

اينستيتوت قشاجين اسيان



Dr Merlin Franco Francis

“Mutualism at risk: the relationship between palmyra tree (*Borassus flabellifer* L.) and the palm tree climber ”

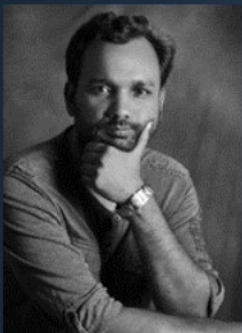
Wednesday, 8th November 2017 at 2:30 p.m.

IAS Meeting Room 2.27, Level 2, FASS Building

### Abstract

*Borassus flabellifer*, commonly known as palmyra tree or sugar palm is a sub-tropical tree widely distributed from the Persian Gulf to the Cambodian- Vietnamese border, where it grows in close association with human beings. The tree is used for multiple purposes by local communities in countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. Although it is primarily a tree crop cultivated for its timber, fruits and sap from the inflorescence stalk, it is also a plant of immense medicinal and cultural values. In recognition of its cultural and economic importance, it has been accorded the status of the National tree of Cambodia and the state tree of Tamil Nadu, India. However, without the palmyra climbers who risk their lives to climb these tall trees, the palmyra tree would lose most of its economic and cultural values. I argue that the relationship between the palmyra palm and the palmyra climbers is not a typical human-plant relationship, but a mutualistic one where both the partners are benefitted, and the weakening of this relationship has been contributing to decline in the population of the species.

### Speaker's Profile



Dr. Merlin Franco works with the Institute of Asian Studies, UBD. An ethnobiologist interested in the relationship between human culture, language and biodiversity, he believes that the traditional knowledge of the indigenous communities that is embedded in their respective native languages holds the key for prudent management of ecosystem services. In the past, Dr. Franco has worked with Curtin Sarawak Research Institute and Earthwatch Institute.