

Welcome Remarks

6th International Conference

COVID-19 IN ASIA:

Communication • Nationalism • Technology

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BANGKOK, THAILAND



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Dr. Robin Ramcharan, Executive Director of Asia Centre, Dr. Yubol Benjarongkij, Dean of the Graduate School of Communication Arts and Management Innovation, NIDA, Mr. Frederic Spohr, Head of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, Thailand, distinguished guests and speakers, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend my warmest welcome to all the participants who are joining us online for the conference, wherever you are based in the world. At this time, health advisories still discourage face-to-face meetings as a solution to slow down and stop the spread of the virus as COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting global health and economies for over a year and a half.

Additionally, we are facing a four-sided "infodemic". First are conspiracy theories over the origins of the virus, building distrust in international cooperation and spawning xenophobia. Second are speculations over the infections and death rates, suspected to be either underestimated or overestimated. Third are recommendations of inefficient or even dangerous remedies for COVID-19. Finally, rumors of harmful effects of the vaccines or their unreliability have been generating fear among the populations. Even hospitals and official agencies have been noted for spreading false information.

To address the challenges of COVID-19 "infodemic", governments have responded by using existing laws and passing new ones under the pretense of protecting their citizens from disinformation. However, these legal measures have often been used instead to censor any intervention contradicting the state-sponsored narrative.

The evidence is presented in a joint baseline study authored by Asia Centre and presented to the Thai Media Fund, "Infodemic and SDGs: Internet freedoms in Southeast Asia". The report shows that all 10 countries in Southeast Asia are infected by the "infodemic". Six are facing disinformation on vaccine safety and efficiency and another six have seen promotion of bogus remedies. The Philippines in particular are affected by all four aspects of the "infodemic".

As an organisation tasked with the promotion of media literacy among Thai citizens and beyond, the Thai Media Fund is pleased to be a partner in this year's conference on COVID-19 in Asia: Communication, Nationalism, Technology.

I trust that this conference will serve as a platform to exchange knowledge on policy-making, deepen existing and new partnerships and as a platform for future collaboration. I wish you all a successful conference and to stay safe during this time.