

Introduction

Supaphan Tangtrongpaibroj

Over recent years the Southeast Asian region has faced many intractable problems. Many countries have faced challenges arising from economic threats, cross-border trade, the environment, stateless persons, or humanitarian problems. Each government has a different response to these challenges.

China proposes a new arrangement for the global economy called “the Belt and Road Initiative,” or BRI in short, to assist in achieving longstanding cooperation with other nations via trade and investment. The BRI consists primarily of the “Silk Road Economic Belt,” linking China to Central and South Asia and onwards to Europe, and the “New Maritime Silk Road,” linking China to the nations of South East Asia, the Gulf Countries, North Africa and on to Europe. Six other economic corridors have been identified to link other countries to the Belt and the Road. However, achieving this vision is not easy in practice and there are significant economic and political challenges. The realization of the potential benefits of BRI is by no means automatic.

In “Belt and Road Initiative at the historic turn of the 21st century,” Thanayod Lopattananont shows how BRI is like networking transnational businesses. As a prelude to BRI, he reviews globalization in the past, starting from the peak of the free-market economy, followed by the economic crises and international disputes that began in the late 2000s.

According to a survey in Southeast Asia by UNHCR in 2015, there were significant numbers of stateless persons spread across the region. The country with the highest number of stateless persons was Myanmar, followed in order by Thailand, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. Although the Asian Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, with the cooperation of each country, have made efforts to address this issue, the number of stateless persons in Southeast Asia

Asian Review 31(2), 2018, pp. 1–3.

Introduction

persists. In “The management strategy for stateless persons in South-east Asia,” Unchalee Srichomphu and Pitch Piyapramote describe the situation of stateless persons in Southeast Asia, analyze the causes of the problem, and suggest strategic solutions for statelessness using a conceptual framework based on fundamental human rights and the stability of the region.

Bhutan is a small and landlocked country. Most of the terrain is highlands and valleys. However, the country is rich in natural resources, especially rivers. The country’s economy relies on agriculture, while hydropower development is on the increase. Bhutan’s economic growth is not as robust as the World Bank expects. However, Bhutan is committed to a different approach to development which prioritises the conservation of natural resources and the environment. Bhutan has her own development model based on the concept of Mahayana Buddhism. The main idea is to live in harmony with nature and not create problems for nature. In “Environmental conservation in Bhutan: Organisation and policy,” Suppawit Kaewkhunok uses qualitative research methodology to study and analyse the effects of sustainable development and public participation through policy setting and organisational structure. The study shows how integrating indigenous ideas with international principles, and building public participation, are the bases of Bhutan’s success in driving environmental policy.

The situation of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar is dire, with no sign of relief. According to the United Nations, since late August 2017 approximately 582,000 Rohingya refugees have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh and around 15,000 refugees are stuck on the Myanmar frontier. As in most conflicts, there are opposing arguments in the debate on the root causes of the Rohingya conflict. The severe measures taken by the Myanmar government and military in the villages of Rakhine State have resulted in large scale forced migration to neighboring countries. In the article, “International mechanisms towards the Rohingya crisis,” Hakim Pongtigor encourages international bodies to develop strategies to solve the Rohingya crisis through mechanisms such as the International Humanitarian Law, the International Covenant on Political Right, and the Responsibility to Protect.

Finally, Waraporn Ruangsri and Kriangsak Chetpatanavanich examine “The dynamics of the cross-border trades and the traders of Northwestern Thailand, 1950s to 2010s,” focusing on Mae Hong Son,

Supaphan Tangtrongpairoj

a border province close to Burma. The authors offer three main points. First, they evoke the impact of economic reform of border trade on the trader's lived experiences through an exploration of the traders' collective memories. Second, they show how memories of cross-border trade are interconnected with socio-cultural relations along the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Third, they point out that the period under study coincides with what is commonly called the modernization era, which is often associated with free trade policy. Their conclusion is that the dynamics of cross-border trade in northwestern Thailand between the 1950s and 2010s provide a perspective on the modern economy of the Thai state and its relationship to economic and political change within Burma. Lastly, this work contributes to an understanding of cross-border trades in the transnational context by supplementing economic history with social history.