ASEAN Background Guide

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the ASEAN committee at WAMUNC XXVII. My name is Jessica Spindler and I will be your chair over the course of this weekend. A little bit about me, I'm a current junior at the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University. I'm majoring in International Affairs with a concentration in International Development and a minor in Economics. Academically, I have interests in microeconomics, economic development, and law. I have been a member of the GW MUN team for three years and am a Copy Editor for The Globe, the Elliott School's Undergraduate Research Journal. Outside of MUN, I work with our men's basketball team, enjoy reading, and love going to local yoga classes in DC.

ASEAN is an important organization to understand because, with the current regional and global economic gains they have made, in the coming decade the Southeast Asia regional bloc will only increase their economic influence on the global stage. Thus, by debating some of the more pressing issues the organization and its member states face, you all will be able to better understand how significant the region's development is to the global economy.

I would like to take a moment to reiterate the level of respect expected from delegates. Any forms of racism, sexism, or discrimination based on identity will not be tolerated. While some positions may not have the same views on identities such as gender or sexuality as we do in the United States, that is not an excuse to say or write material that will harm another delegate or disrespect a culture or country.

With that being said, I look forward to hearing the innovative ideas and debate that you will all bring to the committee. Learning about the opinions of your country (or extrapolating on

what you have researched) and applying them in committee will make for an interesting and fun weekend, especially with our two topics: Cybercrime and GMOs. Good luck in your preparations and I am excited to see everyone in March!

Kind regards,

Jessica Spindler

Introduction

Over the past five years, the world has seen numerous ups and downs, with no sphere seeing more change than the economy. Though the years between 2019 and 2022 had seen a massive fluctuation in global GDP, we've begun to stabilize as a whole. However, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple wars, and massive humanitarian crises have not affected all regions of the world equally. Though they faced many hardships during the pandemic, one of the regions with the most significant bouncebacks has been Southeast Asia.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, is a regional community that aims to increase regional stability, political and economic cooperation, and cultural development among Southeast Asian nations. Founded on August 8th, 1967, there were originally 5 member states; currently 10 nations are members.[1] There are three primary pillars of ASEAN: the economic community, political-security community, and socio-cultural community.[2]

Economically, ASEAN has become a powerhouse on the global stage, earning itself the title of one of the fastest growing regions and an area worthy of significant investment. For example, they have signed a large number of free trade area agreements with countries such as China, Australia and New Zealand, and India. Furthermore, since 2022, ASEAN has maintained a just-over 6% regional GDP growth rate.[3] However, the growth has also brought negatives. With the rapid digitalization of the global economy, the technological infrastructure of ASEAN is severely lacking, exposing it to ransomware attacks, hacks, and leaks.[4] The rebounding from

[1] ASEAN, "About ASEAN - ASEAN Main Portal," ASEAN Main Portal, September 17, 2024, https://asean.org/about-asean/.
[2] Ibid.
[3] World Bank. "GDP Growth (Annual %) (Indicator Code: NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG)." Accessed November 19, 2024. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=8S0.
[4] "Cybercrime: The Underground Economy," Palo Alto Networks, n.d., https://www.paloaltonetworks.com/cyberpedia/cybercrime-the-underground-economy.

COVID-19 has also spotlighted health, making the debate of the safety of GMOs front and center once more.

Thus, the debate over the course of this weekend will follow one of two topics: cybercrime in Southeast Asia or debate over the benefits and risks of GMOs on the health of the Southeast Asian population.

Topic 1: Cybercrime and its Prevention in Southeast Asia's Economy

Cybercrime in Southeast Asia has seen a drastic increase over the past five years. In 2023 alone, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime estimated that SE Asia alone lost between 18 and 37 billion US dollars, mainly in part from scams and cyberattacks, and in the first half of 2024, there has been an estimated 600% increase in reports of deep fakes across the region.[5] Furthermore, there has been a substantial rise in the number of cyber traffickers, who blackmail and hold hostage data as a way to blackmail users into working on scam farms, creating a system of "cyber-slavery."[6] All of this has further created a new culture of cyber crime syndicates that generate billions of dollars per year. This leads to criminal innovation: more advanced deep fakes, complex malware, and ransomware attacks– all aimed at advancing the existing human trafficking and money laundering schemes, making it more difficult for law enforcement to protect the public and break down the syndicates.[7]

Cybercrime is defined as illicit activity that occurs on a digital platform, with or without financial motive, to any person, organization, or government, typically done through the

[5] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). "Cyberfraud Industry Expands in Southeast Asia." October 2024. Accessed November 19, 2024. https://www.unodc.org/roseap/en/2024/10/cyberfraud-industry-expands-southeast-asia/story.html.
[6] "Southeast Asia Is Tackling Cyberattacks on the Underbanked," World Economic Forum, October 15, 2024, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/10/southeast-asia-tackling-cyberattacks-underbanked/.
[7] XYnik. "Southeast Asian Cybercrime Profits Fuel Shadow Economy." October 14, 2024. Accessed November 19, 2024. https://xynik.com/index.php/2024/10/14/southeast-asian-cybercrime-profits-fuel-shadow-economy/.

exploitation of a vulnerability that will cause financial, social, or operational harm to the receiving party.[8] These types of crimes include Phishing, ransomware, cyber-espionage, identity thefts, cyberterrorism, and social engineering, all of which occur in SE Asia. Phishing and ransomware are the most common type of financial crimes; they will be fraudulent emails to collect sensitive information or a malicious software that encrypts and blocks a person's information until payment is received.[9] Cyberterrorism is when a group, for example, hacks a hospital in order to instill fear in the general public.[10] These types of crimes have grown exponentially, primarily because of the slow pace of government development, compared to the illicit economy.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SE Asian economy are most obviously shown by the rapid growth of the online sector. The pandemic significantly accelerated the rate of digital transformation in the region– originally worth 174 billion in 2021, by 2030 the value of the region's digital economy is expected to surpass one trillion US dollars in value.[11] Furthermore, there has been a ridiculously large boom in the ecommerce sector. As in the rest of the world, consumers turned to online platforms to shop, causing businesses to go online to survive. However, as a negative side effect, this digitalization has resulted in a larger divide between the socio-economic classes in the region, augmenting the marginalization of rural and low income groups with little to no internet access.[12] Thus, while there have been large advancements economically, there has also been a significant increase in inequality within the

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[8] "Global Cybersecurity Outlook 2024," World Economic Forum, September 10, 2024, https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-cybersecurity-outlook-2024/.
[9] "UNODC - Darknet Cybercrime Threats to Southeast Asia," n.d., https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/archive/documents/darknet/index.html.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Stephanie Davis, "A Digital Decade for Southeast Asia," *Google*, November 10, 2021, https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-asia/sea-digital-decade/.
[12] "Bridging Southeast Asia's Digital Divide for Financial Inclusion," World Economic Forum, September 10, 2024, https://www.weforum.org/stories/2022/05/bridging-southeast-asia-digital-divide-driving-financial-inclusion/.

region, amplifying pre-existing animosities and augmenting political divides, throwing the political stability off slightly.

Presently, there are many weaknesses within the digital economic structure in the Southeast Asian community. One of the largest barriers to advancement and security is the lack of consistent regulation within countries in ASEAN. For example, Singapore is one of the leading technological hubs in the world, with a largely developed framework in place to protect their individual digital economy.[13] However, in countries with larger rural populations, access to developed technology is few and far between. Another barrier is the infrastructure strain on the economy. While the digital economy is rapidly advancing, there are physical roadblocks that prevent uninhibited developments, for example access to broadband internet, inefficient logistics, and outdated or unsecure payment systems.[14] Past these two main issues, the region also faces rising inequality in accessibility to the internet, a major skills and education gap in technology, and a decrease in private funding, due to the liability of the digital infrastructure.

ASEAN has implemented multiple frameworks and policies as an attempt to mitigate the exponential growth of cybercrime in three main ways. The first manner is the creation of an ASEAN-designated cybercrime desk established by INTERPOL in 2018. The desk's aim is to dismantle cybercriminal organizations through investigation, operational coordinations, and intelligence development.[15] The second angle of attack has been the development of the ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy from 2021-2025.[16] The framework aims to equalize the

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[13] "Southeast Asia Is Tackling Cyberattacks on the Underbanked."
[14] "e-Conomy SEA 2024 Report: Profitability Push in Southeast Asia's Digital Economy Delivers 2.5X Profits in Two Years as Businesses Focus on Monetisation," Bain, n.d., https://www.bain.com/about/media-center/press-releases/sea/e-conomy-sea-2024/.
[15] INTERPOL. "ASEAN Cybercrime Operations Desk." Accessed November 27, 2024. https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Cybercrime/Cybercrime-operations/ASEAN-Cybercrime-Operations-Desk.
[16] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). *ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy (2021–2025).* February 2022. Accessed November 27, 2024. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/01-ASEAN-Cybersecurity-Cooperation-Paper-2021-2025_final-23-0122.pdf.

countries within the bloc in terms of information sharing, technological infrastructure, and response times to cyber attacks.[17] This is done as a way of presenting a united and fortified front across the region. Lastly, ASEAN has implemented a new working group called the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) Working Group on Cybercrime. This working group serves as a space to continuously acknowledge and address practical application and cooperation in the fight against cybercrime in the region.[18]

To summarize, the weak digital and traditional infrastructure in Southeast Asia have caused a major opening for the development of cybercrime and syndicates within the region, causing billions of dollars in economic loss over the course of a single year. Furthermore, there has been rising inequality and a game of catch up in the development of infrastructure to support the increasing technological development.

[17] Ibid.
[18] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). *ASEAN Cyberthreat Assessment 2020.* January 2021. Accessed November 27, 2024. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN_CyberThreatAssessment_2020.pdf.

Questions to Consider:

1. How can ASEAN member states create unified cybersecurity legislation to ensure cohesive action against cross-border cybercrimes?
2. What steps should be taken to address the regulatory disparities that cybercriminals exploit, such as in cryptocurrency usage or data protection?
3. What investments are required to modernize cybersecurity infrastructure in underdeveloped parts of the region?
4. How can Southeast Asia tackle the forced labor associated with scam centers and cybercrime operations?
5. What systems can be established to monitor progress on regional cybersecurity strategies and ensure accountability for implementation?
6. How can governments balance enhanced cybersecurity measures with the protection of individual privacy rights?

Topic 2: Impacts of Genetically Modified Crops on Global Health and Economy

In Southeast Asia, genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are gaining traction, with countries like the Philippines and Vietnam leading adoption, particularly in crops such as maize and cotton. The Philippines was the first in the region to commercialize a GMO with Bt corn in 2002, and Vietnam began growing GM corn in 2015. However, GMO adoption remains cautious in countries like Thailand and Indonesia, where stringent regulations and public skepticism hinder widespread use. While GMOs offer benefits such as pest resistance, higher yields, and potential solutions for food security and malnutrition, challenges like high costs, environmental concerns, and trade barriers remain. The juxtaposition between benefits and negatives have only stimulated the international debates.

Genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, are organisms whose genetic material has been altered using biotechnology, including the modification of traits that are not naturally found in the organism.[19] The first modern GMOs were developed in 1973 using what is known as recombinant DNA technology[20]– or when a singular part of the DNA genome is manipulated and isolated to change.[21] One of the most breakthrough technologies to come from genetic modification is the development of insulin to help maintain insulin levels of diabetic patients.[22] However, the first genetically modified crop/food was developed later in 1994 with the creation of Flavr Savr tomatoes, beginning the GMO craze.[23] Today, GMOs are widely used for the

[19] Melissa Petruzzello, "When Were the First GMOs Developed?," Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d., https://www.britannica.com/story/when-were-the-first-gmos-developed.
[20] Ibid.
[21] "Recombinant DNA Technology," Genome.gov, n.d., https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Recombinant-DNA-Technology.
[22] Petruzzello, "When Were the First GMOs Developed?"
[23] Ibid.

enhancement of nutritional value, pest-resistance technology, and an augmentation of crop yields.[24]

The reasons why GMOs are used in crop production are extensive, reaching across every aspect of crop production, agriculturally and economically. The most important reason for the use of GMOs is the increased crop yields. The genetic modification of crops allows for the installation of genomes and genetic material that allows for climate resilience, pest resistance, and disease control, meaning that the amount of crops per yield increases, allowing for greater food production. According to the US National Library of Medicine, genetic modification to crops has increased crop yields by over 22%.[25] Because the UN has predicted that by 2050 we will need to produce 70% more food to feed the global population[26], increases in crop yields by 22% is a significant step in the right direction. This increased crop yield is also in part because of pest resistance. With the implementation of GMOs, pests are less of a risk and have led to a 37% decrease in the use of chemical pesticides.[27] The decrease in chemical pesticide use and increase in crop yield shows the effectiveness of GMOs in preventing pest-transmitted disease and pests destroying yields, leading to a more consistent, if not growing, year-to-year harvest. All of this has led to an economic efficiency with food that has increased access to proper nutrition.[28]

While there are many benefits to GMOs, there are significant drawbacks as well. Healthwise, there are significant concerns over the potential to trigger allergic reactions and development of antibiotic resistance. Allergic reactions occur when the GM protein or allergen is

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[24] "From Corgis to Corn: A Brief Look at the Long History of GMO Technology," Science in the News, August 9, 2015, https://sites.harvard.edu/sitn/2015/08/09/from-corgis-to-corn-a-brief-look-at-the-long-history-of-gmo-technology/.
[25] Wilhelm Klümper and Matin Qaim, "A Meta-Analysis of the Impacts of Genetically Modified Crops," *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 11 (November 3, 2014): e111629, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0111629.
[26] Glp Digital, "A Short History of GMOs, From Prehistoric Times to Today," Genetic Literacy Project, December 31, 2018, https://geneticliteracyproject.org/2015/08/12/gmos-from-ancient-history-to-the-future/.
[27] Klümper and Qaim, "A Meta-Analysis of the Impacts of Genetically Modified Crops."
[28] "From Corgis to Corn: A Brief Look at the Long History of GMO Technology."

present and consumed by someone allergic, and while the allergy may not be known initially, the mixing of genes between two crops may create new allergens that less people have immunity to.[29] Antibiotic resistant GMOs are also a concern; at Washington State University, experiments were conducted on their persistence using the treatment methods for wastewater and sewage. The study found that some GMOs continued to exist, despite the extensive treatment, raising concerns on the potential for harmful bacteria to remain in the digestive systems of humans.[30]

GMOs also present high environmental and economic concerns. Environmental, the development of GMOs has led to the emergence of "superweeds" that are resistant to more natural or weak herbicides, leading to the use of stronger chemicals harmful to the environment.[31] Furthermore, unintentional cross-pollination of GM plants and non-GM plants may lead to the introduction of unintended traits to plants that could severely impact the biodiversity of a region.[32] Economically, there may be serious issues with what is known as "seed-patenting." Seed-patenting is when companies develop a GM crop and patent it, meaning the farmers would have to purchase rights to use the seeds, and may cut back on their profits, effectively creating a form of oligopoly over the research and development of these crops.[33]

In Southeast Asia, the use of GMOs has been irregularly supported and implemented across ASEAN countries. The Philippines were the first to approve and widely adopt genetically modified crops in 2002, with over 900,000 hectares being cultivated in recent years.[34] After the Philippines, Vietnam is the second largest GM crop producer in SE Asia, however most other

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[29] BioExplorer, "6 Major Disadvantages of Genetically Modified Foods | Biology Explorer," Bio Explorer, June 12, 2021, https://www.bioexplorer.net/disadvantages-of-genetically-modified-foods.html/.
[30] Green Coast. "Disadvantages of GMOs." Accessed November 19, 2024. https://greencoast.org/disadvantages-of-gmos/.
[31] "GMO And non-GMO: Pros and Cons - ProTerra Foundation," ProTerra Foundation, June 27, 2024, https://www.proterrafoundation.org/news/gmo-and-non-gmo-pros-and-cons/.
[32] Green Coast. "Disadvantages of GMOs."
[33] Ibid.
[34] Orachos Napasintuwong, "Current Status of Agricultural Biotechnology in Thailand," FFTC Agricultural Policy Platform (FFTC-AP), July 16, 2020, https://ap.fftc.org.tw/article/1383.

nations have not picked up the trend. For example, Thailand has a near de facto ban on the cultivation of GM crops and the research and development of biotechnology is kept strictly under wraps.[35] Other countries, like Myanmar and Bangladesh, have adopted different GM crops on a smaller scale, but have yet to industrialize their crop production.[36]

Public and cultural perception of GMOs varies across the region significantly. The pioneer SE Asian country to implement widespread GM crops– the Philippines– has significant variation in public opinion, with farmers reaping the economic value and environmental groups and consumers worried about ecological and personal health risks.[37] Some other countries, like Malaysia and Vietnam, are also extremely skeptical about GMOs, questioning the health and ethical aspects of the practice, however public health campaigns have begun to sway public opinion to be more favorable.[38] On the other side of the coin, Indonesia and Thailand are both outwardly opposed. Thailand's government remains adamantly against GM farming because of the cultural emphasis on traditional methods and a lack of trust in biotechnology companies.[39] Indonesia, a Muslim country, has concerns about the religious validity of the crops, specifically if they would be considered as halal to maintain the majority faith in the country.[40]

In recent years, ASEAN has implemented two primary policies in terms of GMOs and GMO awareness. The first is the 2021 guidelines on GMO Analysis that aims to establish a standardized method of GMO detection. This is to determine the authenticity of GMO v.

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[35] "Asia GM Outlook: Additional Progress Amid Rising Food Security Challenges," Fitch Solutions, November 11, 2024, https://www.fitchsolutions.com/bmi/agribusiness/asia-gm-outlook-additional-progress-amid-rising-food-security-challenges-04-05-2021.
[36] Ibid.
[37] ISAAA (International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications). *Social and Cultural Perceptions of GMOs in Indonesia.* Accessed November 19, 2024. https://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/perceptionstudies/socialandcultural/pdf/Indonesia.pdf.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Sylvain Richer De Forges, "Comparative Analysis of GMO Policies in South East Asia," *Bluestrike* (blog), March 3, 2024, https://www.bluestrike-group.com/post/comparative-analysis-of-gmo-policies-in-south-east-asia.
[40] ISAAA (International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications). *Social and Cultural Perceptions of GMOs in Indonesia.* Accessed November 19, 2024.

non-GMO products, such as animal feed, crops, and other products for manufacturing.[41] The second primary policy is the ASEAN Guidelines on Risk Assessment of Agriculture-Related GMOs. The goal of this set of guidelines is to determine and establish the proper guidelines for the risk-assessment of agricultural GMOs to ensure they are non-harmful to humans and other animals that consume them, as well as environmentally safe.[42] Finally, ASEAN has continued public opinion campaigns that are focused on swaying public opinion to be generally positive across all regional countries.

Overall, the development and use of GM crops is varied across the Southeast Asian nations, with both cultural and health concerns at the forefront of the implementation debate. Thus, while there may be significant economic benefits to GM crop use, will the negative effects be outweighed?

Questions to Consider:

1. How can Southeast Asian countries balance GMO adoption with biosafety and environmental conservation?
2. Should ASEAN adopt a regional framework for GMO regulation to harmonize policies across member states?
3. What role do GMOs play in improving food security and alleviating poverty in Southeast Asia?
4. What are the environmental risks of GMO cultivation in Southeast Asia, such as the spread of superweeds or impacts on biodiversity?

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[41] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). *ASEAN Guidelines on Genetically Modified Organism Analysis.* December 2021. Accessed November 27, 2024. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FAFD-32.-ASEAN-Guidelines-on-GMO-Analysis-18GMFNet.pdf.

[42] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). *Report of the 2nd ASEAN-ILSI Training Workshop on Safety and Risk Assessment of Agriculture-Related GMOs.* August 20–22, 2002. Accessed November 27, 2024. https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2nd_gmo.pdf.

5. How do global trade dynamics and export market preferences (e.g., Europe's GMO resistance) affect Southeast Asia's stance on GMOs?

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