



# THINK TANK

News from the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies

The Dean of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Ambassador Barry Desker, recently announced plans to work more closely with the University of Sydney's Centre for International Security Studies (CISS). The announcement was made while he was giving the inaugural Michael Hintze Lecture in International Security. This public lecture was held on 26 July 2007 to mark the launch of the Centre at the university.

The collaboration between the two institutions will include working on areas such as teaching and research. Cooperation in areas of teaching will extend to include the possibility of having staff and student exchanges as well as the cross-listing of subjects in the Master's programmes of both RSIS and CISS. This is an important step for CISS, which will launch their programmes in Master of Interna-



## RSIS Collaborates with the University of Sydney's Centre for International Security Studies

tional Security (MIntSec) and Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate in International Security in 2008.

For both institutions, possible areas of research will include studies in subjects such as threats of terrorism and the spread of pandemic diseases in the region. Dr. Rohan Gunaratna, Head of International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at RSIS, is already working closely with CISS as a visiting academic.

When asked on the issue of collaborative research proposals, Dean Desker said that the two institutions could also work closely on important issues such as climate change, public health and energy security. Commenting on the collaboration, Professor Alan Dupont, Director of CISS, echoed Dean Desker's sentiments. He said, "In a very short period of time, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies has developed an international reputation for its work on terrorism and both traditional and non-traditional challenges to East Asia's security. Given our compatible geographic

and thematic interests, there are obvious synergies to be gained in developing strong research links with RSIS. I look forward to realizing this collaborative potential in the years ahead."



CISS is based in the University of Sydney, which was founded in 1850. It is Australia's first university and it has an international reputation for outstanding teaching as well as for being a centre of research excellence and an active and engaged community leader.

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## RSIS Hosts 3 Prominent Guests in Distinguished Public Lecture Series

The months of May and June were exciting months for RSIS. It played host to three prominent guests who came to the School to speak on regional trade and international security. The three speakers were David Shambaugh, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University; Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of External Affairs, India; and Dr. Mari Elka Pangestu, Minister of Trade, Indonesia.

Professor Shambaugh's lecture, on 31 May 2007, was entitled "The Bush Administration's Asia Policy: A Preliminary Report Card". In his lecture, he gave a frank analysis of the Bush Administration's foreign policy towards Asia. He opined that while the United States' relations with Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and Russia received "poor to mixed reviews", the Administration's relations with Asia "must be considered a net success". This was because the Administration had been fairly skilful in managing critical security issues between Japan, China, Taiwan and North Korea. Moving forward, Washington must build on these successes and at the same time "recalibrate" its strategy to manage the region's growing complexities. He listed some of these strategies as the forging of closer ties with Beijing and New Delhi; engag-



*Professor David Shambaugh, Professor of Political Science and International Affairs, Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University*

ing more with ASEAN and Central Asia; repositioning its Japan policy; "appreciating" the increased regional role of China; adjusting to changing security dynamics and a new institutional architecture; and developing a more pro-active and engaged regional diplomacy at the official and non-official levels. Overall, he stressed the need for Washington to keep up with changes in Asia, as it is a region that is developing very quickly and significantly.

While Professor Shambaugh was optimistic about the region, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee's message from his lecture was more cautionary. While acknowledging the rise of terrorism and environmental issues, Mr. Mukherjee, whose Distinguished Public Lecture was on 20 June 2007, drew the audience's attention to the country's immediate challenges. He pointed out that India still faces challenges in the primary education sector and health sector, despite its recent significant economic growth. Investments in these sectors are therefore a priority for the current government. During the lecture, Mr. Mukherjee also touched on India's foreign relations and on Singapore-India relationships. He felt that India's foreign policy is shifting, from looking at issues as a zero-sum game to one that searches for win-win situations. He noted that the process of searching for commonalities has led to a positive outcome that has resulted in an erosion of the older balance-of-power approach towards an era of multipolarity. As for Singapore-India relations, Mr. Mukherjee pointed out that Singapore was one of the earlier countries that recognized India's economic potential. Its previously concluded Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement is already realizing some benefits. He shared that India is keen to further expand relations with Singapore in areas that would help enhance its media and technology



*Dr. Mari Pangestu, Indonesia's Minister of Trade*

sectors.

The lecture by Indonesia's Minister of Trade, Dr. Mari Pangestu, on 22 June 2007 addressed issues of collaboration and cooperation between Singapore and Indonesia with a focus on developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the Riau Islands. Dr. Pangestu outlined the guiding principles in Indonesia's programme to develop SEZs. These principles include policy consistency, trade fairness, proper spatial planning and support from local municipal governments. To Dr. Pangestu, over and above these, the more crucial motivating factors that will promote SEZ development are the types of incentives available. Such incentives can be extended towards exports and domestic sales, usage of land, facilitation of visa approvals (especially those concerning manpower issues) and the development of infrastructure. She also suggested that the central government in Jakarta will be shifting away from a centralized bureaucracy towards one where local governments will be given more authority to make decisions.



*Pranab Mukherjee, India's External Affairs Minister*

# India-Pakistan Peace Process: Promise and Pitfall

## – Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain



On 12 July 2007, Dr. Syed Rifaat Hussain visited the School to give a presentation entitled “India-Pakistan Peace Process: Promise and Pitfall”. Dr. Hussain is the Executive Director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS), Colombo, Sri Lanka.

In his presentation, Dr. Hussain provided an in-depth look at the challenges that the India-Pakistani peace process has faced in recent years. He explained the complexities surrounding the peace process,

highlighting milestone events that have been achieved and discussing areas where the peace process could be further strengthened. He was optimistic about the long-term viability of the process, which was necessary for peace in the region. But he was also cautious about it. He said that the ultimate success of the peace process is dependent on the level of cooperation and trust on both sides of the border. He stressed key areas such as trade and tourism, which are essential for the continuation of the peace process.

Dr. Hussain also touched on the Kashmir issue. He said that significant losses have been incurred by India and Pakistan. Hence, peace between India and Pakistan will bestow huge cost savings to both sides and therefore should be mutually promoted. Towards the end of the seminar, Dr. Hussain gave a projection on what could be expected of the outcome of the peace process in the near future and the direction that it is likely to take. Based on his analysis, he listed them as the following: the increasing tendency to de-link areas of mutual cooperation from those of intense disagreement; more emphasis on processes to improve dialogue; moving towards seeking “internal solutions” as opposed to facilitating non-status quo solutions; the growing marginalization of militant groups; and the broadening of the peace process. At the end of his presentation, he stressed that Kashmir would continue to remain on the agenda of the two states but was unlikely to block movements of other aspects of the peace process. He also envisaged China to play a prominent role in the peace process in the near future.

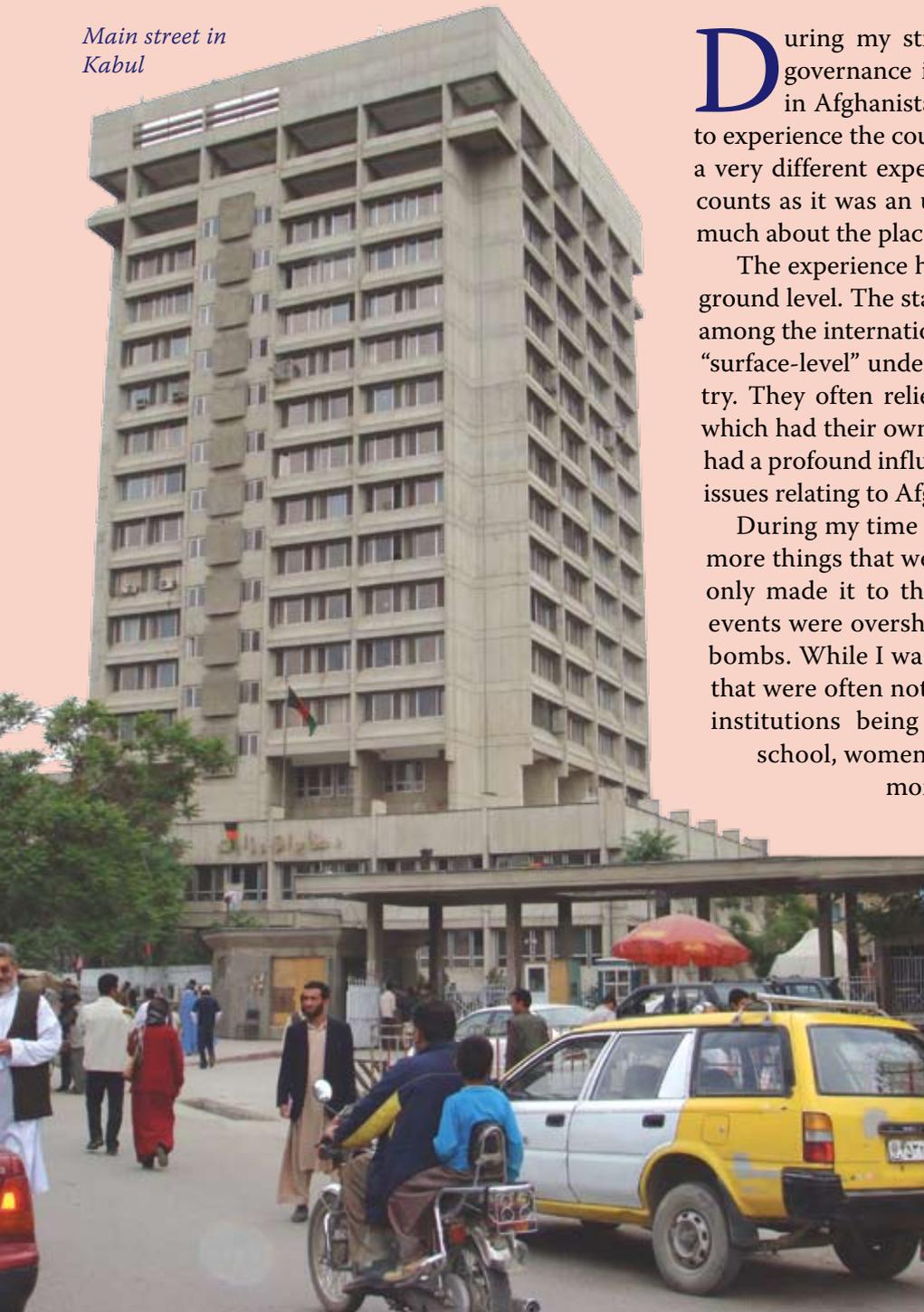


RSIS also co-hosted a roundtable with the Singapore International Foundation, where H.E. Mr. Abdulrahman bin Hamad Al Attiyah, Secretary-General of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), was invited to address the academic and business communities in a one-hour intensive session. In his address, he shared with the invited guests the GCC’s plans to work with Singapore to promote trade and development in the Middle East.

# An Analyst's Time in Ka

*The International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at RSIS conducts research, training and outreach programmes that are aimed at reducing the threat of politically motivated violence and mitigating its effects on the international system. It sends its analysts to affected areas and relevant related institutions to study conflict and violence. Recently, one of its counter terrorism analysts, Mr. Prakhar Sharma, spent five months at the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS) in Kabul. Here are some of Mr. Sharma's thoughts and reflections about his time in Kabul.*

*Main street in  
Kabul*



During my stint at CAPS, I researched on various governance issues that were related to the conflict in Afghanistan. Being on the ground, it allowed me to experience the country and its people at first-hand. It was a very different experience from reading other people's accounts as it was an unmediated experience. I had learnt so much about the place while I was there.

The experience has taught me a lot about conflict at the ground level. The starkest realization, to me, was that many among the international aid community in Kabul had only a "surface-level" understanding of the "realities" of the country. They often relied on reports from the foreign media, which had their own way of framing agendas. This, in turn, had a profound influence on the way the masses understand issues relating to Afghanistan.

During my time there, I found out that there were a lot more things that were happening in Kabul than those that only made it to the news reports. Many times, positive events were overshadowed by reports of violence and car bombs. While I was there, there were encouraging stories that were often not reported by the media. These include institutions being established, children going back to school, women entering the workforce, and more and more people respecting the rule of law, to

name a few. And by experiencing everyday life in Afghanistan, I also got the chance to share in these little "successes" of the people first-hand. It made me feel positive and encouraged about the future of the place.

Afghanistan and Iraq are shaping the global "threatscape". It is therefore very important to understand the present and future trends of terrorism in these two conflict zones. This experience sharpened not only my research and analytical skills, but also my skills in managing people

# Abul: Some Reflections



*Prakhar Sharma (second from the left) with Director of CAPS, Hekmat Karzai (third from the left)*

and projects. I believe that I am now more organized at work and am far better at interacting with people than I was before.

International development is based on the idea that skills and resources should move in the direction where they are needed the most. I feel that this is very true for Afghanistan too. I would encourage the more educated and skilled workers to move to developing countries to help them help themselves. As a committed researcher and an advocate of international development, I am encouraged by the results of my work in Afghanistan. I learnt immensely from my time there and feel that my experience could be put to good use in the future.

I see that the work done by ICPVTR through CAPS has proven that ICPVTR's efforts can help initiate, transfer and build counter-terrorism capacities and capabilities, even in the most challenging conflict zones. And as my experience has taught me, future threats can only be reduced by de-

veloping a deep understanding of conflict zones. This can be achieved by providing help to affected governments and having the international community work together to try and stabilize these troubled areas.



*Staff of CAPS with their bodyguards*

## CAPS in Afghanistan – An ICPVTR/RSIS Initiative



Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies

As part of its offshore counter-terrorism capacity-building efforts, the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR) at RSIS helped in the establishment of the Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS). Besides providing staff support such as Mr. Prakhar Sharma to assist in research, training and networking, RSIS also facilitated the Risk Management Fellowship (RMS) for CAPS's director, Mr. Hekmat Karzai, to complete a Master's degree in Strategic Studies at RSIS. During his time at ICPVTR, Mr. Karzai also underwent training as a counter-terrorism analyst.

# Forgetting Usama ibn Munqidh, Remembering Usama bin Laden: The Crusades in Modern Muslim Memory – A Review of the Forthcoming RSIS Monograph by Umej Bhatia

The Crusades (1096–1291 CE) resonate in Islamist consciousness today. Radical Muslim circles, inspired by Al-Qaeda's chief ideologue, Usama bin Laden, claim that the West is waging a renewed Crusade to destroy Islam. The pre-attack propaganda that influenced the home-grown 7 July London bombers juxtaposed images of the medieval Crusades with contemporary assaults on the Muslim world.

Ironically, while modern Islamists present the Crusades as the central narrative of Muslim suffering, pre-modern Arab chroniclers actually considered the Crusades a marginal event in Islamic history.

A forthcoming RSIS monograph, *Forgetting Usama ibn Munqidh, Remembering Usama bin Laden: The Crusades in Modern Muslim Memory*, explores this paradox. The unique and wide-ranging study by Umej Bhatia, who completed an advanced degree in Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, examines the discourse on the Crusades from across the Muslim world, including Friday sermons, novels, songs, communiqués and fatwas, drawn from events recorded in medieval Arab chronicles or passed down through oral history.

In assessing these interactions, echoes and linkages between place and period in the remembrance of the Crusades, the monograph shows how Islamists shape the belief that the West has been waging a centuries-old Crusade against Islam. It examines how the modern Islamist narrative of the Crusades, wrapped around contemporary events in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, has gained ground in the battle for hearts and memories in the Muslim world.

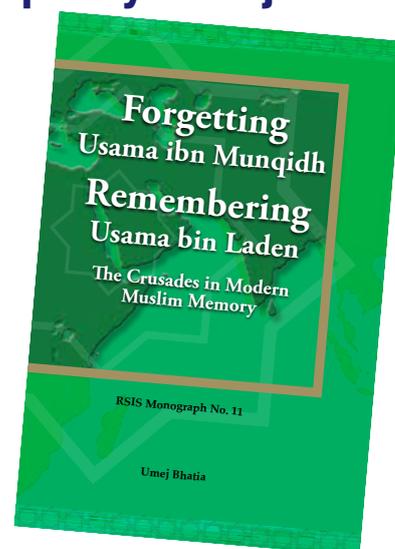
Developing a counter-narrative,

the monograph highlights the historical example of a twelfth-century Syrian Emir and namesake of Usama bin Laden named Usama ibn Munqidh. A keen observer and a pragmatist, ibn Munqidh provides an important corrective to the radical and utopian ideas popularized by Usama bin Laden.

Reviving the forgotten tradition of Usama Ibn Munqidh, Bhatia's study shows the importance of developing a deeper and more textured understanding of historical events like the Crusades. Concrete examples of positive co-existence are balanced against instances of conflict.

This approach promotes a more accurate understanding of the reasons for the difficulties and misunderstandings of the past. As the post-conflict of civilization clash, the history of the Crusades is an ideal subject for enhancing inter-faith dialogue. Promoting a better understanding of the period offers the scaffolding for an informed dialogue between the West and the Muslim world.

The monograph's key recommendation is for policymakers, academics and educationalists in the Muslim world to work with their counterparts in the United States and Europe to find common tools to counter Islamist propaganda in the ideological battle. Education, which includes a deeper dialogue on history, is a key part of the battle for hearts and memories in the struggle against violent extremism. For a start, school curriculum designers in the Muslim world and beyond should review textbooks and educational material that deal with collisions between Islam and the West. The history of the Crusades is an obvious starting point.



## Other titles in IDSS/RSIS Monograph Series

Post-Suharto Civil-Military Relations in Indonesia (Yuddy Chrisnandi)

The Post-Tsunami Reconstruction of Aceh and the Implementation of the Peace Agreement (Aleksius Jemadu)

Fading Away: The Political Role of the Army in Indonesia's Transition to Democracy 1998–2001 (Tatik S. Hafidz)

Betwixt and Between: Southeast Asian Strategic Relations with the U.S. and China (Evelyn Goh)

The OSCE and Co-operative Security in Europe: Lessons for Asia (Joachim Krause)

A New Agenda for the ASEAN Regional Forum (Tan See Seng, Ralf Emmers, Mely Caballero-Anthony, Amitav Acharya, Barry Desker and Kwa Chong Guan)

Beyond Vulnerability? Water in Singapore-Malaysia Relations (Irvin Lim, Joey Long and Kog Yue Choong)

China's Strategic Engagement with New ASEAN (S.D. Muni)

Neither Friend Nor Foe: Myanmar's Relations with Thailand since 1988 (Aung Myoe)

To purchase any of these monographs, please e-mail [isgcng@ntu.edu.sg](mailto:isgcng@ntu.edu.sg)

## Exclusive Interview with Umej Bhatia

Think Tank caught up with monograph author Umej Bhatia and he shared his thoughts on ...

### ... his inspiration for writing the monograph

I was doing a two-year mid-career advanced degree programme in Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. The course placed an emphasis on Middle Eastern history, particularly the medieval period, and required candidates to learn classical Arabic. Our study of Arabic was geared to having us read and understand medieval Arabic texts. At first, I couldn't really see the point of studying medieval history or high classical Arabic. I thought it would have nothing to do with the living and breathing history and language that I wanted to learn to better understand the region. My interest was not purely academic. I was in New York during 9/11. My apartment building was evacuated during the attacks. For several anxious hours, I lost contact with my wife and baby daughter. I was then also part of the Singapore team on the UN Security Council, covering the Middle East and Africa. In the wake of 9/11, I was resolved to focus on knowing the Middle East and understanding political and radical Islam. After securing a government scholarship to study at Harvard, I began to understand that, for the Arabs and for Arabized Muslims, the past is always present. History and scripture run deep and resonate far more than it does in the more future-oriented Western cultures. The average, unschooled Arab schoolchild will have a much better grasp of history than the average Playstation-toting Western-educated child.

Reading the communiqués of Usama bin Laden, I was struck by his use of apparently bygone historical events. As I followed the references and spoke to some of my Arab friends, I realized that he was artfully radicalizing history to mobilize support. I traced back his intellectual influences and found that he was inspired by a cast of ideologues that included an Austrian Jewish convert to Islam who was once close to the revered founder of Saudi Arabia and later served as a senior Pakistani official, and a secular Egyptian literary critic who later became a radical Islamist ideologue. For these men, the Crusades

### ... coping with family life and Harvard

It took slightly less than two years to write the thesis. At the same time, as part of the course, I was required to achieve Arabic language competence at the threshold of advanced Arabic. I was also required to take several other courses on Middle Eastern history, politics and economics, including classes on Islam and the Quran. I wrote a working paper for IDSS on radical interpretations of the last thirtieth of the Quran (the so-called final part of juz 'amma), which is used by proselytizers to return Muslims to the faith. I also wrote several think-pieces for local newspapers on terrorism and Islam, and had a shortened version of my thesis accepted for publication as the cover article for a revered British publication, *History Today*.

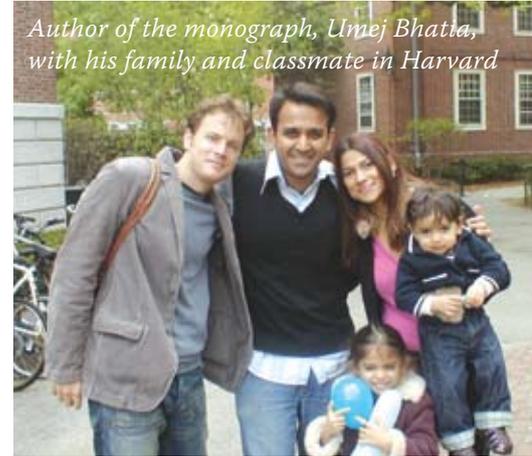
It was not easy to juggle all of this with my studies as a mature student. I was taking Arabic classes with 19-

is a never-ending assault on the Muslim world that has raged for a thousand years. Usama bin Laden dubs the so-called war on terrorism as a

"battle of Muslims against the global crusaders". Certain events and policies, for better or for worse, have invariably helped reinforce the beliefs he peddled. However, as I continued tracing back to its origins this radical version of history through its various aspects, whether modern Islamist, Arab nationalist or Ottoman pan-Islamist, the actual historical Crusades began to yield some counter-facts.

First, contemporary Arab chroniclers did not see the Crusades as the central event of their times. Second, there was as much co-existence as there was conflict between the Crusaders and the Arabs of the period. The Crusaders were known to the Arabs then as the Franks (and to this day, the Arabic word for venereal disease is the Frankish disease and is reputedly traced back to the Crusades and its armies). Indeed, there were instances where Frankish forces and Arab forces joined hands to battle other confederations of Arabs and Franks. Studying some medieval texts in Arabic, I came across the compelling figure of Usama ibn Munqidh. A Syrian poet, gentleman and warrior, he is also Usama bin Laden's namesake. His modern avatar also shares his Syrian heritage through his mother, although we often only speak of his Saudi/Hadrami background. Usama ibn Munqidh symbolized a more three-dimensional and nuanced version of crusading history that I wanted to resurrect. He offered an alternative, now increasingly forgotten, memory of the Crusades.

year-old Harvard sophomores who were the top of their cohorts. They had Pentium 4 brains while, as a thirty-something, I was operating an IBM mainframe. My wife was heavily pregnant with our second child while my firstborn was barely three years old. To save costs, we all lived in a single room and had a living room that served as kitchen, playroom, dining room and study. We experienced two stern winters in Boston punctuated by a pleasantly hot summer in the Middle East. Thankfully, I had incredible instructors and professors who provided an intellectual high to balance the otherwise exacting conditions. I would single out Roger Owen, the storied professor of Middle Eastern History at Harvard, and Ben Smith, my young Arabic preceptor, who are both Orientalists, in the best sense of the word.



**Social Resilience in Singapore: Reflections from the London Bombings**

*Norman Vasu, Select Books, 2007*



Social Resilience in Singapore: Reflections from the London Bombings, edited by Dr. Norman Vasu, deals with issues that the United Kingdom has to deal with in the wake of

terrorist attacks, including the London bombings on 7 July 2005. It also addresses the notion of resilience, which is receiving increased attention from social scientists. Based on the Latin word “resilire”—meaning to jump back or recoil—the phenomenon has been applied to the study of the reactions of society to exogenous or endogenous shocks. Using the London bombings as the impetus for reflection, the book considers the concept of social resilience in a time where terrorist actions are calculated not just to do damage and cause harm but also to rupture the social fabric of pluralistic societies.

*Social Resilience in Singapore will be launched on 24 August 2007, 6.30 p.m., at Select Books, #03-15, Tanglin Shopping Centre. For more information, please visit the RSIS website.*

**Indonesia Programme Highlights**

With many prominent speakers, academics and policymakers from Indonesia coming to address the local community, the Indonesian Programme of RSIS has had a busy and exciting half-year.

Firstly, Dr. Yuddy Chrisnandi, an Indonesian Member of Parliament, from the Golkar party, was invited to speak on the Indonesian Armed Forces and its military reforms in the post-Suharto era. His presentation was based on research done while he was a visiting associate at RSIS in 2003. A condensed English edition of his thesis will be published as an RSIS monograph in September 2007.

Dr. Ir. Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, Director of the Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Agency for Aceh and Nias (BRR Aceh dan Nias), also came to the School to speak on Aceh. His presentation outlined Indonesia’s recent efforts to help develop Aceh and Nias, which were levelled by the 2004 tsunami. He shared with his audience the role of the BRR in the reconstruction of the region and the goals and challenges the process faced.

The Indonesia Programme also organized a Distinguished Public

Lecture by Dr. Mari E. Pangestu, Indonesia’s Minister for Trade. Dr. Pangestu spoke on the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and in particular, the development of the Riau Islands. She outlined the incentives offered by SEZs and the current process underway to finalize the legal framework (see page 2 for more information on this). The timing and subject of the talk coincided with the programme’s Riau Roundtable initiative, which was entitled “Opportunities and Challenges in the Riau Archipelago and Riau Province”.

The Riau Roundtable was held on 27 June 2007. The keynote speech was given by the Governor of the Riau Islands Province, Mr. Ismeth Abdullah. The event was well received by the participants, who included official government representatives from Batam, Bintan and Karimun, representatives from the Indonesian Embassy, academics and the business community in Singapore. The event also featured a luncheon talk by Dr. Ryaas Rasyid, the former Indonesian Minister for Regional Autonomy. Dr. Rasyid is currently a Member of Parliament.

With the advent of Special Eco-

nomie Zones (SEZ), this roundtable was timely. It was targeted at the business and policymaking community in Singapore and academics who are interested in developments in the Riau Islands and its surrounding archipelago. However, the roundtable was not only confined to discussing trade and economic issues. It also touched on social problems that result from economic developments in the region. These were crucial issues that businesses and policymakers would be facing. At the end of the roundtable, there was consensus that social development must go hand-in-hand with economic development. And these issues must be taken into consideration while developing the region.

More talks are being planned in the coming months. Speakers for these talks include Mr. Irwandi Yusuf, the Governor of Aceh; Dr. Boediono, Coordinating Minister for the Economy; and Mr. Taufik Kiemas, Head of the Central Leadership Board of the Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle (PDI-P). Mr. Taufik is the husband of former Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Please look out for updates in the RSIS website ([www.rsis.edu.sg](http://www.rsis.edu.sg)).

5–12 August 2007  
Ninth Asia-Pacific Programme for Senior Military Officers (APPSMO)  
*The Sentosa Resort & Spa, 2 Bukit Manis Road, Singapore*

7–8 September 2007  
Spotlight on Asia’s Energy and Security Challenges: A Multilateral Response  
*Traders Hotel, 1A Cuscaden Road, Singapore*

17 October 2007  
MacArthur Planning Meeting  
*Orchard Hotel Singapore, 442 Orchard Road, Singapore*

18–19 October 2007  
The Rise of China and Its Soft Power  
*Orchard Hotel Singapore, 442 Orchard Road, Singapore*

19–20 October 2007  
New Power Dynamics Security Conference  
*Shangri-la Hotel, 22 Orange Grove Road, Singapore*