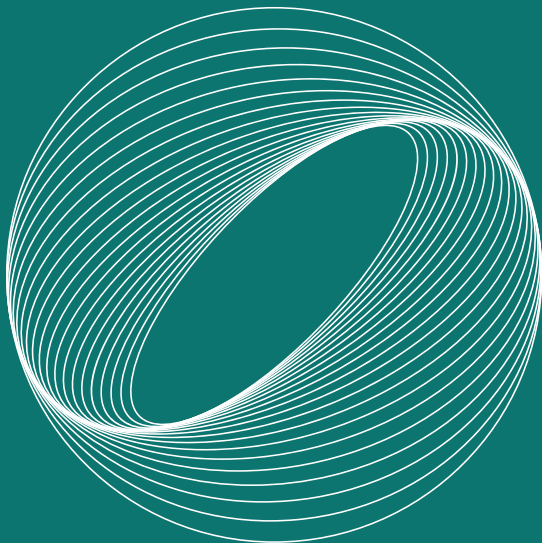




Institute of
International
Studies

DEPT. OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
UNIVERSITY OF CALicut



MONTHLY REVIEW #3

JULY 2025

WHEN VIETNAM'S LOTUS BLOOMS IN BRICS WATERS

Vietnam's recent decision to affiliate with BRICS as a partner country has mainly remained peripheral in Western media discourse (Reuters, 2025). Yet, far from pragmatic hedging, this affair matters, and its symbolism accentuates the Global South's purposeful engagement within a transforming international architecture. Having a robust traditional cooperation with BRICS members, particularly Russia, China, and India (Le, Nguyen, & Le, 2025), Vietnam—a socialist state with a deep-rooted historical memory of resisting imperialism—is aligning itself with an approach grounded in pluralism and multipolarity; a move that, as Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang affirms, amplifies the voice of developing nations and advancing inclusive multilateralism anchored in international law (Vietnam News Agency, 2025).

BRICS may include authoritarian and democratic regimes, but what unites its members is not a form of government—it is a shared skepticism of Western monopoly on truth, power, and development models (Stuenkel, 2014; Jash, 2017; Hopewell, 2017). Vietnam's advocacy for South-South cooperation and sustainable development occupies a distinguished position within ASEAN, Asia, and the Global South. At once a mirror of postcolonial disillusionment and a harbinger of Southern aspiration, it repudiates the presumption that global influence must be conferred through deference to Western hegemony.

Vietnam's alignment with BRICS will also serve as a bellwether for other Indochinese states—such as Laos, Cambodia, and potentially Myanmar—to reassess their external alignments and consider deeper engagement with emerging plurilateral frameworks. Bound by shared postcolonial trajectories, developmental challenges, and geographic proximity, these nations may view Vietnam's accession as a strategic recalibration that legitimizes alternative models of South-South cooperation. (Christopher Paller Gerale, Universitas Negeri Malang)

References

- Hopewell, K. (2017). The BRICS—merely a fable? Emerging power alliances in global trade governance. *International Affairs*, 93(6), 1377–1396. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix192>
- Jash, A. (2017). The Emerging Role of BRICS in the Changing World Order. *IndraStra Global*, 6. doi:<https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.5143222>
- Le, H., Nguyen, H., & Le, D. (2025). The strategic expansion of brics and economic cooperation in the XXI century. *Journal of Monetary Economics and Management*, 8–16.
- Reuters. (2025, June 14). Vietnam admitted as BRICS 'partner country,' Brazil says. Sao Paulo, Brazil. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/vietnam-admitted-brics-partner-country-brazil-says-2025-06-13/>
- Stuenkel, O. (2014). Emerging Powers and Status: The Case of the First BRICs Summit. *Asian Perspective*, 38(1), 89–109. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2014.00>
- Vietnam News Agency. (2025). Vietnam wishes to enhance voice, role of developing nations as BRICS partner country. Hanoi. Retrieved from <https://vietnamlawmagazine.vn/vietnam-wishes-to-enhance-voice-role-of-developing-nations-as-brics-partner-country-74443.html>

THE STRUCTURAL CRISIS BEHIND BANGLADESH'S 2024 STUDENT PROTEST

The 2024 student movement in Bangladesh is often seen as a strong example of grassroots resistance. Still, it also reveals how deeply authoritarianism and neoliberalism are rooted in the country, and how difficult it is for uprisings to bring real change in Global South nations shaped by global capitalism. Although Sheikh Hasina's removal seemed like a democratic win, the protests' origins and aftermath reveal a cynical reality: identity politics and state violence were used to keep elites in power. The job quotas for descendants of Liberation War veterans, which sparked the protests, were less about fairness and more a political tool favoring certain groups while excluding others (Huq, 2024). This pattern is common in many Global South countries, where reforms often protect elite interests behind a mask of change (Ahmed, 2024).

The movement used creative strategies such as decentralized leadership, alliances with workers and unions, and social media campaigns. Cultural tools like music and art helped mobilize support and sustain momentum. (Hussein, 2024; Kazi, 2024). These tactics united students, workers, and soldiers in resisting the system. (Christy, 2025). Yet, the government's violent crackdown, killing over 1,400 people, including children, shows how far those in power will go to silence dissent rather than address real demands (Christy, 2025; Hussein, 2024). Such repression is common among Global South governments enforcing global capitalist inequalities. (Kazi, 2024).

Ultimately, the movement reveals a harsh truth: uprisings may briefly shake authoritarianism but are often crushed or co-opted by systems valuing profit over people. Without dismantling neoliberal and imperialist structures, can true democracy grow? (Huq, 2024; Christy, 2024; Hussein, 2024). (Allene Florence Fadhilah Darmawan, Department of International relations UGM 2023)

References

- Ahmed, F. (2024, September 17). *Bangladesh 2024: Student protests end decade-long rule*. Meer. <https://www.meer.com/en/82577-bangladesh-2024-student-protests-end-decade-long-rule>
- Chisty, M. (2025, February 27). *Bangladesh 2.0: A nation reimagined by its youth, upholding democracy*. Center for Asian Studies. <https://www.colorado.edu/cas/2025/02/27/bangladesh-20-nation-reimagined-its-youth-upholding-democracy>
- Huq, C. (2024, October 9). *The Bangladesh student movement that transformed a nation*. LPE Project. <https://lpeproject.org/blog/the-bangladesh-student-movement-that-transformed-a-nation/>
- Hussein, N. (2024, August 23). *Bangladesh's creative mass uprising - the contrapuntal*. The Contrapuntal. <https://thecontrapuntal.com/bangladeshs-creative-mass-uprising/>
- Kazi. (2024, September 24). *Reclaiming trust: How Bangladesh's student movement outpaced traditional parties*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/reclaiming-trust-how-bangladeshs-student-movement-outpaced-traditional-parties/>

THE MAKING OF MACAN ASIA IN A SHIFTING WESTERN GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

With the ambition to become the *Macan Asia* or "Asian Tiger," Indonesia is determined to strengthen its economic growth to around 5% while also boosting its innovation sector (Octavia & Andryanto, 2025). Amidst the contrasting developments—such as the European Union's easing of Schengen visa access and the United States' imposition of tariffs under President Trump—Indonesia must carefully strategize its international responses.

While President Prabowo succeeded in reducing U.S. tariffs to 19%, this achievement came at the cost of domestic economic concessions, including the elimination of import tariffs and the opening of Indonesia's cobalt resources to foreign access (BBC News Indonesia, 2025). In contrast, the EU's relaxation of visa requirements has enhanced Indonesia's social, political, and economic engagement potential, paving the way for a more advanced partnership with Europe (Andriyanto, 2025). These examples reflect Indonesia's increasingly complex position between two global powers.

To realize its vision of becoming *Macan Asia*, Indonesia must adopt a dual strategic approach to today's geopolitical challenges. With easier Schengen visa access, the country should maximize educational and talent exchange opportunities while accelerating economic diversification to attract European investment. Simultaneously, in response to U.S. trade pressures, Indonesia must prioritize downstream processing and innovation to enhance value-added production in key sectors such as nickel and cobalt. Ultimately, a carefully calibrated dual strategy will empower Indonesia to navigate global power dynamics and solidify its role as a rising Asian powerhouse. (Aminah Rafa Laksita Azmi, Department of International Relations UGM)

References

- Andriyanto, H. (2025, July 13). EU Grants Indonesia Multi-Entry Schengen Visa as Landmark Trade Deal Nears Completion. *Jakarta Globe*. <https://jakartaglobe.id/business/eu-grants-indonesia-multienry-schengen-visa-as-landmark-trade-deal-nears-completion>
- BBC News Indonesia. (2025, July 16). Trump: Produk Indonesia dikenai tarif 19% oleh AS - kesepakatan ini tidak menguntungkan Indonesia, kata ekonom - BBC News Indonesia. *BBC News Indonesia*. <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c9w125qepe5o>
- Octavia, S. A., & Andryanto, S. D. (2025, July 5). Alasan Sri Mulyani Pangkas Target Pertumbuhan Ekonomi Indonesia 2025. *Tempo*. <https://www.tempo.co/ekonomi/alasan-sri-mulyani-pangkas-target-pertumbuhan-ekonomi-indonesia-2025-1905277>

INDONESIA'S DILEMMA BETWEEN NICKEL EXTRACTION AND BIOSPHERE PRESERVATION

Indonesia has an abundant nickel deposit that is used as a blast furnace for its economy. According to ASEAN Briefing (2025), Indonesia holds 42 percent of the global nickel reserves (around 55 million metric tons), and production reached 2.2 million metric tons in 2024. This increase in production also means that Indonesia's earnings from this mineral are growing, reaching up to US\$6.8bn in 2023 according to Peh (2024).

However, this achievement comes with a steep biosphere price. Recently, Indonesia's nickel mining expansion to Raja Ampat has been met with backlash. Many environmentalists argue that in the effort of capitalizing on supply and boost processing, Indonesia has caused irreparable damage to the land around mines and smelters (Jakarta Post, 2025). Furthermore, this concern is not isolated only in Raja Ampat. In Central Sulawesi, communities near Kurisa report water pollution from nearby mines, leading to declining fish populations, affecting local livelihoods (Nindita & Feng, 2025).

This recent outcry from environmentalists highlights Indonesia's hypocrisy towards its own environmental policy. Joko's Widodo administration in 2021 promises to stop deforestation by 2030 in the COP 26 (Rannard, 2021); however, ongoing nickel exploitation within the islands of Gag, Kawe, and Manuran has led to more than 500 hectares of forest being destroyed (Jakarta Post, 2025).

Indonesia should heed the criticism for domestic stability and international reputation. Some efforts the Indonesian government could employ are to do an extensive and methodical clean-up of chemical waste, researching a cleaner nickel production, helping local communities, and reassessing the scale and pace of new mining expansion. (Paramasatya Rakha Abiyoga, Department of International Relations, UGM).

References

- ASEAN Briefing. (2025, April 9). *Investing in Indonesia's Nickel Industry*. ASEAN Business News. <https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/indonesias-nickel-downstreaming-policy-opportunities-and-challenges-for-investors/>
- Nindita, H., & Feng, Z. (2025, April 7). *How China's investment in Indonesia's nickel industry is impacting local communities*. Global Voices. <https://globalvoices.org/2025/04/07/how-chinas-investment-in-indonesias-nickel-industry-is-impacting-local-communities/>
- Peh, G. (2024, October). *Indonesia's Nickel Companies: The Need for Renewable Energy Amid Increasing Production*. https://ieefa.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/IEEF-A%20Report%20-%20Indonesia%27s%20nickel%20companies%20need%20RE_Oct2024.pdf
- Post, T. J. (2025, June 6). *Ministry reviews nickel mining in Raja Ampat after outcry*. The Jakarta Post. <https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2025/06/06/ministry-reviews-nickel-mining-in-raja-ampat-after-outcry.html>
- Rannard, G. (2021, November 2). *Terbakarnya hutan Papua: Luka di hutan terbesar di Asia*. BBC News Indonesia. <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/dunia-59122587>

SUBMIT YOUR WRITING!

Author's guideline:

tinyurl.com/IISOpenSubmission

Enquiry and assistance:

publication.iis@ugm.ac.id | 0813 8153 7878 (Dila)