

Summary



COMMITTED TO
IMPROVING THE STATE
OF THE WORLD

World Economic Forum on East Asia
Singapore, 24-25 June 2007

• **Geun Lee** • **Pongsak Hoontrakul** • **Kuniko Inoguchi**
• **Lim Sung-Nam** • **Noong-Kong Leung** • **Michael J. Roux**
Challenger • **Ralph A. Cossa** Moderated by • **C. Raja Mohan**

Sunday 24 June
14.15-15.45
political winds

Asia Update: Changing Political Winds

Almost five decades ago, the western world was setting the boundaries of domestic politics for a large part of Asia, but the rise of China and India and the economic dynamism of the region have turned Asia from a subject of international politics into an important actor and driver, observed session moderator, **C. Raja Mohan**, Professor, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

This year, the region will see shifts in its political landscape with general elections taking place in Australia, South Korea and Thailand, and key Upper House elections in Japan. These election outcomes will have consequences not just within the region but also in the advanced western countries.

Geun Lee, Professor of International Relations, Graduate School of International Relations, Seoul National University, Republic of Korea, predicted a volatile and closely-fought election and noted that of the three leading candidates, Lee Myung-bak, a member of the South Korean opposition Grand National Party and GNP Chairwoman Park Geun-hye, daughter of former president Park Chung Hee have emphasized growth rather than distribution, while former Gyeonggi provincial governor, Sohn Hak-kyu has focused more on the construction of a social safety net.

Pongsak Hoontrakul, Senior Research Fellow, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand, said recent political events in his country should not be viewed as a "wrong turn," as the military intervention was necessary to quell rising tensions between the pro- and anti-Thaksin factions. He pointed out that historically Thailand had managed major political and social upheavals without a civil war. "Hopefully, early next year, we will have a coalition government and we will open for business. Everyone's welcome," he said.

Kuniko Inoguchi, Member of the House of Representatives, Japan, believed that Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will have to win the election on continuing reforms while dealing with the consequences of those reforms. Two key issues, the ageing demographics – 30% of the population are over 65 years of age – and maintaining economic dynamism in a greying population, will continue to dominate. She noted a third trend, the "feminization of politics" where an unprecedented number of women are winning an unprecedented number of elections.

Noong-Kong Leung, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Phoenix Satellite Television, Hong Kong SAR, does not see much political uncertainty in China and Hong Kong SAR, noting that the extent of political liberties in the former British colony will be largely determined by Beijing, notwithstanding Sino-British agreement on political reforms.

Lim Sung-Nam, Ambassador, North Korean Nuclear Issue and Director-General, North Korean Nuclear Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, said the denuclearization process has been complex with North Korea missing a deadline for shutting down and dismantling its nuclear facilities. Two upcoming developments – the visit next Tuesday of IAEA officials to Pyongyang to discuss modalities of a shutdown and the resumption of the six-party talks in July – could pave the way to fulfilling North Korea's promise to dismantle its nuclear programme. He added that whatever the outcome of the December presidential election, Seoul will continue to pursue the unification of the Korean peninsula through diplomacy.

Michael J. Roux, Chairman, Roux International, Australia, said the growth in trade with China and Japan in recent years has politically anchored Australia in Asia more than ever before. Even Prime Minister John Howard, who was diplomatically more oriented towards the West, "has found Asia...and now the trade and the economics have matched the politics."

/co