

Editorial

Wednesday, May, 9, 2018

Still no solution: Are we going to face the anger of Mother Nature was again?

The last few years, People of the state are experiencing the furry of flood every year. Breached of River embankment, submerging of residential areas living thousands homeless, landslide due to incessant rains are phenomenon which is in the news of today's generation every year.

Many lives have been lost due to the flash flood, many have been killed due to landslides in the state's Chandel district last year. Highways have been blocked every now and then due to landslide, yet the government still fails to take long term measures to fight the problem of flood.

Well, when men starts disregarding the subtle balance of nature or neglect its inherent importance to the very existence of other life forms, she sometimes showed her wrath to make the humans refresh their fickle memories and reemphasise her importance.

For decades the people of the region have totally forgotten that it is Mother Nature that has been making the lives of every living creature enjoy the temperate and lush green atmosphere.

In a world where technology had reached its height, where leaders of the western nations talk about building modern cities under the sea or somewhere in the sky, we in this portion of the earth do not know how to make good use of what Mother Nature has so generously gifted us. It is a known fact that during dry season people of this region faced acute shortage of water and during rainy season the place is usually flooded.

This phenomenon has been experiencing by the people for the past few decades. No people of this generation have ever heard our great great grandfathers facing such a disastrous phenomenon. This clearly shows that the present vicious circle of floods and droughts is the creation of this generation. One cannot simply blame on the mass deforestation as a result of the drastic situation being faced by the people. Politicians and those who are running the government cannot make their way out of this by blaming the citizens for not following the orders of the government. Draughts and floods which were once only learnt through geography books and newspapers have now become routine event of this little state since the last two three decades.

As for the Imphalites from a small child who can read and write to those who hold top post in the government departments or those doing doctoral degree in any discipline, everyone knows that the kind of flood or draught that we the people of Manipur are facing every year is a man made one created by lack of proper planning and/or implementations on water management. Every time when the people faced such a situation there will be much hue and cry from the side of the general public demanding the government for a proper water policy for the state. Even at the state assembly, some of the MLAs had brought up the issue and drew the attention of the government for proper management of water by framing a water policy. Concerned Ministers in the government assured to look into the matter without fail but no visible action has been seen taken up.

This is perhaps because those in power and are responsible for looking after this section of department - say , for example the Irrigation and Flood Control Department (IFCD) which has been now converted as Water Resources Department and Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) seems to be deliberately waiting for occurrence of flood or draught.

Everyone knows that when there is flood the Ministers or the authority of the government department looking after it are entitle to spend huge amount of money in the name of taking up relief measures. This fund so reportedly utilized, only benefitted those who are actually assigned to utilize it.

So, if there is no draught or flood then there are no special packages or huge relief funds to be utilized or rather managed to arrange in predetermined shares amongst themselves. Which means that those in the government never wanted a pragmatic solution to the floods or draughts in this state which have adequate amount of rainfall every year.

Hopefully, the new government, continuing with its nonsense approach towards accelerating the pace of progress in the state brings about that much required change for the better. However, even though intension seems to be clear - lacked of proper study for a long term plan failed the government again making a mockery of the people of the state.

We do understand criticizing the government for the flood that people of the state faced in just one or two days would be wrong as it will take time in taking up the programme that they are taking up for managing flood. However, it is not late for the government to present a long term planning to manage and control flood. May be it will take some 5 to 10 years but until and unless a master plan has been formulated , the future generation will blame today's so called leaders or those who are running the government.

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Nation and State-Building, Self-Determination and Conflict Resolution in Southeast Asia

By: Kamarulzaman Askandar

Mr. President Dr. Debabrata Roy, Chairman of the Arambam Somorendra Trust Dr. Arambam Lokendra, my friends Pradip Phanjoubam and Dr. Immanuel Varte, ladies and gentlemen.

It is indeed a privilege and an honour to be in Manipur to participate in the 14th Death Anniversary of late Arambam Somorendra and pay my respect to him by delivering the 9th Arambam Somorendra Memorial Lecture.

Let me take you to the world of the Southeast Asians who are close to the people of this region. We are living in the year 2014. Malaysia is still struggling with the nation-building process, even if she gained her independence in 1957 and has six years to go to achieve her Vision 2020 of becoming a developed nation. Many people in Singapore, most of whom are descendants of migrants themselves, are complaining that the city-state is being over-run by 'unacceptable' new migrants. Hate speeches on the internet, blogs and discussion rooms show the intolerance of many citizens against peoples brought in to do things, which normal Singaporeans would not do.

Indonesia being the largest country (with the highest number of ethnic groups) is not spared and has to constantly remind its population of the Bhineka Tunggal Ika - 'unity in diversity' concept and prevent another Timor Leste from being created within its boundaries. The Aceh war of independence is over. But self-determination issues are still being discussed between the capital Jakarta and the province Aceh. Timor Leste on its part is still very much struggling not only with nation-building but more importantly in the state-building process and survival.

Thailand has not only the 'colourful' yellow-red power struggle to contend with but also one of the longest running self-determination struggles in the 'far' south involving the Malays of Patani fighting for peace, justice and resolution of the conflict punctuated with almost daily doses of shootings and bombings. These are happening under the shadow of uncertainty permeating the future of the nation amidst question of survivability of the monarchy.

All these, though, pale in comparison with the situation in Myanmar - a nation going through a phase of 'guided transition' in its transformation from war to peace; towards the direction of a 'national dialogue' and constitutional reform which promises an end to their problems, if they can pass through the quagmire of the peace process with the 14 ethnic-states demanding self-determination, justice, and peace. Then, in this country, there is also the need to overcome the dire situation of the Rohingyas, one of the most if not the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world today.

The Indochinese sub-region is not spared as the countries of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos are still trying to overcome the sufferings and legacies of their fight for independence and the pains of this struggle. All have suffered a lot and nationbuilding has been a painful and laborious process. They have the advantage though of 'determined' leaderships not willing to compromise on their goals.

Lastly, the Philippines, too, went through difficult times in overcoming the pains of nation-building with groups in the southern part of the country mounting their own demands for a separate nationhood based on their identity and history. Together with the Patanis of Southern Thailand, the Bangsamoros of Southern Philippines claim the prize for being the longest running self-determination struggles in the region, going back about 400 years when they first fought against the Spanish invaders, to be followed by the Americans and Manila in subsequent years. However, while the Patani struggle rages on, the Bangsamoros have been involved in peace processes since the 1970s to secure peace for their region, culminating in the 2012 Framework Agreement for the Bangsamoro (FAB) and recent Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro (CAB) signed

between the Philippines Government and the torchbearers of the Bangsamoro people, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). As peace can finally see the light of day in Mindanao, it is good to reflect upon the question of why it has been so difficult to attain peace in Southeast Asia. Why the issues that have caused these conflicts, which have their roots in history and are legacies of colonialism, have been so difficult to resolve. And finally, what lessons can be learnt from these examples. In this memorial lecture, I will argue that these struggles are part of the legacy of colonialism and unfinished decolonisation processes in the Southeast Asian region, and to finally resolve them would be tantamount to putting the final touches to the picture of peace in the region.

Nationhood and Self-determination

A nation-state is a State that is dominated by a single, majority or dominant nation. This is in contrast with the 'state-nation' which is reflective of most of what we have in multi-ethnic societies today - a State with many nations. The fond dreams of many nationalists and national liberation movements have been to create a nation-state where a national identity is forged via the consolidation of interests and identities at the end of a long struggle for independence. Whatever differences that they might have during the process of achieving independence, the outcome should be one that celebrates a particular national identity such as a Malaysian identity, a Singaporean identity, a Burmese identity, a Filipino identity and so on. The belief is that a national identity will enhance cohesiveness and make it easier for the fledgling nation to move forward as one.

While differences are acknowledged and even celebrated (tolerated), they are constantly monitored for potential problems and ways are constantly being searched to bridge the gaps. The State for a newly independent nation is used as the instrument, tool or apparatus not only for ruling the country but also for forging this national identity. Power in the system is lodged with the dominant group or groups giving them the advantage over others. In many cases, the dominant group will try to impose its own characters onto the nation. Even if the original intention was to embrace the existing diversity, the outcomes at times would differ. For example, despite the 'Unity in diversity' slogan in Indonesia, the national identity is closely associated with the Javanese culture. This in return is also translated into national development resulting in uneven development between Java and the other islands. Outer islands and regions then complain about the uneven development between the islands, with Java being the most developed island in the country.

Malaysia started out as country that celebrated diversity, too, but minorities have registered their grievances complaining about preferential treatment given to the Bumiputera group, despite arguments saying that these are needed to correct socioeconomic imbalances between the different ethnic groups. Singapore too celebrated diversity in the country, even designating the four main spoken languages as the national languages of the country. The national anthem is sung in the Malay language. But it soon became clear that English is the main language sidelining the local languages and that the majority Chinese group would be dominant in this small city-state. Centralisation of systems in the country added more to all the countries, Malaysia, prefer unitary mode of governance is concentrated in with the dominant made on the basis and sovereignty of the people. The b

for administering the implementation of national policies but also acts as a tool to consolidate powers of the national government. This is the flaw of many decolonisation processes.

The struggle for independence between the colonies (except Thailand) and their colonial masters is soon transformed into a struggle between the new sovereign nation and the newly independent peoples. The struggle is also between proponents of State's rights and the collective group rights, which was then illuminated into a struggle for self-determination. This is especially evident in countries that harbor groups that have vehemently resisted inclusion into this new state-nation in the aftermath of an independence struggle.

The existence of such groups is not a surprise in a situation of multi-ethnicity in a new State. Among the reasons that have been given for their existence include the history of self-rule in the past; a history of antagonism with and struggle against the dominant group which can include too a history of violent actions against them; a clear ethnic or religious identity that differs the aggrieved minority from the rest of the country and especially the dominant majority ruling the country; uneven social, political and economic development between the centre and the periphery; and between the majority and the minority; and existence of kin groups across the border in adjacent countries.

Self-determination Struggles as Unfinished Decolonisation Processes

This section will look at some examples of self-determination struggles from around the region.

Thailand

Thailand is the only country in the region that has never been colonised. In fact Thailand or Siam as it was known before was the one that terrorised neighbors in the region. One such former neighbour was the Malay Muslim Sultanate of Patani in what is now known as Southern Thailand. The Patani Sultanate was invaded by Siam in 1786 and vassals were installed to rule the area on behalf of the King in Bangkok.

The annexation of Patani was formalised with the London Treaty in 1909 between Siam and the British. This treaty gave international recognition to the annexation of the Sultanate. The five provinces, which were annexed into Siam, were a Muslim majority area. Thus, they were clearly distinct from the rest of the country and are now becoming a minority group in a country dominated by the Buddhist Thai.

Phases of anti Thai movements were carried out. Initially, the royalist elites led the movement, which was followed by the Muslim Ulemas and finally by broad ideologically-based pro-independence groups. The last category consist of several groups such as the Patani United Liberation Organisation (PULO), Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN - National Revolutionary Front), Islamic Front for the Liberation of Patani (BIFFP), the Bersatu, and many others.

These groups, most of which were established in the 1960s are still present to this day, having increased their prominence and the intensity of the conflict since 2004. Demands have been on achieving independence for their region, and to a lesser extent autonomy, self rule and the control of development in the area. A peace process was started in 2013, facilitated by Malaysia, but was derailed by the instability and eventual collapse of the Thai Government in 2014.

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the Spanish invaders since the 17th century only to be included as part of the Philippines by the Americans in the late 19th century and eventually by Manila.

Comparatively underdeveloped and poor, the Bangsamoro people also lost their land to land-grabbing activities and trans-migration programs supported by Manila. They now constitute only about 25 percent of the island population and are concentrated in the middle and western parts of the island.

The Mindanao Independence Movements in the 1960s gave way to a more organised liberation movement in 1970 led by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). An Islamist faction broke out of the MNLF in 1977 and became MILF. These two became the major movers of the self-determination struggle in Southern Philippines.

While the MNLF started negotiating with Manila in 1976, culminating in the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) of 1996, MILF started their talks with the government in 1997. Indonesia represented the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in the MNLF talks, while Malaysia facilitated the MILF talks. The MNLF talks resulted in the creation of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), which consisted of five provinces and a city. It was a failed experiment with autonomy for the MNLF.

MILF signed a few notable agreements - the most important being, as mentioned above, FAB in 2012 and CAB in 2014. CAB laid out provisions for a new Bangsamoro Basic Law, power and wealth sharing between Manila and the Bangsamoro, and what they termed 'normalisation' of relations. The conflict is poised to be resolved with the creation of the Bangsamoro Government and parliament scheduled for 2016. This will be the climax of the self-determination struggle of the Bangsamoro people of Southern Philippines.

Aceh

Aceh used to have its own Sultanate ruling over the Acehne people. The Acehne fought against the Dutch valiantly during the colonial period and are proud to say that they have never lost their independence to the Dutch. After the independence of Indonesia in 1949, Aceh was incorporated into the new nation under promises of Islamic solidarity and nationhood.

They were also promised a province of their own and self rule within Indonesia. The promises were not fulfilled resulting in the first phase of Aceh self-determination struggle in the 1950s led by the Ulemas. The conflict ended when they were given special autonomy status and freedom of religion in the late 50s.

The second phase of conflict was more secular in nature and started with the formation of the Free Aceh Movement in 1976 to fight against economic and political injustices. The war was bloody and protracted and ended only in 1998 when President Suharto was ousted.

Aceh then went on a couple of phases of peace processes, a military and civil emergency, a tsunami, and finally a peace agreement in the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two sides facilitated by the Crisis Management Initiative of Finland. This MoU was then translated into the Law on Governing Aceh (LOGA) of 2007 to structure and guide new relations between Aceh and Jakarta.

Among the notable new arrangements are the reverse in the formula for wealth sharing from 30-70 to 70-30; the constitutional amendment allowing for the formation of local political parties in Aceh; and the enhanced decentralisation and autonomy formula for Aceh including consultation with the Acehne on any decisions affecting them. Conflicting issues, however, continue to linger amidst accusations of abuse of power, neglect and incompetency of the current Acehne administrators, lawmakers and leaders, most of whom were former combatants in the long self-determination struggle in Aceh.