

Conference to look at challenges facing media

Sessions will cover topics such as fake news, artificial intelligence and Asia developments

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Over the past months, media outlets gave voice to women who, for years, were forced to stay silent about the sexual harassment they endured from film mogul Harvey Weinstein.

Now that the #MeToo movement has sparked spirited conversations about gender, discrimination and sexual assault, what more can reporters do to keep the discussion of these long-taboo, yet important, topics going?

How can the media fight back against the hate speech and disinformation being put online by extremist groups such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria?

And will artificial intelligence help make journalists' jobs easier – or end up stealing them away?

These are some of the issues that will get an airing at the East-West Centre's International Media Conference in Singapore next week.

Change looks set to be the buzzword this year as the event, which is held at the Singapore Management University's (SMU) School of

Law, takes on the theme of "What is News Now?". Media practitioners, policymakers and tech giants will gather to discuss the technological, political and social upheavals that have rocked the world and the repercussions these have had – and will continue to have – on news production and the role of the media.

The scourge of fake news – which has been used to sow hatred and division – is the focus of a keynote panel, as countries continue to grapple with striking the right balance between the diverse interests and stakeholders involved.

Dr Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information as well as Transport; Mr Warren Fernandez, editor-in-chief of Singapore Press Holdings' English/Malay/Tamil Media Group; Hong Kong Baptist University media professor Cherian George; and Facebook's head of public policy for Asean, Malaysia and Singapore Alvin Tan will speak on the topic on Monday.

Mr Fernandez, who is also editor of The Straits Times, said: "Readers are increasingly seeking news reports and commentators they trust

to help them make sense of a changing world. The challenge of meeting this need, amid a changing media landscape, including the proliferation of fake news, is something media professionals everywhere are pondering and having to come to grips with."

Conference director Susan Kreifels, media programmes manager at the East-West Centre, said: "As we face an ever more digitised news environment and increasing global disinformation, this year's conference will bring hundreds of media professionals together to focus on the intersection of media, technology and social change, and the new-era disruptions and transformations this has brought to the business of news, consumers of information and the stories themselves."

Recent developments in Asia will be in the spotlight as well, with a line-up of speakers who will tackle issues such as the threat of North Korea and how Islam is shaping media coverage in Muslim-majority Malaysia and Indonesia.

At a time of global uncertainty, the shifting balance of power in Asia will be the focus of a panel moderated by Bloomberg View writer Nisid Hajari. The panel includes East-West Centre Washington director Satu Limaye, the National University of Singapore's Institute of South Asian Studies director C. Raja Mohan, and Straits Times foreign editor Zakir Hussain.

And in a period that has seen irate world leaders lock horns with the press, Asian journalists will speak on challenges to press freedom in their countries. They include Ms Maria Ressa of Rappler, the Philippine news site dubbed "fake news" by President Rodrigo Duterte. Singapore's smart nation push will be a talking point as well, with speakers such as GovTech chief executive Kok Ping Soon offering insights into the country's digitisation efforts.

The three-day conference is co-hosted by the East-West Centre, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and SMU, while The Straits Times is a gold sponsor.

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