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Reports: Divisions of the Group of Experts

Report of the Asia South-East Division

Submitted by the Asia South-East Division **

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** Prepared by the Secretariat of the Asia South-East Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

1. Introduction

This report covers the main activities that have been carried out by the Asia South-East (ASE) Division of the UNGEGN in July 2023 and December 2024.

2. Divisional Meeting

The 13th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN ASE Division was successfully held as a virtual meeting on 15 January 2025, hosted by Brunei Darussalam. The meeting was attended by delegates from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore and Sri Lanka. Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam were absent at the meeting. The objective of the meeting was to share the progress for the period between July 2023 and December 2024.

The 13th Divisional Meeting adopted six resolutions:

- i. The UNGEGN ASE Division members have reported progress and activities done on the standardization of geographical names.
- ii. The UNGEGN ASE Division members are encouraged to contribute to the UNGEGN Information Bulletin.
- iii. The UNGEGN ASE Division members to submit the Generic Terms to be compiled by the Technical Committee of WP4 by 18 January 2025.
- iv. The Technical Committee for the WP3-Regional Map of ASED Members (Indonesia) will share more information on the Work Plan and tentative discussion date once the technical issues have been resolved.
- v. The UNGEGN ASE Division members are encouraged to attend the 2025 Session of the UNGEGN in April 2025.
- vi. The UNGEGN ASE Division members are encouraged to participate in the Beta-Testing and the actual survey of the UNGEGN-UNGGIM Collaborative Project.

3. Activities and Progress on the Standardisation of Geographical Names by Member States

Member states of the ASE Division reported the activities and progress of the standardisation of geographical names during the 13th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN ASE Division, summarised below:

3.1. Brunei Darussalam

Brunei Darussalam reported on the activities and the progress relating to geographical names, road naming and related matters conducted by through the Brunei Darussalam National Geographical Names Committee (JKNG) from July 2023 to December 2024, as well the planned activities and initiatives for 2025.

The Survey Department as the national mapping agency and as the Chairperson for the names authority (JKNG) is responsible for the standardisation of geographical names for Brunei Darussalam. During this period, six road names were proposed by the JKNG and four have been approved by the relevant authorities, while two more are still pending approval.

Continuous efforts and measures have been made to ensure that geographical names activity is constantly progressing which includes a field visit to investigate the outstanding names of geographical features in the Tutong district and reviewing the coordinates of geographical features that will be uploaded in the Geoportal Ukur. The Survey Department also contributed an article in the UNGEGN Information Bulletin (No. 67, June 2024).

Emphasis on collaboration and capacity building will be the focus for 2025 and to encourage active participation from the various Government agencies as well as through the UNGEGN Asia South-East divisional platform in order to enhance the significance of the standardisation of geographical names.

3.2. Cambodia

Cambodia reported on the main activities that have taken place during 2023-2024 and are being implemented in the work of geographical names, institutions and related regulations, as follows:

a) Activities on Standardization of Geographical Names

On 25 October 2023 General Department of Cadastre and Geography conducted the workshop on Coding and Dissemination of Geographical codes in the Kingdom of Cambodia.

In December 2024, the Government issued the Sub-Decree No. 280, dated 4 December 2024, on “the Principles and Regulations to Define the Geographical Codes of the Capital, Provincials, Municipals, Districts, Communes, Sangkats and Villages in the Kingdom of Cambodia. This Sub Decree is to ensure the use of uniform of geographical codes nationwide. It also delegated the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to issue the Prakas (Declaration) on the implementation of geographical codes of the above administrative territories.

b) Publishing a list of geographical names

In June 2023, the Ministry of Interior published another separate gazetteer of the Kingdom of Cambodia. The names of 1 Capital and 24 provinces, 31 cities (Krong), 163 districts (Srok), 14 khans, 1385 communes (Khum), 267 sangkats and 14574 villages (Phum) in Khmer are recorded in the gazetteer. Unlike the gazetteer of the General Department of Cadastre and Geography, this gazetteer does not specify the code and location of each name.

In October 2023, the General Department of Cadastre and Geography published the gazetteer listing the geographical names of the Kingdom of Cambodia in Khmer and Latin (with Transcription system 1997). The names of 25 Capital and provinces, 208 districts, 1652 communes and 14596 villages were recorded in the gazetteer. This gazetteer can be accessed online: <https://mlmupc.gov.kh/2023/10/26/gazetteer-cambodia/>.

c) Regulations on Standardization of Geographical Nomenclature

The Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction conducted the internal and inter-ministerial technical meetings to draft the Sub-decree on the establishment of the National Committee for Geographical Names to replace the Royal Government ‘s decision on the establishment of the National Commission of Geographical Names in 2000. This draft Sub-decree will be submitted to the Royal Government of Cambodia for approval to be expected in 2025. The MLMUPC is drafting the Surveying and Mapping Law, which will be discussed with the stakeholders to be expected in 2025.

3.3. Indonesia

The full report of Indonesia, prepared by the Indonesian Geospatial Information Agency (Badan Informasi Geospasial-BIG), outlines the activities undertaken by Indonesia from the 12th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN Asia South-East Division in June 2024 to December 2024.

The standardization of geographical names in Indonesia has been conducted systematically, incorporating processes such as the collection, verification, and publication of geographical names. In 2023, BIG successfully standardized 12,562 geographical names, followed by an additional 4,226 geographical names in 2024. Since 2022, the national gazetteer has consistently been categorized into two subjects: island names and general themes. The gazetteer is available in both printed and digital formats, with a comprehensive version accessible online via the SINAR platform (<https://sinar.big.go.id/gazeter>).

The implementation of Government Regulation No. 2 of 2021 (hereinafter referred to as GR 2/2021, BIG remains committed to fostering an inclusive and collaborative approach to the standardization of geographical names. This commitment is demonstrated through partnerships with ministries, local governments, academic institutions, experts, private sector entities, and local communities. These efforts aim to ensure the accurate representation of geographical names that respect cultural heritage and local identity, strengthen public awareness of standardization practices, and enhance the integration and usability of geographical names data on both national and international platforms. The initiatives included enhancing data interoperability, conducting studies on geographical names, and expanding data collection efforts.

3.4. Malaysia

This report provides a detailed account of Malaysia's geographical naming activities from May 2023 to September 2024, along with planned initiatives through the end of 2024. It covers a diverse range of projects, meetings, publications, and programs related to geographical naming in Malaysia, undertaken by the committees and working groups under the National Committee on Geographical Names (JKNG). The report addresses key areas such as national standardization efforts, participation in local and international meetings, a list of publications, implementation of the UNGEGN ASE Division Work Plan, actions taken and proposed to align with United Nations resolutions on geographical name standardization, and planned future activities.

In summary, the report underscores the significant efforts and initiatives led by the National Committee on Geographical Names of Malaysia and its associated committees and working groups. Through a focus on collaboration, standardization, and active engagement in regional and international platforms, Malaysia reaffirms its dedication to improving the accuracy and relevance of geographical names. These efforts contribute to effective communication and yield economic and social benefits for the nation.

3.5. Myanmar

Survey Department of Myanmar under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Conservation mainly takes responsibilities for production of topographic maps throughout the whole country, as well as the collection of geographic data and geographic names for topographic maps (1:50000, 1:100000 & 1:250000 Scale). Myanmar does not have a National Geographical Name Agency. Survey Department of Myanmar carry out annual map updating process including field data collection for geographical name of ground feature.

Myanmar reported on the activities on National Standardisation of Geographical Names, as follows:

- The General Administration Department (GAD) approves Geographical Names in Myanmar Gazette.
- MSD referred that gazette when describing Geographical Names on topographical maps.
- In describing Geographical Names, Burmese pronunciation is directly replaced with English characters.

- Eight mainly ethnic groups in Myanmar, due to language differences, some geographical names are described in ethnic languages.

Myanmar has planned to set up an annual aim to update the National Topographic Map and to verify the 100 map sheets of 1:50,000 Scale UTM Maps.

Myanmar informed that the Myanmar Survey Department does not standardize geographical names, although in the ongoing One Map Myanmar Project, the geographical names published in the Myanmar Gazette by the GAD are being used as a set of standards.

3.6. Philippines

Philippines reported on the key activities on geographical names from June 2023 to December 2024.

Activities on National Standardisation of Geographical Names as follows:

- a) Updating of the Philippine Gazetteer Project
- b) Philippine Standard Geographic Code (PSGC)
- c) Topographic Map Updates

Involvement in the national and international meetings, conferences:

- 23 June 2023: the Philippines attended the 12th UNGEGN-ASE Division virtual meeting and presented its accomplishment for April 2022 - May 2023
- NAMRIA regularly publishes articles on its website to keep the public and stakeholders informed about its ongoing and completed national mapping activities. These articles cover various updates related to the agency's key initiatives such as mapping and surveying projects, geospatial data and GIS applications, hydrographic surveys and nautical charting, satellite remote sensing, and capacity building and stakeholder engagement.

Planned Activities for 2025:

a) Philippine Gazetteer Project

NAMRIA plans to continue updating the Philippine Gazetteer throughout 2025. It will cover One (1) district of the NCR and nine (9) provinces for the year. These are the Third District of the NCR and the provinces of Laguna, Masbate, Palawan, and Sorsogon in the island of Luzon, Iloilo and Siquijor in the Visayas, Camiguin, Dinagat Islands, and Davao Oriental in Mindanao.

b) Updating of Topographic Base Maps

To serve the requirements of national government agencies, local government units, and the general public for an updated geospatial dataset, continuous updating of topographic base maps at scale 1:10,000, 1:50,000, and 1:250,000 are continuing activities of NAMRIA.

3.7. Singapore

Singapore reported that efforts is put on mapping to update 3D national mapping database. As their geographical names are clear and consistent, there has not been any significant updates on the area.

3.8. Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka did not prepare a national report.

4. Status of the UNGEGN ASE Division Work Plan

4.1. Regional Database and Gazetteer Standards

This project is currently on hold and will resume once a Technical Committee Lead is elected.

4.2. UNGEGN ASE Division Annual Meetings

Technical Committee Lead: Secretariat

The Secretariat will put more efforts this year to organise divisional meetings and ensure that Technical Committees conduct discussions accordingly.

- The 13th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN ASE Division was convened on 15 January 2025 in virtual format.
- The 14th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN ASE Division is scheduled to be held virtually in April / May 2025. Preparation of national report is not required for this meeting as the main agendas are to discuss the matters highlighted in the 13th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN ASE Division and for the leads of Technical Committees to report the progress of the respective work plans.
- The 15th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN ASE Division is planned to be in Brunei Darussalam in September 2025, back-to-back with a seminar on geographical names.

4.3. Regional Map of ASED Members

Technical Committee Lead: Indonesia

Indonesia reported that they are currently experiencing technical issues at the data centre and unable to access the map. Indonesia will share more information and organise discussion once the issues have been resolved.

4.4. Generic Terms of the Asia South-East Region

Technical Committee Lead: Brunei Darussalam

- The First Technical Committee Discussion was held virtually on 14th January 2025. The discussion was attended by Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore.
- The Second Technical Committee Discussion was held virtually on 20th February 2025. The discussion was attended by Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore.
- Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines contributed updates to their country's generic terms. Singapore reported that no changes / new updates for Singapore's generic terms.
- Additional features and generic terms were proposed for inclusion by Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines and these terms are currently under review by the committee before endorsement.

5. Issues / Challenges

a) Resource Constraints

- ASE Division Secretariat: The secretariat is a small team of officers who are also assigned to coordinate and manage the administrative aspects of the UNGEGN ASE Division. As these officers are also responsible for their department's routine and operational tasks and often may need to prioritise certain tasks over the Secretariat duties.
 - Solution: Proper planning of division activities and ensuring that they are stretched across the year.
- Shared Platform: A repository of documents is important for future reference that can be accessed by all division members especially during the handover of the Chairmanship.
 - Solution: The Secretariat has compiled all available documents and stored in an online sharing platform that can easily be accessible.

b) The complexity of coordinating between division members

Effective communication among division members is paramount to the success and progress of the division. For instance, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam did not participate in the meetings organised for this reporting period.

Among the challenges faced:

- Maintaining an updated and active contact list.
- The focal persons have retired or progressed in their career.
- E-mail bounced back to sender.

Solution:

- The Secretariat created a chat group using a free messaging app in an effort to disseminate information or announcement more efficiently, other than through e-mail.
- Requesting annual updates of focal persons.

6. Future / Planned Activities

a) Seminar on Geographical Names back-to-back with the 15th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN, Asia South-East (ASE) Division

The Seminar on Geographical Names is planned to be organised in September 2025 hosted by Brunei Darussalam, back-to-back with the 15th Divisional Meeting of the UNGEGN, Asia South-East (ASE) Division. The seminar will feature keynote speeches and presentations of working papers by experts from the ASE Division member states as well as from local agencies and institutions.

The seminar will provide opportunities for awareness on the importance and impacts of the standardisation of geographical names as well as sharing the experience of ASE Division member states in the administration and implementation of geographical naming.

b) UNGEGN ASE Division Publications

It is the intention of the division to eventually publish the products of the work plan once they are completed. The publications will be accessible by the public and can be used for reference and research purposes.

7. Conclusion

The Asia South-East Division of the UNGEGN has made important progress in standardising geographical names, with strong contributions from its member states. While facing challenges like limited resources and communication issues, the division has worked together to implement solutions and ensure continued progress. Moving forward, efforts will focus on enhancing capacity building, increasing participation, and hosting events like the planned seminar and divisional meetings, which will further promote the importance of standardised geographical names in the region.