Computer Conference
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Chairman of the Conference Organizing
Committee,
Presidents of Member Societies of South
East Asia Regional Computer Confederation,
Distinguished Authors,
Members of the Press,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my capacity as the Minister Attached
to the Office of the Prime Minister and
Acting Minister of Information and
Communication Technology, I am most
delighted to be invited to deliver this keynote
address to the 4th International Conference
on eLearning for Knowledge-Based Society
and the 24th South East Asia Regional
Computer Conference. The theme of
“eEveryThing for Knowledge-Based
Society” is very appropriate.

Because of the tight schedule and
shortage of time, I shall limit my address to
only the topics of eASEAN Task Force and
eASEAN Business Council, eThailand,
eGovernment, eSociety, eEducation, and
eCommerce.

eASEAN Task Force and eASEAN Business Council

In Bangkok on August 8, 1967, ASEAN
(Association of Southeast Asian Nations)
was established with 5 member countries.
They were: Indonesia, Malaysia, the
Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Brunei
Darussalam joined on 8 January 1984,
Vietnam on 28 July 1995, Laos and
Myanmar on 23 July 1997, and Cambodia on
30 April 1999. In September 1999, eASEAN
project was initiated with eASAEN Task
Force as a high-level public-private sector
advisory body to develop a broad-based and
comprehensive action plan. Prof. Dr.
Srisakdi Charmonman was named a member
from Thailand in his capacity as the Project
Manager of the eCommerce Pilot Project of
the Ministry of Commerce and the Founder
and Chairman of KSC, the first and the
largest Internet Service Provider at that time.
ASEAN was the first to create a regional
ICT development initiative. As a matter of
fact, after the establishment of eASEAN in
1999, eEurope was created in the year 2000,

and eAPEC in 2002. The eASEAN was also ahead of the G8's DOT Force and the UN ICT Task Force.

In June 2003, ASEAN initiated another project called "eABC (eASEAN Business Council)" which was formally established in 2004. In my capacity as the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology at that time, I proposed and the Minister agreed to appoint Prof.Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman the Head of the delegation from Thailand and later he was voted Chairman of eABC.

eThailand

With the encouragement of ASEAN for all member countries to promote the utilization of the Internet, eThailand was initiated in the first National IT Policy of Thailand, called "IT 2000" which was approved by the Cabinet in the year 1996.

IT 2000 includes 3 pillars. They are National Information Infrastructure, Human Resource, and Good Governance.

There were three main pilot projects. They are SchoolNet to provide Internet access to schools, GINet to develop Government Information Network, and Itlaws to draft IT laws or Cyber Laws to submit to Parliament to provide legal framework to support IT applications in Thailand.

IT 2010 was developed as a second phase of Thailand national IT policy. The main purpose is to move Thailand into the Knowledge-Based Economy (KBE) and Knowledge-Based Society (KBS). IT 2010 was approved by the Cabinet in March 2002. It recommended five strategic flagships for Thailand, with eGovernment as the main driver for the five strategies, followed by eCommerce and eIndustry for the

information economy or the Knowledge-Based Economy; then eSociety and eEducation for the information society or the Knowledge-Based Society.

eGovernment

Provided in eGovernment are public services delivery through the Internet, employment, and legal infrastructure. Thailand has made many progresses in the sense of providing government services through the Internet. A few examples will be given below.

The first example is eRevenue for filing income tax returns through the Internet for which about 80% of those who have to file income tax returns at the beginning of 2007 used the Internet. It should be noted that the 80% figure is larger than those in other countries.

The second example of eGovernment is the e-services provided by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology. People can access the e-citizen portal site through computers in their houses, offices, public kiosks, and Good Net, the transformed internet café. Until September 2007, more than 20 projects on e-Services such as Online Laws Enquiry Service, Online Trade Registration System, Traffic and Accident Report System, Disaster Warning System for Citizen, Geographic Information System for integration tourism, etc. have been established.

The third example is the comprehensive portal call center or government contact center which was launched in January 2004. Thai citizens can dial "1111" to get all public information and consultation from operators and government officers 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I was told that it was the second government contact center in the world after Hong Kong.

The fourth example is the Government Financial Management Information System (GFMIS). All financial transaction such as budget proposal submission, money transfer, budget benchmarking, budget utilization assessment has been done electronically in all Ministries, Departments and Provinces.

Since last year, the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology has implemented the *Government Information Network (GIN)*. This network has been developed from a cutting edge technology which supports the exchange of information among government agencies and the use of Thai citizen by its effectiveness, high security, stable and reliable network. In 2006, GIN has connected 274 government Departments together. This year, the network has been expanded for more provincial coverage. The network will connect to other government network in 35 provinces and is planned to expand more coverage to the entire country by next year.

Another example of eGovernment is IT infrastructure. Five draft laws were completed in the year 2001. The draft law on eCommerce and the draft law on Digital Signature were combined into the *Electronic Transaction Act*, which was passed by Parliament in December 2001. The law drafting project was transferred to the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology in October 2003. The second IT law passed in Thailand was the “*Computer-Related Crime Act of 2007*”, which became effective in July 2007. The Ministry of ICT, as the law executor, is responsible for enforcing this new statute. Three more laws, namely, *National Information Infrastructure Law*, *Data Protection Law* (including Privacy), and *Electronic Fund Transfer Law*, are still in the process. They should be submitted to Parliament as soon as feasible.

The major findings are:

- 28% of government websites offer services that are executable right on the Internet.
- 96% of websites provide access to publications.
- 80% of websites provide links to databases.
- 29% show privacy policies.
- 21% have security policies.
- 23% of government websites have some forms of disability access, i.e. access for persons with disabilities.

A study stated that South Korea offered the best eGovernment services. Previous analyses stated that the countries with the best services each year included Canada, Australia, Singapore and Taiwan.

I would like to propose to the next government of Thailand to consider announcing a target for Thailand to be on the top ten countries with best eGovernment services.

eSociety

Provided in eSociety are bridging the digital divide, quality of life, culture, health, and public participation.

From IT 2010, the following targets for eSociety in Thailand are:

- By 2010, all Thai people have equal access to and utilization of Information Technology at an affordable price, leading to professional development, increase in quality of life and improvement in the environment. Local content is to account for at least 10% of total content developed in Thailand.

- To compile, process and establish a wisdom network of distinguished thinkers, local philosophers and local wisdom to create international knowledge pool’

- By 2010, at least 50% of Thai villages are to be learning communities, where knowledge is continuously developed and strong economies are formed.

I would like to say that Thailand has a huge digital divide, but we are quickly moving to build a bridge over it. You have heard much about our ICT Computer for Thais, the budget PC programme. We provided PC to the first time users at 250 USD with Linux Operating System. Those who wanted windows OS and Microsoft Office XP home Thai edition pay only 35 USD more. Such programme increased the number of computers sold in 2003 to 1.2 million machines and significantly reshaped the computer industry in Thailand. The price of computers significantly dropped 30-40%.

With awareness of the need to expand digital opportunities to rural and underserved areas, the Ministry of ICT intends to establish ICT learning centers at public places in local communities such as temples and libraries. Capacity building for people and communities through ICT learning centers is one way to bridge the digital divide. With proper access to ICT, Thai citizens will be able to acquire information and benefit from knowledge which, in turn, could lead to job creation in Thai communities. In 2006, five ICT learning centres were set up in 5 communities as pilot project. In the fiscal year 2007, it is targeted to set up 20 ICT learning centers in 20 communities that had been selected. The Ministry of ICT also planned to establish 40 more ICT learning centres in the following year.

For the elderly and disabled, assistive technologies would facilitate proper access to ICT. The National Electronics and Computer Technology Center (NECTEC), the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), and the

Ministry of Science and Technology have set up the Assistive Technology Center (ASTECH) Project to initiate and encourage research and development on various assistive technologies that will enhance the ability of disabled persons to engage in productive work and allow them to fully participate in society.

For Internet penetration, as of the end of the year 2007, less than 10 million people in Thailand are using the Internet. Although the cost of access to the Internet has significantly reduced from the time when ISPs started offering connection in Thailand, more people should be encouraged to use the Internet.

I would like to recommend that the next government establish the target for the rate of Internet penetration in Thailand to be as much as 25% in the year 2008, 30% in the year 2009, 35% in the year 2010, and eventually reaching 70% like in the US.

eEducation of eLearning

Provided in eEducation are developing human resource, life-long learning, computer literacy, and eLearning.

The goal of IT 2010 for eEducation is to develop and prepare the country's human resources at all levels in support of the development of a Knowledge-Based Society.

The first computer installed in Thailand in the year 1964 was at Chulalongkorn University to use in education sector. All universities in Thailand now use computers and the Internet in all kinds of areas including teaching, research, and educational administration.

The SchoolNet Project at NECTEC, which was later transferred to the Ministry of Education, has provided Internet access to schools all over the country. HM the King's

Distance Learning Foundation has provided education to millions of children not only in Thailand but also in neighboring countries.

At the university level, Thailand is the first country in the world to offer the eLearning program of Ph.D. in eLearning Methodology, i.e. at the College of Internet Distance Education of Assumption University.

eLearning in Thailand can be viewed in 2 parts: business sector and education sector. The eLearning of business sector has been increasing continuously in terms of investment since it views advantage of eLearning in providing training and human resource development. For education sector, eLearning has been more widely provided at university level than at school level due to the readiness in terms of personnel, budget and technology.

It has been reported in the US that 90% of large universities are providing eLearning and that there is no field of study in which eLearning is not used. Therefore, I would like to encourage the next government to give active support to eLearning in Thailand at all levels.

eIndustry

According to IT 2010, e-Industry refers to the “strengthening of the manufacturing sector through the use of information technology as an essential tool in the creation of competitiveness of the manufacturing sector, thereby leading to sustainable economic growth.”

The status of IT applications in the Thai industrial sector comprises IT applications in the back office, the production process, and logistics and marketing.

IT 2010 includes the vision to strengthen the Thai industrial sector in support of a Knowledge-Based Society via the development and linking of IT networks by 2010.

The eIndustry policy:

- to promote the use of knowledge as a production base in the Thai industry sector;
- to promote the use of industrial and marketing information on industrial products as guidelines for decisions on the production of industrial products;
- to promote production links between large-scale and small-scale entrepreneurs, both centrally and regionally; and
- to bridge the gap in accessibility to information among Thai entrepreneurs.

In September 2004, the Ministry of Industry developed a comprehensive industrial portal, www.IndustryThailand.com, listing more than 70,000 producers but only in Thai language.

In the US, 100% of industry use computer and the Internet. Bill Gates said that the Internet is the central nervous systems of all organization. In Thailand, many industries are using computer and the Internet but there are still a lot more to do.

eCommerce

Provided in eCommerce are selling goods and services (not only finance, tourism and IT services, but also other industries) through the Internet.

IT 2010 sets the goal for eCommerce to enhance the competitiveness of Thai entrepreneurs, using e-commerce as a tool for business ventures. E-commerce is to focus on export, trade and services, and domestic consumption, with due attention paid to national interests.

One major factor to encourage eCommerce is to create trust. The IT legal infrastructure that has been mentioned earlier will help promote eCommerce development in Thailand.

On July 13, 1998, the Ministry of Commerce appointed Prof. Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman Project Manager on eCommerce for Export with 7 committees, namely, Public Relation and Training, Marketing, Consumer Protection, Taxes and Customs Duties, Shipping and Insurance, Payment and Security, and Digital Signature and Certificate.

A hundred companies were selected for the pilot projects. After that many companies have been successful in eCommerce. A few examples will be given.

The first example is www.PlatuMahachai.com selling the popular Thai fish called "Pla Tu". The owner used to sell the fish at Ram Intra Road Km. 8. He said he listened to Prof. Dr. Srisakdi Charmonman's radio program, "Internet IT with Srisakdi Charmonman" on Radio Thailand FM97 (now moved to FM92.5) describing that a man and a dog can set up a website to sell goods. So, he set up a website to sell the fish abroad at 1 US\$ each while the price in Thailand is much less.

The second example is "eMarketPlace" established in 2001 by the Department of Export Promotion of the Ministry of Commerce and 5 private providers of eCommerce solution. In the web "exporter.ThaiTrade.com", there are more than 5,200 exporters in 17 categories.

The third example is www.ThaiGem.com started in 1998 in

Thailand by an American. The number of products eventually reached 144. The market share of ThaiGem was very impressive at 92% of online trade of gem worldwide. In the year 2001, ThaiGem sales accounted for about US\$ 18 million with a profit of about US\$ 5 million.

The fourth example is www.ThaiTambon.com established in the year 2000 by the Department of Community Development of the Ministry of Interior. The site includes over 4,200 products from "One Tambol, One Product" project.

Concluding Remarks

HM the King's trip to visit the IBM computer factory in the US in 1960 provided great inspiration for Thailand to think about computerization. The first two computers were installed in Thailand in 1964 when only one computer was installed for the first time in Singapore and no computer installed in Malaysia.

47 years after 1960, Thailand has significantly progressed in computerization and utilization of the Internet. The US Internet penetration is over 70% while Thailand penetration is reaching 20%. However, the US is getting close to saturation and so, there is a possibility that Thailand will eventually be at par with the US in terms of Internet penetration.

I am sure all participants of the 4th International Conference on eLearning for Knowledge-Based Society and the 24th South East Asia Regional Computer Conference will try their best to get the most benefits from computer and Internet technology. Best wishes to all of you.