

Southeast Asia

The IPCS Southeast Asia Research Programme Quarterly



ISSUE BRIEF

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July-September 2011

Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

SEARP

.....*Building Bridges and Reviving Linkages*

SEARP aims to promote research on Southeast Asia in India, map the existing nature & dynamics of India-Southeast Asia relations, including aspects of policymaking and highlight current political, economic and security developments of mutual concern. It is supported by the SAEA Group, Singapore

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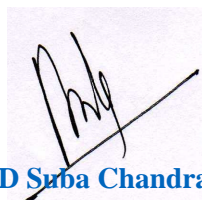
The SEARP Quarterly, a compilation of SEARP's publications provides a wide-ranging commentary on the season's most outstanding issues. As mentioned in its earlier edition, it focuses on the contemporary issues and challenges within Southeast Asia and the bilateral relations between India and ASEAN countries. Through regular interactions, discussions and capacity building the programme aims to bring the two regions closer through networking and interacting with ASEAN countries.

During July-September 2011, the SEARP's research focus was to realize the objective towards exploring and expanding linkages with Southeast Asia through India's Northeast. The Northeast's links with Southeast Asia are vital to the strategic interest of India both in terms of Asian geopolitical balance and as a hub of regional and international commerce. However, India is not able to bridge the development gaps within the Northeast and facilitate linkages with Southeast Asia. Towards this end, the IPCS initiated a new project titled "Northeast as an Engine of Growth" in which we are focusing on how to expand the linkages of the region with Southeast Asia. The Institute has formed a task force comprising of intellectuals, scholars and former bureaucrats (from New Delhi and the Northeast), to help the IPCS bring a recommendation report on the subject. The IPCS task force visited Assam from 3-6 July 2011 and interacted with the Chief Secretary of Assam, the business community, media, scholars and experts from the region. Also as a part of this initiative, an IPCS-edited volume titled "Looking through India's Northeast: Alternative Strategies towards Southeast Asia," was released by the Hon. Chief Minister of Assam, Mr. Tarun Gogoi on 3 July 2011 in Guwahati, Assam.

This Quarter also highlighted the challenges for the new Thai government towards addressing the social, political and economic causes of unrest and inherent contradictions both within the state and beyond. Prof. Baladas Ghoshal in his 'Election in Thailand: Inherent Contradictions, Regional Divide and the Road Ahead' writes about the challenges and the road ahead for the newly elected Pheu Thai party.

The commentaries in this edition examines issues such as the Jemaah Islamiyah 's linkages with the al Qaeda in Lim Yu Hui's 'Remaining Vigilant: Terrorism post Osama'. Prof. Baladas Ghosal highlights the need for improvement in the plight of migrant domestic workers of Indonesia in 'Indonesia: Travails of Migrant Workers'. Lim Yu Hui in 'Understanding Nuclear Power in Singapore: A Necessity, not a Choice' elaborates on why the study of nuclear energy and the building of expertise is a policy imperative for Singapore. In a print media survey Jayasree Nath reviews the opinions on reopening of the Stilwell Road in Northeast India.

In the next quarter, the SEARP further intends to convert its research process into an annual symposium to understand the dynamics of the current issues, challenges and problems in Southeast Asia. As part of the first annual symposium on 'Inside Southeast Asia', the key research areas will be on internal political challenges, inter-state conflicts and ASEAN and regional security'.



D Suba Chandran

Election in Thailand: Inherent Contradictions, Regional Divide and the Road Ahead

Baladas Ghosal

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Ending all puzzles, predictions, calculations and perhaps fears, the Thai people elected Pheu Thai party with a clear majority and removed a controversial government headed by Abhisit Vejjajiva, which came into power not through winning majority in the elections of 2008, but through Supreme Court intervention. But winning a landslide victory with 265 seats of the 500 house seats or 300 when including its five coalition partners including Chartthaipattana, Chart Pattana Puea Pandin, Palang Chon, Mahachon, and New Democrat Party was not enough for Pheu Thai party and its leader Yingluck Shinawatra to form the government, as she and incumbent Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva were among 142 candidates in the 500-member lower house of parliament whom the commission failed to endorse pending investigation of complaints that they violated electoral law, throwing Thailand in a state of suspended animation for more than two weeks.

The uncertainties in crisis-wrecked Thailand's politics was somewhat removed on 19th July when its Election Commission certified the victory of, clearing a major hurdle to her becoming the country's first female prime minister. Yingluck, the sister of exiled fugitive former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was ousted by a 2006 military coup after being accused of corruption and disrespect for the monarchy. As per the Thai election laws, parliament, supposed to open within 30 days of the election, must convene and elect her as prime minister before she can take office, but the house cannot legally convene unless 95 percent of its members are certified by the electoral body. Abhisit also was among the 12 winners endorsed in the ruling announced by the Commission.

The governing Democrat Party, which lost the election and is allied with the elite in Bangkok and the military, has lodged a legal complaint calling for Puea Thai's

“Notwithstanding the acceptance of the poll verdict by the country’s powerful armed forces and the outgoing government party with public statements, uncertainties are still not fully over.”

dissolution for allegedly allowing banned politicians to direct its campaign, including Thaksin by using the slogan "Thaksin Thinks, Pheu Thai Does" in its posters. The staunchly anti-Thaksin People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) has filed a separate complaint, seeking to void the election on grounds that two million Thais were not able to vote. A PAD-linked group has also pressed state investigators to probe Yingluck for alleged perjury in testimony she gave during an assets concealment case involving Thaksin three years ago. Yingluck last week told Reuters she stood by her testimony. More than 100 executives of Thaksin's party in 2007 were barred from politics for five years on charges of violating the election law. Pheu Thai trumpeted its connections with Thaksin, the country's most popular politician, but the law is not clear on what is allowable, and party leaders claimed Thaksin had no say in their activities. Thaksin lives in exile in Dubai to escape a two-year prison term on a graft conviction. His overthrow was followed by controversial court rulings that removed two pro-Thaksin premiers who came after him, even though a pro-Thaksin party won the first post-coup election in 2007. There are also apprehensions in some circles that Yingluck will only act as a proxy for Thaksin. Thai media recently reported on a meeting in Brunei between Thaksin and Banharn Silpa-archa, another banned politician who is the de facto leader of Chart Thai Pattana, a party in Yingluck's coalition. The two were widely assumed to have discussed cabinet portfolios, although this was denied.

I THE BITTER ELECTION CAMPAIGN & ITS AFTERMATH

Notwithstanding the acceptance of the poll verdict by the country's powerful armed forces and the outgoing government party with public statements, uncertainties are still not fully over, given the past history and the vituperative preelection campaign by the ruling establishment against the opposition Pheu Thai party. Even before the elections were to be held, the likelihood of new political unrest had led to nervousness in financial circles in Thailand and internationally. Since campaigning formally began last month, the Thai stock exchange had fallen by 5 percent.

According to estimates cited in Britain's Financial Times, more than \$1 billion was withdrawn by foreign investors from Thai shares. An article on the Bloomberg website on June 22 warned that Thailand's "economic resilience" might "be tested next month as polls indicate

a win for the party removed from power twice in the past five years.”It noted that the 2010-2011 Global Competitiveness Report based on a survey of 13,000 executives said government and policy instability were the biggest concerns for undertaking business in Thailand.

After the elections results were known, however, the stock market raced to a seven-week high on July 5, but only for a short while. Stocks have lost a percent since then on a combination of weakness on Wall Street and uncertainty surrounding Yingluck. When it forms the next government, it could still face concerted opposition from the traditional establishment centered on the army, state bureaucracy and the monarchy.

In 2006, the military ousted Thaksin amid sharp differences over his pro-market measures and methods of rule, which undermined the country’s established patronage system. Political turmoil erupted again in 2008 after the pro-Thaksin party won national elections and formed government. Anti-Thaksin protests led by the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) and backed by the monarchy and the army created the conditions for the removal of two prime ministers by the judiciary and the installation of Abhisit Vejjajiva and his Democrat Party in power.

Last year Abhisit ordered a bloody crackdown by the army on pro-Thaksin protesters led by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) who were demanding Abhisit’s resignation and early elections. At least 91 demonstrators many of whom were rural poor from the northern areas of the country, were shot dead and many more injured. While Abhisit eventually called the elections earlier than expected, none of the underlying political and social tensions has been resolved. The campaign before the elections sharpened tensions between the government and opposition. Puea Thai’s support among the country’s rural and urban poor came from limited concessions made by Thaksin while he was in office as part of his economic stimulus measures. This time the Puea Thai promised 300 Baht/day minimum wages, raising monthly support for retirees to 600 Baht, intervention for higher rice prices, credit cards to farmers as pre-crop financing, corporate income tax cut from 30% to 23% in the second year, tax cut for first time home and first time car buyers, ant-flooding dam for Bangkok, high speed trains, and special administrative states for three Southern Muslim provinces.

Abhisit’s attempts to outbid Puea Thai’s populist pledges by promising wage rises and support for small farmers had largely failed. As a result, the government turned to denouncing the UDD leaders standing as Puea Thai candidates, saying a vote for them meant “you select the terrorists to be members of parliament.” Democrat’s attempt to equate opposition with “violence” and “terrorism” not only sharply polarized voters, but almost laid the groundwork for anti-Thaksin protests or the prospect for an army intervention if Puea Thai won the poll.

“Yingluck is also under pressure to justify her promise of a series of populist policies critics say could accelerate inflation and increase debt.”

The military leadership had denied any plans for a coup, but its bias was obvious. In a nationally televised address on June 14, the national army chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, made a transparent appeal for voters to reject Thaksin and Puea Thai and vote for “good people.” The anti Thaksin PAD, which played a prominent role in protests against Thaksin in 2006 and 2008, has refused to back the Democrats in the pre-election campaign, having criticized Abhisit for taking a weak stand over borderclashes with Cambodia earlier this year. PAD has begun legal action, however, involving the Election Commission to have Puea Thai outlawed because of its connection to Thaksin, who is reported to have called his sister, Yingluck as his ‘clone’. Yingluck is also under pressure to justify her promise of a series of populist policies critics say could accelerate inflation and increase debt. She would probably take a cautious approach to avoid any fallout that would provide ammunition to her opponents. While the forces pitted her would not take any hasty steps to undo her government as that would discredit them in the eyes of the political public for sabotaging democracy and also upset the capitalist class that are behind Yingluck, they are likely to wait for her to make mistakes so that they could use that to undermine her position and dislodge her.

II THAI POLITICS: UNDERSTANDING THE INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS

Whatever future holds for Yingluck, peace and stability seems unlikely in Thailand until the real social, political and economic causes of unrest and inherent contradictions are addressed. Thailand’s endless cycles of political tumult can be understood fully if one takes a deeper look in the historical context by the tensions between Bangkok and the provinces, which had always weakened years of hard work in nation-building and establishing a universal sense of Thai-ness, as the regional divide appears greater than other divisions.

The lines of divisions are complex and compounded by political opportunism of the elites in Thailand. Nevertheless, there is a clear urban-versus- rural split that acts as the primary force driving confrontations between the various factions. Throughout the 20th century, the military - generally with moral support from the monarch- was the only force capable of attempting to maintain a balance of power and the main political arbiter. But then the military itself was often plagued by divisions within its leadership, and the divisions

between the national police and military as a symptom of the country's underlying power struggle further complicated the political processes, and therefore the incidence of 19 coups, the largest in the history of any country in Asia.

Such a political reality has always influenced Thailand's experiment with democracy in a context of military primacy in politics. To make things even worse, a societal polarization also has now become the critical aspect of the ongoing crisis in Thailand. The divide is defined by the alienation between the civil-military elite, on one side, and the disaffected poor masses, on the other. On the surface, the conflict is between Thaksin, the Red Shirts on one side versus the PAD, but deep down it is a structural conflict between those who have and those who have not. This conflict is inherent in the Thai economic structure and has been covered until Thaksin became Prime Minister, but he changed the situation with his populist policies. This enabled the poor to access resources, for example cheap health care, for the first time in Thai history. A vote is no longer a vote. It's about inequalities of economics and justice. The current global financial and economic crisis is hitting Thailand hard. The saving grace in this kind of political and societal divisions was the status and charisma of the King, who was believed not only to hold divine mandate but also above all political bickering. There have been many instances in the past when King Bhumibol had used his influence to reduce political divisions within manageable proportion and retain peace and stability in the country in the face of many challenges.

The 84-year-old monarch has played a political role, implicitly signing off on military coups at times, most notably in 1976, and intervening to ensure the return of civilian governments, as in 1992. King Bhumibol rarely gives interviews and often chooses to talk indirectly. His annual birthday speeches are carefully examined in Bangkok. In 2002, he published a biography of his favorite pet dog, a stray mongrel rescued from the streets of Bangkok that was widely interpreted as a warning that Thailand shouldn't abandon its traditional values in a quickly modernizing world. That was interpreted by many political analysts as an indictment on Thaksins's aggressive style of governance and his attempt at quicker integration of Thailand to globalization and modernization.

It is considered inappropriate for Thais to speak publicly about the king's possible role in politics, and publicly Thaksin denied suggestions that the king was involved in any of the political dramas that cost his job. "One should not bring him into politics," Thaksin said at times, but in June 2006, he said a "charismatic person" was out to remove him from his job as prime minister, went on to say that a mysterious figure whom he refused to name was "wielding extra constitutional force" to push him from office. Most Thais assumed that to mean the king or his chief lieutenant, Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda.

However, the failing health of the King, a constitutional monarch, and his inability to monitor developments in the country personally together with the uncertainty of a successor has now not only removed that restraining factor from the political scene, but his role itself has become a bone of contention between various factions within Thai elites. In his personal absence from the public, his close advisers in the Privy Council, more particularly by Gen Prem Tinsolan and is believed to wield considerable power and behind many maneuverings, which are resented by those who want democracy to flourish in the country without any interference from any extra-constitutional forces.

III THAILAND: THE GEO POLITICS & REGIONAL DIVIDE

Social and political unrest is woven through Thailand's political culture, according to Stratfor. The cyclical instability arises from geopolitical factors that historically have determined Thailand's behaviour and will continue to do so. The Kingdom of Siam, as Thailand was called, took shape around the 12th to 13th centuries, near the fertile mouth of the Chao Phraya River, which empties into the Gulf of Thailand. The Siamese were well positioned to grow rice and sell it to merchants for export to hungry foreign markets. They quickly expanded their territory outward to give themselves strategic depth. Moving northward, they gained dominance over the fertile river valleys of the Chao Phraya and its tributaries, all the way up to the mountainous north -- where they contended with a rival ethnic Thai centre of power, based in Chiang Mai.

To the northeast, they forced the collapse of the Khmer empire and seized the Khorat Plateau, which had (and still has) a large population for much-needed labour. Along the mountainous western border, and south into the Malay Peninsula, the Siamese fought off the Burmese and the Malay. Thailand has always been anxious to secure its defensible positions in the north, northeast and south; its survival depends on it. However, these regions have never been easy for Bangkok to control.

On the eastern Khorat Plateau, Bangkok's hold was always challenged by Cambodian and Vietnamese influence. In the south, the predominantly Muslim inhabitants periodically have resisted Bangkok's authority; a Muslim insurgency rages in the south today. But the most difficult region for Bangkok to rein in-

“ The cyclical instability arises from geopolitical factors that historically have determined Thailand's behaviour and will continue to do so.”

-atrophy and unrest emerge. The Democratic Party is firmly rooted in Bangkok. The military, monarchy, civil bureaucracy and urban middle class were for the most part aligned with the government of Abhisit. They claim to be devoted to traditional Thai values of nation, religion and monarchy and to revere King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Hence the royalist, yellow-wearing protest movement toppled the government in 2008, and the military's unwillingness to act on that government's orders to put the then movement down. The movement led by Thaksin supporters and opposition to the Abhisit government was rooted in the north and northeast. The majority of the population and a wealthy network of provincial big business and agriculture based in these regions support the prorural policies of Thaksin, who is a native son of Chiang Mai. Thaksin's side is associated with entrepreneurs and international capitalist commerce, which is anathema to the military and monarchy Thaksin is also said to have much influence among the national police force, since he served as a policeman.

IV CONCLUSIONS

Whatever might be the root cause of the problem in Thai politics, the outcome of the recent drama in the power struggle and government formation in the country is of vital importance to investors and Western governments. The stakes in Thailand's political and economic stability are, therefore, quite high not just to the Thais, but even for the international community. With a Free Trade Agreement and growing economic relations with that country, India herself has major stake in the political stability and success in democratic experiments in Thailand.

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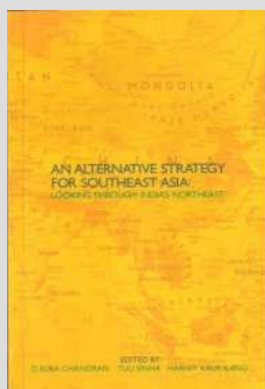
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SEARP RECENT PUBLICATIONS

An Alternative Strategy for Southeast Asia: Looking through India's North-east.

This book focuses on both the hurdles as well as prospects for greater partnership with Southeast Asian region through India's northeast. It delves into issues of connectivity, free trade agreements, security implications, infrastructure, regional geopolitics etc.

The book was released by Mr. Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam, in Guwahati, Assam



An Alternative Strategy for Southeast Asia: Looking through India's North-east.

The first edition of 'Southeast Asia Quarterly' was published in June 2011. The Quarterly provides a wide-ranging commentary on the season's most outstanding issues. The research focus ranges from bilateral relations between India and ASEAN countries to issue based research on topics such as the India-ASEAN FTA, aviation cooperation, geo-strategic issues, internal political developments in ASEAN countries, terrorism and maritime affairs.



Reopening of the Stilwell Road: A Print Media Survey

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The Stilwell Road was a historical supply route to transport requisites to Chinese soldiers during the Second World War. Passing through Myanmar, the road once connected China and North-eastern part of India. The reopening of the road is in the news due to “India’s Look East Policy” to cut the transportation costs between India, China and Myanmar. However, India recently condemned the project, leading to fresh controversies, especially in the country’s North-East (NE). This article elucidates on the controversy and concerns of the Indian central and regional governments.

The Government of India (GoI) believes that Myanmar is reluctant to reopen the Stilwell Road given security concerns. Despite the fact the Indian government has shown keen interest to reopen the road, DoNER officials observed that “Myanmar is hesitating as it passes through the country’s Kachin region which is infested by insurgent elements, including those belonging to India like ULFA and NSCN factions” (Myanmar opposed to Stilwell Road re-opening, The Assam Tribune, 3 July 2011). Pointing out another reason as problems related to funding, in a report published in The Sentinel, titled Reopen Stilwell Road: Northeast CM’s, an Indian foreign ministry official indicated that since most of the road lies in Myanmar, major reconstruction would be pending with Myanmar, as the road was significantly damaged since the War. India’s NE states are very much in support of this road considering the opportunities it gives for commercial growth and development of the Region. Mentioning unanimous decision of the regional heads on the road, Assam’s Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi stated that “there is no second opinion among the regional heads of the North East”. He also urged that for economic prosperity of the region and effective implementation of the ‘Centre’s Look East Policy’, reopening of the road is necessary. Manipur Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh added “Free trade with Southeast Asian countries would be possible only with the reopening of the Stilwell Road which is the gateway to Southeast Asia.” Advocating road links to Southeast Asia, leaders from the NE region pointed out that Yangon, Bangkok and even some Chinese cities are much closer to most North Eastern states than Delhi or Mumbai. For instance, Kunming in China is only 1,726 km from Ledo in Assam where the Stilwell Road begins (Reopen Stilwell Road: Northeast CM’s,

The Sentinel, 19 July 2011). Highlighting the commercial growth and development of the insurgency-affected region, Arunachal Pradesh Governor Gen (Retd.) J J Singh opined that reopening the road would reduce transportation cost between China and India by more than 30 per cent, and make it a production hub for Myanmar and Western Chinese markets (Arunachal Guv seeks opening of Stilwell Road, The Assam Tribune, 20 June 2011). Makbul Pertin, Commissioner of Trade & Commerce, Arunachal Pradesh provided a glimpse of trade prospects, including “agricultural products, valuable timber, precious stones and ayurvedic medicines” which can be traded with Myanmar, while coal, fertilizer, tea, finished wood products, electronic goods, clothes, cement, steel and iron products, medicines and processed foods can be exported by India” (Border trade set for boom on historic Stilwell Road, The Sentinel, 24 Feb 2011). Tarun Gogoi stresses need for connectivity with Southeast Asia, (The Assam Tribune, 5 July 2011). Talking to The Assam Tribune, Pradyut Bordoloi, Assam’s Minister for Industries and Commerce highlighted the importance of the route, urging the central government to adopt a pragmatic policy in developing the economic standing of the NE (Call to reopen NE trade routes, 31 January 2010). On the other hand, highlighting transport connectivity with countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, the opposition party of Assam (AGP) criticized the decision of the GoI as self-contradictory and added that this road could strengthen the bilateral relation between neighbouring nations (The Assam Tribune, 27 June 2010). However, amid this contradiction, what has been overlooked is that the Chinese government has already initiated endeavours for repairing the road to its own advantage. According to information published in The Assam Tribune dated 28th March 2011, a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence pointed out China’s activities on Myanmar border and the reconstruction of the road till India’s doorstep. This stands in sharp contrast to India’s concern to defer opening the road. Overall impression of this survey is that, although Stilwell road has a potential for trade development between India, Myanmar and China, security threats are hindering cooperation. Regional cooperation among the South Asian nations will benefit all and hence there is an immediate need to redress the issue than deferring it. Therefore, the opening of the road holds greater promise than perceived misfortune.

Understanding Nuclear Power in Singapore: A Necessity, Not a Choice

Lim Yu Hui

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The recent Fukushima nuclear disaster puts on the forefront the issue of the safety of harnessing nuclear energy. Soon after this, the Singaporean leadership stepped out to confirm, once again, that a pre-feasibility study conducted to assess the suitability of harnessing nuclear power has not been shelved or cancelled. Indeed, Singapore's growing energy needs may be a strong force compelling the Singapore government to at least consider the possibility of harnessing nuclear power. However, beyond the obvious issue of energy supplementation, a greater concern looms above - the enthusiasm that our geographical neighbours have displayed in exploring the nuclear option and the positive steps that many of them have already undertaken to put them firmly on the course of harnessing nuclear power.

Technical feasibility, regulatory structures, implementation and governance are important issues for a country to consider should it decide that nuclear energy should form part of its energy mix. However, the biggest and most immediate concern of Singapore's policy-makers lies in the choices and actions of its neighbours which will ultimately have an impact on Singapore. Singaporeans and Malaysians will be able to vividly replay how

their cities experience a yearly haze inundation from the fires blazing in Indonesia's forests. One needs only to imagine the panic and hysteria that would arise if the haze was replaced by more nefarious substances like radioactive particles emanating from a power plant accident. It is precisely because Singapore will be at the mercy of its neighbours' activities that makes the study of nuclear energy a more urgent need than before. Understanding how to build, operate and maintain a nuclear power plant and building up local expertise to understand nuclear energy as a science and a technology will ensure that Singapore can engage its neighbours in more meaningful ways. Undoubtedly, choosing to walk down the nuclear path is every country's inherent sovereign right and Singapore certainly has no business telling its neighbours not to adopt nuclear energy. However, Singapore may provide expertise, knowledge and support to ensure that the nuclear facilities constructed in Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand meet international safety and security benchmarks so that the lives of Singaporeans may indirectly be secured. It may also spearhead regional

cooperative regimes to bring ASEAN partners to a common consensus over safety and security requirements and to promote regional information-sharing. ASEAN must start to take ownership of developing and maintaining a Southeast Asian nuclear cooperation platform. The ASEAN Nuclear Energy Cooperation Sub-Sector and Safety Sub-Sector Networks are steps in the right direction. ASEAN members should assist each other in civilian nuclear energy use and also utilize regional platforms to monitor nuclear energy use and enhance safety, security and accountability. Furthermore, an ASEAN network for notifying members of safety and security incidences is necessary to ensure the timely dissemination of information when nuclear accidents occur. The European Community Urgent Radiological Information Exchange (ECURIE) would be a good model for ASEAN to study, emulate and improve upon. It is important for Singapore and

ASEAN to recognize that these broad regional frameworks must be implemented even as individual countries pursue nuclear energy. The close geographical proximity of ASEAN countries means that a radioactive plume emanating in Vietnam will be felt in Malaysia within a matter of days, if not hours. The region's wellbeing hinges, therefore, on the vigilance, transpar-

ency, responsiveness and expertise of all ASEAN countries. It is abundantly pre-feasibility study that it would not pursue nuclear energy, it must still continue to build expertise. Singapore schools must offer programmes to ensure that there are at least some professional engineers, physicists, lawyers and doctors that have a working knowledge of nuclear science and technology and are ready to respond with advice and counsel should the country face a nuclear disaster occurring offshore.

The study of nuclear energy and the building of expertise is a policy imperative for Singapore. Even if Singapore decides that nuclear energy is not a feasible choice, it needs to be able to engage its neighbours who will pursue nuclear energy. This is only possible if the country possesses sufficient technical capacity and depth to conduct meaningful engagement. The simple message is this: start understanding nuclear energy now so that we will not be confused or befuddled when we face threats to our safety and lives later.

Remaining Vigilant: Terrorism Post Osama IV

Lim Yu Hui

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On 2 May 2011, Barack Obama authorized a Navy SEALs operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden. Like other world leaders, Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore, expressed relief at the demise of one of America's most wanted terrorists. However, he was quick to caution against letting the guard down, opining that the threat of terrorism was still very much alive in Singapore and the region.

Indeed, in 2001, Singapore was the target of Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), a terrorist group motivated by the desire to create a Daulah Islamiyah (Islamic state) in the Southeast Asian region by resorting to violence and acts of sabotage and subterfuge. JI had intended to bomb a shuttle bus ferrying American military personnel and their families, American military vessels, embassies, high commissions, and commercial offices housing American companies. As evidence of their commitment to a path of destruction, JI operatives had already sought to procure 17 tons of ammonium nitrate for the purposes of bomb manufacture. The plots of JI were uncovered by the Internal Security Department, whose swift actions ensured that the terrorist schemes were thwarted and all conspirators arrested under the Internal Security Act. The news that a terrorist plot has been uncovered was aggravated by the revelation by the authorities that a video tape surveying the Yishun Mass Rapid Transit train station was discovered in the Afghan home of Mohamed Atef, a close aide of Osama bin Laden. Investigations subsequently revealed that Singaporean JI members had been making visits to al Qaeda in Afghanistan to receive instruction on using weapons and explosives and to witness the success of the jihadist movement in Afghanistan. The primary question for Singapore after Osama's demise is whether Osama's death will fundamentally alter the manner in which terrorist cells operate in Singapore or even bring about its demise. Given the strong association that Jemaah Islamiyah shares with al Qaeda, it is reasonable to argue that if Osama's death were to adversely affect al Qaeda in terms of a loss in leadership, it would also affect JI's activities. Colonel John Maraia of the US Army opines that "[Osama] had evolved from an operational leader into a symbolic one", and that Al-Qaeda operates without his "day to day input." This point is crucial - if the Colonel is right, al Qaeda remains a potent force, even as it is temporarily weakened by the loss of an important figurehead. Further-

-more, consistent with Colonel John Maraia's analysis, Osama's death will be quickly seized upon by the al Qaeda and its associates to spur retaliatory action: Osama's demise will be characterized as martyrdom and his symbolic status cemented. The crucial point to note is that other leaders of al Qaeda (for example Mohamed Atef) possess decision making powers to direct operations and it may be argued that unless this layer of leadership is obliterated, al Qaeda remains operational. In June, al Qaeda confirmed that Ayman al-Zawahiri would succeed Osama. This suggests that, facially, leadership renewal within al Qaeda is taking place and 'normal service' can be presumed to resume soon.

As argued above, whether the JI remains operational in Singapore will largely depend on whether al Qaeda is left in a state of disarray following Osama's death.

"Given the strong association that Jemaah Islamiyah shares with al Qaeda, it is reasonable to argue that if Osama's death were to adversely affect al Qaeda in terms of a loss in leadership, it would also affect JI's activities."

The analysis suggests that al Qaeda remains viable and hence its association with JI continues. It must be noted that al Qaeda's association with JI goes beyond the symbolic. JI members have admitted to briefing the al Qaeda leadership on their plans; al Qaeda's leaders had shown interest in directly leading operations in Singapore, and their own operatives were sent on reconnaissance missions in Singapore for this purpose. Furthermore, JI members are sent to Afghanistan so that they may be exposed to jihadist movements and to receive training from al Qaeda. Al Qaeda's role therefore is not peripheral; on the contrary, its role in building the capacity of JI is crucial.

Singapore must maintain its vigilance and a high level of readiness to respond to any potential terrorist incident. The demise of Osama may prove to be a psychological blow to al Qaeda and its associates but it may also provide the necessary fodder to fan ideological flames and stoke anti-American sentiments. Singapore must continue to monitor activity within and without its borders and cannot assume that the terrorist threat has lowered due to Osama's death. Singapore most certainly should not assume that JI has lost its backer. On the contrary, it must prepare for the chance, however minuscule, that retaliatory action is now being planned and targets are being identified. The words of PM Lee are instructive, "we must not take our eyes off, because if we do, then something untoward could easily happen to us."

Indonesia: Travails of Migrant Workers

Prof. Baladas Ghosal

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The surprise execution of an Indonesian maid, Ruyati binti Sapubi, without the knowledge of the Indonesian government reflects the abominable state of migrant workers resulting from poverty in South and Southeast Asia. The inability of government to provide basic amenities to the people forces them to leave from their own country for an unknown and uncertain future. The Ruyati incident highlights the problem of what is often dismissed as a private matter: the use and abuse of foreign domestic workers. Several countries across the Middle East and Asia host millions of migrant domestic workers, ranging from 196,000 in Singapore to approximately 1.5 million in Saudi Arabia whose conditions in most cases are miserable.

As a reaction to this incident Indonesia has now decided to stop its citizens from working as domestic helps in Saudi Arabia. But barring Indonesian women from working in Malaysia or Saudi Arabia is no solution to the problem of abuse. Rather, as in the case of Indonesia and Malaysia, the reduction in the number of Indonesian migrants might open the market to women from poorer countries like Cambodia. It has come as a great embarrassment to President Yudhoyono, particularly after his return from Geneva where he boasted of his success in cooperating with other countries to protect Indonesian migrant workers at the International Labour Conference meeting. Human rights activists and experts have called Yudhoyono's speech shameful and worthless. The government is now trying to save its face by shifting attention to another woman's case convicted in 2009 of the murder of her Yemeni employer. Saudi Arabia is one of the worst places for foreign domestic workers.

In 2008, a Human Rights Watch report documented widespread routine abuse of Asian maids in Saudi households, where women were subjected to wretched working conditions, as well as emotional, sexual and physical abuse. The suffering is worse, as maids are housebound and far from home, it becomes difficult if not impossible to get any help. Even if they seek any help, the system and medieval laws in Saudi Arabia are pitted against them. Employers have huge control over them and the workers have few rights. Most have their passports taken away. For years, Indonesia has been sending its citizens to work in Saudi Arabia and migrant workers there have been

violence. In the past 20 years, a total of 303 migrant workers from Indonesia have been sentenced to death in Saudi Arabia. Indonesians were outraged in April 2011 when a Saudi court reversed the conviction of a Saudi woman who had been jailed for three years for allegedly torturing her Indonesian maid with scissors and a hot iron. While the government tried to pay attention to such complaints earlier and took initiatives to deal with the host countries and even stopped sending these workers to the accused countries, the pressures of unemployment have forced it to reconcile with the situation. Traditionally, the Philippines has been a stronger advocate of its workers' rights than the other "sender" countries, but the protest by the Indonesian president this time was unusually high-level - especially as it was voiced during the Eid celebrations.

Other countries like Malaysia and Singapore also do not treat their migrant workers well. There is an ongoing dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia over the treatment of domestic maids. After several high-profile acts of violence against domestic workers, Indonesia has been forced to stop women from seeking work as maids in Malaysia for two years. It is only after the two countries signed a deal aimed at improving working conditions for maids, guaranteeing them one day off a week, that Indonesia has allowed its women to seek employment as domestic workers in Malaysia. They will be allowed to keep their passports rather than having to give them to their employers.

Diplomatic pressure can pave the way for an understanding on these issues amongst the Southeast Asian countries. To this end, International Labor Organization (ILO) has recently passed the first-ever convention on the rights of domestic workers, affirming a minimum wage, a weekly day off and a limit to their working hours obliging governments to protect them from violence. However, in order for the convention to be binding all countries must adopt it but not all will. Such initiatives will succeed only when 'household work' is valued and the female workers are treated with dignity. Until then foreign domestic workers will continue to suffer.

“Given Diplomatic pressure can pave the way for an understanding on these issues amongst the Southeast Asian countries. However, in order for the convention to be binding all countries must adopt it but not all will.”

Northeast as an Engine of Growth

IPCS Task Force

To explore alternative strategies towards developing India's Northeast and facilitating linkages with Southeast Asia, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies has formed a working Group consisting of diplomats who have served in Southeast Asian countries, retired military and bureaucratic personnel, and members of the academic and strategic community in Delhi and the Northeast to exchange ideas on issues relating to cultural and infrastructural connectivity, trade, and regional geopolitics.

The objectives of this project are:

- To understand local perspectives on exploring and expanding Northeast's linkages vis-à-vis India's neighbourhood.
- To collect information and alternative ideas on the growth of India's Northeast and the Look East policy as a coordinated effort.
- The task force visited Northeast in July 2011 and interacted with the Chief Secretary of Assam and the strategic community, media, business community of Northeastern states.
- A Policy Document on alternative approaches based on this interactions is in process which will be submitted to DONER, the Ministry of the development of the Northeast region and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

This project is supported by the SAEA Group, Singapore.



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