WHAT’S NEW

In the past two months, different parts of Asia have been experiencing extreme hot weather events. In South Asia in April 2023, Dhaka’s temperature reached its highest in decades at 40.6°C whilst northern and eastern Indian cities recorded above 44°C temperatures. Likewise in Southeast Asia, Thailand's city of Tak experienced a record temperature of 45.4°C, whereas Lao PDR’s Sainyabuli province observed an all-time high 42.9°C. Other cities recorded equally high temperatures such as Vientiane at 41.4°C, Luang Prabang at 42.7°C, and Myanmar’s Kalewa at 44°C.

The World Weather Attribution conducted a quick study to see how far climate change has played a role in it and they have found that climate change has made the exceptional heat and humidity in April in Bangladesh, India, Laos and Thailand 30 times more likely. It has also made the temperature at least 2°C hotter than they would otherwise have been without human-induced increased greenhouse gas emissions.

For many people in Asia, the heatwave is a new phenomenon. The immediate question therefore is whether this is a temporary one-off event, or whether this is a new reality that the societies need to learn to live with moving forward. The World Meteorological Organization’s recently-released report highlighted that climate change and naturally occurring El Niño event are likely to push global temperatures to record levels in the next five years. In fact, there is a considerably high probability for the annual average near-surface global temperature to reach more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels for at least one year.

In light of this, adaptation becomes all the more urgent for people in Asia. Forest fire events and resulting haze in Southeast Asia can recur in such high temperatures. This is in line with a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that suggests the probability of extreme fire events going up by 14 percent in 2030 and by 30 percent by 2050 due to climate change. Anticipatory measures must be put in place to minimise such occurrence.

With the global temperatures getting increasingly hotter, the governments thus need to pro-actively anticipate heatwave impacts on different segments of the society and across different sectors. Policy interventions are needed to assist adaptation to heatwave. Likewise, the population and the different entities within the society need to pro-actively look after their own well-being in such temperatures.
In this month’s NTS-Asia Newsletter, we are proud to feature two extraordinary works of the Consortium member the Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) based in India.

In a world that focuses much attention on the war in Ukraine, Dr Meenakshi Gopinath and Ms Shilpi Shabdita highlighted in “Afghanistan in Transition” that the situations in Afghanistan have worsened since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Women’s rights and participations in the public spaces are especially curbed, and long-time discrimination and violence against the minority group Hazaras is brought to attention. Dr Gopinath and Ms Shabdita both argue that the Afghan people need to take a central place in advancing peace processes and suggest that tackling the issue of women’s rights to education and employment, led by the South Asian Women’s Network, be the first agenda.

The importance of women’s role in peace processes is likewise featured in “Peacewomen of Northeast India” compiled by Ms Seema Kakran. The peacewomen of Northeast Asia are unique because they do not rely on external funding and support and therefore are bolder in challenging the existing international framing of women peace and security discourse. They maintain their space in the political arena making their voices on various issues heard, and they argue that all women, regardless of backgrounds, have the agency express their views and demands on important human security issues.

Warmest regards,
Mely Caballero-Anthony

Researcher Profile
Meenakshi Gopinath

Meenakshi Gopinath is Founder and Director of WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace), an initiative that seeks to promote the leadership of South Asian women in the areas of peace, security and regional cooperation. She is Principal Emerita, Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, a leading women’s college in India where she was Principal for 26 years. Dr. Gopinath was the first woman to serve as a member of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) of India. She is a member of multi-track peace initiatives in Kashmir and between India and Pakistan. She has authored, among others, Pakistan in Transition, and co-authored Bridging the Divide: Peacebuilding for a New Generation, Conflict Resolution – Trends and Prospects, Transcending Conflict: A Resource Book on Conflict Transformation and Dialogic Engagement and has contributed chapters and articles in several books and journals on Gandhi, the Politics of Pakistan, Conflict Resolution, Gender and Peacebuilding, Arts et al. Her interests include issues of human rights and gender, conflict transformation and Buddhist and Gandhian philosophy. For her contributions to women’s education and leadership, she has received several awards and honours including the Padma Shri from the President of India. Dr. Gopinath serves on the Governing Boards of leading research institutes, NGOs, educational institutions and corporate bodies.
May 2023- NTS-Asia Consortium Newsletter

Over 40 decrees have been passed denying public life in Afghanistan. Since August 2021, institutionalised women's erasure from under Sharia, the Taliban's decrees have commitment to upholding women's rights despite repeated assertions of its ideology of the Taliban.

Among others; and deconstructing the fault lines of gender, ethnicity, tribe, religion, protracted conflict across diverse internal engagements with the root causes of the "Education for Peace" initiative with the unique insights of Afghan policymakers, former diplomats, media persons, and academics on the key developments in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Post the takeover, for the first time, a generation of Afghans are taking the lead in shaping the narrative instead of relying solely on global analyses; engaging with the root causes of the protracted conflict across diverse internal fault lines of gender, ethnicity, tribe, religion among others; and deconstructing the ideology of the Taliban.

Despite repeated assertions of its commitment to upholding women's rights under Sharia, the Taliban's decrees have institutionalised women's erasure from public life in Afghanistan. Since August 2021, over 40 decrees have been passed denying secondary and university education to women, prohibiting them from working in non-governmental organisations, imposing severe restrictions on the freedom of movement and expression, and dissolving institutional mechanisms to seek redressal for gender-based violence.

Before the Taliban takeover, Afghan women constituted 27 percent of Parliamentarians, 27 percent of civil servants, 50 percent of the community health workforce, 40 percent of teachers, and 57,000 women-owned businesses. The ban on secondary education for girls in Afghanistan will have far-reaching effects on a country where 65 percent of the population is under 25 years of age. Over 90 percent of female journalists were forced to leave their jobs. Women's retreat from the workforce has led to an estimated loss to the economy of $1 billion (5 percent of Afghanistan's GDP). These directives fit the pattern of gender-based institutional discrimination and contravene Afghanistan's obligations under numerous international human rights treaties to which it is a state party.

Since August 2021, the Taliban have been using a two-tier approach to policymaking and governance, which is starkly different in Pashtun and non-Pashtun areas in Afghanistan. In the non-Pashtun areas, the focus of the Taliban's leadership is to contain non-Pashtun Taliban commanders from occupying influential positions. In Pashtun areas, the Taliban's approach focuses on exacerbating religious fault lines and inter-tribal rivalries.

Voices advocating justice for the Hazaras, previously seen as obstacles to nation-building and national unity in Afghanistan, are finding resonance and support across ethnic divides. The systematic targeting of the Hazaras has become a rallying point for Afghans across ethnicities. The #StopHazaraGenocide campaign on Twitter has surpassed 11 million supporters, bringing the culture of impunity against the historical persecution of the Hazara community to global attention.

REFLECTIONS
Afghanistan in Transition
Meenakshi Gopinath & Shilpi Shabdita

A year after the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, the country rapidly recedes from the global spotlight with the war in Ukraine dominating the discourse on foreign policy and monopolising international media attention. Afghanistan continues to be mired in an escalating human rights and humanitarian crisis, with "gender apartheid," media censorship, "ethnic genocide," economic collapse, and armed resistance defining the volatile status quo. It is the only country without a constitution, without legal recourse to rights and access to secondary and university education for women.

As part of the 'Afghanistan in Transition' series, WISCOMP's publications foreground the unique insights of Afghan policymakers, civil society leaders, former diplomats, media persons, and academics on the key developments in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Post the takeover, for the first time, a generation of Afghans are taking the lead in shaping the narrative instead of relying solely on global analyses; engaging with the root causes of the protracted conflict across diverse internal fault lines of gender, ethnicity, tribe, religion among others; and deconstructing the ideology of the Taliban.

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Researcher Profile
Shilpi Shabdita

Shilpi Shabdita is Program Officer at Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), where she handles programs on Conflict Transformation, Gender Justice and Education for Peace. She has a Masters’ degree in International Peace Studies from the University of Notre Dame, USA, and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding from Lady Shri Ram College, India.

Previously, she worked at Heartland Alliance, USA on migration issues, and with Afghans for Progressive Thinking, Afghanistan on project design and grant writing for youth-led dialogue initiatives. Shilpi has also worked in Uganda at the Justice and Reconciliation Project, where she collated a ‘Community Memory Book’ documenting war memories and justice needs of over 280 former combatants and survivors of war; participated in campaigns for families of disappeared persons; and authored USAID analysis reports on regional reconciliation. Previously, Shilpi served as a Consultant at WISCOMP working on the ‘Education for Peace’ initiative with youth leaders and educators from New Delhi and Kashmir, which focused on inter-regional dialogue, conflict transformation skill building, and collaborative peace projects.

Photo Credit: WISCOMP

Shilpi Shabdita
Program Officer at Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP)
India has been a first responder on humanitarian aid and has a long-standing historical relationship with Afghanistan with cultural ties over centuries. The recommendations for a meaningful Indian re-engagement ranged from liberalising the visa policy for Afghan nationals, enhanced medical aid and humanitarian assistance to local organisations, and refugee populations, more substantive engagement with diverse stakeholders especially among the diaspora, and greater opportunities for Afghan students to study and research in India.

For a peace process to be durable, it must be led and owned by the Afghans. Engagement by the international community should be moderated and guided by the needs of the Afghans. South Asian Women’s Networks, espousing transnational solidarity must lead the efforts in foregrounding a public discourse on women’s rights to education and employment as a first step. The narratives crafted by Afghan women, civil society actors, and the Afghan diaspora look at both immediate and long-term engagement without being subsumed by a miasma of despair.

**Researcher Profile**

**Seema Kakran**

Seema Kakran is Deputy Director, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), an initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility. Seema is trained as a political scientist with a specialization in political theory, public policy and international relations. She has eclectic research interests from gender, conflict and post conflict peacebuilding to equity and inclusion in education from a sociological perspective. Among her recent publications are: Navigating the Terrain of Gender Justice: A Handbook for Gender

Together Against the Violence of Gendered

A South Asian Journal of Peacebuilding.

**REFLECTIONS**

**Peacewomen of Northeast India**

Compiled by Seema Kakran

WISCOMP (Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace)

The Northeast of India has been a site of protracted periods of unrest, rebel movements and militarisation. Of the seven provinces that comprise the region, six have witnessed inking of ceasefire agreements and peace accords. Since the region is home to many tribal, ethnic and ancient communities, each with its own set of traditional wisdoms, customary laws and justice mechanisms, the paths to peace in the region have been overlaid by processes of ‘modernisation.’ Peace accords have put an end to overt armed violence but have failed to address ‘discontents of peace,’ even as modernisation has fomented newer conflicts. At the same time, peace negotiations and accords have re-ordered the political, ideological and moral choices of ordinary civilians as much as those of actors directly or indirectly involved in the conflicts.

A significant feature of peace building in the region is women’s role in facilitating reconciliation of internecine conflicts between tribes and bringing warring groups to the negotiating table.

Women have also been at the forefront of challenging and questioning the process of ‘formal talks’—expanding the canvas of issues as well as the actors involved. What is noteworthy is that unlike other parts of South Asia that have witnessed significant international intervention, Nepal and Afghanistan for instance, the Northeast women did not rely on external funding and support. In fact, South Asian feminist movement for peace—of which Northeast women are a significant part—have not accepted international framing of women peace and security discourse unquestioningly. They have challenged the resolutions that seek to ‘make war safer’ and focus mostly on macro level positioning on peace and security. They have helped expand the definition of conflict, bringing communal violence, extraterritorial accountability and accountability of corporations, in its ambit.

The recent WISCOMP publication Peacewomen of Northeast India offers insights on how global norms on women, peace and security as articulated in UNSCR 1325 and the CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation 30 operate on the ground. Scholars, activists and those linked to grassroots organisations articulate that
despite peace accords, militarisation and increased ‘securitisation’ have produced new vulnerabilities for women in the region. They ask why women’s agency during conflict and peacebuilding does not translate into representation in governance structures at all levels once violence has ended. Some of this is attributed to patriarchal peace processes that selectively pitch women’s rights against community rights while the male ruling class and tribal elites consolidate their monopoly over economic and political resources, sidelining women in the name of protecting Customary Law that denies women space in formal political structures.

However, women are not accepting this political sidelining. They continue to reclaim political space by voicing issues of large-scale land alienation, privatisation of the commons including water and forest resources, denial of the right to contest for local bodies, corruption and curbs on freedom of expression.

Peace women of Northeast argue that peace making involves dissent, discussion, dialogue and questioning not only at the formal table but around it. Such inputs in the region have not only come from academia, thought leaders, public intellectuals or journalists, but from women on the street, in the marketplace, in the farms and the like. Their expression may be different but it carries an undeniable element of agency as women from every walk of life raise issues of ‘lives and livelihood,’ undeniable elements of human security.

### RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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Muhammad Syukri, Gender Policies of the New Developmental State: The Case of Indonesian New Participatory Village Governance, Journal Article, December 2022

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The SMERU Research Institute, Indonesia (SMERU)

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Emerging Security Challenges: South Asian Security Landscape

Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) organized its April Roundtable discussion on the topic, ‘Emerging Security Challenges: South Asian Security Landscape’, at the Westin, Dhaka. The discussion was moderated by Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, a Distinguished Fellow at BIPSS. The expert panel consisted of Dr Niloy Ranjan Biswas, Associate Professor of International Relations at the University of Dhaka, Ms Farzana Mannan, Associate Professor of International Relations at Jahangirnagar University, and Brig. Gen. (Retd) Shahedul Anam Khan, former Associate Editor of the Daily Star. The discussion was attended by Ambassadors and senior diplomats based in Dhaka, government officials, defence personnel, academics, editors, journalists, and scholars.

Dr Niloy Ranjan discussed the geostrategic significance of South Asia, asking a pertinent question of whether we are 'constructing a meta-region'. Ms Farzana Mannan shed light on non-traditional security issues in South Asia, focusing particularly on the impact of climate security on human security. Turning to traditional security issues in South Asia, Brig. Gen. Shahedul Anam focused on hard security and the region’s ability to defend its freedom of action. All the panellists agreed that South Asia should be given greater importance by major international actors.

The roundtable ended with lively interactive session with the participants.

Two Years of Military Rule in Myanmar: Ramifications for the Future

Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) hosted a Roundtable discussion titled, ‘Two Years of Military Rule in Myanmar: Ramifications for the Future’ at the Hotel Bengal Blueberry, Dhaka. The discussion was moderated by Major General A N M Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc, (Retd.), President of BIPSS. The round table had an expert panel comprising - Brigadier General (Retd) Shakhawat Hussain PhD, Senior Fellow, South Asian Institute for Policy and Governance, NSU; Brigadier General Shahedul Anam Khan, ndc, psc, (Retd.), former Associate Editor, The Daily Star and Parvez Karim Abbasi, Assistant Professor, East West University.

The discussion was attended by Ambassadors and Senior Diplomats based in Dhaka, Government Officials, Defence Personnel, Academics, Editors, Journalists, Scholars and Students. The speakers recognized that military rule in Myanmar not only has internal implications but also has implications for its neighbours. Neighbouring countries have to bear the brunt of the volatile situation in Myanmar. Bangladesh has to be more vigilant about this issue before it takes a bad turn in the future.

Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Restrategising the Future

BIPSS recently organized a lecture club discussion on the topic ‘Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Restrategising the Future’. The event was moderated by Major General A N M Muniruzzaman (Retd.), President of BIPSS. The keynote speaker for the event was Barrister Manzoor Hasan OBE, Executive Director, Centre for Peace and Justice, BRAC University. The attendee included- the Ambassadors, Senior Foreign Diplomats based in Dhaka, former Chief of Air Staff, former Foreign Secretaries, Heads of International Organizations, former Senior Military and Civil Officials, Editors and members of Academia among others.

The Rohingya refugee situation has been steadily deteriorating, seemingly with no end in sight. Concern mounts as other crises grip different parts of the world, diverting international attention away from these displaced persons. “What next?” is the question that looms large. Mr Mazoor Hasan has suggested that in order to move towards a solution to this crisis we have to think outside of the box. Bangladesh’s experience and hospitality regarding the Rohingyas has been outstanding but the time has come to restrategise and come up with new ideas. He has suggested to build up on the Kofi Anan report and promote regional collaboration to solve the crisis. He also suggested building cooperation with different actors in Rakhine state where the Rohingyas will ultimately return.

After an extensive discussion on the subject matter, which ensued after the insightful speech by the speaker, there was an interesting question and answer session. The guests raised questions if negotiation and cooperation with Myanmar is actually possible. Click here to read more.
Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS) recently organized a Roundtable discussion titled ‘Disinformation and Influence Operations: A Threat to National Security’, at the Westin Dhaka. The discussion was moderated by Major General A N M Muniruzzaman, ndc, psc, (retd.), President of BIPSS. The speakers of the roundtable were: Ms Ayesha Kabir, Head of English Web, Prothom Alo and Mr. Shafqat Munir, Head of BCCTR and Senior Research Fellow, BIPSS.

The discussion was attended by ambassadors and senior diplomats based in Dhaka, government officials, defence personnel, academics, editors, journalists, scholars and students.

The speakers recognized that every day and every moment, everyone is impacted with all sorts of information from all over the globe as this is the age of information and, unfortunately, of disinformation too. Unless we are alert of the risks involved with disinformation, with the rise in influence operations, these can pose a serious national threat. The state no longer enjoys monopoly over information. Since the behaviour and policies of states are increasingly information-based, they have also become information vulnerable. National security of the state is today linked to the information.

Women: Empowerment & Education

BIPSS Lecture Club on the topic ‘Women: Empowerment & Education’ was held recently. The lecture was delivered by Dr. Rubana Huq, Vice Chancellor, Asian University for Women. The event was attended by several distinguished diplomats, scholars, defense personnel, academics, and other dignitaries. The lecture was followed by a lively discussion on this contemporary topic highlighting the significance of female education and empowerment. The speaker put attention that empowering the community and changing the norms was needed for creating a bright future for all.

Disinformation and Influence Operations: A Threat to National Security

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The discussion was attended by Ambassadors and Senior Diplomats based in Dhaka, Government Officials, Defence Personnel, Academics, Editors, Journalists, Scholars and Students. They talked about the trends and challenges facing the world and Bangladesh in 2023 focusing on the economic and security trends including: grim economic growth, rising inflation, uncertain future of Russia-Ukraine war, energy crisis, food crisis, upcoming election turbulences, resource crunch, regional security issues and disruptive technologies.

Women: Empowerment & Education

The discussion was attended by ambassadors and senior diplomats based in Dhaka, government officials, defence personnel, academics, editors, journalists, scholars, and students among others. The discussion highlighted that hybrid war is a growing threat due to technological advancement and new infrastructure. A hybrid war doctrine and defence policies needs to be developed with multi-sectoral input to ensure national security.

Maritime Security Challenges in the Indo Pacific

BIPSS organized an expert roundtable titled “Maritime Security Challenges in the Indo Pacific” at Hotel Lake Castle. The event was moderated by Major General ANM Muniruzzaman (Retd), President BIPSS. The keynote speaker of the expert roundtable was Dr. David Brewster, Senior Research Fellow, National Security College, Australian National University. Sacha Blumen, First Secretary, Australian High Commission, Dhaka was also present in the event.

The session was attended by senior members of the diplomatic community, government officials, maritime experts, defence personnel, academics, journalists, scholars, and students from different universities. The discussion centered on traditional and non-traditional maritime security threats in the Indo-Pacific region and highlighted the importance of developing maritime awareness and building regional cooperation.
Think tank forum calls for closer China-Central Asia community

Diplomats and academics urged efforts to build a closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future at the Second Think Tank Forum of “China+Central Asia” (C+CS). Held in Beijing, both online and offline, on Nov. 8–9, the forum focused on identifying new opportunities for joint development.

In his congratulatory letter, Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi pointed out that over the past three decades since their independence, Central Asian countries have devoted themselves to exploring a modernization path that suits their national conditions—with gratifying achievements. China will, as always, firmly support the development and revitalization of Central Asian countries and is willing to carry out all-encompassing mutually beneficial cooperation to jointly promote the modernization drive.

Gao Xiang, vice president of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), noted that at present, the world has entered a new period of turbulence and change amid the profound changes unseen in a century, as the pandemic continues to impact international politics, economies, and global security. China and Central Asian countries are closely interdependent and share prosperity and hardship.

“We are willing to work hand in hand with our partners in Central Asia to implement the Global Development Initiative and Global Security Initiative proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping, maintain regional peace and stability, and jointly achieve more robust, green, and healthy new developments, building an even closer China-Central Asia community with a shared future,” Gao said.

In his congratulatory letter, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Vladimir Norov said that China is promoting the industrial and economic development of Central Asia and boosting infrastructure construction in the region, such as transportation and energy. China has become an important trade and investment partner for Central Asian countries. The successive implementation of a series of cooperation projects has propelled the economic and social development of Central Asian countries and enhanced the wellbeing of the people in the region.

Norov expressed his hope that Central Asian countries and China will continue to implement cooperation projects, enhance cooperation in the fields of the digital economy, food security, poverty reduction, and energy, facilitate academic exchanges, and jointly combat terrorism, extremism, separatism, and transnational organized crime.

Experts and scholars attending the forum conducted deep discussions on the construction of a China-Central Asia community with a shared future, and the future development and cooperation between the two sides.

Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP)

Women in Diplomacy

In light of India’s G20 Presidency and the EU-India strategic partnership, WISCOMP - in collaboration with the Delegation of EU to India, and the India International Centre (IIC) - organized a roundtable with women diplomats and policy experts from EU and India. One of the first dialogues of its kind, the roundtable reinforced WISCOMP’s substantive engagement with changing the contours and vocabulary of gender-sensitive diplomacy and foreign policy.

The dialogue addressed questions like what unique skill-sets do women bring to diplomacy and foreign policy? How do women diplomats negotiate peace, strengthen diplomatic relations, navigate challenging postings in areas of conflict, and facilitate intercultural linkages? What are the similarities and differences between the perspectives of European and Indian women diplomats? Watch here.

Integrating Gender and Climate Change Conversations

In collaboration with the India International Centre and Kubernein Initiative, WISCOMP organized a conference exploring a gender-intentional lens in Climate Change action with policy experts, research scholars, environmental activists, and media persons from diverse organizations such as the Centre for Policy Research, Alternative Futures, IRADE, National Institute of Urban Affairs, and South Asia Heat Health Network.

Two short films on the urgency of climate action in association with the Indian chapter of International Association for Women in Radio and Television, were screened during the conference. Eminent experts such as Sonam Wangchuk, Environmentalist, Educationist and Engineer, Ambassador Shyam Saran, Former Foreign Secretary and Prime Minister’s Special Envoy & Chief Negotiator on Climate Change, Ambassador Philipp Ackermann German Ambassador to
India and Bhutan, Ambika Vishwanath and Priyanka Bhide, Co-Founders of Kubernein Initiative, Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Director, WISCOMP, amongst notable others shared their insights igniting ideas and questions for discussion.

WSCOMP was invited to conduct a participatory workshop on ‘Gender Audits in Higher Education Institutions: The Why and How?’ at Sri Venkateswara College of Engineering in Srinperumbudur on 27-28 January 2023. The college was extraordinarily receptive to the ideas and faculty participated in large numbers across disciplinary boundaries of Mechanical Engineering, Applied Chemistry, IT, Physics, Social Science, Automobile Engineering, Computer Science etc.


**Afghanistan Dialogue Series**

With the war in Ukraine dominating the discourse on foreign policy, Afghanistan seems to have receded from the world’s normative frame. WISCOMP endeavors to have sustained dialogues with Afghans, both from within Afghanistan and the diaspora, mostly led by women as they explore methodologies for crafting alternative futures for the people of this embattled country.

**Virtual Book Café Dialogues**

WSCOMP’s innovative online portal Log-in Gender organized three virtual Book Cafés expanding our circles of engagement and nurturing a vibrant community of young scholars and practitioners. Wide range of themes varying from deconstructing the ‘vocabulary of productive work,’ (re)storying the narratives of Muslim women in India, and exploring ‘women's writings in fiction’ became the focal points for discussion. Click here to access the Book Café Playlist.

**Affirmative Action Legislation on Women’s Substantive Political Representation (November 2022)**

In collaboration with the India International Centre, WISCOMP organized a Dialogue with Rami Chhabra, eminent journalist, Dr. Gopalkrishna Gandhi, diplomat and former Governor of West Bengal and Dr. Meenakshi Gopinath, Director, WISCOMP on women’s substantive and equitable political representation in the Parliament and State Legislatures in India. Watch Here

**Engendering Nuclear Disarmament: Challenges and Possibilities (November 2022)**

WSCOMP organized a day-long conference on the challenges and prospects of Nuclear Disarmament in South Asia with former diplomats, strategic studies experts, academics, and young scholars.

The UNGA Resolution 71/57 of 2016 underscores the importance of disarmament and non-proliferation education. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, in 2018, announced a Disarmament Agenda prioritizing gender as "a moral duty and an operational necessity". The Ukraine Crisis has exacerbated the risk of use of nuclear weapons. This ‘hurting landscape’ is presented a dialectic marked by the presence of stressed nuclear dyads, unregulated emergence of new technologies that impact nuclear deterrence, and a crumbling arms control architecture accompanied by the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017) outlawing use of nuclear weapons.

Eminent experts such as Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Former Ambassador of India to the UN Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Lakshmi Puri, Former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations, Ambassador Sujata Mehta, Former Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, strategic studies and policy experts such as Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, Director, Society for Policy Studies, Ambassador Sheelkant Sharma, Former Indian Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and member, IAEA Board of Governors, Dr. Manpreet Sethi, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Policy Studies, Ruhee Neog, Director, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies amongst significant others unpacked layers of the discourse on Nuclear Disarmament. Watch Here

**Breaking Bread with Afghan Refugee Communities in Delhi**

To mark the UN International Day of Peace, the WISCOMP team reached out to a small community of Delhi-based Afghan refugees, hosting them for dinner. A warm and friendly evening, it allowed for everybody to converse and interact without a structured agenda.

**Afghanistan Today: Likely Directions (October 2022)**

WSCOMP partnered with the Centre for Policy Research to bring together Afghan scholars, former members of the government, media persons and civil society actors to virtually deliberate on the following: What are the current developments in Afghanistan that impact upon security, governance, economy and the education system? Is Afghanistan likely to become a breeding ground for terrorist groups once again? How do the Afghans perceive the role of the international community post August 2021? What expectations do the Afghans have of India?

**Afghanistan in Transition since the Taliban Takeover: Engendered Perspectives (August 2022)**

WSCOMP convened a virtual Dialogue with a group of Afghan journalists, scholars, policymakers and civil society actors to deliberate on key developments in Afghanistan and assess their impact on the lives of women since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. In the audience were a group of Indian experts from academia, think tanks and former diplomats. The voices of women in Afghanistan and the Afghan diaspora were at the center of the Dialogue. It recognized that the ‘woman question’ is embedded in the larger social, political and economic context of the country.

**Gender Audits in Higher Education Institutions**

Eminent experts such as Ambassador Jayant Prasad, Former Ambassador of India to the UN Conference on Disarmament, Ambassador Lakshmi Puri, Former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations, Ambassador Sujata Mehta, Former Permanent Representative of India to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, strategic studies and policy experts such as Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, Director, Society for Policy Studies, Ambassador Sheelkant Sharma, Former Indian Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and member, IAEA Board of Governors, Dr. Manpreet Sethi, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Air Policy Studies, Ruhee Neog, Director, Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies amongst significant others unpacked layers of the discourse on Nuclear Disarmament.
Future of Work: Raising the Global South’s Voice

SMERU collaborate with CIPPEC Argentine and GIZ Germany to further linked to the discussion on the Future of Work in Global South that aims to continuously support the existing efforts of the G20 countries after this year’s Indonesian Presidency in G20. An expert meeting organized to further discuss labor markets, inequality and technological changes issues which are linked to the role of the T20 as a forum for harnessing change, The expert meeting discussed the Indonesia’s approach toward the topics that fall within the labor markets and future of work thematic umbrella and the key learnings from the process. Finally, the meeting showcased the regional initiatives, stakeholder mapping, and agendas for 2023 with a focus on labor markets, future of work, technological change, climate change, demographic change, and skills. Click here to watch the podcast.

Partnership and Collaboration for Inclusive and Sustainable Science, Technology, and Innovation

Indonesia is committed to realizing the country’s ideals of improving people’s welfare through sustainable development. The government has brought this commitment into reality by adopting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) since 2015. Indonesia must increase its scientific research, technological skills in all industrial sectors, and product innovation to achieve this goal.

The National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Center for Innovation Policy and Governance (CIPG), Article 33 Indonesia, Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of Regional Autonomy (KPPOD), Indonesian Center for Law and Policy Studies (PSHK), and The SMERU Research Institute collaborate to organize The Indonesian STI Policy Lecture Series II – 2022 themed “Inclusive and Sustainable Science, Technology, and Innovation”. The lecture will have six discussion series, and SMERU will host the sixth series, titled “Partnership and Collaboration for Inclusive and Sustainable Science, Technology, and Innovation”.

The sixth series will focus on inclusive science and technology and innovation partnership and collaboration initiatives in Indonesia to encourage sustainable development. This series will discuss two primary topics: (i) the concept of partnership and collaboration in science, technology, and innovation, and (ii) partnership and collaboration practices in science and technology development and inclusive innovation in Indonesia. This series aims to broaden participants’ insights into the dynamics of partnership and collaboration for science and technology and inclusive innovation that contribute to sustainable development. Click here to watch the podcast.

SMERU 2022 Policy Forum on Poverty and Inequality: Accelerating Inclusive and Fair Digital Transformation to Anticipate Challenges Facing the Future of Work

In 2019, particularly right before the pandemic occurred, SMERU conducted a forum of Towards an Inclusive Digital Economy and a study of Inclusive Digital Economy. Opportunities to encourage digital transformation in all sectors need to be optimized as a collaborative way to accelerate the post-pandemic recovery in Indonesia. The SMERU Research Institute seeks to raise discussions about the importance of promoting a more inclusive and fairer digital transformation in Indonesia by identifying recent trends and responses to the challenges, discussing gaps in policy and strategy, as well as generating future ideas/recommendation to support the digital transformation in Indonesia through the event of SMERU 2022 Policy Forum on Poverty and Inequality. Click here to watch the podcast.

Creating New Unicorns: Digital Talents and a Supporting Ecosystem

The Indonesian government has laid a solid foundation for digital transformation in the 2020–2024 National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN), including efforts to create new unicorns. In addition, the 2020–2024 Ministry of Communication and Information Technology Strategic Plan focuses on developing digital talent and startups (startup companies). Startups play a key role in transforming the traditional economy into a knowledge-based economy.

Developing Digital Technology-Based Youth Entrepreneurship: Creating New Unicorns: Digital Talents and a Supporting Ecosystem

The high youth unemployment rate is one of Indonesia’s development issues. A World Bank study noted that Indonesia’s youth unemployment rate is the highest in Southeast Asia. The 2019 National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) found that nearly three-quarters (74.02%) of the unemployed in Indonesia are youth. The Sakernas data also reveals that the number of Indonesian youth who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) is significantly high. About a quarter of all youth in Indonesia had NEET status in 2020, even though Indonesia is predicted to receive a demographic bonus in the next five to ten years. Indonesian youth are expected to maximize these opportunities and become the main engine that can drive and lead the wheels of the economy.

Startup is a new form of venture that offers innovative and scalable technology-based products and services, or offers existing products and services in an innovative way. Startups have grown enormously in a short period. In particular, startups working in agritech, cleantech, edtech, and healthtech have significant social, development, and sustainability aspects. However, tech startups need financial support to thrive even though their necessities may differ from traditional manufacturing companies, which emphasize more on skills over financial assets.

Indonesia is home to many startups; thus, startups in the country need government support, such as equitable digital infrastructure development and regulations that enable startups to thrive. All policymakers must understand that a conducive ecosystem is key. They also need to recognize issues relevant to the ecosystem, especially on the availability of digital talent, in supporting the tech startup ecosystem in Indonesia. The SMERU Research Institute will hold a forum to discuss creating new unicorns by increasing digital talents and constructing a conducive startup ecosystem at the city/local level through the Forum Kajian Pembangunan (FKP) seminar.

SMERU Research Institute, Indonesia (SMERU)
Dr Lina Gong, research fellow at the NTS Centre, presented a seminar on disaster management in Southeast Asia on 6 May in the International Academy of Red Cross and Red Crescent at Suzhou University, China. Dr Gong talked about changing disaster risks facing Southeast Asia, some of which include climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, and how cascading disasters impact countries in the region. Then she discussed how disaster management has been a channel for multiple purposes in regional cooperation, such as building confidence and solving practical challenges. She also reviewed the progress and weakness in regional disaster management and identified opportunities to strengthen regional cooperation to deal with disasters.

Dr Lassa presented on the fragility of disaster reform in ASEAN based on long-term data from disaster trends and recovery trajectories. Despite the perception that disaster risk reduction policy in ASEAN has improved, ASEAN member states are still unlikely to meet the Sendai targets by 2030. Across the region, there is a lack of a systematic commitment to sustainable recovery and the ‘build-back better’ framework. In the region, we still see a large number of preventable hazard events which turn into disasters. Dr Lassa argued that a ‘creative recovery’ process is needed which commits states and societies to not only reach the same development levels at the time of the hazard but to reach the development levels should the disaster not have occurred. Without a commitment to reaching these levels then the affected communities are effectively returning to the past. This seminar concluded with Q&A on topics of discussion from the role of market mechanisms in providing disaster financing to the impact of anticipatory action on recovery.

The Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) hosted a seminar on Disaster Policy Reform in ASEAN 2003-2023 on 20 February in Singapore. This seminar was delivered by Dr Jonatan Lassa, Senior Lecturer, Emergency & Disaster Management, Faculty of Arts and Society, Charles Darwin University, Australia and moderated by NTS Centre Head, Professor Mely Caballero-Anthony.

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The Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) in the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) hosted a seminar on ’International Research Collaboration’ on 13 February at Orchard Hotel in Singapore. This seminar concluded with Q&A on topics of discussion from the role of market mechanisms in providing disaster financing to the impact of anticipatory action on recovery.

The seminar was delivered by Dr Jonatan Lassa, Senior Lecturer, Emergency & Disaster Management, Faculty of Arts and Society, Charles Darwin University, Australia and moderated by NTS Centre Head, Professor Mely Caballero-Anthony.

Professor Mely Caballero-Anthony, Head of Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies, RSIS delivered the welcome remarks. She highlighted the particular relevance of the planetary health concept in the face of the unprecedented degradation of our natural systems and the emergence of the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. Prof Jemilah then began the opening panel with a discussion on the need to pay attention to the declining state of planet earth in order to advance humanity’s wellbeing.

The second panel on ’International Research Collaboration’ was moderated by Dr Alistair D.B. Cook. Prof Jemilah introduced the Sunway Centre for Planetary Health, and expanded upon its priorities, collaborations, and research work, in addition to exploring potential inter-linkages with the planetary health proposal. In the afternoon, Dr Zhu Qifei (Nanyang Business School) led the discussion on the development of a scorecard to assess the impact of individual companies on planetary health and Associate Prof Md Saidul Islam (College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences) led the discussion on the status of planetary health and the disproportionate socio-economic impacts on poorer communities. Participants then reflected on the research framework and discussed potential new ways to enhance research collaboration.

At the Global Space Technology Convention (GSTC) 2023, Dr Alistair D. B. Cook moderated a panel discussion on ‘Harnessing Space Technologies for Disaster Management’. Mr Christian Patouraux, CEO, Pacfic Broadband Satellites Ltd, Mr Joseph D. Martin, Director, Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM), Mr Aviv Kanelbaum, Business Development & Marketing Manager, Space Division, Israel Aircraft Industries Ltd, and Mr Mohammad Fadli, Pacific Disaster Centre Liaison in The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) shared their views on the biggest challenges in disaster management today, the role of the space industry, and what governments and industry can do to accelerate developments of practical solutions. The main challenges identified by panelists were: (1) the lack of coordination; (2) limited connectivity between satellite systems and countries most affected by natural hazards; (3) the reluctance of governments to invest in preparedness activities as viewed in competition with other pressing needs; (4) identification of dependable partnerships between the space industry and in-country players; (5) system maintenance once
established; and (6) feeding available scientific information into the right decision-making processes. Overall, the panelists saw the convention as an important meeting point to bring together the space industry and disaster management professionals. They encouraged participation in each sector’s activities to explore partnerships and contribute to the development of practical solutions. The GSTC ran from 15 to 16 February 2023 at Sheraton Towers Singapore.

RCRC-RSIS Climate Change, Environment and Humanitarian Action Workshop 2023
27 January 2023

The RCRC-RSIS Climate Change, Environment and Humanitarian Action Workshop 2023 was held on 27th January. It was hosted online by the HADR Programme, NTS Centre Singapore Red Cross Society, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

The workshop brought together thirty academics and senior management from the humanitarian community in Southeast Asia to examine climate adaptation and resilience in disaster, conflict & fragile settings. Participants also discussed the bridging of climate change, environment and humanitarian action to inform standards and target setting in the climate realities of today and tomorrow.

They then shared their views on the significant role of humanitarian organisations and how the Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations can be used to guide humanitarian action. Several participants were from humanitarian organisations that have signed the Climate Charter and shared their approaches to implement the charter commitments. Many participants noted the significant challenges that climate change poses for the humanitarian community both in terms of their own contributions to climate change as well as climate impacts on humanitarian crises. Click here to watch the podcast.

8th session of the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific
1-3 December 2022

The HADR Programme, NTS Centre, participated in the 8th session of the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific in Hua Hin, Thailand from 1-3 December 2022. The meeting was jointly hosted by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), the United States Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management (CFE-DE), and the Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC). Dr Alistair D.B. Cook presented on “The Climate and Environment Charter for Humanitarian Organisations – Implications for RCG” in the session on “Climate Change Adaptation and Humanitarian Civil-Military-Police Coordination: Lessons from Countries and Organisations in the Region”. Dr Lina Gong moderated the session on “Contextual Humanitarian-Civil-Military Coordination in Asia Pacific”. Timor-Leste will be the chair of the 9th RCG in 2023.

RSIS Roundtable on Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific
2 November 2022

RSIS Roundtable on Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific, 2 November 2022: The HADR Programme, NTS Centre, organised the RSIS Roundtable on “Climate Security in the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Implications for Defense and Foreign Affairs” at the Orchard Hotel, Singapore on 2nd November 2022. This closed-door roundtable was the third in the series of climate security events and brought together local and overseas experts in person to discuss climate security in the Indo-Pacific. Throughout the one-day event, participants shared their views on the perceptions of climate change and its implications for security in the region including at the regional level as well as case studies from India and Japan. Further deliberations focused on the conceptual development and impact of climate security on policy debates across the Indo-Pacific.

Humanitarian Futures Forum
14 October 2022

The HADR programme, NTS Centre, RSIS and the Changi Regional HADR Coordination Centre (RHCC) jointly organised the Humanitarian Futures Forum to strengthen support systems for policy planners and decision-makers on ways to better prepare for and respond to humanitarian challenges in this decade and beyond. This forum, the third iteration in the series of humanitarian futures events, brought together local and overseas participants from the military, government agencies, academia, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. The RSIS-RHCC team facilitated discussion about ongoing crises,
as well as those in our immediate and long-term future. The first panel of invited speakers explored emerging trends and risks of human-induced climate change, health threats, urban resilience, and complex emergencies in Southeast Asia. The second panel of invited speakers provided a briefing on humanitarian preparedness, planning and response in recent and ongoing humanitarian responses. The panelists shared their experience of the conflict in Myanmar, the Hunga-Tonga-Hunga-Ha’apai volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga in January 2022, the Armed Forces of the Philippines Civil-Military Coordination Centre and its role during calamities, and the Australia Assists programme. The third panel of invited speakers provided insights into the role of disinformation and mapping technologies and their impact on humanitarian work. Through the course of the one-day event, participants shared experiences, explored overlaps and potential collaboration to overcome some of the shortfalls in and around the humanitarian system.

**CSCAP Nuclear Energy Experts Group Meeting**

27-29 September 2022

Prof Mely Caballero-Anthony, Head of NTS Centre, and Mr Julius Cesar Trajano, Research Fellow, attended the annual meeting of the Nuclear Energy Experts Group of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific in San Francisco, California, USA from 27 to 29 September 2022. They delivered a book presentation titled “Nuclear Governance in the Asia-Pacific.” Around 30 nuclear experts from the Asia-Pacific countries discussed the role of nuclear energy in addressing energy security and climate change, nuclear governance in the region, and significant developments in Small Modular Reactors, including their nuclear safety, security and safeguards concerns. They also visited the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University and met its nuclear security and non-proliferation experts.

**Planetary Health Workshop**

22 August, 2022

Planetary Health Workshop, 22nd August 2022: The Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) hosted a RSIS Workshop on “The Future of Planetary Health: Lessons from a Global Pandemic” at The Hive. This workshop brought together researchers at Nanyang Technological University from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Business School, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Asian School of the Environment, Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine and the Earth Observatory of Singapore to share their unique perspectives on planetary health. The Opening Remarks for this workshop was delivered by Dr Alistair D.B Cook, Senior Fellow and Coordinator of the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Programme, NTS Centre, RSIS. Ms Margaret Sembiring, Associate Research Fellow at the NTS Centre provided an overview of the Planetary Health concept and its focus on the links between human health and the health of natural systems. The second discussion session was led by Associate Professor Tao Chen from Nanyang Business School, on the development of a Planetary Health Scorecard Design and Assessment. The third session was led by Associate Professor Md Saidul Islam, Coordinator of the Environment and Sustainability Cluster, School of Social Sciences and centered on the Justice and Societal Impacts of Planetary Health. The workshop concluded with a discussion of the project’s research framework and next steps. Participants reflected on potential areas for development, identified inter-linkages between each project and discussed further collaboration between the researchers from across Nanyang Technological University.

**ASEAN Strategic Policy Dialogue on Disaster Management (SPDDM)**

19 August 2022

The ASEAN Strategic Policy Dialogue on Disaster Management (SPDDM) was held on 19 August at Mandarin Oriental, Singapore. The event was co-organised by the Singapore Civil Defence Force, the ASEAN Secretariat, the AHA Centre, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, with the RSIS HADR Programme participating as knowledge partner for the event. Mrs Josephine Teo, Singapore’s Minister for Communications and Second Minister for Home Affairs, gave the opening remarks as the guest of honour. Under the theme “The Future of Disaster Resilience is Now: Are We Ready?”, this year’s dialogue facilitated discussion on forward looking ideas that can potentially enhance disaster resilience in the future with an emphasis on the importance to act and invest now.

**RSIS World Humanitarian Day 2022 Webinar**

18 August, 2022

On 18th August 2022, the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Programme of the Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies (NTS Centre) hosted a webinar titled, ‘Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Responses: Local Perspectives’ to commemorate World Humanitarian Day. This webinar brought together Singapore-based humanitarian workers to raise public awareness in Singapore and the wider region. Konstantinos Antonopoulos (Doctors without Borders’ (MSF) representative to ASEAN) discussed on the relatively recent adoption of the Anticipatory Action within the Planetary Health framework by MSF and its relevance in the allocation and prioritisation of resources. As preparation and mitigation take centre stage in a time of increasing climate disasters, these organising principles are gaining momentum. Mathilda Leong (Resource Development Manager World Vision Singapore) shared World Vision’s preference for projects lasting 10 – 15 years to ensure sustainability in the long-run. For World Vision, lessons learnt from COVID-19 include the importance of localisation and the need for pre-positioned resources. Angelina Ong (Executive Director, Mercy Relief) shared the importance of localisation and highlighted Mercy Relief’s long-time practice of partnering with local organisations to run projects, with oversight from Singapore – a practice which proved particularly useful during COVID-19. To hear a recording of the webinar, please visit here.