

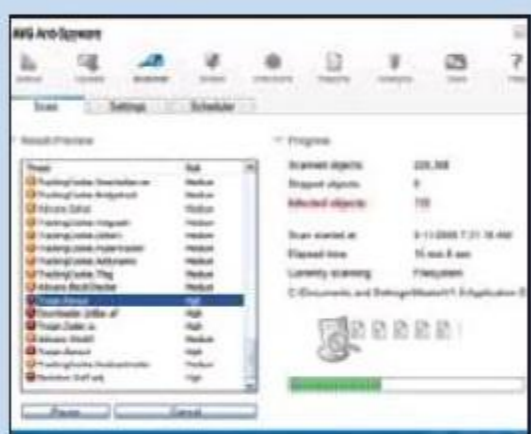
IN DATABASE



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Sudoku — the gadget
The Sudoku craze is now available in handheld form from Mitrus D4



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Wanda Sloan outlines the bare minimum software needed to protect your PC D7



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HEALTHCARE

Doctors told to Google for a diagnosis

Paris — Doctors facing a patient with unusual symptoms could well be advised to use Google to try to pinpoint the cause, a study published on Saturday by the *British Medical Journal* suggests.

Australian doctors were given 26 real-life cases of individuals who had fallen sick with relatively rare disorders.

They were not told what diagnoses had been given in these case reports but did a Google search based on the symptoms that were presented.

Google returned the right diagnosis in 15 out of the 26 cases — an accuracy rate of 58 percent.

The disorders ranged from cirrhosis and the degenerative brain disorder Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, to cat-scratch disease, infective encephalitis and obscure conditions such as Henoch-Scholein purpura, Churg-Strauss syndrome and extrinsic allergic alveolitis.

"As Internet access becomes more readily available in outpatient clinics and hospital wards, the web is rapidly becoming an important clinical tool for doctors," the paper says.

"The use of web-based searching may help doctors to diagnose difficult cases."

The authors add a caveat, however: the results from Google are only as good as the knowledge base of the searcher — a caution that especially applies to patients who also try to self-diagnose their medical problems. AFP

U-TURN AT ICT MINISTRY

New ICT Minister plans to overturn many of the decisions of his predecessors

Story by DON SAMBANDARAKSA

In his first "meet the press" session as ICT Minister, Professor Sitthichai Pokaiudom put forth his radical vision for 3G in Thailand, condemned open source for turning out buggy, useless software and promised to make the civil servants in the ICT Ministry proud of their organisation once again.

Speaking at the IT Press Club, Minister Sitthichai said that he was looking for an investment of around 20 billion baht for Thai Mobile and between 10 and 18 billion for CAT in order to complete the roll-out of next generation communication networks for the two former state enterprises.

Sitthichai said on detailed questioning that Thai Mobile would upgrade its network and operate a WCDMA 3G network while CAT Telecom would roll out a CDMA2000 EV-DO network.

He said that rather than using public money to compete with the private sector, he expected today's private mobile operators to gladly become partners to CAT and TOT and effectively lease their networks and focus on the marketing aspect. He reasoned that none of the incumbents would want to invest in a 3G network as 4G would come along in five years and render today's investments obsolete.

Today this is done in many countries. Virgin Mobile uses the T-Mobile and Singtel networks in the UK and Singapore, respectively, to operate as a virtual network, for instance.

"I see no reason to put CAT or TOT in the stock market, but I'm saying this to a group of Thai journalists. Tomorrow I will be talking to foreign journalists and I will tell them that CAT and TOT will be put on the market at a suitable time, which is not now," he said in one of his typical moments of candour.

The ICT Minister disagreed with privatisation of the nation's telecommunications infrastructure, suggesting private firms would only work for their shareholders' profit and neglect rural areas and redundant infrastructure for disaster recovery as neither are profitable. He said that CAT and TOT could easily ask for budget for large-scale investment projects directly from the government budget.

He also said that merging TOT and CAT would be inevitable and he would look at merging the three boards of directors (along with Thailand Post, itself half of what was the Communications Authority of Thailand) in a few months.

On the subject of open source software, he said the current government plan was a case of the blind leading the blind, as neither the people who are in charge nor the people in industry seem to know the dangers of open source software.

"With open source, there is no intellectual property. Anyone can use it and all your ideas become public domain. If nobody can make money from it, there will be no development and open source software quickly be-



ICT Minister Sitthichai... puts forth his radical vision for 3G in Thailand, but views open source as buggy, useless software

comes outdated," he said.

Apart from Linux, he claimed that most open source software is often abandoned and not developed, and leads to a lot of low-quality software with lots of bugs.

"As a programmer, if I can write good code, why should I give it away? Thailand can do good source code without open source," he said.

The new ICT Minister expressed his belief in censorship and said that even the most avid freedom of speech advocate would change his mind if he sees doctored pictures of his daughter's head on a naked body posted on the Internet.

The ICT Ministry will soon put forward

draft Acts to the National Legislative Assembly on cybercrime and on web sites that are pornographic or considered lese majeste, allowing officials to arrest, fine and imprison offenders.

In another reversal of policy from the previous government, Minister Sitthichai said that the ICT Ministry was as important as the Ministry of Commerce or Industry and would increase in importance in the future. Previously, there was talk of disbanding the ICT Ministry and absorbing its functions into the Ministry of Science and Technology.

He said that in the past, the previous government had a choice of putting in place a capable ICT Minister or one who could be easily controlled by politicians.

"Those with capability may love the country too much while others may do everything and anything just to remain in power as Minister. I'm not talking about any political party in particular," he said.

Sitthichai said that his number one priority would be in making the ICT Ministry more transparent and make the people who work in it proud to work in a clean and effective organisation.

"All our problems start with a lack of transparency. If people are not corrupt, procurement will be faster and better. Putting in place new projects and hiring talented people will be easier. I don't understand why all the committee meetings are secret. All the doors should be open to observers," he said, adding that the media can now sit in front of his own office and see the facial expressions of the people who visit him and whether they leave his office smiling or crying.

He said that problems in projects such as the smart ID card project arose because of a need to interpret grey areas of the Terms of Reference. He said the new ToR would be open to public debate so that there would be no room for interpretation and no room for corruption.

Sitthichai also called the e-Auction regulations a mess and a pointless show of technology, with no real impact on preventing corruption or collusion.

However, as much as he would prefer paper auctions, he cannot do much as e-Auctions are now part of the Ministry of Finance regulations.

Moving forward, Minister Sitthichai said he looked forward to working with his friend and Sipa director Dr Arvuth Ploysongsaeng. He said that we can expect a new ICT Master Plan by ICT Expo in August. He said that the IT sector should continue to focus on animation and multimedia and outsourcing, to which he would like to add embedded systems as a top priority.

THAILAND NEEDS MORE R&D FOCUS

Story by DON SAMBANDARAKSA

Thailand needs to set up more communities for R&D across the country and nurture the capability to create its own intellectual property to survive in the next 10 to 20 years, according to Dr Rom Hirapruk, assistant-president of the National Science and Technology Development Agency, who warned the country cannot continue to import know-how forever.

The former Software Park Thailand director said that the time was now right to start expanding the Science Park concept across the country to foster creativity and home-grown IP.

Today Malaysia, Singapore and even Vietnam and the Philippines are focusing on creating knowledge workers and in creating intellectual property, he said.

Taiwan made the transition to an IP-based economy in 20 years. Korea and Japan took longer. Malaysia, in particular, has set up centres of excellence on palm oil production and today has the highest palm oil yields in the world.

Today, Toyota is doing limited R&D here, but rather than being a strategic investment, it is here only because its factories are here and it needs to research and address Thai-specific problems for its workforce.

One success story is the NSTDA's research into fermented pork sausages. Traditionally, people relied on natural airborne bacteria, however, this was unpredictable and carried the risk of dangerous bacteria taking hold. By carefully selecting and experimenting with different strains of bacteria, today Thailand can make consistent fermented pork sausages which also enjoy a longer shelf-life.

Today, four provinces in the Northeast are ready to set up a science park to pool their resources and create a cluster, or R&D community, while 10 provinces in the South are also ready to set up a regional science park.

"I'm eager to see where this government will focus their budget," Rom said.

Rom, who recently failed in his bid to become Sipa president, said that he was not interested in running for the position of the chairperson of the Sipa Board as he was still young and energetic. He said that older, respected industry figures would be more appropriate for the job.

"But if you get someone who doesn't know anything about IT, you will end up with the same problems we've had up until now," he warned.

Rom also questioned whether ICT Minister Sitthichai Pokaiudom would be able to break down the "not invented here" syndrome, which has prevented the ICT Ministry from tapping into the wealth of ICT knowledge that the NSTDA, Nectec and Software Park have.

IT DANGERS MESSAGE OFFERED FOR HANDHELD OVERUSE

Help for 'Blackberry Thumb'

Toronto — Sore thumbs after spending hours on a hand-held email device? Sounds like a case of "BlackBerry Thumb" — but help is at hand.

The Hyatt hotel chain found so many of its business travellers were complaining of hand and arm discomfort that it introduced a special "BlackBerry Balm" hand massage at most of its North American spas.

Corporate spa director Kyra Johnson said guests began asking masseurs to spend more time on their hands and arms because of the growing popularity of PDA devices like BlackBerrys and Treos.

The 30-minute massage begins with heat treatment and uses a "BlackBerry Balm." It "focuses on counteracting tension on various hand and arm muscles, specifically in the thumbs and overworked wrists," according to a Hyatt statement.

The American Physical Therapy Association recently recognised BlackBerry Thumb as an official work place malady — a stress-related injury due to over-use of any PDA or smartphone.

Ontario-based Research In Motion's BlackBerry became a technological must-have in the late 1990s as a tool that delivers email to users on the move. It is jokingly called a "CrackBerry" by many users.

Professor Alan Hedge, an ergonomics specialist at Cornell University in New York state, said the condition is caused by "highly repetitive, forceful thumb movements with the thumbs held back from the palms."

"It's a bit like the "Nintendo thumb" of the '90s," said occupational therapist Andrew Morton, referring to people who spent hours battering hand-held video games with their thumbs. REUTERS



First Thai animation movie "Khan Kluyay" features a cuddlier-than-Dumbo elephant. The animation and outsourcing sectors gained strong support from the new minister.

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