

From The Editor

COVID-19 boosted not only digital health but also cyber crimes

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Thailand, the country in the top three of the highest road accidents causing an average of 17,914 fatalities each year, mourned a tragic incident near Bangkok on 1 October [1]. The fire broke out on a coach bus carrying 44 students and teachers during a field trip; 20 students' and 3 teachers' lives were lost, while three others were injured. It was revealed that the bus involved in the fire had been in operation for over 50 years and had undergone several unauthorized modifications, including being

improperly converted to gas-powered vehicles, with far more cylinders than legally permitted. What contributed to the accident is that one of the 11 illegally installed gas tanks had come loose, causing a gas leak from a connecting pipe, and the front axle had broken, dragging against the road and sparking the fire [2]. That was not an isolating incidence. Past accidents include a 2019 bus crash in Eastern Thailand with one fatality and 24 injuries, and another in Southern Thailand last year, injuring 25 students. Earlier this year, a similar incident in central Thailand resulted in 25 injuries [3]. In fact, over the past decade, more than 26,930 children have tragically died in road crashes which accounts for one in three child deaths in Thailand, highlighting the severity of the problem [4]. The blaze, which consumed a 54-year-old bus, underscored severe safety lapses, prompting an immediate governmental action. Crucial safety measures, including comprehensive inspections of all 13,426 CNG buses and heightened safety protocols for non-regular buses, were announced [5].

COVID-19 pandemic boosted not only the digital medical service but also everything digitally reformed, including E-commerce and scams. Social media influencers became online business owners and cultivated an image of trustworthiness by showcasing an extravagant lifestyle and inviting numerous Thai celebrities or other influencers to be their business partners or appear in their personal events. Jaw-dropping promotions or benefits were launched to attract attentions initially but the victims later lost their money when they placed further orders. There were 2 gold retailers involving more than 300 victims reporting to the Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau in October [6]. A company attracted more than 300,000 investors by its online advertisements along with social media campaigns, enticed by the promise of high profits and celebrity endorsements [7]. However, after investing large amounts of money, they found they couldn't sell the company's merchandise but were instead urged to bring in more investors. Some victims even resorted to taking loans or selling their possessions to fund their investment. Many ended up losing their life savings. The victims claimed that the company was operating a pyramid scheme, where earnings came primarily from recruiting more members than from selling products or services. In a significant move to bolster consumer protection, a new law in Thailand now permits online shoppers to examine their packages before making payment. This regulation came into force on October 3, allowing recipients to return the entire batch of goods within five days and must be refunded within 15 days as long as the complaint is validated [8]. Thailand is the country in the axis of continental South East Asia which shares the longest borders of Myanmar (2, 202 kms), Laos (1, 750 kms), Cambodia (798 kms), and Malaysia (576 kms). These far-reaching borders are the perfect places for criminal networks to escape the constraints of law enforcement to operate industrial-scale scam compounds. In addition, at the border between Thailand and Myanmar where majorities are Myanmar ethnic minorities who have unique regional conditions which cause internal political conflicts between groups or with the central government, the dimensions of the networks, initially based on illegal online gambling, are getting even more complex. The investors, laborers, operations and victims of the crimes seem to be transnational. It is estimated that most laborers are forced and trafficked from more than 60 countries around the world as well as the victims who lost money. The funds stolen by these cyber

scamming is calculated to likely exceed 43.8 billion US dollars a year. Relationships between these criminal groups and the governments are being investigated as the stolen funds are almost 40% of some countries' GDP and the complex money-laundering operations to move funds into the formal economy is beyond the scale of the criminal organization [9].



The President of Malaysian College of Radiology, the President of Vietnamese Society of Radiology and Nuclear Medicine, the representative from the Philippine College of Radiology, the representatives from the Chinese Society of Radiology, and the editor as the representative from the Radiological Society of Thailand in the Belt-Road-Initiative session on 16 November 2024 at the Chinese Congress of Radiology, Shanghai, China.

China is thought to be the most influential country in the ASEAN region [10]. Belt-Road-Initiative (BRI), once one of the strategies to drive economic and political power into the region, now expands to education and cultures. As also the president of the Radiological Society of Thailand, the editor was invited to give a talk in “Belt-Road-Initiative session” in the Chinese Congress of Radiology (CCR) held on 14-17 November 2024 in Shanghai, China.

In 2025, The ASEAN Journal of Radiology will publish 3 issues a year, with the first issue in January, the second issue in May, and the third issue in September. On behalf of the editorial board, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation for your valuable contributions and really hope that The ASEAN Journal of Radiology will be a platform for the scholar community of Radiology in ASEAN countries and beyond.

I sincerely wish all the readers, authors, our valued reviewers, and editors a prosperous 2025.

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