



Singapore International Cyber Week and ASEAN's in Addressing Cybersecurity Issues

By

Muhammad Verdias Yurindra

Intern at The Habibie Center
thc@habibiecenter.or.id

Synopsis/Abstract

ASEAN member states have been threatened and faced attacks from cybercrime activities over the last few years. A.T. Kearney, a global management company, assesses that the top 1,000 companies in ASEAN have the potential to suffer losses of up to US\$750 billion due to cybercrimes.¹ In relation to this matter, the Singapore International Cyber Week (SICW) is seen as one of the efforts by ASEAN and its member states to address cybercrime issues by discussing some initiatives as well as exchanging ideas, information, and best practices. What was discussed in the Singapore International Cyber Week (SICW) 2019? How did the ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity (AMCC) – which falls under the umbrella of the SICW - take place? What were the programs or initiatives that was launched in the SICW 2019?

Singapore International Cyber Week 2019

Held at the Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre, the Singapore International Cyber Week 2019 lasted for three day, from 1st to 3rd, October 2019. Singapore International Cyber Week is a cybersecurity event to discuss, synergize, and form partnerships as well as initiatives in the cybersecurity space. Involving global policy makers, cyber experts, and other cyber industries, the event is also aimed at exchanging information among states and to find out the best solutions for cybercrime challenges. With the theme of "Partnerships for Trust and Confidence", it emphasizes the importance of close collaborations among governments, industries and various stakeholders to ensure a credible and secure cyberspace that is able to improve the economic growth.²

ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity 2019

The ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity 2019 – which falls under the umbrella of the Singapore International Cyber Week - took place to gather all the representatives from ASEAN member states to discuss various cybersecurity collaborations which aims to strengthen cybersecurity in the region. In the presence of the ASEAN Deputy Secretary-General as well as other ministers and senior officials responsible for cybersecurity, the Singaporean Minister for Communications and Information Mr S Iswaran explained that ASEAN has made momentous moves in strengthening the efforts to address cybersecurity issues.³ Through their strong determination and commitment, ASEAN has improved the capabilities in response to the cybercrime threat that has transpired since a few years ago. He also highlighted three key important areas that ASEAN will focus in the future: regional capacity building, regional cooperation, and international conversations on cybersecurity.

This year's AMCC discussed deeper the cybersecurity matters in order to discuss the formal mechanism coordination among the ASEAN member states in cybersecurity efforts. In this matter, ASEAN Cybersecurity Coordination Mechanism Paper has been drafted by Singapore with also some inputs from other ASEAN member states. The paper will also promote a recommendation for an ASEAN Cross-Sectoral Coordinating Committee and relevant representatives from sectoral bodies. Before the paper will be submitted to the ASEAN Leaders, it will be distributed to the relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies as well as the ASEAN Telecommunications and IT Ministers Meeting (TELMIN) for further discussion.⁴

New ASEAN working committee

During the 4th ASEAN Ministers Conference on Cybersecurity, countries have also agreed on the establishment of regional group to set up a working level-committee. This working committee is aimed at developing a long-term action plan to ensure effective and practical implementation of the norms. The norms were agreed by the ASEAN member states in the last year's conference where they subscribed the 11 voluntary norms that recommended in the 2015 Report of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE). In this matter, it was done as the corroboration that cyberspace is able to provide support in other aspects, such as economic progress, protect human rights, and protect the vital infrastructure to make better living standards.

The committee will engage officials from those who have been working in AMCC. However, Minister Iswaran mentioned the potential challenges that will be faced by the committee in practice is how they can translate and implement the norms into concrete



action. In this sense, the committee will do their task and prepare their plans considering that they have to present in the next ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity. Furthermore, three main focuses of the working committee are: (1) How the countries CERT can collaborate; (2) protection of critical infrastructure; (3) mutual assistance in responding to cybersecurity threats.⁵ The establishment of this working committee is vital to deal with the strategies that should be done by ASEAN Member States in implementing the 11 norms.

In addition, Minister Iswaran also highlighted the ASEAN's digital economy continue to evolve as the one of initiative to create jobs, push innovation ahead, as well as to grow the business. According to Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), the digital economy in the region is predicted to increase six times in the next decade, to an estimated US\$200 billion (S\$277 billion). However, this improvement of digital economy must be shielded by comprehensive cybersecurity efforts.⁶

Launching of ASEAN-Singapore Cybersecurity Centre for Excellence (ASCCE)

The ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity 2019 also saw the launching of the ASEAN-Singapore Cybersecurity Centre for Excellence (ASCCE) as the extension of the ASEAN Cyber Capacity Programme. Minister S Iswaran announced that the ASCCE will receive \$30 million for the next five years and to offer policies as well as develop technical programs.⁷ ASCCE aims to do research and provide training in some aspects in cybersecurity matters such as international law, cyber strategy, cyber conflict, regulations, and other cyber security policy issues. Furthermore, ASCCE also aims to provide CERT-related training and facilitate the exchange information on cybersecurity practices and run virtual cyber defense trainings and exercises. In practice, ASCCE will bring together cyber experts, academia, and other states to be involved in arranging and accommodating capacity building programme. Moreover, ASCCE also has synergized with Temasek Polytechnic to have Cyber Range Facility in Singapore that has begun operating since 2nd October 2019.

Under ASCCE, there are also two initiatives with the United Nations (UN). First, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and Singapore will implement Senior Executive Cyber Fellowship that aims to provide a knowledge for senior management level participants with inter-disciplinary cyber and technology expertise to boost their work on national cybersecurity policy, strategy and operations. Secondly, Singapore will implement a workshop named the Implementation of Norms and Confidence Building Measures (CBM). By this initiative, ASEAN do not only engage with other states, but also



with the international organizations to improve regional capacity building in capacity building of the human resources.

Inaugural ASEAN-US Cyber Policy Dialogue

In this year's SICW, ASEAN and the United States also initiated the ASEAN-US Cyber Policy Dialogue. The dialogue indicated the firm partnership to secure cyber space to advance the communication and economic progress. Co-chaired by the governments of the United States and Laos, the dialogue mainly discussed some cybersecurity issues, including the digital economy, cyber capacity building, and the potential of 5th generation (5G) of wireless technology as well as exchange their views on the international cyber environment, national cyber priorities, as well as joint cooperation. However, this dialogue emphasizes the 2015 Report UN Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (UNGGE) and the recommended voluntary norms of responsible behaviour in cyberspace.⁸

The dialogue also discussed some programs and initiatives as regards to improve the implementation of confidence building measures in the region, such as the U.S. – ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership, the U.S.-Singapore Cybersecurity Technical Assistance Programme for ASEAN, and the U.S. – ASEAN Connect Digital Economy Series. Additionally, US also agreed in supporting ASEAN to implement their efforts in address cybersecurity such as increase the capacity building of people and infrastructure. This dialogue bolstered the cooperation between the United States and ASEAN that is also described under U.S.-ASEAN Strategic Plan of Action which aimed to enhance the political-security, economic, and socio-cultural between US and ASEAN strategic partnership. Besides, the dialogue also indicates support to the vision of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025.⁹

Analysis/The Verdict

Through the Singapore International Cyber Week 2019, ASEAN has shown their commitment and want to progress rapidly in addressing the cybersecurity matters by initiating important initiatives such as the establishment of ASCCE, working committee, as well as conducted US-ASEAN Cyber Security Dialogue. ASEAN will have a huge responsibility in this cybersecurity matters yet has immense challenges to face such as the capability of advances technology as well as the regional problems and geopolitical challenges at the same time. Moreover, the conference may miss the discussion on the



progress of each country's development and what are their challenges to address the cybersecurity in their countries. Even so, this effort from the ASEAN countries may able to reduce the cyber threat in the future and support the ASEAN Member States to have a comprehensive plan in building their capacity.

Endnotes

¹ Business Times. 'Cooperating to counter cyber threat' (2018, November 13). Retrieved from:

<https://www.businesstimes.com.sg/hub>

² Singapore International Cyber Week 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.sicw.sg>

³ CSA Singapore (2019, October 2). 'Opening Speech by Mr S Iswaran, Minister for Communications and Information, Minister-in-Charge of Cybersecurity, at the ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.csa.gov.sg/news/speeches/asean-ministerial-conference-on-cybersecurity-2019>

⁴ CSA Singapore (2019, October 2) 'ASEAN Member States Agree to Move Forward on a Formal Cybersecurity Coordination Mechanism. Retrieved from: <https://www.csa.gov.sg/news/press-releases/amcc-release-2019>

⁵ Channel News Asia (2019, October 2) 'New ASEAN Committee to implement norms for countries' behaviour in cyberspace. Retrieved from: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/asean-cyberspace-working-level-committee-cybersecurity-11963602>

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ The Straits Times (2019, October 2) 'New ASEAN Cyber-security centre launched to train response teams to combat online threat'. Retrieved from: <https://www.straitstimes.com/tech/new-asean-cyber-security-centre-launched-to-train-response-teams-to-combat-online-threats>

⁸ U.S. Department of State (2019, October 3) 'Co-Chairs' Statement on the Inaugural ASEAN-U.S. Cyber Policy Dialogue. Retrieved from: <https://www.state.gov/co-chairs-statement-on-the-inaugural-asean-u-s-cyber-policy-dialogue>

⁹ *Ibid*



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Contact:

The Habibie Center
Jl. Kemang Selatan No. 98, Jakarta 12560
Tel: +62 21 781 7211 | Fax: +62 21 781 7212
Email: thc@habibiecenter.or.id
Website: www.habibiecenter.or.id