



An image from a local Philippines church participating in the elections in 2016; effort from local bodies helped achieve historical 80% voters' turnout. The pandemic-imposed restrictions could impact campaigning, this local mobilization and voter participation. Credit: St. Vincent Ferrer Parish

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The Philippine elections 2022: In search of a leader in a pandemic

PATRONILLO GARCIA, WYNCY EUSTAQUIO, JUN DE DIOS



2016 Philippines election preparation Credit: St. Vincent Ferrer Parish

The second Monday of May 2022 is coming in less than 250 days and in non-pandemic circumstances this would have been an optimal time for Filipino political aspirants to strategize their entry to the Malacañang palace. This early period starts the preparation from all the wannabes and politicians who would try to get the confidence of the voting public against the background of the dreaded COVID-19 disease.

Taking inspiration from President Rodrigo Duterte's victory in 2016, more city mayors may aspire for the presidency. 2016 was the first time Filipinos elected a candidate from Mindanao, southern part of the Philippines beleaguered by poverty and local conflicts, as the 16th President of the Republic.

Over the last few months, surveys from Pulse Asia or Social Weather Station consistently show familiar names such Sara Duterte - the presidential daughter and Mayor of Davao City; Bongbong Marcos – son and namesake of former president a former Governor and Legislator; Isko Moreno – current Mayor of Manila, the country's capital; Manny Pacquiao – currently a senator and boxing world champion are in the top five for the two top posts.

The 2016 General Elections recorded 81% voter turnout, the highest among the three automated elections held in the country. In the last 2019 mid-term election, there was a 76% voter too. It was the administration candidates who won almost all the posts. This could be attributed to the consistent trust rating of the current administration.

The 2022 Election could be an interesting for Filipinos with the pandemic yet to end and with doubts on the Government's ability to handle this situation successfully. In these uncertain times, where currently less than 20% of the population has been administered the vaccine and estimates show that it takes about two months to vaccinate 10% of the population, one cannot predict the turnout. In any case, by the elections, one can expect just about 50% of the population to have had the first jab. It could well end in a selection based solely on the first past the post system.

At Stake

Having a Presidential System, the President as the head of the government is elected through majority votes. In the Philippines, candidates for Presidency and Vice Presidency campaign together but may be elected separately. Thanks to multi-party systems, results in having the top office holders from opposing parties. So, any citizen can seek public office.

The Philippine Congress has a bicameral structure composed of House of Representatives and the Senate. There are 219 regular members of the House of Representatives, elected for three-year terms plus members elected through a party-list system. The party-list seats in the House which currently has 21 seats) and they represent the social development sectors such as labor, indigenous cultural, among others. The Senate has 24 members who are elected for a six-year term with half of them being elected every three years. A senator can run for one re-election, then needs to wait for three years cool off period. Under the Constitution, an incumbent senator can run for President or Vice President post in the middle of his term and can go back to being a senator if he or she loses.

This election is for Local Government Units - the Provincial Governors and Board members, the Mayors, Vice Mayors and members of their respective councils across all regions, cities and municipalities, for a 3-year term in office.

The Challenges

By virtue of the 1998 Automated System Law, the country will be on its 5th Automated Election system with the Commission on Election (COMELEC) awarding of the contract to provide the software to the multi-national and a private company Smartmatic again in May 2021. A logistical concern can affect shipment of thousands of counting machines to target precincts. Some precincts were used as quarantine and evacuation facilities and there might be some hesitation from the public due to virus threat.



2016 Philippines election preparation Credit: St. Vincent Ferrer Parish

Smartmatic have provided the technology in terms of electronic counting system in both local and national elections to various countries including the United Kingdom and United States of America. One of the controversies related to Smartmatic was in the General Election in 2016 for the Vice Presidency post. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who lost to Maria Leonor Robredo, filed protest with an allegation of cheating and fraud. With a long and tedious court deliberations alongside manual audit and physical counting of ballots from selected provinces, the Presidential Electoral Tribunal (PET) dismissed the case in February 2021, just a year before the next election is due.

The Kingmakers

It is not exclusive to Philippines that media plays a vital role in every election, with the social media being used extensively in the 2016 elections. Media provides information on every stage of the polls making the citizen aware of the steps to exercise their right of suffrage. They can be watchdogs to ensure the fair and honest election. On the other hand, to some they are also known to be the kingmakers. Name recall translates to votes and broadcast media and social media make it easy.

With one major media entity – ABS-CBN losing their broadcast rights, the reach of campaign messages and election manifestos to the remote areas could get difficult. Based on various reports, ABS-CBN was the media outfit which did not air Duterte’s campaign in 2016 but instead ran paid negative political advertisements for the opposing candidate in the previous elections.

Owing to these bullies, reports say that Duterte did not get a fair deal of exposure and campaign advertisements from the mainstream media, however enjoyed a huge fan followership on social media. A study on Duterte's social media fame shows that a good number of Duterte's online followership was dedicated offline too. Will this sentiment keep up?

With widening internet uptake citizens have some access to information which makes them wiser and independent decision makers. Information either for or against specific candidates is readily available at the tap of a finger.

Filtering Candidates

To some candidates, this is the chance to highlight their respective efforts during lockdown to convince the voters, while to others, it is an opportunity pick on perceived issues brought about by the pandemic in their campaign strategy.

The previous administrations' achievements or pitfalls can dictate the fate of election candidates. Handling of crisis, natural or otherwise, contribute to the decision-making. In 2016, the aftermath of the super typhoon Yolanda (internationally named Haiyan) and the alleged misuse and diversion of public funds were major issues casted on the chosen successor of then administration party.

Regardless of party affiliation, candidates can stand a chance if they could endorse tangible plans and inclusive recovery programs in their election manifestos. Pressing matters such as economic stability, poverty and rising unemployment rates are some of the issues the new administration must concentrate on. The Filipinos shall weigh in the critical impact between continuity and power shift.

The filing of certificate of candidacy starts in October 2021. The current administration is yet to decide on the candidates. We might see only a few, who have enough resources for an effective campaign, run for office in 2022 given the situation. The pandemic could cast its long shadow on the elections by causing a low turnout. In such a case the winner may not necessarily mean that the choice was of the people but of only the people who could make the choice. One needs to keep the fingers crossed that this does not happen for democracy to flourish in the Philippines.

Being future ready in HR through digitization

VIBHUSHA SHARMA, VIRANI MASAYU, TAFLINE YEW



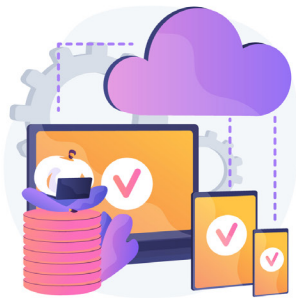
Image Credit: Shutterstock

Pre-Covid, during pandemic phase and the recovery phase, as people become accustomed to the dynamism of working environment, it is imperative for the Organizations to be vigilant to change management. Bringing everyone through the journey of recovery fruitfully will require thoughtful planning of how to remodel corporate culture befitting new, evolved working model.

The strategy through which Organizations fetch employees back will be a determining factor for an efficient Organization structure, corporate culture and employee trust. There are three supposition to this recovery phase: (i) If business insist that people return to the office, they risk losing talent; (ii) If they let employees ‘work from home’, they may have to struggle with maintaining a culture prior to pandemic that was established onsite; If they adopt a hybrid model, they may have to re-engineer the entire working framework (that includes change in structure, strategy, skills, staff and most importantly systems). Either way, Organizations need to deal with the pandemic’s toll on ‘work culture’ carefully. As the perils of pandemic accompanied and uncertainty continues to advance, Organizations will carefully need to maintain flexibility & foresight in how they reshape the future of work.

In any case, the undisputed fact is that technology & machine learning will have an exemplary role in any of the aforementioned premise of work model & therefore many Organizations will be necessitated to invest in technology solutions that support employee interactions with one another as well as with customers.

Such investment in digital transformation will support higher levels of remote working such as productivity analytics & collaboration suites that bridge the gap between people who regularly work in the office and those who work remotely. Many organizations re-routed their digital journey towards SaaS products for more flexibility & cost efficiency. A survey by PwC states that 72% of HR leaders have incorporated their core HR applications with the cloud or are in the process of it.



SaaS
technology



Packaged
software



Decentralized
application

Image Credit: Shutterstock

68% of the HR Leaders stated that “Building Critical Skills and Competencies for the Organization” as their topmost priority. Traditional ways of predicting skill needs aren’t providing a competitive advantage. Employees need more skills for every job, and many of those skills to deliver business performance. Employers need to plan for a skill based workforce.

According to Gartner HR Trends & Priorities Report:

46% of the HR leaders believe organizational design and change management will be critical to top business priorities. In order to build a proactive rather than responsive organization, many of these companies design roles and structures based on outcomes to increase agility and flexibility and formalize adaptable processes. Also, provide employees with varied, adaptive and flexible roles so that they acquire cross-functional knowledge and training.

44% of the HR leaders concluded that current and future bench strength should counter the high volatile situations. Whereby, there is a need for a shift from a supply driven to demand driven planning. Align the Talent supply to organizational strategy, not just for existing roles and vacancies as well as formulize high-potential and succession processes that meet future, not just current, Talent roles and requirements.

31% of CHROs are diverting their Employee experience. ‘Employee Experience’ has become the buzzword in board meetings, transcending boundaries of HR duties, and adding a meaningful dimension to the smooth functioning and optimum organizational growth. Right from equipping them with necessary tools for end-to-end solutions like gadgets, high-speed internet and new technology to sprucing internal communication & allied working arrangements to keep employees at their prolific best. Alongside, building a shared experience of fun, excitement and social interaction for heightened employee involvement has become a prominent priority for organizations.

PeopleStrong, established in 2005 is a leading HR solutions and technology company from India. Delivering cutting edge technology enabled HR solutions in the space of recruitment, employee life cycle management, payroll and compliance management and analytics, the company is enriching experience of over 350+ customers and over 1 Million users users for over a decade and a half now. PeopleStrong delivers its technology and services in one offering, using its on-demand technology product ‘PeopleStrong Alt’, which has distilled tens of thousands of hours of ‘natural R&D’ — a decade long experience of servicing the HR functions of top MNC and Indian companies. Powered by big data, PeopleStrong Alt covers the entire spectrum of HR like recruitment, employee life cycle management, change management and HR analytics, among others. It is a cloud-based, modular, easy to use product, which is scalable for firms of any size or complexity and helps PeopleStrong enable its wide range of users, be it employees, managers, HR teams or CXOs, to experience work in a completely different way.

Ensemble of PeopleStrong Alt



Image Credit: PeopleStrong

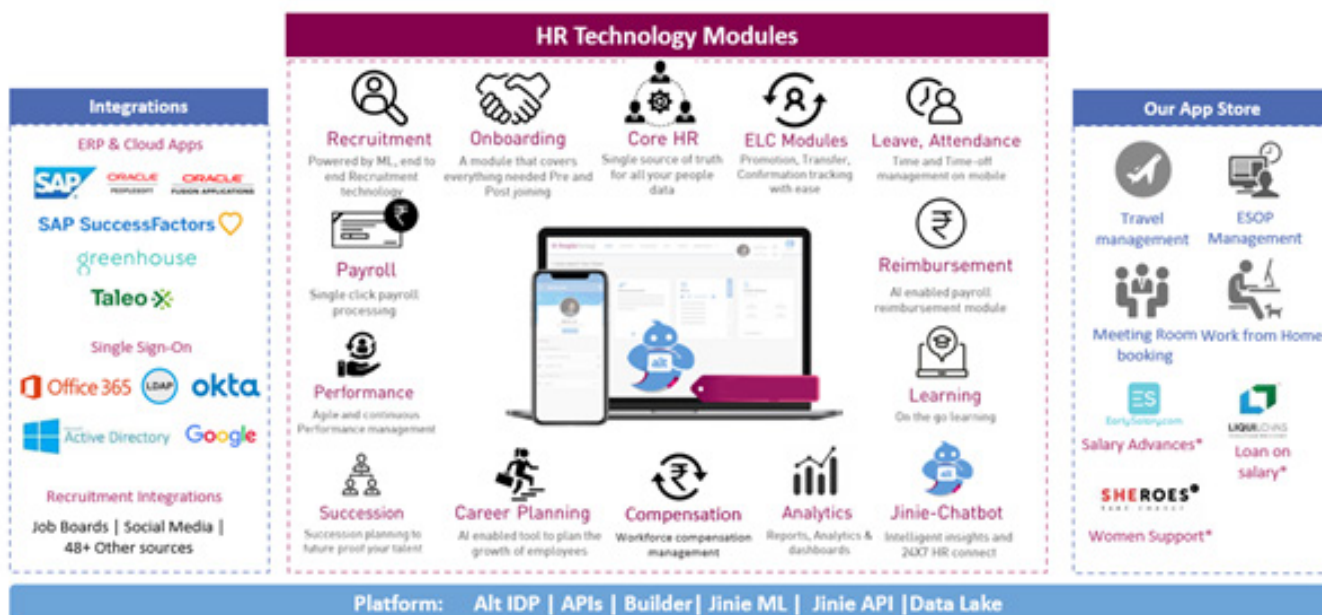


Image Credit: PeopleStrong

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Here are 5 Strategies that will help People practitioners navigate & rise through the tumultuous Hybrid work model.

1. Acceleration of Digital transformation And Strategy



Image Credit: PeopleStrong

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To begin with digital transformation is not about technology. Digital transformation is a comprehensive process that includes change management, Organization structure improvement, skill enhancement, cost saving & people management & this bearing end result as enhancing business performance & employee efficiency.

The consequence of pandemic has led many Organizations to save cost on rent and bills, employees are saving up on commuting costs and travel time. There have been many ways in which ‘remote working’ has allowed organizations to save up on costs. However, in order to sustain remote working model, there needs to be an unambiguous demarcation of work from its location and that is only possible if all the amenities and characteristics of an office are replicated digitally. Hence, in order to sustain this paradigm shift, many Organizations have increased their focus on digital transformation by adopting business automation and leveraging tools like and collaborative platforms.

Through digital transformation and adoption, businesses can innovate, capitalize on people skills, cut down expenses, and foster a work culture of highly engaged employees.

2. Bringing People Performance Closer to Business Performance



Image Credit: PeopleStrong

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Most businesses and organizations set goals in order to achieve the right objectives and fulfill the needs of its stakeholders. Those goals start at the top and trickle down to every team within the organization, each performing unique functions to advance the business. There are many different ways to set and measure goals. One popular way to measure an individual, team or company’s progress towards a goal is by using key performance indicators, or KPIs, which set a standard of success for a specific business objective.

A Key Performance Indicator is a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an individual, team and a company is achieving key business objectives. KPIs also help businesses understand whether they’re spending utilizing their time, and budget and talent on the right strategies, tasks and tools in order to achieve its goals. In order to understand real time Performance scores & leverage analytics as well as ensure a digital assistance & coaching imparted to each of the employee, explore PeopleStrong’s [“Alt Performance”](#)

3. Prioritizing employee experience

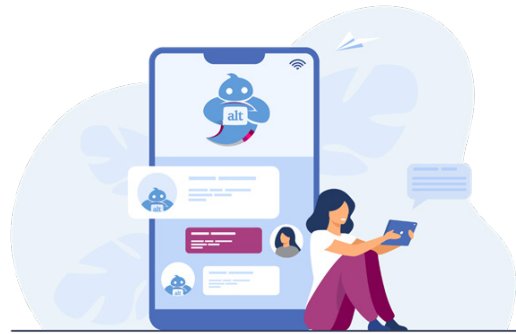
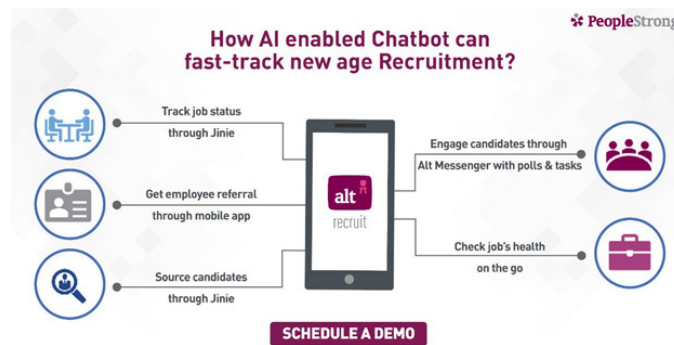


Image Credit: PeopleStrong

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The new hybrid work model presents an opportunity to address the shortcomings of employee experience in the past, which have ranged from biases toward certain types of employees and working styles to inconsistent access to information and tools. Organizations should leverage the technology and employee experience to connect, equip, engage and empower employees whether they are in office or remote as well as to capitalize on the strengths of each element of the hybrid model. Digital Technology (for example, PeopleStrong’s [Jinie](#)) has flattened hierarchies, with everyone connected and having immediate access to information and feedback. Thus enabling more productivity with minimal of supervision.

4. Paradigm shift from ‘sourcing’ to a Digitized Talent Acquisition



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In our continual race to attract top talent, finding the right candidate depends on a recruiter’s ability to intelligently shortlist lengthy and time-consuming recruitment tasks. Thankfully, AI has enabled recruiters to get rid of tedious and non-quantifiable manual processes by bringing in virtual assistance. Recruiters are now able to automate these tasks using AI and ML based PeopleStrong’s [Alt Recruit](#) that helps expedite the screening process for organizations by interacting with candidates, collecting relevant information, scheduling the interviews and even conducting an initial level of screening before setting up a full-fledged interview. The platform also helps integrate multichannel sourcing to access talent pools spread across databases, social/professional networks, job portals, etc. as well as ensures seamless onboarding experience at operational level and Future-proofing organizational structure and hierarchy through strategic workforce planning and talent pipelining at strategic level.

5. Up-Skilling & Re-Skilling



Image Credit: PeopleStrong

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The future of work will require two types of changes across the workforce :- (i) up-skilling, in which staff acquires new skills to manage in their current roles, and (ii) re-skilling, in which staff need the capabilities to take on different or entirely new roles. In order to avoid layoffs, enhance skill set and expand knowledge base, Organizations need to determine whether they can up skill employees already in similar roles. If given a choice, most employees will want to adapt and learn the new technology. And by carefully identifying the employees capable of re-skilling or have potential to learn new skills and matching them to open positions, companies can develop a skills plan tailored to their exact needs. PeopleStrong's '[Alt Learning](#)' that aims at Training people, measuring results & driving growth in the Hybrid work model. The platform makes learning easily accessible as well as integrated as a part of work. This comes in the form of shorter sessions spread across multiple days supporting learning continuity and retention. Another focal point of the 'Alt Learning' is the Learner engagement & retention by incorporating gamification in L&D modules as well as offering a varied options of learning medium through live, interactive sessions coupled with pre-recorded ones, in-classroom training integrated with remote ones, live lectures, quizzes, group assignments, on-demand videos, presentations, etc.

Sino influence in ASEAN's energy: A double-edged sword?

ISHAAN MALIK, TRIPUDJO SOEMARKO



China has 43 coal fired power plants under construction just in the countries of Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia and its influence in renewables sector is increasing in the region. Image credit: Shutterstock

The energy industry has played a vital role in ASEAN's economic story to date. Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have depended significantly on their abundance of energy related commodities – such as coal and oil – for trade and economic growth. And the role of the energy sector (as a driver of economic growth) is only set to expand. However, fossil fuel and non-renewable energy will no longer be the only constituent of ASEAN's energy industry. Renewable energy (such as solar and wind power) is poised to play an important role in ASEAN's future, and in line with this prediction, Governments across ASEAN are emphasizing the importance of shifting to sustainable sources of power.

In this interplay between renewables and non-renewables in the ASEAN energy sector, stands one very important stakeholder – the People's Republic of China. It is widely known that China is playing an increasingly important part in ASEAN's renewable energy – particularly solar energy – sector. But is that the only influence that China has over the region's energy industry? Furthermore, is the influence that China exercises all (and only) good? In reality, the story is more complex.

There is no doubt that China has been a major investor in ASEAN's renewable energy growth. Instances of China's support can be seen across the region – from the 0.5 GW solar farm completed in 2019 in South Vietnam (financed by state-owned power plant builder PowerChina) to the US\$ 10 billion investment (over a 15-year period) that Chinese solar energy firm Risen Energy has committed in Malaysia. And China's footprint has not only been confined to the solar energy space. Just earlier this year, Vietnam Investment Review reported that 3 wind farms are being developed in the country's Dak Nong province with a total investment capital of US\$450 million, and the company developing these wind farms is majority owned (70% stake) by Sungrow Power, which – you guessed it – is a China based renewable energy group.

However, this increasing flow of funds from China (to ASEAN's renewable energy industry) does not paint the full picture. In reality, Chinese investments in Southeast Asia's more traditional sources of energy – such as coal – have far outpaced the investments made in the renewables space. According to an article by Nikkei Asia, dated December 15th 2020, China has 43 coal fired power plants under construction just in the countries of Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia. Furthermore, as per a quote from Ms. Isabella Suarez, a Philippines-based analyst for the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), China is definitely the main investor for coal in Southeast Asia. In fact, according to Ms. Suarez:

“If you look at overseas investment portfolio for Chinese coal, Indonesia and Vietnam are second- and third-highest in the world.”

This strategy of offshoring coal financing and infrastructure to smaller neighbours, has enabled China to set ambitious carbon emissions targets for itself. But China isn't the only Asian juggernaut that has adopted this strategy. Japan and South Korea have also been found to tread the same path. And unfortunately, this trend may not come to a halt anytime soon. According to an article by Yahoo Finance, the rapid increase in demand for power in ASEAN entails the need to build baseload plants – such as nuclear, coal and hydro plants – that can produce energy at a constant rate, unlike wind and solar farms which are smaller and produce output intermittently.

The unfortunate consequence of this is that emerging markets such as Indonesia, Vietnam and Philippines may find it difficult to set and meet aggressive carbon emission (decrease) targets. And, in addition, investment from China may arrive late to Southeast Asia's renewable energy market, potentially worth US\$ 205 billion over the next 10 years.

Whichever way you look at it, be it from a 'renewables' or 'non-renewables' perspective, the fact still remains that China has an exceeding degree of influence in the ASEAN energy market. And the direction that it takes with this influence, may dictate the direction that ASEAN progresses in.

COVID catapults e-commerce to dizzy heights in ASEAN

SARAYU SRINIVASAN



E-commerce in Southeast Asia is said to be a booming industry in the years to come. COVID has pushed 10% more people to take to online. In 2021, consumers are said to be making conscious purchase decisions by navigating through 7.9 websites as opposed to 5.2 in 2020. Image: Shutterstock

In Q2 of 2020, one of the clothing sites Zalora, recorded two million downloads of its app, about 7-12% increase in share of new customers in revenue. Recently the company's COO [Rostin Javedi](#) said that COVID-19 has changed shopping behaviour and it only looks brighter for online marketplaces Southeast Asia.

COVID-19 changed the way we interact in the social and cultural space, our habits and most importantly, our purchase decisions. All these changes were necessary to protect ourselves during this global crisis that posed logistical constraints like social distancing, limited retail hours and overcrowding during the open hours. With medical research still in its nascent stage, there was no better option than to rely on technological affordances. But as the saying goes, every crisis presents and opportunity and the e-commerce sector has epitomized this phenomenon. The maturity of the market has improved by several folds, especially in the urban or over-populated areas.

Based on an internal case study of ASEAN Business Partners' team members in Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam, we found that there was an increase in e-commerce usage and at least five new apps ranging for fintech, retail, logistics and health etc. were explored. This could be because many "essential supply" goods and services started taking their businesses online during the pandemic.

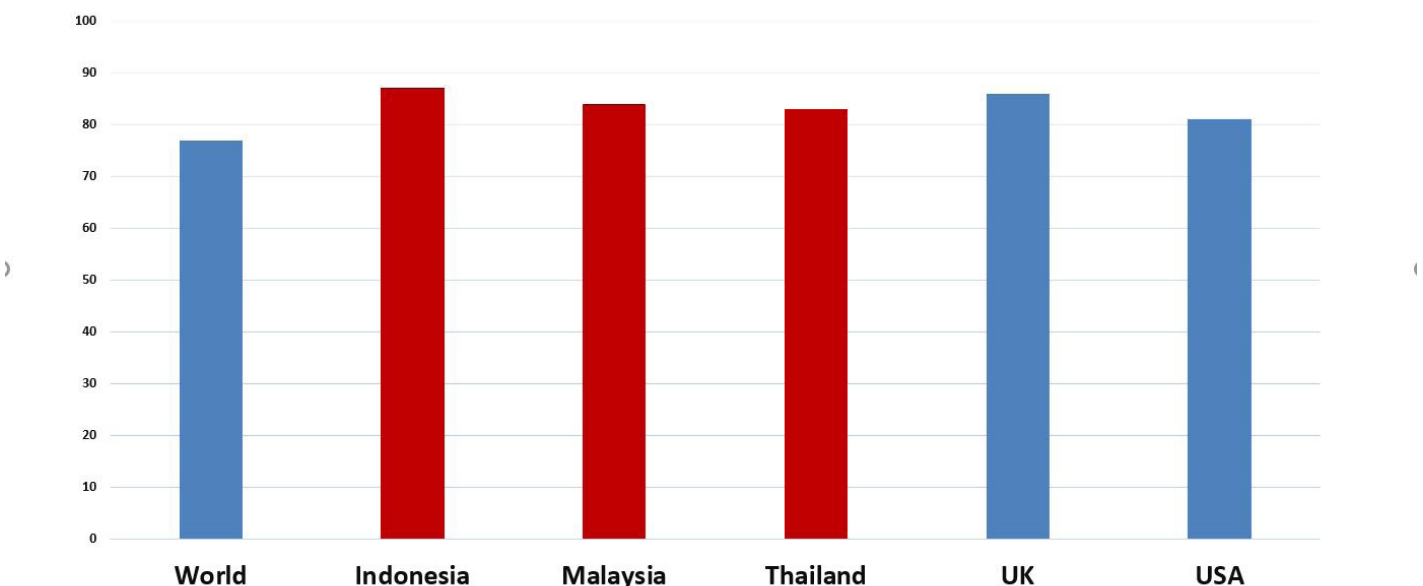
Super App market is forecasted to be at US \$23 billion in 2025. Some of the important services in this segment are ridesharing, food delivery, fintech, digital banking, e-commerce. Super Apps generally create a strong engagement with different businesses through the app all day. Over [US \\$43 billion has been spent on Super Apps across ASEAN](#), China gets about 6x this number. Of the Super Apps services, fintech may be the biggest disrupter as this would be the entry point for other services.

Luxury brands are also finding place buyers online especially for clothing. Some of the respondents said that they would buy a product without touch and feel if it came from the brand’s website. Others said that they would spend upto USD 1000 and this threshold amount has risen during the pandemic. One of the e-commerce sites reported that their customer-base is that of 25-35 age group for luxury segment and unique luxury buyers were on an average 36 and above. This is very much in line with ASEAN’S average age of the population.

An e-Conomy SEA report by Google, Tamasek, says that 40 million people in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam came online for the first time during the pandemic until November 2020. The internet users in the region rose upto 400 million from 250 million five years ago. What could not be achieved in a decade of existence of e-commerce was achieved in a few months into the pandemic. In 2020, Southeast Asia clocked over 11% of the world’s app downloads and Indonesia was leading with a global share of 4%, the highest in the region. The region is becoming a [mobile-first region](#) as more activities migrating to mobile from gaming and entertainment to communications, finance and payments.

With four of its publishers in the top 10 ranking including Amanotes, OneSoft, VNG and BACHASoft, Vietnam market has gained an edge over the others in ASEAN. Vietnam’s Momobank is looking to start digital banking which also is a huge driver of online goods and services consumption.

E-commerce adoption by ASEAN



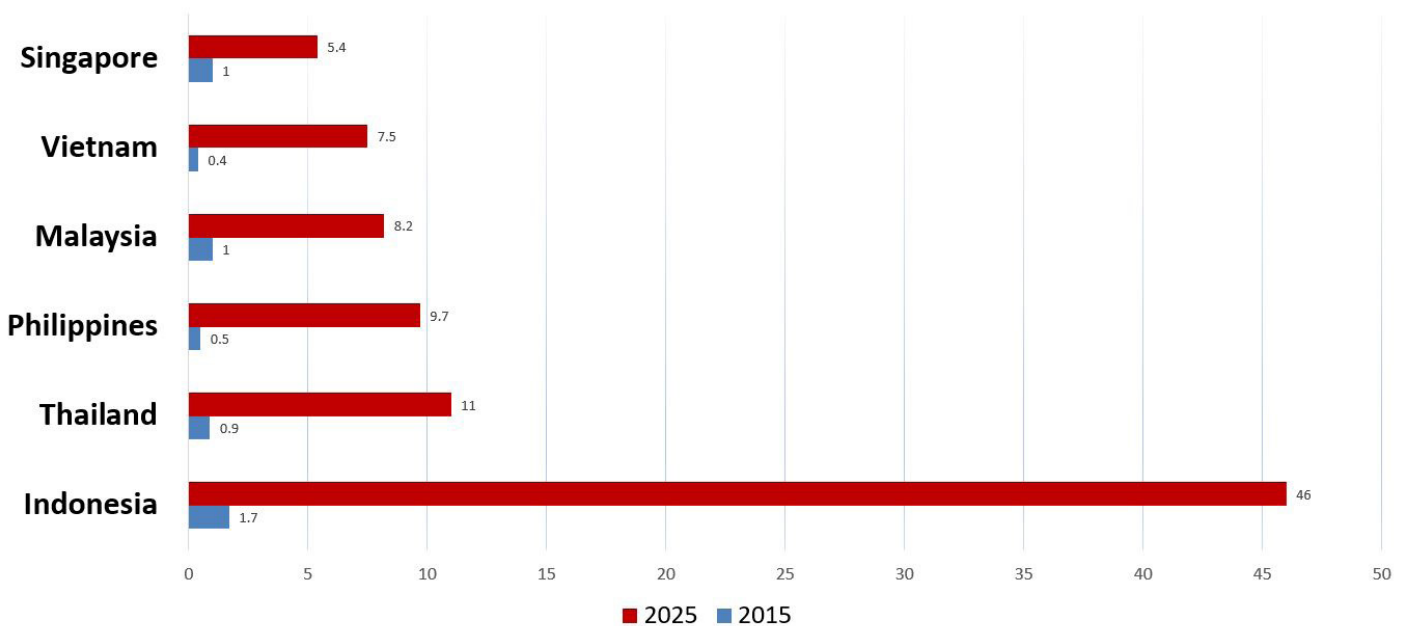
Many ASEAN countries outpaced developed countries and exceeded the world average of 77% in using e-commerce.

Digital retail in Southeast Asia grew 85% year-on-year. About 80% of consumers are expected to go digital by the end of 2021. The e-Economy report also says that the digital spending has increased by 60% from what it was in 2019. People are spoilt for choice with new products and services, 51% said that they tried newer online stores in 2020 than ever before.

Among the ASEAN countries, Indonesia, followed by Philippines and Malaysia have seen highest e-Commerce adoption. ABP’s internal survey showed that a bulk of the e-commerce in the ASEAN happens on mobile e-commerce platforms, what with increasing availability of affordable smartphone devices.

The best part is that the e-commerce story in the ASEAN region has just been scripted and bigger picture is set to emerge as the world moves on beyond COVID. Today, consumers are said to be making conscious purchase decisions by navigating through 7.9 websites as opposed to 5.2 in 2020. Eco-friendly, sustainable and socially responsible products are gaining more traction with 80% of the consumers ready to pay higher charges that come with this segment.

Projected e-commerce growth for ASEAN's big six



Home to a population of over 660M in 2020, and with one of its members, Indonesia, fourth most populous country in the world, it is not hard to imagine the explosive growth of e-commerce in the ASEAN region in the years to come.

The mighty push to e-commerce, which grew at a blistering pace to six times in this region during four years' time- from just US\$ 9.5B in 2016 to US\$ 54.6B USD 2020. It is expected to grow at an annual rate of over 20% and touch close to US\$ 150B by the year 2025.

The demographic advantage of a young population, ever increasing standard of living of its people and a remarkable continuity and support of the governments embracing new technologies to bridge the digital divide and connect more of its populace with the digital world will provide the impetus to growth of e-commerce in ASEAN.

At the same time, with a diverse cultural fabric, a one size fits all approach to e-commerce may not work and homegrown e-commerce companies will spur the growth along with monoliths like Amazon, E Bay, etc. who also will have to adapt themselves to meet the needs of a diverse ASEAN market.

News Snippets – ASEAN News that matter

August 2021

Indonesia

Indonesia launches website to process investment permits

In a major milestone in reform, Indonesian government has launched an online push to process investment permits. This will make doing business easier and faster in the Southeast Asia's largest economy. President Widodo said that the country would overcome corruption, bring strict labour laws and bring quality infrastructure that would be on par with the neighbours such as Vietnam and Thailand to attract investments. [Read More](#)

Indonesian e-commerce PT Bukalapak.com makes blockbuster IPO entry

11-year-old e-commerce company from Indonesia PT Bukalapak.com Tbk backed by Ant Group and Singapore's GIC and tech conglomerate Emtek made its market debut after raising US \$1.5 billion making it the country's largest IPO thus far. This comes as Indonesia e-commerce market gets a boost from stay-at-home consumers during the pandemic which has also led many businesses to take to online platform. The firm focuses on MSMEs and is the fourth largest in Southeast Asia after Tokopedia, Shopee and Lazada. [Read More](#)

Indonesia, Thailand launches cross border QR payment

Bank Indonesia (BI) and the Bank of Thailand (BOT) in their pursuit to strengthen financial integration in Southeast Asia have introduced a cross-border payments system via the countries' national standard QR code networks. The Cross-Border QR Payment system enables merchants and customers in both countries to make/accept payments using either the QR Code Indonesia Standard (QRIS) or the Thai QR Payment networks. The system allows funds to travel through a network of Indonesian and Thai banks. [Read More](#)

Indonesia introduces regulatory guidelines digital banks

The financial regulatory authority (OJK) has updated regulatory guidelines for all the Indonesia based digital banks. The regulation mandates digital Banks to offer services with just one physical location serving as their head office. The regulation also mandates Digital banks to a minimum paid-up capital of US \$694 million. Furthermore, it allows digital bank to be launched via the direct establishment of a new digital banking entity or via the conversion of a commercial bank to a digital bank. [Read More](#)

TelKom – Microsoft Collaboration paves way to digital transformation in Indonesia

Telecom giant Telkom Indonesia Tbk (TLKM) collaborates with the US-based technology giant Microsoft to accelerate digital transformation and achieve digital sovereignty in Indonesia. As per the estimates of International Data Corporation (IDC) that Microsoft's investment in Indonesia will generate new revenue of up to US \$6.3 billion. By 2024, the collaboration between Microsoft and local partners is also estimated to create around 60,000 new jobs. [Read More](#)

A collaboration that opens door to financial inclusiveness in Indonesia

BukaPengadaan collaborates with a Fin-Tech start up Modalku to finance MSMEs players in the BukaPengadaan ecosystem network. This collaboration provides convenience for MSME actors who have joined the BukaPengadaan ecosystem in obtaining business capital financing. This is a strategic step towards building financial inclusiveness in Indonesia. [Read More](#)

Singapore

Singapore govt. promises to protect foreign workers sentiments

Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced there is a need to adjust policies towards foreign workers in order to address concerns about employment amid the pandemic. On Singapore's 56th National Day the PM said that the government was conscious about apprehensions of foreign workers' population going down because of COVID-19 fears. The PM said that protecting foreign labour and immigrant policies were inbuilt in the country's development strategies. [Read More](#)

Singapore-based Grab's Q1 net sales go up by 39%

Ride hailing-to-food delivery group Grab's first-quarter net sales rose by 39% to US \$507 million. The second-largest ride hailing platform reduced its losses by focusing on its deliveries business. The firm is said to go public after a merger worth US \$40 billion with special-purpose acquisition company (SPAC) Altimeter Growth Corp. [Read More](#)

Japan based Aeon launches its mobile app in Singapore

Japan-based retail group [Aeon](#) will launch its mobile payment service Aeon Pay in September 2021. Aeon aims to consolidate its online shopping businesses and prepaid cards under Aeon Pay. Aeon already has financial arms like Aeon Bank and credit card operator Aeon Financial Services. To use Aeon Pay, customers will be required to apply for an Aeon credit card. Payments will be made via QR codes at checkout counters. [Read More](#)

Myanmar

Investment in port does not violate the US Sanctions

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd expounds that the investment in the Myanmar port does not violate US sanctions, referring to the guidelines issued by the US Department of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) under the Ministry of Finance. APSEZ states that the port would create sustainable jobs, encourage private commercial trade and facilitate the movement of goods such as food, medicine and clothing for the people of Myanmar. [Read More](#)

Laos

Laos targets to boost value of exports by 8-10%

Amid the adverse effects of the pandemic, the ministry of Laos is endeavouring to promote the sale of goods domestically as well as for export. The Lao Ministry of Industry and Commerce is working towards boosting the value of exports by 8-10 % from 2021-2025. In order to achieve the said target, the ministry will focus on facilitating trade, particularly in agricultural products and utilize the potential of industry. [Read More](#)

Cambodia

KOICA allocates \$8million to set up National Business Training Centre in Cambodia

Kingdom of Cambodia plans to establish a new National Business Training Centre on the campus of the Royal University of Phnom Penh. The new training centre which is a part of the Business Promotion System between Universities and Industries in Cambodia is established and financed by Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). KOICA extends the grant US \$8 million that will be utilized for construction, facilities and staff training in the centre which is expected to be completed in 2023. [Read More](#)

Cambodia becomes a temporary home to 300 Afghan refugees

Earlier, the Asia Foundation had beseeched before the Royal Government of Cambodia to consider upon the possibility of granting visas to 300 Afghanistan refugees to enter the Kingdom of Cambodia on temporary basis. On August 28th 2021, the Prime Minister Hun Sen has agreed to accept these refugees on humanitarian principles to stay temporarily in Cambodia as well as provide visas on arrival to these refugees and allow them to use their ID cards as travel documents. [Read More](#)

Malaysia

AirAsia's fintech arm secures up to \$100 million from SK Group

BigPay, fintech arm of Malaysia's AirAsia Digital has secured US \$100 million from South Korea's largest conglomerates and tech innovator SK Group. This is an important investment as it strengthens the digital endeavour of AirAsia towards logistics and financial services. The consortium of strategic partners include Malaysian Industrial Development Finance Berhad (MIDF), Singapore-based Ikhlas Capital and another foreign fintech company. [Read More](#)

Malaysian State Energy giant Petronas publishes its laudable Q2 performance

Malaysian state energy giant & the world's fourth largest energy exporter Petronas shares its second quarter revenue that rose to 68% with US \$13.61 billion & thus making a post-tax profit of US \$2.29 billion for the April to June period. The energy giant despite its laudable Q2 performance states that the brewing uncertainties in macro environment along with the risk associated with non-members of OPEC makes the upturn of Oil & Gas sector very fragile. In order to become a more sustainable entity, the company is planning to ramp up its capital expenditure by 9% to 10% in order to meet the requisites of renewable energy and pursue new businesses. [Read More](#)

Malaysia's New appointed PM will entail UMNO to reclaim its premiership

The former Prime Minister of Malaysia Muhyiddin Yassin stayed in power for around 17 months & thereafter resigned on August 16th, 2021, after losing majority support in parliament due to power struggle within his ruling political coalition. The position is now being replaced by the deputy prime minister under Muhyiddin, Ismail Sabri Yaakob. The appointment of Ismail, would essentially keep the ruling coalition intact and his ascent means that the country's longest-governing political party – the United Malaysia National Organisation - UMNO has reclaimed Malaysia's premiership. [Read More](#)

Philippines

Securities Regulator say yes to Del Monte Philippines' \$874 Million IPO

Del Monte Philippines which is famous for its pineapple-based products and sauces said that the Securities and Exchange Commission approved its IPO and listing scheduled for September 2021. This IPO will raise about US \$874 million from its first sale including over-allotment option. This will be the country's second-largest IPO after Instant noodle and biscuit maker Monde Nissin. [Read More](#)

Philippines cancels tax on imported Thai cars

In a relief to Thai car exporters, Philippines has scrapped tariffs on cars imported from Thailand. The country also returned 1.2 billion baht worth of safeguard duty to importers. The Thai Commerce Minister Jurin Laksanawisit said that the move comes after the officials ramped up attempts to resolve trade disputes. In December 2020, Philippines set up a committee to study and impose safeguard measures on Thai passenger car and pickup truck exports. [Read More](#)

Philippine's Casino suspension comes to an end to meet its pandemic revival

Philippines, one of Asia's fastest-growing gambling markets before the pandemic, has been lifted from a suspension on casino operations in the country's top holiday island to generate taxes for its COVID-19 pandemic revival on August 28th 2021. The President after a longstanding opposition to gambling as well as halting the construction of new casinos in the Philippines has finally allowed the operations of a Casino in Boracay. [Read More](#)

Philippines receives a loan of US \$ 400 million from ADB

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) grants US \$400 million policy-based loan to the Philippines to aid in improving local governments' capacity to provide high-quality public services, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Reform Program will help strengthen local government units' (LGUs) service delivery framework, modernize local public financial management, and improve LGUs' financing and investment framework. [Read More](#)

Brunei

Brunei extends financial assistance to SMEs

The Government of Brunei has introduced several measures to help Small and Medium enterprises in order to monetarily aid these enterprises coping with the financial impact owing to the partial lockdown. The Ministry of Finance & Economy (MoFE) confirmed that thus far twelve companies have applied for the government's wage subsidy. The Brunei Darussalam Central Bank had also extended debt assistance to businesses between the period of April to December 2020 & a total of 2,014 applications were granted assistance. [Read More](#)

Thailand

Thai coal producer Banpu bets on sustainable projects in US

Bangkok-based Banpu is planning to buy a combined cycle gas-fired power plant for US \$430 million in the US. Banpu is controlled by billionaire Isara Vongkusolkrit and the power plant is said to be in the state of Texas. The company is said to be interested investing in power projects that use cleaner fuel. This is to achieve the group's electricity generation capacity from 6.1 GW by 2025. The group currently generates 3.3 GW. [Read More](#)

Japan's Shizuoka Gas to expand its natural gas supply business in Thailand

Shizuoka Gas Co. has announced to enter Thai industrial natural gas supply business by 2022 by liaising with Thailand-based natural gas supplier Scan Inter Public Co. The plan is to develop new Japanese corporate customers in the Southeast Asian country by acquiring 49% shares of Thai-Japan Gas Network Co. Thai-Japan Gas Network has agreed on an invest of 412 million Thai Baht. Scan Inter plans to remaining 51% stake. [Read More](#)

Thai coal miner buys gas-fired power plant in US for \$430m

Thailand's largest coal miner Banpu buys gas fuelled power plant in US by acquiring 100% stake against an investment of US \$430 million. The investment is part of the company's business plan to go greener as the company is gradually curbing the role of the coal business, as an alternative shift natural gas and renewable energy. Banpu aims to contribute more than half of overall income from its low-carbon green businesses by 2025. [Read More](#)

Foxconn – An apple maker company plans to set up its EV factory

Foxconn, one of Apple's largest suppliers, has announced to begin construction of all-electric vehicle plants in the United States and Thailand this year, it plans to set up its EV factories in 2022 and start mass producing vehicles the following year. The planned Thai factory will form part of Foxconn's joint venture with oil and gas conglomerate PTT. The two are working on a platform for EV and component production. Foxconn plans to build up to 200,000 EVs at that plant each year. [Read More](#)

Vietnam

Vietnam shortens quarantine for vaccinated entrants

Health Ministry of Vietnam recently cut short the quarantine period for fully vaccinated travellers entering the country. The ministry said that the people who have gotten two doses will have to spend seven days in quarantine and self-monitor. The ministry has also mandated entrants to come with proper certificates to show that they have gotten the last dose between 14 days and 12 months before arrival and have a negative in RTPCR test taken within 72 hours of the travel. [Read More](#)

Vietnam gaming firm VNG Corp. eyes a SPAC merger

Singapore GIC-backed VNG Corp. based in Vietnam, may go public in the U.S. through a reverse merger with a blank-check company, sources said. The online gaming and tech firm has approached financial advisors to talk with special purpose acquisition companies (SPAC). The merger might bring in an investment between VNG \$2 billion to VNG \$3 billion. [Read More](#)

Vietnam welcomes India for Investment

At a Summit held on 27th August 2021 themed ‘Meet Vietnam’ many businesses in Chennai and Bangalore have expressed their disposition toward at investment in hi-tech fields in Vietnam such as pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and automobiles, as well as improving coordination in the textile supply chain. The Chief Minister of Karnataka as well as the Senetor from Tamil Nadu both highly appreciated the connection between India and Vietnam and they look forward to promote cooperation in the fields of semiconductor industry, information technology and biotechnology. [Read More](#)

Commercial Banks further reduce lending rates to support economy

The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) has requested commercial banks to reduce lending interest rates and provide free banking service provision to support customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As per the SBV direction, the Vietnam Banks Association held a meeting having 16 commercial banks as participants, who voluntarily sliced interest rates of about VNĐ 20.3 trillion from now until the end of this year, depending on the size of the bank, to support the economy. [Read More](#)

Asia

Japan's biggest bank MUFJ doubles profits to US \$3.49 billion

Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc. in early August doubled its Q1 net profit as credit costs plummeted. MUFJ reported a profit of US \$3.49 billion for three months to June 30. The bank made a Q1 profit last year was a third of this amount. The bank is the Japan's biggest lender and owns 20% of Morgan Stanley. Japanese banks have been struggling due to ultra-low interest rates and shrinking population. [Read More](#)

Taliban takeover in Afghanistan

Days after the US military withdrew from Afghanistan the Taliban have planted themselves in the presidential palace in Kabul and also taken over all of the major cities in the country. August 16 showed horrific images of chaos and desperation as people race to leave the country even if they had to tug on to a moving airplane. The insurgents said that they would restore an Islamic emirate and that women will have some rights. [Read More](#)

Hitachi to acquire Thales' signalling business in a US \$2 billion deal

Europe's largest defence electronics company, Thales, is to sell its railway signalling business to Hitachi in a deal value of US \$2 billion. This news comes as the Thales looks at ironing out its operations and assure its investors of its focus on high-tech equipment for defence and aerospace industries business. The signalling unit offers train control systems and fare collection services. [Read More](#)

JV between Indian Oil Corporation and State-owned Petronas

The state-run firm, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and Malaysia's state-owned Petronas propose to expand their Indian joint venture into retail sales of transportation fuel. The said JV includes building liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, fuel retailing and gas distribution. The IOC is investing US \$ 13.49 billion to raise its refining capacity by 25 million tpa in the next two-five years. [Read More](#)

Indian automakers shift to Natural gas-powered wheels

With petrol and diesel prices on the rise, and electric being still far from becoming a mainstay in India brings the Indian automakers to explore the option of CNG (Compressed Natural Gas). CNG comes across as a viable fuel option, particularly, in urban areas where it is readily available at a number of petrol pumps. Suzuki Motor Corp that controls Maruti is pushing sales of cars that operate on compressed natural gas (CNG), and is also investing in hybrid technology. While Tata motors is likely to offer the Tiago CNG with only a manual gearbox option. [Read More](#)

Japanese AI based medical equipment launched tele-health in India

Japanese Medical equipment maker OMRON has announced the launch of an AI-based collaborative trial program in the field of remote patient monitoring. The program targets patients who have undergone surgery or resection for the treatment of cardiovascular disease, and remote hypertension and ECG monitoring to strengthen treatment and care regimes to reduce cardiovascular complications and mortality. Omron's tele-health service will broaden patient access in a country with an estimated 300 million people with high blood pressure. [Read More](#)

Bangladesh's largest FDI in energy sector

Japan's energy major, JERA, enters in to a Joint venture agreement with India's Reliance Power on August 24th, 2021 for jointly setting up 750-megawatt (MW) gas-based power project at Meghnaghat in Bangladesh. The agreement was signed in Bangladesh with Reliance Power holding 51% of stake while Jera holding 49% of the same. This project by far will be the largest foreign direct investment in Bangladesh's energy sector. [Read More](#)

About us

ASEAN Business Partners is an independent, market entry specialist that helps internationally oriented companies manage and grow their operations in ASEAN, sustainably and profitably. We are well-networked, independent of governments, and dedicated purely to serving our clients. Our management and country experts are unrivaled in their ASEAN network, experience, and expertise, with proven credentials.

We are a team of top-class professionals with expertise in different industries. Our executives have worked as CEOs, CFOs and in other senior positions in top multi-national companies and represent the best talent available globally. Our founder, Sumit Dutta, is an ex-HSBC CEO who has worked in Indonesia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, India, and the US. A majority of our team and country experts are former senior-level executives from multi-national corporations.

We are passionate about the ASEAN region, one of the highest growth markets in the world, and believe it will be the market of choice for all forward-looking international companies. We seek to create value for our clients and their customers in ASEAN, and so contribute to the prosperity of ASEAN nations and their people.

Please take a moment to review our [website](#). If there is any way we can assist you, please reach out to us.

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