

SNIPPETS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES (CSEAS)

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Picture Courtesy: Associated Press



Picture Courtesy: CGTN



Picture Courtesy: The Straits Times

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CSEAS

Greetings...

In this edition, we are happy to present you an interview with Mr. Joshua Kurlantzick, Senior Fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations on 'The Rise of Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia'. Since its inception in 2016, the core objective of CSEAS has been bridging Southeast Asia with the rest of the world through teaching, research and publication. We would like to thank our readers around the world for sharing your invaluable comments on our previous newsletters, and we look forward to receiving them in the future including from institutions and organizations interested in establishing partnership with us.

Sincerely,
Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen

THE RISE OF AUTHORITARIANISM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

For several months now, countries in Southeast Asia have been undergoing significant challenges which have drawn attention to the state of the region and have given rise to questions about the relevance of ASEAN. For this issue, we had Sanjana Dhar, Research Analyst at CSEAS, interviewed Mr. Joshua Kurlantzick, Senior Fellow for Southeast Asia at the Council on Foreign Relations, regarding the rise of authoritarianism in the region and related issues.



Picture Courtesy: Mr. Joshua Kurlantzick

The Myanmar military is proposing a Proportional Representation system for future elections. Why is the National League for Democracy (NLD) opposing the system and how will this affect the country's democratic transition?

I think the start of the problem is that the military launched a coup against an elected government. So, I do not think the issue is really whether the NLD or really anyone else thinks about whatever system the military junta plans to implement, because it stops actually with the start of the military coup against the elected government. There cannot be any democratic transition overseen by the military government.

The Philippines will hold its Presidential election next year, and the current government under Rodrigo Duterte has shown authoritarian tendencies through human rights violations. Will the election embolden the cases of human rights abuses in the country, or reduce them?

It depends on who is elected, since the Philippines has a single term presidential system, so it depends. I think if one of Duterte's allies or a Duterte-like figure is elected, but if not, it could be reversed and I think it depends largely on who gets elected.

How is Brunei, the 2021 ASEAN Chair, managing the changing situations in the regional bloc?

Brunei has a pretty effective diplomatic service, but I do not think that ASEAN really plays a role in any of these countries' domestic affairs. ASEAN is not really set-up to do that, nor do the countries in ASEAN want it to do that, so regardless of who the Chair is, I do not think it has any role or that much relevance to the internal affairs of any of these countries, even though Brunei is actually fairly effective at managing diplomatic issues.

What is the role of external factors, especially China, on the rise of authoritarianism in Southeast Asia?

I think the rise of authoritarianism in Southeast Asia is mostly to do with internal issues, of which China is not really a factor. I think in only a few places like perhaps Cambodia, China is a significant factor in hardening authoritarianism, but the authoritarianism in Southeast Asia has more to do with internal factors like the fact that the military never really exited politics in Myanmar and Thailand, and the fact that other countries never made the complete transition to democracy and like the Philippines, Malaysia, and even in Indonesia where the military has not made a full exit. China is a small modest factor and not the main reason I think why some of these countries are not fully democratic.

Given the multiple crises on democracy in the region, is the time ripe for ASEAN to amend its Charter?

I do not think ASEAN can amend its Charter. In order to do that it would need all ASEAN countries' consensus, and why would most of the countries want to give consensus to amend the Charter when they are run by authoritarian regimes and they have no interest in other countries interfering in their affair. So, in order to get to that point, it would have to get to a place where many of the Southeast Asian countries want ASEAN to intervene and as the situation is now where Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar and Brunei are all authoritarian states, and the rest quasi-democratic or only really Indonesia is almost a full democracy. Therefore, states in the region do not have any desire for ASEAN to be stronger, so I do not think the amendment is likely to happen.

CAMBODIA IMPLEMENTS A CRUEL COVID-19 BILL

- Rhea Rayidi



Picture Courtesy: [Channel NewsAsia](#)

On March 5, 2021, a bill was passed by the National Assembly of Cambodia for the implementation of the “draft Law on Measures to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 and other Serious, Dangerous and Contagious Diseases.” The law punishes individuals for disobeying rules and regulations set by the government for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19, through imprisonment and imposing fines.

The bill consists of a set of atrocious punishments, such as five years imprisonment for any hindrances to the rules, fining or imprisoning business owners and terminating business licenses, up to three years of imprisonment for violating quarantine procedures, and around 10 to 20 years of imprisonment for the spread of the virus as an individual or as a group. Additionally, it was decided in a sub-decree signed by Prime Minister Hun Sen on February 18, 2021 that “anyone who intentionally initiates, leads, advises, incites, persuades or helps an escape from quarantine facilities” will have to pay a fine of up to US\$12,500.

The bill was described as “a strong legal base for the government...to protect lives and public health,” by the country’s health minister, Mam Bunheng.

The bill, which is believed to have been passed to place a constraint on dissent, has been heavily criticized by human rights groups. Phil Robertson, the deputy Asia director at the Human Rights Watch said, “The Cambodian government has already passed an abusive state of emergency law and now proposes a vague and overly broad Covid-19 law that would further erode the rights of activists and dissidents,” and that “imposing ridiculously harsh penalties for Covid-19 infractions goes against both public health and human rights principles.”

SINGAPORE-INDONESIA BILATERAL INVESTMENT TREATY SOLIDIFIED

- Rhea Rayidi



Picture Courtesy: [The Jakarta Post](#)

On March 9, 2021, Chan Chun Sing, the Minister of Trade and Industry for Singapore and Retno Marsudi, the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Indonesia, made an announcement that acknowledged the solidification of the Singapore-Indonesia bilateral investment treaty (BIT).

Last year, Singapore invested almost US\$9.8 billion - making it Indonesia's biggest investor from 2014. Indonesia has appeared to be appealing to Singapore due to the advancement of Indonesia's tech parks. Indonesia is also crowned one of Singapore's leading investors, with the bilateral investment between both countries estimated to be up to US\$48.8 billion. This was a notable rise in the country's investment, from US\$6.5 billion in the previous year; as per a report by Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board. It was observed that "Singapore's investment in Indonesia had been increasing by 6.5 per cent year on year even before the treaty came into force."

Sing stated about the treaty that "The entry into force of the Singapore-Indonesia Bilateral Investment Treaty marks another important milestone in our countries' long standing economic relationship. It will offer greater protection for Singapore investors venturing into the Indonesian market, and vice versa, safeguarding investments and boosting investors' confidence." Ms. Marsudi said of the treaty that "In this current difficult situation, the ratification of the BIT serves as an important economic boost to expedite economic recovery in our two countries. It could potentially enhance two-way investment ranging between 18 per cent to 22 per cent over the next five years." She noted also that the treaty could aid the countries in accelerating their economic recovery, post COVID-19; and believes that this treaty could advance by 18 to 20 percent in the next five years. At this rate, if the treaty follows through into the future, the investment per year would reach up to US\$200 billion by 2030.

The treaty not only denotes a healthy economic relationship between the two countries, but also symbolizes the cultivation of a flourishing bilateral relations. As Ms. Marsudi voiced, "The treaty gives more certainty and confidence as it provides legal protection for Indonesian and Singaporean investors... (and) strikes a balance between the rights and obligations of investors and the host state of investment." The treaty also goes hand-in-hand with the agreements signed between the countries, to the likes of, the "Avoidance of Double Taxation Agreement."

INDIA AND PHILIPPINES SIGNED BRAHMOS DEAL

- Shubh Sahai



Picture Courtesy: [The Week](#)

On March 3, 2021, India and the Philippines signed a pact that paved the way for government-to-government contracts on defense apparatus including the BrahMos missile. BrahMos is a supersonic missile defense system with a range of 292 kilometers which can be launched from sea, air and land. It was created by the joint co-operation between India and Russia in a bid to create next-generation defense systems.

The Philippines is lagging in military capabilities and has been unable to present a strong response to China's expansionary activities in the South China Sea (SCS). Thus, defense systems like BrahMos form the cornerstone of the defense system that is vital for the Philippines to articulate its national interests. However, critics point out that the pact in its current state has limited utility for both parties for several reasons.

The defense agreement is an arrangement that lays the foundation for the future sale of defense equipment, including BrahMos, which is not yet available. Moreover, the Philippines lacks the purchasing power to finance BrahMos and associated systems and defense personnel training.

Further, the current Filipino military platforms do not possess the capability to launch BrahMos, that means deployment of the missile in the SCS remains a speculation. Though India offered a credit line of 100 million US dollars, it comes along with the challenges to defense sovereignty of the Philippines as New Delhi is likely to influence the Philippines policy in the SCS that could overcommit Manila against China in the region.

India seems to have articulated a sophisticated policy in this case. It aims to increase its defense exports to countries that are facing a threat from aggressors like China but lacks the infrastructural capability to mount an effort. Moreover, New Delhi hopes to develop allies and soft power with such arrangements that would aid its efforts to tame the dragon. But New Delhi seems to have missed a critical point of a possible invocation of the US's Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions (CAATSA).

CAATSA was authorized by the US Congress in 2017 to discourage arms development and import from adversaries like Russia, Iran, and North Korea. The sanctions include NPO Mashinostroyeniya (NPOM), the Russian defense entity which holds 49.5 percent stakes in the BrahMos joint venture and contributes critical sub-systems in the making of the missile.

Thus, India could be weary to front Russian exports in a bid to avoid sanctions from Washington which is India's premier exporter of advanced defense systems. Therefore, India's wish to play the lead in the Indo-Pacific and the Philippines acquiring BrahMos is dependent on several factors that could offset these plans.

THE PHILIPPINES' LOCKDOWN EXPERIENCE

- Shubh Sahai

Of all sectors affected by the coronavirus, probably the worst affected after health would be the education sector. Governments all around the world had to shut down schools, universities, and skills centers to prevent the spread of the virus. While advanced economies and affluent societies could switch to online-learning methods, the economically weaker societies especially in the developing countries found it difficult to transition into online-learning due to lack of state support. Such is the case with the Philippines that experienced its first lockdown on March 15, 2020.

As of March 2021, President Duterte said that infected children could transmit the virus to the elderly, therefore, physical-learning would not be resumed until vaccination is completed. To remedy the situation, the government introduced a blended learning program in October 2020 (and is carried till date) which included online classes with lessons broadcast on social media and television. However, only 43 percent of the entire population has access to the internet and most of whom are affluent people living in metropolitan cities. The country has poor internet access in rural areas and metropolitan slums. Moreover, families that have a single smartphone or computer, often reserve their use to the studies of the eldest child thereby neglecting the younger children in the family. There also is an absence of education platforms on which education can be provided as social media websites allow only limited interaction. Lastly, the Philippines struggles with the problem of frequent power outages, thereby also making television an unreliable mode of education.

Observers fear that the sustained lockdown has led to one million dropouts from school and if not corrected soon, reintegration may never happen. The Philippines is in the bottom when ranked for academic capabilities of fifteen-year-olds in reading mathematics and science. Consequently, the impact of learning during lockdown is enormous. Underprivileged students are unable to attend online instructions as they need to take on responsibilities at home. Children not attending school for such sustained periods are susceptible to sexual violence, domestic abuse, and recruitment into armed groups. Education is necessary to protect vulnerable children from civil conflicts and armed violence, especially in the context of the Philippines.



Picture Courtesy: [Voice of America](#)



Picture Courtesy: [CNN World](#)

US\$6 BILLION WASTED ON PLASTICS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

-Jyot Shikhar Singh



Picture Courtesy: [The Edge Markets](#)

The World Bank's [Plastic Circularity Market Study of 2021](#) revealed an astonishing fact regarding the amount of money wasted in plastic wastes in Southeast Asia. The World Bank has stated that Southeast Asian countries lose out as much as US\$6 billion a year. The wastage comes about as most of the plastic usage in Southeast Asia is singly used and disposed of rather than recovered and recycled. Not only from an economic standpoint does this stand out as a worrying concern, but the fact remains that the amount of plastic wasted signifies environmental concerns for Southeast Asia.

As plastics are not bound to any recyclable or recovering business, there is a significant untapped business opportunity as part of the circular economy, which Southeast Asia is not exploring. As per the World Bank, more than 75 percent of recyclable plastics in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines is not recycled and is disposed of as waste. Thailand currently has the largest petrochemical sector in Southeast Asia. Despite actively contributing to the sector, less than 18 percent of plastic is recycled and despite the petrochemical industries having made significant efforts to invest in plastic recycling, most of the resin-based manufacturing businesses are far from any recycling or recovering mechanisms.

In comparison, Malaysia and the Philippines have shown considerable investment and infrastructural development, especially major brands, in packaging and fast-moving consumer goods industries, for recycled content. But the current operating recyclable suppliers are either small or medium enterprises that do not meet the management system to meet the rising plastic waste in the region. Ndiame Diop, the World Bank's country director for Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand, has expressed concern that along with untapped opportunities and environmental concerns, it is also required that there should be clear and complementary intervention from both private and public sectors in Southeast Asia.

What the World Bank looks ahead to is establishing clear and distinctive recycled content targets and designing new standards for processing and recycling plastic wastes in the nations. Imposing not only the Sustainable Development Goals, but also sorting efficiency, restricting the disposal of plastic waste in landfills, and phasing out non-essential plastic items will unlock that additional material value in Southeast Asia. Asia stands responsible for 80 percent of the total 13 million ton of plastic waste entering the world's oceans and to eradicate the Philippines and Thailand as the third and sixth-worst plastic polluters, these suggestions along with legislative measures in Southeast Asia are necessary.

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK'S FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

-Jyot Shikhar Singh



Picture Courtesy: [Devex](#)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has strived to establish a cycle of low-emission investments in Southeast Asia. This initiative is undertaken along with the target of attaining a high-level sustainable recovery in the coming years for Southeast Asia. The Green Climate Fund (GCF) has specifically allocated US\$300 million to support the ADB. The assistance comes on the notion of establishing and shaping a climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable economic recovery. Sustainable development coupled with economic growth has been ADB's target even before the drastic changes of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. ASEAN's Catalytic Green Finance Facility Program (ACGF) aims to incorporate ADB's and GCF's goals. By incorporating ADB's functioning and GCF's financial and logistical backing, ASEAN seeks to create a new lobby and consensus among Asian nations to catalyze more stable and regular funding to move ahead with sustainable economic recovery. These mechanisms are seeking to target newly proposed US\$4 billion worth of green infrastructure projects across the region and this program seeks to operate with green finance instruments and approaches. What ASEAN further seeks to catalyze is to create a stream of finances that will incorporate public-private partnership and capital sources to support the infrastructural projects.

Vice-President Ahmed M. Saeed of the ADB seeks to believe in the fact that once the ACGF green recovery program is initiated, countries will be able to develop regular and more efficient green stimulus packages. These projects will be focusing on creating climate-friendly jobs and boosting economic growth which will seek to pledge the commitments of the Southeast Asian countries under the Paris Agreement of 2015. One of the biggest problems that remain in establishing a sustainable economic recovery is the lack of funding and financial support. The ADB recognizes the concern and seeks to bridge the gap in financing the green infrastructure and create a circular economic effect to increase the region's annual investment based on these packages, which was estimated to be US\$210 billion even before the pandemic struck the region. Moreover, as the region's economy contracted by 4.4 percent in 2020, the target will substantially increase. The cohesiveness of ASEAN infrastructure managed by the ADB and GCF funding will now prioritize a new trajectory of economic growth and development in the region, and reinvigorate the region's commitments towards sustainable development and sustainable economic growth.

VIETNAM-PRODUCED COVID-19 VACCINES WILL PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN VACCINE DIPLOMACY

- Shivangi Dikshit



Picture Courtesy: [Path](#)

To reduce reliance on foreign states, Vietnam is pushing its domestic COVID-19 vaccine development. Vietnam's Nanogen Pharmaceutical Biotechnology has developed a vaccine called Nanocovax, and the second vaccine developed by the Institute of Vaccines and Medical Biologicals is called Covicvac. This has made Vietnam the first state in Southeast Asia to develop a domestic COVID-19 vaccine.

Vietnam wants to develop the vaccine to promote global equal access to COVID-19 vaccines. Many developing countries cannot afford to purchase the necessary doses from the globally available vaccines for their own use. Hanoi is willing to share its vaccine expertise with other countries. Vietnam has been effective in containing deaths caused by the pandemic to 35, which has promoted the country's status and the successful development of the vaccine will allow it to raise its position further.

Vietnam's initiative to develop and distribute the vaccine will allow and encourage other countries like Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia to promote their ongoing projects on vaccine development. Vaccines from Vietnam will influence the ongoing vaccine diplomacy. Vaccines produced by India and China are competing with each other to gain maximum geopolitical influence. The US and Russian vaccines are also distributed in large numbers, but underdeveloped and developing countries cannot afford these vaccines in large quantities.

However, one of the major challenges to the Vietnam-produced vaccine will be to match the effectiveness of the vaccines already produced and used around the world. Nanogen Pharmaceutical has shown its willingness to share its know-how on the vaccine but its demand will depend on the eagerness of other countries to adopt the technology of Vietnam. The technical advancement of other countries will also influence the demand for the Vietnamese vaccine. To share or distribute its vaccine doses outside the country, Vietnam will need to upgrade its production capacity or have to partner with other countries to produce the vaccine on a large-scale. India, which shares cordial relations with Vietnam, can help in vaccine development and distribution. If Hanoi wants to raise its sphere of influence with its domestically produced vaccine, then it should take advantage of its partners to timely develop and distribute the vaccine.

WOMEN AS FRONTLINE PROTESTERS IN MYANMAR

- Ishita Dutta

In Myanmar, women are fighting against the coup and patriarchy. Women have been the frontline fighters in pro-democracy protests since 1988. Weeks of protests in the country have caused the deaths of more than 500 protesters. The police has used tear gas, rubber bullets and live rounds against the protesters. Despite the risks, many women protesters have taken part in the civil disobedience movement against the coup.

There is a superstition towards women's underwear, sanitary pads, and transitional sarongs in Myanmar, with the women protesters hanging these clothing items to spook soldiers and police officers. Another tool that has helped women protesters is the use of cell phones. It is a tool used to spread awareness across the world and organize protests within Myanmar.

Women were among the first groups to protest against the military. The military has used excessive force against the protesters in the last few weeks. For more than a month, the protesters are being attacked, tortured, and killed. According to reports, women are disproportionately attacked and targeted by the military.

The Sarong revolution uses the belief that if a man walks beneath women's clothing, then it will bring bad luck to them. For women, htamein, or a sarong, is a tool to protest against the coup. The men in Myanmar do not walk beneath women's clothing because it shows them as weaker, and this has helped women escape the police during the recent protests. The fear of menstrual blood and clothing that touched women's private parts cause bad luck for men, especially during battles, according to superstition. The women protesters fear being raped or sexually harassed, and thousands of them who are on the frontline require tools to protect themselves from the violent military crackdown.



Picture Courtesy: [The Telegraph](#)



Picture Courtesy: [CBS News](#)

ANWAR IBRAHIM MET UMNO LEADERS

- Vikas Nagal



Picture Courtesy: [Malay Mail](#)

On March 16, 2021, the leader of the opposition, Anwar Ibrahim, met with leaders of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) party to discuss pre-poll alliance for the next general election. This is the latest bid by the most controversial figure in Malaysian politics to become the country's next Prime Minister.

In recent times, Malaysian politics is in fishy waters. The corruption charges against the then Prime Minister, Najib Razak, and the differences between Tun Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim, led to the defeat of UMNO in the 2018 general election. This was the first time since Malaysian independence that the UMNO lost power. After coming to power, the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition failed to govern effectively. In February 2020, Prime Minister Tun Mahathir resigned after some members of his coalition defected. The defected group leader Muhammed Yassin joined hands with the UMNO leaders and formed a new governing coalition, Perikatan Nasional (PN). However, the conviction of former Prime Minister Najib Razak in the 1MDB scandal rocked the nation's politics. The UMNO party joined hands with the current Prime Minister Muhammed Yassin's party in the hope of sidelining Anwar Ibrahim and to save Najib Razak from jail. After Najib Razak's conviction, the UMNO party members became dissatisfied with the current ruling coalition.

In the past few months, Anwar Ibrahim tried to form government with the support of the UMNO party, but all his efforts failed to garner a majority in the parliament. Many UMNO party members are against the idea of forming a coalition with their arch enemy. But some members of the UMNO party, especially the Najib Razak faction, wants to join hands with Anwar Ibrahim's party to save their leader from jail. If this unlikely coalition of former enemies takes shape in the coming months, it will be a major shift in Malaysian political history.

QUAD'S PIVOT TO GEOECONOMICS

- Vikas Nagal



On March 12, 2021, the first-ever Quad leaders' summit (QLS) was held between the leaders of Japan, Australia, India and the US. At the summit, the leaders launched two major foreign policy initiatives. First, the four democracies agreed to pool their resources to produce and distribute one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine to Asia-Pacific countries, with a special focus on Southeast Asian countries. Second, they agreed to reduce their dependence on China for the supply of rare-earth elements - which are critical for hi-tech industries ranging from mobile phones to electric cars - by creating a special procurement chain.

The Quadrilateral Security Alliance (Quad) is primarily focused on maritime security in the Asia-Pacific region. But the most effective way to counter the Chinese expansionist design in the Asia-Pacific region is to focus more on the economic angle of the competition. In recent decades, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis, China poured billions of dollars into infrastructural projects and provided monetary aid to a large number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Even during the current COVID-19 pandemic, China supplied millions of masks, PPE kits, ventilators and other medical equipment to a large number of countries around the world. The Quad's decision to supply one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine to the Asia-Pacific countries will help in ending not only the pandemic, but also help in checking the Chinese hegemonic influence. With the help of American biotechnology, India's production capacity, coupled with Japan and Australia's logistical support, this ambitious target can be achieved.

The QLS decision to create a special procurement chain for the rare-earth elements is a major geo-economics decision. China controls more than 90 percent of the world's rare-earth element markets. In recent times, China used its strategic advantage in the rare-earth elements to gain an edge in the geopolitical competition. The rare-earth elements special procurement chain will not only protect these countries from the supply chain disruptions, but also reduce their dependence on China.

MALAYSIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE: RISING TEMPERATURE AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- Ishita Dutta



Picture Courtesy: [The Star](#)

Malaysia is a country adversely impacted by climate change, particularly due to the rising temperature and sea level. This year, the country is ranked in the 56th position (to the bottom 10 nations) in the global Climate Change Performance Index, which compares the performances of countries on climate protection. A recent study conducted by Think City recorded an increase in surface temperature across Malaysia. The government's actions are not reflective of the changing climate, which can be due to the coronavirus pandemic as well as domestic politics. The rising temperature in some cities has seen 6.7 degrees celsius in the last two decades. The pandemic has impacted climate activism across the world, and the consequences for countries in Southeast Asia are higher. According to experts, the increased magnitude of climate change requires a change in the country's climate policy. The long-term impacts of climate change on the economy would adversely impact the nation.

The 2nd International Conference on climate change will be held in Malaysia in May this year to address the impact of climate change in the region. The role of governments across the world is imperative in controlling the impact of climate change. The hotter cities of Malaysia pose a threat to the people and wildlife and require nationwide policies to advocate for cleaner fuel. The fourth meeting by the Joint Committee of Climate Change (JC3) released a report for the 2021 Action Plan to prevent the impact of climate change and support companies to switch to a renewable energy. The government plans to invest in technological advancement, creating documents for risk management, involving climate discourses in policymaking, and investing in structures and capacity building of green products and solutions. The government's initiatives with active citizen participation are integral to climate change prevention plans.

SINGAPORE INCREASES SECURITY IN PLACES OF WORSHIP

- Harsh Mahaseth

There has been an increase in the number of threats of attack at places of worship in Singapore. This step comes after a Singaporean youth was detained for planning to attack civilians inside the Maghain Aboth synagogue on Waterloo Street. Another similar incident was reported in January, where a young Singaporean boy was detained for his intention to plan, attack, and kill civilians inside two mosques. Speaking to reporters, Law and Home Affairs Minister K. Shanmugam raised concerns regarding such attacks and the need to review the security at places of worship. Mr. Shanmugam noted that “these places must remain welcoming and cannot be turned into fortresses.”

Shanmugam also said, “I think the security measures may have to be stepped up a bit to balance off the risks that are increasing...it has to depend on how the threats evolve... But my own sense is that not all religious sites will have to be protected to the same level, some face a higher threat level and they may have to take some additional measures.”

The government has been careful in its approach to the sensitive issue, with some concrete ideas to protect places of worship. Different places might require different levels of security, with some places potentially requiring more hardware and patrol in a more discreet way.

The minister also highlighted the importance of civil vigilance. He stated that while the Internal Security Department has been able to pick up signs of self-radicalization, there is a need for the citizens to also be vigilant and help one another.



Picture Courtesy: [Visit Singapore](#)



Picture Courtesy: [Yahoo! News](#)

HIGHLIGHT OF MARCH

Nehginpao Kipgen
外山 文子
Duncan McCargo
James Buchanan
Titipol Phakdeewanich

Center for Southeast Asian Studies

DISCUSSION on THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN THAILAND

CHAIR:
PROF. (DR.) NEHGINPAO KIPGEN
Executive Director, Center for Southeast Asian Studies
Jindal School of International Affairs

SPEAKERS:

DR. AYAKO TOYAMA
Associate Professor
University of Tsukuba

DR. DUNCAN MCCARGO
Professor
University of Copenhagen

DR. TITIPOL PHAKDEEWANICH
Director, Regional Center for
Human Rights Study and Coordination
Ubon Ratchathani University

MR. JAMES BUCHANAN
Visiting Lecturer
Mahidol University

PROGRAMME

2:00 pm – 2:03 pm **Welcome Remarks from Harsh Mahaseth** (Research Analyst, CSEAS)

2:04 pm – 2:15 pm **Monarchy: A Boon or Bane for Democracy?**
Dr. Ayako Toyama

2:16 pm – 2:27 pm **Military and Democratic Transition**
Dr. Duncan McCargo

2:28 pm – 2:39 pm **Civil Society and the Protests**
Dr. Titipol Phakdeewanich

2:40 pm – 2:51 pm **Role of the International Community**
Mr. James Buchanan

2:52 pm – 3:28 pm **Questions & Answers**

3:29 pm – 3:30 pm **Vote of Thanks from Shivangi Dixit** (Research Analyst, CSEAS)

SATURDAY
27 MARCH 2021
2:00 pm – 3:30 pm (IST)

Join us on **zoom**
<https://zoom.us/j/93887609517>
Password: JGU

YouTube Live
<https://youtu.be/K4E1WUuchUE>

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A virtual discussion on the topic, *The State of Democracy in Thailand*, chaired by Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen, was successfully conducted on March 27, 2021.

Speakers (top to bottom, left to right):

Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen, Executive Director, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Jindal School of International Affairs;

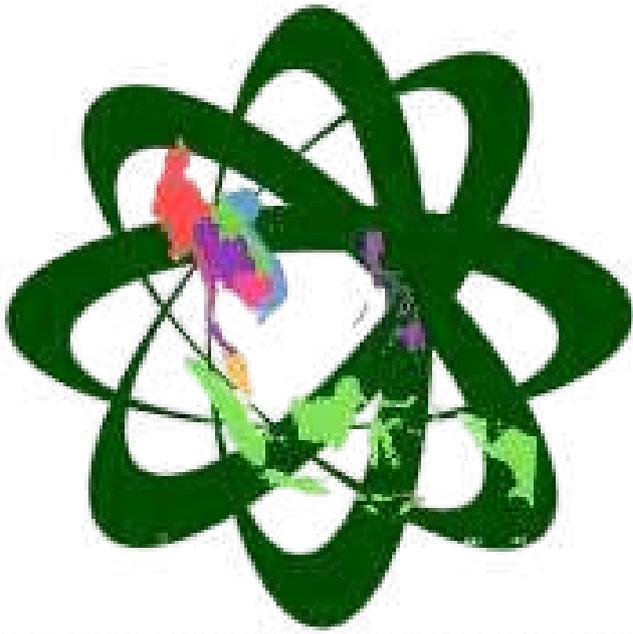
Dr. Ayako Toyama, Associate Professor, University of Tsukuba;

Dr. Duncan McCargo, Professor, University of Copenhagen;

James Buchanan, Visiting Lecturer, Mahidol University;

Dr. Titipol Phakdeewanich, Director, Regional Centre for Human Rights Study and Coordination, Ubon Ratchathani University;

Find the detailed report to the discussion held here and the recording here.



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