

# SNIPPETS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

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## OCTOBER GALLERY



**Top to bottom :** Residents of Vietnam navigating through the struggles of excessive rainfall causing flood and landslide due to the two storms which hit the central regions of the country early this month; Pro-democracy protestors demonstrate outside the German Embassy in Thailand in order to push the German government to investigate the King's actions, who spends a great deal of time in South Germany.

### NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CSEAS

Greetings...

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. In this edition, we are happy to introduce an interview with Rajiv Bhatia, a Distinguished Fellow at Gateway House and Former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar (2002-2005), to discuss India-Myanmar relations. Since its inception in 2016, one of the core objectives of CSEAS has been bridging Southeast Asia with the rest of the world through teaching, research and publications.

I hope you enjoy reading the snippets.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen

# UNDERSTANDING INDIA-MYANMAR RELATIONS

*With the Myanmar election soon to be held on November 8, we had Harsh Mahaseth, Research Analyst at CSEAS, interview Mr. Rajiv Bhatia, Distinguished Fellow at Gateway House and Former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar (2002-2005), to discuss the India-Myanmar relations.*



IN THE FRAME:  
Rajiv Bhatia, with Aung San Suu Kyi in Naypyidaw on March 7, 2013, was leading the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) delegation as its Director General.

Photo: Indian Embassy, Yangon

*How do you think India's ties with Myanmar has changed over time? Have there been any successes that we all should know about?*

Change is constant in nature. This principle applies even to inter-state relations and specifically to the ties between India and Myanmar. Starting from 1948, the relationship passed through various phases. Under Prime Minister U Nu and Prime Minister Nehru, the relationship between India and Burma was at its closest, since there was democracy in Burma. This was followed by a long dictatorship, and it was then when India had to master its own art to connect with Burma, a country which was really a pariah in the international community. For a few years from the late 1980s to early 1990s, New Delhi adopted a rather regressive policy of only supporting democratic forces which brought a hiatus in its relations. This policy was reviewed by the Narasimha Rao government and changed to one of dual-track, namely continuous support for democratic forces while also having normal business relations with the military government. Jumping to the present, from 2011 to 2015, came this hybrid government. It is in the last 4-5 years, there has been a very special effort, and now we stand at the cusp of another election and depending on what happens there, our relationship will be proceeding further, but I am very hopeful that it will move in a very positive direction.

*There are several dominant powers that are building ties with Myanmar, namely India, China, USA, and other Western nations. How has Myanmar been balancing these powers and what do you think India should do in such a situation where there are other competing interests?*

Given the strategic location of Myanmar, as a connecting point for South Asia and Southeast Asia, and the proximity to China and the Bay of Bengal, it is not surprising that so many players in the international field are interested in the country. India strongly supports Myanmar's desire for an independent foreign policy, and to develop a balanced set of relations with other partners, especially its neighbors. This is because India regards Myanmar as vital to its own security, defense and development. It is not in India's interest to see Myanmar extremely or excessively dependent on one power. Therefore, everything that Myanmar does to develop a harmonious, balanced cordial web of relationships around it; it will find India as a major partner and ally.

*In October this year, India stated its agreement to provide debt relief service to Myanmar under the G-20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative which assisted Myanmar in its efforts to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. India and Myanmar have also been working on the Sittwe Port project and intend to operationalize the same by next year. The Indian Foreign Secretary and the Chief of Army Staff travelled to Myanmar to meet Myanmar's state counselor Aung San Suu Kyi for talks on taking forward bilateral relations in a wide range of areas. What do you think of India's proactive approach toward gaining a regional outreach and building ties with Myanmar?*

I fully support it and regard this as a very timely initiative. I am referring particularly to the latest turn of events when an exceptionally important delegation comprising of the Indian Foreign Secretary and the Chief of Army Staff visited Myanmar. But what is more important is how the government and the people of Myanmar reacted to this initiative. There was a significant and widely known positive reaction from the public. The government also attributed great importance, and the state counselor, commander-in-chief, and deputy commander received the Indian delegation. Both sides expressed much satisfaction which was seen in the very detailed report of the ministry of external affairs, government of India. While the Kaladan project had not been completed yet, it will reach a critical point early next year when the Sittwe port becomes operational. There have been multiple other initiatives, but the short point is that under the Modi government in the last six years, the relationship between the two countries has been consistently deepening, and this latest visit was a significant boost to that relation.

*The upcoming election has been affected by systemic problems, rights abuses and also an increase in the COVID-19 cases. How would all of these affect the election, and what do you think can be done to protect the integrity of the election?*

In my view, the decision to postpone or hold the election was an internal call. As outsiders, the important thing to watch is whether the election will be free and fair. Certainly, in some parts of the country, they will be able to hold the election, but that should not deter the rest of the country. It would be better to have three quarters or more of a democracy than no democracy. Holding periodic elections is the heart of democracy, so we should recognize the importance of the coming election and hope that it will be held peacefully and properly

*What do you think is the importance of India-Myanmar relationship? Should we, as academics, give more importance to this relationship? What do you foresee in the coming years with respect to this relationship?*

Our academic community should take great interest in Myanmar. Technically speaking, Myanmar is not part of South Asia, but given that Myanmar is a member of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), an observer in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and a full member of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), it is very closely intertwined in the web of South Asian relationships.

In my opinion, the gap in the relationship in India and Myanmar is the inadequate dialogue, discussion and communication between South Asia and Myanmar. There are multiple issues of mutual interests, such as development, economic cooperation, climate change, ethnicity, constitution, regional and sub-regional integration, that need discussion. An eminent institution like O.P. Jindal Global University can play a leading role in bridging the gap between the academic communities of the two sides. Thank you.



# MIKE POMPEO'S ASIA VISIT - THE QUAD MEETING

- Avirat Parekh

The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who began his visit to Asia primarily made way to the second QUAD grouping meeting in Tokyo, Japan on October 6. The meeting was also attended by Toshimitsu Motegi from Japan, Marise Payne from Australia and Subrahmanyam Jaishankar from India.

This strategic grouping, better known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) is maintained through summits, information exchanges and military drills between Japan, Australia, USA and India. The meeting was aimed at discussing an assertive People's Republic of China as it is noteworthy how under the Trump administration, US-China relations have been at an all-time low. Although the agenda did include other discussion points like the COVID-19 pandemic and the question of cybersecurity, most of the discussion's focus was to do with a shared vision for a free and open Indo-pacific. Mike Pompeo went onto critically voice his views against the Chinese Communist Party by accusing it of significant corruption. He even highlighted a major governance failure which led to the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. It is also noteworthy how the United States is amongst the few countries who even call it 'Chinese virus' while China's relations with Australia are not as pleasant anymore. Although the QUAD initiative began in 2007, to address the rise of China over the years, it had lost momentum, and only recently this strategic grouping has become more active due to an alarming concern against China that all four member nations reciprocate.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry retaliated to these comments and the meeting at large with its own critique, highlighting how regional players must facilitate mutual trust and cooperation, which is not surprising to the international community. A rules-based international order is what each member nation voiced, which primarily even brought attention to China's actions in the South and the East China Sea. The India-China standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was also brought up while Mr. Pompeo made his remarks on the subject which were quick to invoke a reaction from Beijing calling the strategic grouping an 'anti-China coalition.' Finally, the meeting outcome may be deemed a success, but only time will tell if this initiative bound on strong principles of democracies seeking a rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific succeeds in the long run.



Picture Courtesy: The New York Times

## INTERPOL ISSUES 'RED NOTICE' FOR THAI RED BULL HEIR

- Avirat Parekh

There seems to be a new development in the 2012 fatal Ferrari hit and run case in Bangkok involving the now absconding Vorayuth Yoovidhya, who is the grandson of Red Bull's co-founder. With an estimated net worth of 20.2 billion dollars according to Forbes, his family happens to be the second richest in Thailand. The International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) earlier this month (October) issued a 'red notice' to arrest Vorayuth for his role in the 2012 hit and run case.

The charges include reckless driving, causing death and alleged cocaine use which are serious offences not just in Thailand but also around the world. It was in fact in 2012 that Vorayuth killed a policeman by crashing onto him with his Ferrari while the charges against him were dropped initially due to his family's alleged close ties with the government. However, in the wake of the recent Thai Pro-democracy protests, there was a mass public outrage on the subject as the Thais saw this situation as one signifying the benefits enjoyed by the nation's elites. This uproar amongst the country's population has led to a wave of new legal consequences for the Red Bull heir as the office of the Thai Attorney General in September went onto announce fresh charges on counts of reckless driving, causing death and alleged cocaine use. Vorayuth, who had fled the country in 2017 on his private jet, is set to face the consequences in the wake of the 'red notice' issued for his arrest. This uproar has come at a particularly tense time for the current government as the protests demanding the prime minister's resignation are only intensifying. What is fascinating is how much the current government fears these almost revolutionary series of protests against the government and the monarchy.

However, only time will tell if the elites will be able to maintain their relationship with the government as they have been over the years. The 'red notice' may be understood as the most urgent alert by the Interpol as there seems to be a plea for cooperation from the 194 members of the global community to bring him back to the country. The Thai prime minister has also gone onto call the former investigation on the matter 'compromised' which in my opinion is one of his attempts to deal with the uprising against the institutions and society in the country. However, one can hope that Vorayuth gets extradited and tried in the Thai court, but nevertheless this situation is a testament to the recent pro-democracy protests in Thailand.

# CAMBODIAN AUTHORITIES DEMOLISH THE US-BUILT FACILITY AT REAM NAVAL BASE

- Vikas Nagal

On October 4, 2020, the Cambodian authorities razed the US-built facility at their largest naval base in Ream. The Pentagon had raised concern and asked the Cambodian government for an explanation. According to various media reports, the Cambodian government had signed a secret deal with China to build a naval base and allow Chinese troops to station at the naval base.

The Cambodian government had denied the media reports that it had signed a secret deal with China and said that the stationing of foreign troops at Cambodian soil is prohibited under the constitution. The Cambodian authorities had also said that they had moved the US-built facility to a new location to make way for renovation and expansion of the naval base. The Paris peace agreement signed in 1991, which had officially ended the Vietnam-Cambodia war and established the UN peacekeeping mission in Cambodia, had established friendly ties between western countries and Cambodia. During the early 1990s, many nations were adopting a democratic model of governance and Cambodia was also considered to be next in line. But the western democratic illusions were shattered by prime minister Hun Sen's ambitions in Cambodia.

The Hun Sen administration had incrementally gained absolute power by banning opposition political parties and jailing political opponents on trumped-up charges. Western countries had put sanctions on the Hun Sen regime officials and stopped the developmental aid to Cambodia, in order to put pressure on the government. But the regime survived by developing closer ties with China. Under its Belt and Road flagship initiative, China has invested heavily in the infrastructural development of Cambodia and provided millions of dollars in aid. In return, the Cambodian regime supported China in multilateral forums like the UN and also in the ASEAN forum. During the 2016 ASEAN summit, Cambodia blocked a joint statement of the group criticizing China's actions in the South China Sea. Under the ASEAN Charter, all decisions will be taken by ASEAN after reaching a consensus among its member states. Even the Trump administration, which does not take human rights into consideration while deciding foreign policy, criticized the backsliding of the democratic process in Cambodia. The Hun Sen regime is also paranoid about an alleged plot by the western powers to remove him from power. In the end, it can be safely argued that the growing power rivalry between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific and the western countries' economic sanctions on Hun Sen regime will further push Cambodia into China's arms.



Picture Courtesy: Khmer Times

## MYANMAR'S ELECTION 2020

- Shivangi Dikshit

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, nations like Singapore and South Korea have conducted elections, while some are preparing themselves to conduct elections. And Myanmar is one country which goes to the poll on November 8. This election signifies the country's path toward democracy. In the 2015 election, many within the Rohingya community were happy to see the victory of Aung San Suu Kyi as she stood up against the military. But she now defends the military and its unlawful actions in the country. Moreover, the disenfranchisement of many in the conflict zones shows that the state is taking away the people's right to vote.

Most of the citizens deprived of voting rights reside in areas shattered by armed conflicts. Although the civilian government supports the idea of a democratic set-up, the military still holds a significant power and would continue to mold the system to secure its interests. So, it is important that the citizens are well-informed about making a rational choice while choosing their leaders. But unfortunately, the authorities have restricted access to the conflict areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has further worsened the situation and created restriction in movement in various parts of the country. The government has announced journalism as a non-essential profession which has forced many journalists to stay at home and has created barriers in reporting the election-related events. Not just the media but internet access is also restricted in parts of Rakhine and Chin states thereby depriving the people of vital information regarding the candidates and political parties. Currently, there is lack of freedom of expression and movement, misuse of media, discrimination and unequal access to rights and information guaranteed by democracy. This indicates that the election which is intended to set up democracy in the country does not have the elements of a free and fair election.

# THE INDIA-ASEAN TRACK 1.5 DIALOGUE ON CYBER ISSUES - COVID EDITION

- Hariharan Chandrashekar



Picture Courtesy: ORF

Building upon the success of its previous edition, the second India-ASEAN track 1.5 dialogue on cyber issues was held virtually on October 13, 2020. Aptly influenced by the developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's theme 'digitisation' and 'cyberisation of engagements' between the partners, starkly differed from last year's theme of 'Data Governance, Cybersecurity in Asia and Cyber norms forward'. This event was attended by high-level representatives, think tanks and experts from both sides.

There have been developments on both sides, with the recent ban and increased scrutinization of Chinese apps and technological products by India following its engagement with the former over border skirmishes, and also an increased influx and dominance of Chinese digital products and applications in the ASEAN market. The dialogue underscored the importance over the increasing way of the threat posed by technologies toward their national security.

In the inaugural session, the officials categorically acknowledged the increased need to formulate and implement policies to secure their respective cyber domain from malicious actors, by citing that the South Asia and South Pacific region have been a victim of the cyberattacks that exploits the economic downturn, and inducing anxiety in the populace through propaganda, fake news and targeted disinformation. It also noted that growing threats could be tackled with synchronized cooperation, by capitalizing the already robust India-ASEAN Strategic Cooperation of July 2020, to strengthen the ASEAN-India cyber and digital cooperation in a post-COVID-19 era.

Furthermore, in India's commitment to enhancing its 'Look East' policy in the digital sector, it noted the establishment of Centers of Excellence in Software Development and Training (CESDTs) in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam to enhance digital cooperation. Also, India has funded the 'Child Online Risks Awareness Campaign' and 'Building Capacity on Digital Public Services Implementation and Cyber Security for Government Agencies' as Quick Impact Projects in Cambodia in 2020. Highlighting the dynamics of the regions' markets being the largest and also with the fastest rate of adoption of technology in the world, India called for solidary with collective engagement in borderless cyberspace. While this dialogue signifies the importance of the region in India's foreign policy, through efforts to establish a presence in the region creatively, in order to compensate for the lack of economic hard power, it also showcases the increasing willingness by both sides to cooperate in newer frontiers.

# OIL EXPLORATION IN SOUTH CHINA SEA: THE PHILIPPINES CHAPTER

- Mihika Kothari

Following the invalidation of China's claims in the South China Sea in 2016 by the arbitral tribunal at the Hague, Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte has finally lifted the moratorium on oil and gas exploration in the South China Sea (SCS) last month (October). This will restart three projects, including a possible joint exploratory venture with China. China still adamantly refuses to uphold the arbitration and insists on claiming most of the SCS as its own. The claim has led to animosity at varying degrees with other Southeast Asian states - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, as well as Taiwan.

In 2019, Duterte accepted Beijing's offer of a controlling stake in a joint energy venture in the SCS, in the event of an international arbitral judgement that went against it. On October 15, 2020, Philippines Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi announced the decision to resume "energy-related activity" which was suspended in 2014 due to territorial disputes. This latest move comes on the heels of a steady series of negotiations by the two countries, and Forum Ltd and the China National Offshore Corp.

President Duterte was initially much more refrained owing to China's economic and militaristic dominance in the region. However, growing international pressure on China, and strengthened by the arbitral ruling, Duterte has become much stronger on his stance on this issue and both countries have been discussing the best way to exploit these reserves.



Picture Courtesy: India TV

# ANWAR IBRAHIM'S LATEST BID FOR POWER IN MALAYSIA

- Vikas Nagal



On October 13, 2020, opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim met the King of Malaysia to prove his parliamentary majority to become the next prime minister. The incumbent, Muhyiddin Yassin, claimed that his government still commands the support of a majority of the lawmakers in the 222-member parliament. This is the latest attempt by Anwar Ibrahim to become the prime minister, in his long and controversial career.

In the 1970s, Anwar was a charismatic firebrand student leader and founded the Malaysia Islamic Youth Movement. In 1982, he shocked his liberal allies by joining the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), under the leadership of the then prime minister Mahathir Muhammad. The gamble paid off, and Anwar quickly climbed the political ladder to become the successor of Mahathir Mohammed (the titan of Malaysian politics). But in 1998, he was charged with corruption and sodomy. In 2005, Anwar was released from prison and he restarted his political career. In the 2018 election, Mahathir Mohammed joined hands with former foe Anwar Ibrahim to defeat his former party under the leadership of prime minister Najib Razak. Under the agreed deal, Mahathir Mohammed agreed to remain in the post of prime minister for two years and then handover the post to Anwar Ibrahim.

In February 2020, the Pakatan Harapan coalition government collapsed after some of its members left the alliance. The defectors' leader Muhyiddin Yassin became the new prime minister after joining hands with opposition parties. But the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening of economic conditions and the conviction of Najib Razak in the 1MDB scandal undermined the nascent alliance led by Muhyiddin Yassin. The UMNO supported the Muhyiddin Yassin government because it hoped that his government would save its leaders in 1MDB case. But the conviction of Najib Razak in 1MDB scandal dashed those hopes and forced UMNO to look for new partners. In recent weeks, according to some media reports, Anwar's latest bid to power is supported by members of UMNO party to save their leaders from jail. Anwar Ibrahim is joining hands with the UMNO party, against which he had fought for half of his political life. But if Mahathir Mohammed and Anwar Ibrahim can join forces to defeat corruption-tainted Najib Razak, then anything can happen. If the latest bid by Anwar Ibrahim to become prime minister succeeds, then it will be a major turning point in the Malaysian political history.

# BIG OIL'S DEPARTURE FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA: MOVES FOCUS TO RENEWABLES

- Dishant Choudhary

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to another economic bump and policy shift in Southeast Asia as major oil giants, collectively known as the big oil, are looking for a divestiture plan as part of their exit strategy from the region. Although the overhaul has been largely necessitated, as companies and governments across the world are shifting focus on renewable energy sources, the pandemic has expedited the process. The super majors, also referred to as big oil, which includes the US-based Exxon Mobil, Chevron, Conoco Phillips and European companies, BP, Shell, Total, Eni and Equinor have made announcements or conveyed their intentions to dispose assets of worth US\$ 5.7 billion this year in Southeast Asia in the larger \$100 billion divestment scheme.

It may be seen that the energy transition measures adopted by major oil and gas companies had moderately begun at the onset of this decade when prices began to slip as the commodity boom receded. However, in recent times, several other factors have contributed to the acceleration of the process. It includes growing prominence for alternative sources of energy production as oil and gas production has led to huge environmental consequences. To a large extent, the US shale revolution has also altered the investment focus as companies now consider the US to be a potential market for future growth.

Subsequently, government regulations and market conditions have given further impetus to the transition as competition has been dismantled due to governments taking over control of the national resources and the falling demand for oil and gas due to the pandemic. In Indonesia and Malaysia, state-owned companies have increased their role significantly as authorities refused to extend production sharing agreements and stalled licenses for exploration and technical studies till next year. Exiting Southeast Asia and re-strategizing will allow the big oil to improve their cash flow level, competitiveness and business model as the energy sector is heading for a spin in the coming decades. The transition will also substantially reduce emissions and carbon footprint as climate change takes a central stage in global politics and diplomacy. All in all, this move will lead to positive changes which will ultimately benefit all stakeholders.



Picture Courtesy: whowhatwhy.org

# JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER SUGA'S VISIT TO VIETNAM AND INDONESIA

- Sanjana Dhar

Japan plays an important role in the geopolitical developments of the Southeast Asian region. This fact was reinforced by the recent visit of Japanese prime minister Yoshihide Suga's first foreign trip to Vietnam and Indonesia, after assuming office last month. Suga's choice of visiting these Southeast Asian countries denotes the significance that the region as a whole has for Japan. Geographically being a backyard for both China and Japan has made the region important for major powers to safeguard their interests. His visit to the region comes at a time when China's aggressive presence is causing discomfort, and choosing Vietnam and Indonesia as the first states indicates their strategic relevance in this context.

Vietnam, in particular, has been a vehement opponent of China in its territorial disputes with the country, and on the other hand, has a profound relationship with Japan in terms of investments garnered over the years. This relationship was elevated when prime minister Suga agreed "in principle to transfer defence equipment and technology," to Vietnam, and both he and his Vietnamese counterpart pronounced their cooperation on security issues, including the SCS issue and the North Korean threat. Moreover, reiterating former prime minister Shinzo Abe's policy of a free and open Indo-Pacific has also been a key focus, which also ties in the developments of the recently concluded QUAD meeting in Tokyo. With Indonesia as well, Japan focused on increasing defense ties and "promote a defence equipment and technology transfer agreement." In order to do this, both countries agreed to hold a meeting between the defense and foreign ministers of the respective countries. Indonesian president Joko Widodo stated that this bilateral tie is vital in an increasingly competitive environment due to the great power rivalry between the US and China. Indonesia will also receive a loan of \$470 million for medical supplies and other equipments to push Indonesia's pandemic-stricken economy. These developments would not only safeguard Japan's influence in the region but from the perspective of the Southeast Asian countries, these would ensure a secure environment in the face of a growing multifaceted aggression in the region.

# MALAYSIAN PALM OIL SANCTIONS BY THE US

- Hariharan Chandrashekar



Picture Courtesy: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en>

The palm industries of Malaysia and also Indonesia have been routinely imaged as an environmental issue in recent times. The industry itself has been lucrative and has transformed to being a lifeline to the economies of both the countries, contributing significantly since these are the second and the largest producers of the product in the world, which includes providing job opportunity to a majority of its population in millions. However, the politicization of environment-consciousness has put this industry at the center of the issue.

It is widely used as a component among various food products, and now categorized as a potential biofuel makes it a target of international politics. Already, deforestation and routine forest fire have been severely looked upon by its critics. The latter over the past five years have affected Indonesian areas larger than the Netherlands. The government maintains that it seeks to achieve a positive solution to tackle the policy highlights that “jobs creation law, ... favours businesses at the expense of the environment.” This has enabled firms to exploit the resources to increase the level of fires. Additionally, last year, the EU decision to phase out ‘Palm oil’ over health and environmental concerns had itself landed a WTO dispute by both these countries, underscoring the industry’s importance, as well as the need to not acknowledge the pitfalls of the product.

Now, news of banning a major Malaysian palm oil cooperation, FGV, over forced labor practices by the US Customs and Border Protection agency in October this year has sent ripples of fears among firms in the industry. This comes along with simultaneous allegations to the Malaysian rubber glove industry on forced labor. In the meantime, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has called on the US government to work on a full risk assessment and has promised to detain palm oil and palm oil products made by FGV following allegations of forced and child labor. The government, in general, has been in denial of forced labor.

But the ban itself has given a reason for concern for Indonesian firms, as they will be further scrutinized on environmental standards. Such fears can force companies to pivot toward Chinese markets, should it be banned completely. However, the vested financial investment of the US in the industry could limit this development. Nevertheless, this incident highlights growing pitfalls within the industry, while on the other hand increasing it as a biofuel will be beneficial. After these developments, both countries must take concrete steps toward sustainable oil production that restricts deforestation and values human rights.

# PROTESTS ERUPT IN INDONESIA OVER THE NEW LABOR LAW

- Dishant Choudhary

The house of representatives of Indonesia passed a new jobs bill in early October this year. The new legislation, an amendment of more than 70 previously existing laws, promises to effectively boost foreign investment, labor market competition, and improve ease of doing business by cutting down on red-tapism. However, contrary to its original intention, the introduction of this law has led to widespread protests in the country, mostly comprising of students and workers, demanding the abrogation of the “omnibus” jobs creation law.

Several thousand protestors have taken it to the streets of Indonesia, calling for revocation of the legislation, that has been widely characterized by the critics as being violative of labor rights and environmental protection laws. The demonstrations have also witnessed national strikes, whereas the leaders of different unions have publicly denounced the parliament and president Joko Widodo, who had comfortably won the re-election last year, for promoting this legislative scheme which is detrimental to the interests of workers and the environment.

The contention initially arose due to the non-involvement and lack of consultation of the workers, union members and other stakeholders in the deliberation process while taking into consideration the suggestions of the business community. Some opponents have called it a mechanism of paying back to the elite class, who helped president Widodo win the election. Human Rights Watch has indicated that the statute will significantly reduce workers’ protections, including minimum wage, severance pay, maternity and health and care benefits, among other things. The organization has also highlighted that the implementation of the law will lead to massive environmental consequences due to a reduction in the requirements for impact assessment and ease of acquiring land permits.

With a growing frustration and unrest in the country, it will be very crucial to witness if the ruling government will reconsider the implementation of the regulation. Even though it may seem that the government is unlikely to reposition itself on the new legislation, the fight is far from over, as the union confederation has declared that it will go to courts to get the law invalidated once it comes into effect after the presidential assent.

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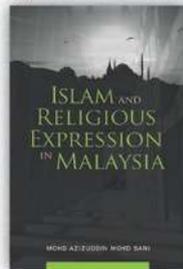
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*Non-Traditional Security Issues in ASEAN* examines the current state of governance of non-traditional security challenges confronting the ASEAN region. The book takes an issue-specific approach to investigating how ASEAN states and societies govern many of the pressing non-traditional security issues, such as climate change, food security, environmental protection, humanitarian assistance and disaster response, health security, nuclear security, and human trafficking and forced displacement.

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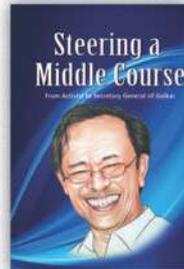
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This book attempts to analyse the concept of religious expression vis-à-vis freedom of speech in Malaysia from the philosophical, political and theoretical perspectives. It begins by discussing the major sources of religious expression that are firmly rooted in the societal and religious beliefs, constitution and legislation of the country. It also examines multiple facets of the Islamization policy in the country and to what extent such policy affects the exercise of domestic religious expression.

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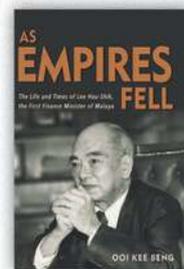
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Born with motor impairment, Sarwono Kusumaatmadja grew up with low self-esteem. Yet, within this awkward, shy boy lay a steely resolve to overcome his weaknesses. It was this same resolve that propelled him to study at high school in the United Kingdom, thousands of miles from his native land. Navigating life on his own in the UK forged Sarwono into an independent and resilient individual; one who never flinched in the face of challenges, but also one who never wanted to play the hero either. His unique character and integrity acted like a magnet for opportunities back home in Indonesia.

2020 260 pages  
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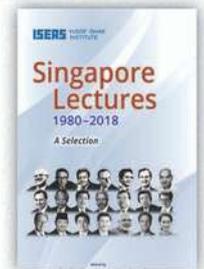
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To understand how independence was gained for a politically complex country such as Malaysia, and how its structure took form requires familiarity with the key players involved. More importantly, only by locating these actors within the changing socio-political context in which they specifically lived does their influence both before and after the birth of the country become clear. His influence in elite circles allowed him to play a key role in the gaining of independence for Malaysia. He was one of the founders of the Malayan Chinese Association, and served as the country's first Minister of Finance.

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2020 315 pages  
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# OCTOBER HIGHLIGHT:

A virtual discussion on the topic *Myanmar's 2020 Election: The Way Forward* chaired by Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen was successfully concluded on the October 15, 2020.

Speakers (top to bottom, left to right):

**Dr. Min Zaw Oo**, Executive Director, Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security;

**Dr. Ashley South**, Research Fellow, Centre for Ethnic Studies and Development, Chiang Mai University;

**Dr. Nicholas Farrelly**, Professor, Head of Social Sciences, University of Tasmania;

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

**Dr. Chaw Chaw Sein**, Professor, Head of Political Science & International Relations, University of Yangon;

Find the detailed report of the [discussion held here](#) and the [recording here](#).



## UPCOMING EVENT:

**Thursday, November 12, 2020  
11:00 AM - 12:30 PM (IST)**

Mark your calendar as Center for Southeast Asian Studies cordially invites you to a discussion on

### Kuki Nationalism And Political Aspiration

We are awaiting you to join us and the exciting panel!

**Zoom Link:**

<https://zoom.us/j/91483894881>  
Password: CSEAS@1211

**YouTube Live:**

<https://youtu.be/hGoJSjYVqKs>

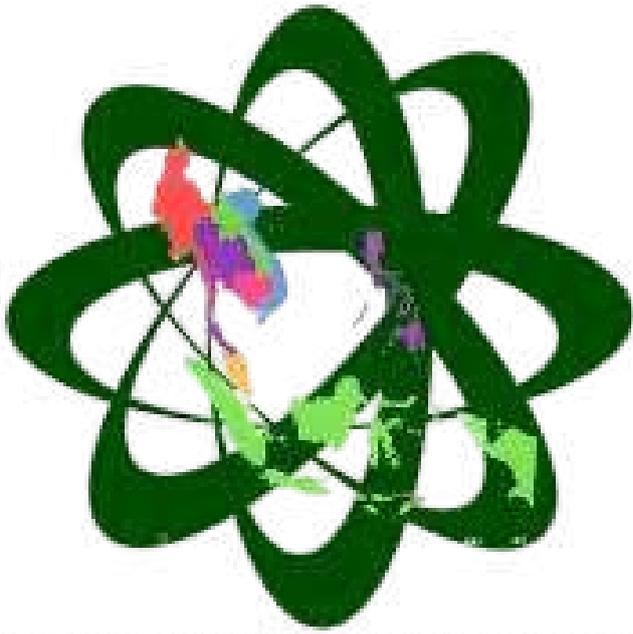
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**PROGRAMME**

- 3:00 pm – 3:05 pm **Welcome Address** by Ms. Sanjana Dhar, Research Assistant, CSEAS
- 3:06 pm – 3:20 pm **Nationalism and Armed Movement** by Dr. Jangkhongam Doungel
- 3:21pm – 3:35 pm **Statehood to Territorial Council: A Change in Strategy or Goal?** by Dr. Seilen Haokip
- 3:36 pm – 3:50 pm **Merits of Political Demand** by Mr. Aaron Kipgen
- 3:51pm – 4:05 pm **Challenges from Within and the Periphery** by Dr. Malem Ningthouja
- 4:06 pm – 4:20 pm **The Way Forward** by Mr. Paojel Chaoba
- 4:21pm – 4:55 pm **Questions & Answers**
- 4:56 pm – 5:00 pm **Vote of Thanks** by Mr. Harsh Mahaseth, Research Analyst, CSEAS



## Center for Southeast Asian Studies

EDITED BY:

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Sanjana Dhar  
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