

BEHIND THE CURTAIN
LIFE IN NORTH KOREA

VOICES OF DISSENT
POLITICAL ARTISTS

UNLIKELY HEROES
THE LANDMINE RATS

ASIAN Geographic™

NO. 126 ISSUE 4/2017

Eyes Wide Open

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

MEDIA OF THE YEAR
SPECIAL EDITION OF THE YEAR
MPAS AWARD 2015

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amazing
THAILAND

The Dragon

By Abdul Wahab al-Bayati (1926–1999)

A dictator, hiding behind a nihilist's mask,
has killed and killed and killed,
pillaged and wasted,
but is afraid, he claims,
to kill a sparrow.

His smiling picture is everywhere:
in the coffeehouse, in the brothel,
in the nightclub, and the marketplace.

Satan used to be an original,
now he is just the dictator's shadow.

[...]

The dictator hides his disgraced face in the mud.

Now he is having a taste of his own medicine,
and the pillars of deception have collapsed,
his picture is now underfoot,
trampled by history's worn shoes.

The deposed dictator is executed in exile,
another monster is crowned in the hapless
homeland.

The hourglass restarts,
counting the breaths of the new dictator,
lurking everywhere,
in the coffeehouse, the brothel,
in the nightclub, and the marketplace.

ABDUL WAHAB AL-BAYATI (December 19, 1926 – August 3, 1999) was an Iraqi modernist poet who was known for his use of free verse, as opposed to classical Arabic forms. His views against the Iraqi government forced him to spend most of his life in exile, though his works – more than 20 volumes of poetry – were never banned in his home country.

Source: *Iraqi Poetry Today* (ISBN 095338246X)
(c) 2003, edited by Saadi Simawe
Translated by Farouk Abdel Wahab, Najat Rahman
and Carolina Hotchandani





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REFLECTIONS

14 Rise and Fall

Tracing history's great shifts in political and military power

REVEALED

16 Divide and Conquer

An overview of the history of colonisation and territorial control

PICTURESQUE

18 Behind the Curtain

Life in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

BY ERIC LAFFORGUE

HIGHLIGHTS

90 Raising the Bar

Profiling political prisoners

PASSPORT

102 Island Styling

The island province of Negros Oriental in the Philippines is a haven for explorers who prefer off-the-beaten-track adventures

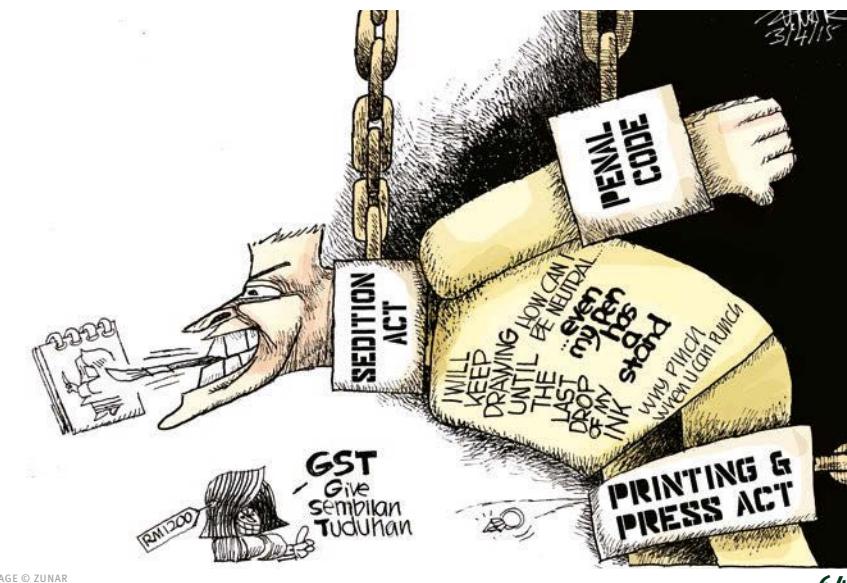
BY RONI BEN-AHARON

MEMORIES

108 Sea Change in the Strait

BY SARAH CHEW

ICON

112 The Dalai Lama

64

CULTURE

30 Democratisation, Interrupted

Civil strife is eclipsing one of the world's most interesting political turns

BY ZIGOR ALDAMA, MIGUEL CANDELA

CULTURE

42 The Hammer, Sickle and a Love for Money

Chinese communism has thrived as a market economy and situated the most populous country in the world as a rising superpower. But can it last?

BY ZIGOR ALDAMA

HERITAGE

54 A Right to Rule

Few absolute monarchies remain – but in some states, blood still runs thicker than water

BY SOPHIE IBBOTSON

COVER STORY

64 Pens Under Pressure

Satirical art questions politics in an era of fake news, vilification of the press and the polarisation of intellectual debate. Some artists will not be silenced

BY MANGAI BALASEGARAM

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EXHIBITION

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It may be small, but for many, our island city is full of significance, stories and surprises. Snapshots of A Little Red Dot is a photography exhibition that celebrates all things Singapore through a common thought and sense of familiarity both visually and emotionally.

Join us to discover different interpretations of iconic Singapore elements from the exhibition. Plus pick up useful photography techniques and tips from our various themed workshops.

Visit capitolpiazza.com for more details about the exhibition, workshops and other activities.

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IMAGE © AARON "BERTIE" GEKOSKI

76

ENVIRONMENT

72 Unfinished Business

With an estimated 100 million sharks slaughtered every year, we take a look at how countries' practices and policies are impacting the shark fin trade in Asia

BY HASTINGS FORMAN

ON ASSIGNMENT

76 Unlikely Heroes

Landmines have left thousands of Cambodians dead or without limbs, but thanks to a task force of trained rats, these killer mines are being sniffed out, and removed

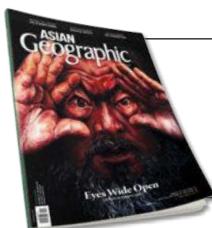
BY AARON "BERTIE" GEKOSKI

CARE

84 Sowing Peace

Seeds of Peace educates and inspires youth from around the world to transform conflict – sowing unlikely friendships in the midst of political turmoil

BY CHRISTINE HOGG, MAGGIE SVOBODA



ON THE COVER

A portrait of renowned dissident Ai Weiwei, who is featured in this issue's story on political artists

IMAGE © BADIUCAO

ERRATUM

In our previous issue (Asian Geographic Expeditions Issue 125, 2017), a label for "Turkey" was accidentally placed above Xi'an in China in an infographic map on page 75. We apologise for this error.



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{ EDITOR'S NOTE }

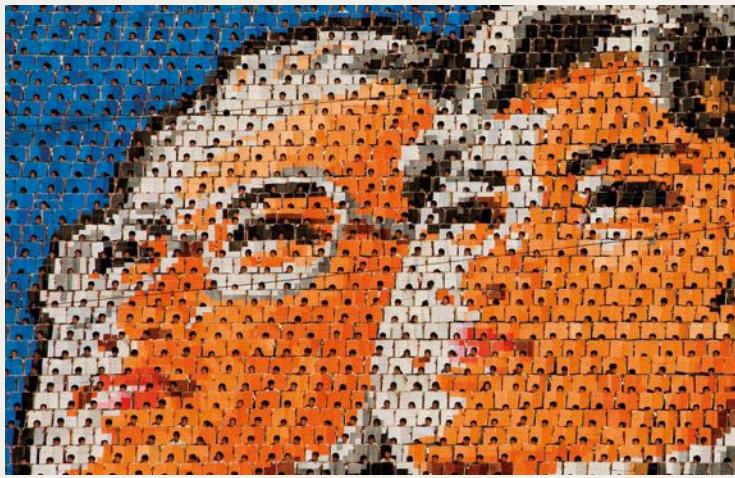


Image © Eric Lafforgue

"The ballot is stronger than the bullet"

Abraham Lincoln



Last year's political road was bleak, and 2017 has already hit its fair share of potholes: Bigots are in the big seats of government, the war continues to devastate Syria, and news of terrorist attacks defile our newsfeeds with increasing regularity. However, there's another perspective espoused by some political analysts, such as Fareed Zakaria and Kishore Mahbubani: Despite appearances, the world has become more peaceful.

The "best of times, worst of times" dichotomy is really dependent on where you find yourself in the world. Research by institutes like the Global Peace Index has shown that peaceful countries are becoming more peaceful, while less peaceful nations are becoming more dangerous. Some countries plagued by a history of violence are making new inroads towards peace, and even the most unlikely of heroes are making a difference: In Cambodia, rats are sniffing out landmines (p78) and youth from Israel and Palestine are engaging in the hope of eliminating their inheritance of hatred (p84).

Politically, contemporary Asia is a crucible. Countries isolated for decades during the Cold War have emerged onto the world stage, and they want a part in the next act. This is destabilising the unilateral world order, particularly with the rise of China, which has roared into power following economic reforms, raising a few eyebrows amongst traditional collectivists (p42).

Placing countries into fixed political boxes is problematic. Democracy is a tag touted liberally by many countries and, in some instances, the claim is borderline ironic – the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" as a case in point (p18). Nevertheless, we have mapped out the political landscape of Asia, using the Democracy Index as a guiding light. The transition to democracy is rarely smooth, and this has proved true for Myanmar, which is being terribly impacted by civil strife between armed ethnic groups (p30).

Despite crackdowns on dissenters, artists have risen to challenge the status quo, and fuel intellectual debate in political cultures that look to subdue them – often at great personal cost (p64). In this issue, we champion the bravery of these revolutionaries making themselves heard in the region.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex W. Campbell".

ALEX W. CAMPBELL

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Lee Kong Chian
Natural History Museum



ITINERARY
Discover
Uzbekistan

September 22–28, 2017

DAY 1 (ARRIVAL)	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
SEPTEMBER 22	SEPTEMBER 23	SEPTEMBER 24	SEPTEMBER 25
Tashkent to Urgench All participants will need to arrive at Tashkent International Airport by 17h00 local time, after which we will transfer to the domestic airport to catch a flight to Urgench in the western region. We will overnight in Khiva.	Khiva to Itchan Kala Our route starts in Khiva, a city of museums with extensive history. We will spend the whole day in the Itchan Kala Fortress, which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Narrow streets, carved “ayvans”, scenic verandas and doorways, and majestic minarets and mausoleums make this city a spectacular national treasure. We will overnight at Khiva.	Khiva to Bukhara The Silk Road went through Bukhara and Khiva and then on through the Kyzylkum Desert. Before departing for Bukhara, we will explore Itchan Kala at daybreak and then visit one of the busiest morning markets. We will stop en route to enjoy views of the Amu Darya River and the desert. We arrive in Bukhara late in the afternoon.	The Historic Centre of Bukhara We spend a day exploring the historic centre of Bukhara. Located on the Silk Road more than 2,000 years ago, Bukhara is a centre of trade, scholarship, culture, and religion. The UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the most complete examples of a medieval city in Central Asia today. We will enjoy an authentic local Uzbek meal, and overnight in Bukhara.



IMAGES © MICHAEL LEE

DAY 5

SEPTEMBER
26

Samarkand

We depart for Samarkand with another local lunch arrangement in a traditional Uzbek home. Samarkand will be a definitive highlight for photographers, who can capture the beauty of the Shahi Zinda Mausoleum Complex. We will also visit the tomb of Qusam Ibn Abbas – a cousin of the Prophet Mohammad who was instrumental in the Islamic history of Central Asia. We overnight at Hotel Platan Samarkand.

DAY 6

SEPTEMBER
27

Samarkand to Tashkent

We pay a morning visit to the Bibi Khanoum Mosque, which was built in the 14th century, as well as a nearby market. We enjoy another local lunch arrangement with a traditional Uzbek meal, and then visit Registan Square, which is at the heart of the ancient city of Samarkand (which was part of the Timurid Dynasty). We will transfer to the train station for the express train to Tashkent, and overnight there.

DAY 7

SEPTEMBER
28

Tashkent and departure

We will run an excursion through the old part of the capital city, visiting the religious complex, Khasti Imam, and the Muy-Mubarak Mosque, which houses the well-known Qur'an of Khalif Osman. By noon, we will transfer to the airport to take our respective departures home.



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ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Departure: September 22, 2017

Return: September 28, 2017

Meeting Point: Tashkent International Airport

Cost: SGD2,400 (twin)/

SGD2,650 (single)

PACKAGE INCLUDES

- Private tour in vehicle (33 seater/45 seater)
- Six nights' accommodation at comfortable hotels (combination of 3-star and 4-star boutique hotels)
- Room is on a twin-sharing basis; for single occupancy, the upgrade fee is SGD250
- All entrance fees and permits
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- English speaking guides for the entire trip
- Group visa to Uzbekistan (for registration before July 30, 2017)
- Guided trip coordinated by XA Travel tour leader and an Asian Geographic tour leader (if the trip is full)
- One-way express train tickets from Samarkand to Tashkent
- A domestic flight from Tashkent to Urgench, including taxes and surcharges

PACKAGE EXCLUDES

- International flight to and from Tashkent International Airport
- Additional beverages (including alcohol) not included in meals
- Any other incidental expenses incurred by participants
- Tips for driver and local guide (voluntary basis)

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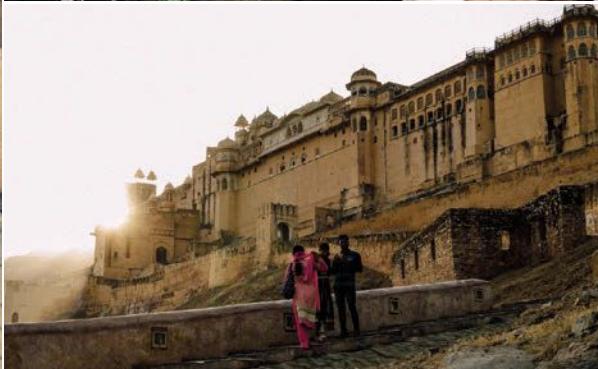




ITINERARY
Discover India

December 9–16, 2017

DAY 1 (ARRIVAL)	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
DECEMBER 9–10	DECEMBER 11	DECEMBER 12	DECEMBER 13
Delhi Arriving at Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi, we transfer to the hotel for the night. The next morning, we proceed to Old Delhi and visit Jama Masjid, the largest mosque in India, followed by a visit to Chandni Chowk, one of the oldest markets in Old Delhi, which was designed and established by Princess Jahanara in 1650. We also visit the Sheeshganj Gurudwara. We spend a second night in Delhi.	Jaipur We catch a domestic flight to Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan. This busy town is teeming with bazaars selling jewellery, textiles and local crafts. We visit the Hawa Mahal (the “Palace of the Winds”), and then head to Jaipur’s Royal City Palace. In the afternoon, we discover one of the astronomical observatories built by Maharaja Jai Singh, and visit Chokhi Dhani Resort for a Rajasthani meal. We overnight in Jaipur.	Amer City We take an excursion to Amber Fort, built in red sandstone and white marble. It was once the capital of the Kachhwaha clan, until Jaipur was made the official capital in 1727. We then proceed to the Kanak Vrindavan temple and gardens. After lunch, we visit the oldest museum in Rajasthan, housed in the stately Albert Hall. We then drive up to the Nahargarh Fort for a magnificent view of the sunset. We spend a second night in Jaipur.	Fatehpur Sikri We head east to visit Chand Baori, which consists of 3,500 narrow steps over 13 storeys. It extends some 30 metres below the ground, making it one of the deepest stairwells in India. At noon, we arrive in Fatehpur Sikri, which offers some of the best preserved examples of Mughal architecture. The city was founded in 1569 by Emperor Akbar, and it served as the capital of the Mughal Empire from 1571 until 1585. We overnight in Agra.



IMAGES © MICHAEL LEE

DAY 5**DECEMBER
14****Agra to the Taj Mahal**

We visit the Taj Mahal, which was built in the 1640s as a memorial to the wife of Emperor Shah Jahan. We then visit Akbar's Mausoleum, followed by the Agra Fort – another UNESCO World Heritage Site – which was the residence of the emperors of the Mughal Dynasty until 1638, when the Mughal capital was moved to the Red Fort in Delhi. We see out the day at the Mehtab Bagh complex, and we spend a second night in Agra.

DAY 6**DECEMBER
15****New Delhi**

We depart Agra to travel to Wildlife SOS, an NGO started by a small group of individuals with the aim of rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife in distress in both urban and rural environments. We then make the three- to four-hour journey back to Delhi on a private bus, arriving back at the hotel with enough time to freshen up. We enjoy a final dinner with the group, and spend the last night in Delhi.

DAY 7**DECEMBER
16****Departing**

All participants will leave for Delhi Airport to take their respective departures home.

**ESSENTIAL INFORMATION****Departure:** December 9, 2017**Return:** December 16, 2017**Meeting Point:** Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi**Cost:** SGD2,150 (twin)/
SGD2,400 (single)**PACKAGE INCLUDES**

- Private tour in vehicle (33 seater/42 seater)
- Seven nights' accommodation at comfortable hotels (combination of 3-star and 4-star boutique hotels)
- Room is on a twin-sharing basis; for single occupancy, the upgrade fee is SGD250
- All entrance fees and permits
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner
- English speaking guides for the entire trip
- Guided trip coordinated by XA Travel tour leader and an Asian Geographic tour leader (if the trip is full)
- A domestic flight from New Delhi to Jaipur, including taxes and surcharges

PACKAGE EXCLUDES

- International flight to and from Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi
- Additional beverages (including alcohol) not included with meals
- Any other incidental expenses incurred by participants
- Tips for driver and local guide (voluntary basis)
- Visa for entry to India

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Rise and Fall

Throughout history, empires have risen to claim and control large swaths of territory, ruling peoples under a single sovereign authority. Inevitably, the baton of power is passed onto the next contender. Here, *ASIAN Geographic* maps the great power monopolies from East to West



27BCE–497CE

ROMAN EMPIRE

- Famous Ruler: Nero
- 70 million people
- 5,000,000 square kilometres
- Political Peak: 117CE



1299–1922

OTTOMAN EMPIRE

- Famous Ruler: Sultan Suleiman I
- 35 million people
- 5,200,000 square kilometres
- Political Peak: 1540



1492–1975

SPANISH EMPIRE

- Famous Ruler: King Philip II
- 68 million people
- 19,400,000 square kilometres
- Political Peak: 1500s



1450–1999

PORTUGUESE EMPIRE

- Famous Ruler: King John II
- Unknown number of people
- 10,400,000 square kilometres
- Political Peak: 1570



1583–1997

BRITISH EMPIRE

- Famous Ruler: Queen Victoria
- 533 million people
- 33,670,000 square kilometres
- Political Peak: 1921



3100BCE–30BCE

- ANCIENT EGYPTIAN EMPIRE**
- Famous Ruler: Cleopatra
 - 1–2 million people
 - 1,000,000 square kilometres
 - Political Peak: 1250BCE



550BCE–330CE

- ACHAEMENID EMPIRE (FIRST PERSIAN EMPIRE)**
- Famous Ruler: Xerxes I
 - 50 million people
 - 8,500,000 square kilometres
 - Political Peak: 480BCE



661–750

- UMAYYAD CALIPHATE**
- Famous Ruler: Abd al-Malik
 - 62 million people
 - 15,000,000 square kilometres
 - Political Peak: 690



1206–1368

- MONGOL EMPIRE**
- Famous Ruler: Genghis Khan
 - 110 million people
 - 33,000,000 square kilometres
 - Political Peak: 1279



1721–1917

- RUSSIAN EMPIRE**
- Famous Ruler: Peter the Great
 - 176 million people
 - 22,800,000 square kilometres
 - Political Peak: 1866

For more details on the respective territories controlled by each empire, visit www.asiangeo.com/heritage/empires

Divide and Conquer

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF COLONISATION AND TERRITORIAL CONTROL IN ASIA



INDEPENDENCE ACHIEVED

1946	1982	1946	1988	1948



INDEPENDENCE ACHIEVED

1991	1991	1991	1991



INDEPENDENCE ACHIEVED

1947	1971	1956	1972

West Asia

SYRIA

Becomes a French Mandate in 1918, and gains independence from the French in 1946

IRAQ

The British colonise Iraq in 1921, and the country gains its independence in 1932

JORDAN

Becomes a British Mandate in 1918. Gains independence in 1946

PALESTINE

Becomes part of a British Mandate in 1920. The State of Palestine proclaims its independence on November 15, 1988. More than two-thirds of United Nations member states currently recognise the state

ISRAEL

Becomes part of the British Mandate of Palestine in 1920. In 1948, the day before the end of the mandate, Jewish leaders declare the establishment of the State of Israel. It is currently recognised by more than 80 percent of UN member states

KUWAIT

Becomes a British Protectorate in 1899, and gains independence from the British in 1961

Central Asia

UZBEKISTAN

In 1865, the Russian army captures Tashkent (which later becomes the Uzbek capital), and the city becomes the Russian administrative headquarters in Central Asia. The country gains independence in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union

KAZAKHSTAN

From the early 18th century until the mid-19th century, Russia expands into Kazakh lands. Russia's colonial tendencies begin to imitate the British and the French. Kazakhstan gains independence in 1991

TURKMENISTAN

After many invasions, Russia controls most of the country by 1894. Turkmenistan gains independence in 1991

TAJIKISTAN

Occupied by Russia in the late 19th century. In 1929, Soviet Tajikistan becomes an autonomous republic of the USSR. Tajikistan gains independence in 1991

South Asia

INDIA

From 1858, falls under the British Raj, along with other territories in the Indian Subcontinent. The Partition of India in 1947 creates the independent "dominions of the British Crown", India and Pakistan. India becomes a republic in 1950

BANGLADESH

Bengal, which includes modern-day Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal, is established by the British East India Company in 1765. Ruled under the British Raj until 1947, when the Partition of Bengal hands East Bengal to newly formed Pakistan. Independence is declared in 1971

PAKISTAN

Becomes a dominion of the British Crown in 1947. Two enclaves are created in 1956, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, the latter becoming Bangladesh and the former changing its name to Pakistan

SRI LANKA

After almost 300 years of Portuguese and Dutch rule, Sri Lanka (called Ceylon) becomes a British colony in 1796. The island becomes an independent dominion in 1948, and a republic in 1972



INDEPENDENCE ACHIEVED



1948 1957 1965 1946 1945

Southeast Asia

MYANMAR

Britain occupies most of Burma by 1824. The third Anglo-Burmese war ends in 1886, placing the rest of the country under Britain. The country gains independence in 1948

MALAYSIA

After both Dutch and Portuguese colonial rule, modern-day Malaysia falls under British Malaya by 1824. The Federation of Malaya, including Singapore, is formed in 1948, with full independence in 1957

SINGAPORE

The city is founded in 1819 under the British East India Company. Becomes part of the Federation of Malaya in 1948, separating and then gaining independence in 1965

PHILIPPINES

A Spanish colony from 1565 to 1898, the Philippines is ceded to the US after the Spanish-American War. Becomes independent in 1946

INDONESIA

Ruled by the Dutch from 1602, Indonesia declares independence in 1945. After the four-year Indonesian War of Independence, the Netherlands finally recognises its former colony's sovereignty



INDEPENDENCE ACHIEVED



1924 1952

East Asia

MONGOLIA

Modern-day Mongolia is controlled by Qing China from 1691 till the Qing Dynasty's collapse in 1911. Independence is declared but conflict with China prevents the establishment of the republic until 1924

TAIWAN

Annexed by the Qing Dynasty in 1683, Taiwan is ceded to Japan in 1895, after the First Sino-Japanese War. After WWII, the Chinese Civil War resumes, with the communists forcing the government of the Republic of China to relocate to Taiwan. Japan renounces territorial rights to Taiwan in 1952, effectively marking the start of the country's independence. China continues to claim sovereignty over the island



COUNTRIES THAT WERE NEVER COLONISED



BHUTAN

However, India guided its foreign policy from 1949–2007

THAILAND

Imitated Western societal structure to deter colonisation

TURKEY

Formerly the Ottoman Empire, it was too strong to be taken by any other imperial power

CHINA

Too large to be conquered, although parts of it were controlled by other countries at various points in history

JAPAN

To avoid colonisation, Japan revolutionised its social and political structures under the Meiji Restoration of 1868

AFGHANISTAN

Overpowered British attempts at conquest

IRAN

Persia amassed a huge debt to European banks that it was unable to repay. The British and the Russians took control of Persian revenue streams for a period of time to settle the debt, but the country was never formally colonised



PICTURESQUE



Behind the Curtain

Photos and Text
Eric Lafforgue





... Life in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea











06



07





09



10



11

01

On Kim Il-sung Square, soldiers march past two enormous pictures of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, the latter of which was added when he died

02

Miss Kim I-sim is a French-speaking guide in the Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum. She said that she learnt French in Pyongyang thanks to the "high level of education that the nation provides". I later learned that she was the daughter of a diplomat and spent her childhood in French-speaking Algeria

03

A soldier looks through binoculars towards the walled section of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This huge wall separates North and South Korea along the border. Thanks to these binoculars, soldiers can see to the other side of the border quite clearly

04

Young soldiers train to walk in line across Kim Il-sung Square in Pyongyang. Every man has a number on his chest. When one makes a mistake, the officers can tell him what to correct by calling his number

05

Women perform during the Arirang Mass Games in Pyongyang. This artistic festival's epic story is based on the Korean folk tale about a young couple who are separated by an evil landlord. It's used to portray the division of Korea. It was stopped a few years ago as it was too costly

06

A North Korean woman wears the traditional dress that most of the women still wear in Pyongyang. Wearing trousers is forbidden for women. She also dons the Kim Il-sung badge, showing that she is a member of the Party

07

A young girl practises her instrument in school in Hamhung. Education is seen as very important in North Korea, and music is part of the curriculum

08

General Pak Shan-su is a hero from the war against the US. When asked why he has so many medals, he said: "Because I killed many enemies"

09

A Kim Il-sung statue in Mansudae, Pyongyang. Thousands of North Koreans come to pay respect to the late leader every day, leaving flowers. Every tourist must do the same – and bow



10

A woman in pink stands out in a crowd of soldiers in a square in North Korea. I could only take one shot before my guides asked me to stop and leave. This was the first picture I took on my first trip to North Korea

11

Young "pioneer girls" clean the Mansudae Square in Pyongyang. This is one of the duties that every citizen needs to do with their school, factory, or work unit. Pyongyang is one of the cleanest cities in the world. North Koreans attribute this ultra cleanliness to their respect for the late leaders who are buried in the city

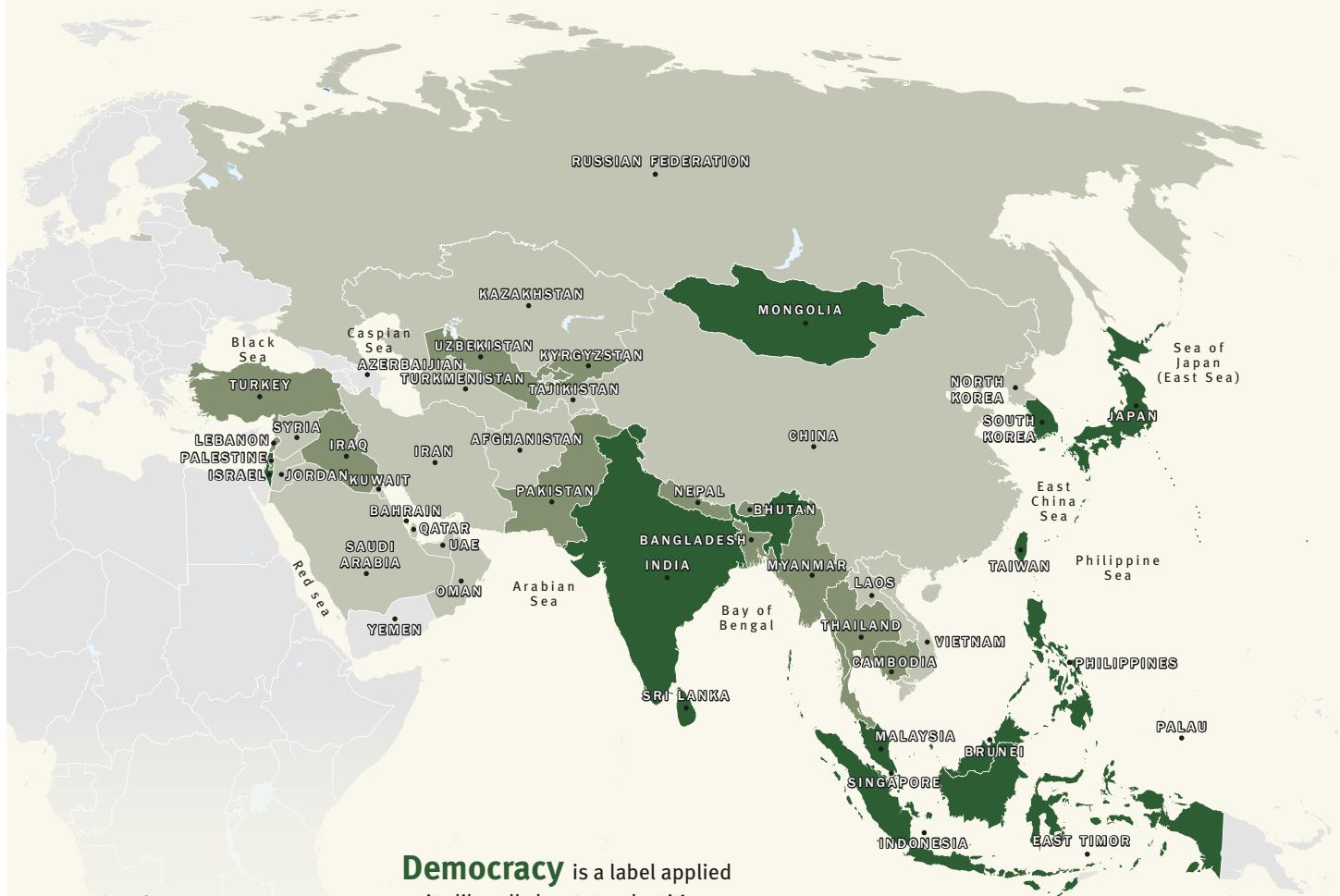
12

A couple sit on a bench in a park in Pyongyang. North Koreans are sometimes shown as robotic in the press, but they are just human, and this quiet affection is often seen in public spaces

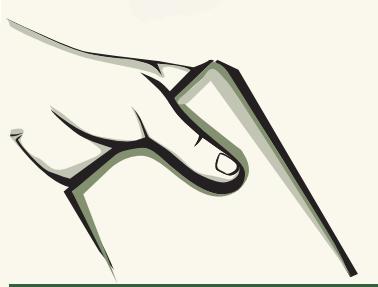
ERIC LAFFORGUE started taking photographs 10 years ago. He has been published in numerous international magazines and newspapers, including *Geo*, *National Geographic* and *Lonely Planet*. His work on the people of Papua was displayed at the prestigious VISA photojournalism festival in Perpignan. He is a Sony ambassador. Visit www.erictafforgue.com for more of his work. For an exclusive interview with Lafforgue about his experiences in North Korea, go to www.asiangeo.com/gallery/north-korea

States of Transition

DEMOCRACY HAS NUMEROUS SHADES OF GREY, WHICH IS WHY IT IS USEFUL TO MEASURE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE THROUGH THE DEMOCRACY INDEX



- LEGENDS**
- Flawed Democracies
Range 6–8
 - Hybrid Regimes
Range 4–6
 - Authoritarian Regimes
Range 0–4



Democracy is a label applied quite liberally by states, but it's worth noting that while several countries proclaim themselves as democratic, this is not always the case in practice. Democracy is understood to be a political system that elects its governments through free and fair elections, and which requires the active participation of citizens in politics and civic life. By this definition, the application of the label to the political landscape of some states that declare themselves democratic requires a hefty pinch of salt – which is why we've included the country's ranking in the Democracy Index as a means of measurement.

The Democracy Index

Categorises countries as one of four regime types:

FULL DEMOCRACIES (RANGE 8–10)

There are no countries that are deemed full or “pure” democracies in Asia

FLAWED DEMOCRACIES (RANGE 6–8)

Practise free elections but may have weak governance, an underdeveloped political culture and poor levels of political participation

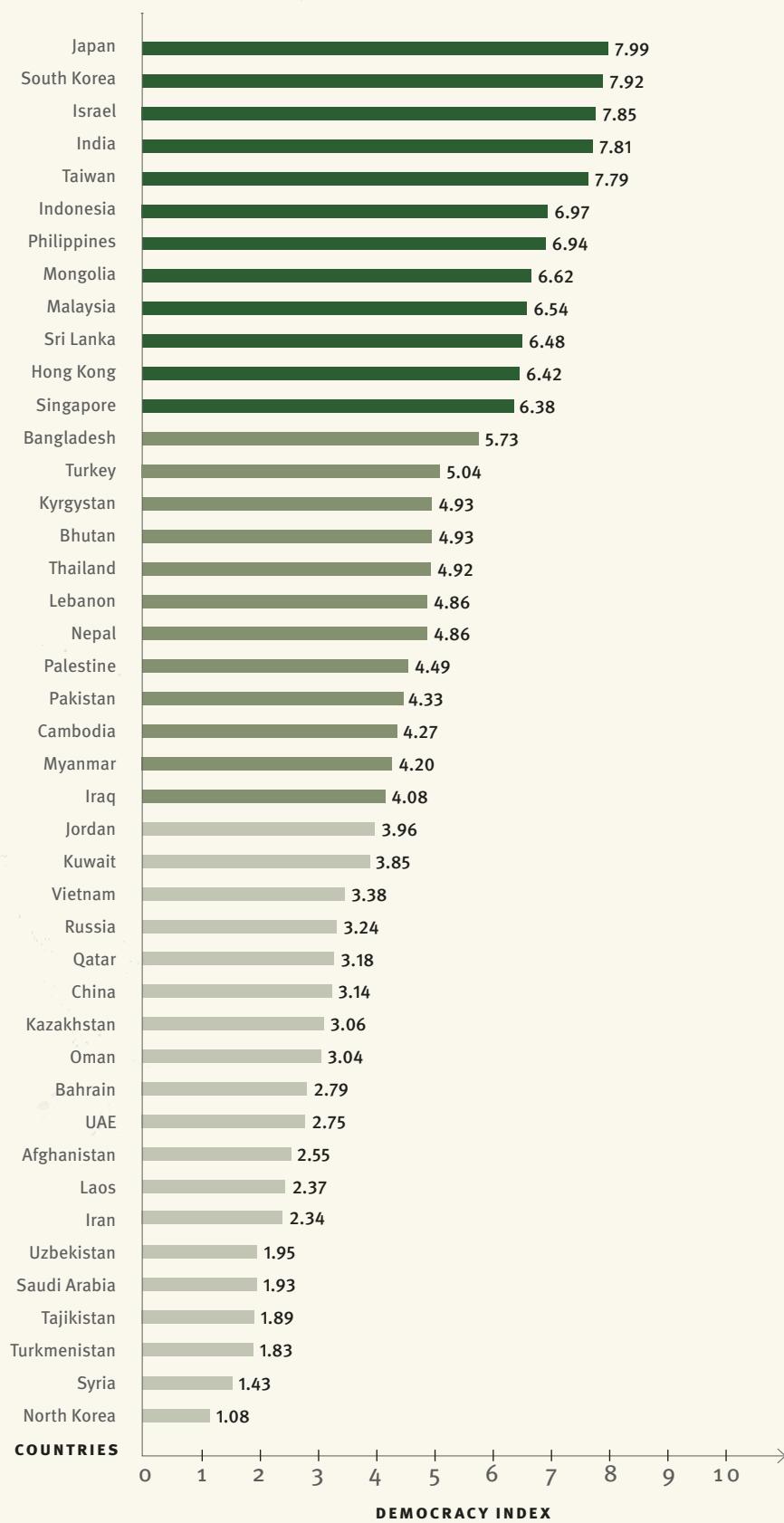
HYBRID REGIME (RANGE 4–6)

Combine democratic traits, such as elections, with autocratic practices, such as political repression

AUTHORITARIAN (RANGE 0–4)

Countries ruled by a single government or person who has unlimited authority, and where people have limited political freedoms

Democratic Standing in Asia



POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Below are the democratic rankings of countries in Asia

FLAWED DEMOCRACIES

JAPAN: Parliamentary government with constitutional monarchy
SOUTH KOREA: Presidential-parliamentary democracy
ISRAEL: Parliamentary democracy
INDIA: Federal republic
TAIWAN: Presidential-legislative democracy
INDONESIA: Republic
PHILIPPINES: Presidential-legislative democracy
MONGOLIA: Presidential-parliamentary democracy
MALAYSIA: Constitutional monarchy
SRI LANKA: Presidential-parliamentary democracy
HONG KONG: Limited democracy
SINGAPORE: Parliamentary republic

HYBRID REGIME

BANGLADESH: Parliamentary democracy
TURKEY: Parliamentary democracy
KYRGYZSTAN: Republic
BHUTAN: Constitutional monarchy
THAILAND: Constitutional monarchy
LEBANON: Republic
NEPAL: Federal democratic republic
PALESTINE: Parliamentary democracy
PAKISTAN: Presidential-parliamentary democracy
CAMBODIA: Multiparty democracy under constitutional monarchy
MYANMAR: Military junta from 1962 to 2011; transition to democracy
IRAQ: Parliamentary democracy

AUTHORITARIAN

JORDAN: Absolute monarchy
KUWAIT: Constitutional monarchy
VIETNAM: Communist state
RUSSIA: Federation
QATAR: Absolute monarchy
CHINA: Communist state
KAZAKHSTAN: Republic; authoritarian presidential rule
OMAN: Absolute monarchy
BAHRAIN: Constitutional monarchy
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE): Absolute monarchy; federation
AFGHANISTAN: Republic
LAOS: Communist state
IRAN: Islamic republic
UZBEKISTAN: Republic; authoritarian
SAUDI ARABIA: Absolute monarchy
TAJIKISTAN: Multiparty democracy
TURKMENISTAN: Presidential republic
SYRIA: Republic in state of war
NORTH KOREA: Communist state one-man dictatorship



CULTURE

Democratisation, Interrupted

Text

Zigor Aldama

Photos

Zigor Aldama and Miguel Candela





Fighters from the Karen National Liberation Army await orders before the daily flag raising ceremony

... A year and a half after Aung San Suu Kyi's party won a landslide victory, criticism is everywhere. Abuses against the Rohingya and battles with armed ethnic groups are eclipsing one of the world's most interesting political turns

BELOW People from the Rohingya minority gather at a mosque in Sittwe's refugee camps

In November 2015, Moe Thway couldn't conceal his excitement. He was about to vote in a democratic election for the first time in his life. As a founding member of Generation Wave, a youth pro-democracy movement born during the so-called Saffron Revolution of 2007, he considered this first free general elections since 1990 – when the military refused to accept its defeat and remained in power – a personal victory. He would not think of voting for any other party than the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by 1991 Nobel Peace Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who spent almost 15 years under house arrest.

"It doesn't matter that the constitution, written by the military junta in 2008, bans 'the Lady' – as many call Suu Kyi – from contesting for presidency, because her kids have a foreign passport. We know that she will exert power through her candidate, Htin Kyaw," Thway explained.



IMAGE © MIGUEL CANDELA

The young activist was right: The NLD won a landslide victory and secured the presidency with 360 out of the 652 votes in parliament, where the army still holds 25 percent of the seats. “That gives the military veto power on any constitutional amendment, and it also keeps three key ministers. It’s going to be tough to reform the current system, but we believe change will come fast,” Thway said before the elections.

Now, almost a year and a half after Htin Kyaw was sworn in, optimism has faded and disappointment has set in. Promises are proving empty and little has improved in the country. Even Thway doesn’t show much enthusiasm anymore. “I’m not sure whether we were wrong or whether hopes were just too high. But the government is definitely not living up to the expectation,” he shares. For many people, that’s an understatement. Since the elections, even the unthinkable has happened: People have marched on the streets to express anger at Suu Kyi – who was practically a deity for many before. She has had to concede that things aren’t going smoothly.

“If you think I am not good enough for our country and our people, if someone or some organisation can do better than us, we are ready to step down”

Aung San Suu Kyi

“If you think I am not good enough for our country and our people, if someone or some organisation can do better than us, we are ready to step down,” Suu Kyi said in a televised address to the nation on the commemoration of the first anniversary of democracy in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma.

In the latest by-elections held in April 2017, the NLD won only nine of the 19 seats up for grabs. This stood in harsh perspective compared to the 2012 by-elections (the first in which the NLD was eligible), where Suu Kyi won 43 out of the 44 seats, securing her ticket into parliament. “She has proven to be just another politician,” criticises Zin Mar Lin, from the Brave New Burma Federation.

The eroding figure of Suu Kyi shows that not everything is rosy in the democratisation process. Myanmar’s transition to democracy has been lauded as a glowing example of how a dictatorship can turn into democracy without a bullet being fired – because the generals decided to hang up their uniforms and turn the military junta into a civil government in 2011.



A transition period began, and with inspiring results: Political prisoners were freed, ceasefire agreements were negotiated with a dozen armed ethnic groups, and the world responded with open arms, lifting the embargo that had been crippling the economy for years.

Companies from all over the world flocked to Myanmar in search of a virgin market to explore, and people dreamed of a democratic president, something that the former British colony hadn’t seen since 1962.

TOP Buddhists rally in Sittwe to request the deportation of the Rohingya people to Bangladesh

ABOVE Rohingya activist Abu Tahay poses with documents that certify the existence of the Rohingya people – even before British colonisation

Lin concedes that there has been positive development. "Yes, economic growth is there and many have started to label Myanmar as the new economic miracle of Asia," he says. "But the truth is that the bonanza is only benefitting a few. And it's easy to understand why: Even if they stepped down, most of the land still belongs to the ex-military who ruled the country, and their families. They pocket huge amounts of the investment flowing into Myanmar. Regular citizens just see prices soaring. Rental prices for apartments, for example, are now ridiculously high. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening."



"Rental prices for apartments, for example, are now ridiculously high. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening"

Zin Mar Lin, Brave New Burma Federation

LEFT Displaced Kachin people at Laiza's rudimentary hospital

ABOVE A portrait of extremist Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu at a monastery in Mandalay



And complaining about it is dangerous. As a journalist at *Frontier* magazine says under the condition of anonymity: “The enactment of Section 66d of the 2013 telecommunications law is a step backwards in freedom of speech, and has been written by the executive power to threaten those who speak against it.” Technically, it punishes defamation using a communications network with a prison term of up to three years, but many denounce it as too ambiguous and vague.

“Journalists, bloggers and activists are censoring themselves for fear of the law, which is a step backwards that nobody expected,” the reporter shares.

“Even prominent NLD figures – like U Myo Yan Naung Thein – have been arrested under Section 66d. But, surprisingly, Suu Kyi and the NLD are not even considering its amendment – something they could do”

Still, no disappointment can rival the political failures in terms of handling one of Myanmar’s most pressing social issues. Democracy has been unable to defuse the crisis of the persecuted Rohingya – a Muslim minority whose population is estimated at around one million people, mostly living in the western Rakhine State – and the military confrontation with several armed ethnic groups who control peripheral territory.



They are not only key to peace, but also to the prosperity and well-being of the country. Suu Kyi has tried to secure ceasefire agreements with all the ethnic guerrillas, but the army keeps at its hostile operations, often using artillery and aviation.

"We are willing to negotiate a ceasefire, but that's impossible when the military keeps bombing our positions. We need to defend our people," says Gun

Maw, a general in the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Meanwhile, internally displaced Kachin inhabitants find themselves trapped in rudimentary camps after fleeing from battle. "Soldiers keep ravaging towns, raping, killing, and burning houses to the ground. The situation of almost 100,000 displaced people is critical," explains Labang Dai Pisa – who manages KIA's camps – at one of the facilities in Jeyang.

KEY EVENTS

1826

The Treaty of Yandabo closes the first Anglo-Burmese war and starts the British colonisation of Burma

1886

Britain takes full control of Burma and annexes it to British India

1937

Burma becomes a crown colony, independent from India

1942

Japan occupies Burma

“We are willing to negotiate a ceasefire, but that’s impossible when the military keeps bombing our positions”

Gun Maw, KIA general

Not far from here, in the main hospital in Laiza, where the KIA is based, patients can't be treated for the lack of medicines. They are so many that even those with infectious diseases can't be separated from the rest. Here, the adoption of democracy hasn't seen a change for the better. "We also thought that over the last year things would get a lot better, and we are still hoping that they will, but unfortunately, what we are seeing at the moment is an increase in fighting, not a decrease, and people need to be able to get to places where they can get aid," the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' Mark Cutts told *Al Jazeera* during an interview. He also conceded that access to help for displaced people was easier with the military government than it is now. "It's baffling," he says.

The KIA can't afford to stop training new recruits. Its camps are teeming with teenagers as young as 14 enrolling in military crash courses. Girls and boys practise with wooden guns before they can handle the homemade version of the Kalashnikov AK-47 and be sent to the frontlines. "We have to fight for a future in freedom," says Maran, a 16-year-old "coach". Her trainees are barely one or two years younger than her – or older, even – but they obey with diligence. Physical training and strategy are taught in the morning. After a frugal lunch, they sleep in bunks during the scorching hours around noon, and then everything starts again. "It's exhausting, but we do it for our families. We have lost everything to the army," a young man explains.

Five hundred kilometres southeast in Kayin State, the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) holds similar training – but with a big difference: They are now at peace with the Burmese military. Still, their leaders expect war again at any time. Zipporah Sein, vice president of the KNLA's political arm, explains why:

LEFT Kachin Independence Army trainees on a break at their barracks

BOTTOM A child who was hit by shrapnel during an army offensive in Laiza, Kachin State, in a wheelchair. She gets no care apart from what her family can offer her

"The only way to achieve permanent peace is to honour what Suu Kyi's father – Aung San, the hero of Burma's independence – promised 70 years ago: a federal state where we all share power equally. Without that, ethnic minorities will always feel discriminated against by the Bamar majority, and they will fight for more autonomy or even independence."

The 1.3 million Rohingya in Rakhine State, just 150 kilometres to the east, fight for survival. Their tragic situation has become the darkest stain on Suu Kyi's ballot sheet since she became a member of parliament. "The Lady" has refused to call them Rohingya, and her party refers to them as Bengalis, although the Muslim group has lived in the Buddhist-majority country for generations; Bangladesh has repeatedly refused to take them in and those that fled to the country are kept in crammed refugee camps.



IMAGES © ZIGOR ALDAMA

1945

Britain recovers Burma from the Japanese with the help of Aung San. Some groups fight with the British in the hope of an independent federal state

1948

Burma becomes an independent country six months after the assassination of Aung San, who made it possible

1960

Moderate U Nu wins Burma's first democratic elections. Two years later, a coup d'état ousts him and makes Burma a military dictatorship

1988

Social unrest leads to a violent crackdown by the military. Thousands die



IMAGES © MIGUEL CANDELA

TOP A Rohingya child outside one of the many tents in the refugee camps in Sittwe

ABOVE A Kachin woman prays at a Christian church in Laiza. The Kachin are one of the several Christian minorities

“Nobody expected the democratisation process of Myanmar to be without hurdles. A year in power is still too short to judge whether Suu Kyi is a good leader”

Tort Reign, activist



KEY EVENTS

1989

Burma becomes Myanmar. Aung San's daughter, Aung San Suu Kyi, is placed under house arrest for the first time

1990

Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD wins elections by a landslide. The military refuses to acknowledge the result and remains in power

2005

The military junta moves the capital city from Yangon to Naypyidaw

2007

Protests turn violent again in the Saffron Revolution led by Buddhist monks. The constitution is changed one year later

"We want to amend the 1982 citizenship law to make sure that they don't remain stateless and that their rights are respected, but we don't think they make a new ethnic group in the country," says the NLD's U Nyan Win, a prominent figure in the party.

Foreign NGOs are criticising the government's inaction, as more than 150,000 people confront death every day in what some already call concentration camps. Their situation has worsened due to damage caused by Cyclone Mora, which struck in May 2017.



IMAGE © ZIGOR ALDAMA

"Overcrowding and malnourishment are becoming critical," says Aung Win, a Rohingya activist. "And the young have been deprived of their future, because education in the camps is poor and discrimination outside means they won't be able to get a job."

Tensions have always been very high between the Buddhist Bamar and the Muslim Rohingya. The current climate of violence dates back to May 28, 2012. On that day, three Rohingya men were accused of raping a Buddhist girl. Six days later, in an act of revenge, a crowd of Bamar attacked a bus full of Rohingya and killed 10 people. Rage erupted, and some 300 people died in the worst riots in recent history.

The camps were set up to prevent that from happening again, but they have become the main tool for implementing an apartheid, in turn fuelling even more violence. Now, Suu Kyi has to add another insurgent group to an already long list: the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA).

"Nobody expected the democratisation process of Myanmar to be without hurdles. A year in power is still too short to judge whether Suu Kyi is a good leader," Naga minority activist Tort Reign says. "There has been too much expectation and excessive pressure. We have just closed half a century of dictatorship, and true democracy will take time to develop."

Despite all the problems, Reign says that the people should exercise patience, and give Suu Kyi some time – at least five years. "But some matters require a solution sooner," he adds. "Otherwise, many people may die." ♦ AG

ZIGOR ALDAMA is the Far East Asia correspondent for *Vocento*, Spain's largest media group. His work often revolves around social and cultural issues.

MIGUEL CANDELA is a photographer currently based in Hong Kong, specialising in social features across Asia. He won Best New Talent at the 2012 Prix de la Photographie (Px3) Paris competition.

2011

The military junta turns into a civilian government. The first steps towards democracy are made

2012

With many ceasefire agreements in place, the NLD wins almost every seat in by-elections; Suu Kyi becomes a member of parliament

2015

Democratic general elections are held and the NLD scores a landslide victory

2016

Htin Kyaw becomes the first democratically-elected president in half a century, although Suu Kyi exercises power

Seeing Red

MAPPING COMMUNISM IN ASIA

With the end of the Cold War in 1989 – signified by the destruction of the Berlin Wall – the Soviet Union collapsed, and with it, communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Governed by a political and economic doctrine that advocates communal control of production, called “collectivism”, today, only four communist states remain in Asia.



KEY EVENTS

1948

Overwhelmed by critics, Mao launches the Cultural Revolution to wipe out counter-revolutionaries. Millions of people leave the cities

1949

Mao Zedong forms the People's Republic of China after his party, the Chinese Communist Party, wins the elections

1959

The Vietcong begin a guerrilla war to unite the North and South of Vietnam under communism. China declares their form of communism more open than the Soviet Union's

1965

Communist guerrilla warfare breaks out in Thailand, begun by Thai militants who have trained in communist propaganda and philosophy in China

1975

The Khmer Rouge seizes Cambodia. North Vietnam claims Siam under communist rule. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is formed, introducing a communist regime



1985
North Korea joins the international Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to be accused less than a decade later of violating its terms

1989
Vietnamese troops withdraw from Cambodia. The pro-democracy student-led Tiananmen Square protests break out in China

1995
The Nepalese communist government is dissolved, which is met with a Maoist revolt aimed at abolishing the Nepalese monarchy, leaving thousands of people dead

2001
China joins the World Trade Organization

2003
North Korea withdraws from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Nepalese Maoist rebels and the government declare a ceasefire, after nearly a decade of bloodshed and failed peace talks



The Hammer, Sickle, and a Love for Money

Text and Photos
Zigor Aldama



A Shen Jindong oil painting at the Beijing Art Gallery shows an infantilised vision of the Chinese military, portraying China's "soft power"

SHEN JINDONG 2005 240x300



••• An apparent contradiction, Chinese communism has thrived as a market economy and situated the most populous country in the world as a rising superpower. But can it last?

ABOVE The price of real estate has become one of the main concerns for families in China. Prices soar and people don't have access to homes

Don't say “communism” – say “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. That’s the official euphemism to describe China’s apparently contradictory social, political, and economic system: a one-party state with an all-powerful government which controls the judiciary and the National Assembly, and a thriving market economy where rapidly growing private and foreign businesses have to bear off-limits sectors where state-owned enterprises (SOE) benefit from monopoly or oligopoly structures.

It's also a country where all land belongs to the state, and citizens pay for the right to use that land for 70 years. But, rampant speculation is blowing the

property bubble bigger than ever seen before in China’s real estate market. The cocktail is being shaken up: Individualism and consumerism have given the boot to old-fashioned fraternity and collectivism.

“Getting rich is glorious,” Deng Xiaoping said when he decided to get rid of Mao’s most controversial and extreme interpretation of communism, implemented first with the Great Leap Forward (1958–60) and during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). By 1979, an impoverished China opened its heavy doors to the world.

But not fully. It needed capital and know-how and foreign companies didn’t doubt that for a second:



They entered in hordes to explore a cheap manufacturing base and to pioneer their business given the huge potential market for their products. In exchange, China got everything its leaders wanted: Protecting core sectors and enacting laws that required foreign companies to establish themselves in the country with joint ventures was a perfect means of achieving the transfer of technology.

Almost four decades later, this strategy has paid off. China is the second-largest economy in the world – the first if purchasing power parity (PPP) is used; it is the main trade power with the biggest surplus in history, and the factory of the world. Moreover, with the help of the government, China has created a group of huge companies with the ambition of going global, shaking up the world order.

Individualism and consumerism have given the boot to old-fashioned fraternity and collectivism

ABOVE A woman rides past hundreds of “share bikes”, China’s latest trend for sustainable mobility in Shanghai

BETWEEN A Mao impersonator in front of an international fashion brand’s shop in Taiyuan



“Communism doesn’t equal poverty, or lack of ambition. We still have features of a planned economy”

Xu Bin, China-Europe Business School

Working in much the same way as Japan did in the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese companies are producing products with similar features to those from their competitors – at cheaper prices – to gain market share in a world burdened by the economic crisis. And, thanks to their huge consumer base at home and China’s reserves (at USD3 trillion), they have started to buy foreign companies: Huawei telecommunications and electronics, Lenovo computers (owner of IBM), Geely cars (owner of Volvo), Wanda real estate (owner of America’s largest theatre chain, AMC), PetroChina Oil (owner of 50 percent of Singapore Petroleum), Li Ning Sports Apparel (owner of Kason), CNR Trains (with multiple contracts for high speed railways) and COMAC commercial aviation (with close to 1,000 orders for its new ARJ-21 and C919 jets) – these are just a few of the names making headlines worldwide.

The statistics painting the picture of China’s economic miracle are astonishing. Their compromise to embrace a market economy in tandem with socialist ideals leaves analysts to ponder whether China can remain classified as a communist country.

It’s a heated debate. Xu Bin, Associate Dean of the China-Europe Business School (CEIBS) in Shanghai, elaborates: “It has features of both systems. It’s a hybrid. And we can argue that China has beaten the West at its own game with the weapons designed by traditional colonial powers to keep their supremacy,” he says. “Communism doesn’t equal poverty, or lack of ambition. We still have features of a planned economy, like state-owned enterprises, and a social welfare system which, despite its flaws, has lifted hundreds of millions of people – 400 million according to the United Nations – out of poverty, and gives at least basic assistance to all in need.”

In fact, China’s per-capita GDP has almost tripled since 2002, while many Western powers have seen theirs decline due to the global financial meltdown. That, Beijing argues, shows that China’s system works.

RIGHT An employee supervises production at a chip factory in Dongguan, indicative of the leap forward in innovation and technology





RIGHT People in Hong Kong at a vigil in remembrance of those who died in the Tiananmen massacre

BOTTOM RIGHT A Mao statue behind a special forces truck in Chengdu

Pedro Nueno, president of CEIBS and professor at Spain's IESE Business School, agrees: "Chinese people live much better now than they did 20 years ago. The fact that labour is much more expensive may deter some businesses from setting up camp in China, but it's a huge victory for a country where domestic demand is driving the economy, rather than exports and foreign investment. Some say China is in trouble because it has grown at its slowest pace in the last quarter of a century, but I say a well distributed growth of five percent is much better than a concentrated eight percent."

Nueno believes that Chinese leaders are among the smartest in the world. He defends the claim by explaining how they use another characteristic of communist states: government intervention. "The Communist Party has reigned over different problems of the market economy – the real estate bubble, for example. It has set rules to make it more difficult for speculators to manipulate the market. The same goes for stocks, where the real value and market value of companies were a world apart. The situation required an adjustment, and Beijing didn't hesitate. Their wisdom is preventing a crash like the one in the US a decade ago."

But not everybody likes this. Asked about the protectionism that the American and European Chambers of Commerce criticise in their annual reports, Xu says: "It's not something exclusive to China. The US – especially with Donald Trump in charge – and the European Union subsidise their companies, contravening World Trade Organisation regulations. They're right to demand more economic reforms, but they should also acknowledge the market economy, and the profound reforms of China."

Macroeconomics aside, Chinese millennials – born long after the Cultural Revolution – are the most confused about the meaning of communism. "They teach us a theory that has nothing to do with reality.



The Mao we love the most is the one printed on 100 yuan bills," jokes Chen Qing, a 25-year-old salon stylist. "We have an entrepreneurial heart, but sharing is not one of our strong features."

Zhu Liya, a 26-year-old owner of a pearl trading company, adds: "Communism as imagined by Marx or Mao doesn't fit Chinese people."

Ding Chen, a purchase manager at a foreign-owned engineering company, doesn't see China as a communist country either. "It's just an authoritarian government with a capitalist economy where laws protect leaders' businesses," the 30-year-old says. "That explains why the gap between the rich and the

KEY EVENTS

1911

The Wuchang Uprising leads to the Xinhai Revolution, which ends imperial rule

1912

Puyi becomes the last emperor of China and a republic is established

1921

The Communist Party of China (CPC) is founded

1934–35

Mao Zedong launches the Long March and establishes CPC's headquarters in Yunnan



Prominent artist Ai Weiwei is also highly critical of the political reforms in China. “The leaders say that our country has the rule of law. But that’s just a plain lie. The Communist Party controls all power and doesn’t care for human life,” he says.

Ai’s words – along with his most controversial artworks – landed him three months of detention, but that won’t keep him quiet. “The Internet has brought a lot of changes to China. Even though censors try their best to keep it under control, it’s still a breath of freedom,” he says. Ai hopes that the new generations will use it wisely to push for democratic reforms “which haven’t tagged the economic ones along”.

But stiff penalties are imposed upon those who “subvert the power of the state”. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo knew this well: He was sentenced to 11 years in jail for demanding democracy for China.

“They teach us a theory that has nothing to do with reality. The Mao we love the most is the one printed on 100 yuan bills”

Chen Qing



poor is widening, and [why] China is drifting away from the Marxism ideal of a classless society. But, we can’t say anything about the corrupt and the *fuerdai* [the second generation of the rich in China] because you may end up in jail. I’ve had to leave China to understand what free speech and other human rights are. Communism should grant those, but it doesn’t.”

Chen adds that the government says – and makes Chinese people believe – that China is already a democracy. “A Western-style democracy wouldn’t work because we are too many, and China would collapse. But that’s just pure speculation,” he says with a shrug.

1937

The nationalists of Chiang Kai-shek and the communists make a united front to fight Japanese invaders

1949

The People’s Republic of China is founded

1946–49

After WWII, the Chinese civil war erupts between the nationalists and the communists. Mao wins, and Chiang is exiled to Taiwan

1958

The five-year plan of the “Great Leap Forward” aims to industrialise China and collectivise agriculture. It has disastrous consequences



ABOVE Deng Xiaoping's portrait is reflected in a police van's window in Shenzhen, designated the first "Special Economic Zone", which Deng implemented to open up the economy

RIGHT ABOVE Soldiers guard the China Pavilion before the opening of the Shanghai 2010 World Expo, an event that showcased the country as the next superpower

KEY EVENTS

1966–76

Mao launches the "Cultural Revolution" to wipe out contra-revolutionaries. Millions of people leave the cities and are re-educated

1976

Mao dies. Soon after, Deng Xiaoping takes the helm

1979

Deng begins implementing economic reforms; a wave of offshore negotiations starts

1989

The Tiananmen Square Massacre takes place after weeks of student-led demonstrations in Beijing

Even though political reform is not on president Xi Jinping's agenda, the central government is committed to deepening economic change. Now is the time for SOEs – one of the last strongholds of true communism in China. These companies produce far more than the country – or even the world market – needs.

For example, China's SOEs produce so much steel that when prices fall, the rest of the world cowers. SOEs are primarily a source of jobs and, as such, profitability is not a priority. "Not only are they a burden for the country, but they are also unfair for the world. They are protected in China, where no competition is allowed in their sectors, but they [also] enjoy a level playing field elsewhere," says Carlo D'Andrea, Vice President of the European Chamber of Commerce in China.

"We must oppose protectionism and facilitate both free trade and investment"

Xi Jinping, World Economic Forum

Still, for millions of workers, SOEs represent a stable job market with many of the benefits you would expect in a communist country – free housing, for instance. SOEs make up only three percent of all Chinese companies, but they produce up to 40 percent of all industrial output, employ around 37 million people, and generate around 20 percent of the GDP. "We still have many advantages over those in the private sector, which make more money. That's why many wish to work for SOEs. But things are changing. Before, we knew our jobs were secured for our whole life," says Hu Xiong, an employee at one of the biggest steel companies in China.

Now, Hu is worried, because almost two million people will be laid off in coal and steel sectors. "They say we will be relocated, but we know that many will lose their jobs. Without other skills, we don't know what to do," he says.



The Communist Party of China with Xi at its helm feels stronger than ever. Those interviewed agreed that although its fall has been predicted in the West many times since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, a change of political rule is highly unlikely. The respondents also felt that there will be a faster shift towards capitalism and, thanks to Donald Trump's policies, a huge increase of Chinese influence globally.

"We must oppose protectionism and facilitate both free trade and investment," said Xi at this year's World Economic Forum. His words left many speechless.

But, it makes sense. China needs to expand.

The state is flexing its muscles, exerting its influence in the developing world with new initiatives and agreements – such as the BRICS (the association of

five emerging economic powers: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and One Belt, One Road (a huge infrastructure programme, initiated by Xi Jinping, linking China with Africa, Asia and Europe via roads, railways and ports) – in which the US don't take part. China has also set up international institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which will help fund Beijing's international agenda. As Xu Bin puts it: "China is just regaining the place it deserves on the world stage." ♦ AG

ZIGOR ALDAMA is the Far East Asia correspondent for *Vocento*, Spain's largest media group. His work often revolves around social and cultural issues.

2001

China joins the WTO and wins its bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing



2010

Shanghai holds the World Expo; China beats Germany as the world's top exporter

2011

China becomes the world's second economic superpower after overtaking Japan

2013

Xi Jinping becomes the new president. Analysts predict that he will rise in importance to match Mao

Blue Bloodlines

MAPPING MONARCHIES IN ASIA

Many royal families today operate as constitutional monarchies, where the monarch acts as the head of state but is not the sole source of political power, which is usually ordered through a parliamentary system. Absolute monarchies, on the other hand, place unlimited power in the hands of the monarch. Often as not, succession passes from one generation to the next within a monarchical dynasty



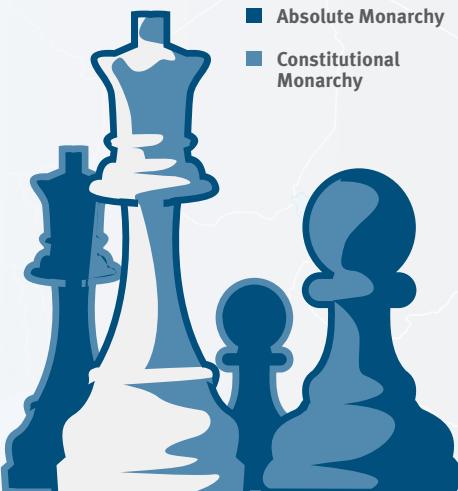
Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

POPULATION: 6.5 MILLION

KING: ABDULLAH II BIN AL-HUSSEIN

This small kingdom emerged after the division of the Middle East by Britain and France after WWI. King Abdullah II has a significant amount of power, with the jurisdiction to implement governments

- LEGENDS**
- Absolute Monarchy
 - Constitutional Monarchy



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

POPULATION: 28.7 MILLION

KING: SALMAN BIN ABDULAZIZ AL-SAUD

Known for its stringent Sunni Islam laws, this major player in the oil trade was established in 1932 by King Abdulaziz. The Al Saud dynasty also wields political power



State of Kuwait

POPULATION: 2.9 MILLION

EMIR: SHEIKH SABAH AL-AHMED AL-JABER AL-SABAH

This conservative country differs from neighbouring Gulf monarchies in having a relatively open political system, although there is growing pressure for political reforms



Kingdom of Bahrain

POPULATION: 1.4 MILLION

KING: SHEIKH HAMAD BIN ISA AL KHALIFA

The Khalifa family has ruled this tiny nation since 1783, and the present king has been in power since 1999. Bahrain is now a constitutional monarchy, but the family still holds the primary political and military posts



Sultanate of Oman

POPULATION: 2.9 MILLION

SULTAN: QABOOS BIN SAID AL SAID

Oman is the oldest independent state in the Arab world. The current sultan (and prime minister) claimed power from his father, Said Bin Taimur, in 1970. His policies have mostly been met with favour

KEY EVENTS

2600 BCE
Foundation of the world's first monarchy in Sumeria (modern-day Iraq)

738 BCE
Coronation of Zabibe of Qedar, Asia's first queen

660 BCE
Origin of Japan's Yamato dynasty, the oldest continuous hereditary monarchy in the world

1234
Coronation of the Jurchen Emperor Mo, who was killed 12 hours later, making him Asia's shortest-lived monarch

1912
Abolition of the monarchy in China



State of Qatar

POPULATION: 2.7 MILLION

EMIR: SHEIKH TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL-THANI

Qatar has come under fire for human rights abuses, and the recent diplomatic crisis following accusations of supporting terrorism – the outcome of which remains uncertain



Kingdom of Bhutan

POPULATION: 750,000

KING: JIGME KHESAR NAMGYEL WANGCHUCK

PRIME MINISTER: TSHERING TOBGAY

By the time King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck claimed the throne in 2006, his father had ceded some of his absolute powers to parliament

BHUTAN



United Arab Emirates

POPULATION: 8.1 MILLION

PRESIDENT: SHEIKH KHALIFA BIN ZAYED

One of the more liberal countries in the Gulf, the UAE is still authoritarian. Each of the seven emirates are governed relatively independently by their respective emir. The sheikh of Abu Dhabi is president



Malaysia

POPULATION: 29.3 MILLION

SULTAN: MUHAMMAD V

PRIME MINISTER: NAJIB ABDUL RAZAK

Sultan Muhammad V is the current “paramount ruler” – a role that is alternated every five years between the sultans of the nine Malay kingdoms



Kingdom of Cambodia

POPULATION: 14.5 MILLION

KING: NORODOM SIHAMONI

PRIME MINISTER: HUN SEN

Heir to the ancient Khmer Empire, King Sihanoni – a trained ballet dancer – became regent in 2004. Today, his role is more ceremonial than divine



Kingdom of Thailand

POPULATION: 69.9 MILLION

KING: KING MAHA VAJIRALONGKORN

PRIME MINISTER: PRAYUTH CHAN-OCHA

This constitutional monarchy has recently been taken over by King Maha Vajiralongkorn, following the death of his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, last year

CAMBODIA

THAILAND

MALAYSIA

BRUNEI



Japan

POPULATION: 126.4 MILLION

EMPEROR: AKIHITO

PRIME MINISTER: SHINZO ABE

Emperor Akihito retains no political powers, nor is he deemed divine, as his ancestors were. Due to declining health, Akihito may abdicate quite soon, following his expressed wish to do so last year

JAPAN



Brunei Darussalam

POPULATION: 413,000

SULTAN: HASSANAL BOLKIAH

Brunei's people receive generous state benefits – as well as a tax-free living. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah is one of the world's longest-reigning – and few remaining – absolute monarchs

1929

Birth of Emir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of Kuwait, Asia's oldest reigning monarch

1971

India strips its maharajas of their privy purses and privileges; Founding of the United Arab Emirates, the world's newest monarchy

1979

Overthrow of the Shah of Iran, ending 4,500 years of royal rule

1980

Birth of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck of Bhutan, Asia's youngest reigning monarch

2008

Abolition of the monarchy in Nepal, turning it into Asia's newest republic



HERITAGE

A Right to Rule

Text

Sophie Ibbotson





A mural from Trongsa Dzong depicts Bhutan's second king



IMAGE © WIKICOMMONS

••• Monarchs have been associated with majesty, mercilessness, and even madness. Few absolute monarchies remain – but in some states, blood still runs thicker than water

ABOVE Ugyen Wangchuck was the first king of Bhutan, pictured here in Trongsa Dzong in 1905

RIGHT King Wangchuck and his son the prince in a field of maize in Dungkhar, Lhuentse

There was a time when a king needed no mandate from his subjects. His right to rule was considered divine. He (and it was almost always a man) was appointed by God, and thus no mere mortal had the right to question, challenge, or dethrone him.

From the very first rulers of Mesopotamia, who regarded their kings as deities after death, through the royal dynasties of China and Japan, South and Southeast Asia, the king's "Mandate of Heaven" was taken as read. For who would risk incurring the wrath of God? Even if you were not a believer, the king's wealth and power, large army, and fortified palace would have been a more than adequate deterrent.

But the world changed. The thinkers of the Renaissance began to argue against the divine right of kings, and slowly but surely, power began to shift to the people. Country after country exiled or decapitated their erstwhile rulers, replacing them

with elected presidents. Being the firstborn son of a king no longer guaranteed your right to rule.

Today, just 43 countries around the world still have monarchs as their head of state (44, if you count the Pope in the Vatican). Of these, 16 are Commonwealth states, led by Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, and she appoints governors general in each country to fulfil her constitutional functions.

Some monarchies are absolute monarchies – all the power is vested in a single person – whereas others are constitutional monarchies, where the monarch is legally bound to act in accordance with the constitution, and shares power with an elected head of government.

But what specifically of the monarchies in Asia? Where are they, and how do they function? Are they still relevant in the modern world? We examine five of the most interesting cases.

{ BHUTAN }

The Land of the Thunder Dragon

*"I will follow in my father's footsteps. My father set the bar very high.
He was a wonderful leader"*

— King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck

“The Land of the Thunder Dragon”, Bhutan is the last great Himalayan kingdom. All around it, monarchies have fallen, but somehow, the tiny Kingdom of Bhutan has survived.

When you start to dig, however, you realise that this should come as no surprise. Bhutan’s mountainous landscape, and the fortresses and dzongs (fortified monasteries) within them, have historically been considered impregnable. The Bhutanese have been largely left to themselves. Recognising the benefits of good relations with their neighbours, however, Bhutan’s kings have taken pragmatic approaches. They worked hard to unite their political enemies within the country, signed a subsidiary alliance with

the British to keep control of everything but their foreign affairs, and looked outside Bhutan to see what forms of government worked best in the modern world.

It was the king of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, who took the initiative and set up Bhutan’s National Assembly in 1953. He created a royal advisory council and a cabinet. When his son inherited the throne in the 1970s, he continued his father’s reformist tendencies.

Today, Bhutan is a constitutional monarchy. Almost all of the king’s powers have been transferred to the Council of Cabinet Ministers, and the National Assembly has the right to impeach him. Bhutan’s current king, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, is one of the youngest monarchs in the world. He, like his father and grandfather before him, is a reformer, genuinely well liked by his people, and is at pains to ensure they are all beneficiaries of his national policy of Gross National Happiness.

IMAGE © YELLOW.BT





{ THAILAND }

A New Era

"Why is it that the king can do no wrong? This shows they do not regard the king as being a human. But the king can do wrong"
 – King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016)

The king of Thailand, Maha Vajiralongkorn, has been king for less than a year, inheriting the crown on the death of his father, the much-loved King Bhumibol Adulyadej, in October 2016. He was educated in the UK and Australia, as well as in Thailand, and after becoming crown prince, had to wait more than 40 years to finally ascend to the throne. During this time, he served in the armed forces, was ordained as a monk, and set up a series of projects in healthcare, education, and agriculture, thus gaining experience outside the palace walls.

Thailand has had no fewer than 19 constitutions and charters since it became a constitutional monarchy in 1932

What exact political role the new king will have in Thailand is yet to be confirmed. He requested changes to the interim constitution after it was approved in a 2016 referendum, and the follow-up general election is yet to take place.

However, his place as head of state seems assured. Thailand has had no fewer than 19 constitutions and charters since it became a constitutional monarchy in 1932, but every single government has accepted the hereditary monarch as the head of state. The Thai royal position gained in both influence and wealth under the late King Bhumibol.



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

LEFT A portrait of the late Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej

RIGHT Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn at the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall of Dusit Palace in Bangkok

The Abode of Peace



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

ABOVE Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah during an audience with Russian journalists

RIGHT Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko in front of the entrance to the imperial residence called Goshō

"There is no conflict between favouring Islamic and traditional values and being more open and international"

– Hassanal Bolkiah

Another tiny monarchy, perched on the northern shore of Borneo, Malaysia is – to give it its full name – the Nation of Brunei, the Abode of Peace. Brunei only became independent from Britain in 1984, and it was then that the current sultan, Hassanal Bolkiah, became head of state.

However, the Brunei sultanate has its origins in the late 14th century, so the 100 years in which the country was a British Protectorate is seen as but a temporary aberration.

This form of monarchy may seem archaic, and would not be tolerated in many other parts of the world, but in Brunei it is remarkably stable and effective

Brunei is an absolute monarchy, with the sultan having full executive authority, including emergency powers. He is not only the head of state, but also the prime minister, finance minister, and defence minister. The sultan rules guided by a philosophy he calls *Melayu Islam Beraja* ("Malay Islamic Monarchy"), which is a blend of Malay customs and culture, Islamic law, and the system of the monarchy. The sultan and his family have a venerated status within Brunei.

This form of monarchy may seem archaic, and would not be tolerated in many other parts of the world, but in Brunei it is remarkably stable and effective. Brunei is amongst the richest countries in the world (including in per capita GDP), and public debt is zero percent of the GDP. Economically, that's an enviable position to be in, and it's made possible by the country's small population and high reserves of oil and natural gas. The sultan will mark his golden jubilee in 2018. He has only just turned 70, and he is in good health. The line of succession is already secured for the next two generations.



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

{ JAPAN }

Emperor of the Rising Sun

*"I believe women have played major roles,
both tangible or intangible, in the imperial family"*
– Emperor Akihito

The world's oldest continuous hereditary monarchy is in Japan. Emperor Akihito, the reigning emperor, is the 125th ruler to sit on the Chrysanthemum Throne in an unbroken line dating back to 660 BCE.

As he is now 83 years old, and not in particularly strong health, there have been some indications that he may abdicate for his son, the crown prince Naruhito, to ascend to the throne. But at the time of writing, Akihito remains in power.

The Emperor of Japan is the head of state, but as the country has been a constitutional monarchy since 1947, it is largely a ceremonial position. Unlike many other monarchies, the emperor is neither the nominal chief executive nor the commander in chief of the armed

forces – these responsibilities fall to the prime minister and the cabinet. Tradition has it, however, that the emperor is descended from the sun goddess Amaterasu, and so he is also a religious authority in the Shinto religion, and must participate in certain sacred rites.

The standing of the royal family in Japan is unusually strong, no doubt in part due to the longevity of the monarchy as an institution, and the political stability it has brought the country. Emperor Akihito has pushed back at attempts by the prime minister to elevate him to the near-god status enjoyed by his ancestors, but he is nevertheless revered by the majority of Japanese people. There is widespread support for his son, Naruhito, to succeed him when he is ready to step down.



The current emir of Abu Dhabi and president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan

{ UNITED ARAB EMIRATES }

Cities of Gold

"The ruler, any ruler, is only there to serve his people and secure for them prosperity and progress"
– Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (1918–2004)

"King of kings" has been a popular – if hyperbolic – title for rulers since the time of the Assyrian Empire. But in the case of the emir (king) of Abu Dhabi, it's actually true. Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan is the head of state of the UAE, which is a federation of seven emirates, each with its own hereditary emir.

The UAE is a particularly curious case. The state was only created in 1971, and yet whereas other newly independent states opted for modern, democratic forms of government, doing away with the vestiges of hereditary rule, the sheikhs chose an autocracy. This reinforced traditional tribal hierarchies and allegiances, but created a can of worms for the future.

The challenges of an absolutely monarchy for the UAE are two-fold. Firstly, there's the issue of rivalry between the emirates and between princes. Sheikh Zayed, founder of the nation, had 30 children. Love is not lost between them, and they wrestle for power behind palace walls. Allegations of attempted coups are frequent, although the country's security apparatus works hard to keep them quiet.

Secondly, this absolute monarchy has no means for dealing with protest or opposition. Corruption is endemic, and human rights abuses – especially of vulnerable migrant workers – frequent. The UAE ranks poorly for civil liberties and political rights. Amnesty International has accused the UAE of an "unprecedented clampdown" on dissent. Those who question the emirs are imprisoned, exiled, silenced.

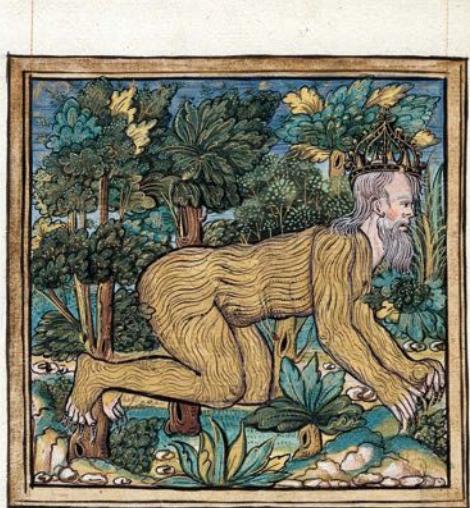
But no ruler can keep his people down forever. If history has anything to teach us, it is that one day they will rise up and take back power. For an absolute monarchy, ultimately, it's a case of reform, or die. ♦ AG

SOPHIE IBBOTSON is an international business consultant and founder of Maximum Exposure Limited. She is also the author of five Bradt Travel Guides covering Kashmir, Uzbekistan and Sudan.

THE THREE MAD KINGS

England's King George III is widely known for his paranoia and madness, but these three historic royals in Asia give him a run for his money.

IMAGE © WIKICOMMONS



RISTOTE, Xenophon, & Platon, et généralement tous ceux qui ont traité de la police humaine ont reconnu par leurs écrits, qu'il n'est rien plus difficile que de bien régner ou commander aux républiques. Car l'affluance des biens

The wretched King Nebuchadnezzar, fourth King of the Babylonians, who went mad after his banishment

NEBUCHADNEZZAR II OF BABYLON (604–562 BCE)

In the Old Testament, Babylonian ruler King Nebuchadnezzar famously recounts his descent into madness. According to the story, the conceited royal was punished for his disbelief in the Hebrew god, exiled to the wild to live like an animal, where he descended into howling insanity. This biblical story accounts for the means by which royal insanity was measured in Judeo-Christian times.

THE ZHENGE EMPEROR OF CHINA (1491–1521)

Known for his malice and irrationality, this emperor of the Ming Dynasty had a penchant for embarking on impulsive military crusades. He was also flanked by one General Zhu Shou, who was completely imaginary. After he and his head of state affairs, Liu Jin, had a falling out, the emperor reportedly sentenced the unfortunate eunuch to three days of torture of "slow slicing".

IVAN THE TERRIBLE (1533–1584)

His name says it all. The first tsar of Russia is known for expanding his territories into Eastern Europe's Kievan Rus, and spearheading the brutal secret police. He carried out the systematic, and sadistic, torture of nobleman. He even murdered his own son, killing him after hitting him with a pointed staff in a particularly heated temper.



COVER STORY

MALAYSIAN GOITAN

ZUNAR
13 Sept 2014

Malaysian cartoonist Zunar's drawings often ridicule controversial laws like the Sedition Act and censorship



Pens Under Pressure

Text
Mangai Balasegaram



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

••• In an era of fake news, vilification of the press and the polarisation of intellectual debate, satirical art has become an important tool to question politics. Despite crackdowns, some artists will not be silenced

ABOVE Ai Weiwei's "Forever" sculpture. The artwork refers to a brand of bicycles mass-manufactured in Shanghai since 1940 that are now scarce

They have been harassed, threatened, publicly scorned and surrounded by large, aggressive mobs. They have been held behind bars, and faced the wrath of furious governments. Yet, they appear not to have lost their moral compass, their passion, or their hearts.

Their "crime"? Art.

Despite government pressure, Malaysia's Zunar and South Korea's Hong Sung-dam continue with their "crimes". In fact, both consider it a moral imperative to do so. Zunar, whose cartoons often flag corruption and censorship issues, says talent comes with responsibility. "It's my duty as a cartoonist," he says emphatically. This month, he is scheduled to face trial for sedition charges, which could land him in prison for 43 years. He remains undeterred. "The risk is very high, but I have to keep doing this."

Satirical artist Hong likens the role of artists to rabbits in submarines. Sensitive to oxygen, rabbits were taken on submarines to monitor oxygen levels.

BELLOW Artist and dissident Ai Weiwei's piece called S.A.C.R.E.D. – an installation that gives viewers a very literal look at his experience in solitary detention

RIGHT Controversial Chinese artist Ai Weiwei during his visit to a makeshift refugee camp in northern Greece

Likewise, artists are watchdogs who work to help “uphold human dignity”. In his native Korea, in an email interview, Hong explains: “Artists are people who tell the world about the preciousness of Nature and life. I have an obligation to communicate through art all the conspiracies to destroy human dignity and Nature.”

Artists Zunar and Hong are among Asia’s “rabbit watchdogs” who have, metaphorically, found it hard to breathe at times. In some Asian countries, it can be a luxury for artists to have the unrestricted space and freedom to express their inner vision and views.

SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

Amnesty International’s latest annual report warns of a “shrinking civic space” in the Asia-Pacific region, with governments “choking dissent” and cracking down on citizen rights. Artists expressing ideas with a razor-sharp political edge may have to wrestle with



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

authoritarian governments. China’s most famous dissident is the artist Ai Weiwei. He has previously said that the Chinese government was “afraid of freedom” and that “art is about freedom”. Ai has been in and out of prison for challenging the government on human rights abuses and corruption.



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK



@Badiucao

One of Badiucao's cartoons showing a VPN (virtual private network) as a ladder to help Internet users "scale the Great Firewall," which is about to be mowed down by a chainsaw-wielding Xi Jinping

"I want to use my art to confront the official record. It's harder to censor visual language"

Badiucao

After the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, Ai launched a "citizen's investigation" on the deaths of children in response to the government's lack of transparency. Shoddy construction was blamed for part of the destruction. Ai collected names of more than 5,000 children, and later honoured them in exhibitions.

Despite a near-fatal beating – which required emergency brain surgery – solitary confinement, and a four-year travel ban, he is resolute and unrelenting. In 2011, Ai was named "the most powerful person in the art world" by *ArtReview* magazine. He has also received Amnesty International's Ambassador of Conscience Award, for "exceptional leadership" in the fight for human rights.

The limited confines artists have in China forced one of the country's leading cartoonists into exile in Australia. He goes by the pen name Badiucao – for "safety" reasons. After his account on the Chinese social media site Weibo was shut down 30 times, he took to Twitter to distribute his work. Within China, people have to find a way around the infamous "Great Firewall" to access his work, yet some still do. Badiucao says: "I want to use my art to confront the official record. It's harder to censor visual language."

In Turkey, the situation for renowned cartoonist Musa Kart is dire. He has been behind bars for months, after a failed coup last year. He was arrested along with 18 other journalists and staff from the leading opposition newspaper *Cumhuriyet*. Upon his arrest, Kart was quoted as saying: "I have been taken into police custody because I drew cartoons!"

Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) called the indictment of *Cumhuriyet* staff – which could result in sentences of seven to 43 years in prison – an "absolute disgrace". RSF said earlier this year: "Only too often, cartoonists pay a high price for their irony and impertinence. The threats they receive are barometers of free speech, acting as indicators of the state of democracy in times of trouble."

One of Asia's more liberal countries is Thailand. Yet last year, Amnesty International called for the government to "relax" its grip on freedom of expression. An exhibition entitled simply "FEAR" captured the public concern for the future amidst

BELOW Artist Manit Sriwanichpoom's exhibition "FEAR" aimed to articulate public concern for the future amidst recent political turmoil in Thailand

recent political turmoil – military intervention, the king's death and street protests. Manit Sriwanichpoom, who uses photography and video to raise social and political issues, was uneasy when he made visuals poking fun at the army government. "No government likes criticism... I was so worried that the army might call me to go through [an] 'attitude adjustment' programme like other commentators, but the show went on smoothly," he says.

Activism in art was important, he felt. "I care about my society... I don't want to live my life with fear. There is no other way but to do what I got to do," he says. FEAR passed without incident.

Elsewhere though, exhibitions have turned violent. In November last year in Penang, Malaysia, a mob of 30 people aligned to the ruling party stormed an exhibition of Zunar's cartoons. The mob surrounded



IMAGE COURTESY OF MANIT SRIWANICHPOOM

“I don’t want to think so much about the outcome. I want to concentrate on drawing cartoons. If I think about it then it will affect my output”

Zunar

and threatened the artist, and demanded that he remove some of his cartoons, which they deemed “offensive” for insulting their leaders. They also vandalised his artwork.

Zunar, a pen name for Zulkifle Anwar Ulhaque, was forced to call off the exhibition. The police offered him no protection. Instead, they later confiscated 20 of his drawings and took him into custody. A month later, Zunar was arrested again while selling books to recoup financial losses from the exhibition’s cancellation.

Zunar has also been locked up for “sedition” twice before. Several of his books have been banned, his staff arrested, his office raided and his publisher warned not to publish more books.

Despite this, Zunar has not put down his pen. His tagline is: “Even my pen has a stand.” Instead, the leading dissenter uses the Internet to share his cartoons freely, without copyright. His bold cartoons ridicule

controversial laws like the Sedition Act, censorship, the US\$700 million corruption scandal that has embroiled Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak, and the US\$17 million ring that the prime minister’s wife allegedly bought.

Although he receives little local media attention, he has drawn wide international interest, winning the 2015 International Press Freedom Award and the Cartoonist for Peace Award. His defiance was captured in a self-portrait where he is bound in chains, with the text: “I will keep drawing until the very last drop of my ink.”

Asked about his upcoming court case, he says: “I don’t want to think so much about the outcome. I want to concentrate on drawing cartoons. If I think about it then it will affect my output. I will start to practise self-censorship.” He adds: “We’re not a culture to confront the government. Some people don’t want to be in the front row, but they do support me.” When he was charged in 2015, his USD12,000 bail money was raised overnight through crowdfunding.

Another Malaysian artist who has found a space online is Fahmi Reza. He is facing charges that could land him in jail for two years for painting clown lips on a picture of the prime minister and sharing it online.



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

BOTTOM LEFT South Korea's ruling party threatened to sue the left-wing artist Hong Sung-dam, who painted the former president Park Geun-hye giving birth to her father, former dictator Park Chung-hee, likening the work to "Nazi propaganda"

BELOW Zunar's cartoon parodying the US\$17 million ring that the Malaysian prime minister's wife, Rosmah, allegedly bought



IMAGE © ZUNAR

"I believe that in a country where artists, designers, cartoonists and satirists have been censored, arrested and charged in court for their art, it is important that this vital form of artistic expression – parody and satire as a form of political protest – continues to be practised and defended at all costs," Fahmi told *BenarNews*.

In South Korea, the struggle between artists and governments – which has involved bans, detentions and even jail terms – culminated in cataclysmic change recently. The revelation that the presidential office kept a blacklist banning 9,000 artists from state funding was a key scandal that led to the downfall of President Park Geun-hye, who was ousted in March, after months of protests involving hundreds of thousands of people.

The blacklist caused deep reverberations in Korean society, particularly because it evoked memories of Park's father, who had ruled the country with an iron fist. Hong believes that Park upheld her father's ideology, saying, "She returned Korean society to 50 years ago." He said many artists joined the large protests in Seoul's Gwanghwamun Square to criticise a government that "suppresses the thoughts of people."

"All artists want freedom to express themselves," says Hong. But most "pursue freedom of form only" rather than "social freedom". Hong argues that freedom should precede nationhood, which he sees as "a means of suppressing people's thoughts". He also believes that a "new power structure" will emerge in this cyber era, which artists will have to guard against. "It is an age when artists need more intuition and sensitivity."

Being a rabbit in the submarine of society was "very difficult" at first, Hong says. Yet, this former Amnesty International prisoner of conscience now feels vindicated with the recent victory of the people. ♦ AG

MANGAI BALASEGARAM is a journalist and health specialist based in Kuala Lumpur who has worked for *The Star*, the BBC, and the World Health Organization. Thanks goes to Jan Sunyoung Wisniewski for the Korean translation.

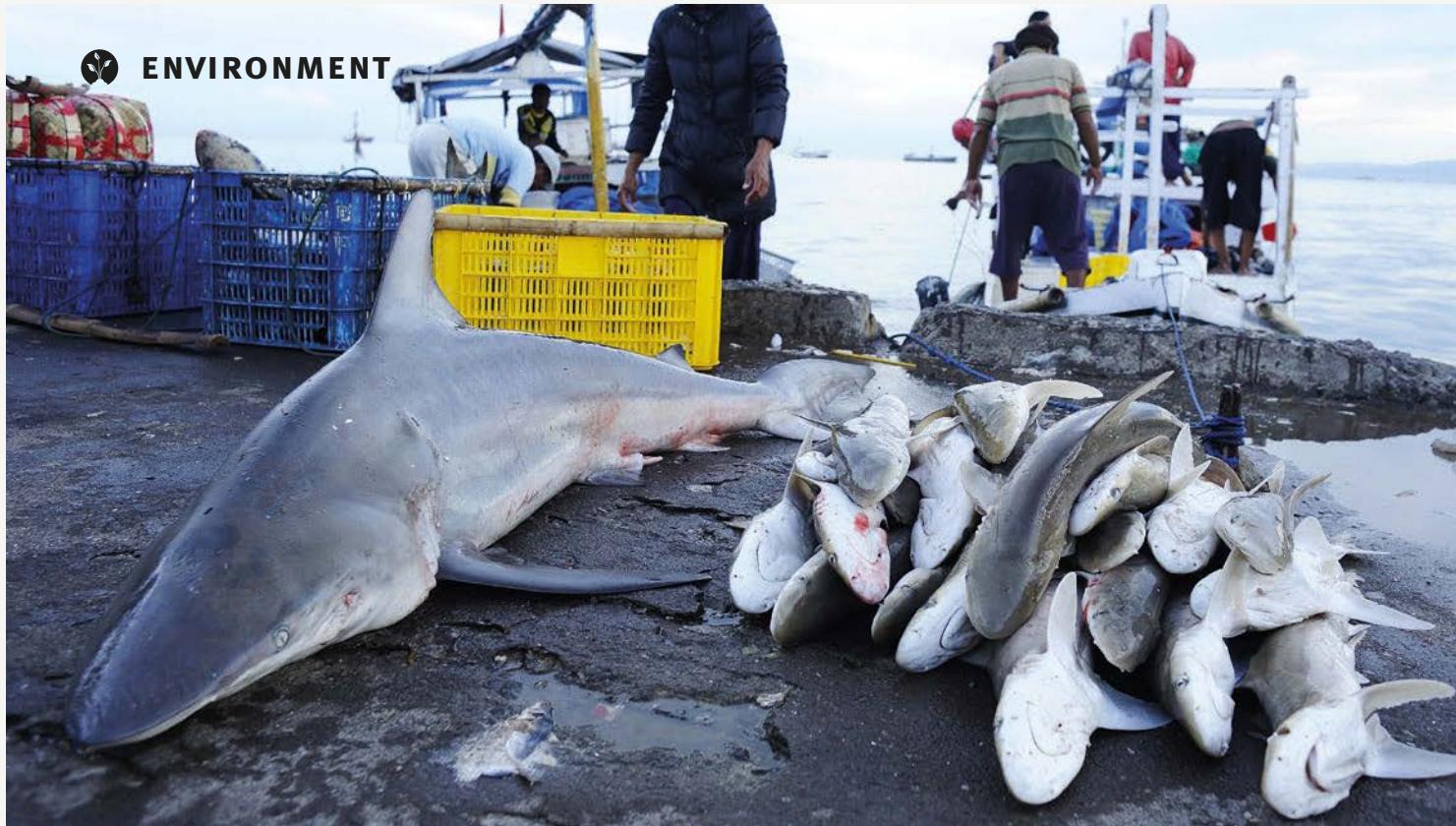


IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

Unfinished Business

Text Hastings Forman

WITH AN ESTIMATED 100 MILLION SHARKS SLAUGHTERED EVERY YEAR, WE TAKE A LOOK AT HOW COUNTRIES' PRACTICES AND POLICIES ARE IMPACTING THE SHARK FIN TRADE IN ASIA



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

Shark fin – and shark meat – is widely consumed in Asia. Shark fin soup is a notable Chinese and Vietnamese delicacy: Such is the prestige associated with the cuisine that it is traditionally served at wedding banquets. At a restaurant, a single bowl can set you back USD100.

But over the course of the last two decades – with the help of big names such as Jackie Chan and Yao Ming, as well as hotel groups, restaurants and airlines – people all over the continent, particularly the youth, are turning their backs on shark fin in the name environmental consciousness. China, a large consumer, has notably banned the dish at state functions.

A 2016 poll by WWF Singapore found that over three-quarters of Singaporeans want government policy to counter the consumption of shark fin. Similarly, a 2014 report by WildAid, an organisation that works to reduce demands for wildlife products, surveyed Chinese consumers online and found that 85 percent of

A 2016 poll by WWF Singapore found that over three-quarters of Singaporeans want government policy to counter the consumption of Shark fin

participants had given up shark fin within the previous three years.

This signals a gradual cultural shift away from the traditional popularity and acceptability of consuming shark fin soup – and the statistics speak volumes. A 2013 report published in *Marine Policy* estimated that 100 million sharks are killed every year, although the figure could be anywhere between 63 million and 273 million. The primary cause behind these shocking numbers? Overfishing for fins and meat.

WHAT IS BEING DONE?

“Pretty much every country in the world has banned shark finning, defined as the act of catching the animal, hacking off the fins, and discarding the body (many times while it is still alive) at sea,” says Randall Arauz, policy advisor of the shark conservation group, Fins Attached.

Fishermen can only dock with sharks that have their fins attached – to then be processed on land. But, this is little more than a defence against a barbaric practice.

LEFT Dead sharks piled up at a fish market

BOTTOM LEFT A fisherman selling shark at a fish market in Beruwala, Sri Lanka

BELLOW Workers cut off shark fins at the Karangsong fish market in Indramayu, Indonesia. Despite the objections of the Indonesian government, shark fishing is still common due to the high demand for shark fin

Arauz states that “in spite of the good intention, this regulation has done nothing at all to address overfishing... The requirement to simply land all the sharks caught is hardly a management policy, and it has no effect on population rebuilding”. The danger of the shark finning industry is that of unsustainable fishing, threatening the existence of dozens of shark species and drastically reducing the overall population. “Sharks need a drastic reduction of fisheries-induced mortality,” affirms Arauz.



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES



IMAGE © NATUREPL.COM/JEFF ROTMAN/WWF

There can be a disconnect between the policies that a nation adopts and their practical implementation

ABOVE There is still a high demand for shark fin, which makes it difficult to implement measures to stop the killing

RIGHT Shark fin soup can fetch around USD100 per bowl

But can countries counter the overfishing of sharks? Many nations have implemented restrictions on the trade of certain endangered shark species under the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) – if only partially. Others have taken further steps, banning shark fishing itself within their territorial waters. Indonesia has done so within Raja Ampat since 2010, and Palau has had a ban since 2009.

However, there can be a disconnect between policies that a nation adopts and their practical implementation. Paul Friese, founder of Bali Sharks Rescue Centre, notes that Indonesia – the top “shark catcher” in the world according to a 2011 analysis by TRAFFIC and the Pew Environment Group (PEG) – have “policies [that] don’t filter down to the fishing villages”. Friese adds: “Fishermen don’t read newspapers, have Facebook or smart phones, for the most part.” The fact that many people are unaware of the rules means that “the disconnect from the policy makers to the fisherman is prevalent”.

Education on policies is an unresolved issue within Southeast Asian fishing communities. Yet Friese says that there are deterrents in place,

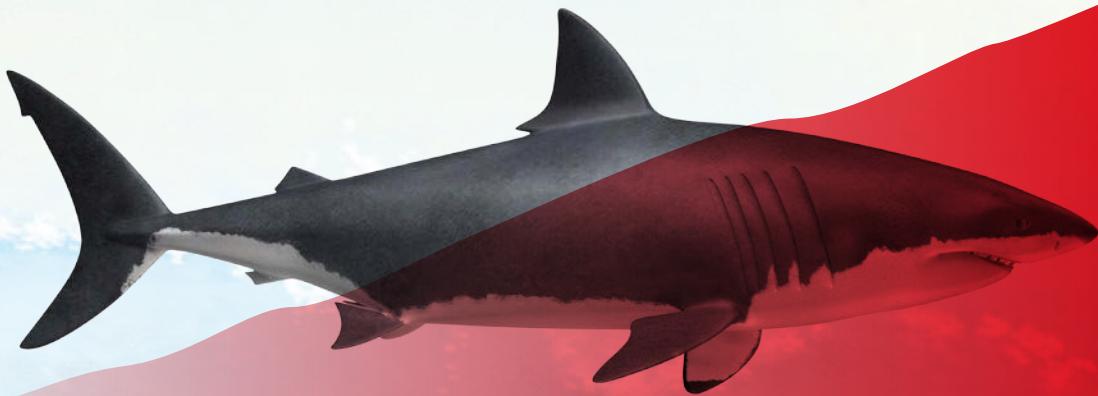
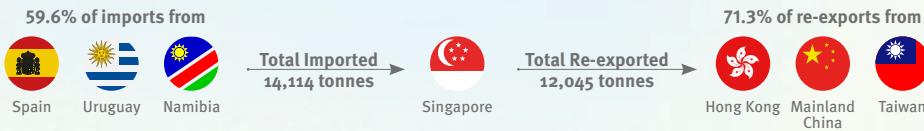


IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

Into the Red Zone

AN ESTIMATED 11,437 SHARKS ARE KILLED PER HOUR GLOBALLY

Singapore is the second-largest re-exporter and importer in the world by value (USD)



100 million sharks are killed every year, although this is more widely estimated to be anywhere in the range of between 63 million and 273 million

Singapore is the 14th-largest importer of shark meat in the world by volume



DATA SOURCED FROM WWF, THE HUFFINGTON POST

notably for larger companies who acquire the majority of catches: “If commercial fisheries are caught, they get fines and penalties.”

In addressing these restrictions, Liz Ward-Sing from Shark Guardian, a marine conservation charity that conducts research projects, says: “We do not have data to show how shark populations have been affected by these bans [in relation to Asia and the rest of the world]. But we know that bans have had a positive effect long-term [on shark populations] in places like Palau.”

But Palau and Raja Ampat are just notable exceptions. It is very unlikely that more nations will implement full or temporary bans given feasibility issues – and money: There is still a high demand for shark fin, and countless businesses are invested in the industry, which generates significant revenue.

FACING THE REALITY

In a simple dichotomy, there are nations that source the sharks, and nations that trade them. Regarding the former, national efforts to manage

and regulate shark fisheries have really missed the mark – to such an extent, in fact, that they have led to the resounding failure of the plan for shark conservation by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), approved in 2001.

The TRAFFIC and PEG analysis from 2011 found that out of the top 20 “shark catchers” – who collectively account for 80 percent of the global shark catch – only 13 have implemented national plans of action to protect sharks – the FAO plan’s primary recommendation.

“The fact that Singapore is a significant trader means the solution to the global shark crisis lies on our shores”

Elaine Tan, WWF Singapore

Even then, implementation is not always effective: Six out of the 20 nations have no breakdown of shark species when they are landed: Only eight provide data for a limited number of species, and 13 have no species breakdown. Without proper identification of species (and volumes) that have been caught and traded, we don't know what and how much has been caught, where it has been caught, and where it will end up.

There is a heavy obligation on the shoulders of large trading nations. Despite the changes in attitude, a report by WWF and TRAFFIC this year found that Singapore remains the world's second-largest shark

fin trader by value, just behind Hong Kong. Singapore is also the world's second-largest re-exporter of shark fin, accounting for 10 percent of global exports from 2012 to 2013.

In addressing this report, Ward-Sing says: “It's not really a surprise to us. But it is very disappointing that such a developed, leading Asian country like Singapore is such a huge contributor to the shark fin trade... It shows there is still such a huge demand for shark fin soup in Asia and this is why we must continue our educational programmes worldwide to reduce the demand.”

Singapore would be expected to see large volumes of any product

BELOW Baskets with dried shark fin and fish products at a traditional Chinese medicine shop

RIGHT Activists stage a protest to draw attention to the shark fin trade in Hong Kong

popular in the region come through its huge port. The same applies to Hong Kong, situated on the doorstep of a massive consumer, China.

Yet such major trading hubs can potentially have a positive influence – even more so if the local population is against the consumption of shark fin and wants to see their nation have more of an environmental impact.

“The fact that Singapore is a significant trader means the solution to the global shark crisis lies on our shores,” says WWF Singapore's chief executive officer, Elaine Tan. As a feasible measure, WWF and TRAFFIC have recommended that Singapore Customs – and other nations – begin



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

recording shark data with Harmonised System (HS) Codes (developed by the World Customs Organization and used to classify goods globally). According to WWF-Singapore's press release for the 2017 report, this would allow for detailed information about the trade: It would permit "distinction between dried and frozen shark products, which is critical for accurately determining actual trade volume, and [to] provide further insight into the species in trade".

Transparency allows for nations to get to grips with sustainability – or at least begin to. Were such a system implemented, there would be monitoring of the volumes – and the species of sharks – being traded. This then allows control over the levels of trade to the benefit of sustaining shark populations.

THE WAY AHEAD

Perhaps one of the more obvious approaches to complement national efforts is to require the fisheries that source them to be verified as sustainable by a global organisation. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), an international certification body for sustainable fishing, judges sustainable fishing according to measurements of healthy populations of species, as well as management measures that prevent overfishing and harm to the environment.

Elaine Tan from WWF says: "The development of sustainable fisheries for sharks is an important part of the solution to the shark crisis. But so far, only one shark fishery in the world has been certified sustainable by the MSC – for spiny dogfish in the US."

While this does illustrate certain problems – why would nations, especially developing ones, consent to sustainable standards and hurt their fishing industry? – it would undoubtedly be to the benefit of shark populations.

For now, at least, the road ahead for nations with large ports is to implement appropriate coding and to properly enforce their controls. In this way, unsustainable fisheries that target sharks indiscriminately (or seek to circumvent regulations) are cut off from exploiting the international market. Alongside education – from cities to isolated fishing villages – which will strengthen people's resolve to get their nations to live up to international obligations, things may just start to change for the better for sharks. ♦ AG



ON ASSIGNMENT





Unlikely Heroes

LANDMINES HAVE LEFT THOUSANDS OF CAMBODIANS DEAD OR WITHOUT LIMBS. BUT THANKS TO A TASK FORCE OF TRAINED RATS, THESE KILLER MINES ARE BEING SNIFFED OUT, AND REMOVED

Text and Photos Aaron "Bertie" Gekoski

"I try not to talk about politics too much," says Suon Rotanna, looking at me from beneath his camouflaged cap. His eyes glaze over for a moment, locked in memories, before a shake of his head and a long exhale of smoke. "Politics took my parents. And it took my leg."

Suon is one of an estimated 40,000 Cambodians who lost limbs in one of the most savage civil wars in recent history. From 1975 until 1979, the Khmer Rouge – led by Pol Pot – attempted to transform Cambodia into an agrarian utopia, an extreme movement based around rural life.

Up to two million skilled labourers were massacred, along with the educated; wearing glasses or speaking a foreign language was enough to condemn you to death by starvation, torture, disease or execution. Many others, often of a young age, were forced to fight in Cambodia's jungles.

Suon was a child soldier. His father was killed in front of him in 1976, and at the age of 14, his grandfather – a leader in the Khmer Rouge – sent him into the jungle near the border with Vietnam. It was here that Suon trained to be a soldier.

"Every day we were scared for our lives," he recalls. Friends and colleagues were slain, accused of being "lazy", or spies for the CIA. It was kill, or be killed. And so, Suon shot his boss. "Otherwise, I knew that one day, it would be me."

He spent the next 14 years in the wilderness fighting against the Vietnamese, until one misplaced foot turned his world on its head. Suon had stepped on an anti-personnel landmine. Designed to severely debilitate rather than kill, the landmine blew off his foot and lower leg, disabling Suon, as well as those who loyally stuck by his side.

It might sound like the plot of a horrifying Hollywood movie, but Suon's story is an all too familiar one in Cambodia. It is thought that up to 10 million mines were laid over a 30-year period, leaving behind approximately 40,000 disabled people – and counting, as dozens more people are still killed every year.

Whilst Cambodia's war officially ended decades ago, work continues to free the country of explosives. But as one of Southeast Asia's poorest nations, the issue today is how to do this quickly, safely, and cost-efficiently.

"I try not to talk about politics too much. Politics took my parents. And it took my leg"

Suon Rotanna

A rat works a field just outside of Siem Reap. Whilst it appears to be attached by its nose, this is a trick of the camera and the chain actually leads to its collar

AN UNEXPECTED SOLUTION

An hour's drive from Siem Reap, in a large plot of scrubland, Victoria scurries along the baked turf, nose to the ground. Attached to a harness tied between two handlers, she works tirelessly, only stopping for the occasional groom.

Victoria is one of 13 giant African pouched rats – dubbed HeroRATs – trained by the Tanzania-based charity, APOPO. Working in partnership with the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), these organisations have partnered with these unlikely mine-detectors

to undertake the mammoth task of clearing Cambodia of landmines.

The rats – which can grow up to one-metre-long, from twitching nose to the tip of their tail – have all undergone extensive training at APOPO's headquarters in Tanzania. Here, they are taught to sniff out TNT, the explosive used in landmines.

APOPO first started utilising the rats' excellent sense of smell in Mozambique and Angola, before beginning their Cambodian operation in January 2016. Since then, they have helped clear seven minefields.



ABOVE LEFT Mine warning signs are commonplace around Cambodia

LEFT Workers conduct daily briefings, before the war on landmines is waged

ABOVE As temperatures begin to rise, handlers retire their rats for the day. By late morning, it's too hot for the rodents to work



"I thought APOPO were crazy when they said they were going to use rats"

APOPO's Programme Officer, Soeun Prom

They have also given over 800,000 square metres of safe, mine-free land back to local communities.

The rats are surprisingly fast workers, covering an area the size of a tennis court in around half an hour. This could take a person up to four

days, as metal detectors pick up all forms of fragmentation and scrap metal, not just mines.

Once a rat comes across an explosive's scent, they indicate the location by scratching on the soil above. The rats are quite safe,

as they aren't heavy enough to detonate the mine. Their reward? A chunk of a banana or a few nuts. Rats, quite literally, work for peanuts.

"I thought APOPO were crazy when they said they were going to use rats," explains APOPO's Programme Officer in Cambodia, Soeun Prom. "People used to hunt them for food, but after they heard how useful rats are for landmine clearance, they stopped killing them."





FAR LEFT Handlers become emotionally attached to their rats and form close bonds with them

LEFT A landmine displayed at the War Remnants Museum outside of Siem Reap

BOTTOM LEFT Suon Rotanna is a former child soldier who lost his lower leg to a landmine. Today, he runs the War Remnants Museum



MEETING CAMBODIA'S "CAMERA KILLER"

"Cambodia's civil war touched people in different ways. During my time in Siem Reap, I heard of a man who worked as an official photographer at the Khmer Rouge's infamous S-21 Prison. At this former school, Cambodians were tortured and murdered. Nhem En estimates he photographed over 100,000 prisoners before and after death. Unlike Suon, Nhem En's eyes showed little of the horrors that he had witnessed. He has now set up his own political party and hopes to become prime minister one day. I wasn't sad to leave him, along with his political ambitions."

– Aaron "Bertie" Gekoski

It doesn't matter that their rodents are an entirely different species: Locally, rats are now revered as life-saving celebrities.

STARTING AFRESH

After losing his leg, and unable to integrate into the society he'd left behind, Suon had a nervous breakdown. "I came out of the jungle and people were using this thing – money," he recalls.

The following decades were something of a blur of therapy and rehabilitation. Once he had recovered and was able, he found work as a gardener at a local museum.

At the same time, Suon began learning one word of English a day. He was also caring for his wife, who had lung cancer – the result of years of working with explosives. When she died, he was refused the right to take time off to bury her. "That was the end of it. So I decided to set up my own museum," he says.

The War Remnants Museum opened last year. This rustic centre is located just outside of Siem Reap, not far from the famous temple, Angkor Wat. Every day, visitors are shown around a small field of artillery and a room filled with assorted landmines that were built to maim, kill, or even obliterate tanks.

Visitors are led around the museum by former child soldiers – including Suon – who lost limbs to the war. It is an authentic experience, quite different to similar tours in Cambodia.

For Suon, the museum is his way of atoning for the past and honouring those affected by landmines. "I want to show people what we went through so it doesn't happen again." ◆ AG

AARON "BERTIE" GEKOSKI is a presenter at S2tv (www.scubazoo.tv), a new online wildlife channel by Scubazoo. ASIAN Geographic has partnered with them to bring you their new show, *Borneo Wildlife Warriors*.

Sowing Peace

Text Christine Hogg
Photos Maggie Svoboda



SEEDS OF PEACE EDUCATES AND INSPIRES YOUTH FROM AROUND THE WORLD TO TRANSFORM CONFLICT – SOWING UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIPS IN THE MIDST OF POLITICAL TURMOIL

Two years ago, while in Amman for a two-week workshop with organisation Photographers Without Borders, Maggie Svoboda took an image that, to the average onlooker, appeared to be nothing out of the ordinary. In the photograph, two women – named Ruba and Alina – are locked in an affectionate embrace, beaming at the camera. What Svoboda's portrait of friendship did not reveal at first glance is the politically-charged back story: one woman is Palestinian, and the other is Israeli.

Locked in political dispute since the early 20th century, Palestinians and Israelis have raged a series of wars against one another in the fight for separate, independent control of this contested territory. Heightened tensions from Arab Muslims and Jewish civilians who reside in such close living quarters have bred a long history of violence.

Civil wars have ravaged the territory: the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, and the Six-Day War of 1967, which concluded with Israel occupying two critical landmasses, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Many Jewish minority communities were exposed and subsequently displaced within Palestinian-occupied neighbourhoods. The ancient Palestinian city of Hebron in the landlocked West Bank is the only city where Israeli citizens live in relative peace alongside Palestinians. It is currently under Israeli control.



LEFT A worshiper bows in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem's Christian quarter. He kneels at the rock that is said to have held the body of Jesus Christ

ABOVE This writing on the wall in the city of Bethlehem calls for global action to end occupation

BELLOW Ruba and Alina at the Gather conference in Jordan. The women met at a Seeds of Peace camp and have been good friends ever since



Seeds of Peace works tirelessly to educate and inspire youth from around the world to transform conflict. Peace is the collective goal

Despite being pitted against one another for decades, Svoboda's sunny portrait (shown left) suggests that many young Palestinians and Israelis are ready for change.

Enter Seeds of Peace, a not-for-profit initiative with a network of more than 6,400 alumni scattered throughout the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, and North America.

The organisation works tirelessly to educate and inspire youth from around the world to transform conflict. Peace is the collective goal.



The vision of Seeds of Peace is simple: Equip young people with the technical skills and relationship-building capacities they need to disengage from politically-charged stereotypes that promote violence in conflict zones. Most Seeds of Peace participants begin the process by attending a summer camp in Maine, in the northeastern US.

After a competitive process, only four to six percent of applicants are selected. All selected individuals must

be citizens of a country in conflict. Upon graduating from the camp, attendees acquire alumni “Seed” status and become well-positioned, adult changemakers in their communities and cultural spaces.

“The programme at the Seeds of Peace camp is centred around daily dialogue encounters that are organised by conflict region,” explains Eric Kapenga, a camp counsellor at Seeds of Peace. “For 110 minutes each day, they engage each other

directly, tackling the most painful and divisive issues defining their conflict, sharing their personal experiences, reflecting on competing narratives, and challenging each other’s prejudices.”

By providing a space for people to meet in a neutral environment, they have an opportunity to generate ideas that can catalyse change. No subject is off-limits. They discuss topics ranging from war and military occupation to suicide bombings, gender, refugees, the Holocaust and immigration.



ABOVE Celebrations during the Purim in the Mahane Yehuda Market in Jerusalem. Purim is an ancient Jewish holiday that commemorates a time when many Jewish people in Persia were saved from extermination

RIGHT The Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem is a holy site where many Jews come to pray. The wall separates people by gender, with men on one side, and women on the other

“The immediate goal of camp dialogue is not agreement or consensus, and there is no expectation that campers adopt or even embrace each other’s viewpoints”

Eric Kapenga, camp counsellor at Seeds of Peace

“The immediate goal of camp dialogue is not agreement or consensus, and there is no expectation that campers adopt or even embrace each other’s viewpoints,” Kapenga explains. “Through dialogue, campers reflect on their own identities and gain insights into the dynamics that perpetuate conflict. In doing so, they lay the groundwork necessary for exploring and addressing these dynamics through local Seeds of Peace programmes once they return home.”

In 2015, Seeds of Peace unveiled a new initiative called “Gather”, which is a five-day conference with the task of investigating new solutions for unified progress. “Seeds of Peace’s programme in Jordan marked the launch of our initiative to spark locally-rooted efforts to change the status quo,” Kapenga says.

“We convened over 200 changemakers from more than 20 countries in Jordan to focus on the roles that business, entrepreneurship, media, technology and gender play in social change,” he adds.

Svoboda elaborates: “Gather was a place where people who had big ideas could find practical ways to put them into action to have an impact on communities typically in conflict.” By bringing people together who would not normally have the chance to meet – and could possibly continue their lives as enemies – a natural shift took place, simply from listening to and learning from one another, she explains.

Of the 100 year-round projects and over 40 peace-building initiatives staffed by Seeds of Peace alumni across the globe, they all share a common goal. They are designed to



ABOUT SEEDS OF PEACE



The Seeds of Peace conflict resolution programme started at a summer camp in Maine in the US. Every year, hundreds of teenagers from regions of conflict meet



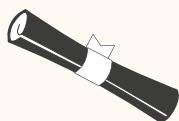
Seeds of Peace operates more than 100 local leadership initiatives, such as facilitator training and negotiation seminars. Over 40 peace-building initiatives are staffed by alumni



More than 500 Seeds have graduated in South Asia alone, and thousands have benefitted from the local outreach work being done



Seeds of Peace launched two new fellowships in 2015 that are designed to connect alumni with the resources, technical support, and training needed for them to continue to make an impact



The Seeds of Peace network consists of 6,389 alumni throughout South Asia, the Middle East, North America and Europe. Alumni currently work in 27 countries

www.seedsofpeace.org



“The Seeds of Peace experience wasn’t an overnight shift in perspective, but more along the lines of expanding one’s vision and showing possibilities that perhaps weren’t clear earlier”

Ayyaz Ahmed, Seeds of Peace alumnus

build empathy and respect in order to shift deeply ingrained attitudes and perceptions in countries in conflict. The key to the organisation’s success is, in part, owing to their approach: They remove young adults from social constructions of their reality, before concrete ideologies take root.

Young people from opposing nations often experience political conflict for the first time through class instruction that is riddled with historical inaccuracies. Ayyaz Ahmed is a Pakistani youth who attended the Seeds of Peace programme as a teenager. His early experiences with Seeds of Peace allowed him to meet people from India for the first time.

Much like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Indo-Pakistani conflicts have created hostile relations between both countries, and citizens of each country are almost expected to harbour contempt for one another.

Now working in the publishing industry, Ahmed credits Seeds of Peace for giving him the confidence to work amicably amongst other cultures as an adult. “The Seeds of Peace experience wasn’t an overnight shift in perspective, but more along the lines of expanding one’s vision and showing possibilities that perhaps weren’t clear earlier,” Ahmed says. “Suddenly, the world was far bigger than I had ever realised.”



LEFT A view of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem as seen from the Mount of Olives



BELLOW A young boy walks along the wall before a military checkpoint to enter into Israel from Ramallah

Since 2001, Seeds of Peace has been working in South Asia to inspire and cultivate exceptional leaders in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

"Our longest-running programmes in South Asia are the interfaith camps that bring together teenagers of various religious communities to explore the differences and similarities in their beliefs, and to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes," Kapenga says. "We currently have over 500 alumni from India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Thousands more have participated in, or benefitted from, our local programmes on the ground in the three countries. Our alumni are actively working to transform conflict in and between their countries, leading initiatives in education, media, business, and other sectors that leverage their unique relationships and skills to create economic, social, and political change."

Developments in social media and the rise of citizen journalism has cultivated a far-reaching digital network that allows cultural demographics all over the world to digest content. No longer suspended in an insulated bubble, nations caught in the midst of political conflict are thrust into the spotlight, and anybody can access information and interact through these online channels. Individuals who may have never come into contact because of political circumstances can now take part in discussions over the Internet, too.

That being said, face-to-face dialogue remains important. As such, Seeds of Peace has recognised the value of actively mobilising a younger generation who are ready to change deeply ingrained attitudes and perceptions so that hatred and ignorance does not continue to take root.

By developing leaders who can make a positive impact in their communities, the hope is that the next generation will instigate transformation within their country – towards peaceful resolution. ♦ AG

CHRISTINE HOGG is a freelance journalist and editor at Photographers Without Borders, a volunteer-run, not-for-profit outfit devoted to amplifying the initiatives of grassroots organisations worldwide through volunteer photography, video, and marketing tools.

MAGGIE SVOBODA is a freelance photographer who participated in a two-week workshop in Jordan with Photographers Without Borders. The organisation has supported more than 100 projects in 27 countries to date.

Raising the Bar

FROM VILLAIN TO HERO (AND SOMETIMES BACK TO ANTI-HERO), ASIA'S FAMOUS POLITICAL PRISONERS HAVE PACKED A LOT OF PUNCH IN TRANSFORMING THE REGION'S DIPLOMATIC LANDSCAPE

They've been saddled with various labels, depending on who has held the position of power at the time: freedom fighter, revolutionist, reformer, dissident, terrorist.

But the question of whether they should be vilified or lionised continues in some cases: Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's national hero for her tireless work towards democracy, has come under fire recently for her denial of the persecution of the Rohingya. Having been denied proper treatment for terminal cancer, Nobel Peace laureate Liu Xiaobo passed away on July 13, 2017. His death has caused outrage in the international community. The leading dissident is still framed as "a criminal" in the Chinese press, but for many others, he remains a hero for campaigning for Chinese democracy.

One could argue that this gives traction to the cliche that "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". But, to take the stance of Jonah Goldberg in his book *The Tyranny of Clichés*, "It is simply absurd to contend that because people may argue over who is or is not a terrorist that it is therefore impossible to make meaningful distinctions between terrorists and freedom fighters."



MYANMAR

Aung San Suu Kyi

"Peace as a goal is an ideal which will not be contested by any government or nation, not even the most belligerent"

Any discussion about high profile political prisoners in Asia usually commences with "The Lady". The Nobel Peace Prize winner spent 15 years under house arrest. The daughter of the former prime minister of British Burma (who was assassinated), she grew up in India, the US, and England. Returning to Burma in 1988 after years abroad, she met political upheaval under the ruthless dictator U Ne Win. After speaking out against his brutality, and actively advocating for democracy and human rights, she was placed under house arrest in 1989 – and was arrested repeatedly over the years. She was finally released from house arrest in November 2010. Five years later, she led the National League for Democracy (NLD) to a majority win in Myanmar's first open election in 25 years.

RUSSIA

Andrei Sakharov

"Both now and for always, I intend to hold fast to my belief in the hidden strength of the human spirit"

Another political prisoner to win the Nobel Peace Prize (1975), the Soviet nuclear physicist was imprisoned for his dissenting views on the Soviet government. He was involved in developing the hydrogen bomb, and thus became concerned about the nuclear age. He voiced his discontent with the arms race, and wrote *Reflections on Progress, Peaceful Coexistence and Intellectual Freedom* in a bid to end it. Due to his criticism of Soviet political repression – and international aggression – he was exiled to Gorky in 1980, and placed under surveillance (where he was harassed by the KGB), following his criticism of the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan. Mikhail Gorbachev later released Sakharov, who was subsequently appointed to the Soviet Congress.



IRAN

Akbar Ganji

"Negotiation talks are the best way to solve anything. We must replace wars and weapons with negotiations and talks"

The brave Iranian journalist has voiced his dissent against the Iranian government, gaining recognition for his work on “the chain of murders of Iran”, which accused a set of senior officials of the killings. This landed him six years in jail. During his imprisonment, he wrote several important essays, most notably a political manifesto, which outlines hopes for democracy in Iran. He has also been fiercely critical of the war and US occupation in Iraq, saying: “You cannot bring democracy to a country by attacking it.” He strongly supported the election protests in Iran in 2009, and carried out a hunger strike outside of the United Nations headquarters to draw attention to the plight of Iranian political prisoners, and the conditions of oppression in the country.

CHINA

Liu Xiaobo

"I hope that I will be the last victim in China's long record of treating words as crimes"

The renowned political prisoner was a bastion for human rights in China. He was sentenced to 11 years in prison for criticising the communist government through a petition called “Charter 08” which called for drastic political reforms and the end of one-party rule. His protests against the government date back to the days building up to Tiananmen Square in 1989, where he was a student adviser, and joined the protest leaders in a week-long hunger strike. His writing, teaching and human rights activities earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010 – the first Chinese citizen to be accorded the honour. Earlier this year, he was released on medical parole after he was diagnosed with terminal cancer; he remained under surveillance. He passed away on July 13, 2017.

INDIA

Mohandas Gandhi

"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win"

He is more commonly known by his name Mahatma, which means, “the great-souled one”. He served many prison terms, beginning with his campaigning against the racial discrimination in South Africa – where he worked for a period in the early 1900s. He rebelled against the laws that required all Indians in the country to be fingerprinted. When back in India, he was sent to jail for campaigning against British rule. After being charged for contempt of the British government in India, he pleaded guilty and was sentenced to a six-year prison term, of which he served two years. In August 1947, India achieved independence. After Partition, he continued to promote peace between Hindus and Muslims. He was assassinated six months later in New Delhi.



SOUTH KOREA

Kim Dae-jung

"Unification is one thing, and stability in Northeast Asia is another thing"

The former president of South Korea received the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts at bringing democracy to the country, and for his work towards establishing peace and reunification with North Korea through his Sunshine Policy. In 2000, he organised a summit that allowed family members separated by the border for over four decades to see each other. His struggle for democracy and improved human rights in South Korea led to his house arrest and imprisonment, and nearly cost him his life in 1980; the death sentence was changed to 20 years' imprisonment. After three years in jail, he was sent to the US for health reasons, only to remain there in exile. He returned to South Korea in 1985. He lost the presidency three times before he finally won in 1997.

VIETNAM

Ho Chi Minh

"Remember, the storm is a good opportunity for the pine and the cypress to show their strength and their stability"

Born Nguyen That Thanh, Ho Chi Minh spearheaded the Vietnamese nationalist movement for 30 years. In 1930, he founded the Indo-Chinese Communist Party, spending the better part of the decade in the Soviet Union and China. While in South China in 1942, he was accused of being a spy and was arrested, spending 18 months in prison. After Japan invaded Indo-China, he returned home and started the communist movement Viet Minh, changing his name to Ho Chi Minh. Following peace talks after eight years of war with the French, he was named president of North Vietnam, serving from 1954 until he died in 1969. The arrival of American troops in 1965 kicked off another war; a decade later, the communists claimed Saigon, and renamed it Ho Chi Minh City.

PHILIPPINES

Benigno Aquino Jr.

"A time comes in a man's life when he must prefer a meaningful death to a meaningless life"

Benigno Aquino Jr. was the leader of the opposition running against the president of the time, Ferdinand Marcos. Aquino rose to political fame after becoming the Philippines' youngest town mayor at age 22, and became the governor of Tarlac Province at 28. His ambitions of becoming president were stalled, however, after Marcos implemented martial law, and put Aquino in prison. Found guilty on charges of subversion, illegal possession of firearms, and murder, he was sentenced to seven years in jail. He was released to undergo surgery in the US, where he remained in exile for three years. Upon his return to the Philippines, he was assassinated at the airport in Manila, sparking protests against Marcos, who eventually fled the country.



MYANMAR

Dr Ma Thida

"Long-term censorship, propaganda and an ineffective education system have made our society intellectually blind"

Myanmar's National Convention process – which was set up to negotiate a democratic constitution – took 14 years to be realised. After the 1990 election (voting in the National League of Democracy) was ignored, several activist groups campaigned against the military regime in secret. In 1993, one such activist, surgeon and writer Dr Ma Thida, was arrested on accusations of four charges: endangering public serenity, contacting an illegal organisation, and printing and distributing illegal materials. She was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment.

Released five-and-a-half years later, she published her prison memoir *Prisoner of Conscience: My Steps through Insein*, which was released in English last year. She spoke to *Asian Geographic* about her life, work, and the current challenges facing Asia's newest democracy.

WITH RESTRICTIONS RELAXED, HOW HAS THE MEDIA IMPACTED PUBLIC DIALOGUE?

Although there is no more censorship board, self-censorship still occurs. There are existing laws that limit freedom of expression, directly and indirectly. Many civil society organisations work hard to expand the boundary of freedom of expression, but it is not easy – even under the new government. Media and information literacy amongst the general public is also limited, and media practice through the required media licence is controlled by the Ministry of Information. Throughout the last five decades, only government cronies or pro-government business people could obtain a licence. Although new licences were guaranteed after 2012, the media landscape is not changing effectively. State-owned media – especially print – are still dominating the market share, and controlling access to information.

HOW IS WRITERS ASSOCIATION PEN MYANMAR CURRENTLY PROMOTING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION?

I am currently a board member of PEN International. PEN Myanmar has three missions: to promote and protect freedom of expression, to establish a vital literary culture, and to create a bridge between literature and school education. "Literature for Everyone" is a community-based literature activity which provides a space for writers and readers to appreciate literature and discuss their opinions. PEN Myanmar also partners with other civil society organisations (CSOs), and our advocacy work has proved successful in catalysing law reform processes. We have started a roadshow which runs workshops on freedom of expression with both regional and national parliaments, as well as with local CSOs. We also have plans to organise more activities on

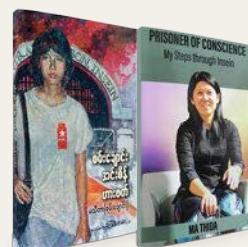
cultivating public opinion, and to start a poetry slam contest. I regularly hold public literary talks on why our society needs freedom of expression, and how we should practise it.

IS THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY BEING TRANSLATED INTO ACTION?

The spirit of democracy is the hardest thing for the majority of our people to understand. Long-term censorship, propaganda and an ineffective education system have made our society intellectually blind. It is hard to change people's mindset in terms of their understanding of leadership and governance. I think that the current political leadership is busy with the peace process and other priorities – like negotiating its authority with the still-powerful military – and so the spirit of democracy is not being translated into action effectively just yet.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE IN MOVING MYANMAR FORWARD?

Without social change, political change cannot be understood as effective change. The collective dream of a federal democratic society is more or less well-recognised, but it is not understood, nor adopted, by the majority of people yet, as they cannot visualise it. Public and private entities should play a role in helping people share in this collective dream. This can be done if the political leadership guarantees freedom of expression and opinion – including press freedom. ♦ AG



Prisoner of Conscience: My Steps through Insein was a bestseller for several months since its release in 2012. It is available at: www.silkwormbooks.com/products/prisoner-of-conscience



Explorers Jenny and Chee Tiong on a camel ride in the Gobi Desert

IMAGE © MICHAEL LEE



Discover the Silk Road

PART 1: DUNHUANG, CHINA
June 4–10, 2017

IN JUNE 2017, 15 EXPLORERS EMBARKED ON THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME, TRACING THE HISTORY OF THE SILK ROAD IN CHINA. ASIAN GEOGRAPHIC'S SHELLEN TEH SHARES HER EXPERIENCE OF THE EXPEDITION – THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF THREE

It was bucketing down when we arrived in Shanghai, but the wet weather did little to deter our excitement. We were soon sloshing our way through the deluge to the Lanzhou Museum to gain an understanding of the historical context of the famed route we were about to embark on.

It was not all work and no play, however, and our group of 15 intrepid explorers began to get to know one another over a delicious dinner beside the mighty Yellow River.

The next morning, we were up early and on the road in our private bus, making our way out of the grey gloom of the city. Arriving in rural Wuwei in Gansu, our guide got some lunch spot tips from a group of locals, and we were soon tucking into a hearty meal of handmade noodles. I came to learn that we were served first because we were guests in town. I was surprised by these small gestures which made me feel so warmly welcomed.

Well-fed, we headed to the Tiandishan Grottoes – which translates to the “Heaven Ladder Mountain Grottoes” – some of the earliest grottoes built in China, which represent a key historical landmark in Buddhist history.

We descended 62 steps into a cavernous ochre dam, initially built to supply water to the local community. This dam houses a series of enormous Buddha statues, the largest of which is the 15-metre Sakyamuni Buddha, flanked by two disciples, two bodhisattvas, and two heavenly kings.

After overnighting in Zhangye, we made a short detour to the Zhangye

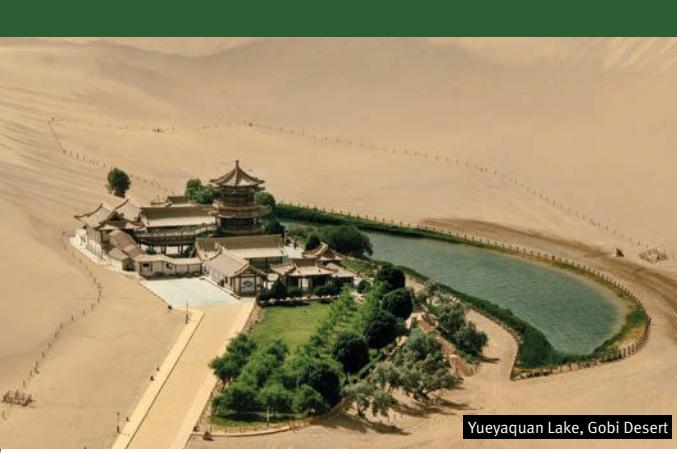


IMAGE © MICHAEL LEE



IMAGE © SYLVIA YONG

Dafo Temple – which translates to the “Giant Buddha Temple” – and it’s certainly deserving of its name: It houses the largest indoor reclining clay Buddha statue (34.5 metres long) in China, depicting the Gautama Buddha’s attainment of Nirvana.

From here, we drove to the Zhangye Danxia Landform Geological Park, famous for its rainbow “layer cake” mountains. Having only ever seen pictures of these iconic rock formations before, I was under the impression that the orange-hued mountains had been overly

photoshopped, and I was prepared for an anticlimax. Imagine my surprise when we arrived to see that these rock formations were just as I’d seen in photographs. The rain had cleared much of the dust from the air, and we were treated to a clear, full-blown Technicolor view of these spectacular landforms.

The next day, we visited the Overhanging Great Wall. Built in 1539, this was a key strategic point in the Jiayuguan military defence system. Climbing to the peak was quite physically demanding, and

made us appreciate the manpower – and stamina – that would have been required to build it.

After a 10-minute bus ride, we arrived at the Jiayuguan Fortress, which was built even earlier, in 1372. This was the primary transportation node linking the East and West along the ancient Silk Road. All travellers passing through here had to retrieve a special exit pass from the officer on duty – much like your passport for international travel. Today, little has changed: Each of us had to acquire a special pass to exit the fortress gate.



The Tiandishan Grottoes are some of the earliest grottoes built in China



"Silk Road" Cultural Show

IMAGE © EDDIE CHOW

It was worth the extra paperwork. Once we'd exited the gate, we were greeted with the sight of the Gobi Desert stretching before us. It may seem romantic now, but for formerly disgraced officials and criminals, the sight of this barren stretch of sand meant exile, and a lifetime sentence of destitute isolation. This accounts for the gate's other name, "the Gate of Sighs".

Thankfully, today, any "crimes" are more for jest than actual banishment: The current (very animated) officer at the gate

bequeaths you with your "ancient passport" by shouting out your name and "purpose" for travelling. Within our group, this included "a trip to Persia to marry a prince", and – less glamorously – "opium trafficking"! The day was capped off with a meal of roasted lamb, slow-cooked whole in a brick oven.

Our fifth day took us to the Yumen Pass and the Dunhuang Yardang National Geopark – another impressive expanse of eerie rock formations. An expedition wouldn't be deserving of its name without

encountering all weathers, but it was nevertheless with some trepidation that I stepped out into a sandstorm that morning. Thankfully, many of our group were well-prepared with facemasks and caps. I, on the other hand, was not as equipped, so I was quite happy to seek refuge in the hotel at the end of the day – and empty out the fine dust that had gathered in my ears!

This was, admittedly, the low-point of the trip, but reparations were made that evening with a spontaneous trip to an extravagant cultural show, fittingly called "Silk Road". Once held at the "Great Hall of the People", it was exclusively reserved for government officials and foreign leaders, but is now open to the public.

This was a more diverting take on the Silk Road's history, using dance and song to portray the vivid cultural traditions and artistic legacies of Dunhuang and the Silk Road. The integration of dramatic lighting, brilliant choreography, and the opulent stage design made for a thoroughly entertaining evening.



A view of the Black Mountains (foreground) and Qilian Mountains (background)

IMAGE © MICHAEL LEE



The Expeditions' group outside the Yumen Pass

IMAGE © MICHAEL LEE

The next day's visit to the Mogao Caves was the definitive highlight of the trip. From the outside, they look perfectly ordinary, set in a slab of drab, brown rock. But upon entering

the dry, cool caves, it's as though you've been teleported into another world: It's a labyrinth of ancient artwork with 45,000 square metres of murals and statues, making it the world's largest collection of Buddhist art. Much of the original pink-coloured paints have turned black due to oxidation. Our guide told me that the painters spent much of their lives painting in the near-dark, guided only by shards of natural light and dim oil lamps, and as such, most went blind.

From the dank darkness of the caves, we stepped into the blinding light of the Gobi, with a view of the Yueyaquan Lake, nestled in the desert bowl, for an afternoon of sandboarding and camel rides – Silk Road style.

Thankfully, the journey back opted for a more modern mode of transportation, and we were all aboard a sleepover train back to Lanzhou, settling into our comfortable bunk beds within their purple and gold Apsara-motif cabins, and gently rocked to sleep.

We ended our trip by crossing the Yellow River in rickety rafts made from sheepskin. I was quite nervous that I was going to fall in, but I stayed comfortably dry. In the middle of the river, I was struck by a sense of Zen: It was peaceful, stranded in this limbo between banks. Our boatman hummed a Mongolian-Chinese song – *Mother in the Dream*. It was a melancholic but fitting ending, as the Yellow River is also called the “Mother River of China”.

The expedition saw many firsts for me: I ate exotic meats such as camel hooves, stir-fried donkey, and Lanzhou noodles with yak meat; I experienced a sandstorm, rode a camel, and a sheepskin raft, and – hilariously – had to abandon any delicate sensibilities when I visited a ladies' loo without a bathroom door!

I learned an extraordinary amount about the Silk Road, but, moreover, I got to explore this part of China with a great group of like-minded people. Ultimately, the people you travel with make or break an expedition. ♦ AG



Clockwise from top left: Explorers Jenny, Chee Tiong, Sylvia and Serene on the train ride back to Lanzhou

IMAGE © SYLVIA YONG

For more information on Asian Geographic's forthcoming Silk Road expeditions to Uzbekistan and India, visit www.asiangeo.com/expeditions



ASIAN GEOGRAPHIC HOT SOUP SCHOOL CHALLENGE 2017

STUDENTS ONCE AGAIN SHOW OFF THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF ASIA



Teams get ready for the semi-finals



Mulling over answers in the elimination round



Testing the buzzer in the semi-finals

RIVER VALLEY
SCHOOL

The 2017 ASIAN Geographic Hot Soup Challenge concluded its sixth successful quiz this year, held at the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS). The competition brought together 20 teams of four between the ages of 13 and 17 from various schools around Singapore, with the majority of participants returning to the competition with high hopes of making it into the finals.

The qualifying round took place at the Asian Dive Expo (ADEX) in April this year, and – in keeping with the focus of the event – tested participants on their knowledge of climate change with 25 multiple choice questions. Fast-forward to July 8, and the teams put their thinking caps back on for the elimination round – another 25 multiple-choice questions on geography, history, conservation and current affairs in Asia.

All questions were derived from the past two years' issues of *ASIAN Geographic* magazine, and so the more vigilant and diligent students gained an edge in the competition by reading up beforehand.

We were then joined by Dr Toh Tai Chong, a lecturer and research fellow at the Tropical Marine Science Institute at NUS, who gave an engaging talk on the crisis of marine trash, and how we can all do our part to clean up our oceans, with several students putting questions to Dr Toh after the presentation. Tension was high as the names of the first four teams were announced, making it into the semi-finals. A team from Hwa Chong Institution emerged victorious in this round, as did another two teams from this school in the two subsequent rounds, placing three teams from Hwa Chong Institution neck-and-neck in the finals.

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Clockwise from top left: Guest speakers Khong Swee Lin, Dr Toh Tai Chong and Debra Teng

Participants had the opportunity to take a breather from all the action, however, with a delicious bento box lunch sponsored by Makan Mate, and another two talks from our guest speakers: Ms Khong Swee Lin – a trainee docent at the National Gallery Singapore – who spoke about the Buginese, and actress Ms Debra Teng, a marine ambassador for Shark Guardian.

The finals were upon us with the three leading teams from Hwa Chong Institution taking to their buzzers, answering 10

picture-related questions. Team E emerged victorious as the Asian Geographic Hot Soup School Challenge 2017 Champions, walking away with the grand prize: a four-day, three-night educational and cultural trip to Bangkok, Thailand, sponsored by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT). The trip will take the students to the floating market, Dinosaur Planet, a family-owned eco-village, and to Ayutthaya, the second capital of the Siamese Kingdom. They will also be able to participate in a cooking class, and attend a Muay Thai training session.

The winning team – Alvern Mak Wei Jie, Cleon Yong Tzen Wen, Ernest Ng Wei Jun and Ho Choong Kai, spurred on by their teacher Ms Li Young Chua-Ngui – were all smiles and fist pumps as they claimed their enormous gold trophy and medals. In the spirit of the competition, the first and second runner-up teams gave the champions their hearty congratulations and applause.

We were honoured to have the Vice-President of the Singapore Nature Society, Mr Leong Kwok Peng, grace the event.



Teams enjoy a complimentary lunch from Makan Mate



Participants receive their goodie bags

Prize Sponsors



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The Hot Soup School Challenge champions



The Hot Soup School Challenge first runners-up



The Hot Soup School Challenge second runners-up



Guest of Honour Mr Leong Kwok Peng

CHAMPIONS	FIRST RUNNERS-UP	SECOND RUNNERS-UP
Hwa Chong Institution Team E Alvern Mak Cleon Yong Ernest Ng Ho Choong Kai Teacher-in-charge: Ms Chua-Ngui	Hwa Chong Institution Team C Elijah Choo Chan Kai En Tan Teong Seng Yong Khee Hou Teacher-in-charge: Ms Grewal	Hwa Chong Institution Team A Loo Guan Hin Quek Chui Qing Galen Lee Brian Siew Teacher-in-charge: Ms Grewal

As this year's Guest of Honour, Mr Leong gave the closing address about his work in environmental education – working on projects with youths in the community.

Mr Leong presented the trophies and medals to the top three teams, and certificates to all the participants, who had the opportunity to have a group photo with him before fetching their goodie bags, which included TAT tote bags and accessories, complimentary laser tag tickets

from Tag Teams, B2P gel pens from Pilot, and a bottle and voucher from the People's Association (PA) Water Venture.

We'd like to thank the schools, sponsors, speakers and organisations that came together to support the event – and a big shout-out goes to all the participants who showed what team spirit is all about. We look forward to seeing teams return to test their knowledge of Asia at the seventh Hot Soup Challenge on July 7, 2018. ♦ AG

EID AL-FITR TRANSLATES TO “FESTIVAL OF BREAKING THE FAST”; IT IS CELEBRATED FOR THREE DAYS. ON THE MORNING OF THE FIRST DAY, MUSLIMS GATHER FOR PRAYER, WHICH IS OFTEN FOLLOWED BY A SHORT SERMON. THIS IMAGE SHOWS AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE EID AL-FITR PRAYERS AT THE ALAMGIR MOSQUE IN VARANASI IN INDIA, MARKING THE END OF THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN.

SEND US A POSTCARD AND WIN!

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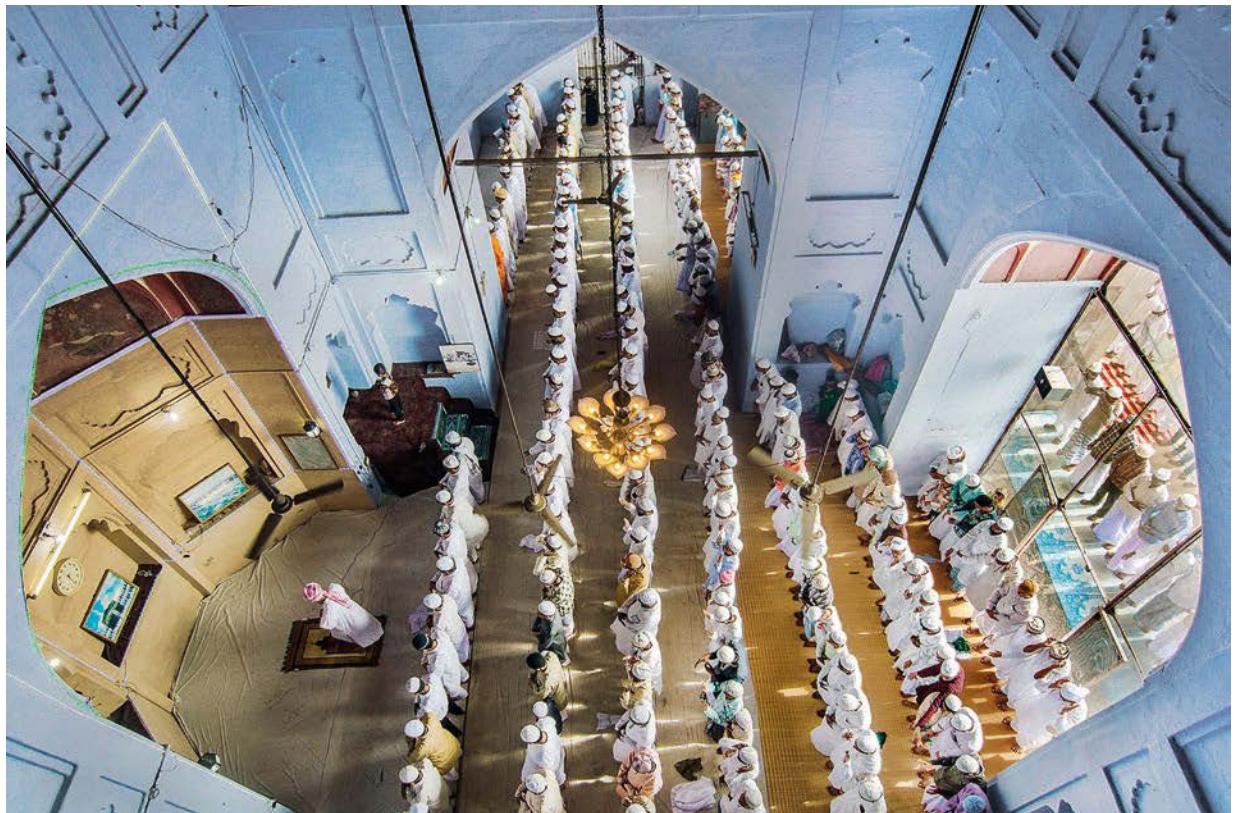


IMAGE © SIRSENDU GAYEN

Congratulations to our winner Sirsendu Gayen.
His image taken at Alamgir Mosque in Varanasi, India has been selected as our Photo of the Month! The winning Photo of the Month is published on our Postcard page in *ASIAN Geographic* magazine and is also featured on our social media pages. The Photo of the Month winner will receive an annual subscription to the magazine.

Nikon D610, 12–24mm lens at 12mm, f/6.3, 1/250s, ISO400



IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK



Apo Island is a short hop from the Negros Oriental capital of Dumaguete

{ PHILIPPINES }

Island Styling

Text Roni Ben-Aharon

THE ISLAND PROVINCE OF NEGROS ORIENTAL IN THE PHILIPPINES IS A HAVEN FOR EXPLORERS WHO PREFER OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK ADVENTURES

We pull off from the black sand beach on a *bangka* (an elongated wooden boat), heading southeast towards Apo Island, a tiny green speck on the horizon. Within minutes of leaving shore, Atlantis Resort vanishes behind the narrow shoreline amidst the tall, swaying coconut trees. The island becomes its own sea of green, set against a dramatic backdrop: The peaks of the dormant volcano Bukid Talinis (*bukid* meaning “mountain”) towering at 1,903 metres above sea level, reach into a cloudless sky. From this vantage point, it’s hard to believe nearly 30,000 people live here, in Dauin, as you can see little sign of human life once you’re a mile offshore.

Apo means “grandchild” in Tagalog, the Philippines’ national language, and so this small island is referred to as the “grandchild” of Negros. Less than a square kilometre in size, the island is surrounded by the Philippines’ first community-organised marine reserve, established in the late 1980s. It is home to nearly 1,000 people; the waters hugging its shores boast 650 documented species of fish and over 400 species of corals, allowing divers the opportunity to see the majority of the 450 coral species indigenous to the archipelago. The reef is healthy and colourful, with a

variety of both hard and soft corals. While snorkelling, we spot jackfish, barracuda, a banded sea snake and hawksbill turtles.

Just seven kilometres away from this diver’s paradise is the southeastern tip of Negros Island in Negros Oriental Province. Negros is the fourth largest island in the Philippines, home to four million people – only two percent of the nation’s population of around 100 million people, spread around its 7,641 islands. This lush volcanic island offers an abundance of little explored terrestrial and aquatic wonders, and a laidback environment without hordes of tourists.

The name of the island is hardly politically correct in contemporary times; when the Spaniards arrived in April 1565, they named it after the island’s original inhabitants, the *negritos* (which translates to “little black people”). The volcanic land is incredibly fertile, but there are only two commercial farming industries: sugarcane (Negros produces half of the Philippines’ sugar) and coconut.

The reef is healthy and colourful, with a variety of both hard and soft corals. While snorkelling, we spot jackfish, barracuda, a banded sea snake and hawksbill turtles



IMAGE © TIM ROCK

ABOVE The colourful reef off Apo Island allows divers to swim with hawksbill turtles

BOTTOM The Atlantis Jeepneys are hand-painted renovated WWII US military buses

TOP RIGHT The colourful weekly Malatapay Market, selling a whole variety of goods

The rest of the agricultural operatives consist of small farms. Colourful markets and stalls line the streets, selling locally-grown fresh produce such as *siniguelas* – a little round green fruit that, when discovered by the rest of the world, may well be touted as a “superfood”, and *ube*, a purple potato which is sometimes used to make a lurid purple ice cream.

Negros Oriental’s vivid “rurban” centre is Dumaguete, a small town by other standards, with around 150,000 people, but it is *the* city in this provincial area, with a dozen universities and colleges, three hospitals, a mall with a cinema, and numerous local businesses.

We take the Atlantis Jeepney, an experience on its own, and head to Malatapay Market. This fleet of mustard yellow US military buses was left behind after WWII and converted by locals into these hand-painted, colourful public transportation vehicles.

Malatapay is a hive of activity with a weekly gathering of farmers selling everything from cattle to flip-flops and bamboo furniture. The highlight here is the variety of local food: *lechon* (a whole roasted pig), banana *que* (using the local variety of short banana, which is coated in sugar and grilled on a stick) and the selective delicacy that is *balut* (a hard boiled, fully-developed duck embryo). After drinking *bukú* (fresh young coconut), we embark on a city tour of Dumaguete.

IMAGE COURTESY OF ATLANTIS RESORT





IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

We visit Silliman University – a prestigious private school boasting a small anthropology museum with a magnificent gem collection – and the oldest bell tower in the Visayas. Driving along the coastal boulevard, we sample *silvanas*, a tasty frozen meringue-like cookies with layers of buttercream, coated with crumbs. This Dumaguete specialty is the gift of choice Filipinos take home from Negros, and so the airport's departure terminal is peppered with people carrying the signature blue-and-white cookie cartons.

The Philippines consists of six unique biogeographical areas – groups of islands once connected.

Driving along the coastal boulevard, we sample *silvanas*, tasty frozen meringue-like cookies with layers of buttercream, coated with crumbs

During the last Ice Age, a 120-metre drop in ocean levels led to their separation, isolating various species such as the now-endangered Visayan spotted deer and the Visayan warty pig, as well as various small birds. It's heaven for Nature enthusiasts, and avid ornithologists can get their binoculars out at Twin Lakes – two crater lakes at the foot of Mount Talinis – with over 114 bird species indigenous to this area, including the endangered Negros bleeding-heart and the Visayan wrinkled hornbill. Our incredibly knowledgeable guide, Jake, from the Negros Oriental Tourism Office, identifies all variety of whistles emanating from the canopy branches.

If you're lucky enough to be visiting at the time of the full moon, visit the Manjuyod sandbar, a pristine strip of white sand that is only exposed during extremely low tides in the Tañon Strait. If you'd like to rent one of the basic stilted structures for the day (or the night), you'll need to coordinate your trip in advance with the municipality. Otherwise, rent a private boat for the day from the nearby town of Bais, and combine your trip with a dolphin watching excursion.

A 30-minute drive from Dumaguete takes us to the town of Dauin, from where you take an exquisite muck diving trip. Here, an abundance of cool critters can be found, such as frogfish and ornate ghost pipefish. Offering easy dive conditions, this is a perfect spot to learn to dive, but it's also an underwater photographer's haven, with excellent conditions to capture unique marine critters, such as flamboyant cuttlefish eggs hatching.



Underwater thrills are a popular pastime in Negros, but there are also numerous activities on land: Caving is a huge attraction here, as there are several hundred underground caves

ABOVE A view of the beach in front of Atlantis Dive Resort in Dauin

BETWEEN Casaroro Falls make for a great photo, if you can handle the trek to get there

on the island, mostly located in the municipality of Mabinay, about two hours' drive north of Dumaguete. The most famous is Crystal Cave, housing 157-metre-long stalagmites and stalactites.

The area offers caving for all abilities; the more daring and experienced cavers venture to Habhaban Cave in Bayawan, located about an hour south of Dauin. Part of the experience is crawling your

way through water – an effort that we're told is worth once you reach the impressive underground waterfall. Sadly, due to serious flood alerts, we had to postpone this adventure.

Back above the ground, natural water sources are all over the island: The Casaroro Falls close to Dauin are a favourite photo opportunity. However, getting there requires a bit of grit, as you need to hike up some 300 steps and across slippery rocks. The view of the sheer drop of roaring water is incredible, and well worth it.

Thankfully, the nearby Baslay Hot Springs (be warned: they follow another steep set of stairs!) offer the weary hiker the chance to take a load off and ease tired legs.

A quick stop at the Baslay Farmer Association – a community farming project that grows coffee and plants local trees to mitigate past destructive agriculture practices – is a good end to an active day, and allows you the chance to support this sustainable local initiative.

From there, it's a short drive back to Atlantis Resort, to rest up with a view and a cocktail made with Tanduay – a delicious local rum. ♦ AGP



IMAGE © STEWART WESTMORLAND



IMAGE © TIM ROCK

EXPERIENCE NEGROS ORIENTAL

WHEN

The best time to visit the Philippines is during the dry season, which is between November and May. May through August are the off-season months, with a few showers at night.

WHERE

Atlantis Resort is well positioned to see the best of Negros Oriental. It's nestled in a tropical garden looking out over the sea. From here, it's easy to get to Apo Island, Dauin, and Dumaguete. For food, check out Tokos and Finbar in Dauin, and Kri in Dumaguete.

Visit www.atlantishotel.com

HOW

Dumaguete is located on the southern tip of Negros Island, 500 kilometres south of Manila, and 110 kilometres from Cebu. There are daily flights from Manila and Cebu. From Cebu City or Liloan Port you can also take a ferry to Dumaguete. The best way to get around Negros is to rent a car. Try Kabayan Car Rental: www.kabayancarrentals.com. For more information, visit the Negros Oriental Tourism Office www.negrostourism.com



RONI BEN-AHARON is a global nomad who enjoys soaking up the sun, exploring trails and diving. She has worked in marketing in the tourism industry for over a decade.

Sea Change in the Strait

Text Sarah Chew



IMAGE © GETTY IMAGES

IN 1965, SINGAPORE WAS OUSTED FROM THE FEDERATION OF MALAYSIA. WE EXAMINE THE TWO COUNTRIES' RESPECTIVE POLITICAL TRAJECTORIES BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

ABOVE Former Singapore prime minister Lee Kuan Yew meeting with labour union representatives

It is August 1965. Less than two years after a merger, Singapore's reluctant departure from the Federation of Malaysia throws her into alienated independence. The separation comes after racial tension and strained political relations culminated in rioting the year before.

The then-secretary-general of Singapore's ruling People's Action Party (PAP), Lee Kuan Yew, is named Singapore's first prime minister, and faces the seemingly impossible task of shaping the nascent nation. Malaysia, now free from the internal threat of

PAP's influence, removes the party from its registry, forcing its Malaysian members to rename themselves the Democratic Alliance Party.

While both countries declare themselves democracies, they remain targets of media criticism for autocratic practices, most notably for the length of time that their ruling parties have retained power: Singapore has remained under the PAP since independence, and Malaysia has remained under the Barisan Nasional since the coalition displaced the Alliance Party in 1973.

Both countries have struggled with managing their respective multiethnic demographics, but their disparate approaches were a significant source of conflict during the merger months. The delicate balance of ethnic Malay and Chinese interests continues to be a sensitive topic, with Malaysian nationalism imbued in the *Bumiputera* policy of positive discrimination – particularly in the face of Singapore's ethnic Chinese majority.

Today, Malaysia has diversified its production-based economy. Under the Najib administration, the state is working towards growing domestic markets. A sophisticated regulatory regime shields the country from financial risk and global crises, but vulnerability in the ever-important export sector remains, especially in electronics, oil, gas, palm oil and rubber. Najib's propositions to reduce the preferential treatment afforded to ethnic Malays were predictably met with domestic opposition, despite their potential to attract foreign investors.

While both countries declare themselves democracies, they remain targets of media criticism for autocratic practices

Unlike Malaysia, Singapore has little to offer in the way of natural resources, but has instead drawn her economy from its strategic position as a port. While also largely dependent on exports, the country specialises in consumer electronics, information technology, pharmaceuticals and financial services. Led by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, efforts to reverse a recent growth slump are underway, with projects in place to train locals for positions currently filled by foreigners. Singapore maintains her status as the financial and high-tech hub of Southeast Asia, attractive to investors owing to political stability and apparent low levels of corruption. ♦ AG

TWO ROADS DIVERGED

1954 People's Action Party (PAP) formed

1957 The 11 states comprising the Federation of Malaysia gain independence from the British

1959 The PAP wins a mandate to form the government, winning 42 of the 51 seats

1963 Singapore reclaims independence from the British and becomes a state in the Federation of Malaysia

1965 Singapore is expelled from the Federation of Malaysia. Secretary-general of the PAP, Lee Kuan Yew, becomes the first prime minister

1967 Singapore and Malaysia are among the founding members of ASEAN

1969 Malaysia's Alliance Party loses seats to the opposition. Prime minister Tengku Abdul Rahman resigns

1970 The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) is established; Malaysia's New Economic Policy is created

1973 Barisan Nasional is formed, a coalition of 14 political parties from the right and centre

1984 First two opposition members elected to parliament in Singapore

1990 Lee Kuan Yew steps down as prime minister, and Goh Chok Tong succeeds him

1995 Barisan Nasional wins the general election with an 84-percent majority

1999 S R Nathan becomes the president of Singapore without election

2005 Singapore and Malaysia settle land reclamation dispute in border waters

2008 Barisan Nasional coalition remains the ruling party with 140 seats. Opposition parties later form the Pakatan Rakyat coalition with 82 seats. BN loses two-thirds majority required to pass amendments in Federal Constitution

2011 General elections in Singapore. The opposition wins about 40 percent of votes. Rattled, the PAP launches a string of campaigns to humanise their policies

2016 Anti-government protests in Kuala Lumpur call for the resignation of Najib after financial scandal; Najib remains prime minister

THE PARTIES



People's Action Party

The PAP has remained Singapore's ruling party since 1965. While seen as efficient and development-focused, the party has been criticised for its non-populist policies and technocratic approach to development. The PAP is working hard to alter this image, particularly following losses in the 2011 general elections. The PAP was re-elected with a 70-percent majority in 2015. Other contenders include the Workers' Party and the Singapore Democratic Party.

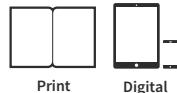


Barisan Nasionalis

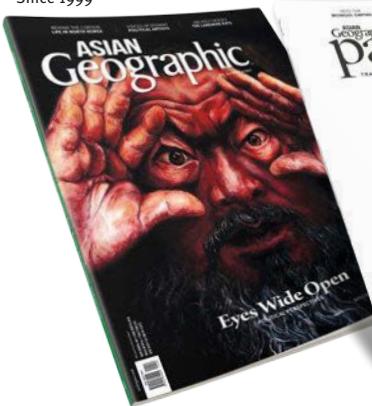
Barisan Nasionalis is the longest-ruling coalition in the democratic world. Headed by UMNO, the BN has championed many notable national schemes, including the *Bumiputera* policies that favour ethnic Malays in education, business, and other aspects of Malaysian society. Other contenders in Malaysia include Pakatan Harapan ("Coalition of Hope"), the People's Justice Party, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, and other small parties.

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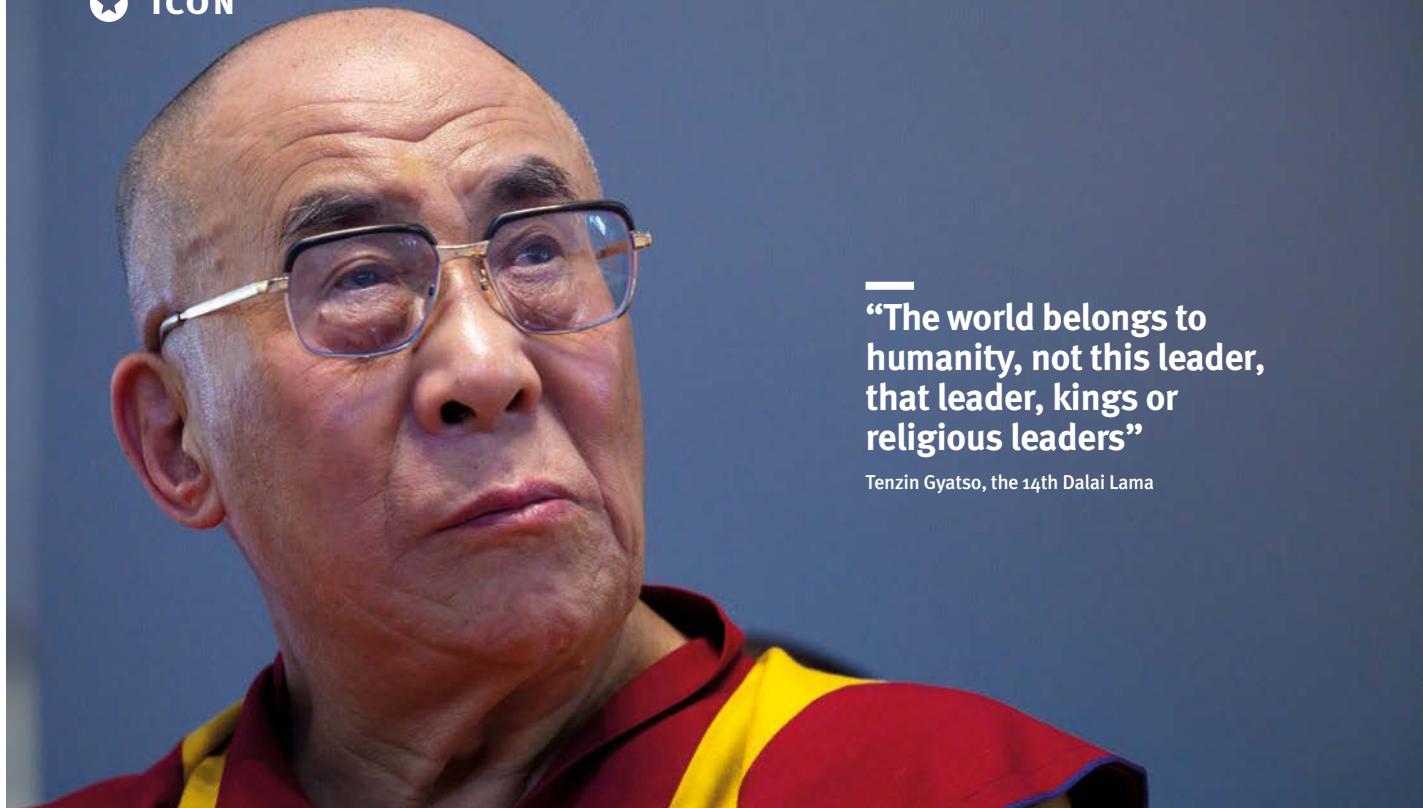
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“The world belongs to humanity, not this leader, that leader, kings or religious leaders”

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

IMAGE © SHUTTERSTOCK

The Dalai Lama

TIBET'S SPIRITUAL LEADER AND PURVEYOR OF PEACE

The spiritual leader of Tibet, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was born on July 6, 1935. He was recognised as the reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama at the age of two. The Dalai Lamas are believed to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the patron saint of Tibet. Bodhisattvas are inspired by a desire to attain Buddhahood with the purpose of being reborn in the world to help humanity. His monastic education culminated in a Geshe Lharampa degree – the highest doctorate in Buddhist philosophy.

In 1950, China invaded Tibet, and the Dalai Lama assumed political power. After nine years of oppression,

protests erupted in the capital, Lhasa, against the continued presence of the Chinese in the country. The rebellion failed, and led to a brutal crackdown on independence movements. Forced to flee, the Dalai Lama established the Tibetan government in exile, the Central Tibetan Administration, in Dharamsala, northern India, where he has been based since.

The Dalai Lama has campaigned extensively for the freedom and democratisation of Tibet. His 1963 “Charter of Tibetans in Exile” outlined guidelines for an administration. In 1992, this administration released guidelines for a free Tibet, with the aim of electing a constitutional assembly. Lobsang Tenzin was elected

as Chairman of the Cabinet in 2001 – a milestone for Tibet, as the people elected their political leader.

In 2011, the Dalai Lama requested that he retire from his temporal authority, announcing that he was ending the tradition by which Dalai Lamas had gained and wielded authority in Tibet. He resumed the status of the first four Dalai Lamas, concerning himself with spiritual affairs. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his commitment to seeking reconciliation between Tibet and China, despite brutal violations.

His attempts to restore peace and human rights set negotiations in motion, but the proposal was rejected by the Chinese government. ♦ AG

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