



A LIFE WELL-LIVED

**PROFESSOR (DR.) NEHGINPAO KIPGEN,
FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
CSEAS
(1978-2021)**

MAY HE REST IN ETERNAL PEACE.



"I am honoured and blessed to have known Prof. Nehginpao Kipgen. He was truly a blessing in my life and I will miss him. I still remember my first conversation with him and how he was sceptical of including me, a law graduate into the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS). However, that soon changed and we had a great year of working together. While I could not meet him in person, he had a huge impact on my life in the little time that I did know him. He strived for me to push for academic and research excellence and together with him I learned a lot about Southeast Asia and we saw the Center grow together. The Center as well as the world will not be the same without him. Please keep Prof. Kipgen's family in your thoughts as they go through this difficult time. My heartfelt condolences."

- Harsh Mahaseth

"It was an honour for me to work with Prof. Kipgen. I knew him since 2019 and was working with him till April 2021. The last time I had a virtual meeting with him was on 19th April 2021 to discuss the CSEAS work and it is now hard to believe that he is not with us anymore to guide us. He was my professor, mentor and inspiration. It was a privilege for me to write several newspaper articles and research papers with him. He always encouraged me to work hard and give my best. He always said, "I want nothing but your best". Prof. Kipgen gave me so many opportunities and, I don't have words to express how grateful I am to him. He was the Founder and Executive Director of CSEAS, and we all will take his legacy forward. Now that he has left, I realize how much he meant to me, and no one can ever replace him in my life. Please, keep his family in your prayers as they go through these difficult times."

- Shivangi Dikshit

"It was nothing short of a dream to be mentored by an esteemed individual such as Prof. Kipgen. I am extremely grateful for him, seeing enough potential in me to be able to work with him, in spite of having no previous experience. Like a true leader, he took me under his wing and polished me to be the individual I am today. I will never forget his kind words and the jokes he cracked during our centre's monthly meetings. It is hard to imagine the center without him. Thank you so much for everything, Professor. I hope to become an individual you would be proud of. Please keep Professor's loved ones in your thoughts, to guide them through these trying times."

- Rhea Rayidi

Professor Kipgen was my mentor, guide, teacher, support and a constant source of strength. He was the first professor I spoke to when I joined the University in 2018. It has been a joy to learn from him and work with him. He was the most hardworking and punctual person, and he was always there when I needed his help or guidance. It was an honour to have known such a person and I hope to imbibe his teachings in my life. May his soul rest in peace and may we continue his vision in all our actions.

- Sanjana Dhar

Prof. Kipgen has been a constant source of guidance and inspiration for me. I worked under his supervision for a semester and every interaction with him was insightful and enriching. He is a role model for me and many aspiring scholars. I am grateful for his presence, the opportunity he provided and he will be truly missed as a kind human and an excellent scholar. I hope his soul may rest in peace and his family gets the strength to grieve.

- Ishita Dutta

My last mail

Dear Professor,

I'm speechless; your untimely demise has devastated us all, and it's an irreparable loss for the University and our research centre. I had the privilege of serving as your Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant, and no one in my life has helped me to write as much as you did; I will be eternally grateful for the opportunities you've given me.

Professor, may you rest in peace

- J. Mohanasakthivel



CSEAS shares with you the last newsletter drafted under the supervision of Prof. Kipgen. The CSEAS Team would like to request all of you to share your messages, experiences and pictures with Prof. Kipgen to our email: cseas@jgu.edu.in. We would be honoured to hear and share your experiences of him.

Regards,
Team CSEAS.

SNIPPETS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES (CSEAS)

IN THIS ISSUE

COVID And Misinformation in Malaysia: An Interview With Dr. Serina Rehman

China Comes to Indonesia's Aid Due to Vaccine Shortage

Duterte And Prayuth Skipped ASEAN Special Summit on Myanmar Crisis

ASEAN in the Aftermath of the Coup

Canada- ASEAN Trade Deal Shows Progress

Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's Approval Rating 'Stable' Amid COVID Vaccine Rollout

Recent Developments in China-Philippines Relations and the South China Sea Dispute

Indonesia's Growing Arms Deal

Defence Ministers of China and Vietnam Agree to Deepen Cooperation

Malaysian Airforce Teams Likely to Visit India in the Coming Weeks to Evaluate LCA Tejas Aircraft

Climate change and the Impact of Tropical Cyclone Seroja on Indonesia

Outrage in Cambodia over Offensively Edited Mugshots of Khmer Rouge Genocide Victims

Recent Highlights

APRIL GALLERY



Picture Courtesy: [The New York Times](#)



Picture Courtesy: [Bangkok Post](#)



Picture Courtesy: [The Guardian Nigeria](#)

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CSEAS

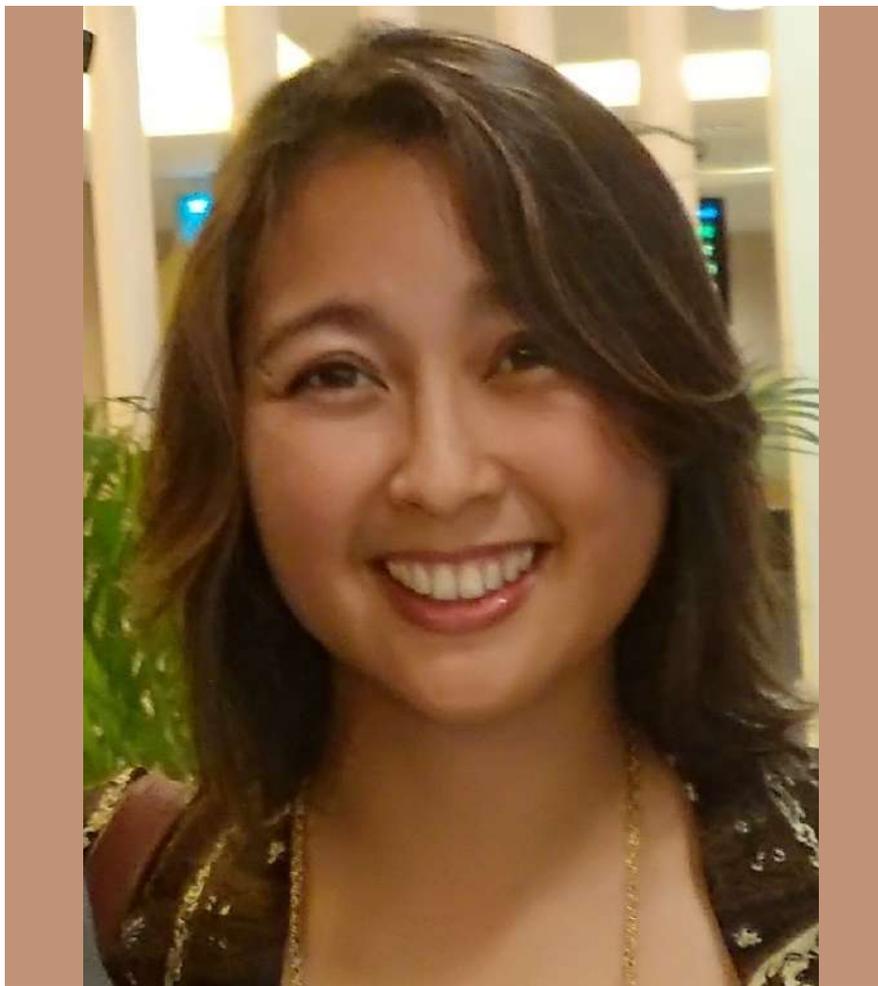
Greetings...

In this edition, we are happy to present you an interview with Dr. Serina Rahman, a Visiting Fellow at the Malaysia Programme and the Regional Economics Studies Programme, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) – Yusof Ishak Institute on 'COVID And Misinformation in Malaysia'. 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 a partnership with us.

Sincerely,
Prof. (Dr.) Nehginpao Kipgen

COVID AND MISINFORMATION IN MALAYSIA: A DISCUSSION WITH DR. SERINA RAHMAN

Dr. Serina Rahman is a Visiting Fellow at the Malaysia Programme and the Regional Economics Studies Programme, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) – Yusof Ishak Institute. A conservation scientist and environmental anthropologist, she is fascinated with all facets of Malaysia's rural outskirts. Her varied publications are all tributaries of this interest, ranging from rural politics to poverty and livelihoods to socioeconomic values of coastal habitats and the Islamic radicalization of rural women. She was awarded the Iskandar Malaysia Social Hero Award 2014 (for Environmental Protection – Individual), and is the Malaysian Ambassador for Citizen Science Asia. She is also an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. Harsh Mahaseth, Research Analyst at CSEAS, spoke with Dr. Rahman regarding COVID-19 and misinformation in Malaysia.



Picture Courtesy: Dr. Serina Rahman

As this is quite an interesting topic with an interconnection between fake news, an incessant political battle for power, and the COVID-19 pandemic, can you shed light on their interconnectedness?

I wrote a commentary on this in FULCRUM some time ago that elaborates a little, but the crux of the matter is that there is an ongoing political battle happening in amongst Malaysian political parties. The current PM Muhyiddin Yassin came into power without the public mandate of an election, and the existing (at the time) Pakatan Harapan, which was voted in during GE14, was unceremoniously deposed.

As a consequence, there has been a constant battle to regain power, political hopping to whichever party a politician might feel will hold power or will be more beneficial for themselves etc. So with this in the background, there is a measure of distrust between the people and the politicians. Not only because they seem more concerned with preserving their position and power than with the people, but also because there is a history of u-turns and going back on what they say or promise to the electorate. At the same time, because there are so many attempts to prove who is in control by myriad parties, there is inconsistency (and some incompetency) in the Covid-related information that comes out. The people have put more faith in messaging and instructions from the Ministry of Health, in particular from its Deputy-General, Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah. However, even that of late has made mistakes in its announcements and declaration, leading to u-turns. In and amongst that murkiness are political trolls who purposely spread misinformation via WhatsApp and Facebook, especially amongst rural folk, and this has led to some thinking that Covid is fake, not more than a severe flu, a political tool to control the people (especially since the state of emergency was declared). In some states such as Sarawak, there are also multiple tiers of decision-making, so at the state and regional level, there are other announcements and instructions given with regards to Covid-restrictions, which differ from Federal instructions, leading to even more confusion. In short, it is a mix of distrust of politicians given the Government's instability, too many heads issuing conflicting instructions and purposeful dissemination of fake news to create instability and confusion.

During a pandemic, having unverified alternative views being published can be detrimental. What steps can the Government take to handle the situation better?

A single consolidated sensible instruction that is simple and makes sense would be best. We had that for a while, where information was solely coming from DG Noor Hisham, but that seems to have evolved. Consistency in the calculation of numbers would also help (currently, they only test symptomatic individuals, and so many wonder if numbers are correct - there are also discrepancies and sudden silence on the reporting of migrant worker testing). But as I mentioned earlier, with more decentralized decision-making to account for local conditions, this consolidated single instruction is difficult. It is also almost impossible to get the different political parties to agree on what needs to be done or said as they are all battling to show their superiority in handling the matter (for political mileage). So the ideal is difficult to achieve.

People from the rural areas have contentions raged between whether the pandemic is actually a hoax to doubts regarding the cause of the deaths and whether it is actually due to COVID-19 or not. What can the Government do to build trust with its rural population?

Not all political parties have a good grassroots connection with rural areas. This is usually the purview of UMNO and PAS (in the northeast region). Information spreads through rural areas now through WhatsApp, Facebook and other social media sites, and of course, the regular gathering at food stalls, jetties, farmer's rest places etc. There is also a huge discrepancy between realities in rural areas and the urban government centre. So again, this leads to miscommunication (the Government does not know HOW to speak to rural folks) and distrust (because of negative or condescending insinuations that are often spouted by those in power about rural people). Those issues need to be repaired, but they are long-term structural issues.

If the Government can get people out to the ground to chat with regular people who sit at food stalls, jetties, and rest places - then the right information might be spread properly, but this requires a huge effort given the size of the country and the spread of the rural community. And even if that is done, there is always distrust by the rural folk of anyone new that comes in to speak to them from 'the outside'. The rural community will usually only believe it if they see something happening before their eyes. For example, someone close to them gets Covid, goes into ICU and dies. If not, they will struggle to believe what they cannot understand and do not see.

Can you tell us about the new law to tackle fake news and whether this is related to the problem of misinformation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic? Was such a legislation necessary under the Government's emergency powers? What is problematic about this new law, and how effective it can be?

I don't look at laws per se, so I don't know the details. I am not qualified to answer this. But I am aware that such a law has the danger of being misused to control the information that is being disseminated. It is easy for someone in power to say that something factual is fake news simply because it is information that they don't want disseminated. This is a very real possibility anywhere in the world, but again, I am not qualified to answer this question.

Fake news and the incessant political battle for power will not help those who are fearful and suffering as a result of COVID-19 or its economic fallout. In your article for Fulcrum, you discuss the need for health authorities to disclose accurate and accessible information to rural communities. Can you elaborate on that and also suggest what further measures can be taken?

Similar to the earlier answer - yes, accurate information has to be released and in a manner that is easy to understand. The Health Ministry's reporting has improved tremendously since Covid happened - they are a great source of information. Bernama, the news outlet, also has great infographics to explain the issues. There are also a few social media groups that try to explain what's going on. But these are not sources that rural folk will turn to. So the urban population might be aware, but the rural folk not so. This content would be more effective in the local language (Bahasa Malaysia) and disseminated by WhatsApp. The health authority was sending out text messages to everyone for a while, but that's gone quiet, and the information tended to be short and instructive. Perhaps sending out information through religious entities (places of worship: mosques or temples) - clan houses (for Chinese rural areas) etc., might be best. But poisoning the mix is the fake news disseminated by political trolls to create confusion - AND those trying to make a quick buck by selling magical or consumable cures to Covid. It is hard for people to discern what is real and what is fake, especially when they don't understand issues related to a pandemic, and this is unprecedented. Even 'official notices' with letterhead etc., have been proven fake. The health authority has, many times in the past, issued 'fake news' notices to dispute what was being sent out.

CHINA COMES TO INDONESIA'S AID DUE TO VACCINE SHORTAGE

- Sanjana Dhar



Picture Courtesy: [The Wall Street Journal](#)

Indonesia has been hit the worst by the pandemic amongst all other Southeast Asian countries, and the Government has been trying to control the situation by increasing the vaccination programme in the country. The Government has announced a plan to inoculate 181.5 million of its population in a year which it hopes would result in herd immunity. However, the Government is facing difficulties in ensuring the supply of Covid-19 vaccines for its population.

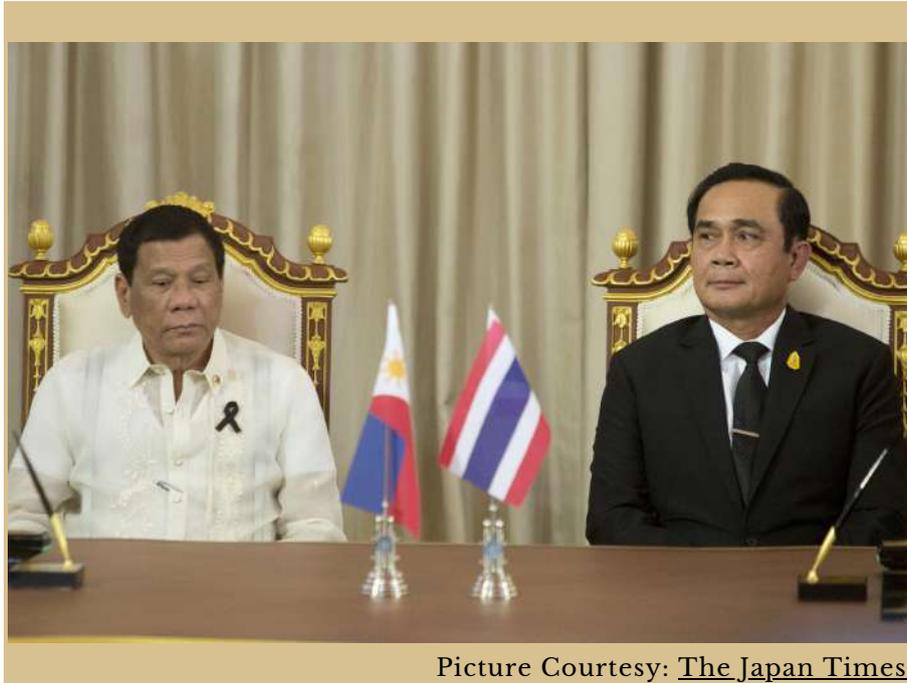
Health Minister Budi Gunadi Sadikin told “a parliamentary hearing that Indonesia would receive 20 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine via a bilateral deal this year, instead of the 50 million doses initially agreed. The remaining 30 million doses were due to be shipped by the second quarter of next year”. Indonesia was also supposed to receive 54 million of the AstraZeneca vaccine as a part of the COVAX scheme, but this has been delayed due to India’s restricted vaccine export. As a result of these delays, the Health Minister said that they would approach China with a request for 90-100 million doses of vaccines.

To this end, China has promised to work with Indonesia in its attempts to vaccinate the Indonesian people. President Joko Widodo spoke to his Chinese counterpart. President Xi Jinping told him that “China would help Indonesia to build a regional vaccine production center while working to vaccinate its own population. China and Indonesia both “attach great importance to the life safety and health of the people and oppose ‘vaccine nationalism’”.

After simultaneous delays in securing vaccines, China’s help to Indonesia comes as a much needed relief. Beijing portrays this as the failure of the West to provide timely aid while showing itself as “the vaccine supplier of first resort to the developing world, and to offer its vaccine a “global public good,””. These series of events have yet again given China the opportunity to emerge as an alternative to the West.

DUTERTE AND PRAYUTH SKIPPED ASEAN SPECIAL SUMMIT ON MYANMAR CRISIS

- Vikas Nagal



Picture Courtesy: [The Japan Times](#)

The ASEAN Special Summit on the crisis in Myanmar was held on April 24, in Jakarta, Indonesia, under the chairmanship of Brunei Darussalam. The President of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte, was unable to attend the summit; however, Foreign Secretary, Teodoro Locsin Jr., represented the Philippines in the ASEAN Summit. On April 22, the Philippines President's official spokesperson, Harry Roque Jr., issued a statement that Duterte will not be able to join a "face-to-face" meeting because of the worsening COVID-19 crisis in the Philippines. The Prime Minister of Thailand, Prayut Chan-o-cha, had also announced that he would not be able to attend the ASEAN Summit on Myanmar because of the increased risk of COVID-19 in Thailand.

The ASEAN Summit on Myanmar is a result of the last two months of diplomacy by countries like Indonesia and Singapore. The decision of President Duterte and the Thai Prime Minister to skip the ASEAN Summit on the crisis in Myanmar is a major blow to the ASEAN efforts to resolve the crisis situation in Myanmar. Especially, the absence of the Thai Prime Minister will make it difficult for ASEAN to resolve the volatile situation in Myanmar. The Royal Thai Army and Tatmadaw have maintained friendly ties in recent decades. Also, after the overthrow of the National League of Democracy (NLD) led civilian Government in Myanmar, Senior Military Chief General, Min Aung Hlaing wrote a letter to the Thai Prime Minister explaining the reasons behind the military coup and asking for his help to "support democracy" in Myanmar.

Myanmar is tittering at the brink of civil war, and further bloodshed will undermine peace and stability in the ASEAN region. In case a civil war erupts in Myanmar, great powers will also intervene in the region. The ASEAN Member States like Indonesia, Singapore, etc., want to restore democracy in Myanmar and are demanding the release of opposition leaders.

If ASEAN can present a unified diplomatic stand on the Myanmar crisis to the international community, then it will put pressure on the military junta and will prevent interference of external powers in the internal affairs of ASEAN member-states. But without the active participation and support of the Thai Prime Minister, the goal of restoring peace and democracy in Myanmar is an uphill battle for ASEAN.

ASEAN IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE COUP

- Shubh Sahai



Picture Courtesy: [Associated Press](#)

The recently unfolded coup in Myanmar is one of the most violent suppressions of citizenship in modern political memory. It included physical repression of protestors and abuse of power by security forces who terrorized students, dissidents, and other supporters of democracy. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) response to the crisis has been long-awaited as observers hoped that a strong regional commitment to democracy and human rights would inspire gravity in the tin-pot dictators of Myanmar. On April 24, 2021, ASEAN convened its long-promised ASEAN leaders emergency meeting on the situation in Myanmar and declared its 5-point consensus.

The 5-point consensus called for all parties in Myanmar to exercise restraint and immediately end all violence. Moreover, all stakeholders were encouraged to participate in a constructive dialogue which was to be facilitated by the special envoy appointed by the ASEAN Chair. Lastly, humanitarian assistance and a visit to Myanmar to meet all concerned stakeholders was pledged by ASEAN. While such a consensus reflects well on the nature and role of ASEAN; however, the efficiency of the consensus yet remains to be seen. For the longest time, ASEAN has not been able to enforce meaningful standards or sanctions on countries that engage in human right abuses or violate international laws. But even in what was decided, it seems ASEAN is shying away from the larger question of legitimacy for the new regime. An invitation to the ASEAN leaders' summit might send wrong signals to the new regime, especially as the meeting was silent about the release of democratically elected leaders such as State Counsellor Suu Kyi and President Wyint.

There also seems to be hesitance to question the military about its date of departure from the status quo. The new regime had justified the coup as a correctional mechanism and with a promise to leave soon. However, the meeting was silent on such a question. With passing time, it is to be observed whether ASEAN can use tools of regional diplomacy and Southeast Asian trade to fast-track Myanmar's journey to democracy or will it again run into political inertia and weak action against the new regime?

CANADA-ASEAN TRADE DEAL SHOWS PROGRESS

- Rhea Rayidi

After three long years of Canada securing a free trade deal with ASEAN, signs of a significant breakthrough are now visible. The deal has been in the process of being ratified since 2017, with Canada actively and consistently attempting to seek for a multilateral deal, which would only be made possible through the success of multiple bilateral deals. Through the course of 2018, regular public dialogue was held in Ottawa to discuss the prospective deal. There was an overall emphasis on suggesting to tackle “existing barriers for Canadian firms, including high tariffs, sanitary and phytosanitary issues and non-tariff barriers”. Agricultural stakeholders made up around 40.8 percent of the attendees proposing ideas.

On April 1, 2021, at the general annual meeting of the Canada-ASEAN Business Council (CABC), both parties (Canada and the ASEAN member states) reaffirmed their existing commitment to fortify economic ties. To further the motives, three key points were addressed. The first being the chair of ASEAN for 2021, Brunei Darussalam highlighting that “opening negotiations for the FTA was a top priority to help stimulate the region’s economy”. The second being a potential “Canada-Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)”, being proposed by the CABC. The third being, the aim to welcome more nations into the “Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)”, an agreement between 11 countries whose global gross domestic product (GDP) amounts to “13.5 percent”: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. These points would help elevate the Canada-ASEAN trade, which soared up to US \$21.26 billion in 2020.



Picture Courtesy: [ASEAN](#)

Picture Courtesy: [ASEAN](#)

PRIME MINISTER MUHYIDDIN YASSIN'S APPROVAL RATING 'STABLE' AMID COVID-19 VACCINE ROLLOUT

-Shivangi Dikshit



Picture Courtesy: [The Edge Markets](#)

According to the Merdeka Center's survey, the majority of people in Malaysia are satisfied with the Malaysian Government's handling of the pandemic. The rating of Prime Minister Yassin eased to 67% in April from 68% in March, in comparison with 63% in January 2021.

The survey showed that 70% of the voters are satisfied with the ways the Government is tackling the pandemic. The survey also highlighted 83% support of the dominant Malay electorate to Yassin as compared to 30% from Chinese and 66% from Indian communities. The Merdeka Center said that Muhyinddin's rating is "still strong" in spite of the "stressed conditions voters report for their own personal financial conditions and their perception of the economy."

The survey also revealed that the people had mixed views about where Malaysia headed, 41% of the voters believed that the country was moving in the right direction; however, 46% believed that the country was moving in the wrong direction. However, these results stated a shift from the results of January 2021, where 32% believed that the country was in the right direction and 54% expressed that country was not in the right direction.

Even though people are satisfied with the handling of the pandemic, the economic condition of the country is also an important issue for the citizens. In the issues related to personal concerns, the economy was the topmost issue, followed by the pandemic and politics. The survey reported that 57% of the voters felt that their personal financial conditions were worse as compared to 2020. But in the handling of the economy by the Government, the survey revealed that 51% were satisfied with it the while 43% were dissatisfied.

The Malaysian Government had declared a state of emergency in January that allowed the Muhyiddin government to suspend the parliament till August. Prime Minister Yassin is also preparing for an election that will be conducted once the pandemic is under control. This survey indicates that Muhyiddin holds a strong position in the country currently. He came to power last year with a slight majority after Mahathir Mohammad quit as the Chairman of Parti Pribumi Bersatuon Malaysia and resigned as the Prime Minister of Malaysia in February 2020. The survey clearly states that people in Malaysia have a mixed view of Yassin and his administration, which will clearly reflect in the upcoming elections.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CHINA-PHILIPPINES RELATIONS AND THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE

- Ishita Dutta



Picture Courtesy: [The Economic Times](#)

The Philippines has been fighting against Chinese aggression in the South China Sea, and tensions have increased in recent weeks. The South China Sea dispute has impacted China-Philippines relations for years, with the area under the 'nine-dash line' that China claims to have an impact on the otherwise improved economic relationship under Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte. The Chinese Government has increased its military presence in the South China Sea and continues to claim the region. The recent escalation is due to the deported ships and the militarized region by the Chinese.

Although the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea has denied the sea-land claims of China, the country continues to exercise authority in the region. The Philippines government called on China to withdraw the ships as they violated the maritime rights of the Philippines. China's 200 ships claim to be fishing in the territorial water of the Philippines, whereas the Philippines have said that the fishing boats do not appear to be doing so.

The Philippines has accused China of militarizing the region. On March 7, 2021, the Philippines government released images of 220 vessels of China. Even after being asked by the Philippines government to leave the area, China still had 220 Chinese vessels in the Philippines waters. On April 20, Rodrigo Duterte said that the Government would send Filipino ships to counter Chinese occupation in the South China Sea. The ASEAN bloc has also failed to resolve the conflict, as China's aggression keeps increasing. The challenge is larger, involving other Southeast Asian countries as well, and the international laws governing the sea have largely failed to resolve the conflict.

INDONESIA'S GROWING ARMS DEAL

- Sanjana Dhar



Picture Courtesy: [Defense News](#)

Indonesia has been engaged in increasing its defence ties with Japan, and in the month of March, Japan and Indonesia agreed on exporting defence equipment from Tokyo. This month, the details of the purchase have been released, and it has been indicated that it will become the largest arms deal between the two countries. “Under the arms export agreement, Japan could deliver up to eight of its new Mogami-class stealth frigates to the Indonesian Navy.”

Indonesia has had a rapid increase in its defence expenditure over the last year, and the equipment export deal with Japan has a role to this end. The cause of this increase in Indonesia’s defence inventory is not very difficult to figure out, as the country has faced maritime concerns with China in the Natuna Islands. Japan has also faced similar concerns with China in the East China Sea from time to time. Indonesia and Japan have expressed their concerns over attempts at changing the status quo, and as can be seen from the arms deal, militarisation of countries such as Indonesia will help in safeguarding Jakarta’s maritime interests.

On a similar note, “Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto paid a visit to South Korea, which included his attendance at the rollout ceremony for the country’s indigenous fighter jet (KF-X).” Indonesia is a 20 percent partner in the KF-X program, although there have concerns regarding its ability to afford this project. Still, the visit of the Indonesian defence minister and, most importantly, his participation, along with the virtual presence of Indonesia’s President at the rollout of the fighter jet, indicates Indonesia’s commitment to the program for now.

Such engagements with Japan and South Korea show the importance that Indonesia is now putting on its navy and air force, as it looks to safeguard its maritime interests as well as play a significant role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region.

DEFENCE MINISTERS OF CHINA AND VIETNAM AGREE TO DEEPEN COOPERATION

- Shivangi Dikshit

Hanoi and Beijing have agreed to build trust and work with each other to diminish the tensions between the two over territorial claims in the South China Sea. Shao Yuanming, Deputy Chief of the Joint Staff Department at China's Central Military Commission and Deputy Defense Minister of Vietnam, Hoang Xuan Chien, attended the event. Yuanming stated that the Vietnamese and Chinese military should strengthen strategic communication, deepen cooperation, address risks and challenges. The Chinese representative emphasized the need to encourage the traditional friendship between the two nations.

Chien from Vietnam also said that Vietnam's military was willing to make a larger contribution to boost their comprehensive strategic partnership with China. Both China and Vietnam have clashed on several occasions over the claims in the South China Sea. Such events show that constructive efforts are being made to settle the maritime dispute without direct confrontations. However, the actual implementation of peaceful measures to solve the issue is still imperceptible.

Before the event, the Chinese survey vessel extended its activities near the Vietnamese coasts. The vessel continued to survey in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Vietnam, later the Chinese vessel was followed by Vietnamese naval vessels. The Government in Vietnam raised its concern about the Chinese activities in their EEZ and accused China of violating the provisions of the United Nations Laws of the Sea.

China's rising assertiveness in the South China Sea was again observed as the Chinese Navy deployed three warships in the region, including a 075 amphibious assault ship. Vietnam is also building its maritime militia in the disputed waters to counter the Chinese domination. The occurrence of such events indicates that even after committing to peacefully resolve the South China Sea dispute, persistent efforts to demonstrate one's claims will occur, particularly to have an upper hand over the other claimants.



Picture Courtesy: [Nhan Dan](#)



Picture Courtesy: [Cosmo Sourcing](#)

MALAYSIAN AIR FORCE TEAMS LIKELY TO VISIT INDIA IN THE COMING WEEKS TO EVALUATE LCA TEJAS AIRCRAFT

- Vikas Nagal



Picture Courtesy: [India Today](#).

According to the [report in the Economic Times](#), teams from the Malaysian Air Force will soon visit India to assess the operational capability of Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas. LCA Tejas is manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), a subsidiary of the Government of India. The Malaysian Air Force is in dire straits and needs an urgent upgradation. [According](#) to Affendi Buang – former Malaysia Air Force chief - 40% of the country's combat fleet needs urgent upgradation. In recent years, the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) started looking for new combat jets to fill the operational gap. India made LCA Tejas, and Pakistan's Chinese-made JF-17 jet emerged as the top contenders for Royal Malaysian Air Force. But LCA Tejas will likely emerge as a winner because of certain important factors.

Firstly, LCA Tejas is operationally superior to the Chinese-made JF-17 fighter jet. LCA Tejas' engine, electronic warfare suite, and radar system are more potent than the JF-17 fighter jet. LCA Tejas can also fire the Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles, whereas the JF-17 fighter jet could not fire the BVR missiles.

Secondly, LCA Tejas is powered by a General Electric F404 engine, whereas JF-17 is powered by a Russian engine. The GE engines are considered superior in performance and require less maintenance than the Russian engines.

Finally, the Malaysia Air Force wants to hedge against China by buying Indian fighter jets. In recent decades, the South China Sea dispute has emerged as a major issue between China and Malaysia. The purchase of JF-17 will bind Malaysia with Chinese technology, whereas the purchase of LCA Tejas will not only give access to advanced technology but will also act as a hedge against the increasingly assertive China.

The LCA Tejas aircraft deal will also transform India and Malaysia bilateral ties. In recent years, especially during the [tenure](#) of Mahathir Mohammed, relations between both countries deteriorated, especially over the removal of Article 370 from Kashmir by the Indian Prime Minister Modi's government. But the LCA Tejas aircraft deal will improve diplomatic ties between the two major democracies in the Indo-Pacific region.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPACT OF TROPICAL CYCLONE SEROJA ON INDONESIA

- Ishita Dutta



Picture Courtesy: [CNN](#)

Climate change has resulted in frequent disastrous cyclones in Southeast Asian countries. The recent hit in Indonesia was the cyclone Seroja. This cyclone, which has impacted the worst, is the 10th tropical cyclone since 2008 that has strongly hit the country and resulted in a death toll of 181 people and many still missing. Seroja has been the most disastrous cyclone creating landfall, destroying infrastructure, and impacting livelihood with floods and strong winds.

The head of the Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency (BMKG), Dwikorita Karnawati, stressed on climate crisis, global warming, and the future prospects of lack of mitigation of climate change for island nations like Indonesia as the cause for the high-intensity cyclone. The Indonesian Forum for the Environment pointed out that mining, land conversion, and other illegal activities might have triggered the natural disaster. The island nation has been warned by the BMKG of more high-intensity cyclones, heavy rains, and extreme weather changes due to rising temperatures in the future.

The Government has relocated people and provided emergency assistance, but the worst-hit areas are Alor, Lembata, and Adonara. The cyclone has been the strongest for the people, the slides and deadly flooding in parts of Indonesia have impacted the population. The cyclone displaced thousands out of their villages, resulting in the migration of people in large numbers. The Seroja cyclone was more disastrous as it hit the land closer than any other cyclones and resulted in the death of people and many missing. The villages reported that there was no warning by the Government, and the lack of early warning structures in the country resulted in damaged livelihoods. The cyclone was rare in the region, and the intensity was unpredictable, flagging the lack of preparedness of Indonesia and lack of response capacity in the region. The country needs to have better infrastructure for early warning for such disasters.

OUTRAGE IN CAMBODIA OVER OFFENSIVELY EDITED MUGSHOTS OF KHMER ROUGE GENOCIDE VICTIMS

- Rhea Rayidi

American-Canadian media group VICE is deeply embroiled in controversy and backlash from Cambodians for publishing colourized mugshots of the Khmer Rouge's Tuol Sleng (S-21) prison genocide victims, altered to appear as if they are smiling. The editing job was done by Irish artist Matt Loughrey, whose intention was to "humanize the tragedy". The mug shots were obtained from the archives of the gruesome S-21 prison, present in the Tuol Sleng genocide museum.

The Khmer Rouge, a barbaric Maoist regime backed by Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979, is responsible for the deaths of almost 1.7 million Cambodians due to their practices of torture, starvation, hard labour and mass execution. The S-21 prison, previously Phnom Penh high school, and the infamous "killing fields" were the areas where approximately 17,000 Cambodians under the suspicion of being against the Communist regime were heavily tormented and executed.

The tone-deaf act was deplored by The National Cambodian Heritage Museum, and Killing Fields Memorial, "Minimizing the pain and trauma of our community from those who are not connected to the experience is not only revising and erasing history, it's a violent act."; along with the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts, urging that the images must be removed. A survivor of this tragedy, Theary Seng, said, "Their humanity is already captured and expressed in their haunting eyes, listless resignation, defiant looks", and that the offensive editing seemed "as if to mock their suffering". The article was taken down by VICE, stating a "failure of the editorial process", as the reason to do so.



Picture Courtesy: [The New York Times](#)



Picture Courtesy: [The Diplomat](#)

RECENT ACTIVITIES

Nehginpao Kipgen
外山 文子
Duncan McCargo
James Buchanan
Titipol Phakdeewanich

Center for Southeast Asian Studies

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 Dixhit** (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;

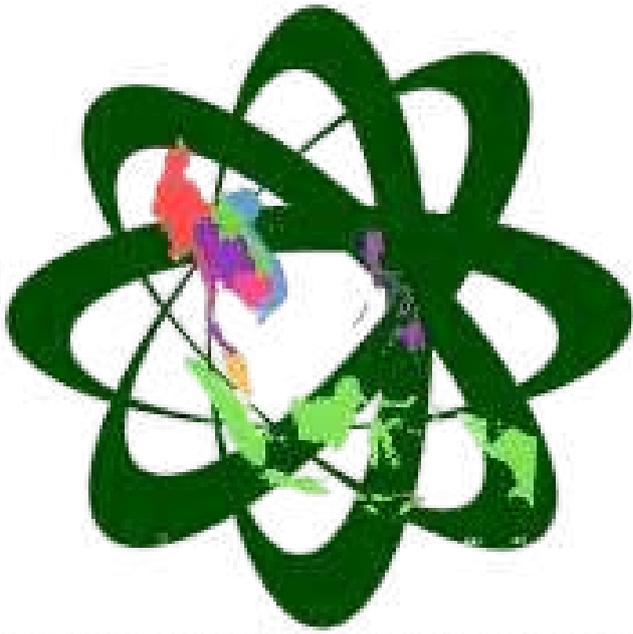
Dr. Ayako Toyama, Associate Professor, University of Tsukuba;

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.



Center for Southeast Asian Studies

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