The ASEAN Summit: Harbinger of Future Progress?

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April 30, 2015

Most observers could be forgiven for seeing the April 26–27 ASEAN Summit in Malaysia as another in a long series of head-of-state talk shops by the grouping. It did not issue any groundbreaking new declarations on the organization’s direction. The bloc did not come out swinging at China, nor did it unveil many big “deliverables” as U.S. observers expect to see from international forums. But a more nuanced reading of the summit suggests that it did set the stage for important developments down the road.

The lion’s share of attention given to the summit understandably focused on the South China Sea, and in particular whether ASEAN leaders would heed Philippine president Benigno Aquino’s call for a robust, united front against the unprecedented challenge of China’s reclamation work in the Spratly Islands. An advanced copy of the chairman’s statement expected to be issued by Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak after the summit leaked on April 16. It made no direct mention of recent developments in the South China Sea and merely echoed ASEAN’s usual vague statement of concern over the disputes and call for peaceful settlement.

The final statement issued on April 28 was considerably revised. It said the ASEAN heads of state “share the serious concerns expressed by some leaders on the land reclamation being undertaken in the South China Sea, which has eroded trust and confidence and may undermine peace, security, and stability in the South China Sea.” There is no way to read that...
Other than as an indictment of Beijing, even if China is not mentioned by name. And that is clearly how China’s foreign ministry read the statement, resulting in a testy briefing the following day in which spokesman Hong Lei lashed out at purported reclamation in the Spratlys by the Philippines, Vietnam, and other claimant nations.

It is dangerous to read too much into the diplomatic tea leaves. But Malaysia has clearly realized as this year’s ASEAN chair that it cannot be entirely passive on the South China Sea issue. And the willingness of the 10 heads of state to sign off on such a strong (by ASEAN standards) statement regarding the reclamation work suggests that it has them concerned as much as, if not more than, the standoff last May over the placement of a Chinese oil rig in waters claimed by Vietnam. That resulted in the first-ever standalone statement by the ASEAN foreign ministers on the South China Sea.

Interestingly, this year’s chairman’s statement says the ASEAN foreign ministers have been instructed to “urgently address this matter constructively including under the various ASEAN frameworks.” They can be expected to use the August ASEAN Ministerial Meeting and ASEAN Regional Forum, which includes the foreign ministers of 16 other Asia Pacific countries and the European Union, to raise the issue with more candor than their heads of state.

It is also telling that the laundry list of concerns in the chairman’s statement regarding the South China Sea includes freedom of over-flight, which suggests a growing worry that China’s reclamation work could lead to Beijing’s declaring an Air Defense Identification Zone over the South China Sea, as it did a year and a half ago in the East China Sea.

Despite the understandable press coverage, the South China Sea was not the only issue discussed at the ASEAN Summit. In addition to the usual...
The ASEAN Summit: Harbinger of Future Progress? (continued)

updates on progress on the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, especially the ASEAN Economic Community set to come into effect on December 31, the leaders adopted three declarations that point to new priorities for the organization.

The first, the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on a People-Oriented, People-Centered ASEAN, echoes the theme Malaysia selected for its 2015 chairmanship. In broadest strokes, it seems a recognition that ASEAN remains an institution of the elites and that the average Southeast Asian citizen does not feel any real connection to ASEAN as a community. Creating a sense of investment in ASEAN among average citizens will be critical for creating a more effective bloc like the European Union. Whether Malaysia’s focus on youth, entrepreneurs, and other targeted groups will bear fruit will have to be seen, but it is important that ASEAN might finally be committed to creating a real sense of community.

The other two declarations, on the “Global Movement of Moderates” and on promoting disaster and climate change resilience, address more immediate concerns for ASEAN leaders. The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has led to increasing concerns about radicalization in Southeast Asian states and the danger of returning jihadists taking up arms in the region. This is of particular concern for Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. The effort to combat radicalization and promote religious and political moderation on a regional scale could prove important in confronting those dangers.

With a landmark UN climate change summit in Paris at the end of the year, 2015 will prove a watershed in the fight to combat climate change. The Philippines, previously a vocal opponent of emissions cuts for developing states, has had a dramatic change of heart in light of the devastation inflicted on the country by 2013’s Typhoon Haiyan and other extreme weather events, which are growing more frequent and severe due to climate change. It is long overdue that ASEAN as a group recognize Southeast Asia’s unique vulnerability to climate change and engage in...
collective efforts to build more resilient communities and mitigate its worst effects.

The ASEAN Summit was hardly a landmark moment for the group, and by Western standards still seems a talk shop. But it may well have planted seeds for important efforts by the organization later this year and beyond.
MYANMAR

- **Parties prepare candidates list for 2015 general election.** The ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party’s Central Executive Committee member Tint Zaw on April 21 said that his party has completed approximately 80 percent of its candidate list for the upcoming general elections, due to take place in November. Khin Maung Swe, chair of the National Democratic Force, which broke from the National League for Democracy in 2010, also announced that his party will field 400 candidates to contest races at both the union and regional-level parliaments.

- **First three foreign banks open in Myanmar.** Two Japanese banks, Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation, and Singapore-based Overseas-Chinese Banking Corporation on April 22–23 became the first foreign banks to open branches in Myanmar in more than 50 years. The three banks were among the first nine foreign financial institutions awarded banking licenses in Myanmar last October. The remaining six banks are from Australia, China, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand.

- **Firms prepare to sign for first stage of Dawei special economic zone.** Thailand’s deputy transport minister, Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, on April 21 announced that Italian Thai Development and Rojana Industrial Park will likely sign the first development contract for the Dawei Special Economic Zone in southeastern Myanmar in May or June. The $1.7 billion contract for the first stage of development of the project is awaiting approval by Myanmar’s parliament. Arkhom said that construction is set to begin by the end of the year.

- **High tin exports from Myanmar cause global prices to drop.** The price of tin on the London Metal Exchange plunged to below $14,000 per metric ton, the lowest since 2009, during the week of April 20 due to a sharp increase in tin supply from Myanmar to China. Myanmar currently exports around 21,000 tons of tin ore a year, up from almost nothing a few years ago. Indonesia, the world’s largest tin exporter, has struggled to respond to the surge in tin ore exports from Myanmar.

- **Ethnic armed groups to meet in Wa special region.** The United Wa State Army will host a meeting at its headquarters in Panghsang in the Wa special region from May 1 to 3 with representatives of 12 ethnic armed groups that have agreed on a draft cease-fire text with the government. The summit aims to foster mutual understanding between groups that
were part of the cease-fire process and those that were not. The Wa were not represented at the signing of the draft agreement between ethnic armed groups and the government last month.

INDONESIA

• **Jakarta hosts Asian-African Conference.** Delegations from 91 countries gathered in Jakarta from April 21 to 23 for the 60th anniversary of the historic Bandung Conference, which gave birth to the Non-Aligned Movement of developing nations during the Cold War. The delegates, including 22 heads of state, called for greater economic cooperation between Asia and Africa but made few written commitments. They did issue a declaration calling for the establishment of an independent Palestine. Many commentators saw Chinese president Xi Jinping and Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, both of whom spoke at the conference and held a number of sidelines meetings, as competing for influence.

• **Jakarta hosts World Economic Forum on East Asia.** President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo hosted the World Economic Forum on East Asia in Jakarta on April 19–21 with the theme “Anchoring Trust in East Asia's Regionalism.” Officials from across the Asia Pacific and beyond discussed financial inclusion, food security, combating non-communicable diseases, and public-private partnerships in infrastructure development. Delegates also launched Grow Asia, a program to promote sustainable agriculture.

• **Indonesia executes eight drug convicts despite international outcry.** Indonesian authorities on April 29 executed eight convicted drug offenders, including seven foreign nationals, shortly after midnight despite pleas for clemency from their home countries, UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, and others. Canberra withdrew its ambassador to Indonesia in anger at the executions of Australians Andrew Chan and Myuran Sukumaran. Filipino Mary Jane Veloso’s execution was temporarily suspended after Manila reported a woman claiming to have recruited and trafficked Veloso turned herself in to Philippine authorities. An Indonesian court a few days earlier gave French national Serge Atalouï a two-week reprieve as he exhausts his legal appeals.

• **Budi Gunawan sworn in as deputy police chief.** Budi Gunawan, who was President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo’s original choice for national police chief, was inaugurated as deputy chief on April 22 in a closed-door ceremony. Jokowi dropped Budi’s nomination for chief after the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) named him a graft suspect. South Jakarta District Court judge Sarpin Rizaldi dismissed the KPK’s case against Budi,
which has since been handed over to the national police for investigation. The Judicial Commission is investigating Sarpin for misconduct over his ruling.

- **Fisheries ministry official found dead in hotel room.** Police are investigating the April 18 death of fisheries ministry official Yoseph Sairlela, who was to be a key witness in the case against Pusaka Benjina Resources, a fishing company accused of using slave labor. Yoseph had two wounds on his face, but a preliminary examination determined that he died of a heart attack. Pusaka Benjina Resources’ operational chief has denied that the company engaged in slavery, but admitted that abuses had occurred on some boats and fishermen had died at sea.

- **Military launches anti-ISIS operation in Central Sulawesi.** Armed forces commander General Moeldoko told reporters on April 20 that the Indonesian military had launched a six-month counterterrorism operation in Central Sulawesi. Moeldoko cited the difficulty of reaching militants in the province’s mountainous terrain as the reason why the military has assumed counterterrorism duties, which are traditionally the province of the police. Radicals in the region have allegedly developed ties to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

ASEAN

- **South China Sea talks take center stage at ASEAN Summit.** The South China Sea disputes were a major focus of discussion among the 10 ASEAN heads of state during the April 26–27 ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur and Langkawi, Malaysia. The final *chairman’s statement* surprised many observers by recognizing that reclamation “may undermine peace, security and stability” and calling on ASEAN foreign ministers to address the issue. In addition, leaders at the summit signed off on three declarations aimed at curtailing extremism, building disaster, and climate resilience, and promoting a “people-centered ASEAN.”

- **Human rights groups urge discussion of Rohingya, freedom of expression at ASEAN Summit.** The ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, a grouping of current and former regional lawmakers, on April 22 released a statement calling on heads of state at the April 26–27 ASEAN Summit to address the plight of Myanmar’s Rohingya minority. They said the Rohingya issue is no longer a domestic one because communal violence has driven more than 100,000 Rohingya asylum seekers into Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. Meanwhile, a coalition of human rights organizations spearheaded by Amnesty International used the opportunity of the summit to call on ASEAN leaders to stop clamping down on free speech by government critics.

A group of Rohingya men gather to leave the Myebon refugee camp to collect firewood under armed military escort. A group of ASEAN lawmakers called on ASEAN leaders to address the Rohingya issue. https://www.flickr.com/photos/69583224@N05/8379542456/
THAILAND

• **National Reform Council debates final constitution draft.** Thailand’s Constitution Drafting Committee on April 20 submitted its draft charter to the 250-member National Reform Council for debate. The draft has also been shared with the public, and the junta has invited comment by political parties and other stakeholders. Critics, including prominent members of the Pheu Thai and Democrat parties, have lambasted the draft, especially for allowing the selection of an unelected prime minister, making the Senate overwhelmingly appointed rather than elected, and establishing a National Ethical Committee with considerable authority over parliamentarians.

• **Government claims violence decreased in southern Thailand.** Internal Security Operations Command spokesperson Colonel Pramote Prom-in on April 23 claimed the number of violent incidents in southern Thailand over the previous six months had dropped to 305, down 60 percent from the previous six months. Pramote said the number of casualties was down 47 percent to 339. He attributed the improvements to increased efforts to win hearts and minds combined with a crackdown on militants. Nonetheless, from April 9 to 22 violent incidents left 19 people dead, 15 injured, and 70 arrested.

• **Former commerce minister faces corruption trial.** Thailand’s Supreme Court on April 20 announced that former commerce minister Boonsong Teriyapirom and 20 other officials in the former Pheu Thai government would go on trial for corruption on June 29. Boonsong and the others are accused of malfeasance for their part in corrupt government-to-government rice deals brokered under the controversial rice-pledging scheme of ousted prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra. They face a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

• **EU puts Thai fishing industry on notice; Thailand, Indonesia set up joint commission to combat illegal fishing.** Prime Minister General Prayuth Chan-ocha of Thailand and President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo of Indonesia on April 23 agreed to establish a joint commission to combat illegal fishing as Thailand vowed to address the problem. The two announced the agreement on the sidelines of the Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Separately, the European Union on April 20 threatened to ban seafood imports from Thailand over concerns about illegal fishing, potentially disrupting more than $640 million in annual trade. The European Commission gave Thai authorities six months to enact “a corrective tailor-made action plan.”
PHILIPPINES

• Department of Justice recommends murder charges for 90 Moro rebels. The Philippine Department of Justice on April 22 released its report on the January 25 clash in Mamsapano, southern Philippines, recommending murder charges against 90 Moro separatists for the killing of 44 police commandos. The Moro groups are not expected to give up those named in the report. Meanwhile the Philippine House of Representatives on April 21 restarted debate on the Bangsamoro Basic Law, which would establish an autonomous political entity in the southern Philippines as part of a peace deal.

• Philippines finalizes order for 10 coast guard ships from Japan. The Philippine Coast Guard on April 19 finalized an order for 10 multirole response vessels from Japan Marine United Corporation. The vessels will arrive on a rolling basis from the third quarter of 2016 to the third quarter of 2018. The procurement is being funded by a $167 million loan from the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The ships will provide a significant boost to the long-underfunded Philippine Coast Guard, which Manila is seeking to modernize amid its dispute with China in the South China Sea.

• Moro rebel leader Ameril Umbra Kato dies. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) founder Ameril Umbra Kato, believed to be in his late 60s, died on April 14 of natural causes. The BIFF appointed Kato’s deputy and former chief of political affairs, Ismael Abubakar, also known as Kumander Bungos, as his successor. The Philippine military recently concluded a two-month campaign against the BIFF, which split from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front after refusing to take part in the ongoing peace process with the Philippine government.

• Supreme Court takes up case against Makati mayor Binay. The Philippine Supreme Court on April 21 gave Ombudsman Conchita Carpio-Morales and Makati mayor Jejomar Erwin Binay Jr. 30 days to submit comments on Carpio-Morales’s petition to reverse a lower court decision preventing Binay’s suspension from office amid bribery allegations. Meanwhile the Court of Appeals, which issued the suspension order preventing the ombudsman from executing its suspension order against Binay, has ordered an inquiry into two of its judges who have been accused of receiving bribes in exchange for that ruling.

MALAYSIA

• Cross protest in Selangor highlights double standard in implementing Sedition Act. Muslim protesters in Selangor state on April 19 protested
outside a church to demand the removal of a cross displayed outside the church building. Following the incident, Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar announced that authorities would not take action against the protesters under the country’s Sedition Act because the protest was nonviolent and not about religion. The incident has caused domestic and international protests, prompting Prime Minister Najib Razak to announce that the demonstrators will be investigated under the Sedition Act and prosecuted if found guilty.

- Whistleblower site reveals 1MDB gave false documents to Singaporean bank. Investigative news site Sarawak Report on April 22 reported that debt-ridden state investment fund 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) may have falsified bank statements about the account of its subsidiary, Brazen Sky Limited, in the Singapore branch of BSI Bank. 1MDB’s chief executive officer, Arul Kanda, has given these allegedly bogus documents purporting to show Brazen Sky’s bank account in Singapore to various authorities, but Sarawak Report said that insider information obtained in Singapore shows a zero balance in the company’s account.

- Former police official claims Anwar pardon rejection is “defective.” Zain Ibrahim, a former chief of the Kuala Lumpur police’s criminal investigation division, on April 19 lodged a report in which he called the rejection of a royal pardon for jailed opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim by the Pardons Board “defective.” He cited Attorney General Gani Patail’s failure to disclose to the Pardons Board that he was under investigation at the time for sanctioning false information in affidavits related to Anwar’s sodomy case. Gani is also a member of the Pardons Board, which is led by the king of Malaysia.

- Central Bank governor says Malaysia’s banking sector solid in response to Fitch warning. The governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia, Zeti Akhtar Aziz, on April 18 said in an interview in Washington that Malaysia’s fiscal situation has improved, with the fiscal deficit having narrowed, and that the country’s banking sector remains solid. Zeti made her remarks in an effort to reassure investor sentiment as credit rating agency Fitch Ratings last month suggested it may downgrade Malaysia’s credit ranking.

- Police arrest 12 suspects over alleged planned attacks in support of Islamic State. Inspector-General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar on April 26 said that Malaysian police had apprehended 12 suspects for allegedly planning to destroy a series of government targets in Kuala Lumpur using homemade explosives. In his statement, Khalid said that the suspects acted in response to a call from the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria to attack secular Muslim nations, which the Islamic State views as its
enemies. Authorities did not specify whether the ASEAN Summit being held in Kuala Lumpur was a target of the foiled attacks.

VIETNAM

- Vietnam’s largest private lender faces criminal investigation. Government inspectors on April 21 proposed an investigation into Vietin Bank, Vietnam’s largest private lender, for a number of violations in its lending and investment practices between 2009 and 2012. The inspectors said they found evidence the bank is hiding bad debts and violating lending regulations in its lending arm. Meanwhile, Vietin Bank’s financial investment department is said to have invested over $13 million in risky business ventures. The investigation is part of the government’s campaign to clean up Vietnam’s banking system.

- Central bank takes over embattled Ocean Bank. Vietnam’s central bank on April 25 announced it will acquire all shares in Ocean Bank to prevent the bank’s weakness from spreading to other parts of the banking sector. Ocean Bank has suffered substantial financial losses in recent years, and its former chairman, Ha Van Tham, was arrested last October for banking fraud. Vietnam’s largest private lender, VietinBank, which also faces a criminal investigation, is expected to take part in the restructuring of Ocean Bank.

- Vietnam’s navy to add two new warships to its fleet. The Vietnamese navy will receive two additional Molniya-class fast attack ships, built domestically but based on Russian designs, in the next two months, according to an April 20 report on the Vietnamese government’s web portal. Vietnam’s navy received its first two Molniya-class missile corvettes in 2014 and is expected to operate a total of six by the end of 2016.

- Vietnamese and Chinese coast guards jointly patrol Tonkin Gulf. Vietnamese and Chinese coast guard vessels conducted a joint fisheries patrol from April 20 to 23 in the Gulf of Tonkin. The joint patrol took place under the auspices of a bilateral agreement on fisheries cooperation that China and Vietnam signed in 2000. The two coast guards also set up a hotline to allow for regular information exchanges and faster communications in crisis situations.

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

- Congressional committees approve fast track with amendments; vote expected in early May. The Senate Finance Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee on April 22 and 23 approved a Trade
Promotion Authority bill granting the president the ability to negotiate trade agreements and limiting Congress to a simple yes or no vote without amendments on any final agreement. House committee members introduced several amendments to the TPA bill, including one to prohibit the United States from signing trade agreements with countries that have a poor record in combatting human trafficking. House Ways and Means Committee chairman Paul Ryan said that he expects both the House and Senate to vote on the bill in early May.

- **Obama rallies Democratic support for TPP.** President Barack Obama on April 23 said that U.S. failure to complete and enact the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement would create a vacuum for China to “write the rules” on trade in the Asia Pacific. It would also, the president said, cause significant difficulties for U.S. companies to do business in Asia and a loss of American jobs. Obama made the remarks at the summit of Organizing for Action, a group that advocates for the president’s agenda.

- **Japanese prime minister announces U.S. and Japan near TPP trade deal.** Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe on April 21 said that U.S. and Japanese negotiators were nearing a deal on outstanding bilateral issues in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade negotiations. Several remaining challenges include Japan’s request for the United States to remove a 2.5 percent tariff on Japanese auto part imports and the United States’ request for Japan to increase its quota for rice imports.

- **U.S. Trade Representative holds TPP talks in Vietnam.** United States Trade Representative Michael Froman visited Vietnam on April 21–22 for talks with senior Vietnamese government and party officials regarding outstanding issues facing Vietnam in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade negotiations. These issues include differences over market access, including for textiles and apparel, government procurement, labor, and state-owned enterprises. Froman said that the United States will allow Vietnam a transitional period to meet certain TPP requirements and is willing to offer capacity-building and other technical assistance that Vietnam may need.

**SOUTH CHINA SEA**

- **Chinese Coast Guard drives off Philippine ships at Scarborough Shoal.** The Philippine government on April 21 denounced China’s Coast Guard for using water cannons against a group of Philippine fishing vessels at Scarborough Shoal. The fishermen also accused Chinese Coast Guard personnel of boarding their ships and throwing their catch overboard.
Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei defended the Coast Guard’s actions and said the Philippines should “increase its education and control of its fishermen” to prevent them from fishing at Scarborough Shoal.

- **Arbitration court to hold hearings on jurisdiction in July.** The tribunal hearing the Philippines’ case against China at the Permanent Court of Arbitration on April 23 announced it will hold a hearing in July to address preliminary questions about its jurisdiction over the case, including those raised by Beijing’s December 2014 position paper. China continues to insist that it will not accept or participate in the arbitration. The judges nonetheless gave Beijing until June 16 to respond to a recent submission by the Philippines addressing the questions raised by China’s position paper.

- **Study says Chinese reclamation causing more than $100 million in annual economic losses.** Edgardo Gomez, a professor emeritus and national scientist at the University of the Philippines, on April 23 released the results of a study finding that China’s reclamation work in the Spratly Islands has destroyed over 750 acres of coral reef and is conservatively estimated to be causing over $100 million in economic losses for coastal states. Gomez released the findings at a press conference hosted by the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources.

**CAMBODIA**

- **Authorities refuse to arrest former Khmer Rouge leaders.** Deputy Police Chief Mao Chandara on April 21 said police will not arrest three former Khmer Rouge cadres who were recently charged with murder and other war crimes. His announcement followed a warning by Prime Minister Hun Sen that more trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders could see Cambodia descend into civil war. Rights groups have accused Hun Sen of meddling with the court process to protect a number of public figures. The UN-funded Khmer Rouge tribunal has succeeded in convicting only three former officials.

- **Four asylum seekers in Nauru agree to resettle in Cambodia.** Interior Ministry spokesperson Khieu Sopheak on April 23 announced that a Rohingya man from Myanmar had volunteered to be the first processed refugee at Australia’s asylum seeker detention center on Nauru to resettle in Cambodia as part of a controversial agreement signed between Canberra and Phnom Penh in 2014. Sopheak announced five days later that three Iranians had also agreed to resettle. The agreement will see Cambodia take in a significant number of refugees who sought asylum in Australia in exchange for a $31 million aid package.
Prince Ranariddh calls for three-party coalition. Funcinpec Party president Prince Norodom Ranariddh on April 24 called on the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) to form a coalition with Funcinpec and the ruling Cambodian People’s Party as relations between opposition leader Sam Rainsy and Prime Minister Hun Sen have warmed over the past month. Ranariddh, who is the son of the late king Norodom Sihanouk, said a merger between the two parties would fulfil Sihanouk’s wish. CNRP leaders have previously rejected the possibility of forming a coalition with the ruling party.

Mam Sonando criticizes opposition leaders, resurrects party to contest 2018 election. Beehive Radio director Mam Sonando on April 22 announced he will revive his Beehive Social Democratic Party to contest Cambodia’s next national election in 2018. Sonando established the party to contest the 1998 elections but won no seats. He made the announcement after criticizing the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party’s recent detente with Prime Minister Hun Sen. Sonando played an active role in the opposition-led street protests that followed the 2013 general election.

Singapore experiences fifth straight month of deflation. Singapore’s consumer price index remained unchanged at -0.3 percent in March, marking the city-state’s fifth consecutive month of deflation according to data released April 23 by the Department of Statistics. The Monetary Authority of Singapore and the Ministry of Trade and Industry attributed the continuing trend to the easing of food inflation, falling accommodation costs, and a decline in private road transport costs, which includes the costs of purchasing a vehicle, road taxes, and tolls.

Singapore-Taiwan trading link to open in July. Taiwan’s Financial Supervisory Commission chairman, Tseng Ming-chung, announced on April 22 that Singapore and Taiwan will open a cross-border stock trading platform on July 1. Brokers in Taiwan will be able to place orders on a limited number of stocks on the Singapore exchange and vice versa. The Taiwan and Singapore exchange operators agreed in September 2014 to examine the possibility of an exchange link.

Keppel goes private for $2 billion; raises expectations other developers will follow suit. Singapore’s Keppel Corporation in April took its property development unit, Keppel Land Ltd, private in a $2 billion deal. Analysts saw the privatization decision as a result of a downward trend in the housing market that has driven down stock prices for land developers. Investors are piling into Singapore property stocks on expectations that other
developers will also seek to go private in lucrative deals, according to an April 21 Wall Street Journal report.

- China-based aerospace company opens aviation safety and training center in Singapore. China’s HAITE Group on April 21 officially opened the HAITE Aviation Training Singapore, which is expected to attract more than $41 million in yearly revenue for the city-state’s economy over the next five years. The safety and training facility will serve as HAITE Group’s international headquarters. It is the first major investment by a Chinese aerospace company in Singapore.
• **Strengthening Fragile States: Causes and Solutions.** The Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) will host a panel discussion on May 1 on the roots of fragile states and how to strengthen them. NPR News's Deborah Amos, Alticor’s Richard Holwill, and Freedom House’s Mark Lagon, among others, will speak on the panel. The event will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at CIPE, 1211 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 700. To RSVP, [click here](#).

• **Empowering Women in Countries with Mixed Legal Systems.** The U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) will host a symposium on May 1 to examine the potential approaches to women’s empowerment in countries with mixed systems of common, civil, customary, religious, and/or tribal laws. Officials from the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Bank, the U.S. Coast Guard, and USIP will speak. The event will be held from 8:35 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. at USIP, 2301 Constitution Ave., NW. To RSVP, [click here](#).

• **Press Uncuffed: Raising Awareness about Global Press Freedom.** The University of Maryland will host an event on May 4 to commemorate World Press Freedom Day and support Press Uncuffed, a campaign to raise awareness about the dire state of press freedom. The event will be held from 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, 1100 Knight Hall, College Park, MD. To register, [click here](#).

• **Roundtable on business and politics in Indonesia.** The CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies will host a roundtable discussion on May 5 on the evolution of Indonesia's business environment and how President Joko Widodo’s administration might reform it. Richard Borsuk and Nancy Chng, authors of *Liem Sioe Liong’s Salim Group: The Business Pillar of Suharto’s Indonesia*, will speak. The event will take place from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. To RSVP, [click here](#) or e-mail the Sumitro Chair.

• **The Banyan Tree Leadership Forum with Serge Pun.** The CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies will host a forum on May 5 with Serge Pun on Myanmar’s current political and economic situation. Pun founded the Serge Pun & Associates group of companies in Hong Kong in 1983 and returned to Myanmar in 1989 to invest in financial services, agribusiness, and property. He established Yoma Bank, the country’s second private bank, in 1993. The event will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. To RSVP, [click here](#) or e-mail the Sumitro Chair.
- **Tackling Thailand’s Middle Income Trap: Innovation and Cross-Border Linkages.** The CSIS Sumitro Chair for Southeast Asia Studies and the Asian Development Bank’s North American Representative Office will host a discussion on May 6 on Thailand’s cross-border economic linkages and efforts to foster innovation in its economy. George Abonyi, visiting professor at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, will speak. The discussion will take place from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. at CSIS, 1616 Rhode Island Ave., NW. To RSVP, e-mail the Sumitro Chair.
SOUTHEAST ASIA FROM SCOTT CIRCLE
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