

# FOCUS ON THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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## EDITORIAL

# The Shifting Ground of Democracy

Across South and Southeast Asia, concepts of democracy, justice, and human rights are facing contestation, re-interpretation, and selective application. Democratization has had a troubled history in Asia, with political regimes wavering between outright dictatorships and tentative versions of liberal democracy. Religion, ethnicity, caste, and class have held greater sway over secularism, pluralism, and universalism in shaping democratic practice.

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Photo credit: Shalmali Guttal

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Ironically, democratic procedures seem to have created conditions that undermine the universality of both human rights and democracy. Electoral democracy has resulted in majoritarian political regimes in which national identity is being shaped and articulated by parochial, nativist, elite, and economic interests in varying mixes. Political parties and leaders that claim majority support through elections and/or through absence of societal challenges to the exercise of authoritarian power, choose which “minorities” (i.e., those not on their side) are deserving of voice, rights, citizenship, and justice. They also choose among the population, groups that can be used as scapegoats for social-economic

problems, who are then vilified, criminalized, and made targets of various kinds of violence. Women, whether part of majority or minority groups, continue to face regressive strictures that place religious-social expectations over their rights as autonomous human beings.

In India, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) claims that it is not behind the escalation of lynching and other violence against Muslims, Christians, Dalits, Adivasis, and secular Hindus. But many of its leaders publicly justify such atrocities as defense of cultural and religious values, and the regime sends clear signals to lynch mobs that they will not be held accountable for their actions. The “war on drugs” in the Philippines has claimed more than

20,000 lives, majority of them poor and many have not been proven to have connection with the drug trade. President Duterte has publicly stated that he does not care about human rights, and has promised military and police officials immunity from prosecutions for these killings, as well as protection from investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Cambodia’s ruling regime has selectively applied tax laws to shut down a major newspaper and other opponents, while businesses related to senior members of the Cambodian Peoples’ Party (CPP) are allowed loopholes to run multi-million dollar operations tax free, or with little tax liability. By legally removing its main electoral



Women in the protest march during Philippine President Duterte’s third State of the Nation Address

challenger—the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP)—in 2017, the CPP has ensured its domination of the current electoral landscape. In the run-up to the general elections on 29 July 2018, the government used legal and other threats to silence calls for an election boycott by those opposed to the CPP. Cambodians who did not vote would be branded traitors, instigators, and guerrillas. On election day, businesses across the country loyal to the CPP offered gifts and money to those whose fingers were stained with voting ink.

In Myanmar, as the National League of Democracy (NLD) continues to hold up the banner of civilian rule and the peace process, armed conflicts continue between the Tatmadaw and several ethnic groups, and organized persecution of the Rohingya shows no signs of abating. In order to maintain good relations with the Tatmadaw, the NLD has played down what many have called a planned genocide of Rohingya peoples. The Government of the Lao PDR (Laos) justifies incarceration without trial of village residents in Southern Laos because they did not accept the “compensation” provided for the taking of their farmland by a rubber company. In Thailand, former senior officials from the Shinawatra government have been indicted for corruption, while those from the Democratic party who ordered the violent crackdown of civilian “red shirt” protestors roam free. But in 2003-2004, the Thaksin Shinawatra government itself led a brutal war against drugs and military operations against insurgency in the country’s deep south.

These trends are inextricably linked with the inequality and immiseration

caused by neoliberalism, and the mad rush to achieve rapid economic growth. The development model that continues to rule the roost across the region has become shockingly extractive and exploitative, creating and deepening poverty for many, and concentrating wealth in the hands of corporations, elites, and upper classes. Trade unions and other organizations of the working class have been sabotaged; the livelihoods of workers, peasants, and fisherfolk are becoming more precarious; rural and urban poor are routinely evicted to make way for investment projects that largely benefit middle and upper classes; women in low income families face increasing hardships because of privatization of essential services, and; indigenous peoples and other local populations in resource rich areas face intensifying pressure from states and corporations who covet and claim these resources.

Neoliberalism has also become central in the practice of politics: political parties are financed by corporations and wealthy interest groups from just about anywhere; parties with money hire private firms to create conventional and social media campaigns that re-invent history and produce “social facts”; independent media and commentators face defamation lawsuits, intimidation, and even murder if they try to set the record straight.

Trolling in social media has become a common weapon to attack those who question the majoritarian rhetoric. The anonymity afforded by social media enables misogynist, racist, communal, and hate remarks with no danger of accountability. Governments on their part are making cybercrime laws more

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draconian, and incarcerate bloggers, commentators, and anyone who challenges their interests, on charges of creating social instability, spreading fake news, *les majeste*, dissidence, and even treason. Rights and spaces for civic dialogue and actions are shrinking for those already marginalized and dispossessed, and those who challenge these trends. But benefitting from economic growth and neoliberalism, middle and upper classes are largely comfortable with maintaining the status quo, and are not willing to champion popular democracy if it undermines their social, economic, or religious interests.

But even as the political climate becomes more restricted, peoples' resistances and opposition to authoritarianism, rights violations, criminalization of dissent, repression, and violence continue. In Thailand, despite a law that prohibits political gathering of more than five people, numerous pro-democracy and pro-rights groups have organized public demonstrations, marches, and gatherings. The Peoples Movement for a Just Society (PMOVE), a coalition of six grassroots movements, camped on Bangkok pavements for 10 days in May, demanding that the government recognize their rights to land, freedom, democracy, and justice.<sup>1</sup> In India, social activists, lawyers, writers, and local leaders brave the risks of violence and murder to publicly oppose hate politics and attacks on minorities. In the Philippines, the Duterte regime's murderous attacks and misogyny are being confronted by people from numerous constituencies and regions, and new platforms are being created by civil society, such as the #BabaeAko movement.

About 40,000 people from different sectors, social movements, religions, and progressive political organizations united in a massive mobilisation on July 23, the day that the Philippine president gave his State of the Nation Address (SONA), to show opposition to proposed changes in the constitution, condemn Duterte's continuing misogyny, and protest against extra-judicial killings, militarization, and impending dictatorship. In Cambodia, workers continue to demand decent wages and work conditions despite a history of violent repercussions. Last June 10, thousands of people in several cities and workers in two industrial zones in Vietnam staged protests against a draft law on Special Economic Zones.

Protests and pushback against destructive infrastructure projects, land grabbing, workers' exploitation, sexual violence, social-economic injustices, and elite politics are not new in South and Southeast Asia. But what makes them remarkable in the present conjuncture is that they are happening in increasingly repressive authoritarian political climates. People are unwilling to further tolerate the exclusions, exploitation, misogyny, social-economic divisions, and violence wreaked by authoritarianism, nativism, and neoliberalism, parading as development and democracy. Crucial aspects of peoples' resistances are to prevent the 'normalization' of discrimination, oppression, prejudice, hate, inequality, and violence; and to push for democratic systems that uphold the universality and inalienability of human rights.

**Shalmali Guttal**

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<sup>1</sup> For PMOVE statements, see: <https://focusweb.org/content/land-freedom-democracy-justice>



# The Indomitable Spirit of Democracy in Thailand

By Shalmali Guttal

On May 22 2014, the Thai military took control of the government through a coup d'état and suspended the 2007 Constitution, except for the section on the Monarchy. On May 20, martial law was declared, and the military summoned opposing political factions for talks to ostensibly resolve an escalating political crisis. Two days later, however, the military announced a complete take-over of the country. Army chief General Prayuth Chan-Ocha assumed the reins of government through the establishment of a new body—the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

The coup came on the heels of over six months of demonstrations and counter-demonstrations by groups who opposed the Pheu Thai party-led government and those who supported them. The opposition was led by SuthepThaugsuban, former Deputy Prime Minister under the previous Democrat party-led government, through a broad platform called the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC). Also referred to as the Yellow Shirts and Whistle Group, the PDRC demanded that then Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra be ousted and the Pheu Thai government

be replaced. The supporters were members of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), also called the Red Shirts, allied with the Pheu Thai party (and its various earlier formations) and loyal to former Prime Ministers Thaksin Shinawatra and his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. Mr.Thaksin was previously removed from office by a military coup in 2006.

Ms.Yingluck was forced to step down as Prime Minister on May 8, 2014 when the Constitutional Court

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February 10, 2018 rally at the Democracy Monument; protesters press for elections. Photo credit: Shalmali Guttal

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found her guilty of abusing her power. The Commerce Minister was named as acting Prime Minister until a planned general election in July 2014, which did not take place.

## Returning Happiness to the People

The NCPO claimed that the coup was necessary to restore peace and order, prevent violence, and restore happiness to the Thai people. The NCPO made it clear that no dissent or opposition would be tolerated; military check points were established across the country; many protest leaders were detained; news, information, and cyber censorship was imposed; politically oriented television stations and community radio stations were shut down, and; a ban on political gathering of more than five people was immediately enforced.

In early June 2014, the Royal Thai Army released a song, “Returning Happiness to the People,” written by General Prayuth, which was released on YouTube and widely promoted by the NCPO. The song was one of several public relations efforts launched by the NCPO to win the hearts and minds of the Thai people even as it stripped them of fundamental freedoms and rights, including the right to liberty, free speech, and assembly.

Soon after the coup, the NCPO started summoning and detaining “influential people” for “attitude adjustment” and “re-education.” Those summoned were asked about their views on the coup, the monarchy, the Shinawatra clan, etc.,

and released on the conditions that they would not engage in political activities, not publicly criticize the junta or express any view that may encourage opposition to the junta, and not leave the country without permission from the junta. Before their release, they also had to sign a statement stating that they were not mistreated or coerced in any way. Politicians, journalists, academics, lawyers, students, writers, artists, members of grassroots movements—just about anyone—could be summoned for attitude adjustment if they were considered dissident thinkers by the NCPO. Some were detained for a few hours or days, but others were held in military camps for weeks.

On July 22, 2014, the NCPO enacted an interim constitution drafted by technocrats without any public consultation. Of special concern in this document is Article 44 (also referred to as section 44), which allows the junta leader absolute power to give any order deemed necessary by the junta to strengthen law, order, public unity and harmony, and prevent any act that undermines public peace. Section 44 has been used for arresting people, transferring officials, governance of land and forests, changes in election protocol of local councils, etc. These orders can be passed by the junta without any judicial, criminal, and administrative liability.

Since the start of the coup, the junta has made numerous promises to hold general elections, none of which have materialised. Instead, infiltration and monitoring of seminars and conferences in universities by the military and police continue, as do surveillance

## On July 22, 2014, the NCPO enacted an interim constitution drafted by technocrats without any public consultation

and arrests of academics, students, journalists, community leaders, and just about anyone who expresses dissent against the establishment. A recent computer crimes act has severely curtailed and criminalised social media activity and freedom of expression. Poor communities have faced increasing hardships as the junta has consolidated the military's power over the country's natural resources and silenced peoples' opposition to destructive resource development projects. Academics and lawyers have observed that many NCPO orders have benefited rich investors at the cost of peoples' well-being and livelihoods. The latest timeline for general elections presented by the junta is

early 2019, but human rights analysts have cautioned that repression and rights violations will intensify in the months ahead of the elections.

## Responses to the Coup

Much of the Thai upper and middle classes support the coup because they fear the populist appeal of the wealthy, self-exiled Shinawatrass and oppose their influence in Thai politics. Some analysts have observed that opposition to Mr. Thaksin is fueled by the fear that he will make Thailand a republic. Many others may not actively support the coup, but believe it was needed to end an escalating political crisis that disrupted their daily lives and negatively affected the Thai economy. The junta's staying power is based on the support of these groups. The roots of the political crisis in Thailand go back a long way, and are embedded in a class divide that transcends rural-urban distinctions. The red shirt-yellow shirt divide that has dogged the country since 2006 can in some ways be viewed as a conflict between the country's old and new elites.

But there are also many Thais from different classes and sectors who have steadfastly opposed the coup. Despite the strictures imposed by the military, mobilizations against the coup started very soon after it was declared. Many of these were organized and led by students from different universities who used creative actions and social media to rally opposition to the clamp-down on fundamental rights and freedoms, and the assault on democracy. These included silent gatherings with: where individuals raised arm with three-finger salute (inspired by

the film *The Hunger Games*), group readings of George Orwell's 1984, quiet sandwich eating gatherings, and flash mobs with posters and cartoons. The actions were held in public spaces, mass transit walk-ways, and outside fast-food restaurants and shopping malls in Bangkok, drawing attention from press, tourists, and passers-by.

In the following months and years, students coalesced across already existing, or newly formed groups such as the League of Liberal Thammasat for Democracy (LLTD), the Thai Student Center for Democracy (TSCD), Dao Din and the New Democracy Movement (NDM). In April 2017, the Democracy Restoration Group (DRG) was formed by students who had graduated from college to continue pro-democracy activities with student groups and other constituencies.

Protest actions were organized at every coup anniversary, as well as on other selected dates, for example on October 6 to pay homage to those killed during the 1976 massacre at Thammasat University. Again, the actions were creative and social media was used to draw participants; for example, taking photographs of themselves in cages to symbolize the imprisoning of thought, a mock referendum to reject the junta's charter and demand democracy, and wearing Pinocchio masks with General Prayuth's face, the long noses symbolizing the junta's broken election promises.

Students have also been attracted to and supported by other pro-democracy groups that have come up over the past 18 or so months, such as Resistant Citizen, Start Up

People, and People Go Network. These groups and networks are made up of NGOs, lawyers, artists, academics, and rural and urban working class people, who are linking political, social, and environmental issues. On January 20 this year People Go Network had a 450-km march from Bangkok to neighboring provinces, to build public awareness on four government policy issues that adversely affect the people. These include environment and natural resources; agriculture; health security; and freedom and liberties.

Students who graduated from university in the past four years continue to be part of the young movement opposing the coup and demanding democracy through formations such as DRG and the People Who Want Elections movement. Student activists come from different socio-economic and political backgrounds, and for the most part do not subscribe to the "red-yellow" divide, nor are they particularly loyal to any political party or camp. They want popular democracy, fundamental freedoms and human rights for everyone, and are willing to risk their own liberty and comforts towards these goals. During an action march organized by People Who Want Elections last May 21-22 to mark the fourth anniversary of the coup, DRG leaders allowed themselves to be arrested in order to defuse growing tensions between the marchers and the police.

Presented below are excerpts from an interview with Mr. Rangsiman Rome, one of the founders of the NDM and DRG, where he talks about collective efforts to reinvigorate a pro-democracy movement in Thailand.



# Interview with Rangsiman Rome

We just started with Anon Nampa, Jaa New [Sirawith Seritiwat], and me on the skywalk between MBK and the BACC on January 27 2018. We wanted to engage people who want to vote so we went to the skywalk in front of MBK. We did not have a plan. The movement grew organically. Bow [Nutta Mahattana] joined after that.

We tried to make a new way. In Thailand, movement building is hard because we do not think of unity, but about our space in the media. Now we are trying to build a movement in a new way, with a Board that makes collective decisions.

People Who Want Elections movement came up with a roadmap for the fourth anniversary of the coup, with actions for February 10, February 24, March 10, and May 21-22, 2018.

In the past, democracy movements were events focused, and there was nothing after the event. We decided to set aside our ego. We thought that if more people [outside the Board] know the roadmap, then more people will join us. We shared the roadmap through social media. And this strategy worked because many people came to know about our plan through the roadmap and joined us. But our roadmap was only till May 22 because we did not know what would happen after that. We are now making an update.

The way our movement grew up was natural. We still don't know how we



Rangsiman Rome

can use international media. We have around 10 people on our Board, who are the leaders of the DRG, Start Up people, Resistant Citizen; all of us have many legal cases against us.

The DRG was built in mid-2017, after the New Democracy Movement (NDM). NDM is a student movement and it was not enough. We had to build a movement for students who graduated, so that they would be able to continue the fight for democracy. There was no NGO fighting for democracy and civil rights, so DRG focused on that. In Thailand there are many NGOs fighting for land, environment, etc., and we agree with that. But we needed a democracy focus.

We were just five people who started DRG and the core group is still only five people. We raise funds

for our activities internally. We have some members and we are linked to a broader network, Project 807/5, which is a youth network, similar to a political school. They have meetings every month. Those students who want to remain committed, join the DRG and get involved in our events. The DRG is supported by this network.

At the May 21-22 activity, 15 of us were arrested on May 22. All the DRG leaders on the Board have legal cases against us. There are nine cases against me and if I am convicted for all of them I face a maximum of 45 years in prison. But others have more cases against them. Anon Nampa has 13 cases against him.

I have cases in the military and civilian courts. The civilian cases are still active and the cases will not go



away. These are political cases so we believe we will not be in jail. The families of our leaders have also faced discrimination. We have to keep going forward and we have to believe that we can bring about change. We do not want to lose, or face defeat.

We hold political schools every month under the Project 807/5. The network members host them in different places and contribute funding for the ones they host. The schools used to be for one day, and now the schools are for three days every month. The topics usually include: analyses of overall situation in different parts of the country; what we can do about the situation; what skills we need to build, etc. The participants propose the topics and DRG shapes the overall structure and framework. These days the schools are more focused on elections.

One of the skills we build is deep listening: how to work across cultures, languages, religions; how to communicate; how to use social media, etc. We try to make participants feel equal and have solidarity.

Most of the participants [in the schools] are in college. We started with 20 students. These students invited their friends, and the numbers kept growing. Those who learn enough become trainers for the next activist group. Some join DRG as staff or members, or they become members of the broader network.

Before the action on May 21-22 we conducted training for the different groups/people who planned to join

the action. We wanted to avoid fighting between people and police. Any picture of such violence will reflect badly on us.

Young people do not want to be told what to do and follow the movement. If they are not happy, they will criticize the movement on Facebook. But the red shirt followers, the older generation don't have that. They are willing to set differences aside to build a movement, and they ask young people why they criticize their own movement.

Young people today have no experience in being part of a movement. They are born into a different society. Most are born into middle class families, have enough money for education and enough opportunities for advancement. Thai university students do not decide big or hard things for themselves, they just make day to day decisions. Parents drop and pick up the people from school and college. The students have no contact with the outside world, no contact with poor people. They meet people from the same [socio-economic] class at school. Their parents make suggestions on bigger issues and they follow them. So how can they decide anything for the country?

I was born in Phuket. In the South [of Thailand] people always talked about politics. One of my early memories is of posters of Thaksin being posted. My family always discussed politics and they supported the Democrats, not Thaksin. When Thaksin won the election, they discussed how corrupt he is, and how he became rich.

At the time of the first coup in 2006, I had many questions. My father is American and I was able to get information from outside. I studied at the Faculty of Law in Thammasat University. I always wanted to study at Thammasat University because of its history. In my first year I joined the Liberal League of Thammasat for Democracy.

At University I realized that every day of my life is related with politics. What is the difference between what we discuss in the classroom and what happens outside? We have to be clear about what is right and what is wrong. We must change wrong things to right things. In Thailand, the political system is wrong and we have to change it.

Each person in DRG has grown up with different experiences that drew them to the movement. DRG believes in freedom of speech and human rights.

I am lucky to have a circle [of family, friends, colleagues] who are interested in politics. But many people of the young generation don't have the circle like me, so it is really hard for them to grow up to be interested in politics. I hope after this they will try to fight for our future.

It is hard to say what we will do in the future. Now we are preparing the youth to join the democracy movement. Our movement is very popular, but for our movement to be successful, we need more support. For example, politicians visit us when we are in jail, but that is not enough.

# Fighting the Legitimization of Hate

By Mansi Sharma

Prime Minister Narendra Modi campaigned and won in the 2014 national elections selling “developmental agenda,” “communalism,” and “emotional sentimentalism” in such an organized manner leaving opponents of his party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) shaken. Opposition leader and former president of the Indian National Congress, Sonia Gandhi, recently admitted that her party was out-marketed by Modi’s promises that India would be transformed within 60 days after he got elected. But where Modi and the BJP had sensed that a dose of communalism would add to their votes, they also went for minority bashing and played on the insecurity of the majority.

The leader used sentimentalism to identify himself with the poor masses. He called himself a poor *chaiwallah* (tea vendor), which worked well with the poor and marginalized. To the middle class, his ‘corruption-free’ regime appealed. The result was the consolidation of the majority Hindu voters, with BJP also getting the majority in the Parliament so that now the right-wing Party has its government in most of the states in India.

However, it is generally observed that the slogans of development and corruption-free society, and the so-called “chai” sentimentalism have been meant as a masked promotion of corporate interests. For example, government implemented



Photo credit: Mansi Sharma

“demonetization” aimed at attacking “black money,” but this initiative has only resulted in destroying small-scale manufacturing, weakening rural and agrarian markets, and affecting daily wage laborers and the informal sector.

Control of cultural and educational institutions, such as the Indian

Council for Social Research and the Indian Council for Historical Research, has also been part of this strategy, especially aimed at historical revisionism. According to a Focus study, *The Rise of Popular Authoritarianisms in Asia*, in BJP-ruled states, “historical revisionism” is escalating; text books for school children are being rewritten in line

with the exclusivist and hate agenda of the RSS. Premier universities that promote heterodox thinking are being targeted as bastions of the “anti-national.”

The public discourse is being militarized and marked by increasing violence, even murder, as well as hate remarks by social media trolls. Muslims and Dalits are being lynched as cow-killers and caste transgressors. In addition, a new “amoralism” in politics is being entrenched—one that shields the powerful from accountability, promotes corruption, and encourages impunity.

The broader ramifications of the BJP in power are there for everyone to see: constitutional posts are being undermined, so that key democratic institutions such as the Parliament, Courts, the Election Commission, and Media Houses have been taken over by people with known right-wing affiliations. The parliament of India, which Prime Minister Modi described as “temple of democracy” four years ago, has never been mocked the way it is today. During the last Budget Session (first quarter of 2018), the Parliament’s scheduled session was delayed to accommodate the State election in Gujarat, reducing the designated number of participants per session to its lowest ever in parliament history. The country saw continuous disruptions in both Upper and Lower Houses. On an average, Lok Sabha worked for 21 percent of its scheduled time, while Rajya Sabha worked for 27 percent. This was the least productive Budget Session for both Houses since 2000.

## Hate Crimes

Nearing the last year of its term before the May 2019 general elections, one of the main legacies of the Modi government is the rise in hate crimes.

As per the government’s own statement in Parliament, hate crimes against particular religious beliefs and castes have increased by 41 percent since 2014.

According to the *Documentation of the Oppressed* database, since 2014 about 451 incidents of hate crimes against 2,546 victims have been reported; these were mostly Muslims, Dalits, and Adivasis. The crimes included physical assaults, threats, murders, lynching, attack on religious places, and communal riots. More than half of the victims were Muslims and the perpetrators were affiliated with various right-wing fringe groups.

In Rasana village of Kathua in Jammu & Kashmir, an eight-year-old girl from the Bakarwal nomad community was kidnapped, gang-raped, kept without food, and administered with sedatives during her captivity in a local temple in January this year. The media did not report it initially, but after four months, when the Crime Branch of Jammu and Kashmir Police filed a charge sheet, the case shocked the public. It was reported that just minutes before she was killed, she was gang-raped again, showing vengeance and hate on the part of the perpetrators. Her body was then dumped in the bushes near the village.

Upon investigation, it was found that this was not just another gender-based crime, but a premeditated

***In the past four years, the country has also seen a rise in hate speeches by members of the ruling party***

***Most of these speeches have been aimed at Muslims, Christians, and Dalits***

conspiracy to dislodge the Bakarwal community from the area. It was the accused’s idea because he was against the settlement of the Bakarwal, who are Muslims. The accused had repeatedly instigated other members of his community to not provide land for grazing to the nomadic communities near their village in Kathua district, a largely Hindu majority area in the Jammu region. They did not even let the parents of the girl bury the dead body in their village and forced them to take the bruised body of a little girl eight kms away because the village community did not want their land to become a “Kabristan,” a Muslim burial ground.

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After the suspects, all of whom were caste-Hindus, had been arrested, there was a huge march in support of the accused by the newly formed 'Hindu Ekta Manch (Hindu Unity platform). Two current cabinet ministers of the ruling coalition government and members of BJP joined the march.

In Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, a member of the state Legislative Assembly belonging to the BJP and his aides were accused of raping a 17-year old Dalit girl. Despite the girl's numerous efforts, the police did not include the name of the accused in her official complaint, hence no action was taken against the perpetrators. After losing all hope to get justice and because of continuous harassment of the girl and her family, she tried to immolate herself in front of the residence of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, on April 08. A day later, the victim's father, who was arrested by the police in a fictitious case, was declared dead in police custody. His post-mortem report highlighted 14 injuries, including abrasions, contusions, and bruises. In this case, the accused were shielded by the government until the High Court took *suo moto* cognizance of it and ordered immediate arrest of the suspects. The Court also reprimanded the Yogi Adityanath government for its failure to act on the victim's complaint. As in Kathua, huge marches were organized in support of the lawmaker.

*Halt the Hate*, Amnesty International's website that documents alleged hate crimes in India, reported that since 2014, 422 incidents of hate crimes against

Dalits have been reported, of which 138 incidents resulted in deaths of the victims; 86 hate crimes were rapes of Dalit women. Amidst these hate crimes is the emergence of a dangerous practice, where citizens marching in support of the suspects is seen as the new normal because the victims are from minorities or marginalized communities.

## Hate Speeches

In the past four years, the country has also seen a rise in hate speeches by members of the ruling party. Most of these speeches have been aimed at Muslims, Christians, and Dalits. The hate speeches work as polarization tool to get votes (from the majority community), instill fear among target communities, and encourage the cadres to take it to the next level like mob lynching, unleashing of hate propaganda on social media, spreading of fake news, threatening people with rape and death. In many cases, it has also been observed that the more outlandish the speech, the more chances of it being rewarded by the party leadership. For example, Anant Kumar Hegde, a BJP member of parliament from Karnataka, in March 2016, said, "As long as we have Islam in the world, there will be no end to terrorism. If we are unable to end Islam, we won't be able to end terrorism." In September 2017, he was promoted as Union Minister in the central cabinet of Modi government. Three months after being made union minister, Mr Hegde declared that the party would remove the term "secular" from the Constitution, saying "These people who call themselves secularists are like people without parentage or who don't know their bloodline."

According to the latest report of NDTV.com, India's online news television, from May 2014 to the present, there have been 124 instances of hate speech by people holding responsible positions. The report said that 90 percent of the hateful comments made under the present regime have been by ruling party BJP politicians. Of 44 leaders responsible for hate speech since the Modi government came to power, only in five cases—four percent of all instances—have there been evidence of a politician being reprimanded, or cautioned, or issuing a public apology. In 96 percent of the time, the provocateurs of the hate speech have gotten away with it.

With these hate crimes and speeches encouraged by government's inaction, there has been a gradual destruction of the secular and plural fabric of India. In such an atmosphere, it is the utmost duty of every citizen of India to fight this ideology of hate and discrimination that is destroying the basic premise and preface of secularism, equality, justice, and liberty enshrined in India's Constitution. The next general elections are just few months away and we are already witnessing the rise in riots and communal tensions in several states and regions. There is a strong reason to believe that these trends will worsen, as we approach 2019 and the general elections. In these testing times when the threat of fascism is dangerously real, it is crucial that all progressive actors/forces, including political parties, peoples' movements, academics, artists, students, and civil society come together and build a mass movement to defeat the authoritarian regime and safeguard our democracy.

# Cambodia's “Color Revolution”

By Sophea Chrek

There has been a campaign against “color revolution” by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen himself and his regime’s allies over the past several years. They claim that the color revolution the former biggest opposition political party, Cambodia

National Rescue Party, organized during the period 2013-2017 was unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> The campaign against the so-called color revolutions has resulted in the dissolution of the CNRP,<sup>2</sup> which used to be the main opposition party to the Cambodian

People’s Party (CPP). The CPP is now the largest stand-alone political party in Cambodia, with only smaller and newly established parties as its competitors.

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Workers strike in a factory in Cambodia, December 2013

Those supposedly involved in staging color revolutions have since expanded to include civil society organizations (CSOs) and communities staging mobilizations/actions, all of whom are supposedly recipients of technical and financial support from western countries. Peaceful public mobilizations and gatherings, including the garment workers' general strike for wage increases in late 2013; protests by various communities to assert their land rights, access to and management of resources, and fair and just compensations for their livelihoods damaged by development/investment projects; campaigns for environmental protection; peoples' forums and assemblies; press conferences; online media campaigns, such as the Black Monday Facebook Campaign that called for the release of human rights defenders and land activists, have all been presented by the ruling regime as examples of color revolutions. Funding organizations and some development NGOs have also now been accused of being part of the color revolution.

"The color revolution oftentimes begins with political demonstration claimed to be non-violent, yet it carries hidden intention to provoke physical reaction from the security forces, leading to injuries or even deaths," said Dr. Ros Chantrabot, Personal Advisor to Cambodian Prime Minister, on national television in Cambodia.

"The organized politically-ill movement against ruling government utilises its media tools, including social media, to portray themselves as victim of the incident

in order to gain international support," he also said.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the steps to undermine the color revolutions are: upholding national peace and security, retaining national sovereignty, protecting elected government leaders, and banishing any and all threats that could lead to social instability, disrupt economic development and cause political erosion. This campaign is fully backed by the Cambodian army, which has asserted that it "is committed to protect the constitutional and legitimate government that is born from elections every five years."<sup>4</sup>

### Coloring Inequality and Injustice

The ruling regime is using narratives of peace, national security and sovereignty, and addressing threats to social-economic instability and erosion of citizens' trust in the current political system to consolidate its own political power. The campaign against color revolutions has been successfully used to sow fear, silence dissent, and polarize and manipulate peoples' actions. It has also been used to justify the regime's acts of repression, and suppression of activists, community mobilizations, and any form of dissent.

Recent experiences have shown that people's actions, especially among those from lower and working classes, are triggered by increasing social injustice, economic disparities, environmental devastation, and destruction of peoples' livelihoods. In the current economic paradigm of

Cambodia power and wealth are concentrated in the hands of a few powerful politicians, *Oknha* (elites and tycoons), investors and corporations.

One glaring example of social injustice and economic disparity is access to and control of lands. This issue has given rise to unresolved conflicts and disputes, and can be considered longstanding problem in Cambodia, especially now that lands have been opened to foreign capital.

Another example is garment workers' low wages, and their poor working and living conditions, even as the garment industry accounts for 16 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 80 percent of Cambodia's export earnings. In 2016, the total number of garment factories in the country stood at 589 factories.<sup>5</sup> Yet, majority of the garment workers (of who, about 90 percent are women) receive such low wages that they struggle to survive, especially after sending remittances back home.

Without overtime work (between two to four hours per day), they will not be able to earn enough to cope with the rising prices of food, rent, utility, and transportation. Many of them live in shared small rooms in building and houses that are built without proper safety, security and health standards. Short duration contracts (under the name of fixed duration contracts) are being used to limit work benefits and curtail workers' rights to association, or to even express dissatisfaction with their working conditions. Contracts are frequently not extended if women are found to be pregnant.<sup>6</sup>



Investors' profits and interests are protected by laws and regulations. But to gain even the smallest improvement in wages and working conditions, workers have to strike and demonstrate on the streets. In many of these struggles, numbers of workers' have lost their lives. The color revolution rhetoric is used to suppress such struggles, as well as to go after unions leaders and labor activists, and most importantly, it has been used to persecute and criminalize unions' leaders and labor activists, and generally silence workers.

It was a farmers' protest action in late 2016 that pushed the government to review their existing policy and mechanisms to support medium and small-scale farmers.<sup>7</sup> Farmers in Battambang province threw their paddy rice on the main road, while farmers from other provinces decided to burn down their pumpkins because brokers and big rice millers offered them very low prices. The government's response to these actions benefitted large rice millers more than small scale farmers, and did not address the systemic causes of the problems.

A campaign in 2016 initiated and joined by NGOs, academics, journalists, community members, and other activists called for the release of human rights defenders and community land activists who were arrested and put in jail without due process. The campaign came to be called Black Monday and was painted by the government a form of color revolution. But to many social justice campaigners and academics, Black Monday Campaign was a campaign strategy to build public support and solidarity against injustice.

Dr. Meas Nee, a socio-political analyst, has argued that peoples' demonstrations are not part of color revolution. "We cannot say all demonstrations are part of a color revolution. People standing up for justice is not a revolution," he said.<sup>8</sup>

### **Peace, Stability, and Sovereignty for Whom?**

By and large, the ruling regime's descriptions of color revolutions make it practically impossible for people to have views, perspectives, analyses, and actions that are critical of the ruling regime. Some academics have observed that this is a smart approach of the government to silence people and prevent unity among those with different views. This approach has also created divisions between local authorities and communities. However, though the color revolution rhetoric has led to confusion, fear, intimidation, social divisions, etc, it also shows that the government is nervous of peoples' actions and power.

According to Lee Morgenbesser (2018) in *Misclassification on the Mekong: the origins of Hun Sen's personalist dictatorship, Democratization*, "The absence of a regularized method to remove the dictator encourages marginalized elites and disgruntled citizens to oust him using irregular means, such as assassination or revolution."<sup>9</sup>

The ruling regime's campaign against color revolution raises some important questions. First, are peoples' demands that their rights be respected, especially rights to livelihood and to live with dignity, threats to national peace

**Recent experiences have shown that people's actions, especially among those from lower and working classes, are triggered by increasing social injustice, economic disparities, environmental devastation, and destruction of peoples' livelihoods**

***If rural communities were supported and protected by the state in the same way as investors, if they were receiving the required subsidies, were ensured secure access to land, resources, and fair markets, they would not feel compelled to organize public actions***

and stability? Second, are peoples' mobilizations asking for their rights to resources and decent work to be respected over privileges given to large-scale investors threats to national sovereignty? Third, what does social stability mean when people and entire communities are forcibly evicted from their homes and lands to make way for so-called development project? Fourth, what mechanisms exist to ensure justice for ordinary people in disputes with investors and *Oknhas*, who already have power and money?

Peace and social stability have different meanings for low-income and working classes who earn only enough to survive daily or monthly, and do not have the security of long term protection and privilege that investors and *Oknhas* have. If rural communities were supported and protected by the state in the same way as investors, if they were receiving the required subsidies, were ensured secure access to land, resources, and fair markets, they would not feel compelled to organize public actions. Rising household debt in urban and rural areas, and lack access to adequate, affordable social services will trigger greater unrest in the future. Will this also be described as a color revolution?

There is no doubt that Cambodia, like other nations, must be an independent, sovereign nation. However, the concepts of independence and sovereignty are called into question when the government grants outside investors more privileges to use and exploit national wealth than its own population.

The color revolution narratives being used by the ruling regime show clearly how insecure the regime is with regard to maintaining its power and existence.

The regime's campaign against color revolutions seems to be working for the moment in terms of creating fear, silencing people, deepening social divisions, and even building its own popularity among some classes. However, the regime would do better to understand that strikes, demonstrations, public actions on the street, and online campaigns, are peoples' responses to the political and economic model that the regime itself is implementing.

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# Southeast Asian Women in Power Face Authoritarian Governments

By Yasmin Ahammad & Clarissa V. Militante

In the face of authoritarianism and systemically-rooted patriarchy in Southeast Asian societies, do women who have ascended to powerful government positions really wield power? Has this 'power' worked towards defending and protecting women and their rights, or has it only helped reproduce patriarchy and support authoritarian rule?

Take for instance the iconic leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, who in light of inheriting a complex power-sharing agreement with the military, and a

myriad of challenges in Myanmar, has come under increasing criticism for her authoritarian style of leadership.

In the midst of numerous reports detailing horrifying atrocities against Myanmar's Rohingya minority, Aung San Suu Kyi—a celebrated icon of democracy and human rights—has had a dramatic fall from grace. In the latest wave of violence last year, almost 700,000 Rohingya people fled to Bangladesh, with survivors telling stories of violent killings, rape, and razing of

entire villages. Meanwhile Aung San Suu Kyi has appeared defiant in her refusal to criticize the Burmese military for their campaign against the Rohingya.

While Aung San Suu Kyi's perceived silence and complicity in the Rohingya crisis has provoked widespread international condemnation, her behaviour is also not entirely surprising given the legacy of patriarchy and authoritarianism she has inherited,

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Aung San Suu Kyi supporters in 2012 before she was elected into government. Photo credit: Yasmin Ahammad



and of which she continues to be part. The complex reality of asserting power in Myanmar leaves little room for virtue.

Her ascent to power has been dogged by the 2008 Constitution, instituted by the Tatmadaw, the Burmese military, which guarantees them a quarter of seats in parliament, as well as control over three key ministries—Home Affairs, Border Affairs, and Defence. The same Constitution prevents Aung San Suu Kyi from getting elected to the presidency. Likely drafted by the Tatmadaw with her in mind, the Constitution bars presidents from having a spouse or children who hold foreign citizenship.

Given this barrier to leadership, Aung San Suu Kyi herself has exuded similarly authoritarian qualities in her consolidation and exercise of power. She has given herself the position of State Counsellor, claiming herself to be “above the President” and de-facto ruler of Myanmar, where she will “make all the decisions.” Her first president of choice, Htin Kyaw, a close friend and confidant, was fully compliant in this arrangement. After his resignation in March 2018, he was quickly replaced by another close ally of Suu Kyi’s, U Win Myint, leaving her tight control over the civilian government intact.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s leadership style follows established practice in a country in which the political culture has largely been dominated by men and characterized by top-down, hierarchical decision making. But she is accused of centralizing governance even further and of closing herself off from everyone but her closest

advisors. She maintains a keen distance from the media, as well as civil society groups, the same allies who spent years calling for her freedom.

Aung San Suu Kyi’s mission to maintain her grip on power has also meant reaching significant concessions with a rampant military, and curtailing freedom of expression. The number of political prisoners—although significantly fewer than under the previous government—is at 50, while defamation cases have soared under the NLD with the use of section 66(d) of the 2013 Telecommunications Law. The high-profile arrests of two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, have further shone a spotlight on the criminalization of journalists.

As the daughter the Founder of the Nation, Aung San Suu Kyi is both empowered and burdened by her father’s legacy to unify a country split along ethnic and religious lines. This legacy initially brought her widespread support amongst the numerous ethnic groups, but the peace process has stalled, while controversial development projects are being pushed forward and stoking tensions in ethnic areas. The resumed conflict in Kachin state just marked its seventh anniversary. Ethnic minorities are increasingly losing faith in Aung San Suu Kyi—a seemingly out-of-touch representative of the Bamar ethnic majority and political elite, ruling from an ivory tower.

In relation to the Rohingya crisis, the situation that has brought her the most criticism from the international community, she has been accused of maintaining silence. Desmond Tutu,

a fellow Nobel laureate, expressed a common view in stating: “If the political price of your ascension to the highest office in Myanmar is your silence, the price is surely too steep.” Yet Aung San Suu Kyi has not remained silent. Rather, she is making an active, tactical decision to not criticize the Tatmadaw.

Her responses to the crisis have ranged from bland platitudes about the rule of law, to outright untruths, dismissals, and obfuscation of reports of widespread human rights violations. The hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled last August have been living in poor conditions in Bangladeshi camps for almost a year now, while those who escaped earlier bouts of violence have languished there for much longer. The situation is untenable.

In January 2018, Bangladesh and Myanmar reached an agreement to complete the voluntary return of refugees within two years. But this premature plan has unsurprisingly stalled. More recently, the Myanmar government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two UN agencies to create the conditions conducive to voluntary repatriation. But safe return remains a distant prospect while Daw Suu and the Tatmadaw continue to undermine the identity of the Rohingya and to facilitate a hostile environment.

As a venerated human rights icon, the human rights advocates expect Aung San Suu Kyi to condemn the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya. As a woman leader, these expectations are augmented; the public project saintly qualities onto her and hope for her to speak out on women’s rights, especially in light of horrifying stories of sexual

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violence against Rohingya women and girls.

Yet, Aung San Suu Kyi will continue to fail meeting these expectations against this complicated reality in which she is acting as a politician within the confines of a deeply patriarchal regime that retains authoritarian tendencies. Recognizing these complexities, limitations, and challenges doesn't mean we should stop demanding more from Aung San Suu Kyi, or from holding her accountable. But it does mean we stop idealising her as a saintly icon she could never live up to.

### **The Philippine President's Mysogyny**

In Myanmar, a woman in power has become a means to reproduce patriarchy, meanwhile in the Philippines women leaders in government fight for whatever space they still have as they try to survive and fight a misogynist head of state.

Apart from the victims of Duterte's war on drugs or *Oplan Tokhang* (which in a local Filipino language originally meant to knock at one's door and plead/persuade the user to change his/her ways), it was clear early on in his presidency that he was also targeting women in powerful government positions critical of him or his government. This, on top of denigrating women in general and inciting violence against them through his misogynist remarks passed on as jokes.

The first to suffer from Duterte's own brand of authoritarianism was neophyte senator and former justice secretary under the Aquino government, Leila de Lima.

Duterte had accused De Lima of drug trafficking, heading a ring of traffickers imprisoned in the country's main prison in Muntinlupa, south of Manila, and that she had also received drug money for her senatorial campaign. Testimonies from several prisoners were heard during a congressional hearing initiated by the president's allies on the case of De Lima. Before this, the senator, as head of the Senate justice and human rights committee, was already conducting public hearings on alleged extrajudicial killings under the president's war on drugs. The conflict between De Lima and Duterte is being traced back to when the latter was still mayor of Davao City, year 2009, and then chair of the Commission on Human Rights De Lima initiated an investigation on the mayor's involvement in the Davao death squads.

In February this year, the Senate ethics committee dropped charges against De Lima, while the Office of the Ombudsman dismissed cases against her of financing terrorism and violation of the anti-graft law. De Lima, however, is still detained in the Philippine National Police's Camp Crame.

The Office of the Ombudsman head Conchita Carpio Morales was also threatened with impeachment last year, with the president accusing her of "conspiring to oust me." Morales wanted to investigate the alleged unexplained wealth of the president. Recently, as Morales' term is ending, Duterte remarked that he preferred the next ombudsman to be "with integrity, not a politician, definitely not a woman."

**As the situations in Myanmar and the Philippines show, women in government in the mostly ‘all-boys’ club’ politics of Southeast Asia have a long way to go in overturning patriarchal values and in championing the rights of women**

Meanwhile, Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno was ousted from her post via a *quo warranto* voted upon by the justices who had in the first place initiated the ouster move against her. Some senators as well as lawyers, including former SC chief justice Hilario Davide, challenged the constitutionality of a *quo warranto* filed by Solicitor General Jose Calida.

Mr. Duterte, after the ouster of Sereno, has distanced himself from what happened, saying he had nothing to do with the decision of the majority of the justices. These were the same justices who had voted in favor of the president’s decision to bury the remains of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos at the National Heroes’ Cemetery last year.

Duterte’s hand was also seen in the Security and Exchange Commission’s decision in January this year to revoke the license to operate of online news media outfit, Rappler, for violating the Constitution’s provision on foreign equity in a Philippine company. Maria Ressa, an authoritative figure in Philippine and international media, heads Rappler. Malacañang has denied any involvement, saying it respects the SEC decision. Media organizations have come forward in defense of and to support Rappler, as the president has always been open about his dislike of the critical media. In his State of the Nation address last year, he threatened Rappler with an investigation. After the SEC’s decision, the president also banned Rappler reporter, Pia Ranada, from covering his activities.

These moves to unseat mostly critical women in high government

positions and in media have further eroded the hard-fought rights of Filipino women to be recognized as having political agency and equal status in running affairs of the state.

Since the Philippines has had two female presidents in the post-Marcos era and in the entire of history of the country—Presidents Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. The ascendance of these women to the highest position of the land has not necessarily translated into the broadening of Filipino women’s participation in governance, realization of women’s rights, and much less in eliminating—or even weakening—patriarchal values. Corazon Aquino’s government was also marked by human rights violations, particularly against peasants, as she championed elite democracy and the interests of her own landed class. Macapagal Arroyo’s government is now synonymous with corruption, including alleged corruption that went up to the highest ranks in the military which she had allegedly allowed to ensure their loyalty.

Women’s rights advocates have rallied behind De Lima and Sereno, although the two public officials may not always see their situations and struggle as part of the bigger women’s movement.

As the situations in Myanmar and the Philippines show, women in government in the mostly ‘all-boys’ club’ politics of Southeast Asia have a long way to go in overturning patriarchal values and in championing the rights of women.

*This is an updated version of what has been published in The Bangkok Post and Ucan news.*



# Creative Forms of Resistance in Cambodia

By Ros Sokunthy

The garment textile sector in Cambodia is a significant sector, exporting to big markets like the US and EU and contributing more than 7 billion US\$ in 2017<sup>1</sup>. Since 2014, the government of Cambodia has paid the sector primary attention by responding to the needs of workers through increases in minimum wage every year, providing electricity service, regulating the price of room rent by not increasing within a two-year period, and the setting up of a national social security fund

(NSSF). While the workers' lot has improved under the current government, the political situation in Cambodia is worsening and the workers are themselves getting affected. They have recently turned to creative forms of political resistance to assert their rights.

One such platform for resistance was the workers' forum cum reflection-meeting. One of the key reflections of the workers from this forum was that workers

gain a sense of pride in being able to meet face to face with key stakeholders such as the local authorities, Her Excellency (H.E.) Mrs. Ngin Chantrea who is the Deputy Director of Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority, federations, and unions. One positive result of the forum was a quick response from H.E. Mrs. Ngin Chantrea on the water issue in places that the workers rented. Workers received the information they needed before and during the forum.

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Worker's Forum on "The development of Garment industry in Cambodia". May 27th 2018. Photo by: Worker's Information Center-WIC

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“We need space and when we are together we can do many things and share what we want other to know,” said one of the workers.

“This event made my mother understand my working condition inside the factory,” another worker said.

One feedback however was that the workers felt that “if the labor inspector came he will not be able to answer our questions.”

There have been fewer activities led by civil society in the first half of 2018 because it is national election year. Some NGOs, civil society organizations, and community organizations in different provinces and cities could hardly undertake their own activity at the ground while some are waiting to see what will happen before and during election day after the opposition is dissolved. But despite these, the Worker’s Information Center (WIC) was still able to gather workers to discuss and reflect on current social-political situations and come up with a creative form of sharing and building knowledge to address sources of fear.

On 27th May, there was a Worker’s Forum on “The Development of the Garment industry in Cambodia” at Chenla theater. There were 645 participants from government, donors, International NGOs, local NGOs, and workers; this was a first in the history of the WIC that such a big event was led by workers from six localities and two provinces. The workers played important roles in organizing and mobilizing fellow workers; meeting and discussing

issues; deciding what should be shared through art and songs creatively. They even performed on stage.

The said activity was more than just a forum as it employed different forms and techniques in showing the plight of workers: role-playing or drama to describe the daily lives of workers in the factory; fashion show and art which illustrated what brands their factories produced and how many machines a worker used daily; songs which contained messages about the conditions in the factory and in the workers’ rented rooms; art exhibit of photos of workers. Other major parts of the forum were the dialogue between workers, unions, and inspector from the labor ministry and the dialogue on workers’ living condition between workers and commune chief, police, and H.E from water resources.

In the dialogues, unions and workers talked about garment factories that closed down while production continued by subcontracting factories and/or sweatshops where the working conditions were worse. Other issues raised in the dialogues were: high quota of production in factory, more overtime work, short contract, work suspension, work insecurity, and high cost of living. How can these issues be resolved through existing mechanisms while Union Law is blocking union activity and gathering, was one of the main questions. While in each garment factory there were more than three to seven unions operating, it was still very hard for each union to bring the case to arbitration council because under the Union Law, 30 percent of workers in the company must be members.

**“We need space and when we are together we can do many things and share what we want other to know,” said one of the workers.**

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One of the two dialogues conducted with different key stakeholders and workers on working and living conditions.  
 Photo by: Worker's Information Center-WIC

Another issue raised was on gender equality. Most workers in garment factories are women but almost all union leaders are male and leadership posts are led by men. How can the unions ensure that women become leaders not only in local factories but also in the federations? Fewer unions consider this an important point but the Cambodia union federation has a woman president to promote women leadership role up to 50 percent; she has also been working closely with women by reaching out to the owners of their rented room, talking and discussing with them issues affecting women.

Within the event, there were also a lot of unanswered questions for the inspector from the Ministry of Labor

who was not present at the forum. Some of these questions were about the case of YUDA factory whose owner ran away with the machinery; the workers were paid only around US \$120 each, which was not the correct amount as per the labor law. Another case was that of the inspector who took the identity cards of workers before paying their compensation. Another case was on what benefits should a worker be given when a factory owner runs away as in the the case of First Garwon factory where workers were employed for about five to six months and received only US \$170 each. Other cases were: Handseven factory and the overtime pay of their workers; and the most recent issue at Estick factory about not allowing workers' leaves.

The participating workers also highlighted the many ways by which the Worker's Forum organized: they reached out to workers and visited them in the rooms they rented; informed workers the importance of the event by telling them the purpose; told them how they can share their issues; who would be the key address persons; phone calls and group chats; asked workers to call their friends.

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I The Phnom Penh Post, on industrial sector grows, but still reliant on garment factories; date 26 February 2018



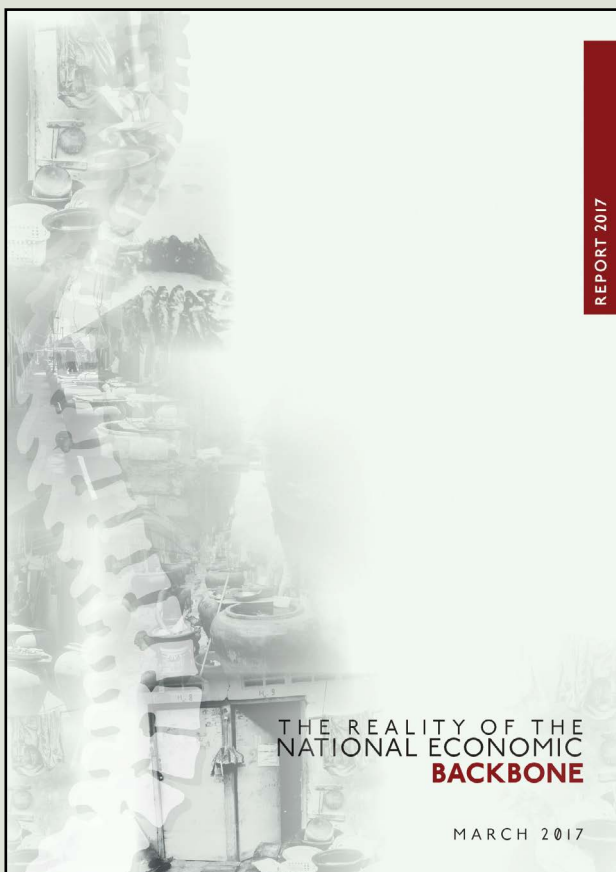


Photos shown in the exhibit that were painted, drawn, composed creatively by workers from six drop-in centers.

# Books on Workers

*Some books were also distributed during the event to encourage workers to read and know what's happening in their sector and the contribution of workers to the economy.*

**The Reality of the National Economic Backbone** was published by Focus on the Global South in 2017; 38 workers helped write its content; they were trained in data collection and participated in the entire process of the study. The idea for the publication began in March 2015 with the United Sisterhood Alliance (Us), of which the Worker's Information Center is a member. They launched a campaign on "Women's Right to Greater Access to Basic Social Services" to advocate access to shelter and utilities, health care services, and safety and security for garment and sex workers through the development of a People's Policy. Since the start of this campaign, WIC conducted many consultations with garment workers at the Drop-In Centers. The consultations focused on analyzing the living conditions of workers in light of laws and policies, including the law on housing and rent, the declaration on access to electricity of workers, and commune/village safety



policy. The results and analysis of the consultations were documented and developed into a People's Policy, with the following objectives: to develop a clear understanding of the living conditions of garment workers and their access to basic social services; to develop a greater understanding of the impact of living conditions on the development and dignity of life of garment workers; to publicize the collected data and use these in advocacy to improve workers' rights and living conditions; and to identify mechanisms for monitoring improvements in their conditions.

**Where the Production Goes?** was published in 2018. It is a case study highlighting the experiences, processes, and collective actions of workers who worked tirelessly to address injustice at the work place; and to contribute to debate on how to address the situations where factories have deactivated or closed.

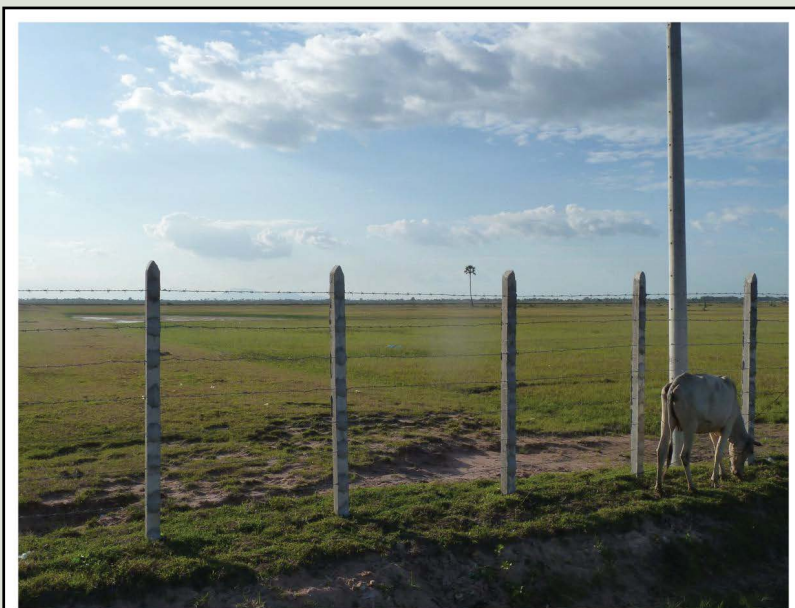


Also, the report aims to highlight strategies and tactics of observation, documenting evidence, analysis, mobilizing workers and select representative for dispute resolution with key stakeholders such as the buyers, factory owners, federations, unions, inspection department, dispute resolution department, arbitration council, and workers.

**The Engine of Economic Growth**, published in 2016, is about foreign aid. Since the early 1990s, Cambodia has been heavily reliant on foreign aid. The Cambodian Government has been seeking to reduce donor-dependence and increase self-reliance, aiming to lift the country to the status of higher middle-income country by 2030. This goal depended heavily on increasing private investment, and the Government has described the private sector as the “engine of economic growth” for Cambodia. It is therefore seeking to encourage both foreign and domestic investments

in order to maintain current growth rates and facilitate continued development of the country. Beginning in the early 1990s, Cambodia has taken steps to liberalize the environment for private sector investment. This included reducing restrictions on foreign companies and passing measures to make it easier for companies to register and receive necessary licenses, permits, and approvals. Since Cambodia moved away from a centrally-planned economy towards the market economy, all sectors of the economy have been opened for private investment both from inside and outside the country, such as investments in agriculture, real estate, energy, transport, communication, manufacturing, and extractive industries. Public services have also been opened to private investment, such as in utilities and healthcare.

The report also discusses the role of private investments in Cambodian economy especially in the generation of employment, raising of revenues, and contributing to national economic growth. However, many investment projects have also been associated with serious problems in their implementation. Private investment in agriculture has been implicated in land conflicts and violations of the rights of farmers and indigenous people. Infrastructure development has caused environmental damage that has not always been adequately mitigated. Mining operations have poisoned ground water, and manufacturers have become involved in disputes with their workers over pay and working conditions. While investment is important for the continued development of Cambodia, irresponsible investment has been connected to serious human rights abuses and impoverishment of Cambodian communities that have lost access to land and resources. Thus, the report presents an overview and analysis of the current investment landscape in Cambodia, as well as its impacts on people and the environment. It is hoped that the information contained here will both raise awareness about current investment trends and promote discussion among the various stakeholders interested in the current trajectory of Cambodia’s development.



## The “Engine of Economic Growth” An Overview of Private Investment Policies, Trends, and Projects in Cambodia

May 2016





# Asian Media and Democracy

By Clarissa V. Militante

Despite the criticisms that have time and again been levelled against media, such as corporate interests determining how news are shaped, alliance with political interests, and corruption in the ranks, it has remained a pillar of democracy. But in the midst of the deepening culture of impunity and increasing political repression in most of Asia, where also the notions and practice of democracy have been criticized as being Westernized and unfit for Asian culture, the media's role as the fourth estate and seeker and promoter of truth is being challenged now more than ever.

Media as a major 'casualty' under authoritarian regimes and totalitarian societies is nothing new, but renewed repression has been on the rise in countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, India, the Philippines. Newspapers and broadcast organizations have faced closure even as journalists are being killed for their investigations into corruption or collusion between governments and corporations, and for their critical stance versus state repression and violation of human rights.

Gauri Lankesh, Indian journalist and activist, had warned about this need

to defend the shrinking space for public debate, with said advocacy costing her her life.

In Cambodia, it was reported the third quarter of 2017 that in the government had closed 19 radio stations across the country, some of them a main source of news in rural areas. The government's reason for the shutdown was "contract violations for overselling program slots to broadcasters"; there used to be eight broadcasters operating in the

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Photo source: Pixabay.com

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country. Meanwhile, the 24-year old English-language *Cambodia Daily* was also closed in September 2017 for “failing to pay a disputed \$6.3 million tax bill.” The editors of the said newspaper, one of the two-English language dailies in Cambodia, claimed that the closure was part of a move to curtail press freedom in anticipation of the 2018 national elections and amidst growing dissent from the country’s civil society.

Using “contract violation” and tax evasion as means to censor and censure media is not new either; these may be legitimate cases, but it is often difficult to separate these moves from political motives. This was also the case with the Duterte government and Rappler in the Philippines. The Securities and Exchange Commission revoked the license of Rappler for allegedly violating the Constitution and Anti-Dummy law; for its part, Rappler accused the government of violating rules of procedure and claimed that the move was more politically motivated owing to Rappler’s critical reportage of the presidency. Rappler reporter Pia Ranada has since been barred from Malacañang and from covering the president. Meanwhile, the Philippine president’s “hostile rhetoric toward members of the media, (which) further exacerbated an already perilous situation for journalists in the Philippines” has been cited by media watchdog Freedom House as having a bearing on freedom of the press.

In India, according to Freedom House report in 2016, “journalists in the country continue to face an

array of obstacles, including legal threats and arrest in connection with their work... Across the country, violence against journalists is encouraged by a prevailing climate of impunity.” In September 2017, journalist and editor Gauri Lankesh was gunned down on the doorsteps of her home, while in March this year, three journalists were killed in suspicious vehicular accidents. The Guardian reported that the families of Sandeep Sharma in Madhya Pradesh state, and Navin Nischal and Vijay Singh in Bihar claimed that these accidents were “deliberate.” Sharma had reported on police corruption before she was ran over by a truck and Nischal and Singh had talked about threats from local authorities.

In Myanmar, Freedom House has included the following as indicators of lack of press freedom in 2016: the murder of journalist Soe Moe Tun in December while reporting on the illegal logging industry; bomb blasts outside the houses of two journalists as means to threaten them; censorship of the coverage of violence in Rakhine State; increase in the number of defamation cases against people who criticized government online; as well as failure to pass a Freedom of Information Law and Broadcast Law that would pave the way for the establishment of non-state media organizations.

### **Media in the Context of 21st Century Authoritarianisms**

Media practitioners have always asserted that as the so-called fourth estate, the media abide by universal tenets of journalism: fairness, accuracy, objectivity, truthfulness—

**Media practitioners have always asserted that as the so-called fourth estate, the media abide by universal tenets of journalism: fairness, accuracy, objectivity, truthfulness**

or according to American veteran journalist Carl Bernstein, in his speech during the White House Correspondents Dinner in April 2017, “the best obtainable version of the truth.”

However, information (including its production and dissemination) is also underpinned by power relations. According to Amber Osman, Muhammad Imtiaz Subhani, and Syed Akif Hasan of the Iqra University Research Center in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>, this power play has manifested in information flow where the US has always been dominant source of information, whether it is news or other forms. These information have shaped cultural norms in other parts of the world, including in Asia where several societies had been subjected to colonial rule. In journalism, according to their study, time and place are key elements and play a role in creating meaning out of realities, and therefore would always have cultural implications. Cultural politics, says the study, is a great challenge to Asian media.

A 2015 UNESCO study on media in Southeast Asia has stated that there are contending views in Asia about media. One is that the media in Southeast Asia should not follow in the footsteps of western media because this further highlights “colonial experiences and exposure to Western learning” and thus, “The way forward...is to “de-Westernise” the past and “Asianise” the present.” The other view is that: “preoccupation with such differences leads to the “dead end” of cultural essentialism. Cultures are open systems with ongoing processes of hybridization.”

Investigative journalist Sheila Coronel recognizes the view of the “non-believers” of liberal democracy, citing that under socialist regimes the prevailing perspective is that of the press being “primarily...a collective propagandist and agitator, as a partner in building socialism, rather than an entity independent—and skeptical of—government.” For Coronel, this is not entirely unrelated to the “Asian values” argument: “fashionable in the 1970s, was the school of development journalism, which preached that in poor countries, the media should veer away from the Western fixation on conflict and disaster and should instead promote developmental goals. From this perspective, the press blunts its critical edge and instead functions mainly as information provider and cheerleader in support of the development agenda.”

“This view, premised on the uniqueness of Asian societies, cast aside Western notions of a watchdog press as inappropriate for the region, where, it is asserted, citizens are willing to sacrifice individual freedoms in exchange for economic well-being. In the Asian values school, the media’s role is primarily that of helping forge social consensus for strong governments in pursuit of economic growth,” wrote Coronel in Public Sentinel Media Governance and Reform (Chapter 5 “Corruption and the Watchdog Role of Media”).<sup>2</sup>

In recent years, the social media has emerged as another challenge to media, mainly providing competition as source of information and cultural influence, especially among the young. The accessibility of

information as well as the means to reproduce and disseminate it has unfortunately led to production of unverified data, fake news, and all sorts of misinformation. Even those who are part of media are guilty of inaccuracies and glaring political biases. Misinformation has recently gone unchecked in Philippine print (mostly through opinion columns), broadcast (radio commentators and television anchors), and online media.

Social media, however, is a double-edged sword, as it has also democratized the production and dissemination of news, resulting in the creation of more independent media organizations and platforms. As Coronel said in her keynote during the 2016 conference of Investigative Journalists and Editors (IRE), the world was witnessing the dawn of the “golden age of muckraking,” noting the existence of more than “100 investigative reporting centers and organizations outside the U.S.,” including in places like Armenia, Bulgaria, Nepal, Venezuela, and Arab countries.

These groups have continued to serve the role of media as watchdogs of government and power holders, and more often now through cross-country collaboration.

Despite these continuing challenges to media in Asia, the journalists role in society remains undeniable—that of speaking truth to power.

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<sup>1</sup> Asian ascendancy: media in the age of globalization; <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3862860/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Books/Public%20Sentinel.htm>



# Online Censorship in Southeast Asia

By Joana Bala

The internet and the proliferation of electronic devices have resulted in a breakthrough from traditional and formal channels of communication to more personalized and dynamic ones. In recent years, the growth of digital media has been considered a tipping point in the shift in socio-political power structures. With broader sectors involved in the input and output of information, the internet has clearly democratized the process of communication. For instance, the 2011 general elections in Singapore

gave a taste of the force of digital media: the lack of broad reporting from national TV caused mass dissatisfaction among the audience who flocked to social media for more insightful and up-to-date information, mainly shared via tweets. Although the result of the elections was in favour of the long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP), new media was celebrated for the role it played in counterbalancing the campaign narrative by giving more space to the opposition Worker's Party, which for the first time gained eight out of the 87

parliamentary seats, its highest number in the country's political history.

Furthermore, researches show that among like-minded individuals, the internet strengthens the sense of collective identity which overall encourages activism. To this end, digital media has also been credited for its capacity to optimize coordination and collective action. In his essay on the political power of social media, communications professor Clay Shirky has cited the SMS-led mobilization in Manila

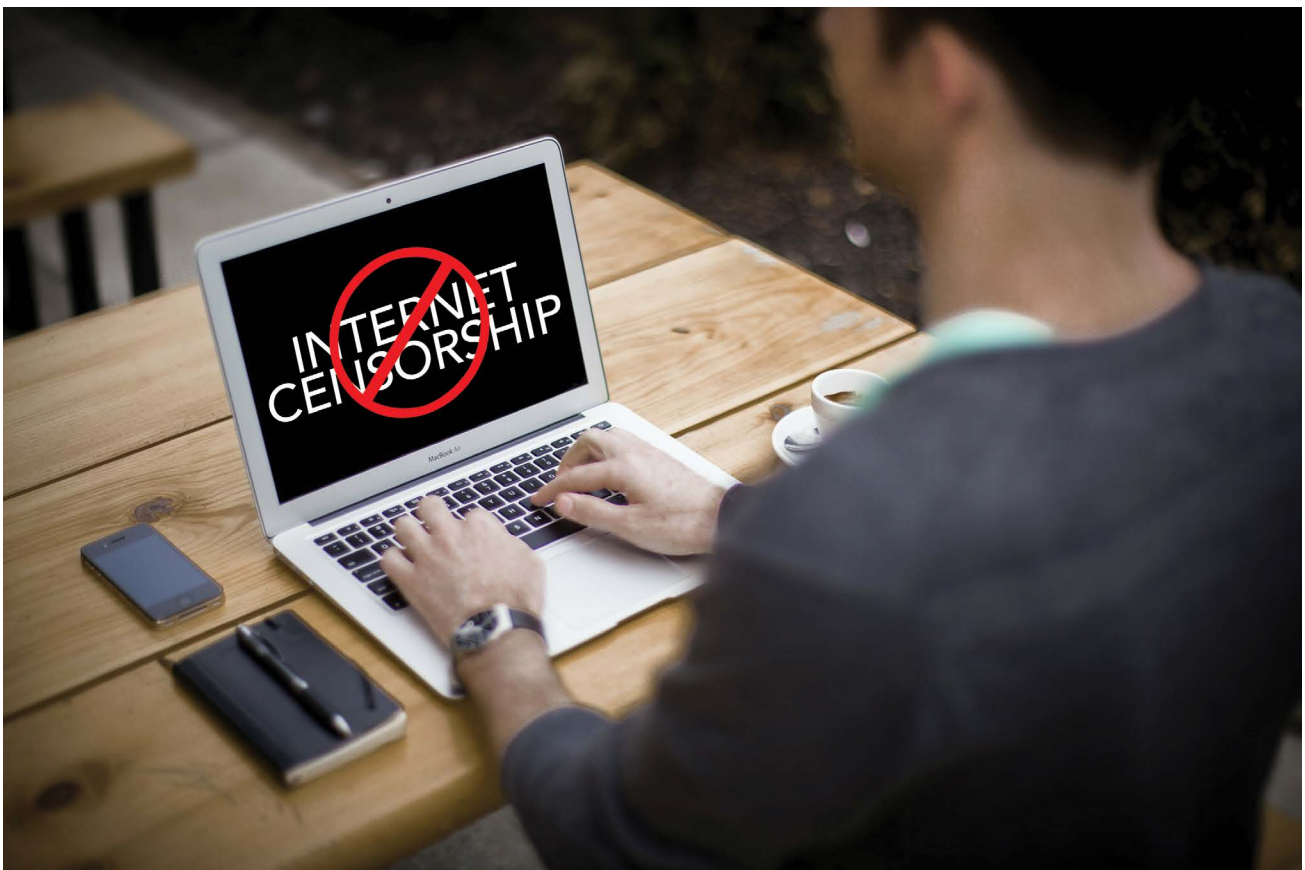


Photo source: Pixabay.com

that caused the ousting of the Philippines President Joseph Estrada in 2001. However, for people living in undemocratic regimes the opportunities provided by social media are not particularly liberating as online interaction remains under the control of authoritarian governments. The maneuvers of the governments to oppose and criminalize expression in the Internet era can be seen as a continuum of old-days plot.

Long before the advent of the Internet, Myanmar already responded with an iron fist against attempts to express criticism of the government and its policies. The journalist and leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD), U Win Tin, languished behind bars for 19 years under the country's military rule, which began in 1962; he became a world icon for his unbending resilience. For the vast majority of the people in Myanmar who have endured decades of isolation, the Internet and Facebook (FB) are manna from heaven. The overnight success, achieved through the 2013 reforms, did not come without its drawbacks. The cyber space has become a fertile ground for both information and disinformation, a hodgepodge of opportunities and threats.

Since the 2008 Constitution came into force, new regulations have been adopted, directly attacking free media and ordinary netizens. Many have been arrested or interrogated for satirical social media posts deemed insulting to the government. Myanmar is one of the 10 most censored countries and one of the top jailers, according to Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). In 2017,

as the crackdown in Rakhine state intensified, Facebook exposed the crimes of the Tatmadaw to a dismayed international community. While the government responded by blaming fake news for damaging the image of the country and its people, the UN and a group of civil society organizations denounced Facebook's responsibility in fanning hatred against Rohingya people. In an open letter to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Myanmar civil society groups stated that FB has spread harm and fear in an unprecedented way and they also complained about the company's reticence on the issue of engaging local stakeholders on systemic solutions.

Moving from Myanmar to Vietnam it does not get much better. With over 50 million Facebook users, Vietnam leads the pack in the Mekong and ranks third in Southeast Asia, following Indonesia and the Philippines. Researches show that since 2012 there has been a growing influence coming from political blogs. However, very swiftly the government has clamped down on bloggers and social media, seeing them as threats. Vietnam has soon become one of the countries in Southeast Asia with the highest number of prisoners of conscience.

An Amnesty International research found that in 2017 until early 2018 there has been an increase of sentences, with the current known number being of 97 prisoners. Among them, there are journalists, bloggers—members of the Internet based pro-democracy group Bloc 8406—and netizens who have criticized government officials on

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***Researches show that among like-minded individuals, the internet strengthens the sense of collective identity which overall encourages activism***

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social platforms. The crackdown also affected bloggers who have decried the environmental impacts of Chinese investments and the shared profits of Vietnamese officials. The arrest of eight members of Brotherhood for Democracy in early April 2018 is the latest form of censorship against civil society advocates; they were charged of carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the People's Administration by means of blog posts "hostile to the state," and will be jailed from nine to twelve years.

Vietnam's Cyber security law, currently at its 16th draft and likely to pass, is poised to be the ultimate attack against online freedom of expression (table 2).

As for Cambodia, with over 6.8 million Facebook users, researches show that most of its users rely on social media for sourcing information. However, despite scoring slightly better than neighboring countries in terms of internet freedom (see table 1), new laws and regulations, such as the Telecommunications Law, will allow the government to secretly intrude into the private lives of individuals.

Prime Minister Hun Sen has profusely used his account as a platform to push his playbook and gain support. Sam Rainsy, the exiled leader of the banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), has accused the Prime Minister of orchestrating the sham likes on Facebook to boost his popularity online.

The government of Thailand has also kept a tight grip on expression

online. The organization Article 19 has expressed concerns on the Computer-Related Crime Act (CCA) passed in December 2016, as it has given sweeping powers to the military government on curbing free speech, enforcing surveillance, and censorship. *Lèse majesté* lawsuits, which prohibit defamations of the Monarchy, have increased following the military coup in 2014. Thailand's ruling National Council for People and Order (NCPO) led by Prayut Chan O Cha has arrested and filed criminal charges against critical posts published on Facebook. Thai non-government organization, I-Law, estimates that under the NCPO regime, 62 people have been charged with *lèse majesté*, with 12 being granted bail (as of 2016).

What's particularly troubling about it is that Section 112 of the Criminal Code has become a private political tool which leads to easy criminalization of those expressing dissent. Privacy International (PI) has also reported on the government's complex web surveillance, aided by a close and informal relationship with Internet Service Providers (ISP). Similar to Vietnam, Thailand has resorted to training more than 100,000 students as "cyber scouts" to monitor and report online criticism which might threaten national security, and to report criticism of the monarchy.

The 2018 *World Press Freedom Index* of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) did not show improvements in the Laotian press, yet again confined at the bottom of the list of countries with press freedom. The one-party government has muzzled criticism both online and offline, and the absence of media

## The maneuvers of the governments to oppose and criminalize expression in the Internet era can be seen as a continuum of old-days plot

pluralism has hindered a broader coverage of Laos at the national and international level. As state media has consolidated its presence on the net, it has also depicted its leader as a man of the people: *Support Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith*, the Facebook account of the PM has allegedly boosted his popularity and approval ratings. In 2016, three Laotians residing in Thailand who criticized the government on Facebook in relation to corruption, deforestation, and human rights issues paid the price via lengthy jail sentences of 20, 16, and 12 years each.



**Table 1. Freedom of the Press and the Internet in the Mekong**

	Freedom of the Press score *	Status	Freedom of the Net score	Status
<b>Cambodia</b>	70/100	Not Free	52/100	Partly Free
<b>Laos</b>	85/100	Not Free	N/A	N/A
<b>Myanmar</b>	73/100	Not Free	63/100	Not Free
<b>Thailand</b>	77/100	Not Free	67/100	Not Free
<b>Vietnam</b>	84/100	Not Free	76/100	Not Free

Source: Freedom House 2017

\*The score considers the legal, political and economic environment  
0: most free 100: least free

**Table 2. Media regulations on the right to free expression across the Mekong**

Countries	Regulations	Implications
<b>Myanmar</b>	<i>Already implemented</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2013 Telecommunications Law, Section 66(d)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The vaguely worded section on online defamation has limited criticism of authorities and has prompted an increase of lawsuits.</li> </ul>
<b>Vietnam</b>	<i>Already implemented</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1999 Media Law</li> <li>2013, Decree 72</li> </ul> <i>Under consideration</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cybersecurity Law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Under the 1999 Media Law, all media working in the country must serve as the mouthpiece of Party organizations;</li> <li>Under the Decree 72, state censorship has been extended to social media platforms and it's now illegal to post anything that might oppose the state or harm national security;</li> <li>The Cybersecurity law will require all foreign providers of Internet-related services (e.g. Facebook, Google, Skype) to store Vietnamese users' data in data centers exclusively located in Vietnam and cooperate with the government in handing over information.</li> </ul>
<b>Thailand</b>	<i>Already implemented</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2016 Computer-Related Crime Act (CCA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CCA has broad powers that are susceptible to abuse and could severely punish legitimate political, academic, or social expression.</li> <li>CCA is incompatible with Thailand's freedom of expression obligation.</li> <li>The investigatory powers force service providers to retain user data or allow for warrantless access to user communications;</li> </ul>
<b>Cambodia</b>	<i>Already implemented</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2015 Telecommunications Law</li> </ul> <i>Under consideration</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cybercrime Law</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It allows the government to monitor private and public online communications between people without their knowledge or consent;</li> <li>The Cybercrime bill appears to be broadly defined and it would give significant scope to implement the law abusively against its perceived opponents.</li> </ul>
<b>Laos</b>	<i>Already implemented</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2014 Web Decree</li> <li>2016 Decree on Foreign Media in Laos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The web decree bans online criticism against the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and the Lao government;</li> <li>The decree limits freedom of expression in Laos by curtailing foreign media reporting in the country.</li> </ul>

now a visiting professor at the State University of New York Binghamton. Thanks for joining us, Walden.

**WALDEN BELLO:** Thank you for inviting me.

**BEN NORTON:** I would like to speak in general about the repression of human rights activists, social justice activists, and the left more broadly in the Philippines. But before we get to that, can we speak specifically about Duterte's threats to arrest the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court? What are your thoughts?

**WALDEN BELLO:** Well, my sense is, you know, this is definitely a threat from Duterte. And will he carry it out if the person, in fact, appears in the Philippines, they start investigating, I seriously doubt that. Duterte has been known to, you know, make all sorts of boasts, and, and then to retract and go back on his word. Promises to support somebody, then withdraws, and has cabinet members that he appoints but he doesn't back them up. So it's hard to say what the guy will do. But you know, if I were the ICC I'd, I'd go in, and then let him take international consequences for not allowing you in.

So it's a case of, you know, you have to fight fire with fire. And if you back down from Duterte, then he'll be more, you know, motivated to, to continue in his very arrogant ways.

**BEN NORTON:** And this, of course, is not the only example of him threatening international agencies, human rights workers, et cetera. I mentioned that the

recent so-called terrorist list that was drafted by the Justice Ministry includes a United Nations special rapporteur. Can you speak about this list, and how the Duterte administration is targeting, you know, peaceful human rights workers, and of course, the left more broadly? You know, left-wing lawmakers and people from the socialist and communist movements.

**WALDEN BELLO:** Well, you know, for me I would first of all say that, you know, the main target that he has, you know, gone after are drug users and drug dealers. And this is, of course, you know, a terrible, terrible thing that has happened, and it's basically scapegoating a certain part of society and using them, you know, as a mechanism to get himself to be popular.

You know, the, you know, the Senator Trillanis, one of the senators in the Philippines, using data from the government itself has in fact revealed that some 20000 people have already been killed, either by the police or by vigilante groups that are mainly really police, you know, linked to the police. So this is, you know, this is a fairly big number of people that have, have already been killed. So this is a massive human rights violation.

So you know, for Duterte, drug users and drug dealers are, are the sort of scapegoat that he uses. That is the equivalent of truth in Nazi Germany. And so that's that's the first thing to point out, that really it's poor people. Poor people who, you know, who are suspected of being drug users. You know, these are the, these are the people that have been targeted. Big drug lords, you know, it's, many of them have not really been caught, or they've been dealt with quite

leniently, if they agreed to, to serve as, you know, witnesses against Duterte's political enemies like Senator Leila de Lima, who's now in jail. If they agreed to cooperate with trumped up charges, then the big drug use, drug dealers, get, you know, basically they get much more lenient treatment from, from Duterte.

So I think that's important to put that. As for human rights activists, the main thing that has, that Duterte has deployed against them has been, you know, so far rhetoric. I mean, he has cursed them. He has said that they, you know, are, are, you know, putting a bad face to the Philippines internationally. But in terms of actually physically attacking human rights activists, that has not yet really happened, although, you know, we would not be surprised if, if it comes to that point. It's been mainly trying to discredit them at this point in time. He has tried, in fact, to discredit the, the Commission on Human Rights and the current commissioner on human rights in the Philippines, and calling him all sorts of names.

Then there is the traditional left in the Philippines. And this is a much more complicated thing. First of all, I think that this terrorist list is, you know, is something that must be opposed. And you know, that, you know, the, the terrorist list, whether, you know, whoever is put in it, you know, this is really something that is, you know, is, is something that that could lead to really widespread extension of the attacks that have been made against drug users.

**BEN NORTON:** Yeah. And on this note, if I can jump in for a second, what I'm interested in is this, the use of this word, 'terrorism.' This,

of course, is not unique to just the Philippines. It seems to be something that's an extension of the kind of war on terror rhetoric, if you will, that originated here in the U.S. And perhaps can you maybe link the two? It seems that Duterte is taking advantage of this climate of ISIS extremists, al Qaeda, the war on terror, and using this label to apply to other groups that have nothing to do with ISIS, al Qaeda, and extremist Islamist groups. Of course, we did see that there was a fight against Maute, which was an ISIS-linked group in the Philippines, in Mindanao I believe. But of course, there's this attempt by the Duterte administration to link together all of these political tendencies in order to effectively eliminate his opposition. Do you think that that is essentially the tactic that is being used here?

**WALDEN BELLO:** Yes, definitely. And I mean, the, you know, this whole branding of groups as terrorists, of course, began with the U.S. State Department. And in fact, the U.S. State Department was the one who originally put the Communist Party in the Philippines and the New People's Army on the terrorist list. So you know, he's learning from from the U.S. He's taking basically, you know, he's taking basically the techniques, the strategies of the U.S. in terms of

branding certain groups as, you know, as in fact terrorists. And let's, let's, let's face it. The, you know, Duterte, I mean, the U.S. has been very heavily involved in the war on so-called terror in the Philippines. And it has worked very closely with the Philippine military. Duterte, yes, he seems like he is, he, you know, he has this image that he is in opposition to the United States, but he does not interfere when the Philippine Army and the U.S. intelligence and Special Forces people work together against different groups in the Philippines.

So, so you know, yes, definitely. This this sort of use of the brand 'terror' is something that is he has directly appropriated from the United States to go after his political enemies. The only thing that, that one must point out here is that, you know, the many, you know, the traditional left, you know, was originally in the Duterte government. You know and in fact they had many, they had a number of of political positions. And what is happening now is that that sort of relationship whereby the traditional left wasn't the government has soured for a number of reasons.

But you know, what I wanted to bring up here is that other groups in the Philippines, other groups within the left in the Philippines,

had, had consistently been against the Duterte administration from the very beginning. And that has to be recognized that, that, you know, the broad, you know, members of the broader left have consistently from the very beginning said, this guy is a dangerous person. He is going to be violating human rights. He is a threat to democracy. And I think that's got to be recognized now. It's, my sense is it's good that the traditional left has come to its senses, and you know, has come out in strong opposition to Duterte. But I think that they should have done that from the very beginning. And having said that, I would say that it's very important that all groups, all people in fact, come together and denounce and oppose this kind of terrorist labeling, whatever group it falls on, this one, this, this kind of terrorist labeling in order to be able to become the targets of political, of Duterte's repression measures. You know, that is a very important thing that all of us on the political spectrum should do.

**BEN NORTON:** Well, here we're going to have to end Part 1 of my discussion with Walden Bello. In Part 2 of our discussion we're going to discuss how the victims of the so-called war on drugs in the Philippines are not drug dealers themselves, you know, rich drug dealers. Rather it's actually a lot of poor drug addicts. And we'll talk about how the class basis for a lot of these far-right populist movements is not actually primarily among or in working class people, but actually more among the middle class.

Walden Bello





# As Initially Published in the Real News Network Philippines' Duterte Uses 'War on Terror' Tactics to Crack Down on Leftists

April 17, 2018

*Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte is violently repressing socialist and communist groups by dubbing them "terrorists," in what ex-lawmaker Walden Bello says is a dangerous threat to democracy.*

<https://therealnews.com/stories/philippines-duterte-uses-war-on-terror-tactics-to-crack-down-on-leftists>

## Interview Transcript

**BEN NORTON:** It's the Real News. I'm Ben Norton. Thousands of people have been killed in a bloody war on drugs in the Philippines in the past two years. This extremely violent crackdown has been led by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. Duterte has compared himself to the genocidal Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler, and vowed to kill millions of drug dealers.

**RODRIGO DUTERTE:** Hitler massacred 3 million Jews. Now, there is 3 million drug addicts. There are. I'd be happy to slaughter them.

**BEN NORTON:** Duterte's War on Drugs prompted the

International Criminal Court to announce in February that it would begin a preliminary examination. Duterte responded by withdrawing the Philippines from the Court's Rome Statute. Now he has threatened to arrest the International Criminal Court's prosecutor if she enters the Philippines to begin investigating. This comes a month after the Duterte administration compiled a list dubbing hundreds of socialist activists as so-called terrorists. Among the more than 600 people included on the list drafted by the Philippine justice ministry are a United Nations special rapporteur, a former lawmaker from a left-wing party, and top members of the powerful Philippine Communist movement.

In December, Duterte declared the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army, to be so-called terrorist organizations, and he has launched many attacks on these communist fighters. Duterte is now trying to get a Manila court to officially recognize communists as terrorists, so he can use this terrorist smear to crush left-wing political opposition and dismantle organizations that may be linked to the communist movement.

Joining us to discuss Duterte's violent crackdown is Walden Bello. Walden is a former member of the Philippine House of Representatives. He's the author of several books on U.S. relations with Asia, and is

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