

MAJAS MEMBER LECTURE SERIES



Dr. Mohd Ikbal Mohd Huda
Moderator

Speakers:

1. Dr. Geetha Govindasamy

“Regime Change and Malaysia-Japan
Relations: Explaining Shifts and
Continuity in Foreign Policy”

2. Dr. Muhammad Danial Azman

“Another Case of Look East Policy?
Malaysia Response Towards China’s and
Japan’s Infrastructure Investment and
Economic Arrangements”

 17 December 2020 (Thu)  12.30 – 2.30 pm  is.gd/b42W1F (Microsoft Teams)

Jointly organised by:



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REGIME CHANGE AND MALAYSIA-JAPAN RELATIONS: EXPLAINING SHIFTS AND CONTINUITY IN FOREIGN POLICY

The talk offers an initial exploration into the causal linkage between domestic political regime changes and foreign policy restructuring. While not popular, the notion that foreign policy objectives are more often than not shaped by internal dynamics is rather true in the Malaysian case. The discussion examines Malaysia's relations with Japan during the Pakatan Harapan government which began in May 2018 but collapsed by February 2020. After being sworn in as the Prime Minister of Malaysia for the second time, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad pledged to re-energise the Look East Policy (LEP) to facilitate economic growth and investments into the country. Though the move was far from surprising, the consequence of the development needs to be understood within the broader context of Malaysia's domestic ties with China. Malaysia's move to expand cooperation with Japan can be explained by a desire to reduce overreliance on Chinese investments. The basic premise of the talk is that Malaysia was not tilting towards Japan, rather the move to court Shinzo Abe administration through the LEP 2.0 was a function of regime legitimization through which Pakatan Harapan diversified its foreign policy partners for the goal of expanding investment and collaboration opportunities.



Dr. Geetha Govindasamy is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of East Asian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. She obtained her M. Phil in Oriental Studies from Queens' College Cambridge University, M.A in International Relations from the International University of Japan and a PhD in International Relations from Monash University. She is a committee member of the Malaysian Association of Japanese Studies and a member of the Malaysian Scholars on Korea (MASK) Network. She teaches and publishes on inter-Korean relations, Korean foreign policy and East Asian international relations. Her publications can mostly be found in international journals like the Asian Perspective, International Journal of Korean Unification, Asia Europe Journal, International Review of Korean Studies, Asian Profile and the Journal of Asian and African Studies.

Dr. Muhammad Danial Azman is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya. He obtained his PhD in International Relations from University of St Andrews, UK. His teaching and research interest is on Africa-Asia Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies.



ANOTHER CASE OF LOOK EAST POLICY? MALAYSIA RESPONSE TOWARDS CHINA'S AND JAPAN'S INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC ARRANGEMENTS

Powerful states often use tools of economic statecraft, such as foreign aid and other financial policy instruments, in a bid to "purchase" influence as well as establish regional leadership among their neighbours. How do Malaysia respond to this precarious turbulence? This presentation examines the response of Malaysia's Pakatan Harapan (PH) (May 2018-December 2019) attempts to renegotiate a better deal with China while renewing ties with Japan. Based on a fieldwork among the Malaysian economic authorities, this study proposes an account of the first reforms, focusing on the measures taken regarding China and renewed economic interests with Japan. It appears that cooperation between Malaysia and the two East Asian giants is rapidly reconfiguring itself, but not moving towards a rift: the relationship is deepening within the negotiated dependence on China, while it is through the idiosyncratic role of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and his renewed interests in Japan. Thus, the emulation and competition between China and Japan have led to the process of foreign policy diffusion in Malaysia. The competition between these two foreign aid leaders in East Asia especially after China's Belt and Road Initiative has shaped the region's infrastructure development dynamics, as PH government strive for a better foreign policy deal that reflect the political sensitivity of Malaysia's domestic development. Such equilibrium through the policy diffusion process has important implications on Malaysia's foreign policy outlook upon China and Japan.