

## EDITORIAL NOTE

### TRAFFICKING IN THE POST PANDEMIC: CASTING HUMAN SECURITY, AND UNIVERSAL PERIODICAL REVIEW IN MALAYSIA<sup>© Σ</sup>

RAVI MAHALINGAM\*, ADILAH ABDUL GHAPOR†,  
AND RUDY KANA‡

---

#### ABSTRACT

Growing research interest and policymaking over the issue of Malaysian security and the human dimension of threats have brought transdisciplinary and transnational engagements in the problem of trafficking. Unpacking salient rudimentary attributes of trafficking, human security, and humanitarian and human rights improvement can no longer be treated as ivory tower work per se. There is a continuous need to accommodate constructive space for academics, policymakers, and state and non-state actors in the idea exchange of the input- and output-processes of our national security policy. This note provides an overview of our editorial work and selection of articles for the publications of this special issue. We remained indebted to the relevant ministries, universities, funding bodies, and non-governmental organisations involved throughout the research and publication process.

**Keywords:** special issue on trafficking, national and human security of Malaysia, UPR and human rights improvement in Malaysia, pandemic and endemic shift of Malaysian Security Studies.

---

© The Author(s) 2023. Published by UKM Press on behalf of SPHEA, FSSH UKM and MAFDC. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Σ **Article info:** Submission date: 6 April 2021; Acceptance date: 13 November 2022; Publication date: 31 Mac 2023.

\* **First Author:** Ravi Mahalingam, PhD (*MALAYA*) is an Assistant, Ministry of Home Affairs, Kompleks D, Pusat Pentadbiran, Kerajaan Persekutuan, 62546 Putrajaya, Malaysia. Email: ravi@moha.gov.my

† **Second Author and Corresponding Author:** Adilah Abdul Ghapor, PhD (*MALAYA*), Senior Lecturer, Department of Decision Science, Faculty of Business and Economics, Universiti Malaya, 50603 Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Malaysia. Email: adilahghapor@um.edu.my

‡ **Third Author:** Rudy Kana, CMBA (*UNIMAS*), Lecturer, Henley Business School, University of Reading, Campus Malaysia, Persiaran Graduan, Kota Ilmu, EduCity, 79200 Iskandar Puteri, Johor, Malaysia. Email: rudy.kana@henley.edu.my

**NOTA EDITOR****ISU KHAS PEMERDAGANGAN ORANG DI ERA PASCA PANDEMIK:  
KESELAMATAN INSAN DAN SEMAKAN UNIVERSAL BERKALA**

RAVI MAHALINGAM, ADILAH ABDUL GHAPOR,  
DAN RUDY KANA

---

**ABSTRAK**

*Minat penyelidikan dan penggubalan dasar yang semakin meningkat berhubung isu keselamatan Malaysia dan dimensi ancaman manusia telah membawa penglibatan transdisiplin dan transnasional dalam masalah pemerdagangan orang. Membongkar sifat asas utama pemerdagangan, keselamatan manusia, dan peningkatan kemanusiaan dan hak asasi manusia tidak lagi boleh dianggap sebagai kerja akademik semata-mata. Terdapat keperluan berterusan untuk menampung ruang yang membina untuk ahli akademik, penggubal dasar, dan juga aktor negeri dan bukan negara dalam pertukaran idea proses input dan output dasar keselamatan negara kita. Nota ini memberikan gambaran keseluruhan kerja editorial penyunting dan pilihan makalah untuk penerbitan isu khas ini. Kami tetap terhutang budi kepada kementerian, universiti, badan pembiayaan dan badan bukan kerajaan yang berkaitan yang terlibat sepanjang proses penyelidikan dan penerbitan.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Isu khas pemerdagangan orang, keselamatan nasional dan insan Malaysia, UPR dan penambahbaikan hak asasi manusia di Malaysia, pandemik dna peralihan endemik dalam Pengajian Keselamatan Malaysia*

## Introduction

Human trafficking is a well-known problem in many countries including Malaysia. Myriads of contending views and positions exacerbate constructive dialogue between academics and policymakers, as well as pragmatic advancement of security policymaking and performance (Trude 2016, 17). In fact, during this exact thinking process, our position as the guest editors for this special issue (as each of us comes from different academic, business, and policy experiences) felt a gigantic task of deliberating comment improvements and editorial decisions for each selected article.

Two underlying themes underpin the publication of selected papers for this special issue. First, the arduous chore of reconciling global and local perspectives of trafficking, and how political sensitivity and criticism of the security ecosystem endure polarised minds, be it conducted by the state or non-state actor. Second, the expansive notion of security currently overlaps with the transnational and mutated object of threats, crimes, and illicit behaviour.

Amid divergent perspectives and the growing application of transdisciplinary perspectives, we can no longer remain silent and reduce complexity of the problem and solution for the pretext of a blame game (Mahalingam and Sidhu 2020, 309). Consequently, combating trafficking and Universal Periodical Review (UPR) of Human Rights development though in the past, treated as an isolated policy and academic exercise, are now, overlapped, or at least, a regress of the former may affect the progress of the latter (Wan Mohd Nor, *et al.* 2023). Increasing civic awareness and multidimensional security literacy among the enforcement officers, the business community, civil society, and ordinary Malaysian is rather necessary. After all, the six principles of the Malaysian *Madani* framework developed by the Unity Government should be considered to overcome the knowledge gap in trafficking and rights improvement so the unprecedented effects of the pandemic upon our security reality and practice can be contained.

Presently, Malaysian state-society relations are under a constant dynamic and transition wherein public opinion and metaverse conversation of everyday concerns and perils of security, development, and rights cannot be isolated from our apprehension of national security and the need to protect (Othman and Mat 2022, 2). International security net effects and how local response to mitigate threats and ensure security can no longer be addressed through a linear approach to mitigate crisis (Othman 2006, 45).

Moreover, long before the mushroomed human capability discourse of development and human security within the Malaysian academic circle, trafficking was often reduced to a domain of legal enforcement and criminality system (Othman *et al.* 2023, 21). In tandem with the post-Cold War transition of understating of threats and interest to human security by early 1990s, there remains a problem with a pragmatic local approach to explaining and understanding non-traditional security interlinked with the cross-border security, national economic development, crimes reduction strategies, and citizen wellbeing. Inadvertently, the national security interest has now lingered with the international and regional security dimensions. In the past, our understanding of national security is confined to the historical contingency of the Malayan communist insurgency, militant groups, and local terrorist networks, and that brought in the practice of total or civil defense (for example, HANRUH and KESBAN) (Boon-Jong 2021, 58). However, our state system has evolved, and so our national defense and security ecosystem has

expanded. Previously unfamiliar lexicon of food security, pandemic and health security, and trafficking and human security were almost silent within the public security conversations (Ravi 2020, 263).

In short, old issues may remain prevalent but require a new and improvised approach. Over the last five years, political challenges and ramifications of prolonged total lockdown have brought gradual awareness of Malaysians on new security and the vulnerability of human, thereby global human security discourse is now part of the national lexicon of safety and menace concerns (Persaud 2022, 145). The development of the defense white paper and national security policy has further reinforced the conversation despite many loopholes in the way we comprehend and deliver them.

As a result, there is no consensus among the local academic and policymaker in approaching or studying the emergence of non-traditional security threats in Malaysia (Jones 2011, 405). Simultaneously with the growing critical turn in global security studies and international relations, various unique applications of critical security strands are now developed as part of Malaysian academic and research training, aimed at increasing public security literacy and improve national policy (Dollah 2023, 578). Apart from conventional strategic studies approach in treating new security as non-traditional security threats, others have focused on securitisation wherein non-security object aimed at explaining the security process and effect of the non-security object Balzacq *et al.* 2016, 404). Meanwhile, human security proponents have adopted the sociological human rights approach in connecting the universal logic of rights and civil liberty in local knowledge and awareness (Persaud 2022, 147). However, academic criticism over the shortcomings and problematic nature of the Copenhagen model of securitisation and universal romanticisation of individual human rights approach to local human security needs are well rehearsed (Haacke and Williams 2008, 778). At this critical juncture and parallel to the ongoing *Madani* approach of the Unity government, the “glocal” approach by the Bangi Human Security Approach (BAGHUS) has resurfaced and call for a local and national sensitivity of applying universal human security practice that is relevant to our national policy (see Ramli *et al.* 2012).

Within the complex development of the Malaysian security study approaches, selected articles for this special issue are organised and gathered to enlighten and broaden Malaysian security readers and policymakers. The first article written by Zarina Othman, Nafisah Ilham Hussein, and Norhafiza Mohd Hed (2023, 8-29) examines the challenges of existing preventive measures in overcoming trafficking issues during a pandemic in Malaysia. Apart from providing a compelling argument and updating the literature, the article offers a fair critical assessment of the Malaysian authority and measures for improvement. Their specific three case studies of the underlying trafficking ecosystem at the palm oil plantation, industrial factory, and local human trafficking shelters illuminate the discrepancies between enforcement and protection. This serves as a reminder to improve and involve state and non-state in ensuring greater security in the protection of rights. After all, through a local understanding of human security, it will be possible to explore trafficking relations with UPR and human rights improvements in Malaysia.

The second article is written by Bakri Mat, Siti Darwinda Mohamed Pero, and Ku Nurasyiqin Ku Amir (2023, 30-49). By focusing on the micro level of unrecognised Rohingya refugees located in various parts of Kedah, Malaysia they argue for the human security perspective of refugee discourse in Malaysia. Instructive lessons from temporary and unofficial shelter accounts of Kedahan Rohingya children and parents have

unravelling complex sensitivity and tensions between the needs of international refugee convention and durable local solutions for "unwanted" or undocumented migrants. The consequence of permanently treating them as economic refugees and illegal migrants poses long-term security policy improvements. Faced with uncertain transit options to another country, temporary UNHCR cardholders of Rohingya are not only subject to present sensitive political backlashes but require an immediate plan of action that mitigates the problem with dignified treatment.

The third article, published by Andika Wahab, Abdul Hamid Abd Murad, and Romil Shamsudin (2023, 50-65), examines causes and barriers within the forced labour ecosystem involving Nepalese foreign worker recruitment in Malaysia. In-depth studies with the Nepalese foreign labours during the pandemic provide a provocative but vital reminder of the continuous improvement of the system. Only through recruitment policy improvements, the prospect of abusive tendencies and violation of immigration law and foreign working permits can be resolved. Nonetheless, a focused study on a specific foreign migrant community in Malaysia informs us of the unique security challenge, and migration policy improvement is needed.

The fourth article produced by Murni Wan Mohd Nor, Fatimah AlZahrah Syed Hussein Al-Attas, and Lubna Sheikh Ghazali (2023, 66-81) focuses more on the relationship between freedom of expression and human rights development within the UPR setbacks and progress in Malaysian since 2018. The article introduces human rights and UPR discourse as part of human security understanding. However, recent security and political situations in Malaysia require a more legally balanced and pragmatic engagement of human rights protections that strike a balance between local sentiments and international worldviews of rights. Immediate abolishment of municipal laws deemed as "undemocratic" is not only counterproductive but distorts local struggles for human rights whereas the absolute universal freedom pretext only negates and constraints credible needs of protection and rights literacy. However, they also highlight the immediate need for legal improvement to preserve justice and rule of law.

The fifth article is a short commentary written by Aizat Khair, Ramlan Mohd Arshad, and Mohd Na'eim Ajis (2003, 82-90). In their contribution, they illustrate the global challenge of the UNHCR as the leading international body for implementing global refugee policy. While Malaysia is not a signatory of the refugee convention, the UNHCR facilitates those deemed a needed refugee and asylum protection. Though their article mainly focuses on the global overview of the international agency, it is essential to inform the Malaysian audience about the situation of different types of refugees. Furthermore, the current national political climate and controversy surrounding problems involving Rohingyas in the Klang Valley require more dialogue and healthy conversation among the locals, including an understanding of the perils of refugee card holders of Rohingya. No doubt security offences related to Rohingya individuals should not be ignored.

Meanwhile, the sixth article is also a short commentary by Mohd Noor Yazid (2023, 91-99) on the needs of the present Malaysian readers of international politics to revisit the historical lessons from the bipolar order of European society during the interwar and cold war periods. The current power rivalry between the US and China in the South China Sea should encourage more re-reading of Political Realism and global history in impacting and improving our knowledge about the ongoing rise and fall of the great power in Southeast Asia.

The seventh article is an obituary note for the late Lieutenant Colonel Professor

Ahmad Ghazali Abu Hassan, who passed away in December 2022. The late Ahmad Ghazali previously served as the First Dean for the Faculty of Defence Studies during the formative year of the National Defence University of Malaysia in 2006. Written by Teh Yik Koon, Aruna Gopinath, and Ariffin S. M. Omar (2023, 100-104), the authors recall their memories of Ahmad Ghazali and his intellectual contributions to the local development of the first national teaching university in defence and strategic studies.

Finally, the eighth and last article is a book review in Bahasa Malaysia, written by Ramli Dollah (2023, 105-114). The in-depth critical appraisal of the book review article is timely and relevant to the focus of this special issue and the ongoing public interest in food security in Malaysia.

### Acknowledgment and Declaration

This special issue resulted from various institutional collaborations and a few funding bodies involving official and unofficial stakeholders. Respected individual articles will provide individual grant acknowledgment and institutional collaboration declaration. Despite the controversy and sensitivity surrounding trafficking and human rights in Malaysia, all appropriate security, ethical, and fieldwork considerations have been heeded. No security hazard, legal offence and moral harm has been involved or has occurred throughout the research and publication processes. All relevant and numerous policy guidance are observed. In line with Malaysia's *Madani* approach, individual scholarly views of each published article do not represent the collective worldviews of Malaysian society. However, they provide constructive avenues for long-term improvement of the Malaysian security policy and our national well-being.

As guest editors for this special issue, we wish to take this opportunity to express our most profound appreciation to the Editorial Board and team members of SINERGI. We would also like to express our gratitude to the journal blind review teams and authoritative experts from various countries and government bodies. We remain grateful for their constructive feedback in improving the quality of this special issue.

### References

- Bakri, Mat., Siti Darwinda Mohamed Pero, and Ku Nurasyiqin Ku Amir. 2023. "Refugee Discourse." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 30-49.
- Balzacq, T., S. Leonard and J. Ruzicka. 2016. "'Securitization' Revisited." *International Relations* 30, no. 4: 403-432.
- Boon-Jong, C. 2021. "Comprehensive Defence: Challenges Faced by Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) in Operationalisation of HANRUH." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 1, no. 1: 57-72.
- Haacke, J. and P. D. Williams. 2008. "Regional Arrangements, Securitization, and Transnational Security Challenges: The AU and ASEAN Compared." *Security Studies* 17, no. 4: 775-809.
- Jones, Lee. 2011. "Beyond Securitization: Explaining the Scope of Security Policy in Southeast Asia." *International Relations of the Asia Pacific* 11, no. 3: 403-432.

- Khairi, Aizat., M. Ramlan M. Arshad and M. Na'eim Ajis. 2023. "Addressing the Refugee Problem by UNCHR." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 82-90.
- Koon, Teh Yik., A. Gopinath dan A. S.M Omar. 2023. "In Memoriam Ahmad Ghazali Abu Hassan (1956-2022)." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 100-104.
- Mahalingam, Ravi. and Jatswan S. Sidhu. 2020. "Inside the Crime of Sex Trafficking in Sabah, Malaysia." *Journal of Human Trafficking* 7, no. 3: 308-324.
- Othman, Zarina. 2006. "Human (In)security, Human Trafficking and Security in Malaysia." In *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry*, edited by K. Beeks and D. Amir, 41-60. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press.
- Othman, Zarina., and Bakri Mat. 2022. "The State of Malaysian Security during Pandemic." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 2, no. 1: 1-5.
- Othman, Zarina., Nafisah Ilham Hussein, and Norhafiza Mohd Hed. 2023. "Examining Human Trafficking Issue in Malaysia's Post-Pandemic Era: Preventive Measure and Challenges" *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 8-29.
- Persaud, Randolph. 2022. "Human Security." In *Contemporary Security Studies* (6th edition), edited by Alan Collins, 144-158. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ramli, Dollah. 2023. "Ulasan Buku: Dasar Sekuriti Makanan." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 105-114.
- Ramli, Rashila., Zarina Othman, Nor Azizan Idris and Sity Daud. 2012. "Towards a Modified Approach to Human Security in Southeast Asia: A Perspective from Bangi." *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 20, no. 3: 577-588.
- Ravi, Anita. 2020. "Human Trafficking and Public Health." In *Routledge International Handbook of Human Trafficking* (6th edition), edited by Rochelle L. Dalla and Donna Sabella, 262-285. London: Routledge.
- Trude, Jacobsen. 2016. *Sex Trafficking in Southeast Asia: A History of Desire, Duty, and Debt*. London: Routledge.
- Wahab, Andika., A. Hamid A. Murad, and R. Shamsuddin. 2023. "Underpinning Forced Labour in Nepal-Malaysia Corridor." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 50-65.
- Wan M. N., Murni., Fatimah AlZahrah Syeh Hussein Al-Attas, and L. S. Ghazali. 2023. "Realising Accepted UPR Recommendations." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 66-81.
- Yazid, M. N. 2023. "Stability and Order in Europe." *SINERGI: Journal of Strategic Studies and international Affairs* 3, no. SI. 1: 91-99.