



## **Summary of the CAJ Board of Directors Meeting**

Vientiane, March 27-30, 2019

The meeting of the Board of Directors (BOD) of the Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ) was held on March 28, 2019 at the headquarters of Vientiane Times, Vientiane, Lao PDR, hosted by the Lao Journalists Association (LJA).

### **Participants:**

#### **Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ):**

- 1) Kea Puy, CCJ Board Member and Secretary General , CAJ Director
- 2) Delux Leang, CCJ Board Member, Deputy Executive Director

#### **Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI)**

- 1) Atal Depari, PWI President, CAJ Vice President
- 2) Otto Munaf Bob Iskandar, CAJ Director

#### **Lao Journalists Association (LJA)**

- 1) Savankhone Razmouny, LJA President
- 2) Sounthone Khanthavong, LJA Vice President
- 3) Thonglor Duangsavan, LJA Executive Member, CAJ Director
- 4) Vorasack Pravongviengkham, LJA Executive Member and Deputy Head of External Relations Commission, CAJ Director

### **National Journalists Union Malaysia (NUJM)**

- 1) Mohd Taufek Bin Razak, NUJM President, CAJ Director
- 2) Chin Sung Chew, NUJM Secretary General, CAJ Director

### **National Press Club of the Philippines (NPC)**

- 1) Rolando Gonzalo, NPC President, CAJ Director
- 2) Lydia Bendana Bueno, NPC Secretary General

### **Confederation of Thai Journalists (CTJ)**

- 1) Pramed Lekpetch, CTJ President
- 2) Mongkol Bangprapa, CTJ Secretary General, CAJ Director
- 3) Chavarong Limpattamapanee, CTJ Advisor, CAJ Director

### **Vietnam Journalists Association (VJA)**

- 1) Ho Quang Loi, VJA 1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chairman, CAJ Director
- 2) Dinh Thi Thuy Hang, VJA Director of Center for Further Media Training, CAJ Director
- 3) Nguyen Do Hoa Mi, VJA Deputy Head of International Affairs Division

### **Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ)**

- 1) Thepchai Yong, CTJ Advisor, CAJ President and BOD Chairman
- 2) Damrit Viriyakul, CTJ Advisor, CAJ Secretary General
- 3) Sumonchaya Chuengcharoensil, Assistant to CAJ Secretary General

### **Observer:**

#### **Myanmar Journalists Association (MJA)**

- 1) Zaw Than, MJA International Relationship Officer

The meeting is chaired by CAJ President and BOD Chairman Thepchai Yong

## **Welcome remarks**

**By H.E. Savankhone Razmouny**

*Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism, Lao PDR*

*President of Lao Journalists Association (LJA)*

In his welcome remarks, the LJA President welcomed participants of the BOD Meeting and said LJA was greatly honored to host the meeting for the first time. He said the BOD Meeting in Vientiane was very important and a great opportunity for CAJ members to share ideas on how to fulfil the Action Plan 2018-2020 which was adopted at the 19th General Assembly of CAJ last year in Bangkok, Thailand. He said during the meeting, CAJ members would raise issues to share with one another in order to reach CAJ's destination, tighten the solidarity and connectivity among journalists and media organizations in the ASEAN Community, boost journalist training and experience sharing, and raise the CAJ's role in the region and the world. The CAJ, he said, would also exchange views to promote the development of the regional press and the media's role and responsibility within the ASEAN Community.

The LJA President also noted the contribution from the Working Visit Program organized jointly last year by the LJA and TJA to tourism in Laos. The program was organized as part of the Action Plan 2018-2020 in which journalists from CAJ member countries were invited to visit Laos and Thailand which the LJA President said represents a concrete example of cooperation of CAJ members.

## **Opening remarks**

**By Thepchai Yong**

*President of the Confederation of ASEAN Journalists and Chairman of CAJ Board of Directors*

In his opening remarks, CAJ President in his capacity as BOD Chairman welcomed participants of the BOD Meeting and expressed appreciation for LJA and His Excellency Mr. Savankhone Razmouny, Deputy Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism of the Lao PDR, and President of LJA, for hosting the event. He said the BOD Meeting in Vientiane took place amid a fast-changing media landscape which sees strong impact from on the mainstream media, noting that these challenges have been recognized by CAJ and were highlighted in both the Hanoi Declaration in 2015 and Bangkok Declaration in 2018 which reaffirmed CAJ's commitment to work together to face this most challenging time.

He noted that the BOD Meeting in Vientiane, therefore, should provide CAJ member countries with a good opportunity to discuss how to enhance cooperation to face the changes and challenges facing the media profession by looking ahead together and come up with new and fresh ideas to strengthen their commitment to closer cooperation and to cope with changes and challenges in this new media landscape.

## **Agenda 1: CAJ Members Update**

Representatives of CAJ member countries report on their current media situations:

### **Thailand**

#### **Chavarong Limpattamapanee, CAJ Director**

Thailand just has had its first general election since the military coup in 2014. Though the election results didn't come as a surprise, they make the forming of the post-election coalition government difficult. The process may extend into the month of May after the Election Commission makes a formal announcement of the election results.

The periods before, during and after the election have been fraught with fake news and disinformation. Concerned with the situation, the Thai Journalists Association (TJA) issued a statement calling on media organizations and media practitioners to be cautious in their political news coverage, especially as far as fake news is concerned. It also reiterates the importance of the media not reporting or echoing hate speech in the aftermath of the election. TJA had earlier issued a guideline distinguishing between facts, information and opinions in the social media. It has also been emphasizing the need for the media to always accompany press freedom with responsibility.

There has been an election of a new executive committee of Thai Journalists Association (TJA) to which Mongkol Bangprapa, who is also currently a CAJ Director, has been appointed TJA's new President. Consequently, he will assume the presidency of the Confederation of Thai Journalists, replacing current CTJ President Pramed Lekpetch.

In order to work toward greater professionalism and responsibility in the region, the National Press Council of Thailand is engaged in a series of cooperation programs with the National Press Council of Indonesia and the National Press Council of Myanmar and is looking forward to working with national press councils in other CAJ member countries.

### **Indonesia**

#### **Bob Iskandar, CAJ Director**

The traditional media in Indonesia have been greatly affected by the proliferation of on-line media. There are currently 1,000 print publications and about 100 television channels across the country, along with 700 or more registered radio stations. Most of these major traditional media outlets have also moved into on-line but those who could not adapt have to cease operation. As the President of PWI, the biggest national media organization which has a membership of 20,000 across the country, Atal Depari has embarked on programs to try to help journalists cope with the new challenges, especially in terms of helping improve their professional competency. PWI has organized competency tests to help distinguish professional journalists from amateur or so-called pseudo-journalists. There have been a number of people who pose themselves as journalists only to seek financial gains. Those who have passed the tests will be issued with certificates. As many as 10,000 journalists have been certified through the tests.

## **Cambodia**

### **Kea Puy, CAJ Director**

Cambodia has become a one-party system after the People's Party of Prime Minister Hun Sen won the general election last year to continue his 33-year-old rule. The complete changing of the political landscape as a result takes place amidst proliferation of social media. Both ordinary citizens and politicians have turned to on-line media to communicate and propagate their messages. Prime Minister Hun Sen now seems to have fans on Facebook more than any other government leaders in the region. How he managed to get as many as 11 million Facebook fans was a hot topic of debate last year.

The Club of Cambodian Journalists (CCJ), which has 91 media organizations and 363 individual journalists as members recognizes the rise of and threat from fake news which has been prevalent on the social media. It has engaged in activities to warn people to beware of dangers from fake news. At the same, it hopes to help in training for both on-line journalists and netizens to learn of media responsibility from professional media practitioners.

## **Malaysia**

### **Chin Sung Chew, CAJ Director**

The new government that came to power after the general election in May last year has been more friendly with the media than previous administrations. It's in the process of abrogating the anti-fake news law introduced by the government of former prime minister Najib Razak in an attempt to muzzle the media ahead of the general election. The government-proposed bill to abolish the law was, however, rejected by the Upper House which is dominated by people appointed by the previous administration. Nevertheless, the current government of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad plans to reintroduce the bill this year.

The Ministry of Communication and Multimedia has taken the initiative of having a dialogue with the media and proposed to work with the Human Rights Commission and the Bars Association. NUJM is seeking meetings with authorities concerned to discuss how press freedom should be promoted.

Nevertheless, the mainstream media are being badly affected by the proliferation of social media. One of the largest Malay-language newspapers, Utusan Malaysia, has downsized its operation by laying off 700 staffs. Other newspapers have reduced the number of pages in order to survive financially. Because of the strong competition even on-line news portals are also finding it difficult to sustain their operation. On the brighter side, Malaysian media organizations and journalists are in the process of preparing a bill seeking to establish a media council to be presented to the government.

## **The Philippines**

### **Rolanda Gonzalo, CAJ Director**

Journalism is no longer a profession that attracts young and talented people. It largely has to do with its low pay and lack of other incentives.

There are journalists who moonlight as publicists in disguise for politicians while some news announcers have been paid to speak for politicians or political parties.

To avoid this trap, professional journalists have been advised to find other sources of income – either engaging in businesses or other additional jobs – so that they don't have to corrupt their profession.

The National Press Club of the Philippines is contributing to helping promote media professionalism by joining hands with universities in offering professional courses at reduced tuition fees with the end in view of economic advancement.

The Philippines has one of the world's highest incidents of journalists being harassed and killed. Thus, Presidential Task Force on Media Security (PTFOMS) has been launched by the government, through the prodding of National Press Club leaders who have entered government service, to provide safety for journalists as a result.

The National Press Club has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) to ensure safety and protection for media practitioners.

Under the MOU, the National Press Club would be notified by the DILG through the Philippine National Police, on the issuance of warrants of arrest by the courts on cases of libel, ordinary or cyber libel, against journalists in the course of their performance of duties for purposes of legal assistance to journalists.

## **Vietnam**

### **Ho Quang Loi, CAJ Director**

Vietnamese media in general are facing major challenges that have affected their readerships and their revenues. Vietnamese authorities are urging media outlets, which number about 1,000, to consider merging in order to survive financially. As a result, media platforms in three to four of the 63 provinces have agreed to merge.

Vietnam Journalists Association recently organized a media festival which drew attendance of about 200 media organizations and associations. The highlights of the event were a visit to different media stands by Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and workshops on the dangers of fake news, how to deal with the financial challenges, and how the media can attract younger readership.

Vietnam Journalists Association has also introduced new guidelines for social media journalists to help them understand the need for accuracy and responsibility. The guidelines also emphasize the need for professional journalists to play a role in fighting fake news by helping the public to distinguish between disinformation and truths.

## **Laos PDR**

### **Vorasack Pravongviengkham, CAJ Director**

Lao media are giving importance to supporting the "Visit Laos-China Year" this year which sees a more open border and cheaper visa fees for Laotian and Chinese tourists. The event follows the "Visit Laos Year" in 2018 which turned out to be a great success with 4.1 million visitors and a revenue of US\$755 million.

Like most other countries, the mainstream media are feeling the effect from the growth of social media. An estimated 45 per cent of the Laotian people now have access to social media.

Laotian media are now focusing their attention on the events and activities leading up to the Congress of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) in 2020. The congress will be a watershed event that will see a new government and a future direction of the country.

## **Myanmar**

### **Zaw Than, observer**

There have been positive developments as far as press freedom is concerned since the first democratic general elections of Myanmar in 2015, with a new media law in place. However, journalists are still subject to arbitrary legal action by authorities. The arrests of two Reuters journalists accused of possessing state secrets last year serve as a stark warning that the media are still facing challenges. The Myanmar Journalists Association are joining other media organizations in reaching an agreement with the authorities so that they would be consulted before legal actions are taken against journalists in relation to their performing of journalistic duty. However, authorities of the Information Ministry are still reluctant to subscribe to such agreement.

In general, the mainstream media in Myanmar are facing a lot of difficulties with dwindling advertising revenue and circulation. Private media feel they have disadvantage vis-à-vis the three state-owned newspapers which offer cheaper cover prices and attract more advertisements. Media organizations also question the rationale of Myanmar having state-run newspapers now that the country has become a democracy.

## **Agenda 2: Report on CAJ activities**

Report on the activities and achievements under the CAJ Action Plan 2018-2020 as presented by CAJ Secretary General Damrit Viriyakul:

1)The Confederation of Thai Journalists and The Lao Journalists Association co-organized the “CTJ-LJA Working Visit Program” between June 17-26, 2018. The program was designed to promote better understanding and people-to-people contacts among ASEAN countries through travel. A total of 18 journalists from 9 countries, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, and China, took part in the program which coincided with “The visit Laos Year” and “Amazing Thailand Year”

The opening ceremony in Bangkok was presided over by Minister of Tourism and Sports of Thailand, Mr. Weerasak Kowsurat. During their 5 days in Thailand, the ASEAN and Chinese journalists not only visited famous attractions in Bangkok, but also had a chance to visit nearby provinces like Ayutthaya before flying to Udon Thani where they toured the world-famous Ban Chiang World Heritage Site and visited Vietnamese and Chinese communities, including the house in which Vietnamese independence hero Ho Chi Minh used to live while he was in Udon Thani.

At the Lao-Thai Friendship Bridge Border checkpoint, the journalists were able to observe first-hand the connectivity between ASEAN countries.

In Vientiane, they were warmly welcomed by the Lao Journalists Association and visited historical places, such as Wat Sisaket and That Luang Stupa. After that, they travelled to Vang Vieng and the famous tourist city of Luang Prabang where they learned a lot about the historical roots of this great and beautiful country.

The closing ceremony was held in Vientiane and attended by high-level guests from both government and private sectors as well as representatives from embassies of ASEAN countries.

2) CTJ together with the Online News Providers Association (SONP) of Thailand co-organized a forum on fake news. The forum, known as “The Rise of Fake News and How to Handle It” was intended to highlight the dangers from fakes and how journalists in the region should work together to combat it. Representatives from mainstream media in ASEAN countries, CAJ member organizations, plus India, were invited to share their experiences at the forum in Bangkok on 20th August, 2018

Besides the forum, CTJ also organized a CAJ roundtable discussion on the topic “How ASEAN Should Fight Fake News” at the Thai Journalists Association (TJA) on 21st August, 2018. (More details on the forum at CAJ website at [cajnet.org](http://cajnet.org))

3)The BOD Meeting in Vientiane, Lao PDR, hosted by the Lao Journalists Association (LJA) is part of the CAJ Action Plan 2018-2020.

### **Agenda 3: Follow-up and review of CAJ Action Plan 2018-2020**

VJA reported on the progress of the project for a media contest on the topic “Sustainable Agricultural Development.” The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development which works in cooperation with VJA on this project has approved funding for it. The contest will be in three categories – for print, on-line and photos. Each country is entitled to submit up to 30 entries (10 for each of the categories) with the deadline for submissions set for May 15, 2019. Entries are articles and photos published between January and December, 2018 and will have to be translated into English. A ceremony to be held in Hanoi to announce the results is tentatively scheduled for August-October, 2019. The first prize for each of the categories will be US\$1,500 in cash, US\$800 for first runners-up and US\$500 for second runners-up. There will also be a consolation prize of US\$300 for each of the categories.

PWI reported that because of the time constraints, it will review the “ASEAN Hero” project and will have it postponed to next year.

### **Agenda 4: CAJ future activities plan**

CTJ proposed a competition in inspiring articles for ASEAN journalists. Thailand has assumed the ASEAN chairmanship for 2019 so it’s timely for CTJ to take the opportunity to help in promoting the spirit of ASEAN Community by organizing a competition for journalists in ASEAN countries to write inspiring articles under the theme “Advancing Partnership for Sustainability in ASEAN.”



**Objectives:**

1. To allow young and mature journalists in ASEAN to exhibit their writing skills and share knowledge and experience with their ASEAN peers.
2. To increase cooperation among members and observers of CAJ).
3. To celebrate Thailand's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2019.

**Activities:**

1. Call for submission of articles (about 500-1,000 words) from young and mature journalists (aged under 40 years) in ASEAN countries (June-July 2019).
2. CAJ members and observers select two winners from the competition in their countries (August 2019).
3. All 20 winners attend a workshop on Sustainable Development and a short field trip in Thailand for three days (September 2019).
4. Award presentation ceremony in Bangkok during the workshop (September 2019).

**Organizers:**

1. Confederation of Thai Journalists
2. Confederation of ASEAN Journalists and its members (including observers)
3. Department of ASEAN Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand

CCJ proposed a joint study tour for CAJ journalists along the ASEAN Highway, linking Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam to help promote closer media cooperation and better understanding among peoples in the member countries. This could be partially done in the context of China's Belt and Road Initiative. However, securing financial support for the project needs to be discussed among CAJ member countries.

PWI proposed that efforts should continue to be made to have Brunei Darussalam join CAJ.

CAJ President suggested that as a starter, Brunei Darussalam should be invited to attend the next CAJ's General Assembly in Indonesia. CAJ President also plans to make a series of visits to CAJ member countries to discuss ways and means to make the organization more dynamic and how to raise the level of cooperation among them.

**Agenda 5: CAJ communication channels**

CAJ President reported that CAJ now has two main communication channels – the CAJ Facebook Page and CAJ website ([www.cajnet.org](http://www.cajnet.org)) which carry news and articles on the activities and movements of CAJ

and those of their individual member countries. However, editorial contributions from CAJ member countries have been rather limited.

CTJ noted that the CAJ website is a crucial communication and public relations tool for CAJ because it is a platform over which CAJ has total control – unlike social media platforms which are dependent on foreign media firms.

VJA suggested that in order to make the two communications platform better known, the name-cards of the executives and staff members of CAJ and its Secretariat should carry the addresses of both the CAJ's website and Facebook Page.

The meeting acknowledged the need as noted by CCJ for both communication platforms to have more lively designs and engaging contents.

The meeting agreed to a suggestion by CAJ President that each of the CAJ member countries is committed to submitting a minimum of 1 news article a month to make the two communication platforms more active.

## **Agenda 6: CAJ Advisory Council**

The meeting generally was of the idea that CAJ would gain from having an advisory council in terms of experience and ideas. However, it noted that there should be a clear guideline on the qualifications of those who will be invited to join the advisory council. Equally important is the question of their role and functions.

The meeting agreed that members of the CAJ Board of Directors will go back to do more homework on this matter so that CAJ would have an advisory council that is most beneficial to its work. Among the issues they need to address are: The number of members of the advisory council, their qualifications, their role and functions, their terms, and how they will fit in with the present CAJ structure.

## **Agenda 7: 20<sup>th</sup> CAJ General Assembly**

PWI proposed to host the 20<sup>th</sup> CAJ Assembly in the last week of March, 2020 but will inform CAJ member countries of the exact dates later on. PWI also agreed to consider holding the assembly on the island of Bali.

CTJ suggested that after Indonesia and Laos, which will host the 21<sup>st</sup> CAJ General Assembly, the host of the next general assembly should return to the alphabetical order. On that principle, NUJM agreed to consider hosting the 22<sup>nd</sup> CAJ General Assembly.

## **Conclusion and closing remarks**

CAJ President expressed appreciation for the active participation of the members of the CAJ Board of Directors. He noted the new and fresh ideas that were put forth in the meeting which he believed should help make CAJ more active and dynamic. He thanked H.E. Savankhone Razmountry, Deputy Minister of Communication, Culture and Tourism, and Lao Journalists Association for hosting the BOD Meeting and for their warm hospitality.