



# LSE ASIA FORUM

Singapore 2008

Alumni, academic experts, policy makers and business leaders gathered at the Shangri-La hotel in Singapore on 11 April for the fourth LSE Asia Forum. The theme this year was *The Politics of Knowledge*. Over 500 VIPs attended the event, which was held in conjunction with the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS).

LSE director Howard Davies and Ambassador K Kesavapany, director of ISEAS, welcomed the audience and Peter Sutherland, chair of LSE's Court of Governors, introduced Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong of Singapore, who delivered the opening keynote speech. In his lecture, Prime Minister Lee said: 'The theme of this conference – knowledge – engages many of us in Asia. The whole continent is on the move today, because China and India have taken off. But Asian countries know that to sustain their growth and improve their people's lives, the use and creation of knowledge are crucial. Hence many countries are seeking to educate their people, upgrade their economies, and create conditions for knowledge and innovation to flourish.' At the end of the opening session he was presented with a commemorative scroll and an LSE baseball cap, which he put on to huge applause from the audience (pictured left).

Tharman Shanmugaratnam (BSc Econ 1981), minister for finance in Singapore, chaired the first session, paving the way for a whole day of discussion and debate in true LSE style. Academics, respondents and session chairs represented a wide range of disciplines and spoke on topical issues for Asia and its knowledge economies.

The LSE Asia Forum 2008 was sponsored by Professor Saw Swee Hock (PhD Statistics 1963, LSE honorary fellow), Singapore Exchange Limited (SGX) and the LSE Annual Fund.

On the previous evening an alumni reception attended by over 250 alumni was held at the British High Commissioner's residence. It was followed by a fundraising dinner held at the Raffles Hotel, in aid of the LSE Singapore Trust, at which Peter Sutherland spoke on the theme of globalisation. Both events were sponsored by Chang Beer.

The LSE Asia Forum provides an opportunity for analysis of different perspectives on the economic, social, political and cultural contributions Asia is making to global development. It is an important part of the School's strategy to enhance its long standing relationship with the rapidly developing Asian region. LSE has a long history of attracting talented students and staff from all major Asian countries.

Previous Forums have been held in New Delhi, Hong Kong and Bangkok.

The full transcript of Prime Minister Lee's speech, along with more information and photos from the LSE Asia Forum, can be found at [www.lse.ac.uk/asiaforum](http://www.lse.ac.uk/asiaforum)



Discussions on *The Politics of Knowledge* were led by LSE professors Conor Gearty, Danny Quah, Nikolas Rose, John Sidel and Lord Nicholas Stern. To give a flavour of the Forum, we include summaries of talks by Professor Sidel and Lord Stern and an account of the day by alumnus Michael Hill, visiting professor at the National University of Singapore.



## The struggle for the sacred by John Sidel

In the world of politics, 'knowledge is power' seems like something of an empty slogan, at least if we consider recent trends in much of Asia. For all the spread of information via the internet and the expansion of education in Asia over the past decade, little seems to have changed in terms of the broad structures of political power in the region.

But if the so-called Information Age has yet to produce dramatic change in the profane world of politics in Asia, the realm of spiritual power – religion – in the region, as in other parts of the world, is in the throes of a great transformation. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to speak of tectonic shifts in the politics of religious knowledge, or, to borrow a term from the world of politics, the democratisation of religion.

Such religious democratisation is evident in at least three ways. First, economic, social and political changes have reduced formal and informal curbs on religious life in parts of Communist Asia. In China and Vietnam, in particular, market expansion, economic growth and the electoralisation of local government have spurred a religious boom. Local officials keen on establishing themselves as good patrons have donated vast sums to build temples and pagodas in the Communist heartland.

Secondly, the past two decades have seen a proliferation of new sources of religious authority, new interpreters of what it means to be a good Buddhist, Christian, Hindu or Muslim. This pluralisation of religious authority structures has eroded the centralised monopolies of the Catholic Church in the Philippines and the sangha in Thailand, the privileged position of the two main Islamic associations in Indonesia, and threatened countless other religious establishments across Asia.

Meanwhile, a third dimension of religious democratisation is evident in the widening forms of popular participation and the shifting patterns of clerical mediation in religious life. El-Shaddai runs wildly popular prayer meetings in parks and stadiums in the Philippines, even as charismatic Catholic groups convene for singalong sessions in homes around the archipelago.

The weakening of religious monopolies and the freeing up of religious competition have unleashed diverse creative energies and uncertainty for millions of believers. In the face of such uncertainties, it is small wonder that a desperate minority turns to violence in the name of an embattled version of the faith.

But such episodes of violence should not blind us to the broadly emancipatory trends observable in religious life throughout much of Asia. Violence has always accompanied democratisation in the world of politics and it is not surprising to find violence alongside what I have called democratisation in the realm of religion. In the decades ahead, new forms of religious knowledge will gradually help to create new forms of politics and new constellations of power in Asia, as elsewhere in the world.

**John Sidel** is Sir Patrick Gillam Professor of International and Comparative Politics at LSE. A longer version of this article was first published in the *Straits Times* in October 2007.



## A global deal on climate change by Nicholas Stern

The problem of climate change involves a fundamental failure of markets: those who damage others by emitting greenhouse gases generally do not pay. Rich countries must lead the way in taking action to overcome this market failure. That means adopting ambitious emissions reduction targets; encouraging effective market mechanisms; supporting programmes to combat deforestation; promoting rapid technological progress to mitigate the effects of climate change; and honouring their aid commitments to the developing world.

Targets and trading must be at the heart of a global deal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The main elements of this deal could be built around a six point programme.

First, the overall targets of 50 per cent reductions in global emissions by 2050 (relative to 1990) agreed at the G8/G5 summit in Heiligendamm in June last year are essential if we are to have a reasonable chance of keeping temperature increases below 2 or 3°C. While these targets involve strong action, they are not over ambitious relative to the risks of failing to achieve them. Within these global targets, even a minimal view of equity demands that the rich countries' reductions should be at least 80 per cent.

Second, there should be substantial trade between countries, including rich and poor countries, in greenhouse gas emissions. This will promote efficiency – in other words, the cheapest ways of achieving cost reductions. At the same time, the flow to poor countries will help them cover their costs of greenhouse gas reduction, thereby giving them an incentive to join a global



**Top: Danny Quah (left) with Tharman Shanmugaratnam. Above: Peter Sutherland**

deal. Trade in emissions reduction has a double benefit: efficiency, and glue for a global deal.

Third, there should be a major reform of the Clean Development Mechanism, a Kyoto mechanism that allows developing countries to sell emission reductions, but does not penalise them for emissions themselves (a one-sided trade mechanism).

Fourth, there should be a coherent, integrated international programme to combat deforestation, which makes up 15 to 20 per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions.

Fifth, there needs to be promotion of rapid technological advance for mitigation. The development of technologies must be accelerated and methods found to promote their sharing. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) for coal is particularly urgent since coal-fired electric power is currently the dominant technology round the world and emerging nations will be investing heavily in these technologies.

Sixth, rich countries should honour their commitments to 0.7 per cent of GDP in aid by 2015. This would yield increases in flows of \$150-200 billion per year. The extra costs developing countries face as a result of climate change are likely to be upwards of \$80 billion per year and it is vital that extra resources are available for new initiatives.

The above six point programme would allow all countries of the world to pursue their development aspirations via low-carbon growth.

**Lord Stern of Brentford** is IG Patel Professor of Economics and Government at LSE and led the review on the economics of climate change published in October 2006.





### An alumnus in Singapore

Michael Hill (above) agreed to provide *LSE Magazine* with his impressions of the Forum. He writes:

For an LSE alumnus, Singapore provides constant reminders of the contribution the School has made to the island state's spectacular progress. The Carr-Saunders Report of 1948 established the University of Malaya, of which Sir Sidney Caine, later a director of LSE, was vice chancellor in the early 1950s. And the contribution of the notable alumnus Goh Keng Swee to Singapore's financial, infrastructural, military and educational develop-

ment attracts ongoing respect. The culture of Singapore, pragmatic and business-like, is also resonant of that of the School. It might be epitomised in Goh's rationale in 1968 for establishing the now famous bird park rather than a zoo: bird seed costs less than meat!

Thus the opportunity to attend the fourth LSE Asia Forum in Singapore offered the prospect not only of enjoying healthy debate but also of savouring some of the less formal aspects of the School, such as its humour. There was an abundance of both.

The sputtering progress of the Olympic flame through London, Paris and San Francisco featured in the keynote opening address of Singapore's prime minister, Lee Hsien Loong, who warned of the long term consequences of the anger expressed by many young Chinese on internet bulletin boards. In a later response by Conor Gearty the implications of these events were interpreted very differently, suggesting that protest was a new way of revealing basic truths about human rights. Both positions were fully reported in the following day's *Straits Times*.

Much of the humour originated with LSE's director Howard Davies, who had a satirical quip for a number of the speakers. But one of the more droll moments came after Nikolas Rose had demolished the timepiece on the lectern, when a subsequent speaker, relying on the chair to remind him of the remaining time, publicly queried whether his raised fingers signaled a remaining two minutes or some alternative coded message. Memories of Student Union debates in the Old Theatre were instantly revived! ■

**Michael Hill** (BA Sociology 1965) is emeritus professor, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand and a visiting professor at the National University of Singapore.

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