



**ASEAN'S FAKE NEWS  
DECLARATION  
NEGLECTS STATE  
PROPAGANDA**



# ACTIVITIES REPORT 2018



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In 2018, Asia Centre, in its 4th year of operations, further consolidated its various initiatives aimed at making a social impact in the region.

Under its flagship **International Human Rights Programme (IHRP)** the Centre continued its investigation of regional human rights mechanisms with its 3rd International Conference on Business & Human Rights: Holding Governments Accountable, 12-13 July 2018. Some 40 presentations were made on broad range of issues such as the interdependence of the three pillars (protect, respect and remedy) of the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights.

Through its **Intellectual Exchange Programme (IEP)**, the Centre organised several seminars. This included the 3rd Benedict Anderson Memorial Roundtable, to pay respect and continue the late professor's contribution to the studies of nationalism and South-East Asia. Another annual event, the Nite for Rights, marked Asia Centre's 3rd anniversary which was celebrated with human rights defenders and NGOs to highlight issues affecting the region. The Centre also held its 4th International Faculty Club which fosters collaboration and dialogue between policymakers, academics and civil society organisations on current geopolitical developments.

In 2018, Asia Centre increased **External Engagements** through a series of joint activities and speaking engagements in Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Korea and Singapore. As part of its external engagement, in 2018, the Centre announced the setting up of **Asia Centre's Malaysia** branch in Johor Bahru. To this end Asia Centre began building up its body of work in Malaysia. The Centre is expected to continue with its strong external engagement moving forward to build partnerships for projects and activities.

Other centre activities included the search for solutions to the **Rohingya Refugee Crisis** and through participation in regional networks on the pressing challenges upholding **Freedom of Religion or Belief in Southeast Asia**.

The Centre also launched a **Commentary Series** in 2018. It published four well-received commentaries on a range of issues that treated Malaysia and ASEAN affairs, addressing in particular issues of democracy, fake news and the Rohingya refugee crisis.

**Internships** at Asia Centre were popular in 2018 with eight interns from different cultures and backgrounds undertaking research and communication roles for the Centre.

**Social Media** continues to be the platform which promotes the activities of the Centre. Asia Centre's primary communications channels are its Facebook Page, which increased from 3000 in the previous year to 4437 likes and its mailing list, which increased to 3,500 contacts by the end of 2018.



Asia Centre is a not-for-profit organisation that seeks to create social impact in the region. It serves as a think-tank, meeting space, project partner and social enterprise. Asia Centre was first established in 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand and in 2018, a second branch was registered in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.



## THINK-TANK

Asia Centre undertakes independent, evidence-based participatory research on significant issues affecting the region. The Centre convenes conferences, roundtables and seminars to discuss these issues and communicates policy advice through publications and workshops.



## MEETING SPACE

Asia Centre manages a boutique meeting space in central Bangkok well connected by public transport. It offers a one-stop service that includes catering, accommodation, and administrative support for all types of meetings.



## PROJECT PARTNER

Asia Centre works with partners to develop programs, implement projects, and convene activities that serve to, inter alia, extend the partner's reach across the region.



## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

Asia Centre generates resources for its work through the provision of services as well as receiving support through donations, grants and sponsorship.



## International Conference on Business and Human Rights: Holding Governments Accountable in Asia

Asia Centre held its 3rd International Conference on Business and Human Rights: Holding Governments Accountable in Asia 12-13 July 2018. The event was held in partnership with Forum Asia and Thammasat University and was supported by the Taiwan Democracy Foundation.



Asia Centre's 3rd International Conference brought experts from around the world who analysed the multifaceted linkages between business operations and international human rights norms but circled back to point to the duty of the State to protect. They highlighted policy and legislative challenges affecting the capacity of states to uphold such norms as stipulated in Pillar One of the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights.



At the conference some 40 presentations were made on broad range of issues such as the interdependence of the three pillars (protect, respect and remedy) of the UNGP. Topics discussed included violations of land rights, indigenous peoples' rights, mining, environment and labour rights. The increasing impact of Chinese business interests in Southeast Asia was also raised. To wrap up the proceedings, a closing panel considered innovative, cutting edge research on the relationship between human rights and architecture, artificial intelligence and smart cities. Participants discussed the need to place the human being at the centre of all discussions as society becomes dominated by innovation and technology.

## 3rd Benedict Anderson Memorial Roundtable Gender and Contemporary Nationalism in Asia

The 3rd Benedict Anderson Memorial Roundtable was held on 19 January 2018. Asia Centre hosts the annual Benedict Anderson Memorial Roundtable to honour the significance of the late professor's contribution to studies of nationalism and South-East Asia, and to continue the debate around nationalism in its contemporary contexts.



## Nite for Rights: Dissecting a 2018 Election in Malaysia: The End of Cronyism?



Asia Centre's 3rd Nite for Rights discussed the key challenge of undoing six decades of cronyism, patronage and money politics was a central point highlighted during Asia Centre's roundtable discussion on the Malaysian elections held in May 2018. Despite the political earthquake, the end of Barisan Nasional's (BN) rule in Malaysia after 61 years and the defeat of former Prime Minister Najib's government, fundamental change is not guaranteed.

## International Faculty Club Rice Before Rights: Challenges of Advancing Human Rights in Asia

2018 saw the 4th International Faculty being held with lively and animated discussions on human rights in the current geopolitical context that features the rise of China and the alleged retreat of the US from global commitments. The IFC brings together academics, researchers and graduate students living, researching, studying, working, or passing through Bangkok, Thailand.



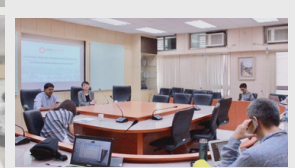
In 2018, Asia Centre participated in conferences, forums, round table discussions and seminars in 11 countries.

In Southeast Asia, Asia Centre had engagements in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. In Indonesia and Malaysia the topics centred on fake news and elections while in Singapore the topic was on human rights violations and the Universal Periodic Review.



In Australia and New Zealand, Asia Centre engagement centred mainly with universities. In Australia, seminars were held in Macquarie University and Sydney University, while in New Zealand there were discussions at Massey University and Victoria University. Topics of discussion included the Rohingya crisis and fake news.

In East Asia, Asia Centre had engagements with institutions and universities in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. In Japan it was with Waseda University. In South Korea it was with the World Human Rights Cities Forum in Gwangju, while in Taiwan it was with National Chengchi University and Soochow University. The discussions centre on the fake news as well as the Universal Periodic Review.



In South Asia, Asia Centre also had engagements with universities, press clubs and the media in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh the topic was on the Rohingya refugee crisis, while in India in the cities of Kolkata, Guwahati and Shillong as well as Colombo in Sri Lanka the topic centre on fake news





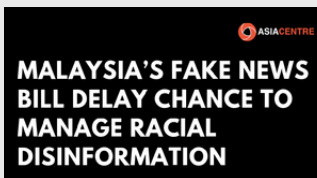
Asia Centre's Malaysian premises

Asia Centre has initiated plans to establish a second branch in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. The new branch will complement and extend the reach of programmes currently organized by Asia Centre Thailand in Bangkok. Johor Bahru was selected as the preferred location for the Centre's second branch because of its strategic location, 330 kilometers from Kuala Lumpur and 18 kilometers from Singapore's Second Link Bridge.

Asia Centre thereafter engaged in several Malaysia themed activities. In Bangkok, it held a roundtable on "Dissecting the 2018 Election in Malaysia: The End of Cronyism" which explored six decades of cronyism, patronage and money politics in Malaysia. In Kuala Lumpur, Asia Centre also participated and co-convened with IMAN the "Democratic Transition in Malaysia" Roundtable, held at the premises Gerakbudaya bookshop, which the Centre represents in Thailand.



The Centre also published two commentaries to encourage the establishment of a **Malaysian Democracy Foundation** and discuss how Malaysia's fake news bill delay was a chance to manage racial discrimination.



Asia Centre and CARE: Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation executed a set of in depth interviews and focus group discussions of a selected group of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.



Overall, in 2018, Asia Centre signaled its intention to establish a Centre in Johor Bahru by increasing its visibility through the organisation and participation in activities in Malaysia.

## International Conference on The Rohingya Crisis and Multidimensional Tragedy and the Centre's outreach



Experts participating in the conference came from around the world, including Australia, Bangladesh, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Local civil society, international organizations, graduate students and media also participated.

### Asia Centre Deliberates Solutions to the Crisis at Conference in Bangladesh

Asia Centre contributed to the search for solutions to the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar and Bangladesh during the International Conference on the Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Towards Sustainable Solutions, held in Dhaka from 2-3 April 2018.



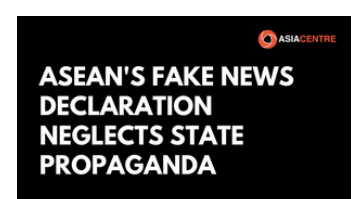
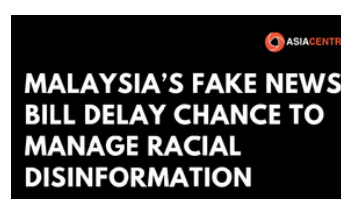
### Asia Centre Undertakes Rohingya Refugee Research in Malaysia



Asia Centre and CARE: Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation executed a project in December 2018 to understand the health experiences of Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia. To evaluate the Rohingya crisis a set of in depth interviews and focus group discussions were taken of a selected group of Rohingya refugees in Malaysia.

## Commentaries in 2018

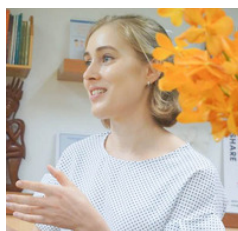
Asia Centre regularly produces commentaries and op-ed's on critical issues impacting the region. This serves to build our profile as a think-tank and to meet our organisational goals of supporting civil society and promoting discourse through knowledge sharing.





In 2018, Asia Centre hosted eight interns from Australia, Bhutan, Ethiopia, Japan and the US. The Centre's internship programme is popular and receives a regular flow of applicants. Asia Centre provides opportunities to interns to undertake substantive and practical work in three professional streams: Communications, Research, and Partnerships. The minimum duration for an internship is three months and the tasks of the internship are integrated with the Centre's ongoing projects.

Learn more at <https://asiacentre.org/asia-centre/interns/>



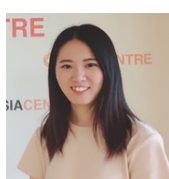
**Elise Schuster**  
University of Queensland



**Hamsa Mohamed**  
Stamford International  
University



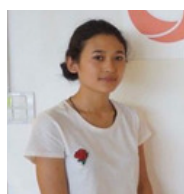
**Estell Kim**  
University of California,  
Berkeley



**Kasumi Shiraishi**  
Waseda University



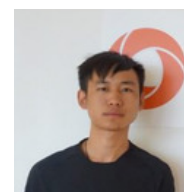
**Kamela Rezaie**  
La Trobe University



**Dawa Dem**



**Tshering Nima**



**Thukten Jamtsho**

Rajamangala University of Technology, Phra Nakhon

## Social Media Outreach in 2018



Asia Centre has been promoting its conferences and events on social media and its mailing list. In 2018 there have been more followers, more likes and more posts! Newcomers to our social media outlets hail from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Malaysia in particular, resulting from external outreach campaigns.



@AsiaCentre\_org  
56 Followers



44 followers



141 followers



3.5k on our mailing list



Page likes increased  
from 2725 to 4438