

JOINT MEDIA STATEMENT

15th CONFERENCE OF THE ASEAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INFORMATION & 6th CONFERENCE OF THE ASEAN PLUS THREE MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR INFORMATION

“ASEAN: A Digital Community with Accessibility for All”

12 March 2021, Video Conference

1. The 15th Conference of the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information (AMRI) and the 6th Conference of the AMRI Plus Three were hosted by Thailand online, via Video Conference, on 12 March 2021.
2. The theme of the 15th AMRI was “ASEAN: A Digital Community with Accessibility for All”.
3. The Meeting was preceded by the 18th Senior Officials Responsible for Information (SOMRI) and its meeting with the Plus Three Countries and Japan on 10 March 2021.
4. The chairmanship of AMRI was handed over from Singapore to Thailand on 1 June 2020 via ad-referendum as agreed by all Member States.

Opening Session

5. The ASEAN Anthem “The ASEAN Way” was played during the Opening Session. The Opening Session commenced with the Keynote Address and Welcome Remarks by the Minister Attached to the Prime Minister’s Office, Thailand, H.E. Anucha Nakasai, who expressed it was an honour for Thailand to host the 15th AMRI and Related Meetings.
6. The Meeting was Chaired by H.E. Anucha Nakasai, Minister Attached to the Prime Minister’s Office of Thailand with H.E Phan Tam of Viet Nam as Vice Chair. The Meeting was attended by all ASEAN Member States, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.
7. H.E. Anucha Nakasai, Minister Attached to the Prime Minister’s Office of Thailand reiterated the important role of the media and information sector in promoting a Digital Community with Accessibility for All. His full remarks appear in **ANNEX 1**.

Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Ensuring Digital Accessibility

8. The Meeting conveyed their solidarity with the ASEAN Community in responding to the adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Meeting noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of regular, timely and transparent sharing and exchanges of situation updates, technical information and experiences in response to the outbreak, prevention and control, diagnosis and treatment, and other aspects of national responses in mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

9. The Meeting noted that the digital economy has been a huge asset during the COVID-19 lockdown. The Meeting recognised that digital technologies have an important role in bridging ASEAN with its citizens. The Meeting further noted that the easy accessibility of information online and on social media platforms, especially amid the community quarantine measures and movement restrictions that were put in place, have transformed the media and information consumption patterns of our societies. Moreover, technological advancements and the COVID-19 pandemic have brought to the fore the significance of digital transformation among creative economic actors. The Meeting took note of Indonesia's initiative to organize the ASEAN Creative Economy Business Forum under the theme "Enhancing Digital Creative Economy: A Step Towards Regional Economic Recovery" as part of ASEAN's effort to address the socio-economic impact caused by the pandemic and in support of the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF).

10. The Meeting also noted that the increased access to social and digital media as sources of information have given rise to the proliferation of fake news and misinformation. In this regard, the Meeting recalled the AMRI Joint Statement to Minimise the Negative Effects of COVID-19 which was noted by the Leaders at the 37th ASEAN Summit on 12 November 2020. The Joint Statement represented the sector's commitment to respond to the negative impacts of COVID-19 by combating fake news and misinformation related to the pandemic and enhancing ASEAN's effective public communication through strengthening media and information cooperation as well as the mechanisms for such.

11. Responding to call for actions by the ASEAN Leaders in the Declaration of the Special ASEAN Summit on the Coronavirus Disease 2019 on 14 April 2020, the Meeting acknowledged the importance of establishing a news and information exchanging platform as a resource for factual information and situation updates which will facilitate effective and timely communication among designated focal points. The platform will be a resource for insights, experiences, best practices in each country, such as labour healthcare and assistance schemes for ASEAN workers in ASEAN Member States.

Framework for Promoting Accessibility for All in ASEAN Digital Broadcasting

12. The Meeting expressed its support for the Framework for Promoting Accessibility for All in ASEAN Digital Broadcasting, which was first introduced by Thailand at the 4th and 5th SOMRI Working Group on ASEAN Digital Broadcasting (SOMRI-ADB) held in Bangkok in July 2018 and July 2019, to enhance cooperation on, development of, and commitment to broadcasting access services among the Member States.

13. The Meeting further noted that the Framework sought to create opportunities and reduce barriers for all groups of people, enabling them to gain access to broadcasting content.

14. Moving forward, the Meeting welcomed the involvement of key stakeholders including the government, the private sector, as well as the general public and civil society in promoting and implementing broadcasting access services in AMS.

Framework for Developing Digital Readiness Among ASEAN Citizens

15. The Meeting welcomed the Framework for Developing Digital Readiness Among ASEAN Citizens. As a broad-based, non-binding and aspirational document, the Framework aimed to place the on-going work in ASEAN's information and media sector on digital literacy, access to information and digital communication within the broader context of developing "digital readiness" among ASEAN citizens.

16. The Meeting thanked Singapore for initiating the Framework for Developing Digital Readiness Among ASEAN Citizens and noted the timeliness of this initiative, in view of ASEAN being the world's fastest growing Internet region. The ASEAN Member States were encouraged to be digitally ready both in terms of providing better connectivity infrastructure and greater adoption of technology across governments, businesses and citizenry.

Raising ASEAN Awareness and Promoting a Community of Opportunities for All

17. The Meeting commended the various initiatives developed and implemented by the information and media sector, both at the regional and national levels, to promote awareness of and appreciation for ASEAN as a Community of Opportunities for All and to foster a sense of ASEAN identity among the citizens of the ASEAN Member States.

ASEAN Strategic Plan for Media and Information (2016-2025)

18. The Meeting welcomed the progress of the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Information and Media (2016-2025). The Meeting noted that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Information and Media sector were currently being developed, and looked forward to its finalisation and operationalisation. The Meeting also noted that the development of the KPIs was timely as the Strategic Plan has reached its mid-term implementation (2016-2020) and welcomed a mid-term evaluation to assess the continuing relevance of its strategies and map the progress of its implementation.

Updates from the Three SOMRI Working Groups

19. The Meeting commended the work of the three SOMRI Working Groups (WGs), namely the Working Group on ASEAN Digital Broadcasting (WG-ADB), the Working Group on Content and Production (WG-CP) and the Working Group on Information, Media and Training (WG-IMT). The three WGs have accelerated the progress on digital broadcasting as well as contributed to creating quality content, building capacity of media personnel, promoting media literacy and enhancing measures to minimize fake news and disinformation within ASEAN.

20. The Meeting lauded the initiative to promote ASEAN's collaboration in dealing with fake news, including the establishment of an ASEAN Taskforce on Fake News. The Meeting commended the effort of Viet Nam in organizing the ASEAN Workshop on Fake News in 2020, facilitating exchange of best practices and information on national policies and regulations. The Meeting was of the view that a safe and secure online environment for all ASEAN citizen is vital for the development of a sustainable and inclusive Digital ASEAN.

ASEAN Communication Master Plan 2018-2025 (ACMP II)

21. The Meeting was pleased with the progress made by the ASEAN information and media sector in implementing the ASEAN Communication Master Plan (ACMP) II. ACMP II supported ASEAN's efforts in implementing all three ASEAN Community Blueprints to communicate the message "ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All". The Meeting welcomed the suite of communication products produced as part of the ACMP II which included the "ASEAN Champion" podcast series and the "Conversations with ASEAN Citizens". The Meeting looked forward to more innovative communication products that would be launched in 2021.

ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI)

22. The Meeting lauded the initiatives of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information (COCI) to develop more digital offerings and incorporate digital elements so as to allow greater participation and accessibility despite travel restrictions. In this regard, the Meeting looked forward to the implementation of projects such as the ASEAN Workshop on Sharing Best Practices on the Use of Social Media Towards a Safe, Secure and Reliable Internet; the ASEAN Young Cyber Influencer; and the Capacity Building for ASEAN Journalists in Effective News and Feature Writing.

23. The Meeting also welcomed initiatives and projects that cut across sectors such as the ASEAN-Women Entrepreneurship TV Documentaries, and the Faces of ASEAN: Opportunities for All project, and encouraged the sector to develop more initiatives that address cross-sectoral issues such as health, environment, disaster management, women, and youth.

Cooperation with Dialogue Partners

24. The Meeting exchanged views on the progress of ASEAN cooperation with the Plus Three Countries in the field of information and media. The Meeting noted the progress of the implementation of the Work Plan on Enhancing ASEAN Plus Three Cooperation Through Information and Media (2018-2023). The Meeting also expressed their appreciation to the Dialogue Partners (China, Japan and the Republic of Korea) for their medical contributions to the ASEAN Member States amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

25. The ASEAN Member States expressed their appreciation for China's efforts to strengthen the ASEAN-China cooperation. They lauded the designation of 2019 as the ASEAN-China Year of Media Exchanges and the adoption of the Joint Statement on Strengthening Media Exchanges and Cooperation between ASEAN and China by the Leaders at the 22nd ASEAN-China Summit in November 2019. The Meeting also supported the review of the revised ASEAN-China Work Plan on Enhancing ASEAN-China Cooperation through Information and Media (2018-2024) and encouraged new initiatives to further strengthen the cooperation between ASEAN and China.

26. The ASEAN Member States welcomed Japan's intention to deepen cooperation for broadcasting contents and system based on the priority measures of the Work Plan, as well as the introduction of Japan's policy related to the theme of the 15th AMRI. The Meeting noted the discussions of the 3rd SOMRI Plus Japan Meeting, and highly appreciated the financial support from Japan to implement the cooperation projects through the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund as well as other cooperative activities.

27. The ASEAN Member States expressed appreciation for the initiatives from the Republic of Korea to further advance cooperation with ASEAN in the information and media sector. The Meeting welcomed ROK's initiatives to further strengthen cooperation with ASEAN by sharing digital journalism experience and promoting media literacy.

Closing and Acknowledgement

28. The Meeting agreed to convene the 16th AMRI and its Related Meetings in Viet Nam in 2023.

29. The Meeting expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government of Thailand for the excellent arrangements made for the virtual convening of the 15th AMRI, 18th SOMRI and Related Meetings despite the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic. The Meetings were held in the traditional spirit of ASEAN solidarity and cordiality.