

## From The Editor

# 50 years after 1975

Received 27 September 2025; accepted 3 October 2025  
doi:10.46475/asean-jr.v26i3.990



Misconceptions kill more than any diseases or disasters can ever do. In a universal point of view, basic requirements in any communities include food and life security, property protection, free trading, and the rights to speak and practice faith they believe in. However, power tends to corrupt, and citizens are always the helpless victims. People in the Southeast Asian countries are still struggling to live better lives.

Like borders between many countries in Asia, the 800-kilometer Thai-Cambodian border has long been a source of conflict, often flaring into disputes over territory ownership. The roots of these issues can be traced back to colonial-era borders, with ambiguities and claims leading to periodic tensions leading to significant casualties and displacements among local communities living near the border. Lately, the tensions were reignited in May when a Cambodian soldier carrying weapons approaching the Thai defensive line was killed. At approximately 08:20 on 24 July 2025, Cambodian forces opened fire from their position across the eastern side of the Thai base. Without warning, long-distant rockets from Cambodia fell on residential areas of a province on the Thai side causing destruction of a hospital and a convenient store in a gas station immediately killing eight civilians including a mother with her two children in a convenient store. Attacks in other three provinces along the border on the same day killed another three civilians including an 8-year-old boy, and a soldier. After four days of fire which displaced more than 100,000 people in four provinces of Northeastern Thailand to nearly 300 temporary shelters and significant soldiers of both sides were killed, both countries agreed to ceasefire and signed a comprehensive mutual agreement on 7 August 2025 in Putrajaya, Malaysia. To ensure the safety of the local communities

along the border, Thailand closed the border to prevent threat of violence from Cambodian soldiers. However, the closure of the border has caused severe disruption of the cross-border business, healthcare, and education system.

Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, countless people's lives in continental Southeast Asia were claimed because of political and military conflicts between feudal states in Burma (today Myanmar), Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Siam (today Thailand), and Malaya (today Malaysia and Singapore). British colonization of Myanmar and Malaya and French colonization of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam during 19<sup>th</sup> century forced Siam to keep busy adopting the concepts of the nation state, restructuring its loosely feudal state to the single centralized governing body that exercised power over a clearly defined borders. Balancing powers between British and French empires and Siamese government ceased wars between feudal states creating peace in this region for a while.



*From left: Young Khmer Rouge soldiers entering Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975 [1]; On 29 April 1975, one day before the fall of Saigon, civilians climbed over the wall of the U.S. Embassy to reach evacuation helicopters [2]; an officer helped evacuees up a ladder on a helicopter [3].*

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the second world war and Japanese invasion helped release Myanmar and Malaya from British colonization, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam from French colonization, and Indonesia from Dutch colonization, with the cost

of many lives in all Southeast Asian countries. Post second world war establishments of modern countries were progressive and successful in marine Southeast Asian countries. However, in continental Southeast Asian countries, the post second world war vacuum was filled with proxy wars between the free world and communism, which lasted more than 20 years and killed even more people, especially in the outrageous Vietnamese and Laotian wars. In 1975, when democratic governments, with support from the United States of America, were defeated and communism was fully established in Cambodia and Vietnam in April, and Laos in December in the same year with assistance from Soviet Union and People's Republic of China, it did not help build trust and peace in these three communistic countries, mainly because of the national borders, the political concepts of founding the Federation of Indochina (adopted from French Indochina during French colonization but under a single communistic government), and the conflicts between Soviet Union and People's Republic of China. The falls of Saigon, Phnom Pehn, and Vientiane in 1975 along with the subsequent Vietnamese invasions into Cambodia and Laos to form Federation of Indochina, forced formal diplomatic relations between People's Republic of China and Thailand in 1975 followed by the Sino-Vietnamese war in 1979. It is depressing note that the weapons made in China, Soviet Union, and the United States of America were used by Southeast Asian people to kill other Southeast Asian people. During more than 10 years of conflicts, at least 1.5 million Cambodians were killed by people in their own nations during the Khmer Rouge regime. More than 350, 000 people from Laos and 700, 000 people from Cambodia were displaced to the Thailand's northeastern and eastern borders. Around 800,000 people fled Vietnam by boats and ships to Hongkong, Southern Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines while around 200, 000 people died at sea. This regional tragedy from political turmoil happened in just 50 years ago. Katsumi Tsujioka, a junior radiological technologist and Japanese health volunteer at the field hospital, who witnessed the displaced people from Cambodia to the eastern border of Thailand will share his tragic memories with us on this issue on pages 240-251. In Figure 8 on page 245, which refers to an event taking place in 1980, it is depressing that we still recently witness Thai soldiers losing their legs to landmines planted in Thai ground by Cambodian soldiers, even though both countries had ratified the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty in 1997.



*A photo of a Cambodian man with his new prosthetic limb after losing his leg to a landmine during emigration to Thailand in 1980, taken by Katsumi Tsujioka [4]; his smile reflects happiness and confidence that come from feeling safe, protected and properly cared for in a refugee camp in Thailand.*

To eliminate poverty, elevate education, and remain a part of free world, Thailand set up two universities in the remote provinces in 1960s: Kon Kaen University in the northeast and Prince of Songkla University in the deep south. This issue continues to keep Associate Professor Chongdee Sukthomya, the first radiologist of Southern Thailand who laid the groundwork for the radiological care and education at Prince of Songkla University in 1975, present in our thoughts.

Nevertheless, hope springs eternal. This issue describes how Thailand implements the AI-assisted system to interpret chest radiographs in public hospitals with the hope of improving health and strengthening Infection Prevention and Control in radiology departments.

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