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Singapore to catalyse ASEAN medical diagnostics initiative

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ASEAN member states meet at the 18th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science, Technology and Innovation



Singapore hosted the 18th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science, Technology and Innovation (AMMSTI-18), and the 77th ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology and Innovation (COSTI-77) and related meetings from 6 to 11 October 2019. ASEAN Member States (AMS) discussed common challenges and agreed to strengthen collaborations in Science, Technology and Innovation. The meetings were organised by Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A*STAR).

AMMSTI-18 and COSTI-77 officially launched projects under the ASEAN Diagnostics Development (DxD) Initiative, which will facilitate the co-development of healthcare diagnostics solutions across the AMS. Another outcome was the endorsement of an ASEAN High Performance Computing (HPC) Workplan.

These projects are in line with the commitment by AMS to strengthen the medical diagnostics ecosystem in Southeast Asia and grow capabilities in high performance computing.

Strengthening ASEAN's Medical Diagnostics Ecosystem

The ASEAN DxD Initiative was endorsed at the 76th ASEAN COSTI in 2018, to facilitate the co-development of healthcare diagnostics solutions across AMS. Following a call for project proposals earlier this year, a Strategic Planning Panel comprising experts and stakeholders from the AMS are reviewing promising projects aimed at addressing diseases, which are urgent unmet needs in the region, such as dengue and tuberculosis.

The Philippines and Singapore are co-leading the ASEAN DxD Initiative, which aims to promote cross-border public and private partnerships within Southeast Asia to commercialise diagnostics technologies and products. It leverages the Philippines' ASEAN Network for Drugs, Diagnostics, Vaccines and Traditional Medicines Innovation's (ASEAN-NDI) platform in connecting AMS, as well as Singapore's Diagnostics Development (DxD) Hub's capabilities in building diagnostics products. Since its launch in 2014, Singapore's DxD Hub has worked with the research and clinical communities to deliver commercially viable developed-in-Singapore diagnostic technologies. It has evaluated over 400 technologies, and delivered nine products with Singapore-based companies, including diagnostic tests for cancers and selection of immunotherapy drugs.

Medtech is a key growth sector for Southeast Asia, and the ASEAN DxD Initiative aims to address the rapidly growing healthcare demand driven by population growth and a rising middle class. It will work towards improving human health, to address unmet clinical needs and grow the healthcare industry in ASEAN, as well as accelerate the development of diagnostics intellectual property in ASEAN into clinically validated diagnostic devices that are ready for market adoption.

Ministers from the AMS will visit Singapore's DxD Hub later today, to learn how the Hub taps on the capabilities of the local scientific and clinical community to address pertinent clinical unmet needs. Over the years, Singapore has invested in capabilities in biomedical research and engineering, which has contributed to its vibrant ecosystem for R&D, innovation, as well as talent. Singapore is well-placed to work together with the other AMS to strengthen ASEAN's competitiveness and accelerate regional economic growth.

Growing ASEAN's Capabilities in High Performance Computing

Against the backdrop of increasing digitalisation and technological advancements, the ASEAN HPC Workplan's aim is to strengthen regional digital connectivity and readiness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This is achieved through increasing access to HPC resources and expertise, fostering public-private partnerships in sectors of mutual interest, and capacity building to equip Southeast Asia's workforce with HPC skills. Singapore and Thailand will co-lead this initiative through A*STAR's Computational Resource Centre (A*CRC), and Thailand's National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre (NETEC).

Dr Raj. Thampuran, Singapore COSTI Chairmanand Senior Advisor of A*STAR, said, "Science, Technology and Innovation are key enablers to enhance ASEAN's competitiveness and catalyse economic growth. As Chair of the ASEAN COSTI, Singapore will share its strategies and experiences to strengthen regional economic integration and technology adoption. Through our collective efforts in growing innovative capabilities, and building a strong talent base, we will position ASEAN well to capture opportunities in emerging trends such as digitalisation, and improve the lives of ASEAN citizens."