



ASEAN ON POINT

20 / 01 / 2021

**PUBLIC FORUM FAKE NEWS:
TACKLING DISINFORMATION
IN ASEAN**

ASEAN ON POINT PUBLIC FORUM SERIES

In response to the global coronavirus pandemic, the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) and the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), created a series of public forums – ‘ASEAN on Point’ - to address issues of importance to the advancement of ASEAN. The forums will provide a platform to bring together representatives of diverse stakeholders to share knowledge on the latest research and insights on relevant topics on post-pandemic recovery in order to inform the policy discourse. It is hoped that the insights and recommendations from the forums can contribute to different sectoral work in ASEAN towards recovery. The vision of these Forums is to ‘Build Back Better’ so that the region’s recovery policies result in a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable region.

SPEAKER:

- Marites Vitug
- Donny Eryastha
- Trieu Minh Long

MODERATOR :

- Kavi Chongkittavorn

AGENDA

TIME	AGENDA
10:00 – 10:05 AM	<p>MC: Ms Lydia Ruddy, Director of Communications, ERIA</p> <p>Welcoming Remarks</p> <p>H.E. Kung Phoak, Deputy Secretary-General ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community</p> <p>Mr Koji Hachiyama, COO of ERIA</p>
10:05 – 10:45 AM	<p>Moderator: Mr Kavi Chongkittavorn, Senior Communications Advisor, ERIA</p> <p>Panelists</p> <p>Ms Marites Vitug, Editor-at-Large Rappler, Philippines</p> <p>Mr Donny Eryastha, Head of Public Policy, ByteDance (TikTok)</p> <p>Mr Trieu Minh Long, Director-General, Ministry of Information and Communications, Viet Nam</p>
10:45 – 11:00 AM	Q&A
	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <p>Ms Lydia Ruddy, Director of Communications, ERIA</p>

PANELISTS AND MODERATOR



H.E. Kung Phoak is appointed as the Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) of ASEAN for ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) from 2018 to 2021. He supports the Secretary-General of ASEAN by providing leadership in implementing the ASCC Blueprint and will lead the ASCC Department of the ASEAN Secretariat. He will also oversee the implementation of projects under ASCC that focus on forging a common identity and building a caring and sharing society.

Before assuming this role, DSG Kung was the Undersecretary of State at the Office of the Council of Ministers of the Royal Government of Cambodia and was working on foreign policy in the Office of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia. He is a Grand Cross of the Royal Order of Cambodia.

H.E. Kung co-founded the Cambodian Institute for Strategic Studies, which started in 2014 as a network of Cambodian and foreign scholars called Cambodian Strategic Study Group aimed at providing pragmatic, non-partisan and evidence-based policy solutions. He had been a visiting Doctoral scholar at the University of Oxford in United Kingdom and Cornell University in United States of America.

DSG Kung was doing his PhD in political science and international relations at the University of Warwick, United Kingdom. He obtained Master's degree in public policy and Graduate Diploma in public administration at Australian National University under the Australian Federal Government scholarship. He obtained a bachelor's degree in industrial and mechanical engineering at the Institut de Technologie du Cambodge under the Royal Government of Cambodia scholarship. He has written and published extensively on foreign policy, defense policy, national politics, and international trade.

DSG Kung is married to Madame Maly Socheata.



Koji Hachiyama is Chief Operating Officer of Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). Mr Hachiyama started his career in the Ministry of International Trade and Industry of Japan (now known as the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry) in 1992 and served in various positions including the Embassy of Japan in Indonesia (1997-2001) throughout the years. In the past two years, Mr Hachiyama served as the Counsellor in the National Strategy Office of ICT, the Cabinet Secretariat of Japan. From 2014 to 2017, He served as the Director of IT Department in JETRO New York and the Head of the New York Representative office of IPA (Japan's Information Technology Promotion Agency).

Mr. Hachiyama obtained his Bachelor's and Master's degree in Engineering from the Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan.



Kavi Chongkittavorn is currently a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, and Senior Communication Advisor at Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA). His research interests are US foreign policy toward Southeast Asia, especially with Thailand, the future of Indo-Pacific, and regional security architecture. He was an Asia Studies Visiting Fellow at the East-West Center in Washington from April-June 2018 and a former editor in chief of Myanmar Times from February to December 2017. He has been a journalist for the past three decades with the English daily, The Nation, from 1984-2013 as reporter, editor, managing editor, and editorial writer. From 1994-1995, he served as a special assistant to ASEAN Secretary-General based in Jakarta. He is also a columnist for The Bangkok Post.



Marites Danguilan Vitug has been a journalist for almost four decades and is one of the Philippines' most accomplished journalists. A bestselling author, Marites has written eight books on Philippine current affairs. She is the former editor of Newsbreak, a pioneering political magazine. Currently, she is editor at large of www.rappler.com.

Her book, *Rock Solid: How the Philippines won its maritime dispute against China*, won the National Book Award for best book in journalism in 2019. She wrote books on the Supreme Court and the Muslim rebellion in Mindanao, among others. She also co-wrote a book, *Breathing Democracy: A Playbook*, which will be released in hard copy in 2021. An online version is available at <https://cald.org/>.



Donny Eryastha is the Head of Public Policy for Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines at TikTok. He has served in various policy leadership roles at tech companies, the World Bank, as well as the Indonesian government. He received his master's in public administration from Harvard University and bachelor's in economics from the University of Indonesia.



Trieu Minh Long is Director General of International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Information and Communications of Viet Nam (since January 2020). He used to be Deputy Director-General of International Cooperation (since 2011). He is responsible for coordinating and developing ICT and broadcasting programs and activities in cooperation with other countries and international organizations. He has been coordinating Viet Nam's cooperation in ASEAN for about 20 years in both Information and Digital sectors and is now the SOMRI Leader and ADGSOM Leader of Viet Nam.

Prior to being appointed to this position, he was the Deputy Director of the Viet Nam ICT Development Project (2009) which is under the Ministry of Information and Communications of Viet Nam (in charge of coordinating the promotion and investment in ICT applications in major ministries and provinces in Viet Nam.

He has joined the Ministry since 1995, undertaking various responsibilities of coordinating programs and activities for in international cooperation in the fields of information and broadcasting; telecommunications and ICT; and post.

He holds a Master degree of Economics from Viet Nam National University of Economics, BA of Laws from the Hanoi National University.

EVENT OVERVIEW

Fake news and misinformation are emerging challenges that the ASEAN Member States must address as access to internet and digital media grows exponentially among ASEAN citizens. Data for January 2020 from We Are Social (2020) reports that internet penetration rate in the region is 66%, which reflects a year-on-year growth of 8.2%. Social media usage is at 63%, a 7.7% increase from the previous year.

ASEAN is taking concrete steps to prevent fake news and misinformation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic that can potentially sow a climate of distrust. Since 2017, efforts to address fake news and misinformation have figured significantly in ASEAN's activities. In 2017, the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) convened a Roundtable Discussion on Fake News and Communicating the Right Information, and have since adopted the Framework and Joint Declaration to Minimise the Harmful Effects of Fake News in 2018. ASEAN also launched the Core Values on Digital Literacy for ASEAN which aims to promote greater cyber security as part of the efforts to counter online falsehoods.

Most recently, the AMRI adopted the Joint Statement to Minimise the Negative Effects of COVID-19 which demonstrates the region's resolve to encourage regular exchanges of official updates and information, develop regional guidelines and a common platform to facilitate timely sharing of information, enhance information mechanisms and working groups, encourage effective and transparent public communication, promote media ethics and social responsibility among media, encourage enhancement of media and information literacy and digital competencies, support use of digital technologies, encourage development of initiatives and projects concerning risk or crisis communication, and further strengthen media and information cooperation.

WELCOMING REMARKS

In his Welcoming Remarks, the Deputy Secretary-General of the ASEAN Sociocultural Community, H.E. Kung Phoak, highlighted how the world's ongoing battle with the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the problem of disinformation. Pre-pandemic, around 439 million ASEAN citizens enjoyed the internet and access to the online world. During the pandemic, that figure has increased at least by 40 million new internet users in ASEAN. In addition, the average internet user in Southeast Asia spends an added hour online since the start of the global health crisis.

ASEAN acknowledges the importance of equipping its citizens with the skill and ability to discern facts from falsehood as it seeks to prevent an 'infodemic' from occurring. To nurture a digitally responsible society, ASEAN leaders adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy, and Harmonious Society during the 31st ASEAN Summit in 2020. ASEAN leaders have taken further steps to include the adoption of a framework and joint declaration by the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) to minimize the harmful effects of fake news with the core value on digital literacy.

ASEAN and its leaders remain committed to delivering a safer online space to its citizens and promoting digital literacy while recognizing that its realization requires a strong partnership of all stakeholders. In closing, H.E. Kung Phoak emphasized ASEAN's openness to collaborations and inputs to help the region become more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable during a period riddled with a pandemic and the threat of disinformation.

Chief Operating Officer of the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), Mr Koji Hachiyama, followed with his Welcoming Remarks in which he outlined the US Capitol riot incident as an example of the harmful influence of online misinformation. The Washington Post reported that online misinformation dropped by nearly 73% since former US President Donald Trump's social media accounts were removed, however, questions over free speech remain unanswered. Mr Hachiyama concluded his remarks by emphasizing that the situation in the US is a warning for ASEAN regarding the dangers of misinformation.

Panel Discussion

ERIA invited three guest speakers from relevant sectors of government, industry, and media to share their expert opinion on how to prevent the rise of disinformation and the spread of misinformation and fake news. The presenters discussed wide-ranging and often complex problems associated with disinformation and misinformation while reassuring that solutions are available to counter its harmful effects.

Editor-at-Large for Rappler in the Philippines, Ms Marites Vitug, was the first to share her insights on the trends of misinformation, the measures that individuals can implement to ensure the consumption of accurate information, as well as the Philippines' efforts in combatting the spread of fake news. Ms Vitug tackled the definitions of misinformation and disinformation early in her presentation given that, while commonly used, the terms have different meanings. The presentation outlined how 'Disinformation is a deliberate, often orchestrated, attempt to confuse or manipulate people through dishonest information' while 'Misinformation is misleading information created or disseminated without malicious intent to manipulate.'

ASEAN Member States (AMS) with high internet usage such as in the Philippines and Indonesia are at risk of becoming a hotbed of disinformation during a time when the perpetrators have adopted an increasingly sophisticated method of operation as the spread of fake news migrates to private chat groups. No individual or country is immune to the harmful effects of disinformation thus Ms Vitug suggests working with academics, citizens, and professional groups for fact-checking initiatives, conducting public digital and media literacy campaigns, and encouraging the public to be wary of content that appears 'too good to be true.'

The second speaker, Mr Donny Eryastha, Head of Public Policy Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines at ByteDance (TikTok) provided an industry perspective regarding matters on increasing digital literacy efforts, fact-checking initiatives in addition to underlining the role of regular users in the fight against fake news. TikTok has taken steps to safeguard its platform via its Community Guidelines which regulates contents coupled with the establishment of a team of moderators who monitor the platform's content. They have also established partnerships with external experts for fact-checking and regular reviews of existing policies.

Mr Eryastha echoed Ms Vitug and H.E. Kung Phoak by encouraging stakeholders across sectors to work together and play their part as the battle against disinformation cannot be undertaken alone. According to Mr Eryastha, the ultimate goal of having governments, NGOs, academics, and external organizations come together is to create a safe and positive internet environment for everyone.

The final speaker was Mr Trieu Minh Long, Director-General at the Ministry of Information and Communications in Viet Nam who provided a government's take on the spread of fake news in Southeast Asia. With 70% of the 650 million ASEAN citizens who live in rural and

mountainous areas have internet access yet limited knowledge on media and information literacy. Improving this skill is at the heart of Southeast Asian governments' agenda amid the 'infodemic.'

ASEAN has moved ahead with other anti-fake-news initiatives through the creation of government-run anti-fake-news centers, recruiting fact-checkers, and plans of setting up an ASEAN Taskforce where AMS can share their operational aspirations and issues in handling disinformation as well as tackling cross-border disinformation incidents. In his presentation, Mr Long shared that the regional body is aiming to develop software and technology that can swiftly detect fake news and notify users of false information that would otherwise exacerbate misinformation practices and lead to violation of the law.

Mr Long highlighted that the rapidly changing landscape of digital technology and disinformation has pushed ASEAN governments to prioritize the revision of existing laws and regulations on dealing with fake news to better reflect recent developments on the matter; it is for this reason that multi-sectoral cooperation is crucial for the region's anti-disinformation efforts.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue: Enforcing Disinformation Laws in AMS

Recommendation: AMS advised to update related laws and regulations on disinformation and enhance public awareness regarding disinformation laws.

Rationale: While AMS have their respective regulations on disinformation and downstream measures on perpetrators of disinformation that have so far been effective, the rapidly changing nature of the spread of fake news has required AMS to improve the legal and regulatory environment on combatting disinformation thus making close cooperation with relevant stakeholders necessary.

Further, many ASEAN citizens are unaware that spreading fake news is in violation of their state's disinformation law thus public awareness on criminal punishment on fake news must also be improved.

Issue: Ensuring Social Media Platforms Enforce Their Community Guidelines

Recommendation: Encourage all relevant stakeholders including media platforms, civil organizations, tech companies, and the public to play a role in countering disinformation.

Rationale: Creating a safe online space for everyone will require the collaboration of various parties encompassing governments, media, tech platforms, academia, and civil society amid the increasingly rapid spread of fake news and disinformation practices. Tech platforms can actively seek inputs from external experts and fact-checking partners to ensure proper follow-through of their community guidelines.

The pace at which fake news travels requires that everyone play a part in contributing to anti-disinformation practices including regular users who can be encouraged to monitor and report acts of misinformation to site admins and moderators.

Issue: : Lack of Media and Information Literacy in ASEAN

Recommendations: Actively launch educative measures and creative campaigns to boost media and information literacy through partnerships with content creators, educational institutions, and organizations to disseminate the information.

Rationale: ASEAN acknowledges the need to advocate for upstream preventive measures such as enhancing media and information literacy among ASEAN citizens in its regional anti-disinformation efforts. Increased knowledge on the subjects aims to assist internet users to discern facts from falsehood thus better identifying if the content is fake news. Tech platforms can also work with government agencies and content creators to offer tips on safe internet use thus aiding in enhancing media and information literacy in ASEAN.

Issue: Limitations of Existing Media Literacy Campaigns

Recommendations: Develop media literacy manuals and materials that are inclusive and easy to understand for all age groups.

Rationale: Misinformation affects everyone regardless of their age or other factors thus older people are equally at risk of the dangers of fake news as are the younger demographic. AMS should consider prioritizing disseminating media literacy information at the school level to children as the youth population gains access to the internet at an increasingly early age. Although the user base of tech platforms such as TikTok is of the younger demographic, older people nonetheless use social media platforms, thus media literacy campaigns must be directed towards all users.

Issue: Improving Fact-Checking Sources

Recommendation: Encourage cooperation between universities, media organizations, and tech platforms for media literacy initiatives as well as fact-checking programs

Rationale: The role of universities is integral in the battle against fake news as it would better equip individuals with the knowledge to identify fact from falsehood. As such, universities can practice media literacy initiatives in the classroom followed by outreach to traditional media and social media.

Academics can additionally serve as fact-checkers for ASEAN governments and social media platforms though they can also provide inputs to improve company policies and enforcements

against fake news, as had been done by TikTok and in the Philippines. Governments, the public, and tech platforms in ASEAN can refer to fact-checking sources that are regularly tapped for information verification such as Rappler, AFP, Lead Stories, and Vera Files.

Issue: Best Practices for Controlling Fake News in ASEAN Post-Pandemic

Recommendation: Initiate close collaboration among AMS, media agencies, and tech platforms to tackle disinformation, misinformation, and the spread of fake news swiftly and effectively.

Rationale: As fake news spreads faster, public and private stakeholders must be proactive in sharing information to the public and in warning the public about false information that is circulating. Given the trend of online misinformation, tech companies must work closely with ASEAN governments to detect fake news and offer a timely response.

Issue: Handling Cross-Border (Extra-Territorial) Fake News

Recommendation: Set up an ASEAN Taskforce designated to tackle regional and global fake news and encourage ASEAN governments and its media sector to proactively share information on dealing with the phenomenon.

Rationale: All AMS face an 'infodemic' battle that will see the practice spread even faster in line with greater technological dependency thus regional cooperation will be integral in ensuring ASEAN citizens can enjoy a safe cyberspace and have adequate sources for official information.

To counter misinformation, media agencies in ASEAN should be encouraged to share their respective experiences on fact-checking and sources of disinformation as it would create a stronger and more solid basis for reporting fake news.

