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Will Greening be Southeast Asian Post-COVID-19 Recovery Strategy?

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The COVID-19 pandemic has inflicted unprecedented economic damages across the globe. Amidst rigorous efforts to manage immediate issues like job losses and business displacements, low-carbon proponents have begun to make calls for a green economic recovery. The basic idea is simple. Since countries are going to commit massive investments to recover their economies, why not invest in green alternatives instead of business-as-usual?

Two arguments in support of this idea include decreasing costs of solar and wind technologies that have made them much more competitive than before, and environmental benefits that will accompany job creations. While these may sound promising, this line of reasoning is not new. Quite the contrary, this is a familiar discourse that green growth proponents have been using to convince governments and businesses to switch to low carbon, but with limited success so far. Additionally, global oil price that has plummeted due to low demand and over-supply is likely to pose a stiff competition

against renewables. Thus, will the global pandemic reset existing practices and provide a fresh impetus for a green post-COVID-19 recovery strategy?

In Southeast Asia, an intentional shift towards a green recovery seems quite unlikely for several reasons. First, although countries in the region had embarked on various climate initiatives pre-COVID-19, green agenda is yet to be featured centrally in national development plans. This is an important factor because the so-called Green Deals adopted in the European Union (EU) and South Korea were not born out of the pandemic response. Instead, the EU's [€1824.3 billion](#) (US\$2.16 trillion) recovery budget, which includes plans to increase climate-related investments, came on the heels of the European [Green Deal](#) that was proposed in late 2019 way before the virus hit Europe. Similarly, the [US\\$61 billion](#) Green New Deal that is featured in Korean New Deal recovery plan was originally the ruling Democratic Party's [manifesto](#) ahead of parliamentary election in April 2020. Meanwhile, in Southeast Asia, since green

agenda is less pronounced due to economic growth imperative that still needs the contributions from high-emitting industries, climate action is likely to move ahead with less fanfare.

Second, considering the urgent need to get national economy rebound to its growth trajectory, governments in Southeast Asia are likely to fall back on existing development plans and accelerate sectors that directly contribute to that end. If sustainability was already integrated within the priority sectors, it will tag along. For example, Indonesia has identified [B30 bio-diesel](#) production, which was actually planned pre-COVID-19, as part of its recovery strategy. Its prioritisation thus will contribute to Indonesia's climate mitigation agenda. Similarly, Malaysia opted to continue with its existing [Large Scale Solar](#) scheme to assist the country's economic recovery. Like-

wise, in Singapore, [US\\$2 billion](#) had been allocated for green financing pre-COVID-19. Since climate solutions are part of Singapore's [current](#) economic expansion plan, the prioritisation of [environmental sustainability](#) in the economic recovery will contribute to Singapore's climate action progress.

In cases where low-carbon transition does not receive explicit support from economic recovery packages, some countries may still be able to stay on track of their existing climate mitigation plans thanks to the presence of big domestic companies like [Ayala's AC Energy](#) in the Philippines and [BCPG](#) in Thailand. These enterprises have been in the green business pre-pandemic and are relatively resilient despite the economic turmoil. This may give such countries a better chance to realise their green commitments compared to those

that rely more on government support for renewable energy development.

In conclusion, post-COVID-19 Southeast Asia is unlikely to embrace a green recovery strategy that essentially envisions countries making additional investments in greener options while abandoning high-carbon counterparts. Instead, climate action in the region will continue at a moderate pace.

Suggested Readings

- "ADB, KBank aid BCPG's renewable energy Lomligor Project," *The Nation*, May 18, 2020, https://www.nationthailand.com/noname/30388046?utm_source=category&utm_medium=internal_referral
- Fabian Koh, "New Industry-led Alliances Created to Pursue Growth, Generate New Jobs in Seven Key Areas," *The Straits Times*, June 20, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/new-industry-led-alliances-created-to-pursue-growth-generate-new-jobs-in-seven-key-areas>
- "Green Deal: Key to a Climate-neutral and Sustainable EU," *News European Parliament*, June 25, 2020, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20200618STO81513/green-deal-key-to-a-climate-neutral-and-sustainable-eu>
- Sladjana Djunic, "South Korea commits USD 61bn to Green New Deal by 2025," *Renewables Now*, July 17, 2020, <https://renewablesnow.com/news/south-korea-commits-usd-61bn-to-green-new-deal-by-2025-706741/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20Green%20New%20Deal%20is,the%20Korean%20New%20Deal%20presentation.>
- Kiki Siregar, "Jokowi Unveils US\$185 Billion Budget for 2021; Indonesia's GDP Targeted to Grow between 4.5% and 5.5%," *Channel News Asia*, August 14, 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asia/indonesia-economy-jokowi-budget-2021-usd185-billion-gdp-growth-13021326>

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Action on water security

Urgent action on water security is essential to better prepare societies for future global health crises. Policy makers across the world need to focus on behavioural change, knowledge promotion and investment in water infrastructure.

Brendan Montague

The Ecologist

24 August 2020

COVID-19 has prompted stimulus measures, but Southeast Asian governments may be missing the chance to go green: Experts

The massive stimulus into Southeast Asian economies - so far about US\$350 billion - has overwhelmingly been focused on protecting jobs and keeping businesses afloat. There are signs that this opportunity is not being seized to include green measures.

Jack Board

Channel News Asia

28 August 2020

Climate change: Power companies 'hindering' move to green energy

Power companies are dragging their feet when it comes to embracing green energy sources such as wind and solar. Even those that are spending on greener energy are continuing to invest in carbon heavy coal and natural gas.

Matt McGrath

BBC

1 September 2020

Aviation contributes 3.5% to human-caused climate change

Approximately half of the total cumulative CO2 emissions in the last 20 years alone could be attributed largely to the expansion of the number of flights, number of routes and fleet sizes, particularly in Asia.

Priestley International Centre for Climate

University of Leeds

4 September 2020

Sri Lanka assessing environment damage from oil tanker fire

Sri Lanka's government is sending scientists to determine whether a three-day fire on a giant oil tanker off its coast damaged the marine environment.

Bharatha Mallawarachi

The Washington Post

7 September 2020

Urgently needed: Ecological view in decision-making

Increasing plastic use during the time of pandemic confirms the underlying limitation in the common human security approach to solving environmental woes. A shift to a more ecological perspective is needed if the world is to meaningfully address environmental worries and care for the planet.

Margareth Sembiring

RSIS Commentary

8 September 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The Sustainable Development Goals report 2020

This report presents an overview of progress towards the SDGs before the pandemic started, but it also looks at some of the devastating initial impacts of COVID-19 on specific Goals and targets.

United Nations

2020

Beyond the Event horizon: Battery waste, recycling, and sustainability in the United Kingdom electric vehicle transition

UK electric vehicle (EV) battery end-of-life is set to scale significantly from 2019. There is an urgent need for powerful, industrialised methods of recycling EV batteries, and for updated environmental regulations to drive battery recovery.

Jean-Paul Skeete, et al.

Energy Research & Social Science, Vol. 69

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Degrowth Conference Vienna 2020: Strategies for a Social Ecological Transformation

This conference explicitly focused on exploring strategies for a degrowth transformation. It adopted a participatory design, including a thorough documentation process to generate tangible outcomes for the degrowth movement and research community.

Recorded Conference

29 May - 1 June 2020

Degrowth and Post-extractivism - A Good Life for All?

The world is on a trajectory of cascading socio-ecological crisis driven by extractivist development and growth-centered economics. This online seminar brought degrowth and steady-state economics together with post-extractivism to seek alternatives for the current crisis-prone global system.

Recorded Webinar

5 June 2020

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Director General Grossi commends 10 years of achievements of the International Nuclear Security Education Network

The IAEA director general recognised the achievements of the network and encouraged its members to continue their work on nuclear security education and gender parity in the field of nuclear security.

Inna Plethukina

International Atomic Energy Agency

24 August 2020

China poised to overtake US in nuclear power by 2030

China is on track to surpass the U.S. as the world's top producer of nuclear energy as early as 2030, reflecting hesitance to build new capacity in Japan and Western nations even as emerging economies move ahead.

Kotaro Fukuoka

Nikkei Asian Review

31 August 2020

Why it's too early to rule out 'sexy killer' coal in Asean's energy mix

Southeast Asia's coal reserves are abundant, forecast to be about 12–14 billion metric tons in 2035. The article claims that it is thus sensible to utilise the region's plentiful coal supply to meet the demand for energy to ensure energy security.

Rizky Aditya Putra and Alfred Gurning

South China Morning Post

2 September 2020

Vietnam urged to reconsider nuclear power programme

The draft energy master plan mentions nuclear energy, but it sees nuclear development to possibly begin only after 2035. The draft also sees national nuclear power capacity reaching 1,000 MW by 2040 and 5,000 MW by 2045.

New Straits Times

7 September 2020

IEA sees oil market stuck between no major slowdown but stalled recovery

The global economy is likely not headed for any major slowdown due to COVID-19 but piled-up storage and uncertainty over China's oil demand cloud oil markets' recovery.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

7 September 2020

China's first homegrown nuclear reactor begins loading fuel

The potential success could mean a nuclear progress in China that would have little to do with Western nuclear reactor technology developers including Westinghouse Electric Co and Electricite de France SA (EDF).

Bloomberg

The Business Times

8 September 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The future of nuclear security in the Asia-Pacific: Expanding the role of Southeast Asia

The article recommends three practical mechanisms to expand cooperation frameworks in Southeast Asia to the broader Asia-Pacific region: (1) strengthening regional capacity building in nuclear security; (2) establishing an ASEAN-Northeast Asia network of nuclear security centers of excellence (COEs) and knowledge centers; and (3) enhancing regional nuclear emergency preparedness and response.

Julius Cesar Trajano and Mely Caballero-Anthony

International Journal of Nuclear Security, Vol. 6, No.2

2020

Attracting private investment to fund sustainable recoveries: The case of Indonesia's power sector

This report analyses Indonesia's shift to economic recovery and a more sustainable power system amid the pandemic, and explores the implications for government decision making.

International Energy Agency

Paris: IEA

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webinar: Mobilising Investors to Finance Clean Energy Transition

Speakers discussed how the crisis is shaping investment decisions and how governments can help harness the power of investors to support sustainable economic recovery.

Recorded Webinar

3 July 2020

SIEW Energy Insights Webinar Series: Opportunities for Hydrogen and LNG in Low Carbon Transition

The webinar featured presentations on the role of hydrogen and liquefied natural gas in decarbonising the global energy system. Panellists recognised the importance of building a more resilient and sustainable energy system alongside economic recovery.

Recorded Webinar

22 July 2020

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Alternative protein a boon for food security. What can S'pore do to this end?

There is a growing interest in low-fat, high-protein "alternative meat" products, amid disruptions in meat supply chains, projected increases in global protein demand, and the growing importance of health and wellness to consumers.

Johnny Teo
Today Online
 17 August 2020

Food security: It's not just about the eggs

As part of Singapore's strategy to be resilient against future risks similar to COVID-19 pandemic, the Singapore Food Agency is putting aside S\$30 million to ramp up local egg, leafy vegetables and fish production in the next six to 24 months.

Gov.SG
 27 August 2020

China's looming corn shortage fans food security unease

China could face a deficit of 10% of its total crop consumption requirements according to traders, with rising corn prices in Jiamusi, China of up to 27% since the start of the year. With state stockpiles nearly dried up, an increase in China's corn import quota could have knock-on effects internationally on importers of corn and other grains too.

Hallie Gu and Dominique Patton
Reuters
 2 September 2020

Asia-Pacific countries pledged bold and innovative action for food security and livelihoods

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, over 40 member countries of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations pledged to transform food systems and to redouble efforts in addressing food insecurity with the aid of digital technologies.

FAO
ReliefWeb
 4 September 2020

Global food prices have been rising during the coronavirus pandemic, hitting food security

Food prices have risen for three straight months since May 2020. This is given the COVID-19's upending of supply chains, movements of manpower, and inputs for food production, alongside the African swine fever which hit China this year.

Huiling Tan
CNBC News
 9 September 2020

Food for thought: UAE's new Strategic Food Security Law

The United Arab Emirates, which imports between 80% and 90% of its food consumption requirements, has enacted a new Strategic Food Security Law to raise the resilience of the supply of key staple commodities in normal times and in anticipation of future crises.

Imtiaz Shah and Erin Kiem
Lexology Law Business Research
 9 September 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Measuring food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic of spring 2020

This article proposes a methodology for measuring food insecurity amid the COVID-19 pandemic, through internet surveys that can approximate the sample sizes of government surveys. An early application of this method showed a three percentage point increase in the number of food insecure households with children in the United States, from 2016 to 2017.

Sunjin Ahn and F. Bailey Norwood
Applied Economics Perspectives and Policy
 2020

Distributional impact of the rice tariffication policy in the Philippines

This paper discusses the distributional impacts of the Philippines' recent shift in rice import policies, from quotas to tariffs. It highlights that this policy change allowed for lower prices of rice, benefitting consumers, while arguing for the need for further support to help farmers become more competitive.

Jean Balié, Nicholas Minot and Harold Glenn Valera
IFPRI Discussion Paper 1962, Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
 2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Future Food Asia Conference 2020

This conference serves as a platform for highlighting emerging approaches to boosting food security, while also recognising revolutionary work on the part of start-ups and entrepreneurs in the field of agri-food technology.

Webinar (Hosted from Singapore)
 21-25 September 2020

CargoNOW - CILT Webinar - Fast, Safe, Secure: The Food Delivery Challenge

This webinar discussed the priorities for food delivery industries and platforms amid the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on reliability and food safety.

Recorded Webinar
 11 August 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

COVID-19 and its impacts – ASEAN Response: Pushing back vaccine nationalism

As ASEAN economic ministers meet virtually to deal with, among other things, the severe impacts of COVID-19, their crucial task should be to strengthen multilateral cooperation. ASEAN should rally its dialogue partners and the private sector to make vaccines available to all. Can ASEAN centrality help push back the worrying trend of vaccine nationalism?

Mely Caballero-Anthony

RSIS Commentaries

26 August 2020

Deadlier than Covid-19: Consider Disease X as a serious threat, say experts

Disease X, a new unknown disease that could cause a future epidemic, should be seen as a serious threat to drive preparedness - as it will be highly infectious, deadlier than COVID-19 and will mutate easily.

Clara Chong

The Straits Times

4 September 2020

Countries in WHO South-East Asia Region sign declaration to fight COVID-19 as ONE

All member countries of WHO South-East Asia Region resolved to collectively fight COVID-19 and strengthen the regional response with better equipped health systems to deliver essential health services during the pandemic.

WHO SEARO

10 September 2020

Australian scientist warns about another emerging health crisis in Pacific, more devastating than coronavirus

While the world is still struggling to get back on track by defeating COVID-19, an Australian scientist has warned that the emergence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), including drug-resistant bacteria, or "superbugs" could be more devastating than COVID-19 pandemic.

Bhaswati Guha Majumder

International Business Times

10 September 2020

Global Covid-19 deaths pass 900k

The global death toll from COVID-19 passed the 900,000 mark on 9 September, as worldwide cases topped 27.7 million, according to a Reuters tally.

Reuters

The Straits Times

11 September 2020

Researchers develop artificial intelligence platform to combat infectious diseases

As the COVID-19 crisis continues to develop, a multidisciplinary team of researchers has come up with a pioneering artificial intelligence (AI) platform known as 'iDentif.AI' (Identifying Infectious Disease Combination Therapy with Artificial Intelligence) to dramatically increase the efficiency of developing a treatment that combines several different drugs.

Srikanth RP

Express Computer

11 September 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

COVID-19: A new lens for non-communicable diseases

COVID-19 has shown that many of the tools required for fighting a pandemic are also those required to fight non-communicable diseases (NCDs): disease surveillance, a strong civil society, robust public health, clear communication, and equitable access to resilient universal health-care systems.

The Lancet, Vol. 396, No. 10252

2020

Simulation of pooled-sample analysis strategies for COVID-19 mass testing

This study evaluates the performance and resource needs of two pooled-sample analysis strategies for the mass-testing of SARS CoV-2 infection during the current COVID-19 pandemic. It investigates how infection prevalence influences the optimum number of samples that can be pooled and, therefore, the number of tests required.

Andreas Deckert, Till Barnighausen and Nicholas NA Kyei,

Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, Vol. 98, No. 9
2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Strategies to Mitigate the Rippling Impact of COVID-19

This webinar shared insights on how a massive and rapid global response to COVID-19 has been mobilised and how such a response would benefit us now and in the future.

Recorded Webinar

4 September 2020

Delivering Quality Essential MNCH Services During COVID-19 from Health Workers Perspectives

Quality of care experts will share global guidance and country experiences in quality of care for maternal, newborn and child health in the context of COVID-19.

Webinar

24 September 2020

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

You don't have to be neutral to be a good humanitarian

It has been suggested that international organisations should dominate humanitarian action because only they can be truly neutral third parties in war. However, racial justice campaigners are rightly demanding that more power be relinquished to national humanitarians in whose countries conflicts are being fought out and especially when the COVID-19 pandemic has placed local aid workers even more at the forefront.

Hugo Slim

The New Humanitarian

27 August 2020

This chart shows how much more common natural disasters are becoming

Reinsurer MunichRe registered 820 natural disasters causing insured losses in 2019. This number has tripled from 30 years ago and climate change is a factor in causing this higher rate of natural disasters.

Katharina Buchholz

World Economic Forum

3 September 2020

Doing it with Google across whole Bangladesh

The Google Flood Forecasting Initiative has partnered with the Bangladesh Water Development Board to bring Google's warnings and services to Bangladesh, which experiences more flooding than any other country in the world.

Raihan M Chowdhury

The Financial Express

4 September 2020

COVID-19 and the climate emergency tell us all we need to know about disaster risk governance

'Disaster risk governance' was announced as the theme of this year's International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction on 13 October in a year when thousands of people have died and fallen ill because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dennis McClean

UNDRR

4 September 2020

Convergence of coronavirus and natural disasters a reminder of the challenges world faces

The COVID-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on places that have also been struck by extreme weather events and accompanying natural disasters like floods, fires, heatwaves and droughts. Affected governments, whose emergency resources already stretched by the health crisis, have struggled to balance the need for testing and treatment of patients and social distancing with evacuations, rescues and relief measures.

South China Morning Post

6 September 2020

Improving the use of social media for disaster management

A machine learning algorithm developed by Texas A&M researchers could quickly identify life-threatening situations through social media posts.

Stephanie Jones

Texas A&M Today

9 September 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The humanitarian-development-peace nexus: Towards differentiated configurations

This paper looks at the recent conceptualisations of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as a response to protracted crises.

Sebastian Benedikt Weishaupt

Working Paper 2020-8

Geneva: UNRISD

2020

Change in the humanitarian sector, in numbers

This piece provides an insight into the various changes in the humanitarian sector that have occurred over the past 25 years. It tracks key indicators such as displacement, humanitarian funding as well as rising and falling humanitarian trends.

Jessica Alexander and Ben Parker

The New Humanitarian

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

2020 Health and Humanitarian Logistics Conference

This online conference will provide an open forum to discuss the challenges and potential solutions in the areas of disaster preparedness and response as well as healthcare.

Virtual Conference

29 September – 1 October 2020

Understanding and Addressing Different Types of Hazard Risks

This webinar will bring together experts in biological, chemical, and nuclear hazards to look at enhancing the current disaster risk reduction efforts and strategies using the all-hazards approach.

Webinar

30 September 2020

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

India coronavirus: Migrant workers returning to cities confront grim reality of lockdown

Months of the lockdown have badly hurt the poorest sectors, particularly the migrant workers from the rural areas of India who are working in the informal sector. Although some migrant workers have returned to the cities to make ends meet, work has been scarce.

Kunal Purohit
South China Morning Post
 21 August 2020

Three years after Rohingya exodus, mismatched expectations of justice

Little has changed even after 3 years since the Rohingya exodus, with a vast majority still living in camps in Bangladesh.

Verena Hölzl
The New Humanitarian
 24 August 2020

5 reasons why sharing responsibility for refugees is smarter than ever in the time of COVID-19

Adopted last year, the Global Compact on Refugees should be used as a blueprint for responding to the impact of COVID-19 on refugees and their host communities. Gillian Triggs explores 5 key reasons why the world should turn to this recently adopted compact.

Gillian Triggs
UNSDG
 11 September 2020

In her global human rights update, Bachelet calls for urgent action to heighten resilience and protect people's rights

Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, calls upon all governments to adopt a human rights-based approach to policy so as to protect vulnerable people from the worst impacts of crises.

Michelle Bachelet
UNHCR
 14 September 2020

The sea is dead: How fishing and migration collide on Tunisia's shores

With the fisheries in the Mediterranean depleting, young fishermen with no other prospects are increasingly turning to smuggling people from Tunisia to Italy.

Layli Foroudi
The New Humanitarian
 14 September 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Integrating migration into the COVID-19 response: A toolkit for development partners

This report studies modalities in which migration and sustainable development interact in the context of COVID-19.

International Organisation for Migration
 2020

World Risk Report 2020 - Focus: Forced displacement and migration

With COVID-19 aggravating the precarious situation of many refugees/displaced persons, it is likely that the situation will worsen further the longer the pandemic rages unchecked. This report calculates the disaster risk of 181 countries by looking at natural hazards and the vulnerability of society.

Benedikt Behlert, et al.
Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Ruhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV)
 2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Public Attitudes to Migration

This webinar explored how issues such as anti-immigration, unemployment and recession are likely to affect public opinions on migration – one of the most discussed issues in the 21st century.

Recorded Webinar
 3 June 2020

Far From Home: MHPSS for Refugees, Migrants and Asylum Seekers

COVID-19 has taken a toll on everyone's mental health, especially for refugees and migrants who are already in precarious positions pre-pandemic. This webinar discussed the mental health of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and how COVID-19 and response measures would have affected their lives.

Recorded Webinar
 25 June 2020