

DIPLOMATIC VOICE

A TRIANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE
INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN
RELATIONS, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
MALAYSIA

ISSN 2289-1277

Welcoming Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah

IDFR congratulates Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah for once again being appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs on 30 August 2021. He was the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the first term from 2018 to 2020.

On 1 September, the Minister announced through a press release that his immediate task within the first one hundred days of the new government is to establish the foreign policy framework with the theme *Focus in Continuity*. The framework will provide guidance on Malaysia's direction, focus and approaches on Foreign Policy.

According to the press release, *Focus* will deal with short-term priorities and challenges in the following five areas: to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact; to emphasise on investments in digital economy and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals; to boost cybersecurity; to promote cultural diplomacy in Malaysia's effort to enhance its national identity, and lastly, to articulate the



concept of peaceful coexistence in the context of multiculturalism.

In terms of *Continuity*, Malaysia will continue to practise its long-held fundamental principles in its international relations. These include maintaining good relations with all parties; upholding Malaysia's interests in terms

of sovereignty, survival, and security; its economic interests and the peoples' prosperity; and protecting and promoting the nation's identity and reputation.

As the training arm of the Ministry, IDFR will support and uphold the core thrusts to the framework. As part of the institute's annual programme, the Workshop on Intercultural Awareness and Cultural Diplomacy, Cultural Diplomacy Lecture Series, and the Cultural Appreciation Day will be maintained. The institute's first Cultural Diplomacy Roundtable Discussion – a two-day programme aimed at establishing the fundamental direction of cultural diplomacy practices in Malaysia was also held in 2021. Finally, starting 2022, IDFR will be offering a course on Malaysia's culture and identity for newly-arrived diplomats based in Kuala Lumpur. These and other similar programmes are expected to contribute to the understanding of Malaysia's unique culture and the importance of cultural diplomacy.

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SHAPING A NEW
GENERATION OF
MALAYSIAN
DIPLOMATS
1991-2021

Deficit of Passion and Dearth of Creativity: Why We May Lose the War against Extremism and Terrorism and How We Can Avoid This

Thomas Koruth Samuel

Introduction

The ability of extremists and violent extremist¹ organisations to identify, radicalise and recruit individuals and other groups to fight for them is a cause of grave concern. What do these groups possess that enable them to thrive in this asymmetric conflict against nation-states?

Perhaps the time has come for the authorities to review our counter-measures and to take stock by not only focusing on the 'kinetic' measures taken against violent extremists but to also consider other elements that could be equally as important.

Deficit of Passion

Though equipped with unrivalled technology, state of the art weapons and tried and tested warfare doctrines, perhaps we are still lacking in certain areas. Scott Atran highlighted a conversation he had with a cleric who was also a recruiter for the *Islamic State* on the Syria-Jordan border. The cleric said, "Look, the people who come to us, come to us with passion....."²

Could it be that we are facing a 'passion-deficit'?

Simply put, we might have the brains and the brawn, but do we have the heart?

Indeed, at times it is not just asymmetric warfare we witness but an even greater asymmetry of passion. Perhaps, those of us

involved in counter-terrorism have forgotten what is at stake: that at the end of the day, we have collectively failed should a terrorist attack take place or an individual get radicalised. Hence, the reality is that while the extremist has a vocation and a calling of how he or she wants to shape the world, we, on the other hand, might just be having a job that pays the bills. Abdul-Rehman Malik from the Radical Middle Way summed it up well when he said,

*"So how do you then bridge this asymmetry of passion? You have one small group of people who are very passionate, and a large group of people who oppose the smaller group but are not necessarily passionate in the same way. And that's a real dilemma."*³

What then can we do?

Firstly, we need to assess if we have the right people to begin with in our efforts to counter both extremism and violent extremism. If we don't, perhaps we need to hire people who are passionate about what they do. We could start by getting victims of terrorism and former rehabilitated terrorists and institutionalise their presence through both formal and informal ways, in our counter-terrorism programmes. Victims of terrorism have a unique voice and provide a 'powerful emotional narrative'⁴ that 'need not only be heard, but ought to be amplified'.⁵ Rehabilitated terrorists on the other hand, with their experience and what they have undergone,

have the 'street cred' that makes them compelling counter-voices against the terrorist narratives⁶.

Secondly, we have to actively search and retain policy-makers, law enforcement officials and researchers who will give it their all, and like the extremists, want to be in no other place but in this battle to win the 'hearts and minds' of the people. I personally know of a fellow researcher who stumbled upon a Malaysian youth who was openly sympathising with a well-known terrorist over social media. The researcher in question got in touch with the young boy, started engaging with him, gently persuaded him by showing him the 'real-picture' on the ground and succeeded in changing his mind over time. Not only did this youth avoid the fate that sadly affects so many well-meaning but naive young people but he subsequently chronicled his experience over social media detailing his change of heart. It all started with a passionate researcher who went beyond his immediate KPI.

Scarcity of Creativity

'Insanity' according to Albert Einstein, was 'doing the same thing over and over again, and expecting different results.' Perhaps the time is ripe for us to reevaluate and even introduce new strategies in preventing and countering violent extremism. In this regard, Navarro and Villaverde highlighted the importance of 'loads of imagination' and 'creative foresight'⁷ However, it

is unfortunate to note that most of the approaches to counter-terrorism tend to focus only on problem-solving. In other words, the authorities assume a 'well-defined, conventional problem and attempt to solve that'. On the other hand, *creative* problem-finding seeks to reevaluate the nature of the problem and then attempts to consider if the right problem is being addressed to begin with.⁸

It is indeed sad to note that the scarcity of creativity and want of imagination in preventing and countering violent extremism has led us to use 'yesterday's methods' to solve 'tomorrow's problems'. In this regard, we have sadly mistaken 'output' for 'impact'. The focus is on continuing to do what we have always done. Hence, we solely look at number of courses conducted, number of tool-guides produced, and number of papers churned, regardless if it makes a difference. Little creativity is needed if our focus is solely on output. On the other hand, it is difficult to make an impact without some degree of creativity. Please do not get me wrong: courses, tool-guides and papers are important but without creativity, the potential for them making a significant difference is very small. The same, however, cannot be said about the extremists. James, Clark and Cropanzano highlighted that a 'great deal of creative effort (was) done in the service of negative ends'⁹ or as some experts have noted, 'the dark side of creativity' which often times has been displayed via violent extremism.¹⁰

Perhaps, the time is right for an overhaul. The 9/11 Commission Report reiterated that the lack of imagination was one of the major reasons the attack was not prevented.¹¹ In his article

'Terrorist Threat Demands Creative Intelligence', Dominic Contreras quoted a former Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officer who observed that there was 'a deficit in creative thinking regarding counter-terrorism...'¹²

In this regard, it is significant to ask if the system and institution in place allows for unorthodox and unconventional strategies and tactics to counter both extremism and violent extremism. Hence, while we continue to work with ideas and strategies that have and are working, we nevertheless need to look out for creative measures to reach out to, engage with and impact our target audience.

For this to happen, there is firstly the need to get such imaginative and creative people on our side. This could prove challenging as Navarro and Villaverde observed that 'imagination is not common in bureaucracies.'¹³ Getting such creative people who think 'outside of the box' is imperative, leading the 9/11 Commission Report to suggest that it was 'crucial to find ways of routinizing, even bureaucratizing, the exercise of imagination.'¹⁴ In this regard, it might even be necessary to look for such people beyond the field of counter-terrorism. This point was reiterated by Richard Clarke, the National Counter-Terrorism Coordinator for the National Security Council who admitted that his 'awareness about the possible use of airplanes as weapons (came more) from Tom Clancy novels than warnings from the intelligence community.'¹⁵ Hence, while real-time data and on the ground intelligence are vital, it is at times creativity that enables us to 'connect the dots' and predict the next move. In this regard, imagination plays an important role in anticipating the

next move of violent extremists,¹⁶ developing strategies at the tactical and operational level in countering terrorism and initiating programmes and activities at the community level to tackle the root causes of terrorism.

It is significant to note that having this creativity is no longer an option for us, for as Ramakrishna observed, the violent extremist is 'now a highly contagious and rapidly self-propagating viral meme, jumping from one vulnerable mind to another' and that to counter this, 'more than ever, strategic creativity in counter-terrorism is needed.'¹⁷ This was reiterated by Benjamin and Simon, who when referring to Al Qaeda, made this chilling observation, "They are genuinely creative, and their ingenuity and desire to inflict massive casualties will continue to drive them ..."¹⁸

Conclusion

The recent events unfolding in Afghanistan has clearly shown us the limitations of relying solely on hard power and the military to resolve violent extremism. On the other hand, the impact of passion and creativity, as witnessed in numerous other fields, has been well researched and documented. Perhaps the time has come to find ways to support, institutionalise and mainstream creativity and passion in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism. After all, any individual or organisation that has made a significance in this world, did so by being passionate, or creative, or both.

Endnotes

¹The term 'violent extremists' and 'terrorists' are used interchangeably.

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¹³Jose Maria Blanco Navarro and Jessica Cohen Villaverde, 'The Future of Counter-Terrorism in Europe. The Need to be Lost in the Correct Direction' for 'The Future of Europe' published online on 5 December 2014.

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¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Kumar Ramakrishna, "Lessons from Boston Bombings: Need for Strategic Creativity in Counter-Terrorism", *RSIS Commentaries No 079/2013*, 29 April 2013.

¹⁸Benjamin, D. and Simon, S. 2002. *The Age of Sacred Terror*. Random House, Inc., New York.

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A Tale of Two-State Solution: The Pre-1967 Borders of Palestine and Israel

Farhatul Mustamirrah Mahamad Aziz

Introduction

The establishment of a Jewish State, Israel as we know today, is not the first attempt to overcome Anti-Semitism. Assimilation of the Jews into the other society and conversion to other religion were the way of life of a majority of the Jews in surviving extreme Anti-Semitism during the 19th century. But the political crisis of 1894, known as the Dreyfus Affair, later became the driving force behind the dream of having a Jewish State led by the founding father of modern Zionism known as Theodor Herzl. Alfred Dreyfus was an assimilated Jewish officer in the French army who was framed for *espionage* despite evidence pointing to his innocence. He was later court-martialed, convicted, and sent to the Devil's Island. Herzl was the journalist covering the case during that time and such event made him realise that assimilation will not solve the problem of Anti-Semitism. A better

option for Jews is Zionism which envisions that the outcast of the world would return *en masse* to a land which they had been exiled 2000 years earlier by establishing a modern political Jewish state. The movement called Zionism had already existed for decades. Since the 1860s, thousands of Jews have been immigrating and building communities in what was then Ottoman-controlled Palestine. Most of these people were escaping harsh condition of Anti-Semitism. One of the important figures for this movement was Leon Pinsker who founded the Lovers of Zion movement 15 years before the rise of Herzl. Herzl later managed to turn this informal movement into a modern political nationalist movement and revive the idea that Jews were a nation.

The Origin of Two-State Solution

Fast forward 50 years later, following World War II and the inauguration of the United

Nations, the General Assembly resolved that a Special Committee be created to "prepare for consideration at the next regular session of the Assembly a report on the question of Palestine." It consisted of the representatives of Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia. In the final report of 3 September 1947, seven members of the Committee in Chapter VI "expressed themselves, by recorded vote, in favour of the Plan of Partition with Economic Union." The Plan proposed "an independent Arab State, an independent Jewish State, and the City of Jerusalem." In the Report of 3 September 1947, 33 voted in favour, 13 against, and 10 abstentions. Within a few days of Israel officially declared an independent state in May 1948, a full-scale Jewish-Arab fighting broke out in Palestine. This failed attempt by the Arab nations was

the first of Arab-Israeli war with a series of war ensuing in later years.

The following Arab-Israeli war in 1967, also known as the Six Day war, resulted in Resolution 242. In the war, Israel invaded the West Bank, including East Jerusalem from Jordan, Golan Heights from Syria, and Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsular from Egypt. Resolution 242 pointed out the “inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East in which every state in the area can live in security.” For several years after Resolution 242, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria interpreted Resolution 242 in unison. It meant that Israel must give back all the territories occupied in the war, and until Israel does so, the Arab League declared that it would have no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations. The problem is the conspicuous condition of the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the 1967 confrontation. The Resolution did not specify the timeline and the extent of the withdrawal of the occupied territories. The Resolution neither commands nor prohibits total withdrawal. As a result, Israel never fully withdrew from those occupied territories.

However, even Resolution 242 was never fully implemented and rejected by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). It became the ground for diplomatic efforts with the sub-text of addressing the issues of the Palestinian people like the Camp David Accords of 1978. This accord took place after the Yom Kippur war in 1973 fought between Egypt and Syria against Israel which resulted in the Israel-Egypt Treaty of 1979. Jimmy Carter was able to

facilitate the discussion and peace negotiations between Egypt and Israel. It was supposed to be “A Framework of Peace in the Middle East” which was again intended to deal with the Palestinian issues. Notwithstanding, like Resolution 242, the language used in this framework was ambiguous and inconclusive that it left both sides to interpret it differently. It left the Palestinian question being ignored once again while also making Israel less open to any future discussions on Palestine.

Another effort, mediated by Bill Clinton, was the Oslo Accords of 1993 between Israel and the PLO. These accords were a series of talks, mediations, and negotiations aimed at finally addressing the two-state solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. The accords called for: 1) Israel to withdraw from Jericho and Gaza, and eventually the West Bank, 2) five years of limited autonomy for Palestinians in those areas, and 3) the establishment of a Palestinian Police Force. The question of Jerusalem, however, was left undecided. In later years, the Gaza-Jericho Agreement of 1994 was signed in continuance of the Oslo Accords, with Yasser Arafat becoming the first President of the Palestinian authority.

Challenges to Achieve the Two-State Solution

The following years witnessed the adversity in addressing the Palestinian issues when Saudi Arabia proposed the Arab Peace Initiatives in 2002, setting conditions for Arab-Israeli peace related to territory, Palestinian statehood, Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees. President George W. Bush made the two-state official United States’ policy

in connection with efforts to end Israeli-Palestinian violence and promote Palestinian National Authority (PNA) reform efforts through the Roadmap for Peace. The initiative offered normalisation of relations by the Arab world with Israel, in return for a full withdrawal by Israel from the occupied territories, including the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and Lebanon, a “just settlement” of the Palestinian refugee problem based on UN Resolution 194, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

However, the PNA under Mahmoud Abbas lost the 2006 legislative elections to Harakat Al-Muqawwama Al-Islamiyya or Hamas. This event further complicated the already contorted effort for peace process because United States’ support is only limited to Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah movement. Hamas ideologically opposed the existence of Israel and denounced the 1993 Oslo Accords.

The release of Trump’s Vision for Peace further deteriorated the already delicate security situation. The so-called peace plan outright rejected the Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem and proposed a series of Palestinian enclaves surrounded by the larger Israel. The peace plan is troubling even for the people of Israel due to the fear of resistance from Hamas.

Reflection on Two-State Solution: Why is it a Tale?

The two-state solution accentuates an independent state of Palestine and Israel, existing as neighbours thus bringing the much-needed peace to that region. In this context the two-state solution envisions the state of Palestine alongside

the state of Israel emphasising on the pre-1967 borders. The claim on pre-1967 border itself is problematic. There is no consensus on what is pre-1967 borders, even with Resolution 242, due to the ambiguity of its condition. The League of Arabs wanted to decide on border before the Six-Day war but Israel, due to its refusal to withdraw from occupied territories as per Resolution 242, already occupied the said borders by building illegal settlements especially in the West Bank.

Another contentious area is the City of Jerusalem. The two-state solution calls for dividing the Holy site into an Israeli West and a Palestinian East. Yet, both sides claim Jerusalem as their capital and consider it a centre of religious worship and cultural heritage. The

effort to draw the line is futile by default.

The two-state solution has become a security concern especially for Israel. The 1948 "Catastrophe" or Nakba resulted in the mass exodus of Palestinians. If the two-state solution were to be realised, there will be a major shift of demographic majority with the return of the original refugees of displaced Palestinians and their descendants. Ironically, Benjamin Netanyahu even endorsed the two-state solution, but he continued to expand the West Bank settlements and even declared that there will be "no withdrawals" and "no concessions".

Internal political turmoil with two different government within Palestine is another impediment to any hope of peace. The leadership

in the West Bank lacks the political legitimacy to make the far-reaching but necessary concessions while the leadership in Gaza denounces the existence of Israel and is Israel's biggest threat.

The two-state solution started as a true resolution based on the Plan of Partition with Economic Union for Palestine and Israel. But due to clashes of interests, internally and externally, the two-state solution has become a tale, one that can only be envisioned but too far to grasp.

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The Return of the Men in Uniform

Istiq Nadzril Abd Kader

The coup headed by General Abdel-Fattah Burhan, going against the principle of a power-sharing transitional government headed with a civilian representation by Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok 2019, was not surprising. The military eventually supported the revolutionary movement and in July 2019 agreed to share power within the Sovereign Council. The arrangement: The initial 21 months would be led by a military figure, then 18 months of civilian leadership, followed by elections. It was a combustible alliance from its inception and was due to break sooner or later. Historically, since her independence, Sudan has experienced such a ruptured alliance, which ended with the military returning to power.

Another historic element that has always played an essential factor is the role of religion, particularly Islam, in the politics of the country. Islam has always played an integral part in social life in Sudan and still does to date. This is well observed during al-Bashir's regime and his predecessors, who used this force to legitimise their pre-eminence. Following the footsteps of the past, Burhan adopted a similar pattern of approaching the Islamist parties to garner support, with possible promises of the centrifugal role of Islam in his current setup or future administration, an area Hamdok's administration botched to pacify, i.e. the Islamic clerics and parties in his efforts to liberalise Sudan from the doldrums of traditional ideologies.

To solidify his coup, the tentacles of Burhan's support went further beyond the support of the security apparatus, military, and Islamist groups. The commander of the Rapid Security Forces (RSF), General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, better known as Hemetti, is a vital element to the success of the coup. Being the deputy to Burhan in the Transitional Sovereignty Council (TSC) and his forces stationed at the periphery of major cities, they can provide the necessary backup if the situation does not favour Burhan. Weeks leading up to the coup, Burhan had publicly reaffirmed that both their forces (Sudan Armed Forces [SAF] and RSF) were working in unity and coordination to protect the homeland and citizens. No

matter how shallow or inconsistent they might be, their alliance should have been taken seriously.

Apart from the above, the reformation that Hamdok hastily brought through the Empowerment Removal, Anti-Corruption, and Money Retrieving Committee, whose powers include “retrieving assets that were allegedly acquired through illegal means” under al-Bashir’s regime intimidated Burhan and several high ranking officials within the military and RSF. Apart from that, the reforms or rather liberalisations of the role of religion drew strong protest by the Islamist parties and clerics, who opined that state and religion are not separate; and the standard of morality among the populace was on a tailspin.

In general, Hamdok’s move was viewed as a danger to the military arm for many reasons. Firstly, under the cloud of the National Congress Party (NCP) during the previous regime, the military had its hands dipped in every aspect of the economy of the country known as Tamkeen, and a percentage farmed out to the political parties which were associated with them. Secondly, the manoeuvres orchestrated were seen to push the military and other security apparatus back into the barracks, which was unacceptable. Thirdly, though measures were undertaken to dismantle the NCP, such efforts were not able to decimate the network as well as the number of sympathisers of the old guard, the third force in Sudan politics. Fourthly, in comparison to Hamdok, Burhan had a stronger platform of an alliance, particularly from Egypt and the United Arab

Emirates, acting as accelerators and enablers to the SAF.

Given Burhan’s and the military’s firm control over the resources and Hamdok’s government’s failure to dismantle these structures, it was an advantage used to disrepute the civilian government. Having control over these outfits, Burhan and his cohorts acted by suffocating the country’s supply of fuel, wheat, and other necessities since the beginning of 2021. This resulted in unprecedented inflation rates i.e. nearly 400 per cent. The main purpose was to perpetuate the existing economic hardship and sow distrust against the civilian government, which gained traction among the civilians; tribal and rebel groups such as the Sudan Liberation Movement and Justice and Equality Movement. Additionally, it further deepened the splinter within the Forces for the Declaration of Freedom and Change (FDFC).

The US, the EU, and the UN Security Council have issued their positions on the situation. The US already linked its condemnation to consequences by immediately freezing USD700 million in assistance. The African Union (AU) called for dialogue and the release of the arrested political leaders. Meanwhile, the EU’s high representative, Josep Borrell, condemned the coup attempt and expressed concern but fell short of conditioning European support on the military restoring civilian rule to the transition. The failures in Syria, Libya, and Somalia in a certain way have withheld potential involvement on the ground. Saddled with current illegal migration from the African continent to Europe is another reason that a full-blown

conflict in Sudan should be avoided at all costs. If the situation evolves into a civil war, it would be a hotbed for ISIS, Al Shabaab, and throngs of other Islamist terrorist groups and fighters, like moths to flames. A condition the Western world would not aspire at this juncture.

Hence, the best option would be to work with Burhan to fulfill the commitment to preserve the civilian government, holding elections in 2023, developing strong institutions and the economy. This would not infer legitimising or recognising his or the military’s actions or rule but a measure to avoid the country from falling into another abyss of dictatorship. Sanctions and coercive measures would be tantamount to punishing the already battered daily lives of the people of the country and working against the aspirations of all stakeholders during the 2019 revolution that toppled Bashir. Hence, continuous constructive engagement by the concerned parties is important and the option of juggling with the model of an illiberal democracy with a liberal economy, strong institutions, national identity building, and rule of law may be the best possible option. It is imperative to avoid the country from being run aground into a chaos of civil war and to end the decades of Sudan’s political stagnation for all the reasons stated previously.

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Myanmar's Peace Process - A Forgotten “Collateral Damage”

Leena Ghosh

Myanmar caught the world's attention in February 2021 when the Military's (Tatmadaw) *coup d'état* thwarted the results of the elections in November 2020 in which the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung Sun Suu Kyi (DASSK), won with resounding success. While the world was contemplating the destruction and devastation in Myanmar in the aftermath of the coup, another tragedy was also unfolding at the same time in which much less information is known, namely, the Myanmar's Peace Process.

Myanmar obtained its independence in 1948. Despite their independence it has been ravaged and plagued by constant armed conflicts all over its land. This is not surprising considering that there are about 135 recognised ethnic groups in the country and others who may not have received recognition. The Myanmar Military is a force of nature and a constant key player in the power dynamics of the country. The main actors in these armed conflicts have been the Military and an ever-changing patchwork of armed groups¹. Most of these armed groups are now known as Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs).

In 2011, President U Thein Sein proceeded to “civilianised”² the military government making it into a “nominally civilian government”. They focused their efforts to achieve peace in fractious Myanmar. U Thein Sein's government created the peace process known as the “Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA)”. The NCA was different from the previous peace initiatives

conducted by the Military in that it moved from bilateral peace agreements to multilateral settings by creating a platform for political dialogue process for various peace stakeholders. It also provided an institutional framework for peace building. The road map for the new peace process comprised of seven steps: 1) Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, 2) Framework for Political Dialogue, 3) National Dialogue and Discussion and Preparation for Security Sector Reintegration, 4) Union Peace Dialogue, 5) Union Peace Accord, 6) Approval by Parliament and 7) Implementation of the Union Accord and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration as well as Security Sector Reform.

In 2015, 15 EAOs signed the NCA while 8 EAOs refrained.

In March 2016, the NLD took over the government and continued to implement and improve the previous government's peace process albeit using similar mechanisms with rebranded names. For example, the Myanmar Peace Centre was replaced by the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre (NRPC). The NRPC was established in July 2016 by Presidential decree to lead the peace process from the Government side. The NRPC was chaired by the State Counsellor, DASSK and functions under the State Counsellor's office, and included members from the Government, Tatmadaw and Hluttaw (de jure national-level bicameral legislature of Myanmar or Myanmar's Parliament in short). The NRPC was a key stakeholder in the peace process

and facilitated the participation of other key stakeholders in the process, particularly by organising, facilitating and/or supporting required meetings. DASSK's government continued discussions with all remaining EAOs to sign the NCA and moved towards a final political settlement and the Union Peace Accord.

In the 21st Century Panglong Peace Conference held in August 2016, nearly all of Myanmar's armed groups attended. Fifty-one agreed points of the Union Accord (a document intended to help bring an end to the world's longest-running civil war) was penned. Filled with enthusiasm for the successful conference, it was agreed that these conferences would be held every six months to maintain the momentum and bring the groups back to the negotiating table on a regular basis.

It should not be a surprise that NLD's efforts to move the peace process faced numerous challenges such as earlier peace initiatives casting its shadow over current processes and affecting the perceptions, priorities and fears of the participants. The pre-2016 ceasefire bilateral agreements between the Military and EAOs usually included a strong economic element and EAOs were granted extensive business concessions. Reaping the benefit of the ceasefire also led to war economies being deeply entrenched which complicated the achievement of lasting peace. Drugs, extractive industries of precious minerals, timber and natural resources became weapons of trade-war and leverage. Transnational crimes

flourished under the cloud of armed conflict.

The NLD knew that to move the peace process forward, they would need to convince the various groups of the peace-dividends that would result from engaging in the current peace process. Resources would be needed. Myanmar reached out for international support. They received the much-needed support among others, through the Joint Peace Fund (JPF) which was set up by international donors to support peace in Myanmar. In 2019, there were ten international donors: Australia, Canada, European Union, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

It appeared that the peace process in Myanmar was on course towards success. However, the events that happened in northern Rakhine State in 2016 and 2017 which led to the mass exodus of people living in Myanmar, namely, the Rohingyas, forever changed that course.

The events of 2016 and 2017 (“the incidents”) cannot be covered here. Suffice to say that international outrage supplied tremendous world pressure on Myanmar, leading the government to focus its attention almost exclusively on trying to defend its image and address the underlying causes of the incidents. Everything else was put aside. The Myanmar Peace Process became collateral damage as the key government officials involved in the peace process were diverted to address the diplomatic channels and other means in efforts to stem the world-wide anger against them. The EAOs and other political parties became frustrated at the lack of development on the peace process. The promised six monthly

21st Century Panglong Peace Conference did not take place. Some EAOs seized the opportunity provided by international condemnation to pressure the weakened government for more concessions.

Donors too had to respond to the international outrage by leveraging their support to the Government. It was clear that many donors were more inclined to support the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar than on the peace process. Donors that prioritised the peace process were adamant that anything that mentioned Rakhine would be doubly scrutinised to ensure that they were not assisting the Government in any action related to the Rohingya issue. No one expected or predicted the divisive outfall from the incidents and the international condemnation that followed which included a legal action at the International Court of Justice. Inroads made in the peace process were affected and ultimately the entire peace process slowed considerably. Compounded with the large number and complexity of Myanmar’s various ethnic conflicts and the amassing mistrust that have built up since independence in 1948, the Myanmar Peace Process has always been frail, fraught, and fractious. Now it seems it also suffered from being a forgotten aspect of Myanmar’s delicate nation building post the incidents. The Government resumed its peace negotiations and two additional ethnic armed groups, the New Mon State Party and the Lahu Democratic Union signed the NCA in 2018.

Similarly, when the coup occurred in February 2021, Myanmar’s Peace Process came to a grinding halt. Blatant human rights abuses and humanitarian law infringements by

the Military spurred the people of Myanmar to put aside their ethnic differences and fight a common “enemy” i.e. the Military. To some, this may be considered a positive outcome from being collateral damage of the coup. However, this banding together will not last if political differences and agreed consensus as what constitutes a democratic Myanmar are not settled.

It is important that diplomatic endeavours to bring Myanmar back to the path of democracy be cognizant of the derailed Myanmar Peace Process. The world’s attention has been focused on the coup, the humanitarian challenges including international crimes that may have occurred. This indeed is critical. However, it is also imperative that the Myanmar Peace Process is not forgotten. In the event the coup can be overturned, the absence of a military government will not assure a peaceful democratic Myanmar. The international diplomatic community should come together to remind Myanmar that it must rebuild its nation by capitalising on the bridges built among the ethnic groups during the coup. Perhaps Myanmar could take inspiration from “the Malaysian Family” concept, which in the context of national well-being highlights the noble family values such as tolerance, empathy, love and sacrifice. The ‘Malaysian Family’ is based on three main characteristics, namely, inclusivity, common ground and contentment and was introduced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob in his maiden speech as Malaysia’s ninth Prime Minister on Aug 22, 2021.

As part of the ASEAN family, we need to collectively address the situation in Myanmar as failing

to do so will inevitably impact the region. ASEAN remains poised to help Myanmar's Peace Process from being 'collateral damage' of the coup.

Endnotes

¹ The Current State of the Peace Process in Myanmar – pg.4

² Three Realities Facing Myanmar's New Dawn by Moe Thuzar

Ms. Leena Ghosh was a consultant working in Myanmar as Senior Peace Advisor and Senior Legal Advisor, as well as Head of the Secretariat for the Independent Commission of Enquiry of Myanmar. She was also Head of Unit for the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

Language as an Intercultural Communication Tool

Norshima Zainal Shah and Norashikin Sahol Hamid

After completing my doctorate viva voce, the external examiner approached me and exclaimed, "I am in awe that you can write a complete thesis in the English language when your first language is not the English language!" I was overjoyed and felt so grateful that English is our second language. In another scene, a fellow postgrad student from Europe said she could speak six languages and inquired how many languages I possess? At that moment, I must say that knowing only two languages was insufficient.

The point is, when one is given a chance to learn another language (either while studying or working or even just visiting abroad), seize the opportunity to learn the language of the (host) country for language is a tool for communication, expressing identity and imagination, play, emotional release, and many more. Language is inseparable from culture and knowing another language boosts one's self-esteem.

A language is a tool that everyone uses every day to communicate messages and reasons to others. Language and culture are intricately related because language signifies a population or society and is directly related to the manners and behaviours of groups of language speakers. Language also refers to the ability to communicate in a manner that others can comprehend. It

becomes more powerful when a larger group of people understands the language than simply in one's own family or community. The power increases when a person can communicate with more people from different cultures effectively for more reasons.

Today's society is defined by an ever-increasing number of interactions that result in communications between individuals of various languages and cultural backgrounds. Business transactions, military collaboration, scientific pursuits, educational exchanges, mass media, entertainment, tourism — and immigration caused by, for example, labour shortages or political disputes — are all ways in which people come into touch. Communication must be as positive as possible during all these encounters, with no misunderstandings. In this context, studies relating to linguistic and culture, which include the differences and similarities, may be vital in this regard.

Massive changes have occurred throughout the past few decades. New aspects of spatial mobility and worldwide communication have been enabled by modern technology. Instability, violent wars, environmental degradation, and economic inequality on one side, and economic expansion, infrastructural development, and

a worldwide job market on the other, have resulted in significant population shifts throughout the world. For various reasons, refugees, tourists, and employees travel and mix, resulting in the very diversified, multicultural communities we see today.

Intercultural communication occurs when individuals from various communication systems or backgrounds interact. Eye contact, gestures, touch, pauses, turn-taking, and time utilisation are examples of differences in verbal and nonverbal interaction. They might be a source of intercultural communication conflicts or disagreements. An intercultural communication dispute may cause feelings of befuddlement, worry, shame, and annoyance.

There can be some pressing issues in intercultural communication. Because each culture has its traits, intercultural communication may be a cause of friction and instability. The root of intercultural misunderstandings may include language, which can act as a barrier, cultural diversity, and issues of ethnocentrism. For example, what are the consequences of ethnocentrism? Ethnocentrism's actual threat is that it develops a sense of moral superiority above all other communities. Other civilisations are seen as backward, inadequate, or bad in this frame of mind. As a result of

such preconceptions, aggression, injustice, bias, and bigotry might emerge.

Additionally, people of ethnic and cultural groups value the effect and strength of language. Language use is essential in every community, regardless of ethnicity, race, culture, or sexual identity. Communication standards, customs, and regulations are unique to each speaking group. Communication rules and regulations are upheld by the speech community, albeit they may change over time. Every language community, on the other hand, has individuals who deviate from the norm. Everyone in the group does not communicate in the same way. Language serves as a sign or indication of the speaker's cultural identity and a method of communication. During contact, the identity is conveyed via the usage of a specific language which is known as discourse markers.

Therefore, what role does intercultural communication play in education? Intercultural communication is a crucial talent for both conventional diplomacy and education diplomacy, as it aids understanding across culturally diverse groups such as organisations, disciplines, industries, communities, social and political systems, and countries.

There are distinguishing features in intercultural communication. It involves knowledge, patience, empathy, open-mindedness, and tolerance. Organisations that have diverse and inclusive employees have a slew of advantages that may improve productivity and profitability. They

do, however, come with their own set of difficulties. For example, recurring miscommunications or insensitivity issues may result in employees feeling unsupported at the workplace, leading to job dissatisfaction. To achieve connection and communication across different cultures with experimentation, openness, and a genuine intention are still possible provided one is willing to learn and respect other people's differences.

The significance of sensitivity in intercultural communication is the heightened sensitivity that drives a person to prioritise nurturing others in addition to increased empathy. Not everyone has the same emotional response to life, and those who have empathy towards others will accommodate to be as understanding as possible with people of the same background or not. In many respects, the capacity to empathise with people from other cultures is crucial. It is, first and foremost, a requirement and guarantee of successful intercultural communication.

Communication is significantly more complicated than most people realise, particularly across cultures. In businesses, a lot of studies has been done on what to anticipate when dealing with business partners from various nations and with varied cultural backgrounds. The situation in Malaysia is that different cultures do mingle while working in the same firm or organisation. However, they only coexist next to one other, attempting to maintain their own culture. Furthermore, different cultures acquire and perceive information differently.

Therefore, language and effective intercultural communication give people the ability to communicate in a manner that others of different backgrounds can comprehend and appreciate. As the workplace becomes increasingly diverse in terms of culture, issues of intercultural misunderstanding may arise more often. Language limitations, which most businesses experience daily, may create challenges in information flow, resulting in mistakes and delays. It is critical to avoid these hazards that might disrupt communication and workflow at the workplace, as they impact the organisation and all value chain members.

The issue in intercultural communication is regarding the labelling and assumptions that all cultures hold about one another. Prejudgments and stereotyping in the workplace may lead to mistakes and misunderstandings, particularly when misinterpreted and misunderstood, which must be avoided to maintain a positive working environment.

After all, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that language shapes one's perception of life, that it is a tool for communication, that it improves intercultural communication (which is critical in today's world to break down cultural barriers and raise awareness of cultural norms), and that it improves self-awareness and communication skills. So, why not try learning a new language today?

Associate Professor Norshima Zainal Shah and Ms. Norashikin Sahol Hamid are lecturers with Universiti Pertahanan Nasional Malaysia.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in the Forum section are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect that of the Institute.

Volunteering at PPV KLCC

One of our officers, Ms. Nuril Fathihah Mazlan, was a volunteer at a COVID-19 vaccination centre. Here she shares with us her memorable experience.

When I received the phone call to volunteer at the Integrated Vaccine Administering Centre (PPV) KLCC, I was ecstatic. I have always been passionate about volunteering especially when it involves the elderly and the disabled. I prayed hard that they would station me at the 'special lane' section. To my surprise, PPV KLCC cater only to those categories.

PPV KLCC started its operation on 7 June with three stations known as HCO A, HCO B, and HCO C. We started with one type of vaccine – Sinovac. It was only in the third month that we started giving out Pfizer as instructed by the COVID-19 Immunisation Task Force (CITF) to vaccinees from the age of 18 to 40 at stations HCO D and HCO E. In late August, we were instructed to open new stations – HCO F, HCO G, and HCO H – to cater to foreigners as there were too many of them lining up with the locals at HCO A, HCO B, and HCO C.

The first two to three weeks, we had to work a full-time shift, from 7.30 am to 10.00 pm – seven days straight. The layout of the vaccination centre and our schedule were managed by coordinators, known as PY. In the beginning, there were only seven PYs. In the fourth week, I was chosen to be a PY as the PPV had to restructure each group to a 7.00 am to 3.00 pm shift and a 1.00 pm to 10.00 pm shift with a two-day break to cover the weekends. We did not get days off on public holidays. In total, there were 15 groups with eight to nine volunteers per group.

The challenging part of being a PY is being the first-person that people would go to when faced with a problem or an emergency. I was yelled at, argued with people about which type of vaccines work best, and dealt with people who were terrified of needles and suffered panic attacks.

One of my best memories volunteering there was when I found an elderly man suffering from dementia crying at the wheelchair section. He was shivering, so I took him to a Medical Officers' station where they checked his blood pressure and tried to calm him down. I found out that his name was Othman through his vaccination card, so when I said his name, he smiled, and yelled his name repeatedly. We made an announcement, and his daughter finally came. She had to leave his father to help her sister who had anxiety. Both were on wheelchairs, so she had to leave her father at the wheelchair station praying that he would not make a scene. When his daughter tried to get him up, he got defensive and held my hand even tighter. He did not recognise his own daughter. When he finally did, he said that he was hungry and wanted to go home – but he wanted me to push the wheelchair. So I helped push him to their car.

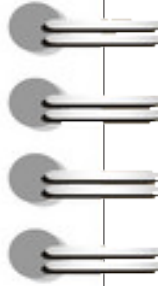
There were also cases where COVID-positive individuals came for the vaccination because they did not know they could reschedule their appointment. They came in long-sleeved shirt, hiding their pink wristband. With too many vaccinees we can only assume that the volunteers at the entrance missed them. When this happened, I had to call the floor manager and the Civil Defence Department, and they escorted the individuals out using a planned route away from people. We had to shut down the operation for close to 45 minutes for sanitisation and to inspect the volunteers who came into close contact with them.

Another case I had to deal with was when a homeless person came for his second dose and when asked, told the volunteer that he was given Sinovac for his first dose. After he had been injected with Sinovac, we found out that he had earlier been given Pfizer. He was holding his vaccination card the whole time but did not give it to the volunteer during registration. The floor manager and the manager (a doctor from the Ministry of Health) came and observed him for one hour – hoping and praying that nothing

would go wrong. Thankfully nothing did, and the manager took the initiative to observe him for another 14 days.

I also had the experience of serving a hundred-year-old patient who was bed-ridden. When he came with his children, the doctors took the initiative to vaccinate him in an ambulance. There were three bed-ridden cases, and all came by ambulance and a drive-thru vaccination process was done.

We served for three months until September. We created many memories despite some hiccups here and there. We vaccinated almost 10, 000 people daily and sometimes more. After 730, 000 people were vaccinated, PPV KLCC was officially closed. It was a great experience and a great honour for me to volunteer and serve at the PPV. If given the chance, I would do it all over again.



IDFR Forum 2021

In conjunction with IDFR's 30th anniversary, IDFR Forum was held for the first time ever on 14 September 2021. The forum, titled *Post-COVID World: Mind the Gaps!*, featured Mr. Pascal Lamy, President Emeritus, Jacques Delors Institute and former Director General of the World Trade Organization as the guest speaker. The forum was also graced by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who delivered the welcoming remarks. Held virtually via Google Meet, it was attended by 140 participants from various embassies and high commissions, as well as officials from relevant ministries, government agencies, think tanks and universities.

Mr. Lamy started off the forum by underlining three major gaps that need to be kept in mind in the post-COVID-19 era, namely, between the "North and South", "East and West" and "Haves and Have-Nots". Firstly, he opined that the pandemic will create a "North-South" asymmetric economic and health shock. Despite encountering the same vulnerability to the virus, developed countries can recover better from the economic

consequences compared to the less developed ones. The inequality in the response of the health system and vaccine distributions are also visible. Secondly, Mr. Lamy added that the new "Cold War" of the United States-China rivalry will continue in the future where both the "East and West" sides see each other as threats. It will raise enormous international challenges in geopolitics as well as geoeconomics to non-US and non-China entities such as the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Thirdly, Mr. Lamy explained the divide between the "Haves and Have-Nots" as a disparity that exists within and between countries, where some countries are impacted by COVID-19 more severely than others, which will lead to social discontent, social unrest and political disruptions, hence making international cooperation more challenging.

Mr. Lamy further detailed four major challenges which require global cooperation: the first one being health, particularly on vaccine apartheid which he regarded as intolerable. The second major challenge is environmental issues.

He opined that the efforts by world power countries are lagging behind to cope with the environmental challenges, starting with climate change. The third major challenge is a digital one, as the pandemic has projected the digitalisation of human lives years ahead. The final challenge is trade, as Mr. Lamy asserted that the reducing obstacles to trade opening is essentially moving forward. The world economy is moving from classical protectionism to what he defined as "precautionism", as the former focuses on protecting producers from foreign competition, while the latter underlines the protection against risks, such as standard, safety, and security which differ across countries.

The forum concluded with Mr. Lamy asserting that the various stakeholders, including multinational corporations, non-governmental organisations, and non-state actors, must take up a bigger role in addressing these global challenges as the multi-stakeholders' coalition will lead to more impactful results beyond the capacity of the sovereign states.

A Briefing Session for Malaysia Future Leaders School 2021 Programme

On 15 October 2021, IDFR, together with the Department of Policy Planning and Coordination and the Public Diplomacy and Communication Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in collaboration with the Institute for Leadership Excellence and Development, Ministry of Youth and Sports successfully organised a briefing session on the topic of *Youth Ambassador* for participants of the Malaysia Future Leaders School (MFLS) 2021. 157 selected participants from Tier 1 and Tier 2 of the programme took part in the specially organised briefing session held via the Zoom platform.

The aim of the briefing session was to provide exposure to the participants on several topics related to diplomacy and international relations. The first was on *Overview of Malaysia's Foreign Policy* and it was delivered by Mr. Nazarudin Ja'afar, who is the Deputy Director General of



the Policy and Strategic Planning Division, Department of Policy Planning and Coordination. Next was *Introduction to IDFR and Strategies for Developing Leadership Skills* by Mr. Amirul Khairi Mustafa Bakri and Ms. Nuril Fathihah Mazlan, both IDFR officers from the Centre for Leadership, Negotiation and Public Diplomacy. The final briefing was on *Malaysia's Public Diplomacy and Social*

Media by Mr. Mohammad Hosnie Shahiran Ismail, Principal Assistant Secretary of the Communications and Public Diplomacy Division.

The briefing sessions went smoothly and IDFR looks forward to more collaborations with the Institute for Leadership Excellence and Development in preparing youths for their future role at the national and international levels.

We Bid Adieu to the *Diplomatic Voice*

The *Diplomatic Voice* was first published in 2011 with the aim of being a platform for the sharing of knowledge and information among diplomacy practitioners, students of international relations, and people who are interested in

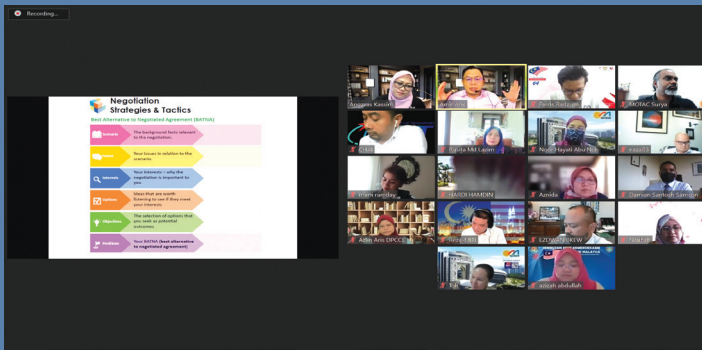
learning about diplomacy. It was also intended to complement the Ministry's outreach programmes.

Eleven years on and thirty-seven issues later, it is time for the bulletin to make way for a new publication

from next year onwards. We fervently hope our readers have benefitted from what have been shared in its pages and will benefit further from its successor.

News Contributors

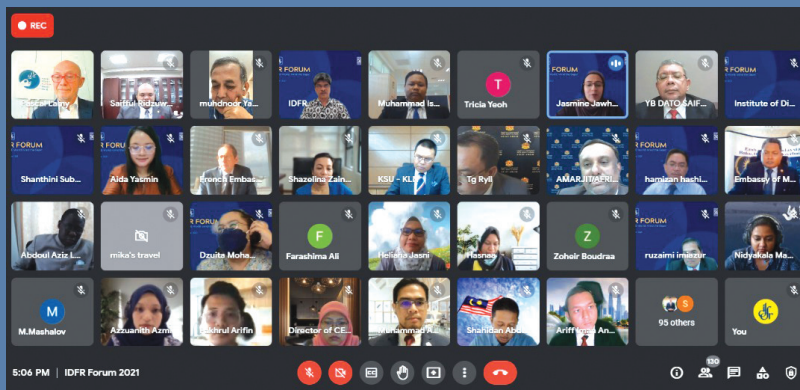
Aida Yasmin Azhar, Amirul Khairi Mustafa Bakri, Engku Nur Ayuni E. Afandi, Hanun Insyirah Ishak, Noraini Awang Nong, Nuril Fathihah Mazlan, Syed Mohd Amirul Syed Abdul Basek



A lecture on Negotiation Strategies and Tactics at the Negotiation Course for Mid-Level Officers, 25 August 2021



Ms. Nurul (centre in grey scarf and black mask) and the volunteers from HCO G on their last day, 8 September 2021



More than 100 participants attended IDFR's inaugural annual forum, 14 September 2021



The orientation for the 2021 Master programme was held online, 4 October 2021



Dato Dr Shazalina Zainul Abidin, the Director General, delivering her mandate to the staff via online, 8 October 2021



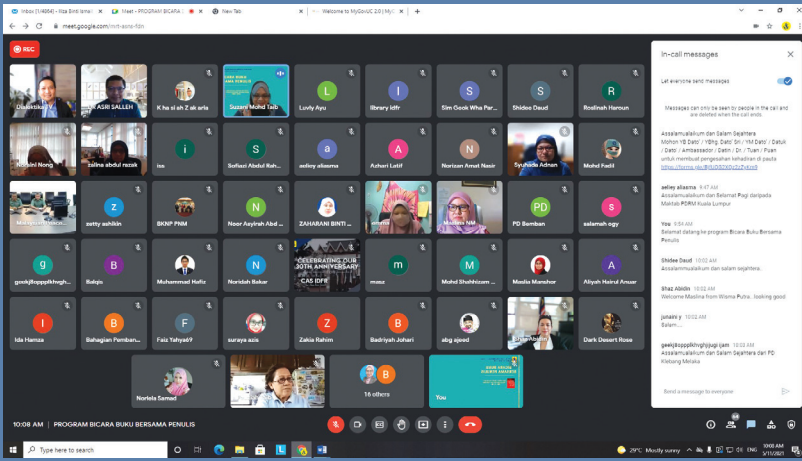
Courtesy call on the Director General by IDFR's sixth Director General, Dato' Dr Fauziah Mohd Taib, 12 October 2021



The Diploma in Diplomacy participants learning the art of fine dining, 12 October 2021



At the certificate presentation ceremony of the Introduction to Diplomacy for State Secretary course, 3 November 2021



The *Bicara Buku* programme by the Library Unit featured Dr Asri Salleh, the author of *Malaysia's United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 5 November 2021



The signing of Exchange of Notes between IDFR and UK International Academy, 8 November 2021



Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs, was at IDFR for a briefing on the institute's programmes, 17 November 2021



In celebration of its 30th anniversary, IDFR recently published a pictorial book titled *Commemorating IDFR@30 1991-2021*