Politics in the Lion City: Toward an “Orchid Evolution”?

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Singapore’s May 7 General Election opened a new chapter in the city-state’s history, marking a big step toward a more open political system—and perhaps a unique, Singapore-style democracy. Although the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) returned to power, garnering 81 out of 87 parliamentary seats—and though it is unlikely that Singapore will evolve into a two-party system anytime soon—the significance of Singapore’s 11th General Election is undeniable.

With a winning margin of more than 10 percent, the Workers’ Party (WP), arguably the strongest opposition party in Singapore, took the Aljunied Group Representation Constituency. This is the first time that the opposition has captured a Group Representation Constituency (GRC), a unique feature of the Singaporean electoral system in which each party contesting the GRC puts up a slate of 4–6 candidates, depending on the size of the constituency, who campaign as a team. The slate that receives a plurality of the votes in the GRC takes all the seats at stake there.

The victory of the Workers’ Party “A” Team in Aljunied, led by party leader Low Thia Khiang and including Sylvia Lim, Muhamad Faisal Manap, Pritam Singh, and “secret weapon” Chen Show Mao, marked several firsts for the opposition: their first female member of Parliament (MP), first Malay MP, and first Sikh MP. The elections are also the first time that almost all—82 out of 87—parliamentary seats were contested, up from 48 in 2006 and only 19 in 2001.

The unprecedented scale of opposition was made possible through agreement among the opposition parties to spread out and avoid three-
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cornered fights. With the exception of Tanjong Pagar GRC, where the opposition was disqualified after filing their papers 35 seconds late, all constituencies were contested. (Tanjong Pagar was won without contest by a PAP team led by Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew). The newly elected opposition MPs, holding 7 percent of the parliamentary seats, will have the weighty responsibility of representing the 40 percent of the electorate that did not vote for the ruling party—nearly 1 million Singaporeans.

In a system where the odds are stacked in the ruling party’s favor, garnering 60.1 percent of the popular vote is considered an embarrassment for the PAP. During the last two elections, in 2001 and 2006, the PAP garnered 75 percent and 67 percent of the popular vote respectively. Although Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong painted this year’s electoral results as a strong mandate for the PAP, it is clear that the PAP is losing its share of electoral votes with each successive election.

With 14.4 percent GDP growth last year and the country effectively at full employment, this year’s election outcome would have seemed unfathomable to external observers. But widening income inequality, rising inflation, unaffordable public housing, a massive influx of immigrants, ministerial pay hikes, the escape of the fugitive-terrorist Mas Selamat, the grossly over-budget Youth Olympics, and even acts of God like the massive floods in the Orchard Road area were some of the common complaints among the electorate. These, however, are mere symptoms of the real problem. The underlying reason voters reconsidered their atavistic alliance to the PAP is deeper and ideologically driven: at the end of the day, Singaporeans want a more responsive, inclusive, representative, and transparent government. Singaporeans were even willing to vote out a strong and popular cabinet minister, Foreign Minister George Yeo, who led the PAP’s team in Aljunied GRC, for this kind of government.

Much of the problem appears to lie with the GRC system. The loss of a capable and well-respected foreign minister was not the only “freak outcome” mourned by PAP and opposition supporters alike. The casualties of this election include the well-loved veteran opposition leader Chiam See Tong. Chiam ventured out from his Potong Pasir Single Member Constituency (SMC) stronghold to contest the Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC. Not only did he lose his gamble in Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC; his 27-year stronghold on Potong Pasir SMC was narrowly lost to the PAP by a razor-thin margin of 114 votes.

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Another unexpected outcome was the election of the wildly unpopular 27-year-old Tin Pei Ling as part of the Marine Parade GRC slate led by Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong. Clearly, all parties—the PAP supporters, opposition party supporters, and now the not-so-silent majority—are upset over these surprises. The GRC system was justified at its inception as a way to ensure minority representation in Parliament. This rationale may now be an anachronism, as minority candidates like PAP’s Michael Palmer have won over Chinese opposition candidates in the more traditional single-member constituencies where they are supposedly disadvantaged. If Singaporeans are no longer voting along racial lines, is the GRC system still justified?

The last and perhaps most significant development in this election was that, for the first time, Singaporeans were engaged. The election rallies during the nine-day campaigning period were well attended. In particular, opposition rallies were held in full-capacity stadiums. The Singapore People’s Party last rally, led by Chiam See Tong, was reportedly attended by 30,000 Singaporeans. Young Singaporeans in particular were engaged in heated debates in new media forums such as Facebook. For the first time, the opposition parties were able to use the Internet to mobilize supporters. As an indication of the speed with which the Internet was able to galvanize support, numerous Facebook pages sprung up overnight after the announcement of the election results calling for Tin Pei Ling’s resignation from Parliament for allegedly violating cooling-off day rules.

That the quality of opposition candidates has improved with each successive election is also an indication that Singapore society is maturing and political space is being created. Better-educated professionals are now more willing to stand up and offer an alternative voice to the ruling party. This includes the likes of Stanford- and Harvard-trained Chen Show Mao from the WP. The candidacy of the National Solidarity Party’s 24-year-old Nicole Seah, who emerged from obscurity to become the up-and-coming star on the political scene, is also an indication that younger Singaporeans are ready, willing, and able to engage in shaping Singapore’s future.

What is in store for Singaporean politics? More than 80 percent of Singaporeans voted this time, many of them—in their 30s and 40s—first-time voters, because their constituencies were contested for the first time. In the past four elections—in 1991, 1997, 2001, and 2006—the percentage of eligible voters who lived in uncontested constituencies was 49.9 percent, 59.3 percent, 66.8 percent, and 43.4 percent respectively. Thus for decades...
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a large proportion of the eligible electorate was denied the opportunity to vote. This large-scale disfranchisement led to political alienation, which the ruling party incorrectly diagnosed as political apathy among the young. Anecdotal evidence suggests that voters were indeed engaged, listening to the debates and weighing the pros and cons before they cast their vote. Gone are the images of docile, passive, and apathetic Singaporeans. The alienation and disenfranchisement that resulted from the inability to vote because of the numerous walkovers in uncontested GRCs dissipated. Singaporeans were thinking about the future of their country and voting with their hearts and their minds. The casting of the ballot is merely an external act. What is more important is the decisionmaking process that takes place within each voter. There was an awakening, a desire among Singaporeans for their voices to be heard, and if I may venture, this was the first time that a strong Singaporean identity was forged.

This election achieved a strong sense of national unity, one that the annual National Day parades have not achieved. There was pride in being Singaporean, and in knowing that every citizen had a stake and a say in the country’s future.

This is truly a watershed and a turning point. The ruling party needs to evolve as Singaporean society evolves. The opposition parties need to prove their worth and credibility to those who are willing to take a chance with them. The performance of both the ruling and opposition parties in the next five years will tell whether they have understood the message of this election. A political evolution is under way in Singapore, and the next election in 2016 will show how the tide has turned.

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SINGAPORE

- **Cabinet reshuffle.** Singapore’s foreign minister, George Yeo, will step down after losing his constituency, Aljunied GRC, in the recent general elections. Yeo announced during a press conference that he is retiring from politics and will not contest Aljunied during the next elections. He also spoke of the need to transform the PAP and noted the young felt “alienated” from their country. Yeo has not detailed his professional plans after his retirement. Mentor Minister Lee Kuan Yew, 87, and Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, 69, also announced their retirement from the cabinet on May 14, 2011, saying it was time for a younger generation to “carry Singapore forward in a more difficult and complex situation.” On May 18, 2011, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced his **new cabinet line-up.** This signals the beginning of the ruling party’s post-election overhaul.

- **Post-election PAP’s overriding priority to improve lives of citizens.** Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has stressed that his government will prioritize improving the lives of its citizens in response to the May general election. In a speech on May 9, Lee pledged that the PAP will change the way it governs and will undergo “soul-searching” to find better ways to serve the electorate. He spoke of the need to transform and upgrade Singapore’s economy, which cannot grow merely by increasing the number of workers. He also cited the importance of raising “incomes across the board.” Inflation, immigration, and income inequality were among the key issues during this month’s polls.

ASEAN

- **The 18th ASEAN Summit.** The 18th ASEAN Summit was held in Jakarta, Indonesia. May 7–8, 2011. Indonesia’s president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono chaired the summit, which was attended by heads of state and senior officials from the 10 ASEAN member countries. Although headlines were dominated by the Thailand-Cambodia border conflict and questions about whether ASEAN would go ahead with Burma’s chairmanship in 2014, the summit focused on three deliverables: the ASEAN community in a global community of nations; the establishment of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation; and enhancing cooperation against trafficking in persons in Southeast Asia. Here are some of the key outcomes:

  - **Accelerate consolidating ASEAN Plus One Free Trade Agreements.** ASEAN members pledged to accelerate regional economic integration by 2015. The steps include addressing
constitutional, legislative, and regulatory limitations that impede the implementation of intra- and extra-ASEAN commitments, as well as strengthening member countries’ respective national coordination efforts to effectively implement the ASEAN Economic Community commitments across various ministries and agencies. In practice, however, many ASEAN countries remain defensive about implementing aspects of FTAs with regional partners.

- **Timor Leste told to wait for ASEAN membership.** ASEAN leaders failed to reach a consensus regarding admission of Timor Leste. While Indonesia, as ASEAN chair, supported the motion, Singapore registered the strongest objection, arguing that Timor Leste lacks the institutions and capacity to attend all the ministerial meetings held each year and would put the goal of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) at risk. The group will hear reports on the issue at the next ASEAN summit in Bali, Indonesia, in October 2011.

- **Postponed decision on Burma’s chairmanship in 2014.** The leaders postponed a final decision on Burma’s request to chair ASEAN in 2014. ASEAN previously stipulated that Burma could assume the chair once a new government was formed, but there was an engaged debate about whether that requirement had been met. The leaders have assigned an ASEAN delegation to visit Burma in the coming months to gather more information. Based on additional information, the leaders will consider the issue again at the October 2011 summit.

- **Continued focus on Thailand-Cambodia conflict.** While ASEAN made no significant headway in resolving the border conflict—no agreement was reached at the summit to end the confrontation—members continued to push the envelope on ASEAN’s seemingly anachronistic principle of nonintervention in the internal affairs of member countries. The push, led by Indonesia, is for peaceful resolution of the conflict around the disputed ownership of the Preah Vihear temple. Indonesia’s Marty Natalegawa proposed a six-point “package deal”—including an exchange of letters on the terms of reference for the Indonesian observers and meetings of the General and Joint Border Commissions—during a Foreign Minister meeting on May 9, 2011. Both governments have yet to agree to the package.

- **South China Sea: Urging progress on Code of Conduct.** Indonesia’s president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono underlined ASEAN’s wish to accelerate the process of establishing a legally binding Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. ASEAN leaders committed themselves to the principle of international law and agreed that ASEAN-China dialogue on the issue was essential to a peaceful resolution. While press reports indicated ASEAN had agreed to keep the South China Sea off the agenda for the May summit and
perhaps for the East Asia Summit in Bali in October, informed
dources from ASEAN governments confirm that maritime security
and related issues were to be discussed at both summits.

- **ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation.** Indonesian
  foreign minister Marty Natalegawa said the ASEAN Institute for
  Peace and Reconciliation aims to enhance regional security and
  help solve disputes among ASEAN member states in a peaceful
  manner. The idea for the body was proposed by Indonesia.

**THAILAND**

- **Elections to be held July 3.** His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej issued
  a Royal Decree approving Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva’s request to
dissolve the House of Representatives and hold general elections on July
3, 2011. Yingluck Shinawatra, 43, sister of former prime minister Thaksin
Shinawatra, became the leader of the opposition Puea Thai party on
May 16, 2011. Abhisit has invited Yingluck to debate him as pre-election
maneuvering heated up around the country. The election is expected
to be close, and early polls show the opposition leading the incumbent
Democrat Party coalition.

- **Political tension escalates ahead of election.** Thailand’s army filed
  a complaint against historian Somsak Jeamteerasakul of Thammasat
  University for alleged lèse-majesté charges on May 11, 2011. Somsak’s
  summons is one of the growing number of lèse-majesté charges being
  pursued by the military and other royalists as the country gears up for
elections. The first election-related violence occurred on May 10, 2011, when
Thai opposition lawmaker Pracha Prasobdee was wounded by a drive-by
shooting in Bangkok.

- **Human Rights Watch releases report on Thailand military crackdown.**
  Human Rights Watch (HRW) has released a comprehensive report of
  its investigation into the military crackdown on the April/May protests
  in Bangkok. The report, *“Thailand: Descent in Chaos,”* summarizes the
  confrontations and issues recommendations for the Thai government, the
  United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, People’s Alliance for
  Democracy, other political parties, foreign governments, and the United
  Nations.

**INDONESIA**

- **Plans to invest $250 billion on infrastructure.** Indonesia plans to spend
  $250 billion on infrastructure development over the next five years.
  Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono aims to use public and
private investment in infrastructure to boost GDP growth to 7.2 percent by 2015. Currently, Indonesia is targeting GDP growth of 6.6 percent through the remainder of 2014. Yudhoyono says his government will double spending on roads, ports, and airports.

- **Indonesia seeks larger role for ASEAN.** Indonesia expressed its hopes that ASEAN can enhance its role as a regional organization that “takes actions and doesn’t just make joint declarations.” Indonesian foreign minister Marty Natalegawa said that under Indonesia’s leadership, ASEAN has been trying to deepen its contributions to integration and conflict resolution. Indonesia proved successful in hosting the discussion on the Thai-Cambodian border dispute at this month’s ASEAN Summit and will continue to play a peacekeeping role until an agreement is reached.

**CAMBODIA**

- **Cambodia and Thailand agree on roadmap for reconciliation.** The Cambodian and Thai foreign ministers proposed a “roadmap” for reconciliation to their governments after meeting on May 9. The agreement, facilitated by Indonesia’s foreign minister Marty Natalegawa on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit, comes on the heels of a recent cease-fire on the Thai-Cambodia border. The agreement has not yet been accepted and the two countries’ defense ministers will meet on the sidelines of the 5th ASEAN defense ministers meeting on May 18 to continue discussions.

- **Bank of China opens Phnom Penh branch.** Chinese investment in Cambodia made a leap forward as the Bank of China announced the opening of its Phnom Penh branch on May 7, 2011. Yue Yi, the bank’s vice-president, said the bank would facilitate business, encourage more Chinese investors to come to Cambodia, and demonstrate confidence in progress made in Cambodia’s banking sector.

- **Labor unrest and violence.** On May 8, 2011, at least 15 people were injured when 100 police officers armed with guns and electric batons attempted to break up a protest in Cambodia led by approximately 2,000 female garment workers. The workers were demanding payment of bonuses after their plant was closed by a fire. Protests and strikes over factory closures have become increasingly common in Cambodia in recent years, where garment manufacturing constitutes the country’s third-largest source of revenue.
VIETNAM

- **Elections in disputed Spratlys.** China has expressed outrage over Vietnam conducting elections in the disputed Spratly Islands for deputies to its National Assembly. On May 10, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu said that the elections violated China’s “indisputable sovereignty” over the Spratlys and their surrounding waters. The two nations reportedly agreed to a document outlining basic principles of conduct in the South China Sea in April, but details have not been released.

- **UN report: high inflation will raise poverty.** Inflation in Vietnam hit 17.5 percent in April and continues to rise. According to a recent UN report, rising inflation will likely push more citizens into poverty and must be countered by immediate and decisive government action. During the last bout of high inflation in 2008, the poverty rate rose by 2.1 percent, marking a step backward in the sharp decline in poverty the country achieved over the last two decades of economic reform.

PHILIPPINES

- **Foreign Secretary Albert Del Rosario to visit the United States.** Philippine foreign secretary Albert Del Rosario is slated to visit the United States in May. This will be the first overseas visit for the secretary since he assumed the role of directing the country’s foreign policy.

- **China offers $1.1 billion concessional loan.** China’s minister of finance and other officials have encouraged the Philippines to use the remaining $1.1 billion from the $1.8 billion concessional loan that the Chinese government granted to the Philippines to bolster Philippines’ infrastructure development. Approved projects—the national broadband network (NBN) project and the North Luzon Railway (Northrail)—funded by the Export-Import Bank of China, which administers the concessional loans for the Chinese government, remain controversial and unimplemented.

- **At least 5 Al Qaeda-linked suspects hiding in Philippines.** According to Philippine military officials, five suspected Al Qaeda terrorists are in hiding in the southern Philippines and plan to train local contacts on bomb making. One of the key suspects is Zulkifli Bin Hir, a Malaysian U.S.-trained engineer, who reportedly trains the Abu Sayyaf guerillas in bomb-making techniques. The other suspects are Indonesians Saad and Qayyim, Amin Baco, a Malaysian, and Mauwiyah, a Singaporean.
BURMA/MYANMAR

- **Thailand bars Burmese minority resistance groups from holding conference.** Thailand barred the United Nationalities Federal Council (UNFC) from holding a conference in Chiang Mai on May 3 to 7 after receiving an official protest from Burma. The UNFC includes Karen, Kachin, Karenni, Shan, Mon and Chin groups opposed to the Burmese government. The move follows the banning of other events, including the celebration of Aung San Suu Kyi’s birthday, that might anger the new Burmese government and damage improved relations between the two neighbors.

- **UN special envoy meets Aung Sung Suu Kyi.** The UN secretary general’s acting special envoy to Burma, Vijay Nambiar, met Aung San Suu Kyi on May 12, 2011, his second meeting with her since her release from house arrest last November. Vijay also met with senior members of the newly installed government of the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD). Vijay urged the new Burmese government to take “concrete steps” to implement the “important” reforms outlined in President U Thein Sein’s inaugural speeches.

- **Senior U.S. official to visit Burma.** Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Yun will travel to Burma for four days on May 18, 2011. Yun, who last visited Burma in December 2010, will meet with senior government officials, ethnic minorities, and businesspersons. He hopes to meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, but it is unclear whether that will happen. Yun’s visit comes on the heels of a partial amnesty granted by the Burmese government to thousands of prisoners on May 17, 2011. The amnesty, however, is not expected to affect most of Burma’s estimated 2,200 political prisoners.

LAOS

- **U.S. reverses stance on Vang Pao burial.** Vang Pao, a Hmong general who led a CIA-backed “secret army” in the Vietnam War and fought Laos’s Communist Party in exile from the United States for years, was honored at Arlington National Cemetery on May 13, 2011. Several hundred Hmong and Laotian Americans, including several dozen from the Central Valley, and their former CIA advisers attended the memorial, along with U.S. veterans and diplomats. The 81-year-old general died on January 6, 2011, in California, and was buried near Los Angeles on February 9, 2011. U.S. authorities refused his burial in the Arlington cemetery three months earlier because Vang Pao was not a U.S. citizen during the Vietnam War.
**Southeast Asia from the Corner of 18th & K Streets**

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- **One non-Communist Party candidate elected to the National Assembly.** Only one non-Communist Party candidate, Sisaliao Swengsuksa, president of the Lao Farmers’ Products, was elected to Laos’s 132-member National Assembly during elections on April 30, 2011. He was one of five independent candidates who ran in the election. The Communist Party is the only party allowed to contest elections in Laos. According to the Laotian media, 3.23 million ballots were cast out of 3.24 million eligible votes. Voting is mandatory in Laos.

- **Laos-China high-speed railway project experiencing delays.** Laos delayed the scheduled April 25 groundbreaking ceremony for its new $7 billion high-speed railway connecting Vientiane to the Chinese border. The delay appears to be related to Beijing’s sacking of Liu Zhijun, the minister of railways, in February 2011. The railway, built with Chinese labor and capital, is Laos’s second railway and will eventually allow rapid transport between Vientiane and China’s Yunnan province.

- **Soochow University will open China’s first overseas campus next year in Laos.** China’s Soochow University will open a $25 million Laotian branch in 2012. The campus will be the first Chinese university outside the mainland and the first foreign educational institution approved by the Laotian government. The university will offer 12 majors, including Chinese language and literature, and may serve as a precedent as China seeks to expand its soft power in Southeast Asia.

**MALAYSIA**

- **Prime Minister Najib to visit the United States.** Prime Minister Najib Razak will visit the United States later this week on a low-profile mission focused on business and to witness his daughter’s graduation. The prime minister will meet with business leaders in New York City and witness the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the CSIS Southeast Asia Program and Malaysia’s Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) for a new study on the future of U.S.-Malaysia relations and funding of a Malaysian fellow at CSIS in Washington, D.C.

- **Petronas to build $20 billion petrochemical hub in Johor.** Petronas Nasional Bhd. (Petronas), Malaysia’s state oil and gas company, will build a $20 billion refining complex with a capacity of 300,000 barrels a day, a naphtha cracker, and petrochemicals and polymer facilities in Johor. The Johor oil and gas hub is scheduled for completion in 2016.

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Melaysian authorities detained Singaporean businessman Abdul Majid Kunji Mohammed on charges of “channeling funds and providing logistics support to a militant group in the southern Philippines.” Under Malaysia’s Internal Security Act (ISA), authorities are allowed to detain terror suspects indefinitely without trial. Philippine authorities said they assisted with the arrest by providing Malaysian counterparts with information on the case.

NEW ZEALAND

- **New Zealand to sign an FTA with India.** India’s commerce and industry minister, Anand Sharma, said India expects to conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) with New Zealand within a time frame of 8 to 10 months. The agreement will place emphasis on complementarities in the agricultural sector, deepening the relationship in the services trade, increasing bilateral investment, and building on the possibilities of cooperation in innovation and technology transfer.

- **Government borrowing $301 million a week.** Finance Minister Bill English told Parliament that the financial position of the government has deteriorated since 2008. The deficit will reach $12.72 billion by next month, the highest level in New Zealand's history. Prime Minister John Key confirmed the average weekly borrowing figure, which he said was unaffordable. The cost of the Christchurch earthquake is a major contributor to the deficit, with the Earthquake Commission accounting for $1.2 billion, not including aid and rescue packages.

- **IMF: NZ house prices overvalued.** According to the International Monetary Fund, New Zealand housing prices are 15 to 25 percent overvalued. The measure is based on the OECD price-to-income ratio. This finding supports the OECD’s recommendation for New Zealand to institute a capital gains tax and overhaul the tax system in order to encourage savings and investments in sectors of the economy other than property. The new report suggested that the country’s capital markets are “shallow,” resulting in overinvestment in the housing sector.

AUSTRALIA

- **Fourth national budget plan released.** Treasurer Wayne Swan emphasized the importance of job creation and curbing unemployment in Australia’s new budget plan. The program will include new programs in health, money
for regional Australia, tax write-offs for small businesses, and programs to encourage low-income families to better educate their children. The budget attributes recovery from the global crisis to the benefits of a commodity boom flowing from what Swan called “the Asian Century,” referring to Asia’s rapid economic growth.

- **Suu Kyi appeals to Australia’s parliament for closer watch of Burmese parliament.** Through a video message, Australia’s foreign minister, members of Parliament, senior government officials, and foreign diplomats were warned by Aung San Suu Kyi that Burma’s political, economic, and humanitarian crises were persisting despite the convening of the Burmese parliament. Suu Kyi, choosing her words carefully, said, “We have not seen any positive, definite move towards a truly democratic process.” The event was held at the Australian National Parliament and hosted by the Australian Parliamentarians for Democracy in Burma, a cross-party group of Australian MPs.

- **Malaysia refugee deal to cost $230 million.** The Australian government plans to take 4,000 refugees from Malaysia, which will be reflected in the national budget over four years to the tune of $230 million. To accommodate this increase, the Humanitarian Migration Program will increase the annual refugee intake quota from 13,750 to 14,750 people a year. Immigration minister Chris Bowen says the country’s refugee program will consist of 7,000 places, primarily for those who have been referred to Australia for resettlement by the UNHCR.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA (PNG)

- **PNG ruling coalition meets following Prime Minister Somare’s illness.** PNG’s ruling coalition has met to choose an acting leader following speculation that Prime Minister Sir Michael Somare may resign due to medical reasons. Somare is presently recovering from heart surgery in Singapore. Sir Michael was expected to return to office on April 18, 2011, after a two-week suspension for financial misconduct, but he extended his leave for medical reasons. The prime minister has been able to keep the disparate ruling coalition together, and his resignation would likely spark a succession struggle.

- **PNG deal with Australia over immigrant detention center likely.** PNG planning minister Paul Tientsen has declared that a deal with Canberra over the proposed reopening of the Manus Island detention center was likely. However, he has demanded more details from Australia and has
insisted that the government would not rush to make a final decision. The Manus provincial government welcomed the proposal due to expectation of increased economic activity on the island. If reopened, the center would accommodate 400 to 600 asylum seekers.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

- Brunei seeks manpower agreement with Indonesia. Indonesia and Brunei are seeking to reach a bilateral agreement on manpower. Indonesian president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had discussed the issue during his state visit to Brunei last February. The agreement would serve to protect Indonesian citizens in Brunei and vice versa. According to the records of the Indonesian Embassy in Brunei, there were 51,000 Indonesian expatriates in Brunei in April 2011; Brunei has a total population of about 400,000.

- Brunei and Oman joint venture to decide on first project. The Brunei-Oman Investment Company is expected to decide on its first joint project this year. The project will probably involve the energy sector and will be based in Oman, Brunei, or a third country. The two sultanates had signed a treaty in 2009 creating a $100 million investment fund based in Muscat, which aims to increase investment opportunities in both countries. Both countries will try to decide on the joint venture before their next bilateral consultation next year.

TIMOR-LESTE

- UN report urges Timor-Leste to use oil wealth to boost other economic sectors. The report, entitled “Managing Natural Resources for Human Development: Developing the Non-Oil Economy to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),” presents the achievements of the country to date and proposes strategies for further development. The study emphasizes the use of revenue from the country’s Petroleum Fund to promote the development of the non-oil sectors of the economy, including agriculture, fishery, and ecotourism.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

- Aquino urges united stand on South China Sea. Philippines president Benigno Aquino urged Malaysia, Vietnam, and Brunei to work together to counterbalance China’s recent aggressive actions in the South China Sea. During the ASEAN Leaders Retreat on May 8, Aquino stated, “We are
all small countries within ASEAN, but if we have a united position, then we will have a stronger influence to talk to China and Taiwan, given the disparity in size.” Additionally, the Philippines resumed chairmanship of the East ASEAN Growth Area 7th Summit, where Aquino will push for the development of the South China Sea as a prime ecotourism destination.

• China adds patrol ship to South China Sea Fleet. Chinese authorities announced on May 8 that they had added a new patrol ship to China’s Maritime Surveillance Force, South China Sea Fleet, located in Guangzhou. The 1,500-ton vessel will be used to “protect the country’s maritime interests, enforce maritime and environmental laws.” The latest addition means that China now has a fleet comprising 13 patrol ships, two planes, and one helicopter. Last May, China released the “Ocean Development Report 2010,” which noted that the country’s maritime rights and interests were threatened by sovereignty and resource disputes.

MEKONG RIVER

• Laos asks Ch. Karnchang to finance dam review. Laos’s government has ordered a review of the $3.8 billion Xayaburi dam. Laos will ask the Bangkok-based construction company Ch. Karnchang Pcl, which owns 57 percent of the project, to pay for the study. Construction work on the dam will stop while the study takes place. The review comes as Laos tries to counter Vietnamese and Cambodian criticism that the dam will cause irreparable environmental and economic harm. Laos, as Southeast Asia’s smallest economy, has a large stake in the project. According to the Asian Development Bank, Laos’s GDP may grow by 7.7 percent this year, helped by hydropower and mining projects.

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

• U.S.-Korea (KORUS) Free Trade Agreement gaining momentum. The KORUS gained significant momentum following visits from top U.S. officials calling for early ratification of the deal. Assistant U.S. Trade Representative Wendy Cutler met with Korea’s trade minister Kim Jong-hoon in Seoul on April 27, 2011, and on April 28, 2011, Korea’s president Lee Myung-Bak met with U.S. commerce secretary Gary Locke, who led a congressional delegation of five Democratic and Republican representatives. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton strongly suggested that the Obama administration will soon send to the U.S. Congress implementing legislation for free trade agreements with Panama, Colombia, and South Korea.”
· **Banyan Tree Leadership Forum**: “New Zealand and the United States: Pacific Partners,” New Zealand’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Minister for the Rugby World Cup The Honorable Murray McCully will address the prestigious CSIS Banyan Tree Leadership Forum on Wednesday, May 18, 2011. The event is open to the public. Please contact the Southeast Asia Program for more details.

· **“ASEAN Beyond 2015,”** with ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan, by Asia Society in New York, on May 18, 2011. Live video webcast is available on AsiaSociety.org/Live from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. EST. Online viewers are encouraged to submit their questions to moderator@asiasociety.org during the webcast.

· **“Democracy, Political Change, and Global Governance in Asia: A Discussion with ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan,”** by the Asia Program and the School of International Service, American University, on May 19, 2011. Please RSVP here.

· **“Global Challenges for Indonesia’s Education in the 21st Century,”** by the United States–Indonesia Society (USINDO) and the Indonesian Leadership Foundation, on May 19, 2011. Please RSVP here.

· **“The Cloister featuring Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, ASEAN Secretary General,”** a private, top-level, off-the-record roundtable briefing for senior statesmen and policymakers, by CSIS Southeast Asia Program. These invitation-only briefings are designed to engender substantive discussion. For more details, please contact the Southeast Asia Program.

· **“Concepts for the East Asia Summit: Connectivity, Security, and ASEAN Centrality,”** a seminar by CSIS Southeast Asia Program and Japan External Trade Organization, at CSIS on May 20, 2011. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary General, ASEAN Secretariat, will be one of the key speakers. For more details, please contact the Southeast Asia Program.

· **“Pacific Night,”** an annual showcase of Pacific culture, food, entertainment, and ideas, organized by the Embassies and Missions of Pacific Island Countries and Territories based in Washington, D.C., and New York. This year’s showcase is being held at the New Zealand Embassy in Washington on the evening of June 22, 2011. It will start with a seminar on “the future of the Pacific,” featuring a panel of speakers from a variety
of backgrounds on the challenges facing the region, to be followed by a reception featuring entertainers and national dishes from countries from around the Pacific region. For more information, contact Michael Appleton, Second Secretary at the New Zealand Embassy.

- **Banyan Tree Leadership Forum: “U.S. Engagement in South East Asia,”** a Banyan Tree Forum by CSIS Southeast Asia Program with The Honorable Kurt M. Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Department of State, on May 31, 2011. Dr. John J. Hamre, president and CEO of CSIS, will open, and Ernest Z. Bower, director and senior adviser of the Southeast Asia Program, CSIS, will moderate the event. For more details, contact the **Southeast Asia Program.**

- **US ASEAN Ambassador Tours in DC, Houston, San Francisco, San Diego.** Four U.S. ambassadors to Southeast Asia region—U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia Scot Marciel, U.S. Ambassador to Singapore David Adelman, U.S. Ambassador to Brunei Daniel Shields, and U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN David Carden (visiting Washington, D.C., only)—will visit the United States from June 2 to June 9 and will travel through Washington D.C., Houston, San Francisco, and San Diego to meet and brief stakeholders about their impressions of the region. The event sponsor is the US ASEAN Business Council. For more information, click [www.us-asean.org](http://www.us-asean.org).

- **CSIS to host seminar on Maritime Security and the East Asia Summit.** This conference is organized by CSIS and the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV) to focus on this important issue ahead of the ASEAN Regional Forum in July and the East Asia Summit in November. Approximately 20 experts will be presenting at the seminar, to be held June 20–21, 2011. Invited keynote speakers include Admiral Thad Allen, Counselor, International Advisory Board, CSIS; and Mr. Danny Russel, Senior Director for Asia, National Security Council. This is a track 1.5 event and is off the record. Approximately 80 senior officials, executives, experts, academics, and members of the media will be invited to participate in the dialogue. For more details, contact the **Southeast Asia Program.**
SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM THE CORNER OF 18TH & K STREETS

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