

Sovereign AI in Southeast Asia

A practical blueprint for trusted,
resilient and locally governed
intelligence



The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.



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with confidence

About this paper

Why this paper

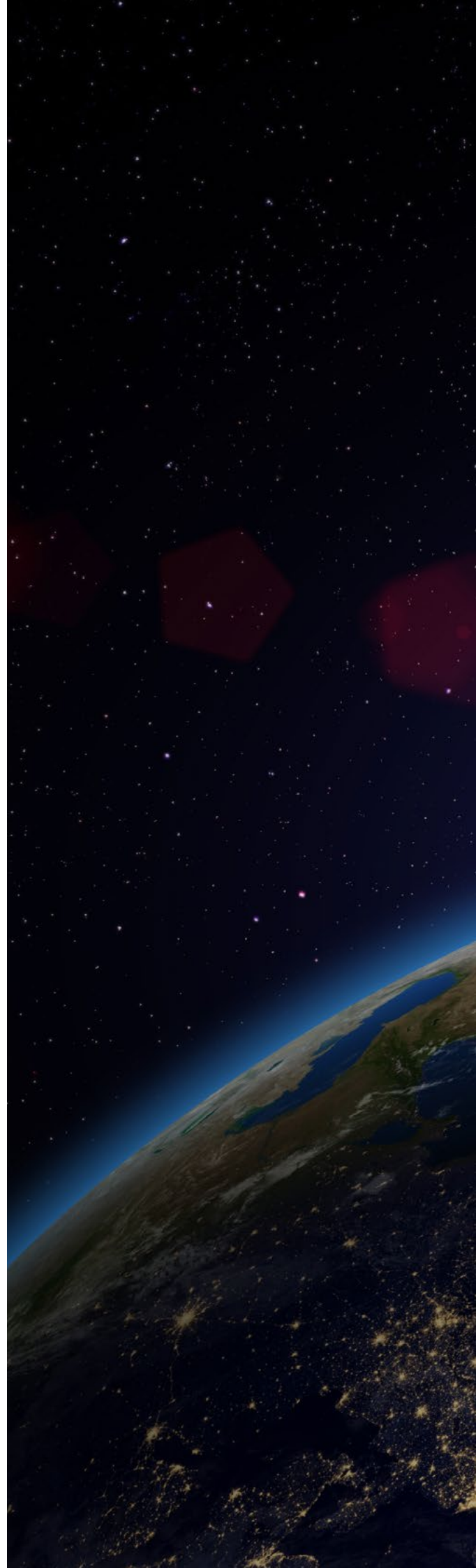
- **Sovereign AI has become urgent:** Southeast Asia should consider ensuring that critical AI systems remain governed and aligned within national boundaries as reliance on AI accelerates across essential services.
- **Clear, practical guidance is needed:** Governments and enterprises require a workable approach to close sovereignty gaps without replacing core systems.
- **This paper provides that path:** translating sovereign intent into an operational model that works across existing infrastructure and complex environments.
- **The ey.ai Sovereign Decisions Operating Layer or DecisionsOL** is introduced as the sovereign decision layer: the in-country operating system that coordinates data, models, actions, and oversight so AI can scale safely under domestic control.

Who this is for

- **Public leaders and regulators:** Ministries, agencies and oversight bodies shaping national posture and assurance.
- **Enterprise decision-makers:** C-suite in regulated industries seeking trusted, in-country AI at scale.
- **Ecosystem collaborators:** AI or data architects and ecosystem partners (infrastructure, compute, models, integrators).

What you will take away

- **A clear definition of sovereign AI** and why it matters for Southeast Asia's competitiveness, trust and resilience.
- **A practical operating model:** a four-layer sovereign architecture with governance embedded at runtime.
- **A concrete industry example** showing how telcos enable and benefit from sovereign AI.
- **A path to value:** why orchestration beats replacement and how sovereign capability scales safely.
- **EY's role in providing DecisionsOL** and orchestrating the ecosystem from intent to operational sovereignty.



Content

Why Southeast Asia needs sovereign AI now

- AI adoption accelerates across Southeast Asia
 - Why control, context and location matter
 - The burning platform for Southeast Asia
 - An operating model for governable, aligned AI
-

Southeast Asia's momentum and the gaps that remain

- Sovereign AI readiness snapshot across Southeast Asia
 - The remaining operational gaps
-

The ecosystem that closes the sovereign AI gaps

- Four actors form the foundation of sovereign AI
-

Introducing DecisionsOL: the operating system that unifies the ecosystem

- Three core shifts DecisionsOL helps enable
 - One architecture – four layers
-

Advancing sovereign AI: national and enterprise opportunities

- Regional opportunity shaped by urgency and momentum
 - A shared opportunity for government and industry
 - A platform for continuous national capability
 - Sovereign AI interoperability
-

Case in point: telcos at the heart of sovereign AI

- Telco as an enabler of sovereign AI
 - Telco as a beneficiary of sovereign AI
-

How EY supports sovereign AI at scale

- A collaboration that turns posture into operating reality
 - DecisionsOL as the foundation of sovereign operations
 - Strengthening governance, architecture and assurance
 - Advising on regulatory compliance and sovereign risk
 - Coordinating a multi-party ecosystem for safe scale
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Call to action



Why Southeast Asia needs sovereign AI now

AI adoption accelerates across Southeast Asia

Across Southeast Asia, AI is moving rapidly from pilot initiatives to the core of how governments, large enterprises, and regulated industries operate. From national infrastructure to healthcare, finance and public services, AI is becoming an essential capability rather than an experimental one. As these organizations lean more heavily on AI, a critical question emerges: **How can they scale innovation while ensuring AI remains aligned with local priorities, regulatory expectations and long-term resilience?**

Why control, context and location matter

For governments and regulated sectors, sovereignty is not simply about where AI systems are hosted – though location remains an essential baseline. The deeper challenge is maintaining meaningful control over how AI systems behave, make decisions and evolve over time.

As AI increasingly affects citizens, customers and mission-critical operations, organizations need assurance that these systems operate according to domestic frameworks, not assumptions embedded in foreign platforms.

The burning platform for Southeast Asia

AI systems that influence security, service delivery, financial integrity and public trust are often trained, updated or inferred on platforms beyond national oversight. This creates a sovereignty gap: where critical decisions are shaped by models, guardrails or update cycles that cannot be fully monitored or governed in-country.

With geopolitical uncertainty, tightening digital regulations and growing competition for compute, this gap carries rising operational, regulatory and strategic risk. The next 18–24 months will determine whether Southeast Asia becomes a shaper of AI rules and standards or a taker of defaults set elsewhere.

An operating model for governable, aligned AI

Sovereign AI provides the operating model needed to keep AI aligned and accountable as scale increases. It enables organizations to monitor, tune and govern AI systems under domestic oversight, ensuring transparent decision lineage, regulatory compliance and continuous policy alignment. Rather than slowing innovation, sovereign AI creates the guardrails and visibility needed for high-value adoption – allowing governments and enterprises to innovate with confidence while safeguarding trust, safety and resilience.

Defining sovereign AI

Sovereign AI means that the models, decisions and behaviors influencing critical services and national outcomes remain governed, monitored and aligned within national boundaries, not external defaults.

Sovereign AI also encompasses control over data, infrastructure, compute, guardrails, update cycles and the operating environment – ensuring sovereignty across the full lifecycle of how AI is developed, deployed and hosted. It provides a framework where data, models and decision-making stay explainable, auditable and under domestic oversight, enabling responsible innovation at scale.

Southeast Asia's momentum and the gaps that remain

ASEAN markets have taken meaningful steps to define responsible AI principles, update privacy laws and launch assurance initiatives. Yet the region is progressing at different speeds, and what is still missing is a shared,

operational sovereign AI model that clarifies where AI runs, how it is governed, and how decisions remain aligned with national intent.

Sovereign AI readiness snapshot across Southeast Asia

Market	Key developments
Singapore	Operationalized AI assurance at scale through AI Verify and the Global AI Assurance Sandbox, allowing real-world testing of GenAI systems. Complemented by the Model AI Governance Framework for Generative AI (2024), aligned with emerging global standards.
Malaysia	Modernized the Personal Data Protection Act (PDPA) with major 2025 amendments (breach notification, portability, mandatory DPOs). Issued National Guidelines on AI Governance & Ethics (2024) and established the National AI Office to coordinate implementation and upcoming legislation.
Thailand	Released Draft Principles for an AI Law (2025) adopting a risk-based framework, defining prohibited and high-risk AI and pairing guardrails with innovation sandboxes and co-regulation. The PDPA remains the baseline for data governance.
Indonesia	Fully enforced the Personal Data Protection Law in late 2024. In 2025, the Constitutional Court clarified mandatory DPO requirements, tightening accountability for high-risk processing and AI-enabled operations.
Vietnam	Enacted ASEAN's first standalone AI Law (effective March 2026) and a revised Cyber security Law (2026). Together, they establish consolidated oversight and adopt a risk-based model influenced by frameworks like the EU AI Act.
Philippines	Issued AI guidance (2024) clarifying the application of the Data Privacy Act across training, testing and deployment, with expectations for transparency, bias mitigation and human oversight. Updated the National AI Strategy Roadmap 2.0 to accelerate governance and innovation.
ASEAN (Regional)	Adopted the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance & Ethics (2024) and the Expanded Guide for Generative AI (2025), providing shared principles – accountability, assurance, testing and provenance – for cross-border interoperability and trust.

The remaining operational gaps

Despite progress, **three operational gaps** consistently appear across Southeast Asia. These gaps determine whether sovereign AI can move from policy to practice:

1 Where models run

High-risk AI workloads are still often executed on foreign-hosted platforms. Without explicit in-country requirements, inference, update cycles and model behavior data can fall outside domestic oversight – a direct challenge to sovereignty.

2 How decisions are monitored

Requirements for runtime logging, activity records, reviewable decision trails and regulator-ready evidence are evolving unevenly. Assurance remains fragmented, creating uncertainty for both regulators and operators in high-stakes environments.

3 How AI stays aligned in production

Most frameworks explain how to assess AI risk, but they rarely show how to keep AI aligned once it is deployed. Organizations still lack clear guidance on continuous monitoring, testing and adjustment of models in live environments, especially when systems are distributed or use sensitive data.

These gaps limit the safe use of AI in sensitive domains such as citizen services, finance, healthcare, energy and border operations, particularly when cross-border services, cloud platforms or large foundation models are involved.

Why the next 18 months matter?

A short window now exists for Southeast Asian markets to turn sovereign intent into operational leadership and early movers will capture advantages that compound rapidly.

Set the standard early: Demonstrate domestic control, transparent decision trails and verifiable oversight to become the preferred choice for high-stakes public sector and regulated industry deployments.

Attract ecosystem gravity: Sovereign-ready environments draw model providers, compute capacity, investment and specialist talent, accelerating innovation.

Avoid technical debt: As hosting, logging and audit requirements tighten, non-sovereign architectures face costly retrofits, migrations and operational disruption.

Compute and energy disadvantage: Secure in-country compute becomes scarcer and more expensive for late adopters as early movers secure strategic capacity and long-term accelerator supply.

The ecosystem that closes the sovereign AI gaps

Sovereign AI requires a coordinated ecosystem. No single party can deliver sovereignty end-to-end. Hosting, compute, sovereign-compatible models and operating control must work together within national boundaries. Across Southeast Asia, this ecosystem is emerging, but without a unifying operating model, contributions remain fragmented and difficult to scale. The challenge is not component availability – it is integrating them into a system that operates coherently under domestic oversight. These actors sit within a broader sovereign AI stack, including sovereign data sets, energy and compute infrastructure, guardrails, model hosting, domestic operations and assurance.

Four actors form the foundation of sovereign AI:

1. **Infrastructure providers:** Deliver secure domestic environments where sensitive data and decision records remain within national jurisdiction.
2. **Compute providers:** Supply in-country accelerator capacity so self-hosted models run predictably and efficiently.
3. **Sovereign model providers:** Offer controllable and auditable models adapted to local language, regulation and sector needs.
4. **Architecture and integration leadership:** Connect these capabilities into a coherent sovereign operating model – designing the blueprint, integrating DecisionsOL across existing estates, coordinating multi-party delivery and ensuring control and scalability over time.

No single actor can close these gaps on their own.

Hosting cannot ensure sovereignty without aligned compute; compute cannot guarantee control without sovereign-ready models; and models cannot remain safe without strong governance. Each capability solves only part of the challenge.

Sovereign AI works only when all four actors operate in sync – with data, models, decisions and controls connected, consistent and accountable across every deployment.

What makes a sovereign AI ecosystem work

A sovereign posture holds only when every component operates as one coherent system under domestic oversight.

Sovereign AI depends on an ecosystem that functions as a coordinated whole, with each layer – from infrastructure to models – reinforcing the others so AI can operate safely, transparently and under national authority.

One operating model: Hosting, compute, models and enterprise systems align within a single architecture, not parallel streams.

Clear accountability: Roles, decision rights and escalation paths are defined and applied consistently across partners.

Integration that preserves control: Components interoperate without exposing model behavior or decision trails outside the jurisdiction.

Safe scale by design: As agents and data sets grow, coherence – not fragmentation – protects sovereignty, auditability and performance.

DecisionsOL is that unifying layer that makes this coherence real in day-to-day operations.



Advanced Monitoring

Ping: 53ms

(12.5)

(22.5)

(15.5)

Frequency:

75 GHz

Utilisation:

84 %

Data Compression:

Introducing DecisionsOL: the operating system that unifies the ecosystem

Sovereign AI becomes real only when hosting, compute, sovereign-ready models and enterprise systems operate as one coherent environment. DecisionsOL provides this capability through a domestically hosted decision layer that orchestrates data flows, model execution, decision formation and runtime oversight across existing systems without major platform replacement.

Beyond integration, DecisionsOL enables sovereignty to be exercised in day-to-day operations. It establishes a shared decision fabric where infrastructure, compute, sovereign-compatible models and enterprise applications operate as a coordinated, domestically governed system.

In doing so, DecisionsOL becomes the operational

backbone for sovereign-grade AI, ensuring that every decision – automated or human-in-the-loop – is fully traceable, governed and aligned to domestic policy requirements. By embedding governance, auditability and control into the decision lifecycle itself, it enables organizations to deploy advanced AI capabilities with confidence, knowing that data residency, model behavior and system interactions remain fully under national jurisdiction.

This allows institutions to scale AI-driven transformation while maintaining the integrity, security and autonomy expected of a sovereign digital ecosystem.

Three core shifts DecisionsOL helps enable:

1 Orchestration over replacement

Traditional modernization relies on replacing major systems; DecisionsOL instead orchestrates across them, introducing a sovereign reasoning layer with built-in governance that reduces risk and enables early value without disrupting operations.

2 Transparent, reviewable decision making

DecisionsOL keeps decision logic and evidence trails in-country, embedding runtime controls, human-in-the-loop pathways and audit logs directly into operations.

3 Scalable blueprint for domain agents

DecisionsOL accelerates deployment of domain-specific agents – from risk triage to clinical documentation – using self-hosted models aligned with national policy and local context.

Why DecisionsOL changes the game

Unifies the ecosystem: Connects hosting, compute, sovereign models and enterprise systems within one sovereign operating environment.

Preserves what works: Integrates across existing platforms, avoiding disruption and protecting long-term investments.

Builds trust into operations: Embeds governance, oversight, decision trails and control points directly into runtime.

Enables safe scale: Supports the expansion of agents, data sets and models while keeping sovereignty intact.

One architecture – four layers: the foundation for sovereign AI (powered by DecisionsOL).

These four layers translate the DecisionsOL framework into a sovereign-ready architecture for designing, orchestrating and governing intelligent agents across the enterprise.

Layer 4

Architecture, orchestration and oversight

Human in the loop governance, architectural coherence and adaptive autonomy.

DecisionsOL: Provides the integration fabric that aligns infrastructure, compute, models and enterprise systems into one coherent environment. It enforces policy, manages exceptions, supports human review and ensures that AI remains compliant, transparent and aligned with organizational and national standards.

Layer 3

Intelligent agent layer

Purpose-built agents for domain-specific decision-making.

DecisionsOL: Delivers and coordinates intelligent agents, and connects them to the sovereign data sets and policies they require. Agents operate on in-country, locally tuned data sets, supporting algorithmic sovereignty while maintaining alignment with national and organizational standards. DecisionsOL normalizes signals and coordinates agent-to-system actions so decisions move reliably and securely through existing workflows.

Layer 2

Unification and orchestration layer

Creates coherent intelligence across fragmented enterprise systems.

DecisionsOL: Normalizes and synchronizes signals from existing platforms, applies policy consistently, and coordinates agent to system actions so that decisions move reliably and securely through enterprise workflows without disrupting core operations.

Layer 1

Existing enterprise systems (keep as-is)

Core systems retained without replacement; modernized through selective integration.

DecisionsOL: Connects to ERP, CRM, clinical, finance and operational systems via APIs, routing decisions into existing workflows while preserving long-term investments and operational continuity.

Why this architecture matters

This layered design makes sovereign AI operational. DecisionsOL integrates the ecosystem into one coherent system – enabling trusted, locally governed intelligence that scales safely across sectors.



Advancing sovereign AI: national and enterprise opportunities

Regional opportunity shaped by urgency and momentum

Southeast Asia is at a pivotal moment. As AI moves into essential services and core economic activity, the region can define a model that is regionally coherent and nationally governed. Early movers will set the standards for trusted digital economies – gaining resilience, regulatory confidence and ecosystem investment. Sovereign AI provides the foundation by ensuring that data, models and decisions remain aligned with national priorities. Several ASEAN markets are also exploring AI for citizens' priorities – using sovereign AI to improve service accessibility, reduce administrative burden and create shared public value. Sovereign AI becomes not only a compliance requirement but an engine for national productivity and inclusive digital growth.

A shared opportunity for government and industry

This opportunity spans public and private sectors. Governments gain stronger control over critical decision systems, better interoperability across ministries and improved national resilience. Enterprises benefit from transparent, auditable AI that meets regulatory expectations and avoids dependence on externally governed models. In both contexts, sovereign AI enables faster deployment of high-value capability without compromising accountability or oversight. Sovereignty is not binary. Organizations can decide what they need to own, what they must control and where they can influence, applying different levels of sovereignty across data sets, models, infrastructure and operations. This layered approach helps institutions balance cost, risk and performance while building the national and enterprise capabilities required for long-term resilience and strategic autonomy.

A platform for continuous national capability

Sovereign AI is not a one-off program. It is an operating capability that strengthens with each deployment, dataset and agent added to the architecture. Early adopters see compounding returns: improved model performance, stronger assurance and better readiness for cross-border digital interaction – creating a self-reinforcing ecosystem of in-country expertise and sovereign-ready infrastructure.

Sovereign AI interoperability

As ASEAN economies integrate, sovereign AI systems must also support safe cross-border data flows and interoperable oversight frameworks – essential for regional enterprises.

2026 to 2028: The sovereignty divide

Policy to production: Markets that operationalize sovereignty now become the default venues for high-stakes AI; late movers adapt to others' playbooks under tighter timelines.

Assurance as currency: Verifiable, in-country decision trails win regulator preference and budget; weak evidence chains slow approvals and squeeze deployment windows.

Architecture gap: Non-sovereign designs face forced migrations as hosting, logging and audit rules harden, raising costs and risking service disruption during retrofits.

Compounding advantage: Each dataset, model and agent added to a governed environment lifts accuracy, assurance and speed to value; laggards face a widening performance and trust gap.

Talent gravity shifts: Skilled practitioners, model builders and ecosystem partners cluster around early sovereign adopters, creating capability gaps that become harder and costlier for late movers to close.

Case in point: telcos at the heart of sovereign AI

Telco as an enabler of sovereign AI

Building the infrastructure, networks and digital backbone that sovereignty relies on

Consider a telecommunications provider in Southeast Asia operating national-scale mobile, broadband and digital platforms. As data volumes surge and AI becomes embedded in essential services, the telco now sits at the core of the country's sovereign digital infrastructure. Sovereign AI depends on this infrastructure.

Telcos are uniquely positioned to provide the in-country bandwidth, compute, identity, routing and security environments required for sovereign-ready AI systems to operate safely and reliably.

Why telcos are central enablers of sovereign AI

- National networks provide secure transport where sensitive data, logs and decision signals move within domestic boundaries.
- Edge and in-country compute allow high-risk inference workloads to run locally with low latency.
- Identity and billing systems uphold traceability, verification trails and user-level audit requirements.
- Domestic data center presence provides hosting for sovereign models and oversight-ready decision layers.
- Carrier-grade resilience supports uninterrupted AI operations for critical sectors (e.g., finance, health, citizen services).

A sovereign-ready infrastructure pattern a telco can support

- Hosting of Sovereign Small Language Models (SSLMs) – compact, self-hosted models tuned to local context and regulation.

- In-country inference paths ensuring model behavior never leaves domestic jurisdiction.
- Secure data transport routes to preserve auditability, provenance and policy alignment.
- Edge accelerators enabling near real-time reasoning for network operations, fraud detection and citizen service workloads.
- Multizone redundancy for sovereign workloads across the telco's national footprint.

As ASEAN markets accelerate their digital ambitions, telcos have a defining opportunity to anchor trustworthy, sovereign-ready AI ecosystems. By combining secure national networks with in-country compute, data stewardship and carrier-grade resilience, they become essential guardians of compliant, high-performance AI.

Telcos that invest early in sovereign architectures will not only strengthen national digital autonomy but also unlock differentiated, future-proof value for governments and industries.

What this unlocks for Southeast Asia

Sovereign AI creates a trusted, in-country AI backbone that keeps data and inference within national boundaries, enables smoother deployment across ministries and regulated sectors, strengthens resilience for high-risk workloads, and reduces exposure to supply chain or geopolitical disruption.

Telco as a beneficiary of sovereign AI

Transforming customer experience, operations and revenue models with SSLMs and sovereign orchestration

The same ASEAN telco also stands to benefit directly from sovereign AI.

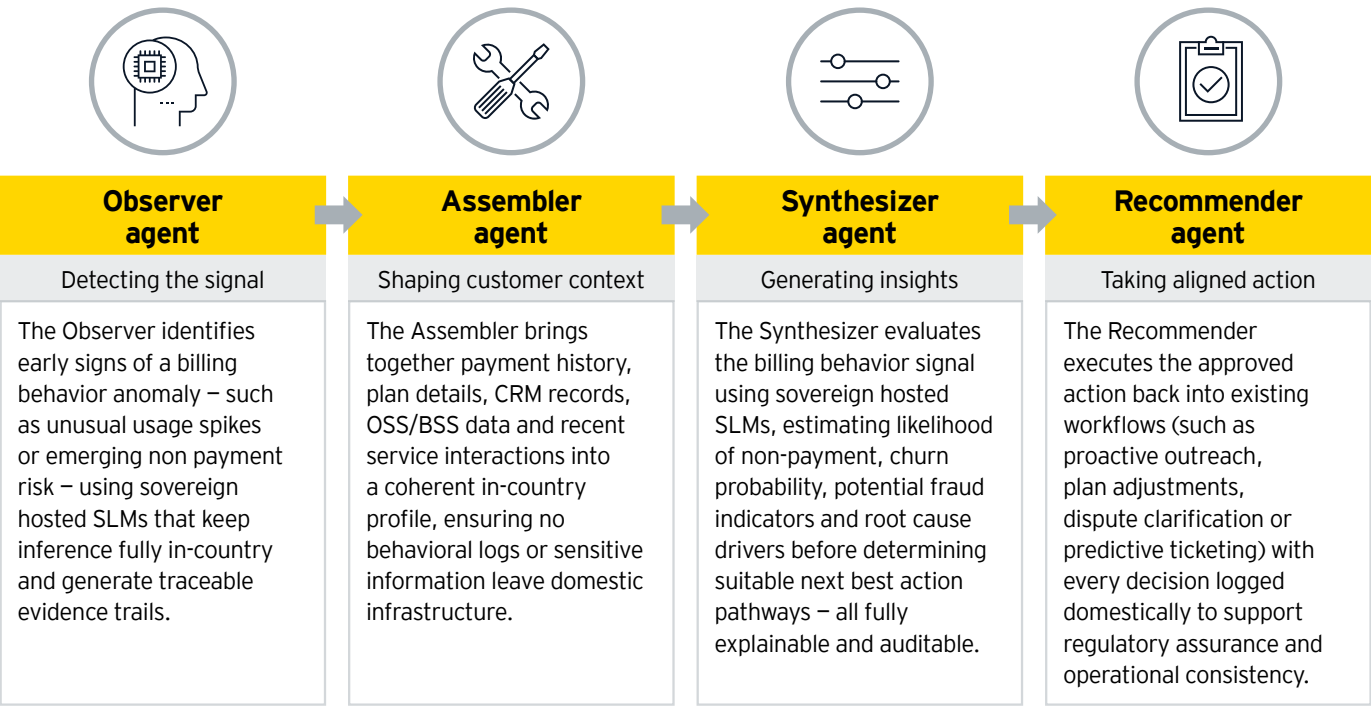
Many of its highest value use cases – identity verification, fraud detection, churn prediction, billing resolution, network optimization – still rely on externally hosted large language models.

These bring risks: offshore inference, opaque updates, limited audit logs, and regulatory friction.

By adopting sovereign Small Language Models (SSLMs) and a sovereign decision layer, the telco can modernize core operations while keeping model behavior and evidence trails fully in-country.

Sovereign AI in practice

A billing behavior anomaly journey



What sovereign AI delivers for a telco

- **Higher service performance:** Higher first contact Resolution through sovereign reasoning along with lower AHT via safe autonomous troubleshooting.
- **Digital sales uplift:** Personalized, context-aware offers through domestic models along with reduced reliance on expensive retail channels.
- **Safer AI automation:** 100% local audit trails for identity, credit and fraud decisions along with transparent guardrails and behaviour controls.
- **Predictive, autonomous network operations:** Early detection of faults, energy optimization and touch free maintenance pathways.
- **National digital resilience:** No dependency on foreign inference, local authority over updates, tuning and guardrails; and continuity during supply chain or geopolitical shocks.

How EY supports sovereign AI at scale

A collaboration that turns posture into operating reality

Delivering sovereign AI at scale requires a unifying operating model where infrastructure, compute, models and governance work together under domestic oversight. Our role is to help organizations translate sovereign intent into practical capability – facilitating adoption is structured, accountable and aligned with national expectations.

DecisionsOL as the foundation of sovereign operations

DecisionsOL provides the locally hosted decision layer that connects existing systems with self-hosted models and domain agents. With governance and auditability embedded directly into runtime, organizations can scale quickly while retaining full control over how AI behaves, evolves and interacts with mission-critical systems.

Strengthening governance, architecture and assurance

Sovereign AI depends on clear decision rights, consistent oversight and verifiable evidence. We support organizations in defining posture, establishing governance frameworks and building the sovereign architecture required to meet sector and regulatory expectations from day one. This includes aligning standards, codifying controls and operationalizing assurance so that sovereignty is maintained at scale.

Advising on regulatory compliance and sovereign risk

Teams can draw on our experience to interpret emerging sovereign requirements, assess regulatory readiness and identify where model behavior, data flows or decision trails may introduce sovereign risk. We help institutions design the safeguards, monitoring capabilities and review mechanisms required to advance safely and confidently.

Coordinating a multi-party ecosystem for safe scale

Scaling sovereign AI relies on contributions across infrastructure, compute, models and sector platforms. We bring these actors together through a coherent operating model, facilitating interoperability and preserving future strategic choice.

As organizations turn intent into execution, the key question is what makes sovereign AI work.

Why sovereign AI demands leadership now

Sovereign AI is emerging at a time when supply chains, digital infrastructure and cross-border data flows are increasingly shaped by geopolitical uncertainty. In this environment, the ability to govern data, models and decision systems within national boundaries becomes a strategic asset – protecting continuity, resilience and trust when external conditions shift.

The organizations and economies that can align infrastructure, compute, models and governance internally may carry a premium of control. They will be able to innovate safely at scale, withstand external shocks and shape the standards others follow. Achieving this level of coherence requires clarity, capability and partners who can help translate sovereign intent into day-to-day operational reality.

Call to action

Sovereign AI is no longer a technology decision. It is a national and enterprise strategy for the next decade.

The moment for action is here. Organizations that move early will set the standards for sovereign-ready AI across Southeast Asia and may be able to secure the strategic advantages that follow. EY supports organizations throughout this journey – helping align posture, establish architecture and deploy sovereign capability with confidence.

Align direction: Begin with a strategic briefing to clarify posture, regulatory expectations and priority domains where sovereign capability delivers immediate value.

Establish the blueprint: Commission a focused sovereign AI blueprint to define the architecture, governance model and implementation pathway required for in-country deployment.

Accelerate with assurance: Advance with sovereign-ready capability that remains fully under domestic oversight – guided by experience in operational governance, ecosystem coordination and safe, structured delivery.

Early leadership will shape Southeast Asia's sovereign digital trajectory for years to come.



Gaurav Modi

EY Asean and Singapore
Managing Partner, Consulting,
Ernst & Young Solutions LLP
gaurav.modi@sg.ey.com



Manik Bhandari

EY Asean Data and Artificial
Intelligence Leader
manik.bhandari@sg.ey.com



Rajesh Kottul

Partner, EY Indonesia Consulting
Leader, PT Ernst & Young Indonesia
rajesh.kottul1@id.ey.com



Hardeep Arora

Partner, Technology Consulting,
Ernst & Young Solutions LLP
hardeep.arora@sg.ey.com



Sukalp-S Sharma

Associate Partner, Technology
Consulting, Ernst & Young
Advisory Pte. Ltd.
sukalp-s.sharma@sg.ey.com

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