

Asean undergrads play diplomats at meet

Students assume roles of senior officials to tackle region's issues and hold mock Asean Summit

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A group of undergraduates from the 10 Asean countries are in Singapore to learn about Asean diplomacy and policymaking through role-play and simulated meetings.

Since the start of their programme on Monday, the 149 students have brushed up on the regional bloc's history and structure, and its decision-making process through expert-led coaching and information sessions.

They are attending the six-day Asean Foundation Model Asean Meeting (AFMAM), now in its fourth year.

Yesterday, the students gathered at UTown at the National University of Singapore (NUS) for the opening ceremony.

In his address, Philippine Ambassador to Singapore Joseph Del Mar Yap said: "It is an opportunity for each and every one of you to contribute your voices to find sustainable and innovative solutions to the challenges that Asean faces today, like climate change, terrorism and the rise of violent extremism, and sustainable development."

The student delegates have been grouped into 20 teams – each comprising members from different countries – to engage in role-play and meeting simulations to address these challenges.

The mock meetings will include a simulation of the Asean Summit.

During the meetings, the students assume the roles of senior Asean officials and work under the theme of a resilient and innovative Asean, which is derived from the tagline of Singapore's Asean chairmanship this year.



Student delegates from the 10 member countries simulating a sectoral meeting yesterday at the fourth Asean Foundation Model Asean Meeting, being held over six days.
ST PHOTOS: SONG TAO

These meetings are "no empty role-play", said Asean Foundation executive director Elaine Tan.

In her opening remarks, Ms Tan noted that two student delegates at the first AFMAM in 2015 are now representing Laos and Thailand in their respective ministries of foreign affairs.

Mr Tanonrat Naktang, 32, a university lecturer and adviser to the Thailand team, said he hopes his students will gain deeper understanding of Asean's challenges.

Among the Singaporean delegates is Ms Jolene Yeo, a 21-year-old NUS political science student, who

said online falsehoods are one of the most pressing challenges.

Ms Yeo, who is assuming the role of Singapore's head of government, said: "All 10 Asean countries must work together to deal with both conventional, as well as unconventional, threats to our economy, cyber security and even the very social fabric of our nations."

"We look forward to discussing how Asean can cooperate on issues of cyber security, creating an Asean digital economy and addressing the problems of online falsehoods."

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Lecturer Tanonrat Naktang, the adviser to the Thai team, hopes his students will deepen their understanding of Asean's challenges.



NUS political science student Jolene Yeo identifies online falsehoods as one of the most pressing challenges as Asean creates a digital economy.