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Au Revoir, Dato' Mohd Zamruni Khalid



Haji Ahmad Shah Al-Musta'in Billah on 15 June 2021. They were appointed by decree instead of the customary ceremony at Istana Negara.

Under Dato' Mohd Zamruni's leadership, IDFR continued to train hundreds of Malaysian diplomats in various areas of diplomacy, international relations, soft skills and foreign languages. As a well-experienced diplomat himself, he actively advocated young officers to not only fortify their skills and be knowledgeable in the field of diplomacy and international relations, but to also cultivate the right attitude in order to be highly competent diplomats in the future. IDFR also conducted various training programmes and discourses for officials from other Ministries and agencies, as well as countries under the Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP).

Admittedly, Dato' Mohd. Zamruni's assignment at IDFR was indeed a momentous and challenging one. Amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dato' Mohd

On 11 August 2021, IDFR paid tribute to its outgoing Director General, Dato' Mohd Zamruni Khalid, in a virtual ceremony held in honour of his two-year service since 6 August 2019 to the Institute.

Dato' Mohd Zamruni has been

appointed as the Ambassador of Malaysia to France. Dato' Mohd Zamruni, along with 18 other Ambassadors-designate, received their diplomatic credentials from DYMM Seri Paduka Baginda Yang di-Pertuan Agong Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah ibni Almarhum Sultan

CONTENTS

1	<i>Au Revoir, Dato' Mohd Zamruni Khalid</i>
2-3	Highlight
4-11	Forum
12-14	News
15-16	In and Around IDFR



SHAPING A NEW
GENERATION OF
MALAYSIAN
DIPLOMATS
1991-2021

Zamruni took it in his stride and successfully navigated IDFR under his leadership by constantly finding creative ways to adapt to the new normal to ensure that course participants receive their training accordingly. IDFR was one of the earliest public institutions to adopt virtual learning at the onset of the pandemic. Another contribution made by Dato' Mohd Zamruni was the establishment of three dedicated committees,

namely, the Committee for Training, Committee for Research and Committee for Publications. The committees, made up of representatives from various stakeholders including IDFR, the Ministry and the academics, aim to discuss and streamline the directions in the respective areas.

Despite Dato' Mohd Zamruni's brief tenure at IDFR, the staff is ever grateful for his leadership,

and warm and approachable demeanour which have assisted IDFR to meet the expectations of its stakeholders. Last but not least, IDFR wishes to extend our most sincere appreciation to Dato' Mohd Zamruni for his contributions and dedication to the Institute and the country.

Bonne chance et meilleurs voeux à vous, Dato'!

IDFR is 30!



IDFR turned 30 on 1 July 2021.

Many of our readers may not be aware that IDFR was initially known as the Centre for International Relations and Strategic Studies (CIRSS). CIRSS was established in January 1979 at the National Institute for Public Administration (INTAN) to provide practitioner-oriented training programmes for officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and other public sector agencies with official representations abroad.

The country's foreign policy and its Vision 2020 objectives under the stewardship of Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the Prime Minister of Malaysia then, necessitated the creation of more professionally trained diplomats and diplomacy practitioners to implement the policy and objectives

abroad. Following a Cabinet decision on 8 March 1991, IDFR was established on 1 July of the same year. It was officially launched in August of that year by Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir himself.

However, IDFR was then still under the purview of the Prime Minister's Department. It was only after a major reorganisation of Ministries and their agencies that IDFR officially became part

of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and function as a Foreign Service Institute in March 2004.

When it was first established, CIRSS (later known as CIRAD – Centre for International Relations and Diplomacy) was based at the INTAN premises on Jalan Elmu in Petaling Jaya. After the centre evolved into IDFR, the Jalan Elmu premises was still its home for close to fifteen years before IDFR finally moved to Jalan Wisma Putra in March 2006.

IDFR's campus on Jalan Wisma Putra formerly housed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1966 until its move to Putrajaya in 2001. Unknown to some, IDFR sits on the site of the residence of the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia and Minister of External Affairs, when he was the Chief Minister of the Federation of Malaya.

To date, IDFR has trained thousands of diplomats and diplomacy practitioners from

Malaysia and all over the world, under various programmes including the *Diploma in Diplomacy*, the *ASEAN Young Diplomats' Programme*, and the *Diplomatic Training Course*. Some of IDFR's foreign participants have benefitted from the MTCP and gone on to become Ministers and high-ranking officials in their respective countries. IDFR is glad to have contributed to their journey and look forward to welcoming more participants to the Institute in the very near future.



Why Should Diplomatic Academies Shift to Online Learning?

Kishan S Rana

A major outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe has been a surge in online distance learning. As they say, necessity is a great mother of both innovation and change. With schools, universities and other educational institutions closed, online teaching became the only way to keep the learning process going, ensuring that students did not miss out on academic schedules, in the difficult, painful months since March 2020. At the same time, in many parts of the world, where online distance learning was long a norm and a method of choice, new ideas have evolved. A disaster thus becomes an opportunity, in its own way.

Let us be candid. Many foreign ministries have long resisted distance learning, be it out of conservatism, or resistance to change among the senior leadership at foreign ministries. Perhaps among the diplomatic training institution faculty have been apprehensive over re-learning new teaching methodologies. However in reality, neither is the change drastic nor difficult. And it brings a huge amount of value. Let us look at a bit of background, before getting into the real, tangible benefits of online learning.

Canada was among the first converts to online distance teaching. So was the United States. It was only in the past ten years that some European diplomatic academies began to

experiment in this direction. We may note among them the UK Diplomatic Academy, launched in 2015, which from the outset has treated distance learning as a prime platform of choice. Australia, China, India and Japan were among the resisting foreign ministry training institutions, but that may now have changed. In contrast, both Africa and Latin America have been open-minded for quite some time, often in the sense of enlisting their officials in training programmes run by foreign entities.

As an online teacher with Diplo foundation for over 20 years I have witnessed both successes and failures with convincing foreign ministries to experiment with and adopt online learning. Here is a balance sheet, listing the pros and the cons of online and traditional classroom teaching. Let us look at the shortcomings, some real and others a bit contrived, based on lack of understanding.

First, direct teacher-student communication, where the eyes meet and student-teacher look deeply into one another, cannot be replicated online. True. But has that mythical ancient *ashram* or cloistered small academy, not long been lost in the mists of time? Do the modern bricks-and-mortar teaching institution replicate the ancient ways? And while Oxford, Cambridge and a few other elite institutions use the tutorial method, involving intensive

personal teaching, that is no longer a norm at undergraduate courses. In today's crowded classrooms, sometimes with hundreds of students, or even at lectures to smaller groups, can face-to-face lectures accommodate more than a few Questions & Answers? Yes, the graduate seminar session or the workshop still carry that flavour of the past but is it impossible to replicate that online? We manage very well at Diplo with seminar papers written jointly by groups of four or five participants, who work across continents and cultures, to produce jointly written essays of 1600 words.

Second, except in a compressed course, the online teaching pace is slow, usually offered as a part-time option. At Diplo's part-time courses, the commitment for each participant is to spare up to eight hours each week to the course – all at times convenient to each, except for the weekly one-hour online chat that takes place at a fixed time. Each lecture has a week-long cycle, during which it is chewed over by a class of 15 or 20, who examine the lecture text of 4000 plus words with between 50 to 80 comments, queries and URLs that they provide. That permits the concepts, tool-box methods and insights to be absorbed gradually by the class participants. We might even say that a measured pace is almost built into the online method. That makes for deep learning.

Third, with geography not a barrier, class members come from diverse locations, and for Diplo, different countries as well. That can be replicated in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) academy, in part because diplomats participating in a course will be from many embassy and consulate locations. Further, one can bring in officials from different ministries, representatives of civil society, think tanks, business and others. And one might even blend into that locally-engaged staff that now increasingly handle quasi-diplomatic tasks. Incidentally, optimal use of local staff is one area in which Global South countries seriously lag behind the West.

Finally, some points on how MFAs might shift to online methods.

One. An online option needs investment into a good 'learning management system'. That is not rocket science, and good templates are widely available. One should ensure that the 'hyper-text' option is used, because that is central to good text-based learning. Not to use hyper-text today is like buying a fine car but rejecting the convenience of automatic transmission because one is hung up on a stick shift.

Two. National lockdowns and closed schools and colleges have accustomed all of us to Zoom and other fine video conferencing platforms. At Diplo we have moved beyond text-based teaching. But we still find much value in using text. Paradoxically, an online chat based on text is preferred by some class members, as superior to video chats. Why? For one thing, it allows participants to pursue several parallel conversation

tracks, unlike what become video monologues. And we still confront video connectivity issues at places. Thus, the text-based chat is alive and kicking vigorously.

Three. It pays to look around, enlist one's officials in courses run by entities such as UNITAR and Diplo, and others as feasible, and absorb their good methods. This is an easy way to gain insights into practical options for online learning, and avoid both omissions and errors. Incidentally, Diplo materials are mostly on a 'Global Commons' copyright platform, so fair use, with attribution makes it easy to re-use materials that we have developed.

What will online teaching involve for the MFAs?

First, the text should be written out, typically 3000 to 4500 words per lecture, with lots of embedded URLs; the latter is vital as the internet is an easy source for supplementary teaching material, besides of course one's own MFA texts that can be supplied as PDF files. The text must be revised, updated each year. The online method is interactive in ways that face-to-face teaching cannot be, in the range of material that can be furnished for immediate access. *Second*, the teachers can be drawn from both retired practitioners and academia. It is really the former that make the best teachers for courses run by MFAs, with a range of practical knowledge that is unmatched by anyone from outside the world of practice. One should also bring in people from business, cultural circles, the media, think tanks, and others from public life. *Third*, leavening the class with those

from other fields, i.e. different entities connected with foreign affairs produces huge advantage. More than elsewhere, much learning takes place among class participants. And this is intensified when team methods are used to write seminar papers and other class assignments. And since geography is not an inhibitor, such diversity becomes an asset.

Much of the distance learning materials are a one-time investment, and while course materials need to be updated continually, the running cost of online learning is modest, besides payments to the faculty and the support staff. And consider the huge savings in not having to bring in both the participants and the faculty and staff to a single location.

To sum up, the pandemic has given a major boost to distance learning. It is now the method of choice for diplomatic systems, thanks to technology, convenience and practicality.

Ambassador Kishan S Rana is a former diplomat, teacher, author and Professor Emeritus, DiploFoundation.

Foresight & Futures Thinking for International Relations

Rushdi Abdul Rahim

“Difficult to see. Always in motion is the future” – Yoda, Jedi Master

The above quote underlines the difficulty of trying to look beyond the present. If the all-powerful Jedi Master with fictional powers like Yoda from the *Star Wars* chronicles is not able to see what the future lays ahead, where does this leave mere mortals like us? So-called experts and futurists have all tried to predict something about the future with mixed results. However, foresight is not about predictions. Advocates of foresight and futures thinking are not oracles or clairvoyants, though the term “futurists” that has been used to describe them gives a completely incorrect impression of what professional futurists and strategic foresight practitioners actually do. Foresight practitioners use foresight tools and methods to assist organisations to be future prepared with the means to look ahead with confidence.

Everybody knows that every decision that we make today, either as individuals or as organisations, will have an impact on the future. Therefore, it makes sense to explore the potential impact of such decisions before they are made, and to make the best decisions that we can today. What foresight attempts to do is create a better understanding of the drivers of change and the megatrends as well as its impact that will enable us to have a new understanding about the future. The future will be nothing like the past. If you were to go back only five or ten years and

think about whether you could have imagined the details of the future that is now, what would you have thought was possible?

However, given the complexity of the external environment, the thinking that goes into strategy development needs to be divergent and expansive. The use of foresight approach facilitates and, in fact, encourages this line of thinking, and then brings this back to the present and now, to the strategic decisions that need to be made today. The aim is to strengthen those strategic decisions – to make them wiser and more robust, as well as *able to withstand the changes* and uncertainties that the future will bring.

Unfortunately, these lessons are too often ignored as most are consumed with the present, not putting much thought on what lies ahead despite being aware of the trends and challenges. Too many countries, organisations, and individuals today suffer from the afflictions of being short-sighted, focusing on just the next thing. Too many organisations focus on the next quarterly earnings report. Too many politicians focus on the next election cycle rather than the next generation. “Low hanging fruits” and “quick wins” are common phrases in designing strategies, therefore enabling actions with little consideration of their long-term impact and consequences.

Foresight & futures thinking is ever more important now, in an era of continual disruptions and

accelerating pace of change. Individuals and organisations need to take the long view and consider the broader impact of their actions on the world. The same can be said for the need for countries to consider the longer-term implications of their policies, programmes, and proposed actions. The importance of foresight in government therefore must not be understated, as those with capabilities continue to build and improve upon them, while those without are seeking ways to create and build their capacities. Earlier this year, the UK government commissioned a study that produced the “Features of effective systemic foresight in governments around the world” report. The report explores how different governments have developed their foresight ecosystems over time and to map the features that can support integration of long-term thinking into policymaking and ensure a sustainable, effective system of strategic foresight within a government.

Foresight in government also applies to international relations, how nations could collaborate across competing economic and political systems. A few notable works have been produced in the last 12 months that contribute towards exploring the future of international relations.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) earlier this year produced the “Global Scenarios 2035

Report". The report presents three scenarios for how the world could be very different than expected in 2035, exploring implications for the future of global collaboration and the OECD. The report was meant to inform discussion on how best to prepare the OECD to meet the needs of a highly unpredictable future. The scenarios were produced from a horizon-scanning exercise to identify change drivers that could have disruptive consequences for global collaboration and the OECD.

The United States of America's National Intelligence Council also released a Global Trends report earlier this year, though with a different time horizon – looking at 2040. The report, published every four years since 1997, assesses the key trends and uncertainties that will shape the global strategic environment for the next two decades. It is designed to provide an analytic framework for policymakers as they craft national security strategy and navigate an uncertain future.

A similar work was conducted

by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a bipartisan, non-profit policy research organisation based in Washington, USA. They produced a "2x2 scenarios", exploring geopolitical order in 2025-2030: "What Will Great Power Competition Look Like?" The four plausible, differentiated scenarios explore the changing geopolitical landscape of 2025-2030, including the potential lasting first- and second-order effects of COVID-19. The scenarios centre on the relative power and influence of the United States and China and the interaction between them, along with considerations of major U.S. allies and adversaries within each of four worlds.

The goal of the reports mentioned was not to offer predictions of the world in whatever time horizon; instead to enable policymakers to see what could possibly be beyond the horizon and prepare for an array of plausible futures as well as the possibility of different future divisions and alliances in the global system, particularly on key issues of global concern.

These reports are of course looking through the lens of a developed country, with possibly different emphases and views. So how about us, Malaysia? Could we do similar exercises and build upon these works and develop scenarios for local context, and create a common understanding of how these trends and future development will impact Malaysia's international relations and diplomacy?

The world is undergoing tremendous change and therefore we can no longer operate in a business-as-usual mode. To quote Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organisation, "We can't go back to normal, because the normal that we had was precisely the problem."

Mr. Rushdi Abdul Rahim is Senior Vice President of the Malaysian Industry-Government Group for High Technology (MIGHT). Some parts of this article were previously published in *myForesight* magazine.

Observation during the Drafting of the ASEAN Joint Communique

Mohamad Rameez Yahaya

The ASEAN Joint Communique (JC) reflects the ASEAN Member States' (AMS) common position. The term 'Joint Communique' can be directly translated as 'Joint Statement' to describe a shared document that provides an official position to be adopted by

representatives of an organisation, in this case by the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting (AMM) held annually.

This time around, the said JC was deliberated two weeks before the commencement of the 54th

AMM/PMC. At the drafting stage of the JC, officials involved had a brainstorming session based on the agreed outlines as per the rough or zero draft provided by Brunei Darussalam as the ASEAN Member State that assumed the chairmanship of ASEAN for

the year 2021. The projected theme under Brunei Darussalam Chairmanship that of **'We Care, We Prepare, We Prosper'** encapsulates, among others, the need for the AMS to cooperate and unite in facing the challenges and difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The thing that impressed the most in the said deliberations is the ability of each representative of the AMS to utilise the art of negotiations to agree to disagree, and to persuade others to accept any propositions without losing his or her country's interest. Akin to a "win-win" situation, the skills of negotiations in the JC upholds the intra-ASEAN interest based on the principles of the **ASEAN Way**, which is to obtain agreement on the text via consensus among the ten AMS.

The importance of this drafting process is to establish an understanding among all AMS; in which this understanding must be agreed by all parties. In line with the provision of **Article 20 of the ASEAN Charter**, this consensus-based decision-making process is the principle that the AMS are legally bound to follow. It ensures equality among member states and prevents the marginalisation of

any AMS especially when it comes to a major decision scenario like that of the JC.

The JC has made a significant impact in maintaining peace and stability in the ASEAN region. It is truly akin to a common community voice for all the AMS. Next, the deliberation on the JC is a process that allows the AMS representatives to receive and exchange information, critically examine a problem, and reach an agreement that will result in an agreed JC text. All understandings made will be an input to all the AMS, as to ensure that the ASEAN region would always be in peace and harmony.

The process of drafting, which takes a very long time, is very important as it will avoid mistakes in the ASEAN Community plan. Any mistakes will affect the true meaning of the inputs to be deliberated. As a result of some important and contentious issues that were deliberated this year, the discussions on the JC had been prolonged, to a certain extent until midnight before it was finally adopted at an extended AMM on 4 August 2021. The JC can be assessed from the ASEAN official website at [https://asean.org/joint-communique-54-th-asean-](https://asean.org/joint-communique-54-th-asean-foreign-ministers-meeting/)

[foreign-ministers-meeting/](#)

The way to move forward for subsequent JC's deliberations is to abide by a specific timeframe to resolve the paragraphs contingent to the point of contention. If the issue is too big to resolve, perhaps the Chair can skip the paragraph and make it a special paragraph to be resolved later after discussions on lesser sensitive paragraphs are completed. Herewith, time-consuming impediments can be overcome, so that the final draft can be materialised and expected for an early adoption at the AMM.

Observing the current hindrances on account of the pandemic, the AMM was obliged to be conducted for the second time in the new norms setting. Even though it was attended virtually, the positive outcomes for the said meeting like the JC were able to be collectively extracted by the AMS representatives. This again evidenced that ASEAN as a regional grouping managed to maintain its relevance even in the time of crisis.

Dato' Dr. Mohamad Rameez Yahaya is the Director of the ASEAN Economic Community Division I, ASEAN-Malaysia National Secretariat. The above article is based purely on the writer's experience in attending the deliberations on the JC and does not contain any indication of confidentiality.

Terrorism Threat in Sabah's Eastern Seaboard: Challenges in Securing ESSZONE¹

Jasmine Mohamed Jawhar

Introduction – Terrorism Threat in Sabah

Sabah's eastern seaboard, particularly areas under the Eastern

Sabah Safety Zone (ESSZONE)², have long been regarded as a transit point for terror elements to travel to southern Philippines and Indonesia. In the past, these

terror elements include groups such as Indonesian-based Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) and Darul Islam (DI). In an interview with *The Star* in April 2017, (now former) chief

of the Special Branch Counter-Terrorism Unit, Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, revealed that the unit discovered some 40 JI-related individuals using Sabah as a transit point to Mindanao.³

In recent years, Daesh and other foreign terror elements have also been found to use Sabah as transit point. In 2018, Ayob Khan stated that about 29 Daesh-linked individuals were arrested in Sabah alone.⁴ Earlier in 2017, investigations following the arrests of a Filipino man, two Bangladeshi men and a Malaysian woman in Sabah and Kuala Lumpur, revealed that Tawau was to be used as a transit point for terror elements travelling to Mindanao.⁵

Nonetheless, one of the most active terrorist groups to use districts under ESSZONE as a transit point and safe haven is the notorious Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) based in southern Philippines. Between 2017 and October 2019, more than 40 individuals with suspected links to the ASG were arrested in Sabah. Some of the individuals were involved in the smugglings of Filipinos and Malaysians through Sabah and were also involved in various kidnapping-for-ransom (KFR) cases in Sabah's eastern seaboard. Additionally, some of the arrested individuals were also linked to the Maute group who was responsible for the Marawi siege in 2017.

It is worth noting that the imposition of the Movement Control Order (MCO) to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Malaysia has helped to reduce illegal cross border activities in Sabah's eastern seaboard. However, potential threats from such groups still

exists. This can be seen particularly during the Sabah state election in 2020, when authorities received information from counterparts in the Philippines of possible attacks during the state election.⁶ The report also stated that there have been nine attempts to commit kidnappings by groups based in the Philippines since May 2020.

The threat to Sabah from terror groups such as the ASG is present and clear. To some, however, the question remains about how the threat still continues despite the various efforts in containing it, including the establishment of the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM⁷), and the continuous curfews imposed in areas under ESSZONE, among others. Much is to be explored in order to understand the challenges in securing ESSZONE, particularly from the threat of terrorism and its related elements. The following sections will investigate these challenges, with the hope of providing a better understanding into the issues surrounding securing the Sabah's eastern seaboard – and formulate better strategies against the threat.

Sabah's Porous Borders and Geographical Landscapes

Often when Sabah's security is being threatened by the likes of KFR groups and ASG, the main reason suggesting the lack of security in the eastern part of Sabah is its porous border. This is certainly accurate with the eastern Sabah coastline being more than 1400 kilometres long. Coupled with limited resources in terms of security officers and adequate facilities as well as equipment, effectively monitoring the vast

stretch of shoreline becomes an even more daunting task.

Additionally, the existence of many small islands near Sabah's eastern shores may also contribute to the challenge in securing ESSZONE, as these islands may be used as strategic hideouts before staging attacks. For example, small islands such as Kapalai, Maiga, Bohey Dulang, Matakang and Pandanan, among others, make it easier for terrorist and KFR groups to slip into Sabah unnoticed.⁸ But it is also important to take into consideration other factors contributing to the challenges in securing the area. The next section will briefly look into the long-standing tradition of border crossing on the Sulu-Celebes Seas.

History – Tradition in Border Crossing Activities

First and foremost is the need to understand the area's rich history, which in turn will explain the continued occurrence of illegal cross border activities in the Sulu-Celebes Seas. Cross border activities have already been taking place since the 16th century, during the Spanish rule.⁹ In the 1960s, a mixture of political aspirations in Sabah and armed separatist rebellion in the southern Philippines further exacerbate the flow of migration, through border crossing, into Sabah from Mindanao.¹⁰ This has led to a sharp increase in the influx of migrants into Sabah from southern Philippines, who migrated for the purpose of getting better job prospects and to enhance their standard of living, among others.

At the same time, these migrants are keeping close contact with

their family members in southern Philippines. Such strong family ties, coupled with the long tradition of cross border activities that is still taking place today, has created a strong 'sense of belonging' between family members who are residing in Sabah as well as those in southern Philippines. This 'sense of belonging' was a crucial element prior to the Lahad Datu incursion in 2013, by the Royal Security Force, an armed group under the self-proclaimed Sultanate of Sulu. There were many among those residing in the districts under ESSZONE who believed in the existence of the Sulu Sultanate and that part of Sabah still belongs to the Philippines.¹¹ This is concerning as familial ties and kinship are known to play a role in facilitating KFR activities with links to terrorist groups, as will be discussed in the article later.

Sabah's Proximity to Southern Philippines

Adding to this is the fact that ESSZONE is strategically located close to neighbouring areas that are politically volatile and less developed in its socio-economic status¹². For example, the main village where the Lahad Datu incursion took place, known as Kampung Tanduo in Felda Sahabat, is only about 65 kilometres to southern Philippine island of Tawi-Tawi.¹³ Meanwhile, Tanjung Labian in Lahad Datu is said to be only 27 nautical miles from the island of Tawi-Tawi, making it easily visible in plain sight.¹⁴

The proximity to such areas also makes it easier for terrorist and KFR groups to smuggle themselves as well as materials such as firearms into and between

southern Philippines, Sabah and Kalimantan. During the days of JI, weapons and explosives were obtained from Zamboanga and later brought to Tawi-Tawi. These items were then smuggled into Sandakan in Sabah by boat and were later brought to Tawau before making its way to Nunukan islands in East Kalimantan.¹⁵ This further complicates the effort by security agencies to monitor and secure the areas under ESSZONE.

Lack of Awareness on the Importance of Physical Security of Businesses

Another important challenge in securing ESSZONE is the lack of awareness on the part of business operators in ensuring the security of their own premises. Hotels, fish farms and restaurants have often been the targets of ASG-linked KFR groups. Over the past years, several cases of successful kidnappings were at resorts located in ESSZONE. A news report revealed foiled attempts of large-scale plans to conduct kidnappings of Caucasian tourists from island resorts in Sabah in 2017.¹⁶ Earlier in 2015, two people were kidnapped from a seafood restaurant in Sandakan by suspected "cross border kidnap gangs linked to the ASG".¹⁷

The attack was also said to potentially involve insider's job, with the individual providing information on high-valued targets in the restaurants.¹⁸ According to a former member of JI based in Sabah, informers with links, including family ties, to the ASG and KFR groups do exist, with most of them being illegal immigrants residing in Sabah.¹⁹ He continued by revealing that

some of these informers work as fisherman, labourers, traders as well as in hotels and some even in government departments. It is therefore important for business operators to have the necessary awareness on the importance of securing their own premises. This could be done by ensuring that workers with valid documentations are hired along with proper recruitment processes. However, most business operators prefer to hire illegal immigrants as they are cheaper and are more willing to work longer hours.²⁰ This makes it even harder for authorities to monitor and secure the districts from potential intruders and kidnappers.

Illegal Immigrants and their Link to KFR and Terrorist Groups

This brings us to the next and final challenge discussed in the article – the role of illegal immigrants as informers for terrorist and KFR groups. The sheer number of illegal immigrants and undocumented individuals in Sabah, particularly in areas under ESSZONE, is not something to be taken lightly. Executive Director of the Institute of Development Studies, Anthony Kiob stated that 1.2 million, out of 3.9 million, are foreigners with the highest number being in Tawau, followed by Sandakan.²¹ Meanwhile, Sabah's state government estimated that there are about 800,000 illegal immigrants in the state.²²

In relation to the kidnappings of two Indonesians from a fishing vessel in the waters off Semporna in September 2018, the authorities were adamant that illegal immigrants from southern Philippines, who have long been

staying in Sabah, aided the kidnappers by providing valuable information on targets.²³ This makes it even more important for businesses to ensure that legitimate workers, with valid documentations, are hired.

However, it is equally important to note that not all illegal immigrants are risks to the country's security. These immigrants, as mentioned above, may have been in the country for decades and have been genuinely working and contributing to the state's economy. Despite not having legal documents, it would be beneficial to the country's economy if genuine workers, with no known links to terrorist and KFR groups, are carefully considered to be permanent residents of Malaysia. This would also allow for a more effective monitoring of migrants in the country.

Conclusion

The article explored some of the challenges in securing Sabah's eastern seaboard. These challenges include Sabah's long eastern shoreline, history of cross border activities in the Sulu-Celebes seas and proximity to neighbouring countries with instable political and socio-economic environments. Familial ties and kinship, as a result of the long-standing tradition of crossing borders and the proximity to southern Philippines, have also created a sense of belonging to Sabah. This has led to, among others, continuous illegal cross border activities and the issue of illegal immigrants in the state. Some of these illegal immigrants

residing in Sabah have links to KFR and terrorist groups based in southern Philippines, thus, making them valuable assets in kidnapping activities. Another contributing issue is the lack of awareness of business operators on the importance of securing their premises as well as the danger in hiring illegal immigrants and undocumented individuals with potential links to terrorist and KFR groups.

These challenges are some of the factors that make securing Sabah eastern seaboard even more difficult. Nonetheless, these are important factors to consider in formulating a better, more robust and tangible, long-term strategies in securing ESSZONE.

Endnotes

¹ The article is based on the author's published work titled *The Lahad Datu Incursion and Its Impact on Malaysia's Security* (2016) and presentation titled "Cabaran dan Hala Tuju Dalam Menjamin Keselamatan di Pantai Timur Sabah" in December 2019 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

² ESSZONE was established following the Lahad Datu Incursion in 2013. Districts under ESSZONE include districts of Kudat, Kota Marudu, Pitas, Beluran, Sandakan, Kinabatangan, Lahad Datu, Kunak, Semporna, and Tawau.

³ Zolkepli, F. (2017). Facing Down Terror. *The Star*. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2017/04/23/facing-down-terror-the-man-who-leads-a-bukit-aman-division-in-fighting-terrorism-has-many-foes-to-s/>

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Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the Forum section are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect that of the Institute.

Reflection on the *Diploma in Diplomacy* Programme

I was excited and humbled by the offer to participate in the *Diploma in Diplomacy (DiD) 1/2021* programme, which began on 2 November 2020.

Our DiD programme differed slightly from its recent iterations, and not just because we were still battling the COVID-19 pandemic and managing the restrictions following the implementation of the Movement Control Order. For one, ours incorporated the On-The-Job Training module, where we spent three out of the five working days from the months of November to December 2020 learning the ropes in a different Department/Division that we were previously from. I personally found the module especially valuable as it exposed me to the workings of Wisma Putra, beyond the Department of Multilateral Affairs which I have grown accustomed to since joining the Ministry.

I was grateful to be attached to the Finance Division at an opportune moment – just when the 2021 Budget was announced followed by the closing of Federal Government accounts for the year 2020. I was fortunate to be part of the various processes related to financial management and planning, and I gained a better appreciation of the intricacy of financial and procurement matters, as well as how it is intertwined with other aspects of the Ministry, especially the Management Services Department and our Missions. Our diverse placements during the training, coupled with the experience from our previous Departments/Divisions, brought about enriching discussions among colleagues on cross-cutting issues for the remainder of the programme.

The academic modules expectedly covered the different facets of work in Wisma Putra such as bilateral affairs, multilateral affairs, management services, ASEAN, maritime affairs, and policy planning. Other relevant topics include the promotion of Malaysia's interests abroad, trade and investment, tourism, and palm oil. In addition, simulation exercises were also incorporated in several modules, namely, on documents for the Annual Leaders' Retreat, resolution of the United Nations Security Council, non-compliance to *Sistem Pentadbiran Kerajaan Malaysia* procedures, negotiations on ASEAN documents, as well as multilateral negotiations. I found the simulation exercises stimulating and an effective approach to put the theoretical aspects of the academic module into practice, leading to a much better grasp of the concepts. I highly recommend that the simulation exercises be retained and possibly expanded to other academic modules, where appropriate.

The English Language module provided an opportunity to further hone writing and speaking skills, while the Foreign Languages module, in which participants selected one of the six languages offered – Arabic, French, German, Mandarin, Russian and Spanish – provided the chance to learn a new language, which may be put to good use in future portfolios and assignments abroad. I was happy to explore a new interest in the German language and hope to develop better proficiency at it in the future.

Throughout the programme, we also hosted several events with senior officials of Wisma Putra as well as distinguished guest speakers. These include a dinner talk with YAM Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin ibni Tuanku Muhriz, Founding President of the Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs; a black-tie dinner with Dato' Sri Muhammad Shahrul Ikram Yaakob, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia; as well as lunch talks with Tan Sri Othman Hashim, Chairman of the Human Rights Commission, and Mr. Edmund Bon, former representative of Malaysia to the ASEAN Commission on Human Rights, respectively. There were also a series of sharing sessions with Heads of Departments of the Ministry; as well as a *bubur lambuk* corporate social responsibility programme in conjunction with the month of Ramadhan that was graced by Dato' Mohd Zamruni Khalid, Director General of IDFR. The hosting of these programmes gave us good exposure on the many aspects of event management, including planning for contingencies.

The Defending National Interest module also imparted valuable experiences, as all of us were put to the

test in standing Malaysia's ground on the issues presented. The diverse background of our panellists – from subject-matter experts from Wisma Putra to academia to members of the media – provided useful insights into how we should prepare for challenging and off-topic questions during a press conference, as well as highlight the importance of exercising good stewardship. It was also an opportunity to recognise our strengths and identify rooms for improvement with regard to public speaking.

The most valuable takeaway from the programme, in my view, is the camaraderie forged between all 21 of us throughout the six months we were together. We supported and helped each other discover our strengths and weaknesses. This has created a strong bond between us and allowed us to work better as a team. Although the COVID-19 situation and implementation of the Movement Control Order had reduced the opportunities of having more physical gatherings amongst us, it certainly did not dampen our *esprit de corps*.

I wish to express my utmost appreciation to the Ministry and IDFR for the opportunity to participate in the programme, as well as to my fellow colleagues of DiD 1/2021 for the friendship and support. With the knowledge and experience imparted to us through the programme, we endeavour to give our best in all our future assignments, be it at home or abroad.

Nizhan Faraz Rizal

IDFR Lecture Series 1/2021

The lecture titled *The Biden Presidency and U.S. Policy in Southeast Asia* was conducted on 9 June 2021. It was delivered by H.E. Brian D. McFeeters, the United States Ambassador to Malaysia, and the session was moderated by Professor Dr. K.S. Nathan, President of the Malaysian Association for American Studies and a Distinguished Fellow of IDFR. The lecture was held virtually with an overwhelming attendance of 186 participants.

H.E. McFeeters began his lecture by emphasising the Biden administration's commitment towards fostering foreign policies that promote American engagements with Southeast Asia and Asia as a whole. He added that the current administration is more of a continuity rather than a change as can be seen from the



various collaborations in sectors such as security, diplomacy, and economy.

H.E. McFeeters stated that the Asian continent is growing to become more economically and politically important in the Indo-Pacific region. In America's view, these nations, despite their different sizes, remain secure in their sovereignty and are able to

maintain economic growth and fair and open competition while accommodating international law. With this in mind, H.E. McFeeters conveyed his wish to strengthen the cooperation and maintain the existing alliances based on shared common values to face current challenges.

With regard to the U.S. relations with ASEAN, H.E. McFeeters said

that the cooperation between the two focused on areas such as economic integration, maritime cooperation, opportunities for youths and women, and transnational challenges. In this regard, H.E. McFeeters mentioned the role of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) cooperation that recognises the ASEAN Centrality and its potential to work together in tackling these issues effectively. He explained how besides viewing it as a security alliance between the Quad and ASEAN, it is a flexible framework that can call for practical solutions for the

challenges taking place in the Indo-Pacific region.

In terms of economic engagement, H.E. McFeeters elucidated that by 2019, the U.S. foreign direct investment amounted to a total of about USD\$353 billion. He stated that U.S. companies and Malaysia collaborated mainly in developing high technology equipment to ensure stable global supply chains and open trade economy.

He also argued that this form of investment would be beneficial to boost Malaysia's competitiveness

and efficiency of government services, especially in the digital realm. This economic view is not limited to monetary investment but as an economic engagement that creates a platform or environment to address other challenges such as peace and security, human rights, education, and climate crisis.

The ambassador concluded his lecture by stating that the Biden administration is focused on maintaining existing policies and programmes that show promising progress in their respective areas.

Economic Diplomacy Series 1/2021

On 7 July 2021, IDFR organised its first lecture under the Economic Diplomacy Series for the year. Titled *Malaysia-China Economic Relations: Opportunities and Challenges*, the speaker was H.E. Raja Dato' Nushirwan Zainal Abidin, Ambassador of Malaysia to the People's Republic of China. Approximately 170 participants attended the virtual lecture.

In the context of COVID-19, H.E. Raja Dato' Nushirwan stated that Malaysia was the first country to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with China on post-pandemic operation and attain a reciprocal vaccine arrangement. In fact, in 2020, the pandemic witnessed a 30 per cent rise in trade amounting to USD\$131.16 billion between the two countries in multiple sectors.

His Excellency also spoke on the challenges where the pandemic has put many economies in the process of transition and proposed that economies focus on efficiency and resilience to achieve shorter supply chains.

Pertaining to opportunities, His Excellency highlighted the relevancy of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Malaysia-China economic relations. Even though the SMEs constitute a small portion of bilateral trade, he believes that with the government's assistance, the enterprises may be able to compete with the Chinese market. His Excellency added that the Chinese government has plans to create a robust domestic market and foster a new development pattern which promotes active engagement between domestic

and international demands. This pattern can be a huge marketing potential that boost internal and external flows of trade while unlocking investment potential.

His Excellency pointed out that digital marketing platforms have been dominant in allowing market flow to skyrocket and how Chinese consumers have shown advancement in their online culture and technology in getting their businesses to thrive. Online sellers have also progressed by reaching consumers across the world through live streaming, among others. With this, His Excellency urged Malaysian brands to take advantage of branding, design, and innovation, and to work their way up the value chain through digitalisation.

News Contributors

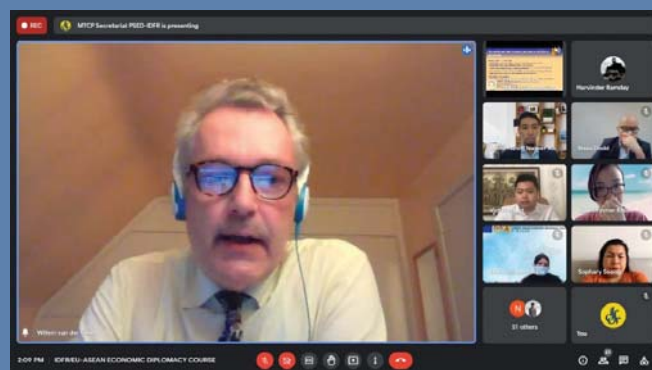
Adrina Zulkarnain, Nizhan Faraz Rizal, Noraini Awang Nong, Nur Qistina Mohd Farid, Shanthini Subramaniam



Panel of Distinguished Fellows' Meeting, 23 April 2021



H.E. Walid Abu Ali, Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Malaysia, was the speaker for the *Ambassador Lecture Series 2/2021*, 6 May 2021



Dr. Willem Van Der Geest, formerly with the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, was one of the presenters at the *EU/IDFR-ASEAN Economic Diplomacy Course*, 14 July 2021



Online discussion on research collaboration with Dr. Maryam Al Mahmoud of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, UAE, 23 June 2021



Courtesy call on YAM Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin ibni Tuanku Muhriz, Founding President of IDEAS, by the Director General, 22 July 2021



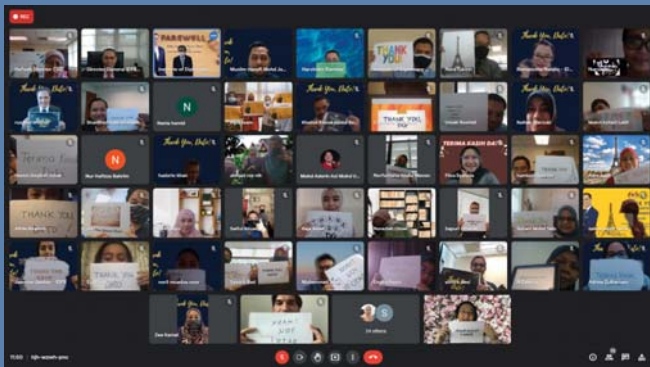
Economic Diplomacy Series 1/2021, 7 July 2021



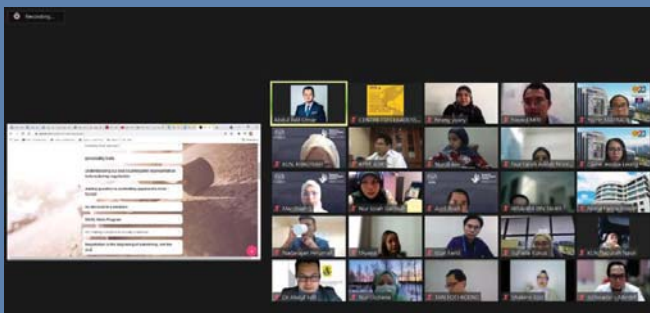
Participants of the *Economic Diplomacy Course* in a lecture session by Ambassador-designate Raja Saiful Ridzuwan Raja Kamaruddin of the Ministry's Department of Policy Planning and Coordination, 23 July 2021



The *Diploma in Diplomacy 2/2021*'s session on Drafting of Annual Leader's Retreat Documents, led by Mr. Nik Ady Arman Nik Mohd Kamil and Mr. Abdilbar Ab. Rashid of the Ministry's Southeast Asia Division, 6 August 2021



Farewell on Google Meet for the Director General, 11 August 2021



Participants of the *Negotiation Course for Junior Level Officers*, 12 August 2021



A fortnightly workshop on Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's planned publication *Istilah Diplomasi dan Hubungan Antarabangsa Edisi Baharu*, 18 August 2021



IDFR was featured on *Bernama.com*, 19 August 2021



One of IDFR's upcoming programmes, 14 September 2021