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Transcending Societal Issues for Space Exploration (12)
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IT TAKES A NATION TO RACE TO SPACE: THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC IN EMERGING SOUTHEAST ASIAN SPACEFARING NATIONS

Abstract

More established spacefaring nations (such as the United States, Russia, India etc.) have come a long way in getting the public to rally behind the new missions that their space agencies propose. However, emerging nations in this domain, like Southeast Asian countries, have to perform a more delicate balancing act. All countries have to manage a diverse range of factors when pushing for the investment of billions of dollars of taxpayer money into space exploration and space technology. However, unlike countries with a significant number of successful missions under their belt, emerging countries do not have a shared national psyche when it comes to justifying expensive space endeavors over issues which are seen as more pressing and grounded. Moreover, Southeast Asian nations have either way been less concerned with prestigious missions and have instead focused on pragmatic applications that can enhance their economic and humanitarian pursuits.

That being said, trends indicate that these emerging nations are becoming more ambitious with regards to the scopes of their projects. Under the backdrop of the growing competitiveness of the global space sector, the amount of taxpayer money entering their local space sectors, be it through government-sponsored missions, public-private partnerships, or investment into promising companies, is bound to increase. History being our witness, we know that investments and competition in emerging sectors go a long way towards increasing the innovative output of that sector – benefitting all of humankind.

However, these plans will be for naught if Southeast Asian nations are unable to sufficiently convince the public that these expenditures are worthwhile. To get the buy-in of the public is critical but doing so is no easy feat.

This paper discusses the pathways and deliberations that nations should consider when trying to bring society together in order to advance a progressive space agenda. The paper looks at past initiatives which have successfully helped countries with a mission develop a national identity. Established approaches to increase public acceptance of potentially divisive issues are also examined. Moreover, the Asian mindset, which can diverge significantly from the Western mindset, is explored in the context of space development. Ultimately, recommendations that will help transcend the societal issues that can hinder the growth of the space industry are also explored.