



The Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA) is deeply alarmed by the Correction Direction from the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) issued by Singapore's PAP (Peoples' Action Party) government against the East Asia Forum (EAF) journal. The EAF article in question was authored by Associate Professor Michael Barr of Flinders University, Australia.

The PAP government contends that Barr's article, 'Singapore's new prime minister entangled in old politics' contains "falsehoods".

We would like to highlight the EAF's rigorous editorial procedure of anonymous peer review by at least two subject-matter experts and internal fact checking.

EAF has responded in detail to the claims made in the POFMA directive stating that

- three of the four claims in the 'POFMA' direction are not based on Barr's words as they are written. "Rather, it attributes words to Barr and then bases its notice of 'correction' on false allegations".
- one claim resulted in inserting the word 'publicly' to provide clarification with regards to the "financial interests, assets and conflicts of interests" noted in the article.

We fully support the principle of a 'Right to Reply' and note that EAF has alongside the original article provided a link to the Correction Notice as well as a separate statement responding to the claims. This ensures that readers have full access to all relevant information and can make an informed decision and draw their own conclusions.

We note that Bloomberg followed a similar procedure publishing the notice and stating that "Bloomberg respectfully disagrees with it, and reserves its right to appeal and challenge the Correction Direction. We stand by our reporting."

While MASSA acknowledges the importance of fact checking and combating fake news, we stress that criticism and opinion must not be unduly restricted under the POFMA. This issue was explicitly addressed through the drafting process and has since been reiterated in public statements by officials. It is vital that POFMA does not suppress legitimate political discourse or academic debate.

Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia Committee
5 February 2025