

## Tackling fake news: Public has till March 7 to write in

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The Select Committee looking into online falsehoods has extended its deadline for the public to hand in written submissions by a week "in response to requests", said Deputy Speaker Charles Chong, who chairs the committee.

Instead of today, the new deadline is now set for March 7 at 4.30pm.

The committee has received 62 submissions as of 4.30pm yesterday, up from the 22 it had received on Feb 10. In comparison, the 1988 Select Committee on the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Bill received 99 submissions from the public, the highest on record.

"I am very encouraged by the strong response to the Select Committee's call for public participation so far," said Mr Chong.

"We have received many thoughtful representations. In response to requests, we have extended the deadline by one week. I hope the one-week extension will allow even more to contribute their perspectives before we start our public hearings from March 14."

The committee was set up last month to recommend how Singapore can tackle fake news, which can range from fake news for commercial purposes to sophisticated state-sponsored disinformation campaigns with political aims.

The public is invited to write to the committee on the causes and consequences of fake news and suggest countermeasures against the threat.

The committee may invite some contributors to speak at the public hearings, which are expected to span two weeks at Parliament House and which the public can attend.

So far, the committee has received representations from various contributors, such as women's rights group Association of Women for Action and Research, academic Cherian George and civil society activist Thum Ping Tjin.

Centre of Excellence for National Security deputy head Norman Vasu said the deadline extension shows that the committee is interested in canvassing more views, in terms of quantity and variety.

Dr Vasu, who will be writing to the committee, said: "What is interesting is that the committee recognises that it will not stick to a deadline and is willing to extend it to get the most varied views. I personally did not find the original date too problematic, but perhaps it was for some others."

**Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Carol Soon said she anticipates the most salient discussion points will be the nature and effectiveness of legislation and how the falsehood problem is defined.**

"Deliberate online falsehoods span a wide spectrum. Those that pose greater concerns are the ones that threaten national security and social cohesion," said Dr Soon, who intends to submit her representations.

"We have seen the impact of such deliberate falsehoods in other countries... These falsehoods warrant our attention due to their insidious nature, involve deliberate orchestration, and leverage the immense reach of social media."