

SNIPPETS OF SOUTHEAST ASIA

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER BY CENTER FOR SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES (CSEAS)

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DECEMBER GALLERY



Picture Courtesy: Channel NewsAsia



Picture Courtesy: ASEAN Briefing

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CSEAS

Greetings...

In this edition, we are happy to present you an interview with Dr. Eugénie Mériéau, a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Asian Legal Studies, National University of Singapore on 'The Role of Monarchy in Thai Politics'. 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.

I hope you enjoy reading the snippets.

Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Dr. Nehginpao Kipgen

The Role of Monarchy in Thai Politics

In 2020, Thailand experienced immense protest against the monarchy and the government. In this issue, we had Shivangi Dikshit, Research Assistant at CSEAS, interviewed Dr. Eugénie Mérieau, a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Asian Legal Studies, National University of Singapore on 'The Role of Monarchy in Thai Politics'.



Picture Courtesy: Dr. E Mérieau

In 1932, Thailand moved from absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy. In recent times, the monarchy has been accused of endorsing military coups in the country. Has the power of the institution become a threat to democracy?

This phenomenon is not recent. The 1932 revolution itself, which can be considered to be the first modern Siamese 'coup', was endorsed by then King Prajadhipok Rama VII who granted an amnesty to the People's Party. Following Rama VII's abdication in 1935 and Rama VIII's death, King Rama IX, who reigned from 1946 to 2016, has always endorsed coups, except in rare occasions, such as in 1981 when the coup attempt targeted his 'protégé', General Prem Tinsulanonda. The same year, Spain's King Juan Carlos also opposed a military coup. In both cases, the coup attempts failed. This tends to demonstrate how crucial royal support is to the success of military coups. The question in the case of Thailand relates to the extent of royal endorsement: is the endorsement only a posteriori (as the recognition of a 'fait accompli'), or also a priori? Is there some form of 'convention' according to which coups are valid whenever the coup-makers manage to secure the king's endorsement a priori, establishing the monarchy's responsibility for Thailand's 'coup culture' and by the same token, authoritarianism? I offer a nuanced answer to that question in my forthcoming book, *Constitutional Bricolage, Thailand's Sacred Monarchy vs. the Rule of Law* (Hart, 2021).

Section 112 of the Thai Criminal Code criminalizes Lèse majesté. Those accused of defaming, insulting or threatening the king, the queen, the heir-apparent, or the regent face imprisonment from three to fifteen years. Why is the Thai government so intolerant about criticisms of the monarchy?

The lèse-majesté law preserves the sacredness of the monarchy. I have argued elsewhere that defaming the king is perceived as blasphemy - lèse-majesté is a kind of blasphemy law. The entire national ideology of the kingdom rests on the glorification of the king. In turn, the repressive state apparatus or 'deep state' (the palace, the army, the police, the courts) relies on the law to enforce such ideology, thereby preserving its status and privilege in Thai society ... Lèse-majesté is a lock that maintains the status quo. In the late 19th - early 20th century Siam, it was first and foremost a tool used by the monarchy to maintain the sanctity of the institution against the wave of secularism and republicanism stemming from its encounter with the West. Its use then shifted to the protection of the monarchy against Marxism and communism in the 1960s, against the Red-shirts in the 2010s and today it is used against the students who have been protesting since the dissolution of the Future Forward Party in February 2020.

During the 1973 uprising, the monarchy emerged as a mediator between student protestors and the Thanom Kittikachorn government, whereas the current monarch, Maha Vajiralongkorn (Rama X), does not seem to make such efforts. What does it signal about his attitude toward the political upheaval Thailand is going through at the moment?

Indeed, Bhumibol supported the students in 1973, ordering to open the gates of the Chitralada Palace to shelter them as they escaped the police; from then on, he established himself as a 'pro-democracy' monarch. However, the king's attitude toward democracy proved to be highly contingent. In the events of 1976, which saw the massacre of dozens of 'Marxist students' at Thammasat University, his role was ambiguous. Moreover, following the 1976 coup, he appointed by royal command Thanin Kraivichien, an ultranationalist and ultraroyalist judge, as prime minister (whose extremist views were even too extreme for the military which quickly replaced him). Rama IX regained his status of a pro-democracy monarch during the events of Black May 1992, in which his intervention stopped the violence and led to the resignation of the military government. However, in the 2010 crackdown on the red-shirt protests in the heart of Bangkok, he kept silent, failing to stop the repression that left 90 dead and 2,000 injured. His son, Vajiralongkorn, seems to follow the same path, that of a balancing equilibrium between liberalism and neoabsolutism. As an example, he requested a moratorium on *lèse-majesté* sometime after ascending the throne; but once students started to criticize him too much, the moratorium was lifted and many of them are now targeted by the law.

The current constitution of Thailand underwent reforms following demands from Rama X, which has given more power to the king since 1932. Does this mean that the monarchy wants to put its interests before its citizens?

The most royalist constitutions ever were the 1947 and 1949 constitutions - they entrusted the king with the powers to appoint the senate. Another royalist constitution was the 1974 constitution, whose drafting process had been entirely supervised by the king, from the appointment of the first assembly to the last edits on the draft. In its first version, the constitution entrusted the president of the Privy Council, appointed at the discretion of the king, the authority to countersign the Royal Act of appointment of senators - bypassing the parliament and the government altogether. Back then, King Rama IX, like Rama X today, asked for constitutional revisions after the text had already been adopted. Therefore, the actions of Vajiralongkorn do not represent a break with past practices at all. In 2017, Vajiralongkorn requested the constitution to be amended so as to remove the need for a regent whenever he went abroad. As such, this does not increase the king's power, but merely removes a possible check on his power, or prevents the rise of a possible competitor. The transfer of royal assets under the king's control or the acquisition of the power to appoint the supreme Buddhist patriarch is not unprecedented and merely seems to replicate, albeit in a less subtle manner, the power grabs of Bhumibol when he himself ascended the throne in 1946 after many years of regency that had considerably reduced the power, prestige and wealth of the throne.

Is it a mistake to believe that the Thai people want to do away with the monarchy altogether, or do they want the monarchy to stay away from politics?

The young people who express themselves in the current protest seem to be ready to have either a ceremonial monarch, or no monarch at all, as shown in the Twitter thread under the hashtag #Why do we need a King. When student protest leader Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul was arrested, she said in substance that if the students' ten demands, which include the reform of the monarchy, were not met soon, they will eventually come down to only one - understood to mean the abolition of the monarchy.

This is the same language of an ultimatum as the one used in 1932 by the People’s Party when they imposed the first-ever constitution on King Prajadhipok; either Prajadhipok accepted to reign as a constitutional monarch, or they would turn the country into a republic. Back then, Prajadhipok did accept, at first at least. His refusal to become a purely ceremonial monarch caused a major conflict with the People’s Party, which eventually led to the king’s abdication three years later. Today, as part of the Thai society remains very attached to the institution of the monarchy (for some, there is great pride in having an interventionist monarch), a compromise solution would probably be to establish a ceremonial monarchy, but this might be difficult to achieve under the present king - even though, for the anecdote, Vajiralongkorn recently declared to a CNN journalist that ‘Thailand is the land of compromise’.

Seeing the current situation in Thailand, where does the future of the monarchy lie? What can we expect Rama X to do to maintain and or retain his position? The Thai people highly revered King Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), whereas Rama X has failed to gain that popularity, and instead, he is criticized by his own people. What actions of Rama IX made his stature rise and made him different from his predecessor?

Rama IX built his charisma with the help of a military dictator, Sarit Thanarat, who seized power in a coup in 1957. The same model is followed by Rama X today, Prayuth Chan-ocha being the new Sarit. Like his father in the 1960s, Rama X is also engaging in a campaign to win the hearts of Thai people, organizing gatherings and meet-ups; the difference being that today the images and sound clips of such meet-ups are captured on iPhones and leaked on Facebook and Twitter. In short, Rama X is replicating his father’s formula. Therefore, we might expect him to build an image for himself and try to connect with the people, something he has already started to do, while favoring a military government for as long as possible. The test of his reign will come with the election of a highly popular civilian prime minister who is able to command a majority in parliament, as Thaksin Shinawatra did in 2001 under the reign of Bhumibol.



Picture Courtesy: Foreign Policy

ASEAN and EU Elevate Their Relations to Strategic Partnership

-Shivangi Dikshit



Picture Courtesy: Bangkok Post

On December 1, 2020, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) elevated their relations to strategic partnership. The virtual meeting was co-chaired by Vivian Balakrishnan, foreign minister of Singapore and Josep Borrell, EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy. The foreign ministers of ASEAN nations, officials from 27 EU nations, and 22 ministerial-level members from the EU attended the meeting.

Elevating the relations with ASEAN was a primary goal of Germany's presidency of the Council of EU. This agreement was also an important element of the policy guideline on the Indo-Pacific region adopted by the Federal Government of Germany. The up-gradation of EU and ASEAN relations is a signal of their support for multilateralism and commitment to free-trade agreements (FTA), rules-based order, and climate protection. EU concluded FTA with Singapore and Vietnam in 2019 and 2020, respectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic was one of the agendas of the meeting. Both parties decided to work together to permit everyone to have access to any effective and affordable vaccine as 'global public goods.' EU has already provided aid to ASEAN to tackle the impact of the pandemic. There was even a discussion on promoting connectivity between the two regions. They also agreed to establish a working group to address "the challenge towards reaching Sustainable Development Goals in the vegetable oil sector."

The promotion of EU and ASEAN relations is a historic step taken by the two blocs with similar goals but a different way of working. Palm oil that is majorly produced by Indonesia and Malaysia has created disputes between EU and ASEAN in the past but now they seem to resolve these issues. The current developments are a positive sign which suggests that both parties recognize each other as significant trading partners and desire to resolve disputes that hinder their relations. EU and ASEAN now commit to providing economic and security ties to one another. This will encourage and provide a larger number of partners to Southeast Asia as the latter struggles to manage the rivalry between the United States and China. The large population of Southeast Asia will give EU the passage to a large market and expand its trade in the region. Eventually, being partners with the EU can allow Southeast Asia to reduce its dependence on certain major powers and create the much-needed balance of power in the region.

Singapore Ready for Phase 3

-Harsh Mahaseth

On April 7, 2020, Singapore government implemented the circuit breaker measures (a partial lockdown) as a preventive measure to the COVID-19 pandemic. This period lasted for one month, three weeks and four days from April 7, 2020 to June 7, 2020. Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong initially announced that the circuit breaker would last from April 7 to May 4. However, as the result of an increasing number of cases, the government extended the circuit breaker period by almost a month. The restrictions were further tightened, and the businesses allowed to open were trimmed down. On May 19, 2020, the government announced that the country would exit from the circuit breaker on June 1, 2020 and progressively lift in three phases.

On December 14, 2020, Loong announced the beginning of phase 3 from December 28, 2020. He stated that, "The year will end with good news." He further mentioned "Please understand even if we enter phase 3, the battle is far from won. COVID-19 virus has not been eradicated."

To enter phase 3, the government had to ensure the country fulfilled three criteria:

- *Enough people were adhering to health protocol measures;*
- *The government was able to conduct sufficient PCR testing for early detection and public health action. The country is now able to conduct over 50,000 tests per day and has one of the world's highest testing rates per million people; and*
- *High adoption of the TraceTogether Program for effective contact tracing. Around 65 percent of Singapore's population have downloaded the TT mobile application with the aim of increasing this to 70 percent by the end of 2020."*

The TraceTogether Program will become mandatory for anyone over the age of seven, and the system is being trailed at several sectors where there is a likelihood of close contact of citizens.

Under phase 3, it has been mentioned that the capacity restriction of premises such as social gathering will increase.

India-Vietnam Hold a Virtual Conference in a Move to Counter China's Expansionism in the Region

- Dishant Choudhary



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Vietnamese counterpart Nguyen Xuan Phuc agreed on a slew of measures in a summit held between the two strategic partners on December 21, 2020. The two leaders concurred on an open and rules-based policy for the Indo-Pacific region, in an effort to promote peace and security amidst China's growing dominance.

The summit was a result of an ongoing high-level talk between the two sides that involved discussions on the COVID-19 pandemic, military exchanges, training, and capacity building program. They also took up the matter of the ongoing conflict in the South China Sea (SCS) region and emphasized on the implementation of rules in accordance with the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

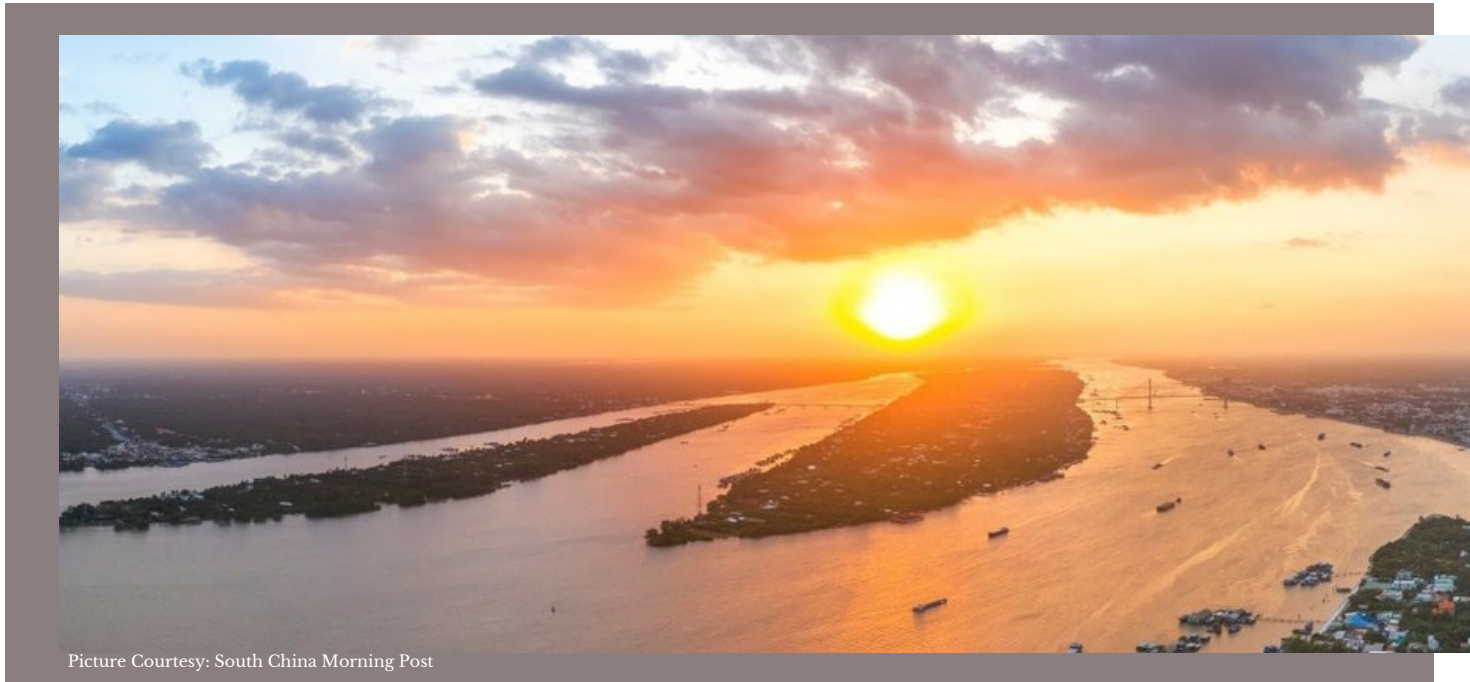
The summit highlights the growing mutual resentment against China's aggression in the SCS and other nations in the region as a whole. This is at the backdrop of the increasing tensions between China and other Asian nation-states. While India has been embroiled in a military stand-off along their disputed border with China since May 2020, Vietnam has had to deal with China's oppression in the SCS targeting Vietnamese fishing boats and conducting naval exercises in the disputed areas violating international norms and Vietnam's sovereignty.

The summit will, on one hand, strengthen the existing strategic partnership between the two nations and, on the other hand, will boost confidence amongst other ASEAN members to voice their concerns against China's assertiveness.

Picture Courtesy: South China Morning Post

The United States Launches the Mekong Dam Monitor

- Sanjana Dhar



Picture Courtesy: South China Morning Post

The United States launched the Mekong Dam Monitor on December 15, 2020. This initiative is a collaboration between the Stimson Center and Eyes on Earth, and will provide information about the climate conditions, river flows and reservoir conditions in the Mekong region of Southeast Asia, by using “open-source remote sensing, satellite imagery, and Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis.” The Mekong region is one of the most densely populated regions in the world, with 60 million people living and depending on the river for their livelihoods. Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam lie in the flow of the Mekong river. Chinese dam projects have severely affected the countries in the lower basin of the river causing downstream droughts, adding another layer of concern, threat and negative impact on Southeast Asian countries by China.

In this regard, the United States considers the threat to the Mekong region as existential as those in the SCS. The threat of China felt in the SCS can similarly be felt in mainland Southeast Asia in the Mekong region. Therefore, the Mekong Dam Monitor aims to provide weekly updates “on the levels of reservoirs at 13 Chinese dams along the Mekong’s main stretch, as well as at 15 tributary dams. It will also circulate weekly visualisations and analysis of China’s 11-dam cascade on the upper Mekong, as well as maps and data on temperature, snow cover, precipitation and other indicators along the river’s full course.” The initiative will provide the much-needed information and data to the Mekong countries in order for them to make informed choices and prepare themselves accordingly.

With this initiative, there are concerns of an increase in great-power rivalry between China and the United States, while Southeast Asian countries are at the center of the competition. Politicizing the matter would harm the Mekong countries as the main purpose of the initiative would get lost in attempts by the great powers to get an upper hand over the other. Even though China has not reacted much to the launch of the dam monitor, and has only stated that, “China and other Mekong countries had in recent years overcome external “noise and interference” to boost cooperation on water resources,” and Beijing has also taken advice on water resources but “resolutely opposes malicious provocation,” the move by the United States is conspicuous and alludes to a larger rivalry in place with China in the region. The initiative will, no doubt, positively impact the Mekong countries in terms of transparency and access to information, but future developments in the great-power rivalry might shift the tide for these Southeast Asian countries.

ICC Will Probe into Duterte's War on Drugs

- Vikas Nagpal



Picture Courtesy: South China Morning Post

On December 15, 2020, the International Criminal Court (ICC) chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said that it had the “reasonable basis to believe” that Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte’s “war on drugs” in which thousands of people have perished, is responsible for crimes against humanity. Bensouda will decide by next year whether to open an investigation into the alleged crime against humanity committed by the Duterte administration. It can potentially lead to the trial and conviction of President Duterte and other senior officials.

In February 2018, the ICC had started a preliminary investigation into the alleged mass murder and crime against humanity committed by Filipino officials during the so-called “war on drugs.” In response, the Duterte administration threatened to arrest Fatou Bensouda, if she visits the Philippines and withdrew the country from ICC.

The ICC was established in 2002 to prosecute heads of states and other senior officials for crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and crime of aggression. But the court’s decision to investigate war crimes committed by the US troops in Afghanistan and Israeli war crimes in Gaza puts it into the crosshairs of the Trump administration. The Trump administration had threatened to put sanctions on ICC officials if it decides to investigate the US troops for possible war crimes in Afghanistan. Also, the Trump administration maintains that the ICC has no jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute the US troops’ actions in Afghanistan because the US is not a member of ICC. In the US and Israeli cases, international law experts argue that the court has jurisdiction to hear both the cases because Afghanistan and Palestine are members of the ICC. Whereas in the Philippines case, its withdrawal will have no effect because the court is already in its final stage of “determining admissibility.”

The only way through which the Duterte administration can avoid the ICC investigations is by convincing the ICC prosecutors that Manila will conduct “free, fair and impartial” investigations of crimes committed during the “war on drugs.” Recently, the Philippines justice department announced the formation of a task force to investigate the narcotics war indicating that the Duterte administration is taking actions to “stave off an ICC investigation.”

Snubbing of Chinese Vaccines by Cambodia?

- Sanjana Dhar

Cambodia has been relatively successful at managing the COVID-19 pandemic, and the government is now gearing up to get vaccines for its citizens. In this regard, Prime Minister Hun Sen addressed the nation and stated that the country would only be using vaccines which are approved by the World Health Organization (WHO). This has led to speculations over Cambodia snubbing China and Chinese made vaccines such as Sinovac. There are various opinions which have emerged analyzing Hun Sen's speech.

Some opinions point to the fact that the Cambodian prime minister meant exactly what he said and made it very clear that only WHO-approved vaccines would be used in the country and nothing else, indicating that Chinese vaccines are not necessarily off the table, if approved by the WHO.

This can also be explained by the fact that due to the successful containment of the virus by the government, allowing any virus might be counter-productive to the manner in which the country has managed the pandemic. Therefore, agreeing to use vaccines approved only by the international health organization also shows a step toward securing the country's interests, in terms of containment.

There are some viewpoints which also suggest that this is a direct indication that Phnom Penh has repudiated China, its main foreign partner. Such an act is being seen as an attempt by Cambodia to warm up to the West and also a restructuring of diplomatic ties, by signalling that Cambodia is not a complete China flatterer. As relations with the US turning sour in the past few weeks due to the demolition of a US-built facility at a naval base in Cambodia, the lack of mention or association with a Chinese vaccine in Hun Sen's speech is being viewed largely as a conscious attempt by Cambodia to disassociate with, and not be seen as a country dependent on China.

However, it must be noted that Cambodia is one of the major proponents of China and its Belt and Road Initiative projects. From an economic aspect, Cambodia and China are tied to each other strongly, and as long as Cambodia receives money from Beijing for development, a snub at the Chinese vaccine does not seem to affect much of the narrative. Moreover, if any of the China-developed vaccines get approved by WHO, then this would also lay to rest the argument that the Cambodian government does not want to use Chinese vaccines for its citizens.



Picture Courtesy: Ya Libnan

Myanmar's Tax Relief Measures

- Harsh Mahaseth

The government of Myanmar has issued tax relief measures for businesses in the form of tax credits due to the economic losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, under notification 65/2020. The measures come in the form of tax credits and also deductible tax expenses for the current financial year.

The country's economy is suffering from the pandemic, and growth is expected to remain subdued at two percent for 2020, down from 6.8 percent in the previous year. Furthermore, the poverty rate could increase to 27 percent in 2021, a rise from 22.4 percent at the beginning of this year (2020). The tax relief is part of the government's COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan, which comprises seven goals and ten strategies covering a range of social and fiscal measures. These include providing low-interest loans worth over US\$73 millions to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises in the hotel and tourism sector, in addition to deferment of corporate income tax (CIT), and social security contributions.

Some of the tax reliefs are as follow:

- Business income tax: The ministry of planning, finance and industry had also announced assistance to small and medium-sized enterprises, hotels and tourism and cut-make-pack companies.
- Export taxes: The government had announced that the advance income tax would be waived until the end of the fiscal year.
- Tax credit: The government also announced a 10 percent non-refundable tax credit with regard to incremental wage bills and 10 percent non-refundable tax credit for incremental investment in capital goods.

What are the tax relief measures?

The government has allowed taxpayers to claim 10 percent of incremental salaries as a tax credit for CIT purposes. The tax credit will not be refundable, and so any excess in CIT payments after deducting the 10 percent tax credit will not be allowed as a refund. Taxpayers can claim 125 percent of incremental wages (incurred during fiscal year 2019-2020) as deductible tax expenses for the current fiscal year. This special deduction is available to all corporate taxpayers regardless of whether they are in a profit or loss position.

Trump Administration labeled Vietnam as “Currency Manipulator”

- Vikas Nagpal

On December 16, 2020, the US Treasury Department labeled Vietnam a currency manipulator, for improperly intervening in foreign exchange markets to gain an advantage in the international export market. In its report to Congress, the treasury department said that Vietnam “conducted large-scale and protracted intervention, much more than in previous periods, to prevent appreciation of the dong.” While the treasury department had scrutinized the exchange rate of other major trading partners of the US, only Switzerland and Vietnam were found exceeding the criteria made to measure the unfair currency practices.

In 2019, the Trump administration had labeled China as “currency manipulator” during the height of the US-China trade war. The “currency manipulator” designation requires the designated country to enter into negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and the US government to fix the situation. The Vietnamese government had called the accusations unfair and hoped for “fair and harmonious” resolution of the dispute with the US authorities, but the designation risks undermining the strategic convergence between the US and Vietnam.

In recent years, the US-Vietnam bilateral ties have taken center stage in the Indo-Pacific region. The shared animosity toward China has brought the two countries together. The cold war era bitter rivals have joined hands to foil the hegemonic designs of China in Asia. However, the Trump administration’s obsession with bilateral trade deficits risks undermining the strategic and economic partnership between the US and Vietnam. The protracted negotiations between the US and Vietnam threatens to create frictions and will undermine the strategic convergence between Washington and Hanoi.

Most importantly, Vietnam’s widening trade surplus with the US is the unintended consequence of the Trump administration’s trade war with China. The trade war had forced many multinational companies to move their production chains out of China. Many of these multinationals have shifted their factories to Vietnam, to avoid tariffs on their exports to the US. The incoming Biden administration may remove the label of “currency manipulator” and restore its partnership with Vietnam.



Picture Courtesy: Financial Times

India-CLMV Business Conclave: Building Bridges for Constructive Development

- Shivangi Dikshit



Picture Courtesy: Jagran Josh

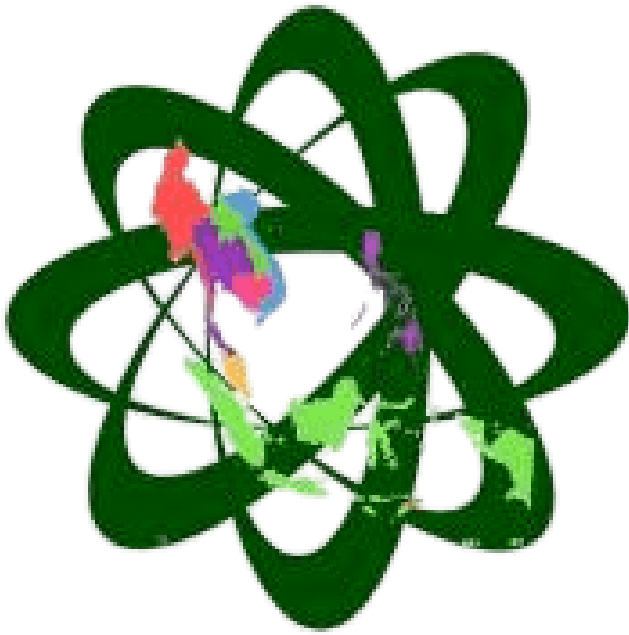
The confederation of Indian industry, in collaboration with the union ministry of commerce and industry, concluded a virtual business conclave with Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV countries). The conclave was a two-day event from December 3-4, 2020. This 6th India CLMV Business Conclave aimed at providing another platform to enhance collaboration with the CLMV countries. This business conclave focused on creating business opportunities for enterprises from various sectors like agriculture, power and clean energy, light industry, infrastructure, health and pharmaceutical, information technology, skills and education for all the participant countries.

CLMV countries are some of the key growth points in ASEAN. Therefore, they have attracted preferential and FTA from major world economies. They are also being considered valuable manufacturing units. There were sectoral sessions and country sessions followed by a virtual exhibition for 15 days.

India emphasized that CLMV countries are a crucial part of its Indo-Pacific policy, supports ASEAN centrality, and promotes respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, rules-based order, and adherence to international laws. New Delhi even encourages peaceful resolution of disputes and discourages the use or threat to use force by any nation-state in the region. The CLMV countries got invited by India to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), and engage in ventures of Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

Collaboration with CLMV countries is essential for India for various reasons. This sub-group within Southeast Asia includes Vietnam and Myanmar that are critical partners of India in Southeast Asia. These two countries are imperative for the success of India's Act East Policy (AEP). These countries are geographically closer to India than other Southeast Asian countries that make them central to the AEP. CLMV countries are highly dependent on China for trade, investments, and infrastructure development. Consequently, it becomes necessary for India to counter-balance this situation. For India to be able to reduce the trade asymmetry with China in CLMV countries, it needs to focus on connectivity projects and promote private sectors to invest and work in partnership with the enterprises in CLMV countries.

The CLMV countries are relatively less developed and India can undoubtedly support them in reaching their maximum potential. New Delhi should help them by providing skills-based training to their labor, and the Indian enterprises should expand their business and employ the labor market of CLMV countries. A rise in trade with CLMV countries will give India access to a bigger market for its goods and services. Such efforts will promote political stability and economic growth and development in India and in its neighborhood.



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