Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak called for foreign intervention to stop the "genocide" of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar on 4 December, as he joined thousands of Rohingya protesters in Kuala Lumpur. The UN has warned the Myanmar government that the new government’s reputation is at stake.

Malaysia has been increasingly critical of Myanmar’s handling of violence and allegations of state abuses in northern Rakhine state and Najib has called on the United Nations, the International Criminal Court and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to intervene.

Najib’s attendance at the protest of 10,000 people – mostly Rohingya, came despite warnings from Myanmar that Malaysia risked violating the ASEAN principle of non-interference in other members’ internal affairs.

Najib responded saying that ASEAN members had pledged in its charter to uphold basic human rights and he also accused Aung San Suu Kyi of inaction, revealing that she had declared the Rohingya issue off-limits during bilateral discussions.

Adama Dieng, the UN’s special adviser on the prevention of genocide, has warned that the reputation of Aung San Suu Kyi’s government is at stake as international concern on how the government is dealing with violence.

Aung San Suu Kyi has responded to the criticism and accusations, saying she wants to improve the situation but called for understanding from the international community as the issue is a highly sensitive and delicate matter.

"...I’m not saying there are no difficulties, but it helps if people recognise the difficulty and are more focused on resolving these difficulties rather than exaggerating them so that everything seems worse than it really is," she said.

Source: UNHCR Malaysia

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Reuters (4 December 2016)
Channel News Asia (2 December 2016)
Reuters (29 November 2016)
ASEAN countries are bracing for rising debt bills as the region’s currencies are at their weakest in a decade. The amount that the area’s companies, banks and governments must repay on dollar-denominated bonds will rise 8 percent next year.

The currency slide hasn’t been as bad as in other emerging markets because ASEAN is more insulated now after the region expanded its local debt markets following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, but borrowers must repay 8% more on dollar bonds next year to US$19.7 billion.

Thailand has vowed to work for the region as a whole in taking the lead in the formation of an ASEAN common fisheries policy to create sustainable development in marine resources throughout the region, solve the problem of illegal fishing, and promote sustainable fishery management.

Thailand’s Agriculture Minister Chatchai Sarikulya made the vow during the two-day “Asia Regional Conference on Building Ocean Health: Sharing experience to move towards sustainable fisheries management” in Seoul, that ended on 30 November.

“The ASEAN community, as a major food and marine producer sharing common waters, should manage the region’s marine resources with common goals and directions, with our eyes on long-term sustainability of the regional marine resources – in particular, the fishery sector. After collaboration, a clear and tangible outcome of ASEAN marine sustainability should be seen within the year 2019,” the minister said.

Thailand will host the “ASEAN Ministers’ Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry” next March, and a seminar in July, at which policymakers, government officers, practitioners and experts from all over the world can exchange experiences.

After these two gatherings, “everyone should move forward together without leaving anyone or any sector behind”, Chatchai told the conference, adding that the region could also join forces with South Korea, China and Japan under ASEAN+3 to promote cooperation in sustainable fishery for the whole region.
US SHIFTS MILLIONS OF DOLLARS AWAY FROM PHILIPPINES DRUG CRACKDOWN

Of the US$5 million that had been intended for Philippines law enforcement efforts, the United States in early September shifted US$4.5 million into maritime law enforcement and another US$500,000 to human rights and internal reform efforts.

- About three-quarters of the killings took place in police counter-narcotics operations and the rest is believed to be the victims of vigilantes or drug lords eliminating rivals or possible snitches
- The US has also halted the planned sale of 26,000 assault rifles to the Philippines' national police
- In recent years, the United States has sent the Philippines hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid and military and development assistance, making it the third-largest Asian recipient of US military aid after Afghanistan and Pakistan

THAILAND’S PARLIAMENT NAMES NEW KING IN FORMAL PROCLAMATION

Thailand’s parliament named Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn as the new king on 29 November, completing a formal step for the heir to take the throne following the death of his father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, who died at the age of 88 on 13 October this year.

- Following a 1924 law on succession, the cabinet submitted Vajiralongkorn’s name to the National Assembly after a brief meeting, where members formally acknowledged him as the new monarch
- Vajiralongkorn, Bhumibol’s second child and only son, was designated to be the king’s successor in 1972
- The love life of the now 64-year-old Vajiralongkorn has often been the source of gossip, as he has seven children with his three ex-wives
- The exact date of the coronation is unknown and will happen only after the cremation of King Bhumibol, which may take place a year or more after his death,
PHILIPPINES UNVEILS NEW INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

The Philippines' Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) revealed on 28 November the government's new industrial strategy that focuses on industries where the Philippines has existing and potential comparative advantage.

- Speaking at the Manufacturing Summit 2016, DTI Secretary Ramon Lopez said the strategy aims to generate employment and promote entrepreneurship.
- The strategy's top five industry priorities include manufacturing, agribusiness, information technology-business process management (IT-BPM), tourism, and infrastructure and logistics.
- Citing the fact that the Philippines is the fastest growing economy in Asia with a 7.1% recorded growth in the third quarter of 2016, Lopez said that the Philippines outpaced other countries like China (6.7%) and Vietnam (6.4%).
- Lopez called on stakeholders to take advantage of the huge export market created by the ASEAN Economic Community, as well as the potentials with the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

SINGAPORE TOPS GLOBAL EDUCATION RANKINGS

Singaporean primary and secondary pupils scored the highest in an international education tests in maths and science, and the rest of the top places in these rankings were dominated by East Asian countries.

- The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), published every four years, is based on tests taken by more than 600,000 students, aged 9-10 and 13-14 in 57 countries.
- Despite Singapore's international success in tests, the Ministry of Education in Singapore recently produced an advert with a message that education is more than about getting high grades, in response to concerns about too much pressure on Singapore's youth.
- “The most important common factor to success was the quality and status of teaching”, said TIMSS director Michael Martin, “and Singapore's achievement reflected that it had made education a priority.”

Looking at the long-term trend of over 20 years of testing, it is evident that the class sizes are getting smaller, although there is no apparent link between class sizes and level of achievement.