ASEAN HAS A LONG LIST of responses to transboundary issues in the region, including haze, amphibians and natural disasters. ASEAN has learned from these crises by putting into place workable regional mechanisms to coordinate responses across borders and jurisdictional boundaries. Still, there are gaps and challenges, requiring ever flexible adaptation to new or emerging realities.

Serious episodes of smoke haze from peatland forest fires affected countries in maritime Southeast Asia throughout the late-1980s and 1990s, worsening to a then-unprecedented level in 1997-1998. Recurring regularly since then, 2015 is seeing the worst spreading of haze from Indonesia's Sumatra and Kalimantan provinces to major cities in Malaysia and Singapore and other ASEAN shores including Thailand, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 followed by the H1N1 Asian Flu spread rapidly across the borders of several ASEAN countries, requiring flexible arrangements to sovereignty in tracking and containing the spread of the virus across borders. The social and economic costs of SARS induced the ASEAN Health Ministers to convene special meetings with their counterpart from China (the country of origin) to receive full information and updates on the SARS situation there. The devastating impact of the Indian Ocean tsunami on coastal cities in Indonesia and Thailand in 2004, the 2008 Cyclone Nargis humanitarian crisis in Myanmar, and Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, have shown that regional collaboration can catalyse or facilitate better responses.

This is nowhere more evident than in the spate of haze transboundary issues in the region during the past two decades. The haze crisis of 2015 shows unprecedented levels of air pollution that continue to hover between hazardous and unhealthy to highly hazardous range. But no special meetings of the ministers on haze have been convened, although bilateral meetings have taken place among ministers of Indonesia and Malaysia, and Indonesia and Singapore. The haze has also affected President Joko Widodo’s attempt to be more hands-on in tackling this issue; his planned visit (in September) to the ‘ground zero’ areas in Sumatra and Kalimantan had to be cancelled due to the haze causing poor visibility below the legal minimum. Yet, local authorities have been reluctant to declare states of emergency in the affected areas, and seem more concerned with “looking good” in the upcoming regional elections.

This highlights the political nature of regional responses and the reality that ASEAN countries will be more responsive to their domestic priorities over collective regional interests. ASEAN wide initiatives have thus had limited success in managing the haze crisis in 2015. Even if the Indonesian ratification, and despite the commitment of President Joko Widodo and some members of his administration, Indonesia’s decentralized government structure has shown weak enforcement of the agreement’s provisions.

The deadline for applications is 31 March 2016.

Applications should be sent to the following address:
ATTN: Buddhist Studies, Post-Doctoral/Visiting Fellowship Application
Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre,
HIS Institute
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace, Singapore 119618

To find out more about our Centre, please visit
http://nsc.iseeas.edu.sg

Visiting Fellowship in Buddhist Studies

The Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore encourages researchers to pursue research on historical interactions among Asian societies and civilizations. The Centre is now accepting applications for Visiting Fellowship positions from scholars at all ranks who wish to undertake research and writing under the following themes:

1. Buddhist History in Southeast Asia
2. Buddhist networks between Southeast Asia and other Asian countries
3. Buddhist Archaeology, Material Culture and Art in Southeast Asia

The Visiting Fellowship will be for one year, with the possibility of extension. Post-doctoral applicants are also welcome but should have graduated with a PhD no longer than three years prior to their successful appointment at NSC. Commencement date will be from June 2016.

Responsibilities
Successful applicants are expected to complete a paper on the proposed topic (to be published in a peer-reviewed journal), organise or contribute to a workshop, and give a public seminar hosted by ISEAS. They are also expected to contribute to the intellectual environment of NSC and assist in developing NSC’s publications series where possible.

Fellowship benefits
Successful applicants will receive a monthly (all-inclusive) stipend that is commensurate with higher rank and experience. A round-trip economy airfare between the home country of the researcher and Singapore will also be provided (applicable to non-Singaporeans only).

Application
Applicants should include with their application a cover letter, a full CV, two reference letters, and a research proposal of not more than five pages (double spaced). The proposal should discuss the topic to be examined, plans for any fieldwork, project timeline, and envisaged research outcomes for the period of the fellowship should also be indicated.

Moe Thuzar

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Enquiries
Please contact Mr Ang Swee Loh, Deputy Head of Administration
(sweeloh@iseas.edu.sg)
Tel: (65) 67 78 09 55

References
1 Estimates calculated some years later placed the total loss at about US$5 billion.
2 The ratification process for the regional haze agreement followed that of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty of 1995, which required 7 ratifications to enter into force. The motivation for a faster timeline for the haze agreement to enter into force was due to concerns by the environment ministers that implementation of the agreement would be delayed if it was not ratified by all ASEAN members to ratify it.
3 The ASEAN Peatland Forests Project funded by the Global Environment Facility (2009-2014), and the EU-funded project on Sustainable Management of Peatlands in Southeast Asia.
4 At ‘ground zero’ in Kalimantan, the air pollution level was ten times more than what Singapore or Malaysia experienced on the Pollution Standard Index.

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