

**SPEECH BY MR CHEE HONG TAT, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS AND
INFORMATION & HEALTH, AT THE THIRD GLOBAL NEWS FORUM ON 26 JULY 2017 AT
SWISSOTEL MERCHANT COURT HOTEL**

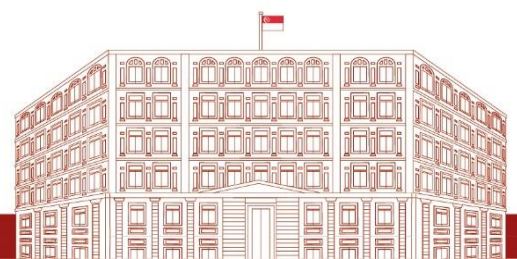
Dr Javad Mottaghi, Secretary-General, ABU
Mr Walter Fernandez, Editor-in-Chief, Mediacorp
Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to join you at the third Global News Forum.

2 I would like to express my appreciation to the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union and Mediacorp for hosting this forum. The Global News Forum provides a valuable platform for broadcasters and partners to come together to discuss issues pertaining to the media industry.

3 Today, we have a diverse media landscape. Digital technology lowers the barriers for content production, allowing anyone to create content and disseminate it widely. While this gives all of us access to a tremendous library of content, the fragmentation has made it more difficult for broadcasters around the world to sustain viewership and also advertising revenues.

4 Adding to this challenge is the rise of fake news. While there is a lot of content, not all the content is real, accurate, and of good quality. Due to the ease of distributing content on social media, as well as algorithms that prioritise engagement over accuracy, it has become much easier for unscrupulous content creators to benefit financially by publishing misleading information with sensational half-truths and attention-grabbing headlines.

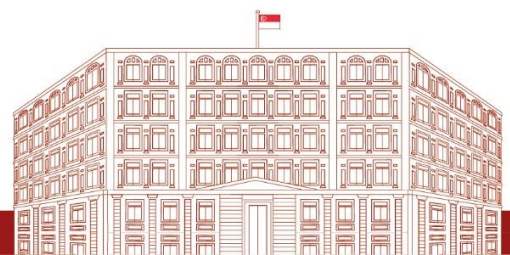


5 Fake news itself may also become more insidious due to technology. Recently, researchers at the University of Washington used Artificial Intelligence to create a realistic video of President Barack Obama speaking words taken from a separate source. Looking at the video, you actually cannot tell that it is a fake video; it is that realistic. Perhaps, in the not-too-distant future, fake news will be more than just fabricated words. They could also take the form of videos, making them even more believable and dangerous.

6 The proliferation of fake news has contributed to an erosion of trust in the media in many countries. Besides confusing the public, fake news creates the impression that the mainstream media's factual news coverage is inadequate or uninteresting. This could be one reason why the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer showed a general worldwide decline in the level of trust in institutions, with the media, unfortunately, showing the largest drop. As the Russian chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov once wrote on Twitter, "if you can convince people that real news is fake, it becomes much easier to convince them that your fake news is real."

7 The dangers of fake news go beyond declining trust in the media. There are numerous examples of how fake news has damaged reputations for individuals and organisations, led to social unrest and affected election outcomes. This is why we have to handle fake news carefully, and deal with the perpetrators with a firm hand.

8 Many countries have called for tougher regulatory measures in response to the threat of fake news. For instance, Germany has recently approved a bill that requires social media platforms like Facebook to remove hate speech, fake news and other criminal materials from their networks within 24 hours of receiving a notification. Failure to comply will result in stiff fines of up to 50 million euros.



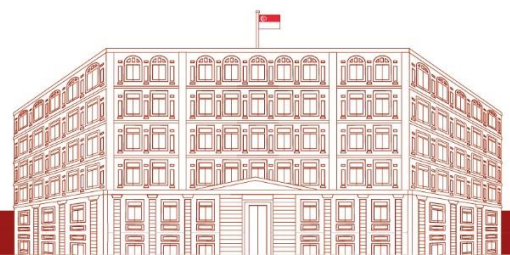
9 In Singapore, the Ministry of Law is developing new legislation to deal with fake news. We are clear that a regulatory approach cannot be the only solution. The fight against fake news must also entail raising information and media literacy. In addition, we must support the growth of trusted news sources, which the public can turn to if they want accurate and reliable information. These trusted sources include the mainstream media and public broadcasters. They also include credible online sites which have established a good reputation for accurate and objective reporting.

10 The Singapore Government has started various programmes to promote media literacy and online etiquette. One example is the National Library Board's S.U.R.E. campaign. The acronym stands for Source, Understand, Research, and Evaluate – four simple concepts that one can keep in mind when assessing the veracity of news.

11 The Media Literacy Council, which was set up in 2012, has also helped to develop public awareness and education programmes. The members of the Council come from diverse sectors, spanning the media, business, academia, schools, and community organisations. Through its annual Better Internet Campaign and numerous outreach programmes with corporate partners and schools, the Council has increased awareness of media literacy issues in Singapore.

12 It is however not enough to only focus on media literacy – that is only one part of the solution. A key factor is where consumers can turn to if they want credible and reliable information, and what can they do if they encounter a piece of fake news. This is where news organisations and public broadcasters can and must, play a critical role.

13 Many of you are actively developing strategies to stay relevant in the current operating environment. Events like this forum are useful as we can learn from one another, compare notes and share perspectives on how broadcasters can best respond to the challenges facing the industry today.



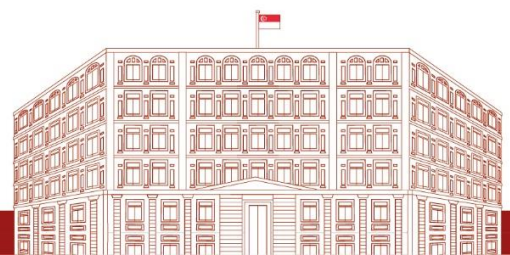
14 At the same time, we should be cautious of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach or think that a certain technology or method can be the silver bullet. As the late Mr Lee Kuan Yew once said in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1988, “the media play a key role in the life of every country, but it is a role which differs from one country to another” due to their different historical experiences, political systems and social-cultural norms.

15 So it is with this caveat that I would like to propose three areas on how we can move forward together in the broadcasting industry, drawing upon our experiences in Singapore.

16 First, we believe that professional news outlets must focus on quality reporting. The idea is not to beat fake news at their own game, for example by using more sensational headlines or generating clickbait. That is neither feasible nor desirable. Fake news sites do not have to protect their reputation or check their facts. So we cannot beat them if we play by the same rules. Exaggerated claims, misleading content and provocative emotional appeals may capture eyeballs in the short run, but they will tarnish the organisation’s professionalism and credibility over time.

17 Instead, we should strengthen the value proposition of mainstream media news by reaffirming the core values of journalism. These include a commitment to facts and accuracy, the discipline to remain transparent and impartial in one’s reporting, and a sense of duty to serve the wider public interest.

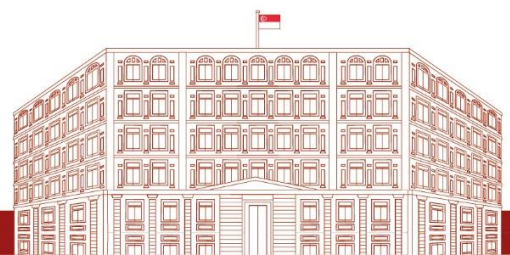
18 We have been fortunate that public trust and satisfaction with the media in Singapore have remained relatively high compared to other countries. Singaporeans obtain their news from a wide variety of sources, both local and international, and social media is widely used in Singapore. In such an environment, local news agencies Mediacorp and SPH have done well to remain a leading source of daily news for many Singaporeans. Our local Free-to-Air TV channels are still the most popular destinations when it comes to media consumption, with more than eight in ten Singaporeans tuning into these channels every week. The mainstream media in Singapore must continue to work hard to maintain public trust and stay relevant.



19 Over in the UK, the BBC is also reaffirming its commitment to quality journalism. It has chosen to respond to fake news with what it calls “slow news”. This means a stronger emphasis on more in-depth, impartial and context-rich analysis, rigorously supported by evidence and expertise. In a recent interview with *The Straits Times*, Mr Jim Egan, Chief Executive of BBC Global News, commented that there is “a flight to quality”, because people “want to have a sense of who they can believe, where they can get a sense of balance, [and] where they can get some slow news.”

20 I agree with Mr Egan’s observations. And I also think that it is a mistake for news organisations to reduce the resources for their newsrooms when they face financial pressures due to a more challenging business environment. While this may make commercial sense in the short term, it will weaken their capabilities in the longer term and affect their ability to produce quality content which are essential to attract and retain viewers. That is like trying to lose weight by shrinking your muscles, it is bad for health and not sustainable. A better long-term strategy is to invest in building deeper capabilities to deliver quality products and services to consumers.

21 Hence, besides focusing on quality, the second strategy I would like to propose is for news organisations to invest in digital technology to keep up with changes in consumer preferences. Mr Walter Fernandez mentioned this earlier, Dr Mottaghi also mentioned this earlier, and I am sure this is something that is at the top of your agenda for all news organisations. In Singapore, we see a decline in the number of people who read newspapers and watch TV, but an increase in those who get their news and information online. The overall numbers – viewership and readership - for SPH and Mediacorp news have remained stable because consumers are now accessing their online content through apps, websites and social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube. *Channel NewsAsia’s* Facebook page, for example, has been ranked amongst the top 10 within Singapore in terms of the number of followers. Newspapers such as *The Straits Times* and *Lianhe Zaobao* also have sizeable and growing online readership, including readers from other countries. But one key challenge for many media companies is how to monetise their growing online presence, to make up for the loss in advertising revenue from their traditional platforms. I do not think we have found a

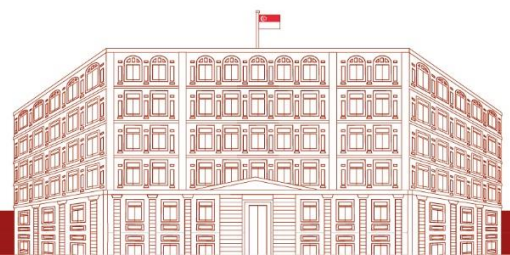


good solution yet, but this is an area where there can be useful discussions and mutual learning between news organisations and broadcasters.

22 I believe it is essential for news organisations to continue building capabilities to stay relevant and operate effectively in the digital space. Our media professionals know that a different set of skills and approaches are required for digital news, as one cannot take content which has been produced for traditional platforms and simply move it online. They are experimenting with new ideas and trying out new ways of engaging their viewers. They are also working in partnership with technology companies and independent producers to maximise the potential for developing creative content and innovative formats, as some of the expertise required do not traditionally reside in-house. This requires an approach where we look outside for partners that we can work with and can give us the boost in terms of building new capabilities.

23 This brings me to my third point, which is the importance for news organisations and broadcasters to build strong networks and partnerships to deal with the many challenges facing the industry. Individually, most news organisations do not have sufficient scale to compete with Internet giants like Google and Facebook, including in areas such as online advertising inventory and marketing. There is also value to collaborate and take a united stand against the rising threat of fake news.

24 Collaboration also helps reduce the overheads of content creation, and builds synergies between complementary news organisations. Indeed, this was how international news syndicates like the *Associated Press* began, as cooperative ventures between newspapers to share the cost of news creation and extend the reach of their individual articles. Such partnerships are even more useful in a digital age, where scale is a crucial asset. What is the equivalent of these international news syndicates for the digital era? I understand that there is Asian Vision Network (AVN) which has been in existence for a while that has allowed broadcasters in this region to share content, which is a very good initiative. But what other platforms and networks can we build to help all of us to operate more effectively in the digital



era? And how can news organisations work together to help one another to prepare for the future? These are some of the issues which can be further discussed at this forum.

25 The journey ahead is a difficult one, but I am not pessimistic. As a politician, I have to be optimistic, but optimistic in a realistic way. I am confident that news organisations and broadcasters can step up to the challenge by playing to your strengths. My optimism is reinforced when I interact with the dedicated and talented teams of editors and journalists, including many of our young reporters. I can sense the pride in wanting to do their jobs well and their passion in making a difference to society through journalism.

26 To stay relevant, news organisations must continue to invest in quality reporting, develop deeper digital capabilities and build stronger networks and partnerships. There is no simple solution or silver bullet, but we know we must persevere and keep on trying, because we have an important responsibility to serve public interest by providing accurate and objective news to our people.

27 Thank you very much and I wish all of you a fruitful session ahead.

