

THE STRAITS TIMES

Asia report

MCI(P) 087/05/2019 October 2019

INDEPENDENT • INSIDER • INSIGHTS ON ASIA

- Killer robots
- Cyber Security
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WORLD NEWS DAY

Making a difference

Thirty-eight newsrooms around the world have pooled together their most impactful stories, in a show of support for credible journalism and the difference it can make.

IT MATTERS • FACTS MATTER • ACCURACY MATTERS • OBJECTIVITY MATTERS • FAIRNESS MATTERS • BALANCE MATTERS • ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS
• EQUALITY MATTERS • HISTORY MATTERS • NEWS MATTERS • YOUR VIEW, YOUR LIFE • YOUR FUTURE, YOUR WORLD • IT MATTERS

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Why the news matters to you and me

DAY BY DAY, OUR FAST CHANGING WORLD grows more complex, confusing and challenging.

The United States is at odds with China. The planet is getting warmer faster. Technology is disrupting just about every industry, from banks and money-changers, airlines and travel agents, as well as the media.

Little wonder then that we all need some help keeping up to speed with these changes, making sense of it, and trying to figure out where it is all going.

Pressed for time in dealing with information overload, people are also finding it harder to sift out what's real from fake, with more and more dubious content swirling around, spread rapidly over the new communications technologies.

So, ironically, while the world is more connected today and more people have much more information readily available at their fingertips, societies are not necessarily better informed or equipped to make the tough choices they need to if we are to address the many challenges we face.

Instead, the credibility of and trust in major institutions seem to be insidiously chipped away amid the welter of information and disinformation, facts and alternative facts, thereby undermining our ability to have sensible democratic discussions on the way forward.

This is where journalists and professional newsrooms come in.

Our job is to seek out information, cross-check and verify it, understand the history, background and context, strive to be balanced and objective, analyse and interpret developments, and seek to put out as fair and unvarnished an account of events as we can, to help our audiences make up their minds on what it all means for them.

This matters. Because in the absence of credible and reliable information, we can't have rational and reasonable debates, and discussions turn into shouting matches, which tend to be dominated, and won, by those with the loudest, most nasty or persistent – or often, the best financed – voices, which drown out others.

Every one of us ends up the loser, with your views, your societies, your futures, degraded in the process.

So, yes, it matters. Which is why the theme for this year's World News Day says simply: Real News Matters.

The video to promote it intones: It matters. Facts Matter. Accuracy matters. Objectivity matters. Balance matters. Accountability matters. Equality matters. History matters. News matters.

It is commonplace today to say, rather glibly, that news is available for free, every one is a journalist, and there is no future for journalism.

That, to me, is an example of fake news.

News you receive is never free. Content costs money to produce, especially quality, credible, in-depth, reliable content. If you are getting it for free, it usually means someone is paying for it, and getting it to you for a reason. Perhaps it is to sell you some marketing message or propaganda. It could be to influence your views or spending preferences. It could be to sway your vote, or shape your society.

So, indeed, it does matter, to you, to me, our societies and our futures.

This is why we are marking World News Day today, September 28.

Some 38 newsrooms from around the world have come together to celebrate the work of professional journalists and the difference it can make.

In this special report – and our website at www.worldnewsday.org – you will find a host of compelling stories of how journalists and newsrooms have worked to help improve public policy, expose corruption, fight sexual abuse, harassment and discrimination, address major issues of the day, and also inspire and uplift communities.

This global collaboration is led by the World Editors Forum and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (Wan-Ifra).

We are building on the efforts of our colleagues in Canada, where the Canadian Journalism Foundation first launched a WND project in 2018.

We hope to keep growing this effort, to make World News Day an annual celebration around the world, to showcase how journalists and newsrooms contribute to the societies they are meant to serve.

Warren Fernandez

Editor-in-Chief

The writer is also President of the World Editors Forum, a global network of editors, which is part of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (Wan-Ifra)



Warren Fernandez

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Country Report

Chinese propaganda
takes millennial turn

PHOTO: DOUYIN

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REAL NEWS MATTERS

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newsrooms.
Forty-seven stories.
Countless
beneficiaries.

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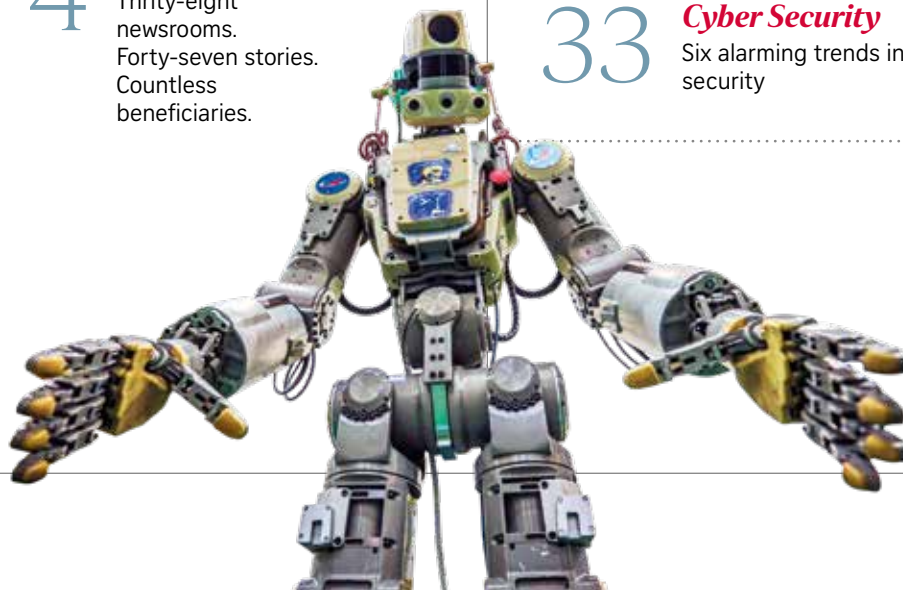
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PHOTO: CRISTINA MENINA

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Asia News
Network Editor



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NEWSROOMS

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STORIES

THIRTY-EIGHT NEWSROOMS. FORTY-SEVEN stories. Making an impact that has been felt far and wide.

Editors and journalists in newsrooms around the world have come together to showcase some of the work they do and the effort that goes into producing stories that make a difference to the lives of people in their communities.

This is to mark World News Day (Sept 28), which celebrates journalism and the importance of credible news that matters.

Through this, the aim is to inspire and motivate other news organisations to continue their efforts, despite the tumult experienced by media titles in an era of social media.

Newsrooms have pulled out their most impactful works to share with readers around the world.

These stories have shaped policies, exposed corruption, and fought injustice, reporting from the ground to tackle issues of significance to their communities.

Together, these titles serve the information needs of more than half the world.

Thailand's Bangkok Post shared a report on the problem of farmers' debt and the need for new solutions.

Bangladesh's Daily Star highlighted its stories on frequent accidents of fire in its capital's densely populated commercial zones, which are lined with decrepit buildings, built long before fire prevention norms became the rule.

Lives have been lost and business disrupted. The stories forced the government into action.

German daily *Suddeutsche Zeitung*, shared its explosive expose with German news magazine *Der Spiegel* earlier this year that led to the fall of the ruling government.

The report recounts a sting operation in July 2017, three months before Austrian elections that year, that was videotaped.

It showed the leader of Austria's far right FPÖ party, and the deputy mayor of Vienna at the time, meeting a woman in Spain who claimed to be the niece of a Russian multi-millionaire and offered him

campaign support, in return for public contracts.

The politician, Heinz-Christian Strache, later rose to become the country's vice-chancellor. But the video's release earlier this year, and the reports, led to his downfall.

"The newspaper paid no money for the material," a representative from *Suddeutsche* said in their submission for World News Day. "And neither did *Der Spiegel*, according to the magazine."

Brazil's *Zero Hora* has an investigative report on how retirees in their country were being charged for insurance that they did not sign up for. It took the paper's team close to two months to expose the scam.

And *Fiji Sun*, a daily newspaper in the South Pacific nation, submitted a story on how an online message posted by a Fijian living in Australia warning of unrest on Sept 23 generated worry among citizens.

Many Fijians have not forgotten the political turmoil that divided the nation in the past.

But checks, and a message from The Republic of Fiji Military Forces Land Force Commander, Col Manoa Gadai on Sept 18, effectively quashed the speculation.

Singapore's *The Straits Times* submitted three stories written in the past 18 months that influenced public policy. These were Senior Health Correspondent Salma Khalik's article on how a dogged 84-year-old shook up the country's health system, Senior Correspondent Joyce Lim's report on public health institutions paying foreign agents to refer patients and Senior Writer Wong Kim Hoh's inspiring profile of a former flight attendant who became paralysed after an accident but now helps others find their feet. The paper also shares its continuing effort to fight fake news.

These and several other contributions made by contributing newsrooms can be read on the World News Day site, www.worldnewsday.org.

The idea to mark a day to celebrate journalism in this part of the world took shape at an inaugural meeting of the World Editors Forum, Asia chapter, in May, when editors from 15 newsrooms met in

PARTICIPATING NEWSROOMS

Here is the list of newsrooms from around the world that have joined the World News Day campaign.

- 1 The Daily Star, Bangladesh
- 2 Zero Hora, Brazil
- 3 China Daily, China
- 4 Fiji Sun, Fiji
- 5 Suddeutsche Zeitung, Germany
- 6 South China Morning Post, Hong Kong
- 7 Anandabazar Patrika, India
- 8 DT Next, India
- 9 Metro Vaartha, India
- 10 The Hindu, India
- 11 The Hindu Business Line, India
- 12 The Lede, India
- 13 The Quint, India
- 14 Times of India, India
- 15 Antara News, Indonesia
- 16 The Jakarta Post, Indonesia
- 17 Bernama News Agency, Malaysia
- 18 BFM 89.9 Radio, Malaysia
- 19 Sin Chew Daily, Malaysia
- 20 The Star, Malaysia
- 21 El Sol de Mexico, Mexico
- 22 The New Telegraph, Nigeria
- 23 The Nation, Nigeria
- 24 ABS-CBN, Philippines
- 25 Manila Bulletin, Philippines
- 26 Philippine Daily Inquirer, Philippines
- 27 Asian Scientist Magazine, Singapore
- 28 CNA, Singapore
- 29 The Straits Times, Singapore
- 30 Berita Harian, Singapore
- 31 Tamil Murasu, Singapore
- 32 Times Select, South Africa
- 33 The Chosun Ilbo, South Korea
- 34 JoongAng Daily, South Korea
- 35 The China Post, Taiwan
- 36 United Daily News Group, Taiwan
- 37 Bangkok Post, Thailand
- 38 Viet Nam News, Vietnam

Go to
<http://worldnewsday.org>
 to read and view contributions
 from the newsrooms on how
 they made an impact.

Singapore on the sidelines of the Wan-Ifra Publish Asia 2019 conference.

Taking up the idea, Bangladesh Daily Star's editor and publisher Mahfuz Anam said that with the challenges posed by the social media, newsrooms should showcase what they do and the impact they make, operating with the professional standards and ethics honed over decades.

Indonesian Antara's Meidyatama Suryodinigrat also noted that media literacy is more vital than ever, and the next generation needs to be educated about journalism.

The group picked Sept 28 as the day to mark WND, as Sept 28 coincides with United Nations' International Day for Universal Access to Information. [ST](#)

The writer is also Editor, ST Asia Report.



ST ILLUSTRATION:
CHNG CHOON HIONG

Mr Seow Ban Yam went for an eye surgery at the Singapore National Eye Centre. He received a medical bill of thousands of dollars but received only \$4.50 in insurance payment.

PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



Honing policies

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

How a dogged 84-year-old shook up Singapore's health system

SALMA KHALIK

Senior Health Correspondent

GETTING OLD AND PAYING FOR HEALTHCARE is an increasing worry for many people around the world, but the elderly in Singapore could be forgiven for thinking their problems would be sorted out.

After all, the Republic's healthcare system ranks among the best in the world, delivering basic, affordable treatment for those who qualify. And this is not all on the taxpayer – individuals pay an initial amount and then a national health insurance scheme kicking in.

The compulsory health insurance scheme, MediShield Life, was introduced in 2015 to help cope with the needs of a rapidly ageing population, as families worried about the large medical bills that can arise when a loved one becomes frail.

But the recent case of 84-year-old Seow Ban Yam revealed that for some, the worry had not gone away. He was shocked when he received a medical bill of thousands of dollars from the Singapore National Eye Centre (SNEC), and for which he received only \$4.50 in insurance payment.

The normally mild-mannered Mr Seow took it upon himself to challenge the bill, writing to the hospital authorities and insurance administrators to get to find out why he was being charged so much.

The explanation that everything was in order merely confused him further. He did not understand why a public institution would charge him \$3,664, after government subsidies, when the maximum amount he could claim under MediShield Life for his surgery was \$2,800.

Wondering if he had got his sums wrong, Mr Seow wrote a letter to The Straits Times (ST), saying: "Hopefully, you can find my case worth looking into, not only for myself, but also for the sake of the many people like me who otherwise are not aware of what a MediShield Life claim entails.

What ST discovered, as a result of Mr Seow's case, shocked even those in the upper echelons of

BEHIND THE STORY

Senior correspondent Joyce Lim first got wind of the dealings between foreign agents and public health institutions when The Sunday Times obtained a contract signed by NUH with an Indonesian agent to provide "administrative services".

She spent a month staking out public hospitals and eventually tracked down foreign agents, who confirmed arrangements with NUH and SGH. The investigation crossed borders, with Indonesia correspondent Wahyudi Soeriaatmadja convincing Jakarta-based hospital agent HCM Medika to open up about the trade.

The expose led to public outcry over public health institutions paying such incentives when their priority should be to treat the sick in Singapore. Questions on such arrangements with foreign agents were also raised in Parliament, which led to disclosures by the Health Ministry of the numbers of foreign patients being treated at public hospitals.

the Ministry of Health (MOH) – that at least one public health institution had raised fees to levels much higher than those covered by the national health insurance scheme.

In Mr Seow's case, the subsidised bill from SNEC was 50 per cent higher than the claim limit for that procedure.

The wider implication was that thousands of patients in Singapore were probably in the same boat as Mr Seow, getting bills from public institutions which exceeded the claim limits set by MediShield Life.

As a result, the issue was raised in Parliament in January and the Government has decided to review national health insurance claim limits every three years instead of five.

WHY IT MATTERED

What got Mr Seow so riled up and made the issue such a talking point was that when MediShield Life was introduced, the Government made a promise that lower-income people need never fear having to foot big medical bills entirely by themselves for treatment at public hospitals.

The aim was to cover 90 per cent of the bill for 90 per cent of patients beyond the initial deductible and co-payment over that.

Mr Seow's complaint led to the discovery that, in the years since MediShield Life was launched, coverage had in fact dropped to 80 per cent of fully subsidised bills.

HOW THE PROBLEM CAME TO LIGHT

In 2017, retiree Mr Seow when he went to SNEC for two operations to unblock the tear ducts in both

eyes, in preparation for cataract surgery.

He knew he would have to pay 10 per cent of the bill after the deductible, which is capped at \$3,000 a year for those over 80, so he expected to pay a total of \$3,148. But he ended up paying \$4,472.30 instead, as the bill exceeded the claim limit by \$1,472, including fees for room and board as well as the operation.

In January, addressing ST' report on Mr Seow's plight, Senior Minister of State for Health Edwin Tong announced more regular reviews of claim limits that cap national health insurance coverage.

He also promised: "We will continue to review, refine and strengthen MediShield Life and other components of our public healthcare financing system, and just as importantly, manage our healthcare costs to ensure that public healthcare remains affordable for all Singaporeans."

As for Mr Seow, his dogged pursuit of his case will benefit those who undergo similar procedures. Patients who need the same surgery he did – dacryocystorhinostomy (duct drainage surgery) – as well as procedures such as glaucoma surgery with implants and retinal detachment surgery, "will see subsidised bill sizes lowered by an average of 25 per cent", said a spokesman for SNEC.

And what of the amount that Mr Seow had to pay for himself? SNEC offered Mr Seow a goodwill payment of \$1,300 – close to the amount MediShield Life would have covered if the entire bill had been within the limits set. [ST](#)

This story is a compilation of a series of articles published in The Straits Times from Dec 31, 2018, to Jan 16, 2019.

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

Health Ministry clamps down on medical tourism in public hospitals

JOYCE LIM AND WAHYUDI SOERIAATMADJA

WHEN HIS FATHER NEEDED TREATMENT FOR his prostate gland in 2008, property developer Yudi Rahmat Raharja found someone who could arrange for it to be done at a public hospital in Singapore.

The Jakarta-based agent organised everything,



A National University Hospital (NUH) spokesman said NUH's foremost priority is to provide care for Singaporeans, who are given priority for appointments and hospital beds.

PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

from an ambulance pick-up at Changi Airport to the doctors' appointments.

"I don't remember being charged any agent's fee, and had no issue with how much we were charged by the hospital," Mr Yudi, 50, said.

"We understood the agent's work was reflected in the total bill."

Instead of Mr Yudi footing the agent's commission, the hospital paid for it.

This practice of paying foreign agents to refer patients had been going on for years at some public healthcare institutions, with agents potentially earning thousands of dollars in referral fees. But the institutions have now terminated such contracts.

The Health Ministry (MOH) issued the order after The Straits Times (ST) published a report about the connection between hospitals such as National University (NUH), Singapore General (SGH) and Changi General (CGH) and these agents.

MOH told ST following the September 2018 report that the priority of public healthcare institutions was to serve Singaporeans' healthcare needs.

While foreign agents were not tasked with marketing hospital services and served mainly to facilitate visits by foreign patients, the ministry said it wanted hospitals to cease such contracts, "to avoid potential misinterpretation and misrepresentation".

Foreign patients did not get subsidies and could be charged a premium for procedures performed by senior doctors, so agents' fees, as a percentage of the total bill, could be very lucrative.

In one case, an Indonesian agent contracted to provide NUH "administrative services" was paid 8 per cent of the hospital bill, excluding doctors' fees, for every foreign patient accepted by NUH.

The agent would get an additional percentage if the patient bill exceeded \$500,000, and even more if it exceeded \$1 million.

Jakarta-based hospital agent HCM Medika said since 2007, it had facilitated medical visits for

15,000 patients to Singapore and Malaysia.

"For Singapore public hospitals, an appointment could take one to two weeks. For private hospitals, patients can get a confirmation and meet a doctor as quickly as the next day," said Ms Lena, a relationship officer at HCM Medika.

"We don't charge patients. We are getting fees from the hospitals."

Other agents in Indonesia and Vietnam told ST they, too, had arrangements with SGH and CGH.

Among other hospitals, Tan Tock Seng said it did not engage such agents, while other public hospitals did not reply to queries.

SingHealth, which runs SGH and CGH, and NUH told The Sunday Times they would cease the agreements.

"NUH's foremost priority is to provide care for Singaporeans," an NUH spokesman added. "NUH reviews all referrals to ensure that it has the capacity, capability and resources to provide treatment that will be beneficial to the patient. Singaporeans are given priority for appointments and hospital beds."

SingHealth said the primary role of agents, which it termed "medical associates", was to help overseas patients navigate the healthcare system, including advising them on the relevant health records needed and assisting with paperwork and travel.

"Medical associates are non-exclusive to SingHealth and they charge an administrative fee (per patient) for their services," said SingHealth.

Doctors interviewed by ST expressed concern about such fees.

"This practice of giving a 'referral fee' to 'medical agents' is unethical," said Dr Keith Goh, consultant neurosurgeon at International Neuro Associates. The 8 per cent commission on a hospital bill of \$500,000 would be \$40,000 – "which is more than the annual salary of a staff nurse", he noted.

The concern about foreigners crowding out Singaporeans in restructured hospitals is not new and was raised in Parliament in 2010.

After ST published its report, social media was flooded with queries about how many overseas patients were being treated at public hospitals and if they had contributed to the long waiting time for appointments.

As a result, two MPs raised the issue in Parliament last November.

Responding, Senior Minister of State for Health Lam Pin Min said public hospitals treated 10,900 foreign patients in 2017. Those referred by contracted service providers made up about 0.4 per cent of attendances in public health institutions.

Following the MOH's instruction to end contracts, public healthcare institutions also removed or blocked webpages containing information for overseas patients. [ST](#)

This story is a compilation of articles published from Sept 30 to Nov 21, 2018.

BEHIND THE STORY

Senior correspondent Joyce Lim first got wind of the dealings between foreign agents and public health institutions when The Sunday Times obtained a contract signed by NUH with an Indonesian agent to provide "administrative services".

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The expose led to public outcry over public health institutions paying such incentives when their priority should be to treat the sick in Singapore. Questions on such arrangements with foreign agents were also raised in Parliament, which led to disclosures by the Health Ministry of the numbers of foreign patients being treated at public hospitals.



Mr Heinz Christian Strache, with his wife Philippa Strache, at a function at the Prater Alm Bar in Vienna on Sept 19. Neither Der Spiegel nor the Süddeutsche Zeitung have any reliable information about the motives of the people who set Mr Strache this trap in 2017 or whom they may have been working for.

PHOTO: EPA-EFE/
CHRISTIAN BRUNA

Exposing corruption

SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG, GERMANY

Austrian politician caught negotiating with Russia in trap

HEINZ-CHRISTIAN STRACHE, THE LEADER OF Austria's right-wing populist FPÖ party, met an attractive Russian multi-millionaire in Ibiza on July 24, 2017. She offered him campaign support in exchange for public contracts.

What he didn't know was that the entire exchange had been staged and was being recorded by hidden cameras.

It is still not known who was behind it, but the video was created three months before Austria's general election that October. Following the election, Mr Strache would rise to become the country's vice-chancellor.

The video shows Mr Strache and fellow party member Johann Gudenus, at the time the deputy mayor of Vienna, meeting a woman in a luxurious holiday villa on the Spanish island of Ibiza. She was introduced to them as Alyona Makarova, the purported niece of Igor Makarov, a Russian oligarch close to President Vladimir Putin. She apparently could conduct business practically anywhere she wanted with her "Latvian" passport.

The supposed investor, who offered to put €100 million (\$151 million) into their partnership, already had a plan.

She proposed acquiring a 50 per cent stake in a highly influential Austrian tabloid, the Kronen Zeitung, and use it as a mouthpiece to back Mr Strache and his party in the election campaign.

Mr Strache, dressed casually in a T-shirt and jeans, seemed enthusiastic – mostly about the proposal, but also about the woman herself. "Are you kidding? She's hot," he said, with a Viennese lilt.

For more than six hours he spoke with the Russian, alternately whispering and roaring, lecturing and gesticulating.

"As long as I'm not dead," he said at one point, "I'll be in charge for the next 20 years."

Ultimately, a deal took shape in that room in the Ibiza villa on that July day in 2017: Russian money of uncertain origin would help boost the FPÖ's election results. And it went without saying that the woman who said she was Alyona Makarova would also get something out of it.

That night, switching between Russian and English, she repeatedly asked what she would get in return after the election if, as planned, Mr Strache were to become part of the government. The woman had a confidant at her side at the villa, a middle-aged man in white trousers and a blue shirt, who did most of the talking when it came to the sensitive negotiations. He demanded, in German, that they be granted the kind of blatant financial advantages that only a government can provide.

But Heinz-Christian Strache, who is fond of presenting himself as the man cleaning up Austrian politics, didn't stand up and leave as one might have expected him to do in such a situation.

**LEILA AL-SERORI,
OLIVER DAS GUPTA,
PETER MÜNCH,
FREDERIK
OBERMAIER
AND BASTIAN
OBERMAYER**



Mr Strache resigned as Austrian vice-chancellor on May 18 after two German newspapers published footage of him apparently offering lucrative government contracts to a potential Russian benefactor. The daily *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the weekly *Der Spiegel* published extracts of the covert video the day before.

PHOTO: SCREENGAB/DER SPIEGEL, GERMANY

Instead, though repeatedly emphasising during the conversation that he was available only for legal deals, he readily agreed to proposals that, if implemented, would clearly be illegal.

The matters discussed included the question of whether the FPO, if it became part of a coalition government, would be in a position to award artificially inflated government contracts to the purported Russian.

They also talked about the possibility of the Russian woman making a donation to the FPO party that could be concealed by way of an association.

The Russian woman's apparent confidant said her money wasn't "actually entirely legal" and described the deal as "legally tricky." And still, that didn't prompt Mr Strache and Mr Gudenus to leave. The confidant said the Russian woman's dealings were in "an illegal space." Mr Strache and Mr Gudenus remained seated.

The full length of the meeting is documented in the video, sober viewing that raises deep moral questions, over more than six hours which covered not only backroom deals, but also the overarching goal of creating a tamed Austrian media landscape similar to the Hungarian model.

Did Mr Strache or Mr Gudenus report to the authorities the next day that someone had attempted to bribe them? Or that illicit money was to be smuggled into Austria?

Requests for responses to those questions sent by *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and news weekly *Der Spiegel* were left unanswered.

In a message to *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel*, Mr Strache and Mr Gudenus did not deny

BEHIND THE STORY

The meeting in Ibiza appears to have served the sole purpose of deceiving Strache and Gudenus in a professionally staged and technically elaborate spectacle. Hidden cameras and microphones were installed in the villa in light switches and in a mobile-phone charging station. The microphones recorded almost every word spoken. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Der Spiegel* both obtained parts of the video and audio recordings and analysed them together. However, the newspaper paid no money for the material, and neither did *Der Spiegel*, according to the magazine. To determine the veracity of the video, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* obtained photos of an invoice showing the villa was booked from July 22-25, 2017. An expert hired by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* confirmed that the photos advertising the villa on the booking website show the same rooms that can be seen in the hours of video footage. Hidden cameras and microphones began recording their conversations there.

having been in that villa, but said it was a "strictly private meeting."

Ibiza, an oligarch's niece, millions and millions of euros and a major newspaper?

Even by the standards of Austrian politics – which has a penchant for absurdist drama – it was an audacious scenario. Too audacious to be real, in fact. Mr Strache and Mr Gudenus, it turned out, had been lured into a trap. Someone had wanted to put to the test how they would react to such a tempting offer.

The purported Russian wasn't the niece of oligarch Makarov, who is actually a real person. It is also not likely that she had hundreds of millions of euros at her disposal. She was simply acting as a decoy.

Neither *Der Spiegel* nor the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* have any reliable information about the motives of the people who set Mr Strache this trap in 2017 or whom they may have been working for.

But one thing was clear following the evaluation of the material and verification of its authenticity by two experts: It was in the public interest to know how two such high-ranking representatives of the Austrian government and of their party, responded to dubious advances from a purported oligarch. [ST](#)

This story by Leila Al-Serori, Oliver Das Gupta, Peter Münch, Frederik Obermaier and Bastian Obermayer was originally published in May 2019.



Judith Daramay wheeling her husband, Antonio Cabillan, out of the National Kidney and Transplant Institute in Quezon City for fresh air in between his peritoneal dialysis treatment, which is covered by his benefits from the Philippine Health Insurance Corp.
PHOTO: INQUIRER / LYN RILLON

THE PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER, PHILIPPINES

Ghost patients, scammers haunt Philippine health system

AS A MEMBER OF PHILIPPINE HEALTH INSURANCE Corp (PhilHealth), patient Maria (not her real name) was getting free dialysis treatment at a city centre in Quezon, Philippines.

The state insurer's health insurance coverage entitles each PhilHealth member to 90 free dialysis sessions a year.

Maria died in March 2016, but PhilHealth continued to pay for the rest of the dialysis treatments at 2,600 pesos (S\$70) each.

Dead patients undergoing kidney dialysis, ghost patients getting cancer treatments and fake members are just some of the fraudulent schemes that led to at least 154 billion pesos in losses at PhilHealth.

The state-owned corporation manages health insurance of public and private employees and their dependants, as well as indigents or poor beneficiaries.

In June, The Inquirer uncovered massive corruption in the health insurance agency, bleeding billions of pesos from health premiums paid by its 105 million members and beneficiaries.

A former employee of WellMed Dialysis & Laboratory Centre Corp, Mr Edwin Roberto, disclosed how he filed PhilHealth claims using the names of dead patients for non-existent dialysis sessions since March 2016 upon the instruction of one of his employers.

Owners of the clinic prepared the claims and told the centre's employees to copy the patients'

signatures from their medical records so that these claims could be submitted to PhilHealth, he said.

Mr Roberto told reporters that he and fellow ex-employee Liezel Santos went directly to the PhilHealth office in January to follow up on the status of their complaints about WellMed, but the visit was futile.

Apart from turning a blind eye to payments for kidney dialysis treatments of dead patients, the list of fraudulent acts that corrupt PhilHealth officials and personnel knew about include cancer treatments for fictitious members, fake payment receipts of overseas workers as well as hospitals overcharging by declaring ailments like cough and common colds as pneumonia.

Overseas Filipino worker (OFW) Marveleca Bautista-Jauod is just another victim embroiled in the schemes of conniving PhilHealth employees and fraudsters.

Hours before her flight to Kuwait on Aug 12, 2015, the OFW discovered that the PhilHealth benefit package which was supposed to cover the hospitalisation cost of her eight-year-old son, who had been stricken by dengue, was invalid.

But because her PhilHealth member record did not reflect any payment made by her hiring agency, her family had to shell out around 12,000 pesos for the hospital fees.

Her mother eventually found out that the PhilHealth official receipt (POR) Ms Bautista-Jauod

**LEILA SALAVERRIA,
JOVIC YEE,
MARIEJO RAMOS,
MARLON RAMOS
AND MELVIN
GASCON**



After the Inquirer's series of reports, President Rodrigo Duterte asked for the resignation of a dozen top PhilHealth officials and ordered the arrest of the Wellmed Dialysis Centre owner and the others involved in the scam.

PHOTO: INQUIRER / LYN RILLON

received was fake.

"Eli", a PhilHealth employee who monitored cases of fake PORs until September 2018, had recognised the same scheme in at least 48 hiring agencies handling land-based workers.

However, since the scam was first spotted in 2015, the lack of political will and general "inaction" of top PhilHealth officials hindered its speedy resolution, Eli said.

The case files have been passed on to five PhilHealth presidents, illustrating the bureaucratic red tape plaguing PhilHealth's inquiries into irregularities, he added.

Eli cited the case of Dennis Mas, then regional vice-president of PhilHealth's National Capital Region (NCR) office, who was supposedly concerned that picking up the issue of the fake PORs – which by that time was already being reported in six provinces as well – could affect his chances of promotion.

This widespread corruption in the public health system is an injustice, as most Filipinos can barely afford hospitalisation and medicine.

A 2016 study by the state University of the Philippines found that six out of 10 Filipinos die without ever seeing doctors. The country's doctor-patient ratio is 1:33,000, a far cry from other countries which have an ideal ratio of 1:1,000.

In 2018, the newly passed Universal Health Care Law, which mandates universal health coverage of all 110 million Filipinos, set aside a budget of 171 billion pesos.

However, these efforts are nought if PhilHealth does not undergo a major overhaul.

Documents obtained by the Inquirer showed that Health Secretary Francisco Duque III was made aware of the loss caused by PhilHealth's overpayments and other fraudulent schemes in November 2017, a month after he took office.

Dr Minguita Padilla, former head executive staff of former Health Secretary Janette Garin said: "There is a culture of fear. You can't blame them. Once in a while, there would be motherhood statements denouncing the fraud, but nothing happens. Those who really try to fix it, they get removed, end up

being called troublemakers."

After the Inquirer's series of reports, President Rodrigo Duterte asked for the resignation of a dozen top PhilHealth officials and ordered the arrest of the Wellmed Dialysis Centre owner and the others involved in the scam on June 7.

He replaced the PhilHealth president with a retired military general to undertake sweeping reforms in the agency.

In his fourth State of the Nation Address on July 22, Mr Duterte singled out the Inquirer's PhilHealth expose as an example of corruption he wanted to weed out.

The Philippine president said: "The recent uncovering of the massive fraud perpetrated against the public health insurance system proves that corruption is pervasive. Huge amounts of medical funds were released to cover padded medical claims and imaginary treatment of ghost patients."

On Aug 14, the Senate blue ribbon committee opened an investigation on the PhilHealth scam after several senators filed resolutions calling for an inquiry.

Two months since the Inquirer began the series, the story is still unfolding with more revelations of corruption in PhilHealth. [SI](#)

This story is a compilation of a series of articles originally published by the Philippine Daily Inquirer from June 6 to 21.

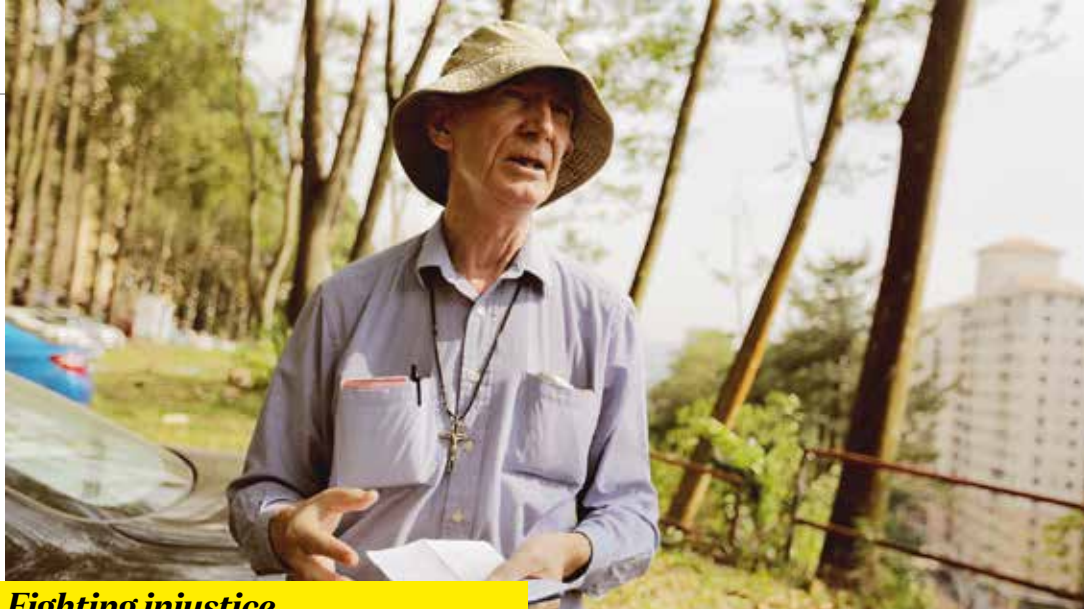
BEHIND THE STORY

The Inquirer investigative team first scratched the surface of the massive corruption in PhilHealth upon receiving documents and interviewing two whistleblowers. The former employees of Wellmed Dialysis Centre exposed their employer's scheme of charging kidney dialysis for dead patients.

Five reporters from the team spent weeks pouring through voluminous documents, interviewing insiders and taking out-of-town trips to find victims of the scam. The team took more than a month to launch the series of investigative reports.

After the first series came out on June 6, 2019, more documents and whistleblowers came forward about PhilHealth's systemic misconduct. The Inquirer ran a total of 24 stories on the issue.

The unravelling corruption included an exclusive report on the Secretary of Health's conflict-of-interest, as his family corporation was found leasing a building for PhilHealth and supplying medicine for the Department of Health.



Fighting injustice

THE STAR, MALAYSIA

Taking down a drug mule syndicate

IN A CROWDED SHOPPING MALL IN KUALA Lumpur, 16-year-old Shirley* (not her real name) met two men she had never seen in her life. They gave her a flight ticket to Hong Kong and RM2,000 (\$\$665) in spending money. A friend she had met on Facebook, 15 years old at the time, had arranged the trip, telling her it was a free holiday. He had gone several times before, and even brought souvenirs back for her.

On the morning of her flight, one of the men showed up again and gave her and a fellow traveller a pair of shoes each. They were asked to wear them to Hong Kong.

Hours later, her life as she knew it was over. After arriving at Hong Kong International Airport, she was picked out for a body search, and 700g of heroin were found in the soles of the shoes.

For Shirley's parents back in Malaysia, the nightmare was only just beginning. For nearly two months, they had no idea what had happened to her.

The last time they saw Shirley, their only child, she was begging them to let her go to Hong Kong with her friends. She was only supposed to be gone for three days.

Her parents searched everywhere – the airport, the police, hospitals – and found nothing. They couldn't eat or sleep, and yet, as the owners of a small business, they had to continue working each day to survive.

And then came a phone call which gave them fear and relief in equal measure. It was from Hong Kong Correctional Services – their daughter was facing over 20 years in prison on drug-trafficking charges.

Ever since that moment, Shirley's parents have been working frantically and desperately to prove

their daughter's innocence.

But Shirley is not alone. In the past year, nearly 30 young Malaysians – some still teenagers – have been arrested in Hong Kong for being drug mules on behalf of international syndicates; and experts say the arrest numbers are just a fraction of those who actually make it through.

With drug production in South-east Asia's infamous Golden Triangle region hitting record highs in the past year, the number of mules being recruited to transport drugs could grow even higher across Asia, and Malaysia – the region's low-cost airline hub – appears to be the perfect transit country.

Drug syndicates operating in Malaysia have been using Facebook pages and WeChat groups with devastating effect, luring impressionable young people with "paid holidays" (like the one Shirley went for) or part-time courier jobs.

Some even say openly that the job involves drugs.

If the mules get arrested, they are left to rot in prison while the syndicates get off scot-free.

All communications are done using fake profiles on chat apps, so the recruiters can't be traced.

After receiving a tip-off from a lawyer and a prison chaplain in Hong Kong, investigative journalists from R.AGE started looking into this increase in drug-mule activity and working with the families of the arrested mules to find out more about the syndicates.

Through its investigations in Malaysia and Hong Kong alone, the journalists were able to uncover syndicates which were sending mules to Vietnam, China, South Korea, Taiwan, the Middle East, Australia, and even as far as Brazil and Peru.

The team then went undercover, posing as

Father John Wotherspoon is a prison chaplain on a mission to dismantle the operations of drug-mule syndicates across the world, working together with media organisations like R.AGE in Malaysia to expose the syndicates.

IAN YEE AND
SHANJEEV REDDY



An undercover journalist (above, left) from R.AGE, posing as a potential drug mule, manages to arrange a meeting with a drug-syndicate recruiter. PHOTOS: R.AGE/THE STAR, MALAYSIA

potential drug mules to meet the syndicates' recruiters, in the hopes of exposing their tactics – which range from friendly recruitment to brutal physical force.

Little did they know, their investigations would eventually help expose a dangerous drug-trafficking network, with connections to a dealer in Hong Kong.

But it all started with a series of prison visits in Hong Kong.

Shirley, now 18, told R.AGE her story from behind a glass panel at a Hong Kong prison. She was supposed to be graduating from high school this year.

Her Facebook page is full of photos of her and her friends from school. None of them know what happened. Only her parents and a few close relatives were clued in.

"I told her not to go," said Shirley's mother, her voice trembling as she spoke from their home, in a small town two hours south of Kuala Lumpur.

They haven't moved anything in Shirley's room, the bigger of the two rooms in their home. It's also

the only one with a window, so the parents offered it to her.

"She's such a sweet child – her grandmother's favourite, and popular with all her schoolmates – but she started mixing with these 'friends' on Facebook, and now they've ruined her life.

"She begged me to let her go with them. I felt bad because we never had the money to take her for a holiday overseas, but I still said no. In the end, we just couldn't stop her," said the mother.

Her parents, too, had never been on a plane. Despite surviving on a combined RM3,000 a month, they spent almost all their savings making two trips to see Shirley in Hong Kong, desperate to find evidence that could help her case before she is sentenced.

"I can't sleep. I can't eat. I just cry myself to sleep every night thinking about her," said the mother.

"Just one trip – her first time on a plane," said her father ruefully. "Look what it has done to us."

Shirley has not heard from the 15-year-old friend who recruited her. He was on the same trip, but on an earlier flight. As far as she knows, he's back in Malaysia, safe and sound.

Other mules tell us it's a common diversionary tactic – keep the authorities busy with one or two arrests, while the majority pass through.

"I believe I was set up (to be arrested)," said Shirley. "I was the one to take the fall. Why else would they only plant 700g on me? That seems like a very small amount."

Proving that in court, however, seemed an almost impossible task for her parents. The syndicate had burnt all traces of its involvement, and the parents didn't have enough money to hire a lawyer.

Although Shirley eventually pleaded guilty to avoid trial, the group of undercover journalists' investigation behind this story put a dent in Malaysian drug syndicates' operations by exposing their mule recruitment methods.

Their work has helped raise awareness about Father John Wotherspoon's work, a prison chaplain from Hong Kong on a mission to expose drug-mule recruiters in Malaysia before they ruin any more lives.

With the help of corroborative intel from Father Wotherspoon and families of incarcerated drug mules, a drug lord dubbed as Shanker was detained under the Special Preventive Measures by narcotics officers in February.

Three more senior figures in his syndicate were arrested as well.

However, much remains to be done, like many others the teenage recruiter who made Shirley a drug mule is still at large.

* All names have been changed to protect the identity of the families involved. [S1](#)

This story by Ian Yee and Shanjeev Reddy was originally published on June 24.

BEHIND THE STORY

Drug syndicates operating out of the infamous Golden Triangle in Indochina have been flooding Asia with record levels of synthetic drugs, with Malaysia a strategic transit point – particularly for the recruitment of innocent young mules.

Undercover journalists from The Star's R.AGE team followed the trail of information left by the mules and their devastated families to track down the syndicates' recruiters, and found enough information to help Malaysian narcotics officers make several arrests, crippling at least one drug-mule network.

Their work, which included a hidden camera sting operation on a mule recruiter, helped stem the tide of Malaysian drug-mule arrests in Hong Kong – another strategic transit point for drug trafficking, according to experts. It also helped create widespread awareness about the drug-mule syndicates' recruitment strategies.

In the months after R.AGE's investigations, there were zero Malaysian mule arrests reported in Hong Kong, according to one activist, compared with more than two dozen arrested in the nine months before.

Then, in May this year, two more arrests emerged.

R.AGE is now working with the arrested mules' families to provide information that could help the mules' cases in court, and is planning a follow-up campaign to tackle drug abuse.

THE QUINT, INDIA

A woman's journey from slavery to activism in India

FOR MS PACHAYAMMAL, 25, FREEDOM TASTES like briyani. That's the dish she first ate after getting rescued from six years of bonded labour in Tamil Nadu.

"We were finally able to eat a meal in peace," she said.

Now a feisty activist, Ms Pachayammal, along with her husband Arul, has rescued over 100 people from slavery, advocated for homes and helped in rehabilitating them.

Ms Pachayammal's story is one of 10 women featured as part of The Quint's "Me, The Change" campaign. The campaign, presented by Facebook, sought to put focus on a demographic usually ignored by mainstream media – female voters who are heading to the polls for the first time.

Launched in October 2018, the campaign highlighted the issues and aspirations of these first-time woman voters in the run-up to this year's Lok Sabha elections.

Ms Pachayammal married Mr Arul when she was barely 16. Although she married willingly, little did she know that she was being wedded into slavery.

She said: "My husband's parents had a debt which he had to repay. The 'owner' decided to get me married to my husband so that we formed a 'pair' (easy to manage, lower pay and we wouldn't run away). We didn't know this. I, too, really liked my husband so I married him."

The couple faced physical, verbal and sexual abuse daily. Ms Pachayammal was paid 200 rupees



(\$3.90) a week, and along with over 25 other bonded labourers, slaved for the quarry owner for six years. She was given one meal a day of watery rice gruel and worked nearly 12 hours daily.

"At 4am every day, the owner would call us to break rock. Some days, the men would have to work till midnight," Ms Pachayammal said.

This went on until she was rescued at the age of 23.

According to The Quint, over one million people were bonded labourers in Tamil Nadu last year. After her rescue, Ms Pachayammal turned to activism, drawing from an unending well of self-confidence and seeking out basic rights (homes, electricity, work) for rescued bonded labourers.

She stakes out quarries, brick kilns and carpentry suspected of hiring bonded labourers for months, trying to get close to the workers. Afterwards, she ropes in government officials and organises raids.

Ms Pachayammal is now part of the State Rural Livelihoods Mission and gets a steady monthly income. Occasionally, she does daily wage work. Her husband earns a living driving an auto-rickshaw he received from a corporation as part of their social work. Both of them are doing very well today. [T](#)

This story was originally published in The Quint on Nov 30, 2018.

After spending six years as a bonded labourer, Ms Pachayammal, 25, is now an activist and, along with her husband Arul, has rescued over 100 people from slavery.

PHOTO: THE QUINT, INDIA

VIKRAM
VENKATESWARAN

BEHIND THE STORY

In gathering Ms Pachayammal's story, three reporters at The Quint reached out to global non-governmental organisation International Justice Mission, from where many case studies were sourced, before zeroing in on her.

Until The Quint's video, Ms Pachayammal was a true inspiration, but her story was not covered in mainstream media. The sight of a camera or journalist would push her into what could be described as the "camera effect".

All her responses were rehearsed

and interactions were formal. Ms Pachayammal was expecting to be fed words to say, which she would then rattle off. This had been her common experience with the media and what had always happened.

To tackle this, The Quint reporter Vikram Venkateswaran made several trips to Ms Pachayammal's village with a cameraman, but without any equipment. The team got to know the villagers and spent time with Ms Pachayammal and her husband. It was only on the fourth visit that the

reporter brought a camera along.

On the sixth visit to Ullavur village, which is a three-hour drive from Chennai, the camera was finally unveiled. Over a kerosene stove, as Ms Pachayammal prepared "sambar" (a local dish), the reporter started a conversation about food – what she liked to eat and what she got to eat while she was a slave. And so began the genuine retelling of Ms Pachayammal's inspirational story, which the team managed to capture on camera, minus the hesitation.

TIMES OF INDIA, INDIA

Predators around us

AMBIKA PANDIT

POLICING AND COURTS ALONE CAN'T COUNTER sexual harassment and abuse. The emotional complexity of such experiences as well as the family's reluctance to discuss abuse make it hard for survivors, male or female, to speak up.

Yet more survivors now want to put their experiences out in public – as long as their identities are not disclosed. This is their way of owning their experiences which, they say, helps to heal.

When Times of India's Ambika Pandit started the series of first-person accounts, she was flooded with responses from readers and motivated survivors to come forward to share their experiences buried for years.

Her series of 10 survivor accounts shows that the trauma stays for years and often affects other relationships. Some of the survivors have not even been able to open up to their families.

IN THE FIRST PART of the series, a successful career woman in her early 40s explains that her confident facade hides scars of being harassed by an uncle, victimised by an alcoholic husband and raped by a stranger.

She tried to numb the pain with alcohol and drugs, but then chose to fight back. Now sober for nearly eight years, she says she still struggles for a life that's "normal."

'I speak so that others won't suffer alone.'

PHOTO: SAJEEV KUMARAPURAM



When Times of India's Ambika Pandit started the series of first person accounts, she was flooded with responses from readers and motivated survivors to come forward to share their experiences buried for years. PHOTO: **TIMES OF INDIA**

"I speak so that others won't suffer alone.

"Years ago, a man raped me as his friends stood guard. I was terrified. I was sure I would be killed.

"As I waited in fear, another man threw my clothes at me, and said, 'The man who raped you is the son of a politician from another state and he has a gun. He will kill you and I don't want to be embroiled in a murder case so I have decided to help you escape.'

"I dragged myself to the police station, where a cop asked my name, address and father's name.

"The last (piece of information) made me back out. I realised that I could not tell my parents all this.

"I had a successful career as a communications professional. I was a divorcee, 28 years old, living alone in an upscale neighbourhood.

"I chose silence over legal recourse. My rape is still a secret.

"I have started share my experience on various platforms, keeping my identity anonymous.

"I hope this coming out will help other women and girls. I want them to stand up for themselves and not suffer alone."

IN THE SECOND ACCOUNT of the series, a 19-year-old Delhi University student speaks of repeated sexual assault from a cousin – an experience she still hasn't been able to tell her parents about.

Her rapist was a distant cousin. He was in college; she wasn't even 10 years old, yet he raped her each time she had to go to his house.

The abuse stopped when she and her family moved to the city.

Last year, she joined a voluntary organisation that encourages people to break their silence around sexual abuse and harassment.

Her parents are still unaware of what she had faced. [SI](#)

This story is a compilation of a series of articles published from July to August 2018.



Reporting from the ground

ABS-CBN, PHILIPPINES

The battle of Marawi, and the destructive power of hatred

“FALCON”, A MARINE SNIPER, RECALLS HOW his companions died as they tried to reclaim the Mapandi bridge from the Maute group – Isis-inspired terrorists – amid the five-month-long conflict in Marawi City in the southern Philippines that started in May 2017.

Just a few hours past midnight, when the Marine troops tried to advance from the bridge towards a street surrounded by buildings, terrorists unleashed a storm of heavy gunfire, grenades and molotov cocktails. The firefight lasted 14 hours.

Despite the difficulty in getting through an area of terrorist-infested buildings, the valiant troops did not give up. Instead, they tried to enter the Mapandi area through a much farther bridge.

The Marines were eventually able to retake the bridge in at least two months, a turning point in the war that allowed the military to bring in more troops and supplies to the main battle area.

The bridge also became a key route used to transport rescued civilians and wounded soldiers, said Army Colonel Romeo Brawner, deputy commander of Task Force Marawi.

The experience made Falcon and Col Brawner realise the difficulties of urban warfare. The sniper

added that most Marines were trained for thick jungle battles but not for fighting in cities.

RAINING BOMBS

The sound of bombs raining and flattening Marawi impaired the hearing of 78-year-old Nanay Linda, who spent the whole five months in the hands of the terrorists.

Nanay Linda, a retired health worker, was among the hostages taken at nightfall on May 23. That night, Nanay Linda recalled, they were taken in a van with teachers abducted from Dansalan College.

She said there were times Omar Maute, a terrorist leader, visited the building where they were held captive. An alumnus of Dansalan College, Maute would always talk to his former school principal about the good old days.

Maute assured the captives they would not be killed since they only wanted the military to withdraw its forces, Nanay Linda recounted.

What stuck with Nanay Linda from the conflict was the relentless bombing that led to flattened buildings and dead bodies.

“It was always raining bombs until almost all of the structures there were flattened,” she said.

**WORLD
NEWS
DAY**
REAL NEWS MATTERS

PATRICK QUINTOS

For months, Nanay Linda and her fellow captives ran from building to building to avoid the bombs, while praying to the heavens that they would not be hit.

Until one day, no bombs fell from the sky.

ESCAPE PLAN

Three weeks before the military announced the end of combat operations, the hopes of Nanay Linda and the rest of the captives lifted as a drone arrived. By then, the captors let their guard down as supplies were depleted and fatigue set in.

With a lipstick, one of the captives scribbled the word “help” on a cloth, hoping the drone would heed their call. And through the drone, the military handed them a phone, with an escape plan the captives pursued by dawn.

The captives ran until they were able to board a military safe vehicle, and were later brought to a safe house, staying there for eight days before they were allowed to go home.

However, much of the town was already flattened by the bombing, with many losing their homes in the process.

Townfolk, like “barangay” – meaning village – chief Bashir Manri, looked heartbroken as he stood atop what used to be a lively park in the city’s centre, looking for this house.

“I looked for my home first. But I couldn’t even recognise our place because of the damage. I can no longer recognise home,” he said.

NO ONE WAS SPARED

Even the powerful clans in Marawi were not spared by the destruction.

Provincial government official Zia Alonto Adiong broke down in tears when he saw the devastation that turned their ancestral house into a pile of broken stones and twisted steel.

Adiong’s grandfather, the late senator Domacao Alonto, began to build the house in Panganuran village in the 1950s. Their residence was treated as an open house, as Maranaos freely entered the compound on many occasions.

He said the family has yet to discuss how to rebuild their ancestral house. He has proposed retaining a portion of the ruins as a marker for people to see, a reminder to the next generation of the destructive power of hatred.

RUINED MOSQUES

Simultaneous calls for prayer from towering minarets scattered throughout central Marawi used to wake up Maranaos from their lakeside slumber before daybreak. But the war silenced these Islamic beacons of peace as the nightmare of destruction befell the town area.

Out of at least 56 mosques or masjids – big and small alike – in the 24 villages in the main battle area, 48 were wrecked and would need to be built from scratch, according to the United Imam of the Philippines. Most of the destroyed mosques were the big ones, including the landmark Islamic Centre.

MARAWI REHAB

Wider roads, a modern business district, riverside parks, and promenades are just some of the improvements expected to rise from the ashes of war in Marawi City.

And what the battle destroyed in five bloody months, the government promises to rebuild in four years at most.

The reconstruction of the 24 most affected villages inside the 250ha land that used to be the main battle area would require an estimated 48 billion pesos (\$\$1.3 billion).

How locals and the national government view reconstruction work may even lead to a worse problem – radicalism – said researcher Steven Rood, a former University of the Philippines professor from the northern Philippines who has done studies on the Moro conflict both for the Social Weather Stations and the Asia Foundation.

While the government’s plan tries to paint a beautiful and modern picture of a reconstructed Marawi in three more years, the Maranaos have a simpler vision – good ol’ home. As the Maranao saying goes: “Minsanoray bolawan a oran ko isa ka inged na mapangiroy tadn i tarintik sangganatan.”

Roughly translated in English, it means: “Even if gold rains in other places, I will prefer the raindrops in Lanao.” [SI](#)

This story was originally published on March 13, 2018.

BEHIND THE STORY

Written by Patrick Quintos, the story was part of a nine-part special report that won the 2018 Association of International Broadcasting (AIB) Awards in the interactive category and an Honourable Mention in Journalistic Innovation at the Society of Publishers in Asia’s (Sopa) 2019 Awards for Editorial Excellence. It recounts the five-month siege on Marawi City staged by Islamic State sympathisers in 2017 through the perspectives of the people affected by it. Before this story, readers have never had a view of how widespread the destruction was except for news footage shown on television. The multimedia story was presented on a map with several aerial shots of Marawi, which gave readers a survey of its total annihilation. It was developed for the Web by Regie Francisco and published on the ABS-CBN News Digital website, featuring photos from Jonathan Cellona and Fernando Sepe Jr and drone videos from Val Cuenca. With the city holding the families’ stories and their culture’s legacies in shambles, residents of Marawi fear that the situation will unravel into more conflict if the government fails to provide answers about its destruction. This story is both an attempt to acknowledge that fear, and to honour the people who struggled to stay alive as well as the memory of those who perished.

**SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST,
HONG KONG**

The only unmasked protester who stormed LegCo explains July 1 drama

HUNDREDS OF PROTESTERS STORMED HONG Kong's Legislative Council on the 22nd anniversary of the city's handover to Chinese rule on July 1, breaking glass panels, windows, dismantling furniture, daubing graffiti in the chamber and attempting to put up the British colonial flag.

Mr Brian Leung Kai-ping, 25, was among those who entered the legislature – and the only one who openly revealed his identity that night.

The storming made international headlines and marked a “quantum leap” for the entire movement against the extradition Bill and the city's push for democracy, he said.

In an exclusive interview with the South China Morning Post, via a Telegram phone call – the social networking tool widely used in the movement – he explained his actions and why he had no regrets.

Q: Where were you on July 1 and what was your role?

A: I skipped another major rally to stay around the Legislative Council (LegCo) complex for nearly eight hours, keeping a close eye on every move. Like most protesters, we had been waiting for this opportunity to make a statement inside LegCo. There was, of course, no clear consensus at the time how long we should occupy it, which underlined the very nature of the extradition Bill movement – decentralised, leaderless and spontaneous. We were improvising.

Q: After an hour and a half, reporters observed you removing your mask and asking everyone to stay. Why did you do that?

A: At the time, more and more people, wary of police countermoves, started to leave the LegCo chamber.

I made a risky move to step on the desk of one lawmaker, removed my face mask, and shouted at the top of my voice: “The more people here, the safer we are. Let's stay and occupy the chamber, we can't lose no more.”

Some protesters warned me not to remove my mask, but I felt it was the defining moment of the night. I felt we ought to appeal to the crowds to join in and form a barrier and support those inside the LegCo complex. No one could tell when we would



step foot in LegCo again.

As police were drawing closer and closer, after some deliberation, most decided to end the siege. I volunteered to be in front of the camera to read out the key demands of protesters in the chamber.

The last thing I wished to see, after all the action taken, was to have no clear demands put on the table.

If we didn't do that, the public might only remember the vandalism and point fingers at us as a mob. That would also hand the government a convenient reason to prosecute each and every one of us, which would mark yet another setback to civil society like in the 2014 Occupy movement.

Q: But weren't the actions of the protesters that day, along with the damage done to LegCo, violent?

A: Be clear that any damage was only done to the LegCo building or properties within, not so much to any person or even police officers. Protesters have been restrained in their use of force.

It is worthwhile to note the graffiti was not merely vandalising. For instance, protesters spray-painted and covered up “People's Republic of China”, leaving behind only “Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.” That is a clear mistrust of the two-systems principle. Most of the other graffiti was about commemorating the three lives lost in this movement.

So they were only telling the public that this was not just mob action but to register the accumulated frustrations of an unfair electoral system. Compared with the death of three people who used their lives to deliver a message, does the damage to several glass frames even count?

Q: So what was the young protesters' state of mind in being part of the July 1 protest and other sieges?

A: The pursuit of freedom and democracy is what fundamentally drove hundreds of protesters that day into LegCo, the same goal shared by hundreds of thousands who took to the streets earlier. The government has thus far turned a blind eye to our demands, and there was no real change or real

Mr Brian Leung Kai-ping, 25, who openly revealed his identity, despite his fellow protesters warning him against removing his mask, as he felt it was the defining moment of the night.

PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI/THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

ALVIN LUM

actions tabled. If (Mrs) Carrie Lam claimed herself ready to be more humble, why did she not make clear the suspended Bill was completely withdrawn, a move that could easily settle the controversy?

Or, the government could choose not to charge protesters arrested earlier, which we saw happened to those in Taiwan's Sunflower movement. Or, it could task an independent inquiry into police's excessive use of force.

Any of these would be welcomed by the civil society, but the government refused to take these calls on board.

Q: You mentioned the three deaths. These are suicide cases. Isn't it wrong to glamourise them and call them martyrs?

A: It was evident that protesters were so outraged that three lives were sacrificed throughout this movement, when peaceful means were almost all exhausted. Young protesters were at a point of desperation.

We were not in a position to pass any judgment on their decisions but what the protesters could do was to honour their faith.

One may well argue that time is supposed to be on young people's side. But, with the disqualification and jailing of pro-democracy lawmakers and activists after the 2014 "umbrella movement", the entire generation was banned from the political system.

We do not have the luxury of our parents to settle down in another place. Nor do we have the burden of a 30-year mortgage to worry about. Young people have nothing to lose, their only hope is to stay safe to see the sun rise, and hope to join protest another day. We want democracy, now.

Q: Can you share your personal background, your

schooling, your parents?

A: Hong Kong's social movement has always inspired my academic study. After graduating from the University of Hong Kong with a dual degree in law and politics, I chose for my master's thesis the topic of how civil society could help democratic transition and prevent authoritarian regimes.

I have always aspired to become a professor and return to teach Hong Kong students to be socially aware in the future.

I really don't want to mention my family, as I don't think that's helpful.

Q: What's next for the movement? And what's next for you? And are you in Hong Kong?

A: Civil society has already exhausted every possible peaceful means, and it is not trying to exercise violence for the sake of violence. The government needs to reflect on its response.

For my own part, I am not sure whether I can fly to the United States this September to continue my PhD studies in political science at the University of Washington. I am still considering various options, and seeking as much advice as I can.

While I am not yet a political dissident in exile, that is a real threat ahead of me and my peers if the government chooses to press charges against all those who entered LegCo, who played their part in this protest.

I am blessed to receive legal advice and other recommendations from my social network, while remaining financially independent through a role as a teaching assistant. For those who may be 17 and 18 years old, there could be real consequences and it is worrying. [SCMP](#)

This story was originally published by the South China Morning Post on July 5.

Alvin Lum's exclusive interview was a scoop, being the first journalist who spoke with the protest leader who was willing to take off his mask at the Hong Kong's Legislative Council.

PHOTO: SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST

BEHIND THE STORY



Alvin Lum is an award-winning political journalist specialising in Hong Kong politics and the city's justice system. He sought to understand the reason why protesters stormed the council even after the government had shelved the Bill. This led him to contact Brian, who had left Hong Kong right after the movement, through a mutual acquaintance. Published on July 5, his exclusive interview was a scoop, Alvin being the first journalist to speak to the only protest leader who was willing to take off his mask during the trashing of Hong Kong's Legislative Council. "That interview, when it was published, helped fill the void why protesters still need to resort to this kind of more radical measures which has never happened before in Hong Kong," Alvin said. Tammy Tam, editor-in-chief, South China Morning Post added: "Alvin's exclusive interview with Brian Leung reflects the vital role SCMP has played in independently covering and revealing insights into an important chapter of this still ongoing unprecedented political crisis in our city. We will continue in our unwavering commitment to report these developments with professionalism and courage."

Tackling Issues

CHINA DAILY, CHINA

Pioneering daily use of cutting-edge daily tech

FUJIAN PROVINCE, A WHITE, 5G-ENABLED, sensor-rich agricultural robot moves between two rows of leafy greens in a greenhouse, collecting data about the plants, and feeding it back to the control room.

The pictures and data it transmits from the farmland arrive almost in real time, thanks to its compatibility with super-fast fifth-generation, or 5G, mobile communication technology. The latency, or the time lag, is no more than just one-hundredth of a second.

This allows the data to be analysed by computers in the control room, which are driven by artificial intelligence, or AI, more efficiently, according to the Fujian Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Fujian Newland Era Hi-Tech Co, the two entities that developed the robot.

As if to soften the edge of its high-tech innards, the robot sports the eye-pleasing appearance of an adorable cartoon character.

Its smooth, round base, hiding wheels underneath, adds to the overall cuddly effect.

Moving smoothly and fluidly, its motions jerk-free in all directions, the robot can inspect farms automatically and collect data samples used to power various applications. It can determine plant health and decide if pest control measures are warranted.

Odds are, in the not too distant future, this 5G super robot will even be able to pick fruit with one of its bionic hands.

It is part of a broader trend in China that involves tech companies teaming up with a variety of industries – agriculture, automobile, healthcare – to explore possibilities in combining 5G and AI to revolutionise traditional sectors of the economy.

Some of its uses have been to conduct the first 5G-enabled surgery on a human and transmit ultra-high-definition TV content through 5G networks to self-driving buses and cars.

The high-tech push is expected to accelerate since the nation kicked off the 5G era, in June.

Yang Kun, an expert at the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, a research institute based in Beijing, said 5G enables data transfers at speeds that are at least 10 times faster than 4G, making it possible to gather high-



ILLUSTRATION: MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

quality data quickly, which is necessary if AI is to be effective.

“AI applications have existed before the commercial use of 5G, but it is the superfast speed, gigantic computing capacity and massive device connectivity of 5G that will spawn the use of AI in more sectors and on a far larger scale,” Yang said.

Lyu Tingjie, a professor at the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications agreed, noting 5G’s responsive speed can empower mission-critical applications that were impossible with 4G networks.

“When a needle pinches your finger, it takes one hundredth of a second for you to feel the pain.

MA SI IN BEIJING
AND HU MEIDONG
in Fuzhou

WORLD
NEWS
DAY
REAL NEWS MATTERS

And the theoretical latency of 5G is one-tenth of that. Only with such speed can remote surgeries and autonomous driving see wider applications,” Lyu said.

In March, a patient with Parkinson’s disease underwent China’s, and possibly the world’s, first 5G-based remote surgery.

With technological support from Huawei Technologies Co and China Mobile, a doctor in Sanya in the Hainan province, remotely operated surgical instruments to implant a deep brain stimulator known as a “brain pacemaker” into the patient in Beijing, about 2,500km away.

Ling Zhipei, chief physician of the First Medical Centre of the Chinese PLA General Hospital, who was in Sanya on a work rotation, conducted the three-hour surgery. “The 5G network has solved problems like video lag and remote control delay experienced under the 4G network, ensuring a nearly real-time operation,” Dr Ling said.

On June 6, China granted commercial 5G licences to China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom, the nation’s top three telecom carriers by subscriber numbers.

The country is expected to invest US\$184 billion in 5G by 2025, according to a report released by the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, which represents the interests of more than 750 mobile operators worldwide.

Such investments are expected to power China’s big AI push through a development plan to build a

one trillion yuan (US\$141 billion) AI core industry by 2030, which is expected to stimulate related businesses to the tune of 10 trillion yuan.

Digital technologies such as AI, next-generation network security, robotics, blockchain, internet of things, 3D printing and virtual reality all depend on data, and 5G can address the need for data collection and its quick, smooth transmission, said Zhong Zhenshan, vice-president of emerging technology research at the China branch of International Data Corp.

Wang Xianchang, a professor at Jilin University, said the most important use of AI is to allow machines to automatically make decisions, for instance in self-driving vehicles. 5G will allow such decisions to be made effectively and more reliably.

When a car encounters emergency situations, like a pedestrian suddenly stepping into the road, a delay in seconds of data transmission among sensors in the car could cause a serious accident.

5G technology should prevent such things from happening, Wang said.

Currently, self-driving buses are under test in a string of cities across China, including Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and Changsha, Hunan province.

Chinese online search engine operator Baidu Inc announced plans as early as in December 2017 to mass-produce autonomous buses for designated areas. It will partner bus manufacturer Xiamen King Long United Automotive Industry Co.

In East China’s Anhui province, carmaker Anhui Jianghuai Automobile Co Ltd has teamed up with Baidu to develop cars with auto-pilot systems.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, said the commercial use of 5G would impart further momentum to AI, but more discussions are needed about the legal and ethical issues surrounding its wider applications.

China took a step in that direction in June when it issued new guidelines for scientists and lawmakers to promote the “safe, controllable and responsible use” of AI for the benefit of mankind.

Xue Lan, dean of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University and chairman of the committee that issued the guidelines, said AI has raised many new and complex issues, like data privacy, machine ethics, safety, risks and misuse such as the creation of “deepfake videos” that spread misinformation, and AI-manipulated footage.

But AI is not as uncontrollable or mystical as some people imagine, experts said. Regulatory or supervisory mechanisms could steer it in the right direction and still leave enough room for exploration, course-correction, remedies and calibrated growth, analysts said. [S1](#)

This story by Ma Si and Hu Meidong was originally published on July 8 by China Daily.

BEHIND THE STORY

China Daily took a broader look at the potential for 5G mobile technology to transform industries beyond the telecommunications sector in an article that appeared in Business Weekly on July 8, 2019.

The report, a collaboration between Ma Si in Beijing and Hu Meidong in Fuzhou, examined how the fifth-generation technology is being increasingly put to work in industrial applications that also exploit advances in artificial intelligence (AI).

While consumer-oriented applications of 5G have monopolised the headlines, the report by Ma and Hu shed light on the commercial uses that are being explored for the technology.

The marriage of 5G and AI is also being championed as a means for China to promote their safe and responsible use for the benefit of mankind.

With sectors offering interesting contrasts, the report led with the use of 5G in agriculture and healthcare. Agriculture has been seen as a laggard in the uptake of cutting-edge advances, while caution is at the forefront of people’s minds when it comes to the medical establishment’s adoption of new practices enabled by scientific breakthroughs.

As they interviewed experts in diverse fields, the reporters were impressed by the extent of the progress made by Chinese scientists and the readiness of entrepreneurs to embrace their work.



Inspiring communities

THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE

Defying the odds to walk and help others find their feet

IT WAS A HOT JANUARY AFTERNOON IN 2013. The sun was beating down on Desmond Lim as he sat astride his Kawasaki Versys 1000, waiting for the traffic light to turn green on a country road near Kanchanaburi.

The former flight attendant was heading back to Bangkok after a month-long motorbike sojourn which had taken him from Singapore to Thailand.

A sudden impact from behind threw him to the ground. It was a truck driven by a man too engrossed with his phone to notice Desmond.

The 43-year-old recalls: "I saw tyres, they went over me. I saw tyres again, turned on my side and got run over again."

He lay groaning on the hot tarmac for more than six hours before an ambulance arrived.

For more than a year, the hospital was his home, because his injuries – fractured pelvis, broken right leg and organs which had shifted – were horrific.

Doctors told him that he would never walk again, which threw him into a deep malaise.

But Desmond eventually walked again, thanks to his grit and the love and support of his family and several medical workers.

Today, he walks with the help of a brace because his right leg – the lower part is paralysed – is now shorter than the left.

"There is pain when I sit or stand, but I have learnt how to manage it," he says.

With his employability limited, he got a loan from his sister and used his savings to start The

Prosthetic Company three years ago.

The social enterprise specialises in prosthetic and orthotic equipment and services.

The outfit has since grown to become one of the largest of its kind here and has expanded to Malaysia.

Knowing what his clients need has helped the business, he says.

"I've been through it and I know what it is like. I understand how they feel, I listen and try my best to give them what they want."

Because of his family circumstances, Desmond became independent and started earning his own keep at a young age.

By the time he was 15, he was working full time as a banquet staff member at a hotel in Dunearn Road, pulling more than \$1,500 a month including overtime.

"I'd go to school in the morning and work from 3pm until 11pm every day," he says, adding that the hotel provided him with a room.

Before the accident, Desmond – a purser at Cathay Pacific Airways by then – enjoyed flying because it was relatively stress-free and gave the motorbiking enthusiast opportunities to take long rides to Malaysia and the region.

The day his life changed is seared in his memory.

The accident attracted a crowd and caused a big traffic jam, one reason why the ambulance took six hours to reach the scene.

"It was a hot day. I was burnt because the

ground was so hot. Some people sheltered me with umbrellas and poured water on the ground to cool it. I couldn't move my body, only my hands and my mouth," he says.

"I don't know how to describe the pain. I can only say I felt as though I was dying. I thought about whether I would die, what I had done and not done."

He was taken to a provincial hospital that looked like it had not been renovated since the 1960s.

"I was rolled into an operating theatre which had fans," he says, adding that none of the medical staff spoke English.

By then, his riding companions had come to know of his accident and informed his family in Singapore.

Because the hospital was not equipped to deal with his injuries, he had to endure another bumpy two-hour ride to a hospital in Bangkok, where his mother and one of his sisters were waiting anxiously.

"I'd been conscious throughout, my eyes were wide open for more than 10 hours. But when I saw my mother, I hyperventilated, cried and then blacked out," he says.

The next time he regained full consciousness was several weeks later at Singapore General Hospital.

He did not go home for the next 15 months.

"I couldn't sit up or turn sideways for the first eight months. There were pressure sores all over my back and heels," says Desmond, who went through half a dozen operations.

For nearly a year, the sight of wheels – on TV or in newspapers – would set off anxiety attacks.

"I felt lost, I didn't want to talk to anyone," he says, adding that he had to see a psychiatrist.

He credits his family and several hospital staff for getting him out of depression.

"Some of the physiotherapists went out of their way to help me. They bought me food and visited me on their days off to encourage me."

To regain his mobility, he started swimming and walking up and down from his family home on the 11th floor of his block, even though it took him a few hours.

He started The Prosthetic Company in 2016 because he felt that the variety of prosthetic and orthotic aids here was limited.

After drawing up a proper business plan, he approached his eldest sister, a professor at a local university, for financial help.

By then, Desmond had attended short courses on prosthetics and related subjects in Europe and China.

"I'm not certified, and all the doctors and clients I deal with know that. But my staff are. I have good technical knowledge, I know how to troubleshoot. My job is to deal with clients and run the business. We've not had a single complaint ever since we started," he says proudly.

Because others have helped him, Desmond wants to pass the kindness on.

When he recovered, he donated blood several times and took part in support groups for those who have lost their limbs or mobility.

As founder of The Prosthetic Company, he now works with different associations to offer free prosthetics to those who cannot afford them.

Life is unpredictable and we have to live it well, he says.

"As long as you're hardworking and you make decisions not just to benefit yourself, things will turn out well." **ST**

This story was originally published on June 16, 2019.

BEHIND THE STORY

This inspirational tale is part of Wong Kim Hoh's award-winning profile series, *It Changed My Life*, in *The Sunday Times*.

Named *The Straits Times Journalist of the Year* in 2016, the senior writer has persuaded many to share how they overcame the darkest moments of their lives.

"I get a lot of readers telling me that the stories have moved them, inspired them and galvanised them to do more," he said. "In some ways, I guess what they are telling me is that the stories have changed their lives."

Kim Hoh has always been interested in human journalism. Even after writing for more than 30 years, telling the

stories of people from different walks of life is what gives him the most satisfaction. One of the people whom he has interviewed is Singapore-based charity founder Angie Chew, who gave up her high-flying career to help others lead more meaningful lives. Another is school dropout Vernon Kwek, who is now chief executive of a cleaning company with 3,000 employees.

Kim Hoh's series of stories led *The Straits Times* to institute the ST Singaporean of the Year award in 2015 to recognise Singaporeans who had made headlines and inspired the community.

"We decided that *The Straits Times Singaporean of the Year* should not be about simply picking a top

newsmaker, businessman, social worker, or some other paragon of virtue or achievement," said ST editor-in-chief Warren Fernandez.

"Rather, we wanted the award to showcase the stories of Singaporeans who, by their actions and lives, inspire all of us... They show us that it's not only those who perform heroic feats who can be heroes, that you don't have to be great or grand to do good. You might not be a saint, but you can still do your part to put things right."

Kim Hoh has also written other books, one of which is *Big Hearts, Big Dreams*, a compilation of inspiring stories about the 2015 and 2016 ST Singaporean of the Year nominees.



The Orang Rimba live in simple wooden shelters.
PHOTO: ANTARA INDONESIA NEWS AGENCY

ANTARA, MALAYSIA

Indonesian radio station gives jungle group a voice

AS HE USUALLY DOES IN THE MORNING, Mr Madu, who like many Indonesians goes by just one name, greets his listeners before beginning his show. He runs his broadcast from a community radio station, Benor FM Radio, located in a remote area in Bukit Suban Village.

The village is located in the Air Hitam district of Sarulangun Regency in the Jambi Province.

Benor Radio was initiated by an NGO called the Indonesian Conservation Community Warsi.

It started its broadcast in 2013, and prioritises its radio programmes for the Anak Dalam, who are also known as the Orang Rimba ethnic group.

The Orang Rimba are a native Jambi community who live nomadically in the forest as a group.

Mr Madu is a native broadcaster from the Orang Rimba. There are five other native jungle people who are broadcasters.

For the children of the Anak Dalam, it is not easy to learn to be an announcer. However, their willing attitudes have now made them broadcasters whose voices are eagerly awaited by the Orang Rimba in the forest and local residents.

By broadcasting the radio show to cover an area of 30km, the Benor Radio programmes can be heard by 80 per cent of the 2,546 jungle people in the national park area.

Benor Radio was established to deliver information to people who live in the forest and who are difficult to reach physically.

"To get information, Orang Rimba access is very limited. With the radio, it can provide information to the jungle people and the radio can be a learning medium for them," said Mr Jauharul Maknun, who is responsible for Benor FM Radio.

"Benor is also expected to become a media platform that bridges the gap between the jungle people and the surrounding community, reducing the negative stigma of outside communities towards the jungle people. We can provide understanding to the outside community about the jungle people," he added.

For the Orang Rimba, radio is the only medium they have to get information.

Moreover, Benor Radio provides information about the arrival of health workers to the national park area. This is important to the Orang Rimba whose secluded and nomadic lives in the forest often rob them of health facilities. [ST](#)

This story was originally published in May 2019.

The Orang Rimba are a native Jambi community who live nomadically in the forest as a group. For them, radio is the only medium they have to get information.

PHOTO: ANTARA INDONESIA NEWS AGENCY



**WARREN
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Commentary

Securing the future of quality journalism

Credible content that audiences value and new sources of revenue needed to sustain newsrooms

THE POSTER BOY FOR ROBUST HEALTH IN THE media industry used to have decidedly Indian features.

Even as their counterparts elsewhere languished, Indian media houses were once busy launching new titles, snapping up journalists and boosting orders for newsprint, bucking global trends several years ago.

Today, sadly, a pall appears to have settled over many of these newsrooms.

"We need to change... we are playing catch-up

now," one top Indian editor told me at a dinner on the sidelines of the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers' (Wan-Ifra) India Conference on Sept 18.

Lacklustre advertising during recent festive seasons has taken a toll on print advertising revenues, as circulations slide, he says.

Like many others, he laments how copies of most papers are sold for a few rupees at news-stands, with prices held down by the industry's market leaders' strategy to maintain their dominance.

Worse, hardly anyone charges for content online, while digital advertising is small and mostly soaked up by the technology giants, so there is scarcely any revenue coming in from online operations despite growing audiences.

The result: Newsrooms feeling starved of editorial resources and facing mounting commercial pressures from advertisers, sponsors as well as governments not averse to withholding advertising to focus editorial minds. Media credibility ends up being hit, even amid a growing proliferation of fake news all round.

"Sooner or later, we are going to have to find a new revenue model," added another editor, pointing to tentative talk of experimenting with paywalls at some publications, just as media organisations around the world have been doing in recent years.

These Indian anxieties are symptomatic of a global phenomenon, with the impact of disruption in the media industry coming lately to Singapore.

In 2016, American entrepreneur Gerry Lenfest set up the non-profit Lenfest Institute to support sustainable business models for quality local journalism. Other media groups, such as the BBC, receive state funding for public broadcasting efforts, while in countries such as France and Norway, state funding is given to support quality journalism, with grants tied to a media group's readership and reach.

Elsewhere, media leaders at similar events have long lamented the triple challenges facing the industry: growing threats to media freedom, the existential question of media viability and the pressing need for innovation in newsrooms.

All three issues are now inextricably linked, equal sides of a trilemma that have to be tackled together.

Without a viable plan to sustain their newsrooms



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

into the future, fervent debates on media freedoms will be academic discussions. And clearly, any plan to ensure the survival and continued growth of the media entails a need for innovation and transformation, both on the editorial and business fronts.

These challenges were summed up starkly by Mr Juan Senior, president of Innovation Media Consulting, at a Wan-Ifra conference held in Singapore in May.

He pointed to the phenomenon of newsrooms repenting for the folly of their “original sin” of giving away costly-to-produce content for free, in the vain hope that doing so would draw audiences - and advertisers would follow. New digital revenues might then make up for the decline in print readerships and revenues.

It did not happen - or rather, did not happen fast and far enough. While some news groups - including The Straits Times - have seen significant growth in both digital readership and revenues, these increases have come off a low base and so are not quite enough to make up for the print shortfall.

Besides, the bulk of digital advertising has been hoovered up by the likes of Facebook and Google, riding on the backs on media groups which produce the content they amalgamate to draw audiences, while insisting they bear no responsibility for the content on their platforms.

Today, just about every media group is dabbling with paywalls and digital subscriptions, moving from “advertising revenue to reader revenue”, notes Mr Senior.

“If you are not producing content you can charge for, you should get out of this business,” he declares, adding “if you have no digital business, you have no future” and “money is made where content is viewed.”

Despite the stark warnings, he insists he is optimistic about the future of journalism. Fake news, he contends, “will save journalism.” Declines in trust amid the welter of fake content will drive audiences to seek out credible voices for reliable content and they will pay for quality content they can count on.

“Newsrooms will have to move from the idea of being print or digital first, to journalism first,” he concludes, arguing that paying audiences will gravitate to those news organisations that are able to offer engaging, quality and insightful content, as well as value-added services, from events, business intelligence or investment tips, memberships, customised newsletters, books and even customer references and retail services.

A study on media viability published in May by the DW Akademie, a German media-related think-tank, draws a similar conclusion: “Media outlets are confronted with a sobering truth: They can no longer sustain themselves on advertising revenue alone.”

Instead, they will have to have a range of revenues, spread across a variety of sources, to prevent over-reliance on any particular source of funds.

“The financial constraints are affecting the overall quality of journalism and the independence of journalists,” the report says.

“In short, independent, high-quality journalism depends on a viable media sector. It requires a variety of sources - from money and infrastructure, to community support and strategic alliances.

“Those who wish to impose restrictions on free media and manipulate the public debate often prey on imbalances or weaknesses in the media system. They often use economic means to set their agendas or limit access to information. Therefore, viable media are crucial players in the protection of freedom of expression as a whole.”

Perhaps the most comprehensive study done to date on how best to secure the future of quality journalism was that undertaken recently by an independent commission in the United Kingdom, led by the former journalist-turned-academic, Dame Frances Cairncross. It published a 160-page report titled The Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future For Journalism in February.

In a recent interview over the phone, she told me that her commission began by asking themselves some fundamental questions: Why should anyone care if media organisations survive? What would happen if they did not? Why should public funds be used to support them?

They figured that there was no compelling reason taxpayers’ money should be used to fund gossip and lifestyle columns, concert reviews or sports reports. “If people want these, they will have to pay for them,” she says.

But, she is quick to add: “It is very important that a healthy democracy has ways in which individuals can follow what their elected representatives are doing on their behalf. And have trained intermediaries, which we call journalists, who can question those representatives and the institutions that they stand for, so that we have questions being aired and their replies made available for people to read.”

She sums this up as “public interest journalism”, namely, the reporting on the “machinery of government and how well it is working”, from the courts and legislature, to local and state councils, to school and statutory boards.

The public submissions and research her commission compiled make clear that “a dearth of public interest news and information, especially reporting of public authorities, can have dire democratic consequences.”

There was a “clear link between the disappearance of local journalists and a local newspaper, and a decline in civic and democratic activities, such as voter turnout and well-managed public finances.”

Indeed, the presence of a printed newspaper widely available to the community, backed by a professional newsroom, often helps to focus minds on the need to be open and above board in public affairs, she notes, calling for further studies into this.

**Fake news...
'will save
journalism'.
Declines in
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welter of fake
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credible voices
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content and
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can count on.**

”

Without societal support, public interest news risks being crowded out by reports that draw wider audiences for their ability to shock and awe. Fake news also tends to spread faster and further for similar reasons, studies show.

How best to support public-interest journalism? The commission made nine proposals in its report, submitted to the British government then led by Prime Minister Theresa May. Whether the new government under PM Boris Johnson, a former journalist himself, will pursue them remains to be seen, she says.

Yet, the ideas are of wider interest, since they might apply to other countries as well. The commission proposed:

- Rebalancing the relationship between

publishers and online platforms, with codes of conduct drawn up and overseen by media regulators to govern the commercial relationships between media publishers and technology platforms.

- Investigating the online advertising market to study if it is working competitively and, if not, what should be done about it.

- Setting up a news quality obligation that would require and regulate online platforms' commitment to delivering quality news.

- Boosting media literacy, with government agencies working with media players to help audiences navigate the increasingly complex information landscape, especially amid the proliferation of fake news.

- Helping local publishers which are most vulnerable, for example, through the state-funded BBC sharing some of its local content as well as technical expertise.

- Setting up an innovation fund with government support to boost innovation within media organisations.

- Offering new forms of tax relief to media organisations, such as by extending zero-rating for value-added taxes to digital newspapers and magazines, or tax reliefs similar to those given to charities or film and other creative industries.

- Funding public interest news with grants and sponsorship for local reporting and quality journalism projects.


- Setting up an independent Institute for Public Interest News with a mission and mandate to ensure the sustainability of public interest news, including the implementation of the above proposals.

The report concluded: "Ultimately, the biggest challenge facing the sustainability of high-quality journalism, and the press, may be the same as that facing the sustainability of many areas of life: The digital revolution means that people have more claims on their attention than ever before.

"Moreover, the stories that they want to read may not always be the ones that they ought to read in order to ensure that a democracy can hold its public servants to account.

"This review has, therefore, dwelt on what it considers to be the most significant functions of journalism – ensuring public accountability and investigating possible wrongdoing. And whereas new business models may continue to support good journalism in many forms, they may not always support public interest news... so, this review proposes that most energy be given to the provision of public-interest news.

"This will require new sources of funding, removed from government control. It will need institutional and financial structures that combine a guarantee of independence with adequate support.

"That will be a difficult combination to secure, but the future of a healthy democracy depends on it." 

The writer is also president of the World Editors Forum.

Media run by markets, moguls and mandates

THE DISRUPTION IN THE MEDIA industry is ongoing, and, amid much change, a variety of models for supporting journalism has emerged. Which works best, in various societies and culture, is a subject of much debate. Some of the main models are:

MARKETS

Media houses like The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Financial Times and The Straits Times are operated as commercial entities, relying on revenues from advertisers and subscribers.

While print remains a major source of revenue, as this declines, many are moving towards greater reliance on digital revenues, especially from readers, through various forms of online paywalls. Some media companies are publicly listed, while others are private entities. In recent years, with the industry in a state of flux, there has been a flurry of newspapers changing ownership, such as in Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, South Africa, the United States and Britain.

MOGULS

Businessmen and philanthropists buying media companies is an age-old practice, with media barons like Mr Rupert Murdoch dominating media houses in the West for years. These business chiefs do so to gain influence or to support journalism. In recent times, The Washington Post has been bought by Amazon founder-owner Jeff Bezos, while the South China Morning Post was bought by Alibaba's former chief Jack Ma.

MANDATES

Some media groups have public or private funds or institutes to support their journalistic efforts, such as The Scott Trust set up in 1936 to sustain The Guardian's independent journalism.

In 2016, American entrepreneur Gerry Lenfest set up the non-profit Lenfest Institute to support sustainable business models for quality local journalism. Other media groups, such as the BBC, receive state funding for public broadcasting efforts, while, in countries such as France and Norway, state funding is given to support quality journalism, with grants tied to a media group's readership and reach. 

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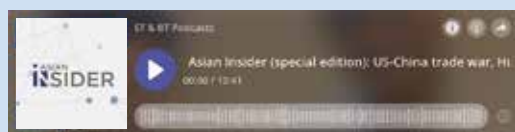
Associate Editor Vikram Khanna discusses the ongoing trade war between US and China.



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A humanoid robot working side by side with employees in the assembly line of a factory in Kazo, north of Tokyo.
PHOTO: REUTERS

Artificial Intelligence

Strides in AI raise killer-robot fears

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Beijing tapping new media platforms to reach out to tech-savvy younger audiences: Experts

IMAGINE A WORLD WHERE KILLER ROBOTS, powered by artificial intelligence (AI), have the ability to decide who lives and who dies on the basis of deep learning and algorithms, without any human intervention.

This scenario has been criticised by naysayers as alarmist. But experts, including United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Tesla co-founder Elon Musk, have warned of the risk that AI can be put to nefarious use in the wrong hands.

Dr Min Sun, chief AI scientist at business solutions start-up Appier, told The Straits Times



that governments ought to have more active discussions on accountability as they debate how to update laws for a digital age to address issues like data governance and privacy.

He said: “There is no 100 per cent accurate AI system, just as there is no human being who is 100 per cent accurate all the time. What if an AI robot system misfires and kills someone on your side? Or, what if a self-driving car makes its own decision to avoid an accident and ends up causing another accident? Who will be accountable?”

These are but some of the conundrums that have to be unpicked even as strides have been made in AI, such as the AlphaGo program that defeated one of the top players in the Go board game.

Studies show that 47 per cent of jobs may be replaced by automation in the next 25 years, but experts note that AI machines are equipped to perform singular tasks rather than complicated functions that humans are adept at doing.

Furthermore, computers rely on both quantity and quality of data to gain in competency during the deep learning process, which means time is needed to work out the kinks.

Dr Sun noted the example of the Henn na Hotel chain that opened to a publicity blitz in 2015 with its use of robots, but ended up axing its ineffectual AI workforce.

The issue was also discussed at the Social Innovation and Global Ethics Forum in Tokyo on Sept 19, where Mr Frederik Bussler, chief executive of Japanese blockchain start-up Bitgrit, noted that AI today mostly “can only be applied to one task”

“It may drive a car or play a game, but it cannot drive another car, or play another game,” he said.

Dr Rolf Pfeifer, who has taught robotics at Osaka University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University, spoke of the need to “distinguish very clearly between performance and competence”

“If you change the size of the Go board from 19 by 19 to 18 by 18, the AI system won’t be able to make a single move. You have to retrain it.”

All these exemplify the complicated process of tapping fully autonomous systems on a day-to-day basis, let alone the ethical minefield of military combat.

Japan, wary of the eventuality of killer robots, urged negotiations on the need for international restrictions at the United Nations this year.

It has also vowed never to build such machines and stressed the need to retain human control.

Several governments like the European Parliament have gone further to pass a resolution calling for an international ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

But there is resistance from other major military powers like the United States, China and Russia, which are developing such systems in what observers fear will lead to an arms race if unchecked.

Ms Mary Wareham, global coordinator of the Campaign To Stop Killer Robots, describes the threat to be as fundamental as nuclear weapons and climate change, and calls for more political will among countries for a global treaty.

“International law was written for humans, not machines, and it urgently needs to be strengthened to tackle the serious threats posed by killer robots.” **ST**

ACCOUNTABILITY

What if an AI robot system misfires and kills someone on your side? Or, what if a self-driving car makes its own decision to avoid an accident and ends up causing another accident? Who will be accountable?

”

– DR MIN SUN,
chief AI scientist at
business solutions
start-up Appier.

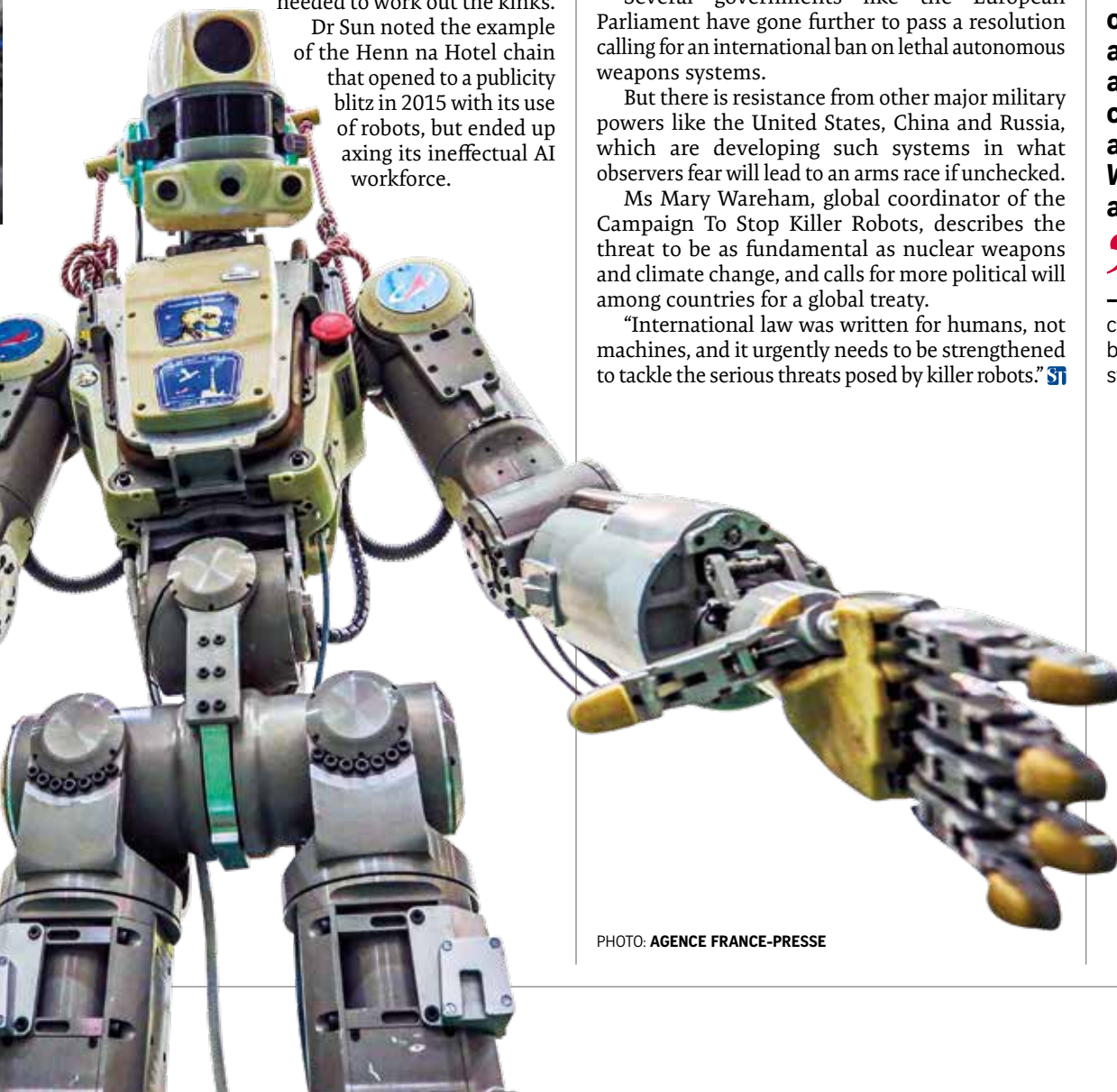


PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

ST poll: Safety before privacy in AI surveillance

IRENE THAM

Senior Tech Correspondent

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Over two-thirds of respondents support use of AI in drowning detection and law enforcement

PRIVACY TAKES A BACK SEAT IN SINGAPORE when it comes to safety and security, a Straits Times poll on attitudes towards the use of artificial intelligence (AI) shows.

More than two-thirds of some 5,000 respondents in August's survey supported the use of AI in law enforcement and drowning detection.

Specifically, respondents were asked if they supported the use of scanners that recorded and matched people's faces and movements against a citizen database to help nab law breakers.

Close to two-thirds of respondents, however, objected to the use of AI tools to determine workers' productivity, say, by screening keystrokes on computers and the duration of breaks.

Similarly, close to two-thirds of those polled would not let AI technology comb through their entire digital footprint to determine their ability to pay back a loan.

The questions were part of an interactive quiz to assess how ready people were to yield control of their lives to AI, which has moved into homes, streets and workplaces.

Other types of policing, such as in determining employees' productivity or one's credit-worthiness, were frowned upon.

Mr Hagen Rooke, counsel at London-based law firm Reed Smith, said that these AI systems do not capture all the data required to appraise an employee's performance.

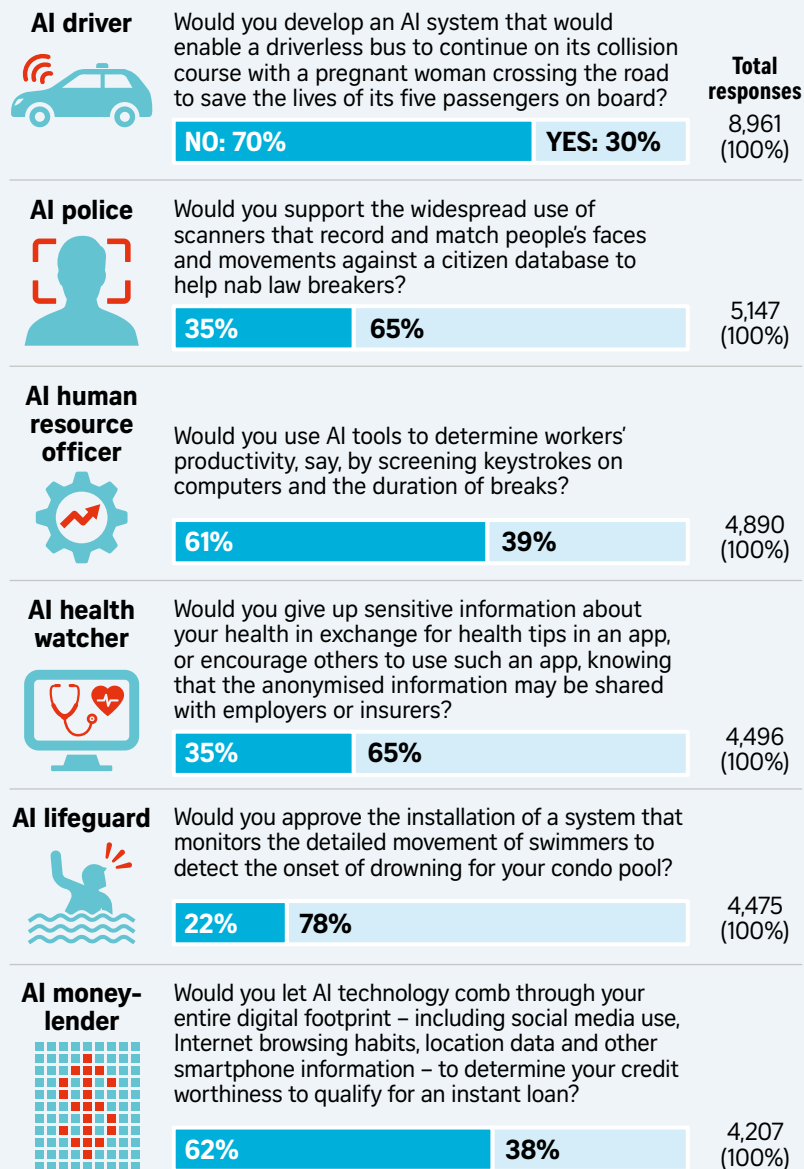
"Similarly, scoring one's creditworthiness based on one's digital footprint may unfairly distort the credit profile and act as a socially stigmatising factor," said Mr Rooke.

Furthermore, the lack of transparency around such credit scoring algorithms compounds the sense of insecurity towards the technology, said Singapore University of Technology and Design's Professor Lim Sun Sun.

At a recent AI conference, Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran said that trust underpinned all AI efforts.

"Ultimately citizens and individuals must feel that all these initiatives at the end of the day are focused on delivering welfare benefits for them," he said. [ST](#)

ST interactive quiz: How ready are you to live with AI?



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STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



Six alarming trends in cyber security

WHILE THERE WERE FEWER CYBER THREAT INCIDENTS IN SINGAPORE LAST YEAR, THE REPUBLIC continues to be the target for cyber attacks by advanced threat actors, the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA) said in its third annual Cyber Landscape report.

Here is a look at six alarming cyber security trends highlighted in the report:

1 DATA BREACHES

With data becoming the most valued currency or “commodity” in cyberspace, the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA) said that cyber criminals will try even harder to breach electronic databases.

Those that store large amounts of private and personal information will be the biggest targets.

The data breach involving healthcare cluster SingHealth was Singapore’s worst cyber attack, with the personal information of more than 1.5 million patients – including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong – stolen by hackers in June last year.

2 THREATS TO GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

Supply chains that consumers depend on for goods are increasingly becoming interconnected and automated, thanks to technology. But the CSA warns that cyber criminals are trying to disrupt them.

This could be for reasons such as extracting data from the companies involved in these supply chains or holding them to ransom. Industries dominated by a few firms are especially vulnerable as problems in one stage of production could lead to a breakdown in the entire chain.

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In Lucknow (India)



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3 ATTACKS ON CLOUD DATABASES

An increasing number of databases are being hosted in the cloud, which is where software and systems are designed specifically to be deployed over a network.

This means cyber criminals will try to exploit potential vulnerabilities in cloud infrastructure.

4 SMART BUILDINGS AND CONNECTED SYSTEMS

The advent of Internet of Things devices and connected industrial control systems in buildings and factories might improve and quicken, but it also means they are open to more danger. As these buildings and systems become “smarter”, the risk of them being attacked to hold their owners to ransom, or exploited to spread malware or conduct distributed denial-of-service attacks, also increases, the CSA said.

Trust is key commodity in enabling deeper

LESTER WONG

Correspondent



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Singapore's Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran addresses AmCham Members on Singapore's Strategy for the Information Age.

ST PHOTO: NG SOR LUAN

WITH SINGAPORE ON TRACK TO BECOMING A Smart Nation and Asean digital capital, opportunities in the digital economy abound for broader and deeper collaboration with American technology companies, said Minister for Communications and Information S. Iswaran on Sept 17.

Establishing trust between governments, businesses and consumers for cross-border data flows will be crucial in this respect, he added.

In a speech at a luncheon held by the American Chamber of Commerce at the Mandarin Orchard hotel, Mr Iswaran pointed to Asean's potential for strong economic growth and Singapore's ongoing efforts to harness that potential in the technology sector.

“You will all know the key metrics of the region – over 600 million people with a rising middle class and growing disposable incomes. Asean is expected

to be among the top four aggregate economies in the world by 2030,” he told an audience made up of representatives from various American companies based in Singapore.

“This region has burgeoning needs that can be met by American companies. Singapore is not only a gateway to other Asean countries, but can also provide companies with a more nuanced understanding of the various Asean markets through deeper partnerships.”

The Government has been encouraging local technology companies to tap their digitalisation experience for partnerships with regional counterparts, including at a technology showcase in Jakarta in March to connect 10 Singapore tech firms with Indonesian logistics companies.

Three of the 10 have since begun discussions with Indonesian partners.

Mr Iswaran said the Digital Industry Singapore (DISG) office formed in June, which brings together the Economic Development Board, Enterprise Singapore and the Infocomm Media Development Authority, would also help American companies in Singapore that want to do more through providing a single interface that addresses “the whole gamut of needs”

Trust is the key commodity to capitalise on these opportunities in the digital realm, he added, as consumers grapple with new ways of transacting and doing business.

Singapore is involved in many efforts to establish international frameworks to guide behaviour in cyberspace, including the development of an Asean Framework on Digital Governance and as part of a United Nations Group of Governmental Experts.

“Companies also have a very big role as part of the solution. You have to show that you are worthy of (the consumer's) trust when it comes to their data, and this is even more important for cross-border



5

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

AI will be able to enhance the capabilities of security systems in cases such as detecting unusual behaviour and rolling out appropriate responses and mitigation measures in the case of an attack. But the CSA warned that threat actors can also use AI to search for vulnerabilities.

It could also potentially be used to create malicious software that bypasses existing online security measures in an organisation.

6

BIOMETRIC DATA

As biometric authentication, such as the use of fingerprints or facial scanning, becomes increasingly common, threat actors will shift to target and manipulate biometric data to build virtual identities and gain access to personal information. [ST](#)

collaboration in digital economy: Iswaran

data flows in e-commerce and digital payments,” said Mr Iswaran, who is also Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations.

In a dialogue that followed his speech, he was also asked about how Singapore is managing the challenges thrown up by trade tensions between the United States and China, and rising anti-globalisation sentiments amid disruption from technological advancement.

“I think we will all be better off if the US-China trade tensions can be resolved. If tensions are aggravated, the global economy will become fragmented and affect supply chains. That is not desirable,” he said.

“In the meantime, what we are doing is to find new ways of developing partnerships and linkages through new free-trade agreements and digital economic agreements.

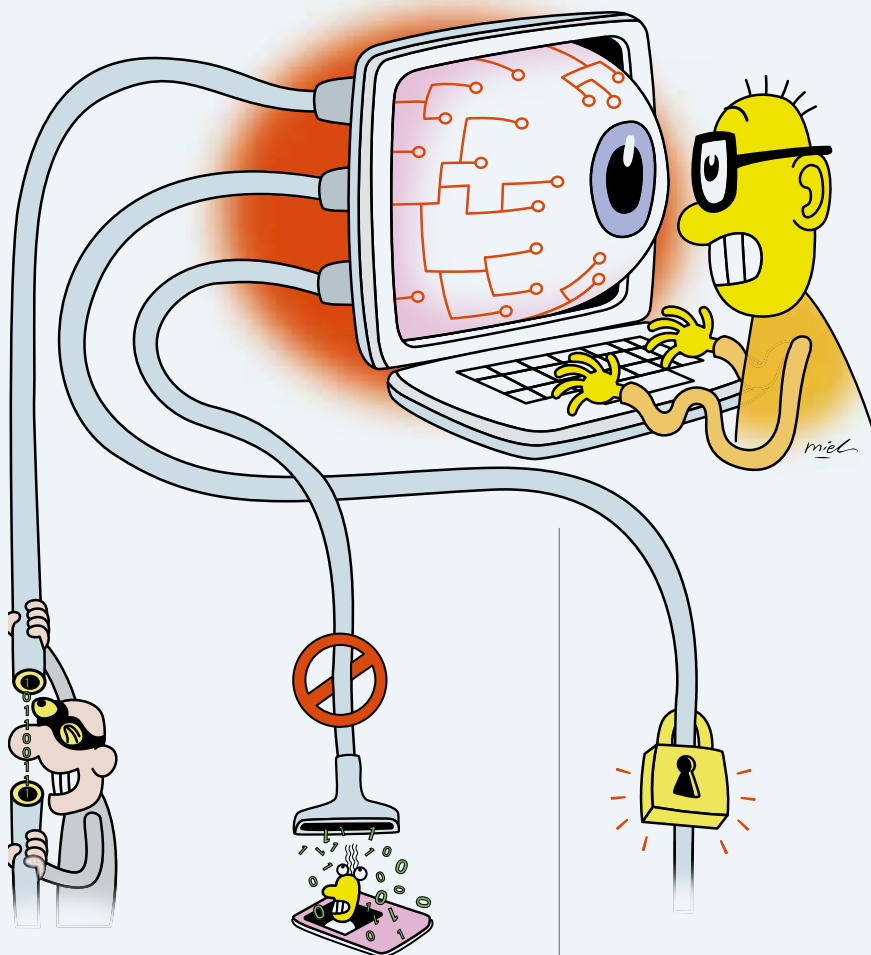
“Domestically, an important area is how we digitally transform the various sectors of the economy. And that involves upgrading the capabilities of both our companies and our workers.” [ST](#)

Mr Ishwaran is the hosting minister for the Singapore International Cyber Week (SICW) this year. SICW's 4th edition is being held from Oct 1 to Oct 3 this year.

The established cyber security event in the region will see discussions on machine learning, automation and Artificial Intelligence in the next generation taking place, besides issues relating to cyber security.

Some of this year's keynote speakers include ST Engineering President Ravinder Singh, Huawei's global cyber security and privacy officer John Suffolk, and Mr Tim Hwang, former director of the Harvard-MIT Ethics and Governance of AI Initiative.

The third edition last year, organised by the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA), brought together over 8,000 global cybersecurity experts from over 50 countries.



ST ILLUSTRATION: MIEL

Drones and the new era of warfare in the Middle East

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THE EXPLOSIONS LASTED NOT MORE THAN a minute and, although the noise was deafening and the dark plumes of smoke lingered, no human casualties were registered.

Still, the impact of the recent attacks against Saudi Arabia's oil installations is certain to prove long-lasting. For they serve as evidence of how the face of war is changing in profound and disturbing ways.

And they also provide a grim reminder to the United States' leaders that, notwithstanding all their efforts to limit America's burden of maintaining stability in the Middle East, Washington is simply incapable of detaching itself from the region's problems.

"Drones" – what the military calls unmanned

Attacks on Saudi oil facilities highlight new threats to US air supremacy, as well as the difficulty of America turning its back on Middle East politics

combat aerial vehicles, or remotely piloted vehicles – have been in use, especially by industrially developed nations, for at least a decade. They are able to hover in the air for hours at a high altitude where they are neither heard nor seen, carefully photographing objects or targets of special interest, intercepting communications or simply mapping sections of the ground.

And, as we have known for years, they are also the weapon of choice for the US and Israeli militaries in their various targeted assassination operations against the leaders of terrorist organisations.

However, the deployment of drones against the oil installations in Saudi Arabia represents a new chapter in the history of warfare – if only because of the massive use to which they were put against a Saudi target, and the implication that the episode carries for future warfare operations in the Middle East.

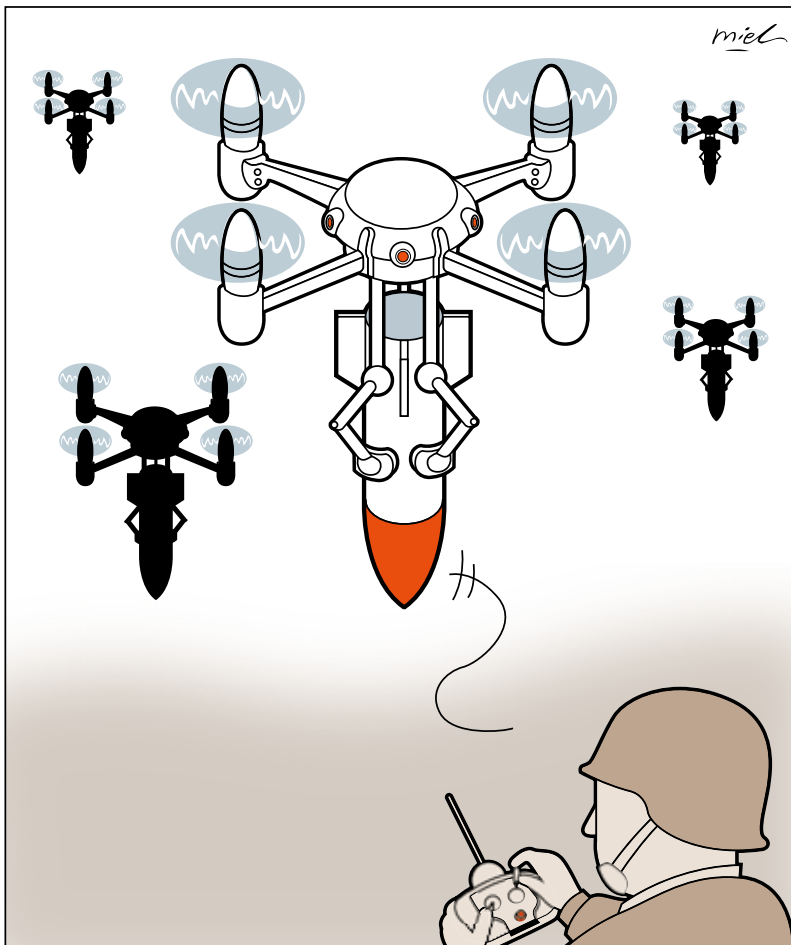
IRAN'S USE OF DRONES

It is by now crystal-clear that the attacks were perpetrated by Iran, that they emanated from Iran's own territory, that they were carefully planned and involved the use of both drones and cruise missiles and, finally, that the Iranians retained the element of surprise throughout the attack.

This was despite the fact that, as it subsequently emerged, US intelligence did pick up some Iranian military "chatter" which could have alerted Saudi Arabia's defenders that some sort of Iranian attack was in the offing.

This is not the first time that Iran's drone capabilities have been deployed in a war-fighting capacity. Recently, a drone operated by Hizbollah, an Iranian-supported paramilitary formation in Lebanon, tried to enter Israeli territory; subsequently, another drone – probably operated by Iran and launched from neighbouring Syria – also tried to enter Israeli airspace.

Both these attempts were of a probing nature, more intended to test Israeli air defences and highlight Iranian capabilities, rather than to hit particular targets.



ST ILLUSTRATION: MIEL

No longer, however. For in launching the attacks against Saudi Arabia – another one of Teheran's chief enemies – Iran took its drone strategy one step further and integrated its unmanned aerial vehicles into a broader and far more substantial push.

The attacks not only exposed Saudi and American military vulnerabilities, but also acted as a reminder of just how the new generation of military drones can change the face of the battlefield.

LOW COST, HIGH IMPACT

Producing effective drones is no longer the monopoly of technologically advanced countries. And, since such aerial vehicles are unmanned, putting them in the air in larger numbers often compensates for their lower build quality and manoeuvrability capabilities; this is one case where Iran can make up for quality with quantity.

Furthermore, it is now virtually impossible to prevent a person equipped with nothing more sophisticated than a mobile phone from acquiring the Global Positioning System coordinates of a potential target. These can then be fed into a command-and-control system which can direct the drones to their intended destruction point. Much of the technology involved in such operations is now available on open commercial markets.

And just as significantly, such an operation is cheap: Iranian drones are estimated to cost not more than around US\$15,000 (\$\$20,656) each to build, but the use of a mere handful of these has succeeded in knocking out almost half of the oil production of the world's biggest oil exporter. In literally a few minutes, the Iranian drones and cruise missiles have inflicted more damage to Saudi Arabia's oil sector than the entire 2003 Gulf War.

And sweeter still from the Iranian perspective is the fact that the attacks remained eminently deniable. In strictly technical terms they are not, of course, difficult to decipher: All intelligence services of key Western governments identified Iran as the culprit within a matter of a few hours after the attacks were perpetrated.

Yet, for a variety of reasons, it suited many governments to claim that they were still "awaiting evidence" as to who the culprits may be. With every day that passed in this artificial debate about who might be behind the attacks, the credibility of US or Saudi military retaliation against Iran's deeds was progressively eroded.

And, as the Iranians knew all along, it really does not matter how much intelligence information the Americans may decide to release about the attacks, for it can all be dismissed as nothing more than invention and "fake news" from Washington.

WARFARE WITHOUT DECLARED WAR

Either way, the fact that drones are cheap yet accurate, exploit real military vulnerabilities, can deliver a heavy punch and fudge the question of

liability makes them the weapons of the future.

What lies ahead is a confrontation between Iran and its enemies in the region, a clash in which drones will be used alongside other "proxy capabilities" – such as militias, terrorist attacks, land and sea-based mines and cyber-hacking activities – in order to undermine states and governments.

It is warfare without a declared war, a confrontation which never stops and one in which old concepts of negotiation, deterrence or escalation are no longer relevant. That is the future of the Middle East, as unveiled by the recent encounter in Saudi Arabia.

For a number of years, the US has tried to extricate itself from policing the Middle East, a task which the Americans have been discharging since the end of World War II. The fact that the US turned from a major importer of oil into a net producer and exporter of this commodity clearly helped with the disengagement process.

But the attacks on Saudi Arabia serve as a rude reminder that the Americans will not find it easy to extricate themselves from the Middle East.

PETROL POLITICS

The first reason for this is precisely the oil dependency that supposedly did not matter.


Few of America's own politicians seem to be aware of the fact that although their country is, overall, a net exporter of oil, it still imports substantial quantities of Middle Eastern oil, and its supply chains therefore remain partially vulnerable to what happens in the region.

Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Adel al-Jubeir told reporters earlier that Riyadh was awaiting the results of a probe into the Sept 14 strikes which initially halved Saudi oil production.

Oil is also a global commodity, priced in global markets. So, when the price of oil registered its biggest price spike in three decades after the Saudi oil installations were attacked, this immediately threatened to translate into higher oil prices for US consumers, prompting President Donald Trump to offer the opening of America's strategic petroleum reserves in order to calm markets.

The US may not have an immediate stake in Middle Eastern oil. And it clearly is no longer a big customer of this commodity; countries in Asia are. But as recent events in Saudi Arabia have indicated, every foreign customer of Saudi oil either preferred not to notice what has happened or instinctively assumed that it was up to the US to provide the answer.

Old habits die hard, and the habit of both expecting the US to fix the Middle East and blaming the US for complicating the handling of the region remains as stubborn as ever.

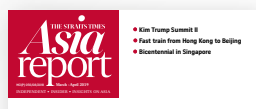
Still, and however much Mr Trump may prefer to ignore the matter, the reality remains that only the US is capable of responding to the Iranian challenge. 

What lies ahead is a confrontation between Iran and its enemies in the region, a clash in which drones will be used alongside other "proxy capabilities" such as militias, terrorist attacks, land and sea-based mines and cyber-hacking activities in order to undermine states and governments.

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THE STRAITS TIMES *Asia* report

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We do.



Race for 5G

America's Silicon Valley has led the global market racing 5G services, with the promise of applications and opportunities waiting on decisions. Where's the race for 5G technology headed?



Asean's new tech tigers

Redefining the regional future



DOES AI THREATEN YOUR JOB?

Artificial intelligence (AI) opens new pathways to progress but can affect livelihoods. Where are we headed? AI expert Kai-Fu Lee gives his answers inside.



Collision course?

The trade spat between the United States and China is part of a deeper contest for geopolitical dominance. Does history – and ongoing developments – hold hope for a solution, or some compromise?



- Outrage in Hong Kong
- El Nino and Climate Change
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US-CHINA

Trading blows

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Women Power

Women leaders, gender equality key to creating more jobs in Asia

WOULD ASIA BE BETTER OFF IF IT IS LED BY women?

Ms Chiara Corazza, managing director of the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society, one of the world's leading platforms supporting women's leadership and progress, certainly thinks so.

"At the workplace, the share of women working in Asia-Pacific countries (Apac) is 62 per cent versus 78.9 per cent for men, and it's a gap that has not narrowed over the past four years.

"Gender equality in Apac could add US\$4.5 trillion (\$6.2 trillion) or 12 per cent of regional gross domestic product," she told The Straits Times (ST), ahead of the Sept 18-20 Women's Forum Asia held in Singapore.

"Worldwide, this represents 240 million jobs and US\$28 trillion to global GDP," she said.

Ms Corazza was managing director of the Greater Paris Investment Agency from 2002 to 2016, responsible for attracting foreign investors to the greater Paris region. She also led France's bid for the 2008 Olympic Games as director of international affairs for Paris 2008.

Nearly 120 speakers and about 1,500 people from the region and elsewhere gathered at the forum to

discuss the critical importance of women's leadership in a changing world. ST is a media partner of the forum.

Ms Corazza told ST: "Nineteen out of 20 of the world's most dynamic cities are in Asia, making the region attractive to investment, capital and talent.

"However, Asia lags behind in terms of women leadership (12.8 per cent) compared with other regions such as Northern Europe (35.6 per cent), Western Europe (23.6 per cent) and United States/Canada (20.9 per cent), and this represents a huge loss in terms of social impact and economic gain."

In France, which leads the world in the number of women sitting on boards, the figure is 43 per cent. But it is only 10 per cent in Singapore and under 2 per cent in Japan, she noted.

"At the current rate of change, the gender gap in Apac will take 171 years to be closed," she said.

President Halimah Yacob delivered the keynote address at the forum. Speakers at the event included Ms Sim Ann, Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information, and Culture, Community and Youth, as well as French Minister of State Agnes Pannier-Runacher, former chief executive of Pepsico Indra Nooyi and Schneider Electric chairman Jean-Pascal Tricoire. [ST](#)

Ms Chiara Corazza, managing director, Women's Forum for the Economy and Society with Mr Jean-Pascal Tricoire, chairman and CEO of Schneider Electric.
PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

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Asia News
Network Editor



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The world needs more Stem – Stem needs more women

**ERSILIA VAUDO
SCARPETTA**



For instance, countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Albania and Turkey, which come low on the WEF gender equality measures, see women making up 35 – 40 per cent of Stem graduates, whereas in countries with more gender equality, like Switzerland and Norway, the figure is lower at around 20 per cent.



FROM CLIMATE CHANGE TO POPULATION ageing, passing through food security, global health epidemics and the advent of artificial intelligence: the world we live in faces today a multitude of massive, urgent and inextricably linked challenges.

While new skills and technical know-how are required to find innovative solutions to these pressures, women – half the world's population – continue globally to be a minority in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (Stem), making their under-representation a serious concern, no country exempted.

To face the world's big challenges, we need progress in Stem – and Stem needs the talents of women. It is a fact.

Today, in the majority of the countries in the world, women graduating from tertiary education outnumber men.

However, fewer women than men complete Stem and ICT university degrees.

This also applies to Asia where, according to the latest research by Unesco Institute of Statistics (UIS), women account for more than half of graduates at tertiary level in many countries.

This is the case in China, Macau, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

However, gender representation in Stem fields are highly variable, as the proportion of female graduates in these subjects ranges from 21 per cent in Macau spiking up to 44 per cent in India.

Beside the geographical differences, disparities in terms of gender representation can also be wide across fields of study.

In Asian countries, female graduates are quite well represented in disciplines such as natural sciences, mathematics and statistics – surpassing men in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam – but the percentages drastically drop when looking at other fields of study, such as engineering.

Vietnam stands out as female engineers make up more than one third of total tertiary graduates (37 per cent) – as compared with the 14 per cent observed in Japan and Macau.

Better news comes instead from Infocomm Technology (ICT), where gender parity has been already achieved in India as of 2017, while Indonesia follows behind with its 35 per cent, clearly outperforming OECD average that stalls at 20 per cent.

Although these improvements are encouraging, it is clear that women's potential in Stem has not been yet fully capitalised.

If science and technology have always represented the foundation of economic growth throughout human history, advancing and improving technological resources and infrastructures have been playing a more and more critical role in the promotion of socio-economic development today.

Moreover, with the main global challenges strongly linked to Stem, these fields represent one of the most fertile grounds to make a positive impact on the world.

So, globally, why are there still so few girls who decide to pursue studies and careers in science and technology?

It is certainly not due to an inherent capacity. Differences in quantitative and mathematical ability between girls and boys could emerge after eight years old, but this would be primarily due to social and cultural factors.

However, preferences about educational paths start to diverge in high school.

In OECD's assessment, there are essentially two factors that influence this decision: the students' self-appraisal of their own abilities and chances of success, and their attitude towards science and scientific professions.

Young people's self-confidence and perception of their own identity are shaped by the social context in which they live.

Evidence shows that, if boys dream of becoming scientists, engineers or architects, girls rather prefer to devote themselves to others and study health and medicine. Furthermore, expectations of having a science-related career start forming in students' minds already before the age of 15 – strongly influenced by cultural biases and stereotypes.

Indeed, OECD findings reveal that, already at age 15, far more boys (18 per cent) than girls (4.7 per cent) envisage to work as professionals in engineering or computing fields.

In addition, parents are still more likely to expect their sons, rather than their daughters, to enter a Stem career, even when boys and girls get the same good grades at school.

Recently, a very interesting gender-equality paradox has emerged.

Using several large and often publicly available datasets, like the gender inequality measures taken by the World Economic Forum (WEF) and Unesco data on Stem degrees, a study published in the journal *Psychological Science* in 2018 showed that there is a tendency for nations which have traditionally less gender equality to have a higher



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

number of women in Stem than countries that are gender-progressive.

For instance, countries like Algeria, Tunisia, Albania and Turkey, which come low on the WEF gender equality measures, see women making up 35 per cent to 40 per cent of Stem graduates, whereas in countries with more gender equality, like Switzerland and Norway, the figure is lower at around 20 per cent.

Interestingly, in Finland, which is among the most gender-equal countries in the world, education plays a crucial role in the promotion of gender equality and gender awareness, and female students in high-schools outperform their male counterparts in Stem subjects.

There, less than a quarter of science college graduates are women.

As a possible explanation, the authors of the study consider that women, in countries where it is thought there is greater gender inequality, are more attracted to Stem fields as they could simply be seeking the clearest possible path to financial freedom. And often, that path leads through Stem professions.

If the number of women graduating in Stem subjects is still low, it should not come as a surprise that gender parity remains elusive among researchers, too, as a result of a leaky pipeline which sees the discrepancy in male and female representation widening at doctoral and research level.

Based on the latest available data from UIS, in 2015 women represented on average 23 per cent of total researchers in East Asia and the Pacific, and 19 per cent in South and West Asia – thus remaining far from the already poor world average of 29 per cent.

In this context, ensuring that girls and women have equal access to Stem studies and professions becomes imperative. And this goes beyond the moral call for simple gender parity and equal opportunities. In fact, women's participation enhances scientific excellence and improves the quality of Stem outcomes, as diverse ways of thinking promote creativity, reduce potential biases, foster knowledge sharing and deliver more robust solutions to problems.

Without the tension among diverse perspectives, including those of women, we will not be able to fully address the global challenges of decades ahead. But today more than ever, their involvement appears essential. Enabling the full development of half of the world's talent pool is essential to ensure sustainable growth and to make economies competitive and ready for the future.

The path through Stem subjects leads to empowerment, emancipation and enhanced freedom.

If the achievement of gender equality is an uphill battle, a stronger presence of women in Stem fields would drive a pervasive and enduring change allowing women to definitively stake their claim in the places where we imagine and construct our collective future.

Asia, with its rich diversity of cultures, languages, backgrounds, and with its historical focus on innovation represents the perfect environment to maximise the catalytic role of Stem and unlock the potential of young generations of girls and women, by enabling them to create a positive impact for a more inclusive and sustainable world. [ST](#)

The writer is an astrophysicist and the Chief Diversity Officer at the European Space Agency. She was a speaker at Women's Forum Asia, held in Singapore.



From soldiers dancing in-sync to military-themed wedding pictures, the People's Liberation Army has made a successful push onto Chinese social media, particularly video sharing platform Douyin.
PHOTO: DOUYIN

Country Report

Chinese propaganda takes millennial turn

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Beijing tapping new media platforms to reach out to tech-savvy younger audiences: Experts

XINWEN LIANBO, THE NIGHTLY PRIME-TIME news bulletin of China's state broadcaster CCTV, is known as a stuffy, officious news programme, that Chinese viewers often joke reports only good news about China and bad news about the world.

But the programme has adopted an informal take on things. In late August, it launched an account on Kuaishou, a short-video sharing platform, where it has sought to share China's views in a more informal, tongue-in-cheek manner.

In a video about the Hong Kong protests, news anchor Kang Hui compared the violence of protesters to piles that, if left untreated, would become a sore that "damages Hong Kong's rule of law" and the city as a home for its people.

Xinwen Lianbo's foray into Kuaishou is the latest in a continuing effort by Beijing to modernise its propaganda apparatus and tap new media platforms to reach out to younger audiences, said experts.

Since its launch, the account has amassed over 24 million followers. The videos follow a simple recipe: stoke nationalism, but in an entertaining manner.

In one video, news anchor Li Zimeng made fun of US President Donald Trump, who had tweeted last month that top trade negotiators from Beijing and Washington had spoken over the phone. Beijing later said there was no such call.

"Did the US receive a phone call from scammers?" said Ms Li, to a chorus of supportive comments from Chinese netizens.

Apart from the broadcaster, other arms of the party and government, including the Communist Youth League and People's Liberation Army, have also tapped popular video-sharing platforms such as Bilibili and Douyin.

Earlier this year, an app called Xuexi Qiangguo – which could be translated to mean, "Study Xi to strengthen the nation" – was launched. It quizzes users on things related to President Xi Jinping's activities, theories and achievements.

Professor Sun Wanning of the University of Technology Sydney describes Beijing's efforts as "indoctrination", noting that the propaganda messages of previous generations can easily be repackaged for millennials. "Like the rest of the

world, Chinese millennials are keen adopters of the latest mobile technologies and suffer from short attention spans. They are also just as enthusiastic as their Western counterparts about posting jokes, music videos and short, sharp, attention-grabbing memes on social media”, she wrote in an analysis published by The Conversation in August.

Recently, state news outlets have also deployed memes and short videos to great effect when covering the Hong Kong protests, using these images to build a narrative that the city’s protesters were violent troublemakers.

Dr Willy Lam, an expert on Chinese politics at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, said the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been using “unprecedented resources” such as apps and other

Internet tools to reach the masses.

He noted that President Xi had in 2013 referred to control of the Internet as a “matter of life and death for the party.” “The Internet is seen as a battleground, it is either occupied by the CCP and politically correct ideas and theories, or it is lost to foreign infiltration,” he said.

Professor Steve Tsang, director of the SOAS China Institute in London, said that while Beijing’s efforts might not look unusual when compared with what other governments are doing to modernise their messaging, the difference is that in China, the CCP has a powerful grip on the truth and narrative. “Even Trump has to live with alternative narratives or normal reporting by the traditional quality press. The latter does not exist in China,” he said. [ST](#)

Chinese state media reveals softer side of President Xi Jinping

HE COULD BE INSPECTING TROOPS, STARING down foreign visitors across a long table, or instructing party cadres and officials. China’s top leader Xi Jinping is often depicted as a leader who rules with an iron fist.

Chinese media, however, has recently painted another picture of the man, saying that behind the scenes he is a loving husband who calls his wife every night, is an avid sports fan and swims 1,000m daily.

Details on the private life of China’s paramount leader are rarely revealed.

The party’s official People’s Daily recently offered a glimpse into the personal life of Mr Xi, 66, in two articles, in the latest effort to burnish his credentials as a man of the masses.

The first article, published online on Aug 7, described Mr Xi as a “warm family man”

It recounted one “simple romantic gesture” in 1987, soon after he had married Madam Peng Liyuan, 56, then a famous singer in China.

Madam Peng had returned to Xiamen after travelling for work, and Mr Xi – then the vice-mayor of the city – rushed to pick up his wife, surprising her with a bunch of flowers plucked from their garden.

It also quoted Mr Xi saying in a 2004 interview: “I call my wife every day, we have been married for more than 10 years, but daily it has been like this. We might not be together today a lot of the time, but every day there is contact.”

Mr Xi also grew up playing football, and never lost the touch years later when in 2012 he kicked a Gaelic football while on a visit to Ireland as China’s Vice-President.



“He loves watching basketball, football, boxing and other sports. At times he would watch sports programmes late at night,” said the newspaper.

It quoted Mr Xi telling Russian media in an interview in 2014 that despite his hectic schedule he still “sets aside time to swim 1,000m daily”.

Details of Mr Xi’s closely guarded private life are a hot topic in China. In 2013, the Chinese president made an unannounced visit to a dumpling store, where he ordered steamed buns for lunch, sparking a media frenzy.

“This softer approach to propaganda is part of an all rounded effort to boost Xi’s image and build a personality cult around him,” said Dr Willy Lam, an expert on Chinese politics from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. [ST](#)

– Danson Cheong

In a photo taken on July 7, 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan pose on the red carpet as they attend to a concert at the ‘Elbphilharmonie’ as part of the G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany.
PHOTO: EPA-EFE

Vietnam digs in on South China Sea oil and gas projects amid Chinese pressure



A photo taken on April 29 shows a Rosneft Vietnam employee at the Lan Tay gas platform in the South China Sea off the coast of Vung Tau, Vietnam. PHOTO: REUTERS

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VIETNAM, LOCKED IN ONE OF ITS MOST protracted test of wills with China of late, is trying to allay fears that yet another foreign joint-venture energy project in the South China Sea may be canned due to pressure from Beijing.

The question over American firm ExxonMobil's involvement in the Ca Voi Xanh, or Blue Whale, gas field project off central Vietnam arose as a Chinese survey ship remained in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone in early September, the third such encroachment since July.

On the afternoon of Sept 13, Chinese government-owned Haiyang Dizhi 8 was anchored about 360km from the southern Vietnamese city of Vung Tau, according to information from vessel tracking website Marine Traffic.

Under escort by the Chinese coast guard, it has surveyed the area, triggering a demand from Hanoi for Beijing to immediately remove its vessels.

Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesman Le Thi Thu Hang, in a media briefing on Sept 12, condemned China's actions as illegal, saying that the waters in question "lies entirely within the sovereignty and jurisdiction of Vietnam." Replying to a query, she added that the Blue Whale project was continuing as planned.

The project consists of an offshore platform, a pipeline, a gas treatment plant on the mainland as well as pipelines linking third-party plants to generate power.

When fully up and running, the Blue Whale project is expected to provide US\$20 billion (\$30.3 billion) in revenue for Hanoi and supply enough power to cover 10 per cent of Vietnam's current demand.

China claims almost the entire oil-rich South China Sea through a vaguely defined "nine-dash line", which overlaps the claims of the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, as well as Taiwan.

To bolster its position, it has reclaimed and militarised disputed islands in South China Sea, while engaging in a discussion over more than a decade with Asean to draw up a code of conduct to manage territorial disputes.

Beijing has repeatedly tried to block companies from non-littoral states from taking part in oil exploration, and proposed that the final Code of Conduct should include a clause which states that marine economic activity "shall not be conducted in cooperation with companies from countries outside the region".

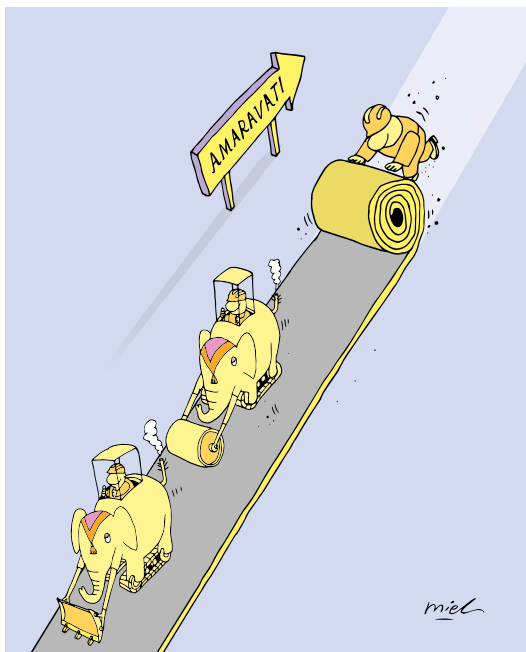
In 2017, Hanoi scrapped an oil-drilling project licensed to state-owned PetroVietnam, Spain's Repsol and United Arab Emirates' Mubadala Development, under Chinese pressure. Less than a year later in 2018, Vietnam cancelled another project licensed to Repsol about 400km from its southern coast over the same concerns.

This year, oil-drilling activities that Hanoi licensed to Russia's state-owned Rosneft 370km south-east of Vietnam again triggered opposition from Beijing, which sent Haiyang Dizhi 8 with escorts to Vanguard Bank on the western edge of Spratly Islands. Vietnam opted to extend the oil rig's operation.

Dwarfed by China's naval prowess, Vietnam has opted to flex its diplomatic muscles instead. At the July meeting between Asean's and China's foreign ministers in Bangkok, Vietnam's Foreign Minister Pham Binh Minh called out China's actions for eroding trust and causing instability.

Vietnam, along with the other Asean states, took part in the inaugural Asean-US Maritime Exercise in September held mostly in waters off Vietnam's southernmost Ca Mau province. The drills helped Asean's navies search and seize suspicious boats. **ST**

Amaravati plans still more dream than reality



ST ILLUSTRATION: MIEL

Singapore can shrug off the consequences of Amaravati, the proposed capital city, not proceeding to plan but India, and specifically Andhra, needs to ponder the long-term consequences.

IN THE SUMMER OF 2008, THE LATE PHARMA tycoon Anji Reddy, an industry icon of the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh who seeded the Hyderabad-based generics drugs sector, drove me to the residence of Mr Chandrababu Naidu, then as now forced to sit in opposition after losing his majority in the state assembly.

Spread on his office table were detailed drawings of the modern international airport that was being built in Shamsabad, on the outskirts of state capital Hyderabad. The project had been conceived by Mr Naidu, in his second term as chief minister of the province. However, most of its execution fell to the Congress-led government of Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara

Reddy, a man of hugely populist instincts known to all as “YSR”

Though out of power, Mr Naidu was nevertheless keeping a close eye on the airport’s development and YSR did not seem to mind his rival’s abiding interest in the project.

I left Mr Naidu’s house remarking to Dr Anji Reddy that unlike the bitter, family-centred political rivalries of other large neighbouring states such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, Andhra politicians seldom seemed inclined to undo the good work of their predecessors.

Today, watching the unravelling of plans to build Amaravati as a modern capital of the now-divided Andhra Pradesh after it lost traditional headquarters Hyderabad to Telengana, I am not so sure.

The mess once again involves Mr Naidu and his grand, or what critics call grandiose, plans.

‘CYBERABAD’

Mr Naidu, during his 1995-2004 stint as chief minister, is credited with placing Hyderabad as one of the great software development centres of the world, and for cleaning up the city. The big metropolis in the Deccan plains, known for its syncretic culture, caught the imagination of the world with office towers named after Bill Gates and other tech icons.

Dozens of Fortune 500 companies have development centres there today, occupying offices, a good part of which was built by Ascendas of Singapore. Indeed, the key software development district is even named Cyberabad. The city’s decade-old airport is among the busiest in the nation.

Still, that vision of a province plugged into the world ran directly into the ground reality that Andhra Pradesh is predominantly an agrarian state, despite its coastline and strategic spot facing the Bay of Bengal along whose rim is much of prosperous South-east Asia. Accused of an urban bias, Mr Naidu, despite his sturdy development record, was kicked out of power and spent several years in opposition before he stormed back in 2014 as the first elected head of truncated Andhra state.

Those who have met Mr Naidu will always remember that special glint in his eye. Top state officials say he badgers them night and day, offering ideas, inquiring about programmes and following up on action taken. Although Mr Narendra Modi has grabbed the limelight since 2002 with his single-minded focus on modernising his home state Gujarat into what came to be called the Guangdong of India, Mr Naidu was the original “development chief minister”

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There was no question which city Mr Naidu had in mind as a benchmark – Singapore. Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations S. Iswaran flew down for the October 2015 ceremony marking the start of Amaravati's development, joining him and India's Prime Minister Modi.



Now, returned to power in 2014 after the popular YSR died in a helicopter crash, Mr Naidu was once again out being himself, and his first big idea was to build a spectacular capital city along the fertile plains of the Krishna River. Situated between the existing towns of Guntur and Vijayawada, energy-efficient Amaravati was conceived as a Smart City development spanning some 200 sq km, half of which would be green spaces.

SINGAPORE BENCHMARK

There was no question which city Mr Naidu had in mind as a benchmark – Singapore. And the Lion City responded; Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations S. Iswaran – who is also Minister of Communications and Information – flew down for the October 2015 ceremony marking the start of Amaravati's development, joining Mr Naidu and India's Prime Minister Modi. Earlier, Singapore's most reputed urban planning and development firms had joined hands to contribute their expertise, honed over decades, for Andhra Pradesh. The seed development masterplan covered a 16.9 sq km area that would be the heart of Amaravati. There was another one for the broader city and a third for the wider, state capital region.

From the start, there were doubts whether Mr Naidu was biting off more than he could chew. Despite Mr Modi's words of encouragement at the inaugural of site work and his vision that Amaravati would inspire the vast Andhra diaspora to return to lead a start-up movement in the new state, the challenges were several. This included a critical dependence on the federal government for funding at a time when Mr Modi's party was eyeing prospects of extending its influence into Mr Naidu's home turf.

Mr Naidu himself seemed to acknowledge some of those challenges when he mentioned in his speech in Mr Modi's hearing that unlike the big southern metros of Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, Andhra did not yet have a revenue-generating capital city. Even as he sought buy-in from the farmers vacating the land by offering various revenue sharing "land pooling" schemes, dozens of court cases were filed seeking to stall his moves. The opposition, now led by the late YSR's son Jagan Mohan Reddy, alleged severe cronyism and the cornering of prime lands by interests close to Mr Naidu.

Nevertheless, work began. Contract work to the value of 358 billion rupees (\$6.9 billion) was awarded for a total of 68 projects, according to the New Indian Express. So far, the paper said, Andhra state has spent 80 billion rupees.

Now, a government change mid-year has turned things upside down in Andhra.

Mr Jagan Mohan is the new man in charge after handing Mr Naidu a trouncing in the polls at the head of YSR Congress, a party named after his father. The new government says its priorities are primarily agrarian and that Amaravati is both unnecessary and overly expensive. It has stopped work on the project pending inquiries into alleged "irregularities" in contracts awarded by the Naidu government,

which had burdened the state with massive debt.

Some of this has to do with the personality and politics of the YSR Congress people. Mr Jagan Mohan is seething at the 16 months of jail time he spent in 2012-13 while being investigated by federal agencies for corruption during his father's time.

Although it was the government of Sonia Gandhi-led Congress Party, that ordered the arrest, he seems to believe some of it was also because of Mr Naidu's ill-will.

There is an ideological issue at stake; the YSR Congress founder and his late father have their roots in Kurnool, an area steeped in Maoist thinking. Like his late father, whose first big move as chief minister was to order free power for farmers, Mr Jagan Mohan is by instinct a socialist.

An expert politician but untested in office, he has to think carefully of the long-term implications of cancelling Amaravati before making his final call on the project.

Beyond the masterplan it prepared, Singapore itself has not put any significant investment in Amaravati. So, this is no Suzhou. And there will be plenty of future opportunities in ports, shipping and technology parks. Yet, it is in Mr Jagan Mohan's interest to leverage the positive momentum of ties that Andhra Pradesh has built up over years with Singapore and the global goodwill the island state enjoys. His finance minister, in Singapore recently, spoke eloquently of quadrupling the state's economy by 2030. He should know that only rapid urbanisation can provide the engines for such growth.

The Andhra diaspora is vast. Get into a city bus in Seattle, or walk around the airport in Houston or Singapore's Changi Business Park at lunchtime, and you cannot miss hearing the chatter in Telugu, the state language. A modern state capital for Andhra, modelled with software help from Dassault Systemes, the company that helped design Boeing's Dreamliner and was enlisted by Mr Naidu for Amaravati, would capture the world's imagination. As seen by the Chinese development experience, diaspora – and the pride overseas Chinese feel for the mother country – have a critical role in rapid modernisation.

What of New Delhi? Frayed political ties between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Mr Naidu's Telugu Desam Party have queered interest in projects linked to Mr Naidu. With its huge majority in Parliament, neither does BJP need the support of Mr Jagan Mohan's grouping. That reduces his leverage with Mr Modi.

Nevertheless, the Indian leader took office vowing to be prime minister to all Indians. It may not be a bad idea for him to put an avuncular arm around Mr Jagan Mohan's shoulders and offer him reasonable funds to proceed with building the Smart City, even if its scale is moderated somewhat. If nothing else, the rise of a new metropolis would boost the growth prospects of Asia's third-largest economy, now at risk of slipping into the anaemic expansion rates clocked in the 1960s and 1970s. [ST](#)

New faces of retail

The idea of going to a shop to just buy a product is outdated, but brands can provide varied activities or services to retain customers, say experts



WITH METRO DEPARTING AS THE CENTREPOINT'S anchor tenant, one question has been hanging on many people's lips in Singapore is this: Is physical retail dead?

Not quite – it might just be in need of a few new tricks.

When it was later announced that French sporting goods giant Decathlon would take over as the anchor tenant, complete with immersive and experiential concepts, the buzz around “experiential retail” was re-ignited.

But experiential retail alone cannot keep a brand afloat, retail experts told *The Straits Times*.

They outlined brand identity, consistency in messaging, retail experience and community-centred activities or services as key factors in retaining shoppers today.

A lot of it boils down to concept and brand identity, said Associate Professor Leonard Lee of Marketing at NUS Business School at the National University of Singapore.

“To attract consumers to shop at a physical store, brands need to go beyond offering tangible products,” he said.

“Successful brands are able to elevate that to what concept they are offering to consumers and, from there, provide a corresponding set of services and experiences consistent with that concept.

“They look at retail experience rather than just transaction of products.”

Here are five brands doing it right.

APPLE: GO FOR A CONSISTENT BRAND IDENTITY

The Cupertino technology giant has long been lauded for being ahead of the retail game, with in-store services such as its free Today at Apple sessions, where the public can pick up skills such as photography using Apple products.

Prof Lee believes Apple's key strength is a clear, consistent brand identity that runs across all its marketing strategies.

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At Apple stores (above, the Jewel Changi Airport outlet), customers can freely explore the products displayed.

PHOTO: APPLE

“The store is an expansion of its concept of creativity – the tables feel almost like laboratory tables; it puts the products on the table for people to explore. It encourages active engagement where shoppers are free to experiment on their own.”

Service beyond buying and selling plays into the brand’s success too, he said. He cited Apple’s customer service strategy of having store assistants bring the credit card machine direct to shoppers, instead of making them queue at a cashier.

“Unlike some electronics retailers here, Apple’s physical stores don’t focus too much on transactions – a lot of it is about selling an experience and lifestyle marketing. Apple is trying to promote a digital lifestyle.”



Irish fast-fashion retailer Primark (above, in a 2018 photograph of its Oxford Street outlet) recently opened its largest store in Birmingham, Britain.
PHOTOS: REUTERS

PRIMARK: BIG-NAME COLLABORATIONS TO THRILL YOUR AUDIENCE

With fast-fashion brand Forever 21 announcing it was filing for bankruptcy, it might be tempting to blame low prices for a label’s downfall.

But proving that theory wrong is Irish fast-fashion retailer Primark.

Known for its wide variety and affordable buys, Primark recently opened its largest store in Birmingham, Britain.

Alongside the shopping, the store has an in-house beauty salon, barber and restaurants including a Disney-themed cafe, so you can relax in comfort after you shop.

Primark’s selling point has always been “offering the best value on the high street in an amazing store environment” – but, that aside, the new store and its offerings will help it differentiate itself to attract footfall, said Mr Samuel Tan, Diploma in Retail Management Course Chair at Temasek Polytechnic School of Business.

“In a location that serves one of the youngest cities in Europe – 40 per cent of its population is under 25 years – the product offerings reach out largely to the young shoppers.”

The value retailer is also doing well in bringing in new-to-market products by collaborating with brands to feature popular characters such as Harry Potter and Pusheen, as well as with notable television shows Friends and Game Of Thrones, he added.

The tie-ups add variety and are relevant to the store’s target demographic.

Similarly, local retailers can look at collaborations with other brands to keep concepts fresh and exciting, he said.

LULULEMON: CREATING A COMMUNITY WITH FREE FITNESS CLASSES

At Lululemon, you can buy athletic apparel and put it to use almost immediately at one of the brand’s many affiliated fitness events.

The Canadian retailer, which has four stores in Singapore, organises complimentary yoga, meditation and fitness community classes both in and out of its stores.

Its Duxton Road shophouse outlet, in the Tanjong Pagar district, has a dedicated space that accommodates up to 20 people each week. It also holds outdoor pop-up events – last month, it hosted a yoga session 56 storeys above the ground at Ion Sky in Orchard Road.

In today’s context, offering such “skills-based development sessions” align with the brand works because it enables consumers to become better at what they are already interested in, said Ms Lim Xiu Ru, a lecturer at Singapore Polytechnic’s School of Business.

“(The approach) continues to be successful as people become better at what they do – be it more serious in their yoga, meditation or even high-intensity interval training pursuits. That way, when they are looking to buy attire which helps them pursue these activities, Lululemon is the first brand that crosses their minds.”

The label has also been adept at creating a community with like-minded individuals, said experts.

In Singapore, it collaborated with other home-grown fitness studios such as Boom and WeBarre to organise boxing and barre – a type of workout that combines ballet-inspired moves with elements of pilates, dance, yoga and strength training – classes respectively.

Mr Tan of Temasek Polytechnic noted how Lululemon strategically employs “young and active individuals” as service staff to represent the brand. “At activities or events, experts or well-regarded instructors are deployed to run the sessions. The community-centred activities reinforce the brand’s values and builds brand awareness.”



The brand's customer-centric business model is about meeting users' needs – something retailers can learn from, he added.

VANS: A SPACE FOR THE 'IN' CROWD

For sneaker label Vans, a unique concept store in London has gone above and beyond selling shoes.

Constructed inside five underground tunnels, the House of Vans store incorporates a cinema, cafe, live music venue, art gallery and even a skating ramp.

The indoor skate park is free to use for all, with a Skate Skool organising weekly skating lessons.

Besides being an obvious tourist destination, it draws and retains its intended crowd.

Retail experts agree that creating and selling a lifestyle targeted at its consumers keeps them coming back for more.

Ms Lim of Singapore Polytechnic noted how the store's "strategic location" near London's famous



Leake Street graffiti tunnel and railway vaults attracts just the right audience for it to provide a fully integrated experience.

She said: "By regularly holding skate nights, film screenings and music performances, this is not a store – but rather an experiential space where the 'in' crowd gathers and hangs out. This helps the label build brand resonance with its target audience who are buying into the Vans' lifestyle concept, rather than just the products."

It also provides purpose for its shoppers to visit the store, said Mr Tan of Temasek Polytechnic.

"Singapore retailers may need to better understand its customers to address their needs. The brand values must be relevant to the lifestyle of customers to be more sustainable."




ULTA BEAUTY: KEEPING A FRESH LINE-UP OF BRANDS

American beauty store chain Ulta Beauty has won the loyalty of many in the United States, with an attractive rewards programme; in-store services such as hair, skin and brow treatments; and a curated line-up of indie brands such as ColourPop and Kylie Cosmetics that previously were available only online.

The beauty giant, whose biggest competitor is Sephora, also recently launched a virtual make-up try-on service for customers.

Ms Lim also commended the brand's new initiative Sparked, which provides consumers with access to direct-to-consumer, lesser-known brands.

"This not only helps Ulta Beauty position itself as a brand which supports emerging brands, but it also helps customers get to know more brands – and this keeps them excited and coming back for more."

Singapore retailers can look at promoting home-grown brands to keep their line-up "fresh", Ms Lim noted. "If these featured brands could be curated along a theme and provide a unique experience each time, customers may be intrigued and regularly come back to find out what's new." 

LEFT: A yoga session conducted by Lululemon Singapore at Ion Sky. PHOTO: COURTESY OF LULULEMON SINGAPORE FRANCE-PRESSE

Ulta Beauty (in a 2018 photograph), an American beauty store chain, provides consumers with access to direct-to-consumer, lesser-known brands. PHOTOS: AFP


BOTTOM LEFT: The House of Vans store in London incorporates a cinema, cafe, live music venue, art gallery, and even a mini skating ramp. PHOTOS: HOUSE OF VANS LONDON / FACEBOOK

LIFESTYLE MARKETING

Unlike some electronics retailers here, Apple's physical stores don't focus too much on transactions – a lot of it is about selling an experience and lifestyle marketing.



– Associate Professor Leonard Lee of Marketing at NUS Business School, on Apple's key strength being is clear, consistent brand identity that runs across all its marketing strategies.



The international director of the Michelin Guides, Gwendal Poullennec is well-recognised in the industry as the public face of the “famously anonymous” Michelin inspectors.
ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Lifestyle

Michelin Guides’ international director critiqued by kids when he cooks

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MR GWENDAL POULLENNEC OFTEN RECEIVES the VIP treatment when he dines out.

After all, the international director of the Michelin Guides is well-recognised in the industry as the public face of the “famously anonymous” Michelin inspectors.

The tables are turned, though, when he is back home in Paris. His four children, aged one to seven, judge his cooking and are not particularly starstruck by his job.

The 39-year-old Frenchman, who joined French tyre manufacturer Michelin in 2003, says: “I’m always travelling, so when I’m home, I’m in the kitchen but on the other side. My children are my clients and the critique can be sharp.

“They just know I work with Bibendum (the Michelin Man) and if they see me on TV, they will ask me about what I’m doing.”

Mr Poullennec – who was in town for the fourth edition of the Michelin Guide Singapore on Sept 17 at Capella Singapore – is not an inspector, but has

eaten “thousands of meals” with the team.

He says: “I’m trained by them but I do not write any restaurant reports because people know my face. My main mission is to make sure restaurants are fairly assessed and we all align on key decisions when we make it. It is not a one-man show.”

On Singapore’s newly minted three-Michelin-starred French restaurants Odette and Les Amis, he says: “It is an important milestone. Both restaurants have been established for a long time and can be local success stories, whatever the style of cuisine.

Both fine-dining restaurants had received two stars in the past three years since the guide was launched in 2016. Five restaurants received two stars this year, the same number as last year. There were 37 eateries that received one star, three more than last year.

Mr Poullennec says: “The more important the decision, the more people we send to evaluate the restaurants as consistency is key. It is a huge

responsibility to award three stars.”

He does not reveal any numbers with regard to the inspectors and their diversity. He would only say the team is growing in numbers and that there are more women on board.

He also says the same inspectors – both local and international – who judge Michelin-starred restaurants also rate hawker food for the Bib Gourmand list that was launched in September.

For restaurants that did not make the cut this year – whether because of closure or drop in quality – he calls it the “normal cycle of life.”

“You have ups and downs, restaurants closing and new concepts. But what’s interesting is to have restaurants that open this year and very quickly reach the one- or two-star level. It’s a sign of the local market’s maturity,” says Mr Poullennec, who has spent the past 12 years in charge of the Michelin Guides’ international development.

The graduate of the ESSEC Business School in

Cergy, France, worked for a hospitality brand before joining Michelin in a marketing role.

He has since initiated guide launches in culinary destinations such as New York, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Kyoto, Bangkok and Taipei. Beijing’s first Michelin Guide will debut on Nov 28.

He says: “The more the guide goes international, the more we have to be consistent and homogenous in rating. Whether you dine in Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo or New York, the quality remains the same at the different star levels.”

And while it may well be impossible for inspectors to dine everywhere, Mr Poullennec insists they cover plenty of ground.

He says: “What pushes the inspectors is the thrill of discovery. We leave no stone unturned. We can’t be everywhere because there are millions of places to eat, but places of interest are tested. We are tasting much more restaurants than what we select in the ranking.” **ST**

French restaurants Les Amis and Odette get three Michelin stars for the first time

ONCE AGAIN, SINGAPORE HAS RESTAURANTS with three Michelin stars. And not one but two.

Odette and Les Amis were both given the maximum three stars in the fourth edition of the Michelin Guide Singapore unveiled on Sept 17 at a ceremony in Capella Singapore hotel.

Both fine-dining French restaurants had received two stars in the past three years since the guide was launched in 2016.

Singapore had three-star Restaurant Joel Robuchon in 2016 and 2017, but it closed down in June 2018, leaving a vacuum until now.

Odette’s chef-owner Julien Royer, 37, said the top award was only the beginning and not the end for what he and his team were trying to achieve for the restaurant. “We try to get better every day.”

He added: “It’s due time for Singapore restaurants to get three stars as we are a nation of foodies. We have a strong responsibility to be at the top of our game. It is like winning the gold medal at the Olympics.”

The restaurant at the National Gallery Singapore is co-owned by the Lo And Behold group of restaurants.

Chef Sebastien Lepinoy, 45, of Les Amis in Shaw Centre was elated: “I’ve been waiting for this for 29 years. I started when I was 16 until now.”

“Three stars is the biggest accolade a chef can get. It’s a real barometer. If you get it in Singapore, it’s like getting it in Paris, London or Tokyo.”



Les Amis’ chef Sebastien Lepinoy (left) and Odette’s chef-owner Julien Royer, after receiving their three stars from Mr Gwendal Poullennec, the new international director of the Michelin Guides, on Sept 17.

ST PHOTO: MARK CHEONG

Asked what is next, he said: “I will go and catch the fourth star. I will tell my team that the easier day was yesterday. We need to do more.”

Five restaurants received two stars this year, the same number as last year. Making its debut in the Singapore guide was Zen, which was opened in November 2018 by Swedish chef Bjorn Frantzen and restaurant group Unlisted Collection.

Saint Pierre, which received one star in the past two years, moved up a notch this year when it was awarded two stars.

The remaining three retained their two stars: Shisen Hanten, Shoukouwa and Waku Ghin restaurants.

There were 37 eateries that received one star, three more than last year. **ST**



Les Amis N
Odette N

WONG AH YOKE
Food Critic



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Big Picture

PHOTO: CHING-HUNG HUNG

Taiwan's river enforcement efforts destroy wildlife

"THE ONLY WAY HOME IS TO BASH AGAINST a wall."

In March 2018, the Environmental Ethics Foundation of Taiwan released a video shot depicting fish jumping from a river in order to reach the upper streams to spawn.

However, as the river bank was made of concrete, the fish were defeated and died at the river side. None completed their mission to return.

This was not a special case, but an average scene by the rivers of Taiwan.

The Society of Wilderness investigation team on Taitung streams investigated 40 streams in Taitung but discovered that only one was not modified.

The rest had their base and bank covered with concrete, so there was no upper stream for fishes to return to or water for crab-eating mongooses to drink.

The streams were also losing their fauna.

River enforcement projects by the government

are the main culprit behind this environmental degradation.

Taitung's natural environment is regarded as one of the least developed in Taiwan.

However, even a beautiful county like Taitung is embedded with a truth we cannot ignore and forget.

Conducted over three years, the Society of Wilderness investigation report on the streams of Taitung revealed that 39 out of 40 streams have changed greatly over the period.

One species that has suffered from these changes is the *Sicyopterus japonicus*, also known as the monk goby. The fish is common in the streams in Taitung.

Its pectoral fins contain suction cups used to move between pebbles and rock walls near the estuary. But the construction makes the river bed too high for this fish to climb, not to mention other creatures. [S](#)

– United Daily News, Taiwan

This story was originally published by United Daily News on Jun 14, 2018. It is part of the World News Day initiative. Visit <http://worldnewsday.org> for more.

THROUGH THE LENS

PHOTO EXHIBITIONS ORGANISED BY
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EXHIBITION
2019



**WORLD PRESS PHOTO
OF THE YEAR 2019**

Honduran toddler Yanela Sanchez cries as she and her mother, Sandra Sanchez, are taken into custody by US border officials in McAllen, Texas, US, on June 12, 2018.

© John Moore,
Agence France-Presse

**THE STRAITS TIMES
PHOTO SHOWCASE**

A protester smashing a glass panel at the entrance of the Legislative Council building in Hong Kong on July 1, 2019, the anniversary of the city's handover to Chinese rule.

By Lim Yaohui,
The Straits Times

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