



RENEWAL THROUGH CRISIS

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC &
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA



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We will never stop searching, sharing ideas



THE weight of history can sometimes lie heavily on those who follow the paths of great men and women. But the promise of the future lights the path for the intrepid.

When I became chief executive of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia on 15 September 2020, I knew that I had been bestowed with great trust, responsibility and privilege. I knew that – pandemic or no pandemic – I had to hit the ground running with my new colleagues at ISIS Malaysia.

Our aim was and remains simple (yet ambitious): to build on the solid foundations of the past and recalibrate ISIS Malaysia so that it remains the premier platform for developing ideas for Malaysia's future.

This report provides a glimpse of our collective efforts thus far. As with practically every other sector, the world of think-tanks was dramatically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–21. As borders closed and nations went into lockdown, the days when our researchers were frequently engaged in conferencing throughout the world came to an abrupt halt. ISIS Malaysia made the difficult decision to postpone – and ultimately cancel – our signature event, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable.

We had to adapt quickly. Physical meetings were soon replaced by a barrage of virtual ones. Yet, the many adjustments imposed by the pandemic also gave us a newfound appreciation for our core mission as entrepreneurs of ideas.

The result has been a renewed bloom and vigour in our researchers' work. The profound implications of the pandemic provided the impulse for a vast number of these essays and policy briefs, many of which are available on our website. This spirit of constantly searching and putting forward policy-relevant ideas and solutions will continue to animate our work at ISIS Malaysia.

The lockdowns have also provided an unexpected opportunity for us to embark on another project: the restoration of ISIS Malaysia's home. Thought to have been built in 1895, this building was the official residence of the late Tan Sri Mohamed Noah Omar, who served as the first speaker of the Dewan Rakyat from 1 September 1959 to 29 February 1964.

The renovation of the bungalow became a series of revelations. With the removal of the partitions, carpets and false ceilings, we are now able to appreciate the wisdom behind the original design of the building. We look forward to being able to welcome visitors to this building, which has been the site of so much history and cherished memories.

The extent to which ISIS Malaysia thrives in the post-pandemic future (if "post-pandemic" can at all be an apt description) will ultimately depend on our ability to be nimble and responsive to the demands of our many stakeholders.

This can never be the work of just one person. I would, therefore, like to express my immense gratitude to the board of directors of ISIS Malaysia for their guidance in these challenging times. I would also like to thank all members of the ISIS staff for their dedication and hard work. Working with them has given me confidence that ISIS Malaysia's best years are yet to come.

An exciting and challenging future beckons.



HERIZAL HAZRI
Chief Executive

Ideas, imagination and implementation

SINCE its inception in 1983, ISIS Malaysia has been true to its mission of providing thought leadership, shaping policies and working towards helping Malaysia achieve its goals and aspirations.

As a premier think-tank, we play a major role in influencing actions on strategic domestic and regional issues, contribute towards national discussions, and disseminate research and findings on national and international issues for the benefit of Malaysia.

Our goal is to contribute towards nation-building, achieve peace, shared prosperity and sustainability. This outlook is imprinted in our DNA and provides an impetus for what we do today and have done in the past year.

Our work is esoteric in nature, leveraging on our position both domestically and internationally to interpret current and emerging strategic policy issues through Track-Two diplomacy and undertaking research; informing key stakeholders, including governments and non-government actors, on strategic and emerging issues; and influencing public discourse through publications and media engagement.

Although we engage actively in Track-Two diplomacy, we also focus on development, socio-economic and foreign policy

issues. Through our research and other inputs, we help shape better-focused national policies and programmes. We engage at multiple levels, including with both state and non-state actors, to influence the implementation of policies on the ground.

ISIS Malaysia is in a unique position as it was established by the government but not part of it. This allows us to serve as an important external sounding board and contributor to policy discussions and developments in Malaysia.

In efforts to broaden our impact, we engage with non-state actors, such as through the All-Party Parliamentary Group Malaysia on Sustainable Development Goals (APPGM-SDG), to address local and global community concerns and agenda.

Many foreign governments and international organisations also turn to ISIS Malaysia for accurate and nuanced views of policymaking and strategic issues in the country.

We see this as a duty to the nation and its people that we must uphold as best we can.

We are driven by the vision of a nation that is secure, prosperous and progressive that is at peace with itself and in the global community of nations.





Capacity building

As we headed towards 2021, ISIS Malaysia took stock of Covid-19's havoc on societies and other disruptions.

Political tensions around the globe, including the ones closer to home, affected economies and created uncertainties.

Crises in the home front, security threats in the region, extreme poverty, rise of superpowers, climate change, advancement of women's rights, and challenges to diversity and digital disruption require deep and broad expertise. To this end, we are taking steps to enable ourselves with the capabilities to meet this future.

As we stay true to our mission to undertake relevant, proactive and impactful policy research and execution, we are conscious of and keeping pace with the changes in the world. We need to ensure that ISIS Malaysia continues to be part of the solution and in this light, take steps to attract the right talent to be well positioned to inject ideas into the policy discourse.

At the same time, knowing that we must leave no one behind, we will also strive to empower our existing workforce with the means to reskill and upskill themselves, and provide them with the support to help them adapt.

Our capacity building efforts involve recruiting skilled and dynamic talent for our operations team and attracting star power to strengthen our research team. Together, the old and the new will take ISIS Malaysia to greater heights.

Digital leap

As Malaysia prepares to ride the wave of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), ISIS Malaysia has initiated the process to harness digital technologies and promote innovation in our work and policy discourse. This is not only aligned to the national agenda, but also with our aspiration to be a forward-thinking institution of thought leaders, innovative thinkers and industry pioneers.

At ISIS Malaysia, we are committed to equipping our internal stakeholders with the knowledge to tackle the subject and the technology itself. It also means making use of technology to enhance research methods.

However, we are conscious that we cannot achieve these goals on our own and we are taking steps to build new

partnerships in the country and around the world. Our collaboration strategy will involve building institutional links and corporate partnerships.

Modernisation efforts

As the pandemic moved to its second year, we laid the groundwork to modernise the institution in terms of digitalisation. This is to ensure seamless and robust digital connectivity as we embraced a remote working culture and keep all stakeholders connected.

One of the important lessons learned from the pandemic is the need to modernise, especially in digitalisation efforts, and to do so quickly.

As the world in which we operate undergoes rapid changes, we need to accelerate our digitalisation efforts to progress and serve our stakeholders better. As such, we have taken the first step to improve our communication network.

The pandemic also necessitated the need to adopt new ways of engaging with our stakeholders and communicating to our audience. We are tapping into the power of social media to complement our work. As such, we are committed to building a comprehensive social media and digital strategy to create greater impact through our opinion, research findings, advocacy, policy recommendations and convening activities.

At the end of 2020, we took the daunting step of undertaking extensive renovation to our headquarters. The neo-classical building, which houses the ISIS headquarters, was built circa 1895 and was in a state of disrepair. On 2 January 2021, work started to conserve the building, which we envisage as repurposed through adaptive reuse.

The first phase of renovation is near completion and we are proud that we now have a beautiful building that is not only impressive aesthetically, but safe and conducive for our most important asset – our staff.



Adapting to 'new normal'

COVID-19 cast a long dark shadow on Malaysia, sparing neither individual nor organisation. We also spent most of 2020 without a chief executive and director and felt the lack of top-level strategic instructions and thinking keenly. The "big ideas" could not filter down to all sections.

Malaysia imposed a lockdown – the movement-control order (MCO) – in March 2020, which impacted on the way we functioned. Problems ranged from coordination among staff with the work-from-home arrangement to hosting and supervising interns because of the disrupted workflow and working conditions.

The MCO curtailed our research activities, making it impossible to carry out fieldwork domestically and internationally.

The closure of borders ended the hosting of roundtables and conferences, which are a key part of our engagements, including ISIS Malaysia's flagship conferences, the Asia-Pacific Roundtable and PRAXIS.

Most of the conferences moved online but the outcomes were far from optimal.

The constraint also meant researchers could no longer reach out to vulnerable and marginalised populations. Although mobile phones are ubiquitous, online interviews do not allow researchers to capture the nuances or build connections with interviewees.

This affected their data collection and quality of research.

But Covid-19 did have a positive impact on our research. As the pandemic unfolded, it provided the impetus for researchers to coalesce and develop a series of papers, reports and articles on its impact on Malaysia.

The highlights included analyses on the pandemic's impact on the socio-economic sector and trade in goods and services among the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership countries; Asean's response to the tussle between the United States and China; youth unemployment, low wages, trade barriers, displaced workers, youth and women; and the call for a Green New Deal in an effort to build back better.

Seizing opportunities

While the outbreak dominated the headlines and seeped into every aspect of daily life – from mask-wearing to sanitisers –



Managing ISIS during a pandemic

When the government announced the first MCO in 2020, it was unfamiliar territory for us. We were worried about our staff and their health, certainly, but also worried about how it would affect our research output, conferences and events.

But we, as an organisation, and as a team, overcame those challenges and emerged stronger than ever.

Staff performance, such as the number of research publications, remained unchanged. In fact, we brought in more research projects in the first six months of the year than we've ever done.

We encouraged the staff to work from wherever they are and provided dedicated support to ensure that everyone had what they needed to perform to the best of their ability.

Of course, some divisions had it harder than others. The pandemic took a toll on the Public Affairs and Conference Services (PACS) division, simply due to the nature of its work.

We took our events virtual with a gusto and continue to move from strength to strength.

As we look back at 2020 and look forward to the years ahead, we will continue to support our people to ensure their output remains high, no matter where they are, or how they choose to work. Our people are our greatest asset, and we will strive to support them in every way we can.

Sohana Enver Azyze, head of administration

our researchers seized the opportunity to undertake work pivoted around this once-in-a-lifetime pandemic.

They addressed issues of gender inequality, mental health, migrant workers and refugees; bilateral and multilateral relations; countering extremism; cybersecurity; policies towards refugees and asylum-seekers; implementation of the SDGs; and water-energy-food security; and embarked on topical or "opportunistic" work, such as China's "vaccine diplomacy" and engagement with Russia.

Board members



**General (R) Tan Sri Dr
Mohamed Hashim Mohd Ali**

Chairman of the board



**Datuk Rohana
Tan Sri Mahmood**

Board member



**Tan Sri Dr Sulaiman
Mahbob**

Board member



**Tan Sri Dr Mohd Munir
Abdul Majid**

Board member



Tan Sri Rastam Mohd Isa
(until 2/3/2020)

Board member



Herizal Hazri
(appointed on 9/12/2020)

Board member

Management



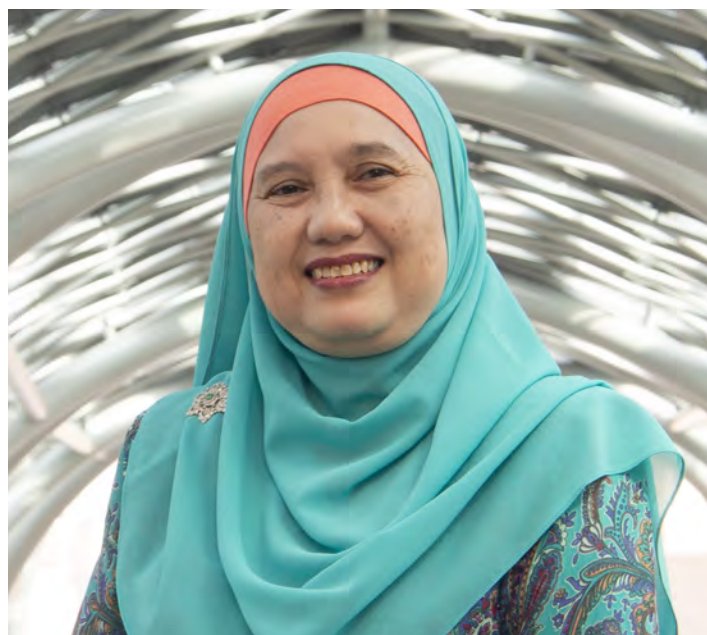
Herizal Hazri
Chief executive



Sohana Enver Azyze
Head of administration



Alizan Mahadi
Senior research director



Tengku Sheila Tengku Annur Zainal
Director of public affairs and conference services

Operations team



Administration

(From left) Abdul Halil Musa; Abdul Halid Shafie; Kamaruddin Ariffin; Emy Irwan Abdul Rahim; Kamarul Azira Mohd Dross; Mohamad Shazli Mohamad Sharif; Zulkifli Arshad; Asbullah Mohd Isa; Hassan Hashim; Mohd Azman Mohd Zain; and Mohd Zulkefli Udin



Secretarial

(From left) Zainun Majid; Azimah Othman; and Norazzah Suleman



Finance

(From left) Mohamad Shazli Mohamad Sharif; Yong Nural'Ain LA Shah; Abd Razak Ismail; and Abu Bakar Mohamed

Operations team



Information services

(From left) Ahmad Syahir Adnan; Mohd Ali Yarmamat; Joann Saw; Ridzwuan Rosli; and El-Jeffery Ibrahim



Public affairs and conference services

(From left) Jefri Hambali; Louis Anak Denis; Mohamad Hanafi Kamaruddin; Nur Atikah Ishak; Maria Aziz; and Harizan Zakaria

Great to see everyone learning, contributing to ISIS



FOR most of 2020, ISIS Malaysia did not have a chief executive and I was the most senior person (I assumed the post of senior research director in August 2020) and with the support of other senior researchers, had to chart the way forward and keep the organisation running.

Because of Covid-19, the role of a think-tank became more directly relevant towards ensuring both short-term responses and long-term recovery across social, economic and even environmental issues.

In ensuring that ISIS Malaysia played a role in these tough times, there was an ISIS-wide analysis on Covid-19. Beyond the pandemic, my role was to give direction to the researchers and get them involved in interesting and strategic projects so that they can continue to learn and grow.

This was rewarding as it also demonstrated the relevance of ISIS Malaysia as a think-tank during a crisis. We had our researchers carry the name of ISIS Malaysia in all areas of research, as the pandemic cut across virtually all aspects of our lives and, therefore, across multiple policy issues. While it was challenging and daunting helming a post of responsibility, it also provided clarity in terms of what role we can play in nation-building.

One of the highlights of 2020 was that ISIS Malaysia continued to produce good quality work and contribute towards important policy discussions. Also, it forced us to move towards new ways of working, including being more multidisciplinary.

For example, a project to review the Asean Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint was not the largest project at ISIS

Malaysia, but it was rewarding because it cuts across various areas and required efforts across the whole organisation to complete the project. It created a conducive environment and promoted learning and a cross-fertilisation of ideas.

On a personal note, I was the lead researcher in the APPGM-SDG, which on an international scale was quite a novel approach to SDGs research and implementation. It provided a model whereby a global framework can be translated into the ground level.

We collaborated with parliamentarians, local community leaders, local civil society groups and local government agencies to both identify the most pressing development issues faced on the ground as well as the solutions to address them. This is an example of how a think-tank can also extend its remit as a think-and-do tank to affect development outcomes on the ground.



Alizan Mahadi, senior research director

Helping the nation pursue 'green growth'

AS Malaysia gears itself towards becoming a high-income nation, it is inevitable that affluence would lead to higher consumption, production and waste.

Recognising the need to adopt a sustainable framework, the Economic Affairs Ministry commissioned ISIS Malaysia to study and review the draft Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) Blueprint with the aim of redrafting the blueprint for updating and clarifying the objectives and alignments to the latest government policy agenda and the SDGs.

ISIS Malaysia worked on a module of training package on understanding the SCP, focusing on building institutional capacities and technical capacities among policymakers to integrate SCP into the policy system as an alternative to the urban development pathway.

We also worked on developing a baseline review of the MyHIJAU programme – the green scheme to certify goods and services that meet local and international standards – to recognise the importance of regular reporting on the implementation of eco-labelling and green products in Malaysia.

The outcome was a draft blueprint produced for the Economic Planning Unit (EPU). SCP is a holistic means to address sustainability as well as a global agenda, being one of the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 12).

In terms of impact, the policy establishes Malaysia as a leader in SCP with a holistic policy that cuts across various sectors, including transport, food, tourism, construction and waste.

The institute collaborated with the APPGM-SDG. The group is an innovative approach which seeks to localise the SDGs through partnering members of parliaments as SDG "champions". The pilot project localised the SDGs in 10 constituencies.

APPGM-SDG's impact was two-fold. First, discussions between local leaders, civil society organisations and government agencies at the grassroots level resulted in issue-mapping. The mapping served as the basis for capacity building and solutions to woes, such as loss of income, unsustainable waste and water management, and youth unemployment. Second, allocations were provided for projects that addressed these issues, resulting in customised solutions, including enhancing skills, facilitating inter-agency dialogues and increasing incomes of targeted vulnerable groups.

Calvin Cheng was the lead researcher for the Petaling Jaya constituency in Selangor while **Harris Zainul** handled the Pendang constituency in Kedah.

Climate-change projects form a crucial component of our work. Our researchers were involved in projects related to six distinct but crucial pillars of the climate-action puzzle.

The output was then shared in articles, papers, seminars, webinars, workshops, radio, or television interviews, and covered one or more of the following "pillars" or sustainable, low-carbon strategies: carbon pricing; green growth and the energy transition; climate change adaptation; strategic resource sustainability; circular economy; and Malaysia's international climate ambition.

In February 2020, ISIS Malaysia hosted a roundtable discussion on carbon pricing, an integral factor in climate action.



(From left) Darshan Joshi; Ainun Jaabi; and Nazran Zhafri

Technology, innovation, environment and sustainability

In 2020, ISIS Malaysia focused on localising SDGs through the APPGM-SDG, a non-partisan parliamentary grouping. We continue to be an advocate for climate change policy and policy instruments and will continue to put the spotlight on Malaysia's commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The discussion influenced to some degree the content of [*Making SDGs Matter: Leaving No One Behind*](#), a book produced in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS).

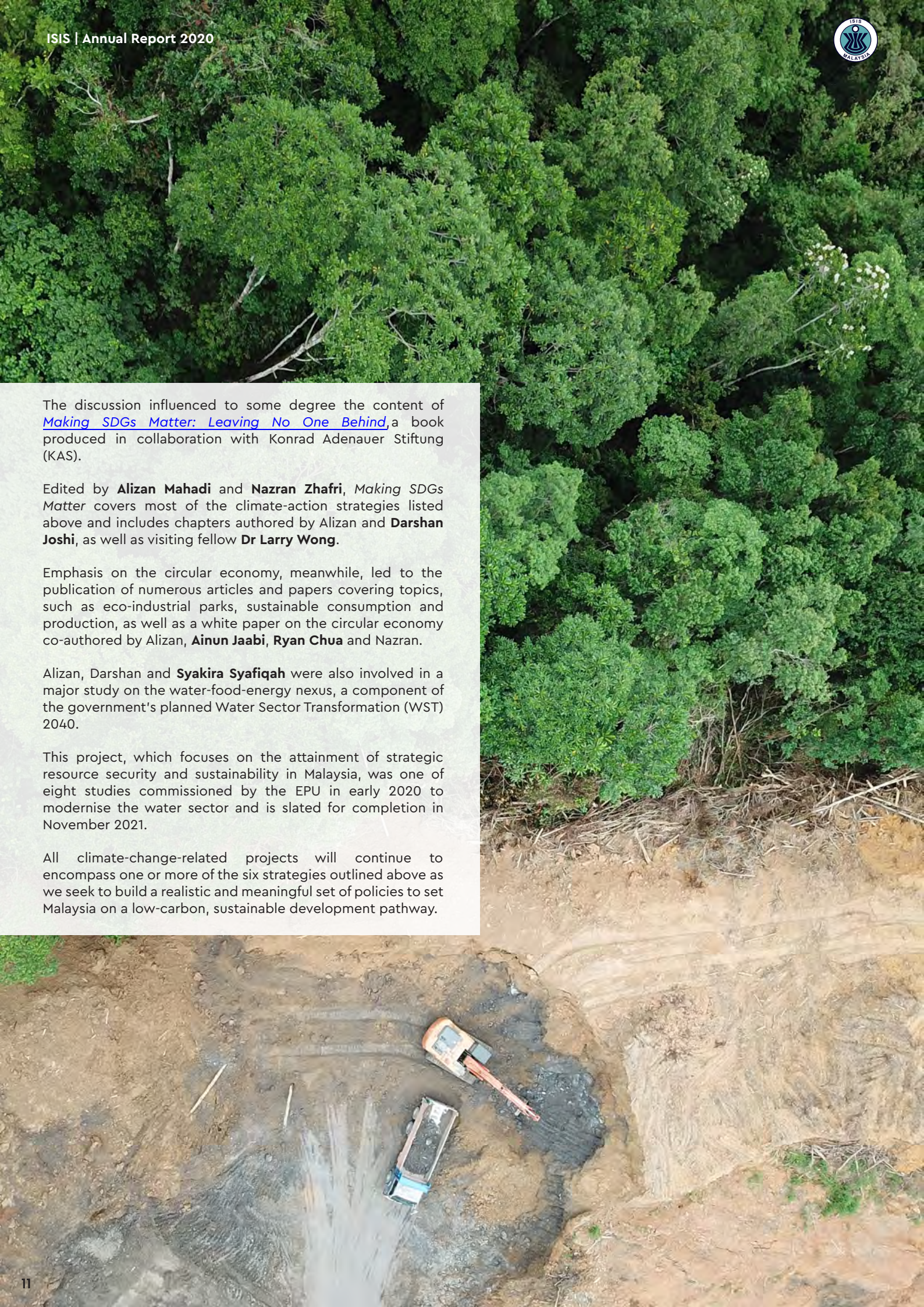
Edited by **Alizan Mahadi** and **Nazran Zhafri**, *Making SDGs Matter* covers most of the climate-action strategies listed above and includes chapters authored by Alizan and **Darshan Joshi**, as well as visiting fellow **Dr Larry Wong**.

Emphasis on the circular economy, meanwhile, led to the publication of numerous articles and papers covering topics, such as eco-industrial parks, sustainable consumption and production, as well as a white paper on the circular economy co-authored by Alizan, **Ainun Jaabi**, **Ryan Chua** and Nazran.

Alizan, Darshan and **Syakira Syafiqah** were also involved in a major study on the water-food-energy nexus, a component of the government's planned Water Sector Transformation (WST) 2040.

This project, which focuses on the attainment of strategic resource security and sustainability in Malaysia, was one of eight studies commissioned by the EPU in early 2020 to modernise the water sector and is slated for completion in November 2021.

All climate-change-related projects will continue to encompass one or more of the six strategies outlined above as we seek to build a realistic and meaningful set of policies to set Malaysia on a low-carbon, sustainable development pathway.



Empowering the most vulnerable

ISIS Malaysia researchers also focused on multi-stakeholder and in-depth policy research, spanning the spectrum of policymakers, private sector, civil society and communities/groups on the ground.

The nature of some of this work is multi-year, where research can span years.

Over 2018–20, ISIS Malaysia collaborated with Unicef Malaysia on a study entitled "Situation Analysis of Children in Malaysia (SitAn)", which assessed and analysed the situation with respect to children's rights and development, highlighting potential and critical issues in areas, such as legal and policy framework; demographic and socio-economic status; education and child development; health and nutrition; and child protection.

This project reached fruition with the launch of the "Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Malaysia 2020" report in September 2020, which provides the basis for the discussions for the development of the Unicef – government of Malaysia country programme 2021–25 and other planning processes, such as UNSDCF (UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks – previously UNDAF), for which Unicef and the government are already undertaking preparatory work. The SitAn will also support national planning and development processes, in particular the 12th National Development Plan 2021–2025.

As Covid-19 continued to unfold in the country, the researchers conducted and oversaw several assessments (both rapid and in-depth) analysing the pandemic and various measures to contain it, and their specific impact on women and gender, foreign workers/migrants, and health.

Terence Too, Tengku Nur Qistina, Puteri Nor Ariane Yasmin and Thomas Daniel, among others, produced a series of reports on domestic violence; gender-inclusive policies; mental health; refugees; community responses to gender issues; and the health system's resilience.

Over 2020–21, ISIS Malaysia collaborated with the Responsible Business Alliance (RBA) to conduct a study entitled "Mapping of Key Stakeholders in the Indonesia-Malaysia and Nepal-Malaysia Labour Migration Corridors".

The aim was to map and analyse key stakeholders and components to enhance the responsible recruitment programme in promoting safe-migration corridors through the transformation of recruitment practices and standards in the supply chain.

It was a multi-country study conducted in Indonesia, Nepal and Malaysia, reviewing legal and institutional frameworks, recruitment processes and practices, key stakeholders, and the challenges, gaps and recommendations with regard to the pre-recruitment, pre-departure, post-arrival and repatriation stages of labour migration in these corridors.

Migrant workers play a critical role in Malaysia's economy: as of July 2020, Malaysia employed some 1.7 million migrant workers constituting about 11% of the workforce, while the World Bank estimates between 1.2 million and 1.5 million irregular migrants in 2017. The RBA study resulted in workshops in Malaysia, Indonesia and Nepal, where key stakeholders, including government and policymakers, business representatives, private recruitment agencies, employers' associations, trade unions, migrant labour representatives and civil society organisations gathered to discuss the findings as well as the recommendations and ways forward.

This study also complimented and served as a background/baseline study to a parallel RBA initiative on the implementation of a pilot incentive model for suppliers and/or private recruitment agencies (PRAs) in Malaysia to implement responsible recruitment and employment policies.

Between 2018–19, ISIS Malaysia collaborated with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on the development of two background studies for the national action plans on the elimination of forced labour and the worst forms of child labour.



(From left)
Terence Too and Tengku Nur Qistina

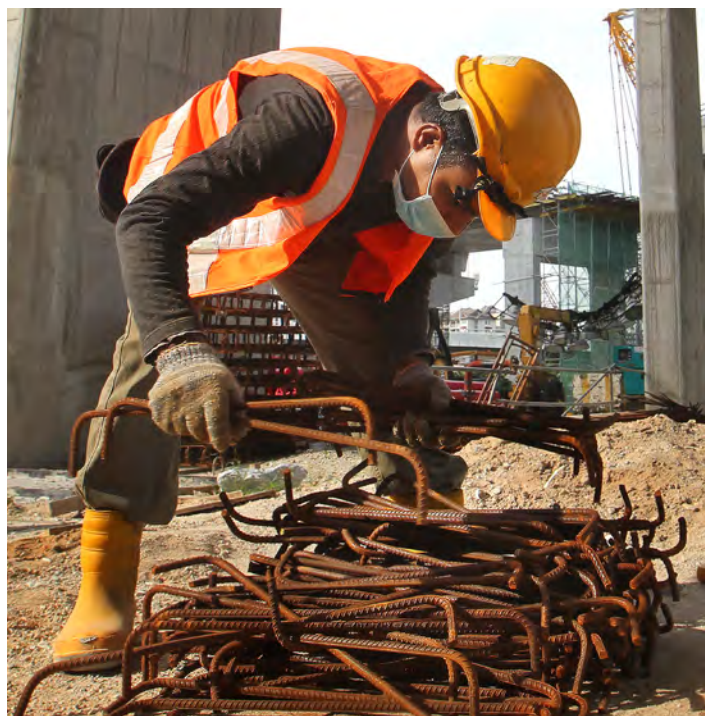
Social policy and national integration

The constraints imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic impacted ISIS Malaysia's efforts to fully engage with key issues affecting women, youth and children, public health, education, national integration and shifting demographics. However, it provided the impetus for us to delve into the impact of the pandemic on our communities.



The objectives of these studies were to review and identify potential entry points to address gaps in policies and interventions to ensure the effective and sustainable elimination of forced labour and worst forms of child labour (WFCL); and to identify and assess existing or planned interventions in the relevant sectors with a view to adding value to them, consolidating their impact on the fight against forced labour/child labour, and filling in gaps.

With the completion of the report and workshop in December 2019, Terence participated in technical and expert workshops, which together with the report and other initiatives from ILO and other stakeholders laid the basis for the finalisation and adoption of the National Guidelines on Human Trafficking Indicators (NGHTI), the incorporation of forced labour and WFCL into the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) 2021–2025; and [National Action Plans on Forced Labour and Child Labour anticipated to be finalised by 4Q21](#).



Confronting Covid-19

CALVIN produced one of the most widely read articles on the ISIS Malaysia website on the [impact of Covid-19 on the economy](#) and the fiscal responses to the pandemic during MCO 1.0.

The policy brief touched on the pandemic's impact on incomes, supply chain and called for a robust financial stimulus package to "supercharge" the economy.

Many researchers took part in a larger project on the "Preliminary analysis of the socio-economic implications of the Covid-19 pandemic in Malaysia".

Delays in merging the different parts meant that ISIS Malaysia could only submit the report to Datuk Seri Mustapa Mohamed (Tok Pa) in the EPU last August. In a meeting with Tok Pa to brainstorm the 12th Malaysia Plan, we highlighted that the report was being worked on and Tok Pa expressed interest in it. The report looked into the impact of the pandemic and the following lockdowns on the micro and macro-economic environment in Malaysia with a special focus on the digital economy.

The EPU is likely to use the report to develop the 12th Malaysia Blueprint led by Tok Pa.

In February 2020, Calvin took part in a student outreach at Help University for a HELP Academy UoL Student Union talk series. He presented research on the US-China trade war.

In May 2020, Harris and **Farlina Said** co-wrote a [chapter](#) titled "Asean engagement with North Korea: potential, opportunities and limitations".

Following the two US-North Korea summits held in Singapore then Vietnam, the chapter frames, articulates and critically assesses Asean's potential role in the denuclearisation/normalisation dialogue. The chapter dives into the opportunities unique to the 10-member regional organisation and considers its inherent limitations to bring about peace in the Korean peninsula.

In September 2020, Calvin and Harris presented [their paper](#) for the Network of Asean-China Think-Tanks (NACT) working group discussion on "Future of labour in Asean and China: challenges and responses". The paper was later translated into Mandarin and published in the *Journal of China-Asean Studies*. Calvin also produced a policy brief ([ISIS Policy Brief #7-20](#)) and

[presentation](#) "Pushed to the margins: the unequal impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on marginalised Malaysian workers" while in December, ISIS Malaysia hosted the [27th PECC general meeting](#), acting as secretariat (as part of Malaysian PECC or MANCPEC).

Analyst Harris spent a good part of the year researching on the [Covid-19 infodemic](#) and consequent issues, leading up to a policy paper on "The Covid-19 infodemic in Malaysia: scale, scope and policy responses", which sampled fact-checks by [Sebenarnya.my](#) to identify the types of false information on the topic.

Besides that, he published two policy briefs outlining [options](#) to address the infodemic, on top of op-eds in the *New Straits Times* and *Malaysiakini* to raise awareness on the issue. This policy brief was presented to key stakeholders at the Science, Technology and Innovation Ministry.



(From left) Muhammad Harris Zainul; Dr Juita Mohamad; and Calvin Cheng

Economics, trade and regional integration

ISIS Malaysia has deep expertise in analysing Malaysia's economy, identifying trade and investment opportunities, and the geopolitics of international trade. However, as the effects of the pandemic grew in scope, length and intensity, our focus changed to take into account the urgency of socioeconomic issues amplified by the pandemic, including youth unemployment, wage stagnation, trade barriers and displaced workers; specifically, youth and women.

Foreign affairs forte

ISIS Malaysia's Korea Foundation fellow **Dr Hoo Chiew-Ping** conceived a series of projects focused on the delivery of substantial Track-Two contributions to the New Southern Policy and 3rd Asean-RoK Commemorative Summit.

The project spanning from July 2019 to September 2020 consisted of the ISIS Malaysia forum on Korea at the end of 2019, the book [New Southern Policy – Catalyst for Deepening Asean-ROK Cooperation](#), a special edition of [ISIS Focus](#) and a book launch in 2020.

The 60th anniversary of Malaysian-Korean diplomatic relations was marked by an online commemoration in a "normal" Malaysia Scholars on Korea (MASK) Network Forum meeting. It included selected interventions and reflections by role-players of the MASK Network Forum, as well as

participation and presentations by Wisma Putra and the Republic of Korea embassy in Malaysia. The discussions took stock of the bilateral relations and explored ways forward.

Celebrating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Malaysia and RoK during a resurgence of the pandemic and the imposition of the MCO required creativity and deft public affairs arrangements.

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) commissioned ISIS Malaysia to undertake the national mid-term review of the Asean Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025 implementation.

We evaluated the results and effects of the achievements of the specific outcomes and impacts of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 objectives.

Alizan, Thomas, Nazran, Farlina, **Muhammad Sinatra**, Qistina and Terence participated in this project which was successfully executed to the satisfaction of the client. The final report was submitted to Asean (Malaysia was one of the few countries to have submitted on time) and presented to stakeholders.

ISIS Malaysia's effort was also the first time any agency in Malaysia (including MOTAC, which supervises the implementation of the ASCC in Malaysia) attempted to encapsulate a qualitative assessment of the implementation of the ASCC in Malaysia.

The methodology and approach – a combination of outcome-based monitoring systems and sectoral interviews – should serve as a template for MOTAC to conduct future assessments.

Several researchers also participated in preparing a strategic assessment on Malaysian foreign relations for the consideration of the foreign minister and Foreign Affairs Ministry. This assessment sought to present a comprehensive and strategic outlook on how Malaysia could leverage on its key competitive advantages to position itself in an evolving international order.



(From left) Izzah Khairina Ibrahim; Muhammad Sinatra; Farlina Said; Zarina Zainuddin; and Thomas Daniel

Foreign policy and security studies

Last year, ISIS Malaysia took a critical look at ASEAN's cooperative response to Covid-19 and its ripple effects, how the pandemic was subsumed within ongoing major power competition between the United States and China, and the role of middle powers in ensuring a peaceful, rules-based regional order free from major power competition or hegemony. Our ongoing key research areas include issues impacting bilateral relations, countering violent extremism, cyber security, and Malaysia's policies towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Return to constitutional fundamentalism

PROF Emeritus Datuk Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi was the fourth holder of the Tun Hussein Onn Chair (THOC) in International Studies.

The chair was established to honour the contributions made by the third prime minister in shaping the nation's foreign policy. The THOC at ISIS Malaysia is funded by the Noah Foundation.

During 2020, Shad published two books, authored an article in the *Singapore Academy of Law Journal*, published five articles in ISIS Malaysia publications and 29 articles in other publications.

He delivered seven THOC public lectures (two of the webinars had some of the highest participants for ISIS Malaysia) and delivered 15 other seminars/webinars to such diverse institutions as the Judicial Academy, Taylors University, Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, University of Malaya, Malaysian Medical Council, Bar Council, Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College, National Human Rights Society, and National Institute of Public Administration. He delivered talks to visiting delegations from Bangladesh and Mindanao and took part in a book project on SDGs by ISIS Malaysia and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

He was invited to deliver a much-celebrated TED talk on "Returning to the constitution's path of moderation". He was invited by the Federal Court to deliver an amicus curiae for the apex court in the famous case of *Rovin Joty*. He also addressed newly appointed judicial commissioners on "constitutional interpretation". The Dewan Rakyat speaker invited him to be a joint editor for a pioneering book on parliamentary practice. He has advocated moderation in inter-ethnic relations and has written extensively on institutional reform.

To promote constitutional literacy and constitutional patriotism, he wrote fortnightly articles in *The Star* and appeared in many BFM programmes on contemporary public law issues.

Among his national and international activities on behalf of THOC are co-editor of *Law, Principles and Practice in the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) of Malaysia*, Sweet & Maxwell, 2020; [The Pandemic, the Constitution and the Laws](#) in ISIS Focus 3/2020 issue No. 12; [Our Constitution – Our Document of Destiny](#), No. 1 of a series of essays on Malaysia's constitutional fundamentals; [Constitutional Supremacy](#);



Prof Emeritus Datuk Dr Shad Saleem Faruqi

[Theory v Reality](#), No. 2 of a series of essays on Malaysia's constitutional fundamentals; [Appointment of a Prime Minister](#), No. 3 of a series of essays on Malaysia's constitutional fundamentals; and *Freedom of Religion and the Covid-19 Pandemic*, No. 4 of a series of essays on Malaysia's constitutional fundamentals.

The ISIS webinars touched on the constitutional conundrums of the Covid-19 crisis, dissected our Westminster system of "parliamentary government", and covered the constitution and the shariah and federal-state relations on the peninsula's sometimes thorny relations with Sabah and Sarawak.

The Noah Foundation (Yayasan Mohamed Noah)

The Noah Foundation is a charitable non-profit organisation established on 23 June 1971 by the late Tan Sri Mohamed Noah Omar, the nation's first speaker of the Dewan Rakyat.

Since its inception, the Noah Foundation has administered funds for education, religious and charitable purposes.

Over the years, the Noah Foundation has funded the following projects:

- The establishment in perpetuity of the Mohamed Noah Fellowship in Asian Politics at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom.
- The establishment in perpetuity of the Mohamed Noah Fellowship at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Oxford, United Kingdom.
- The establishment of the Tun Abdul Razak Lecture Theatre at the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, United Kingdom.
- The Masjid Yayasan Mohamed Noah (the Mohamed Noah Foundation Mosque) at Sri Layang, Genting Highlands.
- Renovated and enhanced the orphanage, Rumah Anak-Anak Yatim Muar, housed in the Noah family home in Muar, Johor.
- The Tun Hussein Onn Chair in International Studies at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia.
- Medical supplies and equipment to medical institutions and humanitarian aid missions.

Datin Paduka Dr Faridah Abdullah is chairman of the board of trustees of the Noah Foundation. The board of trustees strives and is committed to perpetuating the vision of the late Tan Sri Mohamed Noah Omar.

