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The new year began with new hopes for Southeast Asia and Oceania. Development in the first two months were an indicator of how some of the countries like Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines would fare in the remaining ten months. Myanmar was expected to continue to walk the path of democratization. Myanmar President's amnesty led to the release of over 13,000 prisoners in early January. The ruling USDP Party's proposal to amend the clause in the Constitution which debars Aung San Suu Ky from contesting for the post of President is a welcome move.

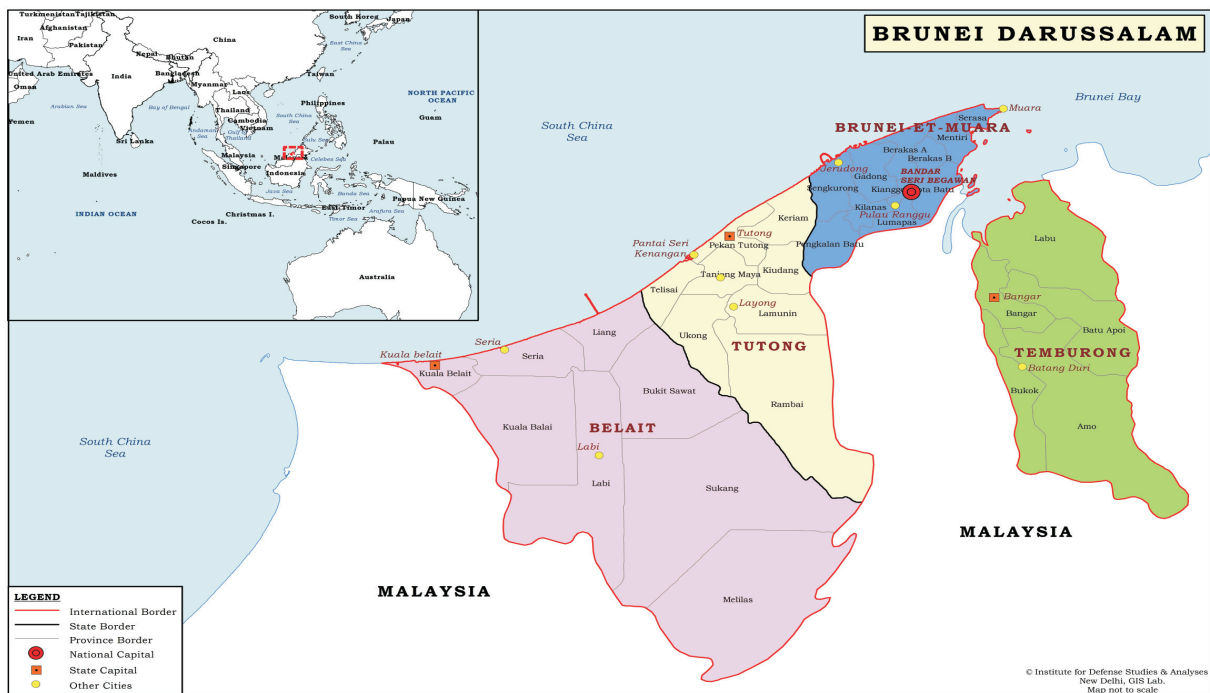
China has continued to exercise its influence over its Southeast Asian neighbourhood. When the Cambodian Deputy Premier Hor Namhong visited Beijing recently China reaffirmed friendly ties with Cambodia. China also strengthened its economic ties with Brunei when its Petrochemical giant Hengyi Industries signed an agreement to set up an integrated refinery and petrochemical project in Brunei. China-Vietnam conflict in the South China Sea continued even as Vietnam protested against China 'violating' its sovereignty.

Nuclear energy continued to hold an attraction for Southeast Asian States. Cambodia told the visiting DG of IAEA of the country's interest in nuclear technology for development- in agriculture, health etc. Vietnam attracted nuclear experts from across the world at the Nuclear Power Asia 2014 in Hanoi in January to discuss post-Fukushima challenges.

Thailand went to the polls (despite boycott) on February 2. It's military continued reiterating that it was not waiting to stage yet another coup. In Philippines the military was engaged in modernizing it self (particularly its intelligence wing) and planned to recruit 20,000 new troops over the next three years. The Filipino government did this while simultaneously working to sign an agreement with the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF).

**Udai Bhanu Singh**

## BRUNEI DARUSSALAM



*Source:* IDSA

**Capital:** Bandar Seri Begawan

### Land and Geography:

Brunei Darussalam, located between Malaysia and South China Sea, occupies a land area of 5,765 sq. km (2,226 sq. miles).<sup>1,2</sup> It is located at the northwest end of Borneo Island. Brunei shares a common border with Sarawak, Malaysia and this common border divides the country into four districts. The eastern part is called Temburong district and

the western part consists of Brunei Muara, Tutong and Belait districts. Bandar Seri Begawan is situated in Brunei Muara district.<sup>3</sup>

### Population:

In 2012, the population of the country is estimated at 412,200.<sup>4</sup> The sex ratio (males per 100 females) stood at 101.9 in 2012.<sup>5</sup> Brunei Muara, which has the capital of the country, is the most densely populated district of the country.

- <sup>1</sup> Princeton University, available at [http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Geography\\_of\\_Brunei.html](http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Geography_of_Brunei.html), accessed on 26 December 2013.
- <sup>2</sup> BBC News Asia-Pacific, 21 May 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12990060>, accessed on 26 December 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> Brunei Press, available at <http://www.bruneipress.com.bn/brunei/brunei.html>, accessed on 26 December 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> World Bank, available at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam>, accessed on 17 April 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> UN Data, available at <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Brunei+Darussalam>, accessed on 17 April 2014.

## Politics and Government:

Brunei was the only Malay state that chose to remain as a British dependency and did not join Malay Federation in 1963. The present Sultan of Brunei, His Majesty, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah came to power in October 1967, followed by his father's abdication and he was crowned in 1968. The Sultan is the supreme executive authority of the country and also serves as the Prime Minister, Finance Minister and Defence Minister. However, there are councils to advise him on matters relating to religion, privy, cabinet, succession and legislature. In 1991, the Sultanate announced a conservative Malay Muslim Monarchy ideology through which the Sultan was declared as the defender of faith in the country. In a slightly moderate step towards giving the citizens some political rights, the Sultan re-opened the parliament in 2004 after a suspension of 20 years. A new legislature or Legislative Council, with five indirectly elected members, was convened in 2005 and since then, it has met few times.<sup>6</sup> The Sultanate has announced a plan to form a new legislative council with 45 members, 15 of whom would be elected by vote. However, this plan still exists on paper only.<sup>7</sup>

## Religion and Ethnic Composition:

Approximately 67% of the population professes Islam, 13% Buddhism, 10% Christianity and another 10% practices indigenous religion or other faiths. The constitution of Brunei accepts Islam as the state religion; however, it also accepts existence of other religious communities for peace and harmony in the society. In practice, it is widely acknowledged that other religious communities do not get same rights and privileges as given to the Muslims. Apart from Malays, ethnic Chinese are one of the major ethnic communities in Brunei, constituting approximately 16% of the total population.<sup>8</sup>

## Economy:

Brunei is a small but high-income economy. Hydrocarbon resources, particularly, crude oil and natural gas production contribute more than 50% to the GDP and together they comprise 90% of the country's total exports.<sup>9</sup> Brunei's economy grew by 2.7% in 2012, primarily driven by commodity exports and the capitals' airport expansion.<sup>10</sup> It has to import 80% of its food requirements. "Some quick and interesting facts about Brunei are as follows;

- The Human Development Report 2009 has identified Brunei as having the highest

<sup>6</sup> Economic Intelligence Unit, Country Report, Brunei, Fourth Quarter 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Economic Intelligence Unit, Country Report, Brunei, Fourth Quarter 2013.

<sup>8</sup> US Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report 2005, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51505.htm>, accessed on 26 December 2013.

<sup>9</sup> The Brunei Economic Development Board, The Prime Minister's Office, available at [http://www.bedb.com.bn/why\\_ecooverview.html](http://www.bedb.com.bn/why_ecooverview.html), accessed on 27 December 2013.

<sup>10</sup> Defence Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific, 2013, available at [http://www.defence.gov.au/dio/documents/DET\\_13.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/dio/documents/DET_13.pdf), accessed on 27 December 2013.

<sup>11</sup> The Brunei Economic Development Board, The Prime Minister's Office, available at [http://www.bedb.com.bn/why\\_ecooverview.html](http://www.bedb.com.bn/why_ecooverview.html), accessed on 27 December 2013.

human development index in the Islamic world, the second highest quality of life in ASEAN and one of the highest literacy rate in the world (94.9%).

- Global Competitiveness Report 2009-2010 indicated Brunei as having the second highest per capita income in the ASEAN region and the third most favourable tax regime in Asia.
- According to World Trade Organisation 2008 report, Brunei is the fourth largest oil producer in ASEAN and 9<sup>th</sup> largest LNG exporter in the world.
- According to World Health Organisation, Brunei has one of the best health care systems in Asia.<sup>12</sup>

## Defence:

In 2012, Brunei's defence expenditure was estimated at USD 410 million and this represented no real time change from 2011.<sup>13</sup> Its defence expenditure represents

less than 4% of its GDP. The Royal Brunei Armed Forces is well trained and the Sultanate shares good defence relationship with Singapore and the United Kingdom. Both of these countries offer training to the Brunei forces. Under the Malaysian command, Brunei has deployed its forces to Lebanon (UNIFIL) and southern Philippines (IMT).<sup>14</sup>

## Select Economic Indicators

Gross Domestic Product (current USD): \$ 16.95 billion (2012)<sup>15</sup>

GDP (PPP): \$21.03 billion (2011 est.) (Data in 2011 USD)<sup>16</sup>

GDP Real Growth Rate: 2.2% (2011 est.)<sup>17</sup>

Inflation Rate (consumer prices): 2% (2011 est.)<sup>18</sup>

Unemployment rate: 2.7% (2010)<sup>19</sup>

School Enrolment (primary, %, gross): 95% (2012)<sup>20</sup>

CO2 Emissions (metric tons per capita): 22.9 (2010)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The Brunei Economic Development Board, The Prime Minister's Office, available at [http://www.bedb.com.bn/why\\_factsfigures.html](http://www.bedb.com.bn/why_factsfigures.html), accessed on 27 December 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Defence Economic Trends in the Asia-Pacific, May 2013, available at [http://www.defence.gov.au/dio/documents/DET\\_13.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/dio/documents/DET_13.pdf), accessed on 27 December 2013.

<sup>14</sup> The Military Balance, 2013, Asia, Chapter Six, 113:1, 245-352.

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, available at [http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp\\_fin](http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp_fin), accessed on 26 December 2013

<sup>16</sup> Michigan State University, available at <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/brunei/statistics>, accessed on 27 December 2013

<sup>17</sup> Michigan State University, available at <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/brunei/statistics>, accessed on 27 December 2013

<sup>18</sup> Michigan State University, available at <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/brunei/statistics>, accessed on 27 December 2013

<sup>19</sup> Michigan State University, available at <http://globaledge.msu.edu/countries/brunei/statistics>, accessed on 27 December 2013

<sup>20</sup> World Bank, available at [http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp\\_fin](http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp_fin), accessed on 26 December 2013.

<sup>21</sup> World Bank, available at [http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp\\_fin](http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp_fin), accessed on 26 December 2013.

Life Expectancy at Birth (years): 78 (2011)<sup>22</sup>

GNI Per Capita (atlas method, current USD): \$ 31,590 (2009)<sup>23</sup>

Data sources are indicated in the footnotes

### Foreign Relations:

Brunei's chairmanship to ASEAN ended in 2013. Besides ASEAN, Brunei maintains cordial relationships with all Islamic states. Brunei and Malaysia have agreed to demarcate their land border. However, it has disputed claims over South China Sea.

### Relations with India:

Bilateral relations between India and Brunei started in 1984. Both countries do share common platforms in forums like CHOGM, UN, NAM, ARF etc. Brunei has supported India for a permanent seat in

the United Nations Security Council. Since July 2012, Brunei is the coordinator of the India-ASEAN forum. In 2011, exports from Brunei to India amounted to around 1265.91 million Brunei dollar and exports from India to Brunei was estimated at 36.53 million B\$.<sup>24</sup> India primarily imports crude oil from Brunei and Brunei's imports from India, primarily consumer goods, are generally directed through Malaysia and Singapore. However, India has exported a sizable number of highly skilled professionals as well as semi skilled and skilled workers to Brunei.<sup>25</sup> Majority of doctors in Brunei are from India. Indian businessmen enjoy a near monopoly over textile business in Brunei. According to some governmental sources, approximately 10,000 Indians live in Brunei. Brunei was the seventh ASEAN country to implement the India-ASEAN FTA on goods in 2010. HM Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah visited India during the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, held in December 2012 in New Delhi.

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<sup>22</sup> World Bank, available at [http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp\\_fin](http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp_fin), accessed on 26 December 2013.

<sup>23</sup> World Bank, available at [http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp\\_fin](http://data.worldbank.org/country/brunei-darussalam#cp_fin), accessed on 26 December 2013.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 2013, available at [http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Brunei-India\\_bil\\_Brief\\_\\_XP\\_\\_2013-3.pdf](http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Brunei-India_bil_Brief__XP__2013-3.pdf), accessed on 27 December 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, January 2013, available at [http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Brunei-India\\_bil\\_Brief\\_\\_XP\\_\\_2013-3.pdf](http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Brunei-India_bil_Brief__XP__2013-3.pdf), accessed on 27 December 2013.

# In the name of democracy: a story of Thailand's Democracy Monument

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*April 25, 2014*

Each year, Bangkok is listed among the most-visited cities in the world. Thailand's capital, whose real name is 'Krung Thep' or the 'city of god', is known for beautiful temples, gorgeous palaces, naughty nightlife, great shopping malls, and tasty street food. Popular sites include the Grand Palace, the Temple of Emerald Buddha and Khaosan Road where thousands of young tourists check into affordable hotels everyday.



The Democracy Monument in Bangkok on a normal day

Not far from this hustle-bustle, the Democracy Monument stands tall in the middle of Ratchadamnoen Avenue. On normal days, the monument serves as a traffic circle on one of the busiest roads in Bangkok and also as a landmark in an area crammed with temples and government offices. It hardly gets any attention from tourists or passers-by, but this changes whenever democracy in Thailand is at risk and people take to the streets to protest.

The spot then becomes the center of political movements that struggle in the name of democracy, despite their different interpretations of what this contested term really means.

## Red and Yellow

From November 2013, anti-government protesters have gathered on Ratchadamnoen Avenue as one of the main protest sites, and set up a center stage at the Democracy Monument. The movement first started as a civic struggle against the 'blanket' amnesty bill seeking to pave the way for ex-Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to return to Thailand after seven years of self-exile.

Not surprisingly, the bill was sponsored by Thaksin's sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, who is also the current Prime Minister and seen as his proxy. The bill had been passed earlier by the lower house, and if also cleared by the Senate, would have given a clean slate to Thaksin, who



Anti-Yingluck government protesters gather around the Democracy Monument at night.



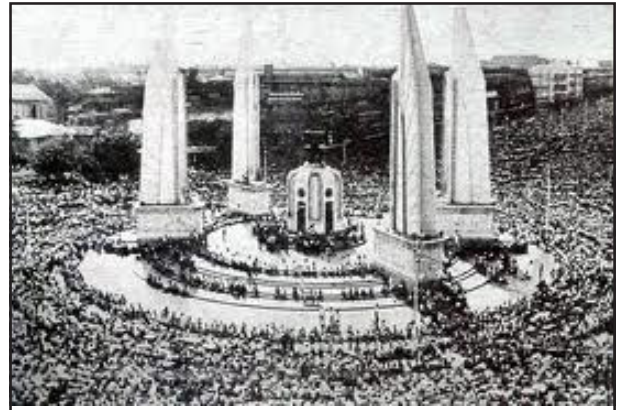
had been convicted for corruption by the Supreme Court. It would have also dropped all politically related crimes committed since 2004, two years before a military coup overthrew Thaksin from power.

Facing strong public resistance, the Yingluck government eventually backed down and the Senate rejected the bill unanimously on 11 November. But under the leadership of the Democrat Party, the rival of Yingluck's Pheu Thai Party, the demonstration was soon elevated to an anti-government movement rally to topple the elected executive. The movement continues even after Yingluck's government dissolved the parliament and scheduled the new election for 2 February 2014.



A camp has been set up nearby the Democracy Monument for the protesters to sleep over, cook and eat free food together while listening to speeches at night.

The ultimate aim of these protesters is now for Yingluck's interim government to resign and make way for the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PRDC), the leaders of this movement, to set up their own interim government of the unelected "People's Council," which seeks political reform to root out Thaksin's alleged influence and corruption in Thai



On the most memorable day of the Democracy Monument, 14 October 1973.

politics. For the PRDC, real democracy in Thailand can emerge and prosper only with these undemocratic and unconstitutional measures.

The plan is strongly opposed by Thaksin's supporters and those who disagree with the movement's strategy. With protesters forcing government offices to shut down in Bangkok and different parts of Thailand, and an election boycott that forcefully obstructs voters from casting their ballots, the major violent clashes between the pro and anti-government supporters are impending. So far, sporadic violence during demonstrations already claimed eleven lives, and there is no sign that the conflict can end in foreseeable future.

Three years ago, the Red Shirt protesters occupied the same area in a demonstration to oust Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and his Democrat Party-led government whose ascension to power came after the Constitutional Court's judgment disbanded the People's Power Party, Thaksin's second ruling party. The clash on 10 April 2010 between protesters and the military forces employed for the crackdown left 25 people dead and more than 600 injured. While the court trials for the crimes committed during this incident have not been finalized, the infamous amnesty bill would grant impunity to those responsible for the unlawful killings. The

Red Shirt's discontent with the broad-scope amnesty is one of the reasons behind the government's concession in withdrawing the bill.

## 81 years of struggle

At its inception in 1939, the Democracy Monument was designed to commemorate the Siamese Revolution of 24 June 1932, which abolished absolute monarchy and turned Thailand into a democratic country. In the opening speech by the Prime Minister, Field Marshal Plaek Pibunsongkram, the aim of this political symbol was defined as to “glorify the value of democracy and to remind Thai people to forever protect this political system”.

A coup took place within just a year of this grandiose statement, followed by another coup executed by the monument's inceptor himself. For the next nine years, Pibunsongkram put Thailand under military rule, which hardly valued democracy.

The monument became a popular symbol for the struggle for democracy in October 1973. Frustrated by a corrupted military dictatorship that had lasted for three decades and the government's failure to deal with persistent inflation, the student movement led by the National Student Center of Thailand launched a campaign demanding the government of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikajorn to replace the ruling military decree with a democratic constitution.

More than 500,000 people joined the march to the Democracy Monument on 14 October, which ended in a bloody tragedy, as the military government ordered the army to open fire causing 77 deaths and 857 injuries among the demonstrators.

Despite this, the democratic sentiment did not last long, and Thailand witnessed succession of military coups without major public protests.

The “Black May” of 1992 put the Democracy Monument back into the center of Thailand's political scene. The site was then used as a rally point against the newly appointed Prime Minister, Army General Suchinda Kraprayoon, an ex-army chief who had earlier vowed not to assume the premier post as he was not elected to the Parliament. The 200,000 protesters suffered a bloody military crackdown, which lasted for three long days, from 17 to 20 May, before Suchinda finally agreed to step down and ended the crisis.



Red Shirt movement paying tribute to the protesters killed on 10 April 2010.

These protests set a new standard for Thai democracy: the prime minister was, from then on, to be an elected member of parliament and belong to the party which commands the majority votes in the lower house. Despite the ironic fact that Suchinda was later replaced by Anand Panyarachun, who was neither an elected parliamentarian nor nominated by the winning party, military rule was now no longer acceptable to the Thai public whose democratic standard were elevated. As a consequence, for more than a decade the Army stayed formally out of politics, an unprecedented phase that was only reversed by the 2006 coup against Thaksin.

## Back to the future?

Since the last years of Thaksin's premiership, which saw his popularity declining among the middle class due to alleged misuse of power and cronyism, Thai politics has often turned into a literal street battle. Mass protests have been used as a tactic by a variety of movements that have lost trust in elections and the parliamentary system. With strong support from the grassroots, Thaksin's party has resurrected and managed to win elections despite having been disbanded twice by the Constitutional Court.



The Yellow Shirt's movement against People's Power Party converged in 2008.

On its side, the Yellow Shirts or supporters of the People's Alliances for Democracy (PAD) and other anti-Thaksin groups have been on the street on many occasions to campaign against what they call Thaksin's "puppet governments". This frustrated and conservative force has gone as far as to propose a new form of democracy in which the King would appoint the prime minister and other key positions. Many of these people participated in the 1992 Black May protest but had no qualm over the 2006 Army coup, which they saw as a necessary evil.

The PAD, which announced the end of its movement in August, together with its new avatar emerging in the recent anti-

government movement, has on many occasions been pressuring the Army to commit another coup. But having realized that the Thai public at large and the international community will hardly tolerate another military intervention, the Army has been trying to compromise and cooperate with the present government as long as the latter does not interfere in its sphere of power i.e. top-level officer promotion or penalize its past actions.

On the other hand, during the two years of Abhisit's government, the pro-Thaksin Red Shirts also used street demonstrations to voice their dissent over the judicial intervention against Thaksin and Abhisit's tenure of office, which they deemed illegitimate and undemocratic. Their massive street occupation in the main business areas, far beyond the traditional area around the Democracy Monument, led the government to opt for a bloody military crackdown causing 99 deaths.

## Monumental sacrifices

At the peak of all these political mobilizations, protestors from a variety of ideologies and backgrounds always converged around the Democracy Monument. They used its symbolic power to justify their goals and its strategic location in the heart of the city to coerce governments into change.

Many lives have been lost on Ratchdamnoen Avenue during Thailand's now 81-year old struggle to become a truly democratic country. Only time will tell how many more lives will have to be sacrificed before the Democracy Monument can carry its name with pride.

## ASEAN

### Myanmar's Activity as the Chair of ASEAN Bagan

As Myanmar assumed the Chairmanship of ASEAN, its first activity was to convene the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Retreat in Bagan on 16 January, 2014. Building of the ASEAN Community, ASEAN Vision for Post-2015 ASEAN Community were some of the issues discussed at the Retreat. ASEAN's Six-point Principles on South China Sea were reaffirmed at the Retreat as the Foreign Ministers stressed on stability, freedom of navigation and peace in the region. Myanmar's Union Minister for Foreign Affairs, U Wunna Maung Lwin chaired the Retreat. Myanmar's agenda for the 2014 ASEAN Summit is 'Moving Forward in Unity to a Peaceful and Prosperous Community'.<sup>1</sup>

### Japan's Enhancing Economic Ties with ASEAN

Japan's External Trade Organisation (JETRO) reported that around 75 percent of 3,471 Japanese Companies surveyed want an expansion of activities in ASEAN nations of Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. While this shift of attraction from China may be viewed as a consequence of rising cost and environmental degradations in

China, some argue that this is a part of PM Shinzo Abe's efforts to build more ties and strengthen partnership with Southeast Asia in order to counter-balance China with whom Japan shares a tensed relations with a spat over the disputed island of Senkaku/ Diaoyu on the East China Sea.<sup>2</sup>

### ASEAN-EU Partnership

The first meeting between the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union Committee of Permanent Representatives happened on 27 February 2014 in Brussels. The ASEAN-EU cooperation currently emphasizes on peace and security cooperation, economic and trade links, socio-cultural cooperation and institutional support to ASEAN. Ambassadors of the Member States of both ASEAN and EU noted the ongoing ASEAN-EU cooperation and exchanged views on lessons learned on successes and challenges in the respective regional integration processes.<sup>3</sup>

### Mid Term Review on IAI

Mid-Term Review on the Implementation of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan II held in Jakarta in February 2014. It was shared that existing gaps in development may deter the plans for the formation of an ASEAN Economic Community and may hinder progress in regional cooperation efforts in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural and Political-Security communities. Representatives from the Senior

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN Secretariat News, "Myanmar commences role as ASEAN Chair; hosts Foreign Ministers Meeting in Bagan", 17 January 2014, Available at [http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/myanmar-commences-role-as-asean-chair-hosts-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-bagan?category\\_id=27](http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/myanmar-commences-role-as-asean-chair-hosts-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-bagan?category_id=27), accessed on 27 January 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Bangkok Post, ASEAN winning Japan Investment, 28 February 2014, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/397532/asean-winning-japan-investments>, accessed 24 March 2014.

<sup>3</sup> ASEAN.org, ASEAN committee of Permanent Representatives Meets EU Counterparts, 28 February 2014, [http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/asean-committee-of-permanent-representatives-meets-eu-counterpart?category\\_id=27](http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/asean-committee-of-permanent-representatives-meets-eu-counterpart?category_id=27), accessed 24 March 2014.

Officials (SOM), Senior Economic Officials (SEOM), Senior Officials Committee for the ASEAN Social-Cultural Community (SOCA), and the IAI Task Force attended the meeting. They shared views on the progress made to counter the developmental challenges faced by Member States, particularly CLMV countries. The Mid Term Review is expected to be completed by April 2014 and the report will be shared at the 24<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit to be held in Yangon in May 2014.<sup>4</sup>

## ASEAN-India

### Malaysia Introduces Visa on Arrival for Indians from Third Countries

Malaysia has introduced visa-on-arrival for Indians who have valid visas for Singapore and Thailand as well as have confirmed return tickets for India. Tourism Malaysia Director Manoharan Periasamy issued a statement which confirmed this news. He said that Malaysia is a popular holiday destination for Indians and with the ease in the visa regime, his country can expect more Indian travelers who are already on tour to the third countries like Singapore or Thailand. The fee for this Visa on Arrival (VoA) is USD 100.<sup>5</sup>

### Infosys to Enter Myanmar

India's second largest IT giant, Infosys, has bagged a consultancy from the Myanmar government. Sources from Infosys confirmed that the company is trying to help Myanmar with its long experiences in information technology in India and other corners in the world. Last year, Daw Aung Saan Suu Kyi visited Infosys office in Bangalore and talked about the necessity of usage of information technology in improving the economy of Myanmar. Myanmar, often regarded as the last frontier of globalisation, is taking help from USAID in getting IT cooperation from companies like Google, HP, Microsoft, Intel, Cisco etc. Microsoft, too, has already announced its ventures with a local company in Myanmar.<sup>6</sup>

### Diplomats met in Kolkata to Identify Loopholes in Intra-Regional Trade and Connectivity: SAARC (-Pakistan) and BCIM Representatives Met

Peoples' Republic of China's Consul General to Kolkata said that in 2013, over seven lakh Indians visited China and only one lakh Chinese visited India and that was due to the complicated visa regime of India. Chinese companies in India complained that it takes at least four to five months to get an Indian visa. The Consul General said that the complications in the Indian visa regime should be relaxed and in order to enjoy the geographical advantage of Kolkata in

<sup>4</sup> ASEAN Org, Mid-Term Review on ASEAN integration: Development Gap may Hold Back Progress, 24 February 2014, URL: [http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/mid-term-review-on-asean-integration-development-gaps-may-hold-back-progress?category\\_id=27](http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/mid-term-review-on-asean-integration-development-gaps-may-hold-back-progress?category_id=27), accessed 24 March 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Business Standard, Malaysia Introduces VoA for Indians Coming from a Third Nation, 6 January 2014, available at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/malaysia-introduces-voa-for-indians-coming-from-a-third-nation-114010600883\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/malaysia-introduces-voa-for-indians-coming-from-a-third-nation-114010600883_1.html), accessed on 8 January 2014

<sup>6</sup> Business Standard, Infy To Help Myanmar Develop e-Governance Strategy, 9 January 2014, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/infosys-to-help-myanmar-develop-its-e-governance-strategy-114010801573\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/companies/infosys-to-help-myanmar-develop-its-e-governance-strategy-114010801573_1.html), accessed on 9 January 2014.

the BCIM sub-region, more flexibility should be adopted at the policy levels. The Consul General of Nepal in Kolkata, Mr. Ghimire, too said that the geographic proximity between Kolkata and Nepal should be exploited and tariff and non-tariff barriers should be removed at the earliest. Poor road connectivity was another issue raised by Nepal and Bangladesh's representatives in the meeting. While Mr. Ghimire told about the poor condition of the National Highway 34 that connects Nepal with India, especially the 40 km stretch between Raipur and Dalkhola, the Deputy High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India pointed out that more direct linkages should be established between India and Bangladesh. Mr. Kyaw Swe Tint, Consul General of Myanmar to Kolkata expressed that BCIM countries need to enhance their people-to-people connectivity and border trade.<sup>7</sup>

#### **MoU between India and Myanmar on Border Demarcation**

In May 2013, India and Myanmar finalized a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on border security, cracking down on smuggling, including human trafficking, as well as establishing the exact line of the 1000-mile-plus frontier. About 103 miles of the common border have yet to be precisely mapped out, including nine

border posts. On 17 January 2014, Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (the assembly of Myanmar) has approved the text of the MoU. Myanmar's Defence Minister, Maj Gen Kyaw Nyunt said, "A signed MoU can help both sides prevent threats of violence across the border and control human trafficking and other illegal trade".

#### **Photo Exhibition to Display ASEAN-India Partnership in the ASEAN Secretariat**

A photo exhibition on 'Civilizational Links between India and Southeast Asian Nations' based on archival material and contemporary photographs at the ASEAN Secretariat was jointly inaugurated by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, H. E. Le Luong Minh and Ambassador of India to Indonesia, ASEAN and Timor-Leste, H. E. Gurjit Singh in the mid of February 2014. Mr. Le Loung Minh said, "In the backdrop of their fascinating landscapes and diverse ethnicities, both Southeast Asia and India are dynamic and fast growing economic regions. With their shared histories and cultures - straddling between tradition and modernity - they both make up probably two of the most fascinating regions in the world." India would be implementing projects worth more than US\$ 40 million in ASEAN in the next three years. Over 2,000 students, farmers, scientists, academics, experts, and journalists from ASEAN are invited by India annually through various programmes, implemented both at bilateral and multilateral levels.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The Indian Express, Diplomats Detail Problem Areas in BCIM Trade Ties, 11 January 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/kolkata/diplomats-detail-problem-areas-in-bcim-trade-ties/>, accessed on 13 January 2014.

<sup>8</sup> ASEAN.org, Close friendship Between ASEAN and India Captured on photographs, 13 February 2014, URL: [http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/close-friendship-between-asean-and-india-captured-on-photographs?category\\_id=27](http://www.asean.org/news/asean-secretariat-news/item/close-friendship-between-asean-and-india-captured-on-photographs?category_id=27), accessed 24 March 2014.

## Northeast India- Look East Policy

### Three NE States Excluded from Protected Area Regime

From 1 January, 2014, the visitors from Myanmar need not to take protected area permit to visit Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram, according to an official statement released by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The MHA Circular dated 30.12.2010 said, the entire States of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland have been excluded from the Protected Area regime notified under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order 1958, initially for a period of one year.<sup>9</sup>

### BSF to Guard Indo-Myanmar Border

Border Security Force's Director Subhas Joshi informed that from 2014, BSF will guard the 1624 km long Indo-Myanmar border across the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. He said, "Now that we have been given the responsibility, we will carry out the work of building infrastructure like border posts and new roads".<sup>10</sup>

### International Agri-Horti Show in Assam to Boost Investment

The first Assam International Agri-Horti Show was launched in Guwahati for four days in the second week of January 2014. Delegates and participants from several ASEAN countries as well as Italy, Korea, South Africa, China and UK came to join the festival. The State Agriculture Minister Nilamani Sen Deka was hopeful that such events will explore avenues to enhance foreign investments in the agri-horti sectors of Northeast India.<sup>11</sup>

### Release of Fund for Rail line in Manipur Halted, Foreign Missions and International Agencies Approached for Road Construction in NE

Manipur's Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh claimed in a meeting of the Northeastern Council (NEC) in Guwahati that 42% work on Jiribam-Tupul-Imphal Railway has been completed in spite of the center's release of only Rs. 450 crore against the estimated Rs. 1200 crore of total sanctioned budget. However, since October 2013 no fund has been released for the railway project and this is likely to bring the construction work to a standstill point, apprehended the CM.<sup>12</sup> However, another source said that the GOI has approached the foreign missions of Singapore, Japan, Malaysia,

<sup>9</sup> Protected Area Permit relaxed in 3 states of NE, Nagaland Post, published on 5 Jan, 2014, available at <http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/State/StateNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA1MTg1Ng%3D%3D>, accessed on 27 January 2014.

<sup>10</sup> BSF to Guard Myanmar Border from 2014 itself: DG, IBN Live, Published on 4 January 2014, available at <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/bsf-to-guard-myanmar-border-from-2014-itself-dg/443433-3.html>, accessed on 4 January 2014.

<sup>11</sup> First Assam International Agri-Horti Show to begin tomorrow, Business Standard, published on 7 January 2014, available at [http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/first-assam-international-agri-horti-show-to-begin-tomorrow-114010700799\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/first-assam-international-agri-horti-show-to-begin-tomorrow-114010700799_1.html), accessed on 7 January 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Governor, CM Confer on Railway Project, E Pao, Published on 10 January 2014, Original Source, The Sangai Express, available at <http://e-pao.net/GP.asp?src=5..110114.jan14>, accessed on 10 January 2014.

Thailand, Spain and Italy in India to ask their construction companies to participate in the road building activities in Northeast India. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has already expressed its interest in investing in road and other infrastructural projects in the region and India has reciprocated to it positively. Both India and Japan are worried as China's presence is strong in the entire Asia-Pacific.<sup>13</sup> At least eight stretches on Imphal-Jiribam, Imphal-Kohima, Maram-Dimapur, Ukhrul-Tadubi and Aizawl-Tuipang highway corridors of National Highway 53, 39, 54, 44, 40 and 60 have been identified by the ministry and JICA for the latter's possible investment in the region.<sup>14</sup> Another flow of fund may come from the ADB's South Asia Sub-regional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) programme under which ADB would provide around \$323 million and the Indian government would make available around \$58 million to complete a project in about five years. The project envisions a road of 235 kms. between Panitanki-Fulbari on the Nepal-India-Bangladesh corridor, Jaigaon-Changrabandhu on the Bhutan-India-Bangladesh corridor, Imphal-Moreh on the India-Myanmar border, and a bridge on Mechi river along the India-Nepal border.<sup>15</sup>

### Update on Kaladan Project

At present, dredging and widening of Kaladan River are taking place between Sittwe and Paletwa. The 160 km inland waterway transport system for cargo ships terminating in Paletwa is expected to be finished within next three-four months. In the meantime, road construction work between Paletwa (also known as Kaletwa or Setpyitpyin) to the India border point Lomasu has also been started, after some delays. Another 100 km stretch (from Lomasu to Lawngtlai in Mizoram) will be connected with the Indian National Highway 54.<sup>16</sup>

## Brunei

### Brunei to Begin Sharia Law Punishments from 1 April

In October 2013, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah announced that Brunei would begin implementing Sharia Penal Code Order in the country from April 2014 and punishment such as beating, severing limbs and death by stoning would be used to penalize whoever is accountable. A certain section of the social media users started to criticize the 67 year-old Sultan for his backward moves. However, the Sultan considered them as insults and declared, "They cannot be allowed to continue committing these insults, but if there are elements which allow them to be brought to court, then the first

<sup>13</sup> Including Imphal-Jiribam/Kohima Routes Govt. Seek Foreign Aid for NE Roads, The Sangai Express, Published on 15 January, 2014, Available at <http://www.thesangaiexpress.com/tseitm-34689-including-imphaljiribam-kohima-routes-govt-seeks-foreign-aid-for-ne-roads/>, accessed on 15 January 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Mishra and Verma, Live Mint, ADB may Fund Road Projects in North East Region, 20 February 2014, URL: <http://www.livemint.com/Industry/Vn5zMQGmurc32R9ibhwEli/ADB-may-fund-road-projects-in-NorthEast-region.html>, accessed 24 march 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Northeast India Anticipates Seaport, Nagaland Post, published on 20 January 2014, available at <http://www.nagalandpost.com/ChannelNews/Regional/RegionalNews.aspx?news=TkVXUzEwMDA1MjgoMg%3D%3D>, accessed on 28 January 2014.



phase of implementing the Syariah Penal Code Order in April will be very relevant to them".<sup>17</sup> His announcements came in late February 2014. Sharia punishments can incorporate stoning to death for adultery, severing of limbs for thieving, and beating for violations ranging from abortion to alcohol consumption to homosexuality.<sup>18</sup>

## Cambodia

### CNRP's Protest against the Government

The 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia that ousted Pol Pot and his brutal Khmer Rouge was celebrated in Cambodia in early January this year. However, the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) allowed only those who are loyal to the present government to participate in the festival. This happened in the midst of the anti-government protests led by the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) which alleges that the last election held in July 2013 was manipulated by the Hun Sen

government and a fresh election should be organised to ensure justice to the democratic principles. Since July 2013, CNRP decided to boycott the parliament and refused to accept their status as the main opposition party in the parliament. CNRP also demands reform of the National Election Commission (NEC) which is responsible to supervise polls in the country. Critiques argue that NEC suffers from lack of independence.<sup>19</sup>

The recent crisis in Cambodia was highlighted by the media when the government security forces fired on the protesters leaving at least five of them dead in early January 2014.<sup>20</sup> By the mid of January 2014, CNRP leader Sam Rainsy and his Deputy Kem Sokha wrote a letter to the prime minister and negotiated for certain demands like a re-election in 2015 or 2016, a television channel's license in the name of Rainsy and chairmanships of some parliamentary committees.<sup>21</sup> After some delays, negotiations re-started between the government and CNRP, which was stalled since September 2013. Unfortunately, another hitch may emerge in the negotiations as the CPP has signalled its refusal to discuss on restructuring the NEC, which is now a key demand of the CNRP.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Bangkok Post, Brunei Hits Back at Criticism Over Sharia, 26 February 2014, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/397125/brunei-hits-back-at-criticism-over-sharia>, accessed on 24 March 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Bangkok Post, Brunei Hits Back at Criticism Over Sharia, 26 February 2014, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/397125/brunei-hits-back-at-criticism-over-sharia>, accessed on 24 March 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Radio Free Asia, Cambodia Opposition party Threatens to Call off Talks", [Online], 11 March 2014, URL: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/cnrp-03112014191707.html>. Accessed:12 March 2014

<sup>20</sup> Radio Free Asia, Cambodia's Ruling, Opposition at Odds Over Electoral Body Reform, 10 March 2014, URL: <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/reform-03102014163840.html>. Accessed:12 March 2014

<sup>21</sup> Cambodian opposition said to be seeking compromise with PM. [online] The Star Online. 15 January 2014. Available from: <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/World/2014/01/15/Cambodian-opposition-said-to-be-seeking-compromise-with-PM/>. Accessed: 16 January 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Radio Free Asia, Cambodia Opposition party Threatens to Call off Talks", Op.Cit.

## Indonesia

### Indonesia Jailed Taufiq for Conspiring Bombing at the Myanmar Embassy

Indonesia jailed an Islamic extremist for conspiring bombing at the embassy of Myanmar in Indonesia for a period of seven and half years. Ahmad Taufiq, a member of the extremist group, Negara Islam Indonesia (the Islamic State of Indonesia) was caught by the police with a backpack full of home-made bombs. Suprpto, the presiding judge of the court mentioned that such actions are likely to disturb peace and undermine government's efforts to minimise terrorism. Taufiq's motive was to teach a lesson to the government of Myanmar which was alleged to support persecution against the Rohingya Muslims.<sup>23</sup>

### Arrest of Senior Democrat Party Member in Corruption Cases

The Corruption Eradication Commission, the anti-graft agency of Indonesia has arrested Anas Urbaningrum, former Chairman of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party in early January 2014. He is charged with a bribery case involving a US\$205 million (S\$260 million) graft scandal related to construction of a sports stadium in Hambalang in West Java province. President Yudhoyono is set to step down following the parliamentary election in

April 2014 and Presidential election in August 2014 as he has already spent two five-year terms as President. The Democratic Party has been fast losing its credibility and popularity in the country, thanks to the legal procedures taken by the Corruption Eradication Commission to eliminate corruptions from the country. Joko Widodo, the Governor of Jakarta, is a strong contender against the Democratic Party in the coming election.<sup>24</sup>

## Laos

### The Fourth Friendship Bridge over Mekong to Connect Laos and Thailand

The fourth Friendship Bridge was opened on the river Mekong to connect Laos and Thailand in December 2013. It connects the city of Chiang Saen (in Thailand) and Huay Xa (in Laos). With the opening of the bridge both trade and tourism got a boost as mini-cruises are offering tour upto the historical city of Luang Prabang in Laos as well as many Laotian travellers have started to visit Thailand by crossing the bridge. Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn was present to witness the opening ceremony on 17 December 2013. The cost of the bridge was amounted to approximately THB one billion (US\$ 300 million). According to some estimates by the customs office at Chaing Khong on the Thai side of the bridge, border trade is expected to reach the volume of THB 100 billion in the next couple of years, especially after the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. The bridge will reduce transportation costs of commodities. Until last

<sup>23</sup> Z News, Indonesia Jails Extremist over Myanmar Embassy Plot, 6 January 2014, [http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/indonesia-jails-extremist-over-myanmar-embassy-plot\\_901793.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/world/indonesia-jails-extremist-over-myanmar-embassy-plot_901793.html), accessed on 8 January 2014

<sup>24</sup> AsiaOne, Indonesia Anti-Graft Agency Arrests ex-Chairman of the Ruling Party, 10 January 2014, <http://news.asiaone.com/news/asia/indonesias-anti-graft-agency-arrests-ex-chairman-ruling-party>, accessed on 24 March 2014.

year, ferry service was as high as USD 60 for a container which will be reduced to USD 15 by this year.<sup>25</sup>

## Malaysia

### Protest against Price Hike in Malaysia

Thousands of demonstrators were gathered for a rally in the Independence Square in Kuala Lumpur to protest against price hikes on 1 January 2014. Bukhairy Sofian, chairman of the youth group, Student Solidarity Movement Malaysia, said, “Today is a signal. We hope the government realises that the people are angry and can listen to our demands — reduce the cost of living for the people.” The Barisan Nasional led government in Malaysia which won by a marginal majority in the last election that was held in May, said, they are trying to reduce the national debt of the country. In his New Year speech, PM Najib Razak said that cutting subsidies on petrol and other commodities and bringing some hikes in the prices are essential to save money on the part of the government. He further said, “We must accept that we have to make changes to keep our finances under control.” Petrol prices rose by 10.5 percent and electricity tariffs have been increased by some 15 percent in the last few years in Malaysia.<sup>26</sup>

### Visit Malaysia Year

The Tourism Ministry in Malaysia has announced 2014 as the Visit Malaysia Year. The Tourism Ministry hopes to attract 475,000 British and 2 million tourists in the Visit Malaysia Year. In order to achieve the targets, the tourism ministry is planning to improve and address its infrastructure as well as safety and security issues of the tourists.<sup>27</sup>

### Sedition Charges against Veteran Leader of DAP

Democratic Action Party’s (DAP) Chairman, Karpal Singh (also the lawyer of Anwar Ibrahim) has been found guilty and sentenced to three years of jail term in a sedition case involving his humiliating remarks against one of the nine state Sultans of Malaysia. Mr. Singh, the veteran parliamentarian of Malaysia is accused of insulting the Sultan of Perak in a case where the latter sided with the ruling coalition in a case surrounding control over the state. Prime Minister Najib Rajak, despite his promises to reform the old Sedition Act, said, until the new law is implemented, the existing laws need to be accepted.<sup>28</sup>

## Myanmar

### China’s Ambassador to Myanmar paid a Visit to MISIS and talked about Expanding Bilateral Cooperation in the Backlight of

<sup>25</sup> [traveldailynewsasia.com](http://www.traveldailynewsasia.com), Easier Crossing Into Laos Thanks to a Fourth bridge Over the Mekong River, 7 January 2014, <http://www.traveldailynewsasia.com/news/article/54473/easier-crossing-into-laos-thanks>, accessed on 8 January 2014.

<sup>26</sup> Palatino, Mong (2014), Protests Greet New Year in Southeast Asia, *The Diplomat*, 6 January 2014, accessed 24 March 2014, URL: <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/protests-greet-new-year-in-southeast-asia/>.

<sup>27</sup> MYSINCHEW.com, Visit Malaysia Year, 3 January 2014, <http://www.mysinchew.com/node/94941?tid=12>, accessed on 6 January 2014

<sup>28</sup> Bangkok Post, Malaysian Opposition Lawmaker Found Guilty of Sedition, 22 February 2014, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/asia/396366/malaysian-opposition-lawmaker-found-guilty-of-sedition>, accessed 24 March 2014.

### Myanmar's Position as the ASEAN Chair

Chinese Ambassador to Myanmar Yang Houlan visited the Myanmar Institute for Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) on 9 January 2014 and talked about strengthening Sino-Myanmar bilateral relations. He stressed that *Paukphaw* (fraternal) friendship and strengthening of win-win cooperation between Myanmar and China should be developed. H.E. Houlan assured that China wants to see a peaceful, stable and prosperous Myanmar which is in line with the interest of the people of Myanmar. He mentioned that Myanmar is now the Chair of ASEAN and has a rising influence on the regional affairs. Given that in mind, he expected that China and Myanmar will share an expanding cooperative space in future. According to Ambassador Houlan, mutual strategic trust, mutual beneficial cooperation, people-to-people contact and cultural exchange and strengthening coordination and cooperation in international and regional affairs are four issues on which Myanmar and China should work. As Myanmar government is still confused about resumption of the Chinese funded Myitsone dam, Ambassador Houlan's speech can be seen as an effort to encourage the intellectuals in Myanmar in support of the dam. Also, in the regional sphere, after China's announcement of ADIZ on East China Sea, lots of speculations are being spread on

China's actual intentions in East and Southeast Asia. Hence, it is of no surprise that China is trying to enjoy a superior position on the minds of the people and nations in its periphery.<sup>29</sup>

### US Ambassador to Myanmar Urges Amendments to Article 59

U.S. Ambassador to Myanmar Derek Mitchell said on 10 January 2014, Friday that 'As an observer interested in seeing this country reach its potential as a democratic state, it seems curious to me that someone who is the leader of a major political party, chair of a major parliamentary committee, who has sacrificed herself for decades as a courageous patriot committed to the success and strength of the country, someone clearly very popular with the people, will be excluded from presidential contention'. He further said that Article 59 of the Constitution is 'relic from the past' and needs to be amended as Myanmar is opening up itself to the world of freedom and democracy. He commended Shwe Mann, the Speaker of the Assembly who said that the present constitution should be changed. Few hours later, Suu Kyi said that she is hopeful about changes in Article 59 of the Constitution. She further said that her efforts for amendments in the Constitution are a part of her fight for ensuring equal rights for the *citizens*.<sup>30</sup>

### Buddhist Mob Attacked Muslims in Northern Rakhine

Du Chee Yan Tan, a village in Northern Rakhine state, located in western Myanmar, witnessed another breakout of violence against the

<sup>29</sup> English people.com, Xinhua, Chinese Ambassador Stresses Strengthening of Win-Win Cooperation with Myanmar, 9 January 2014, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90883/8508448.html>, accessed on 10 January 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Radio Free Asia, Suu Kyi says Myanmar Should Amend Charter for Equal Rights, 10 January 2014, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/charter-01102014155940.html>, accessed on 13 January 2014

Muslims on 9 January, 2014. Approximately 48 Muslims were killed in the violence that lasted for around one week. Northern Rakhine is home to 80% of Myanmar's 1 million Rohingya Muslims, persecuted by the ongoing violence in the country. The foreign ministry of Myanmar issued a statement but said no civilians have been injured in the violence. However, Medecins Sans Frontieres confirmed that they have treated 21 wounded people in Du Chee Yan Tan village during and after the attacks on the Muslims by a Buddhist mob. Navy Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said, "I deplore the loss of life in Du Chee Yar Tan and call on the authorities to carry out a full, prompt and impartial investigation and ensure that victims and their families receive justice."<sup>31</sup>

### **Myanmar Lifted Curfew from Meikhtila**

The Myanmar government has lifted the dusk-to-dawn curfew from four towns in Mekhitila on 31 December 2013 which was imposed since March 2013 followed by a communal riot between the Muslims and the Buddhists in the region. Approximately 43 people were killed in the riot which was not limited to Meikhtila and spread to other regions in Central Myanmar as well.<sup>32</sup>

## **Philippines**

### **Fourth and Final Round of Peace Deal between MILF and the Government in the Philippines**

On 25<sup>th</sup> January 2014, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Filipino Government have signed the fourth and final part of the normalisation pact, a part of the peace deal that was initiated in October 2011 in Kuala Lumpur. This will facilitate the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro which will ensure MILF's governance in the Southern island of Mindanao in return of the decommissioning of the weapons by them. MILF will set up an independent decommissioning body to identify the valid members of the group and then the decommissioning process will start. However nobody will have to surrender and no arms and weapons will be destroyed. The Moro insurgency has caused death of around 120,000 people and displacement of another 2 million people in the Philippines. The Filipino government is hopeful to successfully complete the process of peaceful negotiation by 2016.<sup>33</sup>

### **Unemployment on Rise in Philippines Post Haiyaan**

Unemployment rate rises to 27.5 percent in the Philippines in the last quarter of 2013, making

<sup>31</sup> Inquirer.net, UN: Myanmar Buddhists Kills More Than 40 Muslims, , <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/568687/un-myanmar-buddhists-killed-more-than-40-muslims>, 25 January 2014, accessed on 27 January 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Business Standard, Myanmar Lifts Curfew in Riot-Hit Meikhtila, 1 January 2014, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/myanmar-lifts-curfew-in-riot-hit-meikhtila-114010100181\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/myanmar-lifts-curfew-in-riot-hit-meikhtila-114010100181_1.html) and accessed on 2 January 2014

<sup>33</sup> Philippines, Muslim Rebels Agree to Peace, The Nation, 27 January 2014, <http://www.nation.com.pk/international/26-Jan-2014/philippines-muslim-rebels-agree-to-peace>, accessed on 27 January 2014

the 7.5 percent growth in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) far from being inclusive. An estimated 12.1 million Filipinos are jobless, according to an investigator. According to another agency, Pulse Asia, nearly 55 percent Filipinos feel that quality of national life in the country in the last 12 months deteriorated and the situation may continue even in 2014. Typhoon Haiyaan/Yolanda and a 7.2 magnitude earthquake that hit parts of the Philippines last year have definitely contributed to the increasing joblessness and other qualitative derogations in the country. Geneva-based International Organization for Migration estimated that some 6 million workers have lost their jobs due to Yolanda.<sup>34</sup> However, the government is hopeful about recovery from this economic downturn in the country. According to government sources, the joblessness created in the last quarter of 2013 was however less than 34.4 percent estimated in March 2012.<sup>35</sup>

## Singapore

### Singapore Displeased with Indonesian Move to Name Fleets After 'Terrorist's/ War Criminal's'

In a move to show displeasure against the Indonesian navy's decision to name a new frigate KRI Usman Harun, who were accused in Singapore for a bombing in the McDonald House in the Orchard Road in 1965, Singapore denied access to 100

Indonesian Armed Forces officials to the Singapore Air-show, organized in February 2014. Dr Tan See Seng, Deputy Director of the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore, said the latest action is a "reflection that Singapore treats this incident very seriously and wants to convey that impression". On the other hand, Jakarta claimed it as an internal affair of the country.<sup>36</sup>

## Thailand

### Anti-Government Protests in Thailand

As the anti-government protest in Thailand has been intensified under the leadership of Suthep Thaugsuban and his party, People's Democratic Reform Committee, PM Yingluck Shinawatra refused to step down from power by saying that she has the responsibility to protect democracy in Thailand. On the other hand, the protesters claim that the present government is actually run by Yingluck's elder brother Thaksin Shinawatra, who is in self-exile to avoid jail sentence on corruption charges in Dubai. Yingluck Shinawatra has however denied all these charges. The opposition has already 'shutdown' Bangkok and cut electricity and water supplies to the homes of the prime minister and all her cabinet ministers. The opposition is demanding for a people's council to govern the nation. They further claimed that if the present government does not step down, then they will take custody of all ministers. In 2006, Thaksin Shinawatra was ousted by a coup and Thailand may witness another military

<sup>34</sup> Asia News Network, Jobless Filipinos hit 12.1 Million, 11 February 2014, <http://www.asianewsnet.net/Jobless-Filipinos-hit-12-1-million-56957.html>, accessed 24 March 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Asia News Network, Singapore Move Signals 'Strong displeasure' to Indonesia, 10 February 2014, URL: <http://www.asianewsnet.net/Spore-move-signals-strong-displeasure-to-Indonesia-56908.html>, accessed 24 March 2014.

intervention if the present stalemate continues. The election commission urged the government not to hold the election in February 2014. The widely-admired King Bhumibol Adulyadej seems to be sympathetic towards the protesters as the later expressed their grave concern over Thaksin's alleged disregard for the royalty.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the Thai government has declared a 60 day emergency in Bangkok and surrounding provinces for months-long anti-government protests taking place there. Though, no plan has so far been unveiled regarding breaking the protests in Bangkok, the army has been empowered to ban public gathering of more than 5 people, censor news media, impose curfews and detain subjects without charge.<sup>38</sup>

The voting was disrupted by the protesters and people could vote only in 89.2 per cent of the polling stations nation-wide.<sup>39</sup> Followed by the election, violence got an escalation in Thailand. In a grenade attack on the protesters, at least 41 people were

wounded and one five year old girl was killed in Khao Saming district of the eastern province of Trat.<sup>40</sup>

## Vietnam

### China Issued New Law to Restrain 'Foreign' Fishing in South China Sea, Vietnam Condemned It

China has issued a new dictate to restrain all 'fishing' operations in South China Sea. It says that all 'foreign' fishing operations in South China Sea need to take approval from PRC as the sea comes under the jurisdiction of China. However, both Vietnam and Philippines have condemned China for issuing such a claim. The Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs said that such regulation 'escalates tensions, unnecessarily complicates the situation in the South China Sea, and threatens the peace and stability of the region'. Vietnam said, it has sovereignty over all of Spratley and Paracel Islands and all 'foreign activities in these areas without Vietnamese acceptance are illegal and invalid'.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Murdoch, Lindsay, The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 January 2014, <http://www.smh.com.au/world/thailands-prime-minister-yingluck-shinawatra-refuses-to-resign-as-protesters-plan-arrest-20140115-hv8hb.html>, accessed on 16 January 2014

<sup>38</sup> Thailand Declares State of Emergency as Anti-government Protests Continue, Voice of America, 22 January 2014, <http://www.voanews.com/content/thailand-declares-emergency-decree/1834269.html>, accessed on 22 January 2014

<sup>39</sup> Euronews.com, Thailand Election: Polling Disrupted, but no major violence, 2 February 2014, <http://www.euronews.com/2014/02/02/thailand-election-polling-disrupted-but-no-major-violence/>, accessed 24 March 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Aljazeera, Thai Army Chief Rules Out Intervention, 24 February 2014, URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2014/02/thai-army-chief-rules-out-intervention-20142246282235291.html>, accessed 24 March 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Fox News.com, Philippines, Vietnam Condemns China's New Fishing Law That Reinforces Claim over South China Sea, 10 January 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2014/01/10/philippines-vietnam-condemn-china-new-fishing-law-that-reinforces-claim-on/>, accessed on 13 January 2014.

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The Southeast Asia and Oceania Centre focuses on policy-relevant research in respect of the ten ASEAN states, East Timor and Oceania, including Australia and New Zealand. The Centre studies India's bilateral and multilateral relations with states of the region with a view to providing contemporary relevance to India's Look East policy. It has a futuristic approach and examines the emerging trends in the regional security architecture. The Centre studies the potential for India's enhanced defence cooperation (including maritime issues) and cooperation in non-traditional security issues with the region. It examines internal developments of countries in this region, especially political transition and the role of the military, and their implications for India. The Centre seeks to promote Track-II institutional linkages with the region.

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