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Why nuclear security matters in Southeast Asia?



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Recent cases of missing radioactive materials in Southeast Asia this year alone vividly highlight the significance of enhancing nuclear security in the region. In Malaysia, a radioactive device was reportedly lost in August 2018 while being transported by two employees of an industrial company that owned the missing device. In the Philippines, an industrial equipment containing radioactive materials was stolen from the facility of a construction firm in July 2018. There were concerns that the unknown amount of radioactive materials contained in the missing devices could potentially emit harmful radiation if handled improperly or be used as a weapon, otherwise known as “dirty bomb”.

While nuclear security is often understood to be about securing nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons, it is also very much about the security of radioactive materials. As defined by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), nuclear security is “the prevention and detection of, and response to, theft, sabotage, unauthorized ac-

cess, illegal transfer or other malicious acts involving nuclear material, other radioactive substances or their associated facilities”.

Securing radioactive materials

Although there is no nuclear power plant in the region currently, there is a broad range of legitimate uses of radioactive materials especially in industrial facilities, hospitals, research reactors, and scientific laboratories. Without stringent oversight on the use and handling of radioactive materials, there are potential risks of these being accidentally leaked, stolen and used for malicious purposes, or released indiscriminately by non-state actors. From 2013 to 2017, there were four reported cases in Southeast Asia involving illicit trafficking and theft of radioactive materials. Hence, a key point to note is that the security of radiological materials is an important component of nuclear security.

Apart from the immediate impact of a radiological leak, attack or explosion,

there are four major non-traditional security consequences associated with a nuclear security incident: health, economic, societal and environmental. Therefore, establishing an effective and sustainable nuclear security infrastructure is crucial for the protection of the state, people, society and the environment.

Establishment of regional networks

Across Southeast Asia, current gaps in nuclear security governance include lack of funding support to implement capacity-building projects and wide differences in nuclear knowledge and infrastructure among ASEAN Member States. Further efforts are therefore crucial to improve capacity in the least developed Southeast Asian countries. Moreover, several ASEAN Member States have yet to ratify and incorporate global nuclear security agreements into their national legal frameworks.

The burgeoning regional cooperation on civilian nuclear energy among ASEAN Member States can help plug these gaps in nuclear security governance. The ASEAN Network of Regulatory Bodies of Atomic Energy (ASEANTOM) has been conducting regular exchanges of best practices, capacity-building efforts, and assistance to member states to implement key international agreements.

Apart from regional bodies such as the ASEANTOM, nuclear security training and support centres of excellence (COEs) can potentially play a key role in establishing a regional nuclear security architecture. In Northeast Asia, COEs can develop the human resources and technical support services needed for a sustainable nuclear security regime. Southeast Asian states may emulate this good practice by establishing their national COEs. So far, only a few states such as

Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam have established their nuclear security training centres. A collaborative network of COEs in South-east Asia can complement the work of ASEANTOM in terms of sharing good practices, resources, expertise and information.

With the ever-present transboundary risks of radiological emergencies and stolen radioactive materials, improving the rate at which security policies are fully implemented and understood by all stakeholders could dramatically narrow the gaps in nuclear security in the region.

Suggested Readings

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CLIMATE CHANGE

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Sustainable Investment Forum Europe

12 March 2019
Paris, France

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

21–22 March 2019
Geneva, Switzerland



Courtesy of Flickr account of European Commission DG ECHO and used

ENERGY SECURITY

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Ensuring energy security also vital: Tan Wu Meng

Jose Hong,
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Singapore International Energy Week

29 October- 2 November
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RSIS Seminar on Science and Technology Needs in Nuclear Security Detection

20 November 2018
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International Atomic Energy Agency,
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45th Session of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS 45)

15-19 October 2018
Rome, Italy

3rd International Conference on Agricultural Engineering and Food Security

12–13 November 2018
Berlin, Germany



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HEALTH SECURITY



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Sulawesi quake: Rescuers issue public health warning as more bodies found

AFP,
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Australia launches inquiry into mental health's impact on productivity

Reuters,
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Climate change is bad for your mental health

Kate Wheeling,
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Implement policy changes to complement mental health campaigns

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25–27 October 2018
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8th Annual Global Healthcare Conference

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

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14-15 November 2018
Brussels, Belgium

Evaluating complex humanitarian interventions—utilizing evidence-based approaches

22-23 November 2018
Oxford, UK

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Activists 'shocked' after Hong Kong police chiefs block alert to banks on human trafficking-linked transactions

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Human Trafficking 101: Victim-centered approach for human trafficking investigations

3-6 December 2018
Tennessee, USA

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27-28 February 2019
Buenos Aires, Argentina

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Living with water: Embracing cultural adaptations to floods
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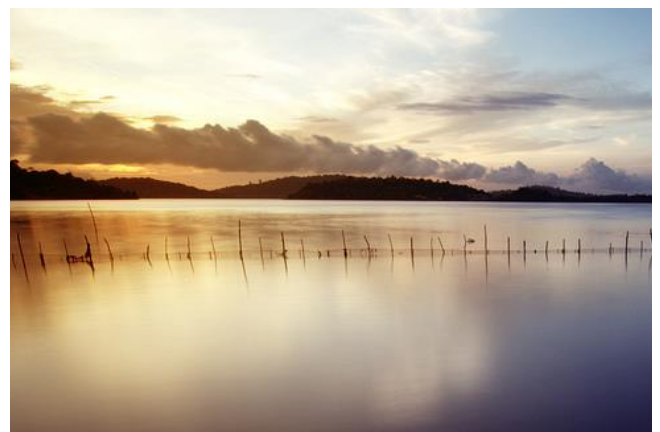
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Bali, Indonesia

Water Security and Climate Change Conference 2018
3-7 December 2018
Nairobi, Kenya



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