

THE STRAITS TIMES

# Asia report

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INDEPENDENT • INSIDER • INSIGHTS ON ASIA

- Japan's new era
- Chips on casinos
- Changi's new Jewel

# What's next?

## SEEKING A SECOND WIND

Indonesia, India and Thailand could well see a return of their leaders, albeit with fractured mandates. What lies ahead?



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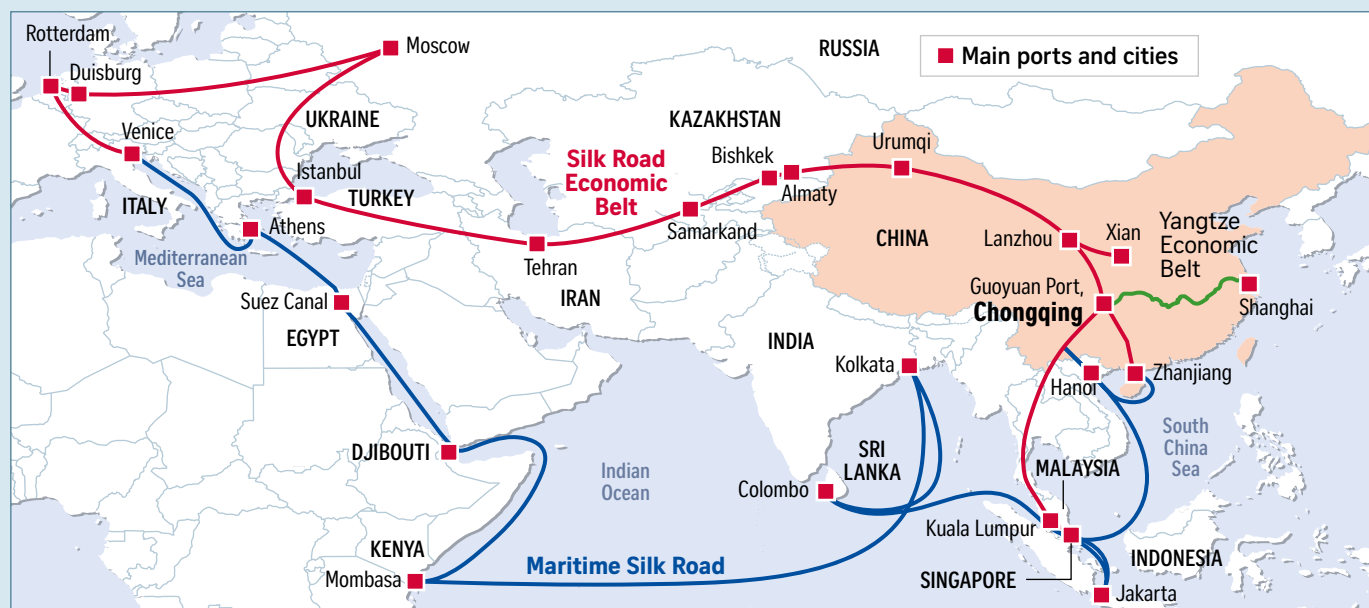
# Boosting connectivity in Chongqing

China has embarked on its massive Belt and Road Initiative, a cross-continental infrastructure project. In this the “belt” builds an overland economic route across Central Asia to Europe and the “road”, an ancient sea route linking China with South-east Asia, Africa and Europe.

Chongqing is where they meet. The sprawling city of 31 million people sits at the Y-shaped junction of the “belt”, “road” and Yangtze River economic belt. That underpins the Chongqing Connectivity Initiative (CCI) – Singapore’s

third government-to-government project with China after Suzhou Industrial Park in 1994 and Tianjin Eco-city in 2008 – which was started in 2015.

With Chongqing as its operating centre, the initiative aims to help western China's economic growth by improving its connectivity within and beyond the region. The project has four priority areas: transport and logistics; financial services; aviation; and information and communications technology. Here are some insights into what it will entail:



## TRANSPORT & LOGISTICS

2018

In this year, Singapore and China formally agreed to jointly develop the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor, expected to boost western China's links with South-east Asia.

**2** Singapore and Chongqing will serve as mutual gateways in South-east Asia and western China respectively, providing companies access to each other's markets.



## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

17,000

Number of users  
Singapore tech start-up  
Fooyo has gained. It is  
expanding its work in  
Chongqing.

40

Approximate number of tech companies the Infocomm Media Development Authority led to Chongqing's Smart China Expo last year.



## FINANCIAL SERVICES

**US\$15 billion**

From 2016 to 2018, financial institutions in Chongqing completed 75 projects amounting to this.

2

United Overseas Bank saw corporate clients double at its Chongqing branch from 2016 to last year.

4

In 2016, DBS Bank completed four offshore bond issuance deals, which took up a third of the Chongqing National Development and Reform Commission foreign debt quota.



## AVIATION

14

### Weekly flights between Singapore and Chongqing

190,000

### Passenger movements between Singapore and Chongqing last year

Sources: AFP, GUOYUAN PORT, STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

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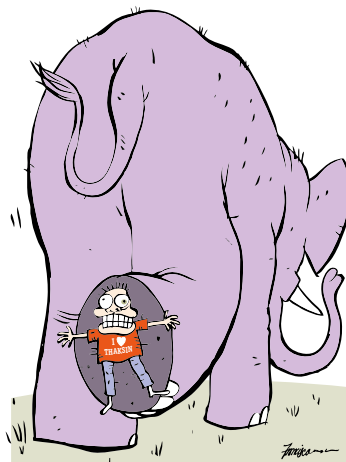
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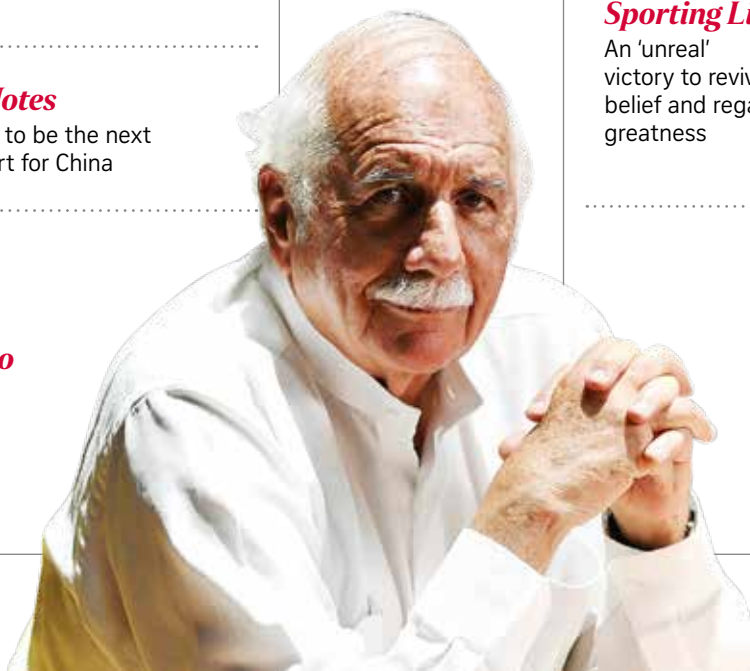
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*Cover Story*

# Seeking a second wind

Three Asian countries could see their leaders back for another term in power although without landslide victories. What lies ahead?



## INDONESIA

# Jokowi faces uphill road ahead

The incumbent and his advisers face more questions before final results are out by May 22.

PRESIDENT JOKO WIDODO DID NOT LOOK like a man on the cusp of victory as he addressed supporters on April 17, even though unofficial quick counts, by no less than five pollsters, tipped him to win re-election.

If anything, he appeared somewhat sombre as he called for patience among his supporters, while the General Elections Commission races to tally the millions of votes cast in this year's presidential election in Indonesia.

Indeed, there was little cause for celebration, especially when the landslide victory many had predicted for the uber popular leader seems to have eluded him, according to the quick counts.

As of April 17, the unofficial tally, based on more than 80 per cent of the ballot data targeted for sampling by pollsters, gave the incumbent a lead of between eight and 10.5 percentage points over his old rival Prabowo Subianto.

If the quick counts prove accurate, as they have at previous elections in Indonesia, Mr Joko, as the incumbent, would have merely stretched his lead by a hair's breadth over an opponent who has no track record in government.

His widest potential winning margin over Mr Prabowo – based on Jakarta-based Poltracking Indonesia's quick count – projects Mr Joko taking 55.3 per cent of votes over Mr Prabowo's 44.7 per cent. Indikator Politik Indonesia gave him the smallest victory margin of 53.9 per cent to 46.1 per cent.

When the two men last contested the presidency in the 2014 elections, Mr Joko – then an outlier candidate campaigning on a promise of reforms – defeated Mr Prabowo, a blue-blood candidate, 53.15 per cent to 46.85 per cent.

So while his campaign team, led by intrepid media mogul Erick Thohir, would have taken the win based on the quick counts, they will no doubt wonder why their candidate did not receive the strong referendum so many said he deserved.

Surely there will be more questions in the days ahead for Mr Joko and his inner circle of advisers, before final results are out by May 22.

After all, Mr Joko rarely lost his position at the top of electability polls, if ever. In fact, some polls had given him insurmountable leads over Mr Prabowo just weeks leading into the elections.



At his peak, Mr Joko's approval rating was almost 70 per cent, with several surveys in October 2017 showing he would win by a wide margin if the election was held then.

So, what happened?

Analysts say bread-and-butter issues ultimately proved decisive for voters. And despite an ambitious infrastructure push, Indonesia's stalling economic growth and a weak rupiah may have also hurt him.

Also, while the actual figure for abstentions in the April polls is still unclear, it cannot be ruled out that liberal supporters carried out their threat to abstain from voting in protest over the President's decision to pick right-leaning cleric Ma'ruf Amin as his running mate.

Of course, Mr Joko's continued image as a grounded leader who cares for the people was still strong enough to get him over the line.

The big questions now are how Mr Prabowo will react in the days ahead and how Mr Joko approaches the challenges of his second term with a mandate barely bigger than the one from his first term.

Mr Prabowo seems to have taken a slightly different, less combative approach this time round – urging calm among his supporters – but he has still claimed his own polls have him winning.

In the end, the big rematch turned into a replay, and that leaves neither candidate truly satisfied. **ST**

An election official carries a ballot box after the election in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, on April 18, 2019.

PHOTO: EPA-EFE

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# 5 key challenges awaiting Indonesia's President Joko Widodo if he wins second term

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Indonesia's presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto and his rival, President Joko Widodo, during a televised debate, ahead of elections.  
PHOTO: REUTERS

PRESIDENT JOKO WIDODO LOOKS SET TO BE re-elected if unofficial quick counts released after the April 17 polls prove accurate, as they have at previous elections.

Economic headwinds from the United States-China trade tensions, the perennial threat of radicalism, rising extremism, and potential domestic political conflicts could challenge his resolve as he seeks to fulfil his vision for Indonesia.

Here's a look at five key challenges that would await Mr Joko in his second five-year term.

## 1 FORMING A NEW CABINET

The first challenge for the newly elected President would be to pick ministers to fill his new Cabinet. This will likely happen in October after his inauguration.

According to tallies from major pollsters, Mr Joko is on course for a winning margin of around 9 percentage points – compared with just 6 percentage points in 2014 – which would provide him with leverage to appoint more technocrats and professional ministers to help shape future policies.

However, the new President is unlikely to be able to avoid pressure from party leaders who may propose their own political appointees.

## 2 GENERATING HIGHER ECONOMIC GROWTH

Mr Joko had promised to expand the economy by 7 per cent when coming into power in 2014, but growth hovered at around 5 per cent during his tenure.

Despite falling short of his target, he managed to reduce the poverty rate to below 10 per cent of the population for the first time in Indonesia's history.

The current administration aims to see South-east Asia's biggest economy grow by 5.3 per cent this year. Mr Joko's challenge in his second term would be to speed up economic expansion amid external risks, such as trade tensions between the

United States and China, and slower global growth.

He would also have to tame the “twin deficits” – fiscal and current account deficits – which have affected investors' sentiment and currency stability.

## 3 BOOSTING CONNECTIVITY THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Mr Joko began his first-term tenure with an ambitious infrastructure push to connect the vast archipelago of more than 17,000 islands, with record-high spending of around US\$350 billion (S\$477 billion).

While achieving widely acclaimed success in some key projects, such as the trans-Java toll road and Indonesia's first subway in the capital, he still has work to finish, including the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed railway network and Jakarta-Surabaya semi-fast railway network, which have seen little progress.

Furthermore, he is expected to execute more vital infrastructure projects that will not only boost connectivity but also create jobs.

## 4 MAKING INDONESIA SAFE FOR EVERYONE

The triple church bombings and attack at the Surabaya police headquarters in May last year have raised concerns over the rise of extremism in the world's biggest Muslim-majority nation.

In stark contrast with the past, the militants were willing to sacrifice their wives and children as cover for suicide bombings. A number of perpetrators allegedly had ties to a local terrorist group loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Mr Joko would be expected to increase the budget of the national police in order to carry out intensive counter-terrorism efforts. Under his second-term leadership, Indonesia also needs to strengthen regional and international cooperation in counter-terrorism.

## 5 ENHANCING INDONESIA'S GLOBAL STANDING

Mr Joko has less interest in foreign affairs than his predecessor Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, under whom Indonesia joined the Group of 20.

But Mr Joko will now be expected to speak at the annual United Nations General Assembly, where Vice-President Jusuf Kalla has stood in for him in the past four years.

As Indonesia's leadership in the Islamic world has been widely recognised, such as by Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Mr Joko could do more to push for the interests of fellow Muslims, including in Myanmar's Rakhine state and Palestine. [ST](#)







## INDIA

# Modi pitches himself as ‘watchman’ to win votes

After his successful 2014 polls pitch as a tea seller, message now is that Indian PM is keeping close watch on corruption

IN THE 2014 ELECTION CAMPAIGN, THE BHARATIYA Janata Party (BJP) fired up voters by highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s humble origins as a tea seller.

The BJP seized on the idea after Congress leader Mani Shankar Aiyar said dismissively that Mr Modi could be a tea seller but not the prime minister, giving the BJP a theme to anchor its campaign.

At the time, Mr Modi’s tea-seller roots appealed to an aspirational India, contributing to his popularity and a landslide win.

Now five years later, the BJP is back with another campaign. Mr Modi is now calling himself a chowkidar, or watchman, and has urged his colleagues and supporters on Twitter to take a pledge of “Main Bhi Chowkidar”, which means “I

am a watchman” in Hindi.

BJP leaders said the aim is to drive home the point that Mr Modi watches over the country to prevent corruption.

BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad said: “The chaiwallah jibe was started by the Congress. Mr Modi said, ‘yes, I am born of a chaiwallah family. I have been born in poverty’. As for the Main Bhi Chowkidar campaign, it is a positive narration of the emerging identity of India for a corruption-free government and invoking people to become part of that.”

All BJP leaders and their supporters have affixed chowkidar to their Twitter handle following Mr Modi, whose Twitter handle now reads Chowkidar Narendra Modi.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has showered money on Facebook and Google advertisements, spending six times more than Congress since February, according to data from the two firms. Mr Modi merchandise abounds, as do Mr Modi marketing sites. PHOTO: DPA

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**Modi wants to project himself as an honest person who is eradicating corruption... The supporters have embraced it. But fence-sitters may not be taken in.**



– Professor  
Ghanshyam Shah,  
a Gujarat-based  
political analyst

“My best wishes to all you chowkidars. Very pleased with your enthusiasm. Owing to your watchfulness, corruption is on the wane and thieves are feeling the pain,” tweeted Mr Modi, who will connect with 2.5 million people who have taken the pledge, through video-conferencing on March 31.

The campaign comes on the back of the Balakot air strike that Mr Modi ordered on Pakistan, amid an assurance that the country was in “safe hands.”

He is seeking re-election and is trying to recreate the same wave of enthusiasm that propelled him to victory five years ago, following a decade of Congress rule which, during its last few years, saw a series of corruption cases.

The Congress faced a humiliating drubbing in the 2014 elections, winning just 44 seats. The BJP won 282 seats, the first time in three decades that a single party had won such a majority.

This time, however, Mr Modi is weighed down by the problem of unemployment and a farm crisis. He is also under attack from the Congress party, led by its president Rahul Gandhi, who has accused him of corruption in a defence deal related to the purchase of 36 Rafale fighter jets from a French company.

The Congress, which has coined the phrase the “watchman is a thief”, has raised questions on why a private firm with little experience in aviation was chosen as the Indian partner in the deal, in place of a government firm.

The government and BJP have denied any wrongdoing.

Analysts believe the watchman campaign is intended to blunt the Congress offensive. “It is election propaganda. Modi wants to project himself as an honest person who is eradicating corruption after Congress had come up with the Rafale issue. He wants to strengthen this image, which was strong in 2014, particularly among middle-class voters,” said Gujarat-based political analyst Ghanshyam Shah. “The supporters have embraced it. But fence-sitters may not be taken in.”

Dr N. Bhaskara Rao of the Centre for Media Studies said: “It is a campaign intended to avoid critical issues.”

The Congress has dismissed the campaign as a rebranding exercise to hide the government’s failures. It is also trying to build up a narrative that the BJP government is tilted towards rich corporates.

“Chowkidars are for the rich, not farmers,” said Mrs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, general secretary in charge of east Uttar Pradesh.

Ultimately, not everyone is convinced the watchman will be as successful as the tea seller.

Mr Sadanand Dhume, a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, tweeted: “There’s no doubt that many of Modi’s cult-like followers love the ridiculous idea of changing their Twitter handles in unison, but will the #MainBhiChowkidar campaign convince any fence-sitters? Colour me sceptical.”

## ***First-time Indian voters hold key to victory in polls***

OF THE 900 MILLION VOTERS ELIGIBLE TO CAST their votes to determine India’s next leader, 15 million are new voters who have recently turned 18, the age from which Indians are eligible to vote.

Including others who will be voting in parliamentary elections for the first time – as well as those who turned 18 just after the last elections in 2018 – this number goes up to 84.3 million.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party seek re-election this year, unemployment and other issues that are key to young voters have emerged as challenges, even threatening to put a dent in the BJP’s hopes.

An analysis by The Indian Express newspaper showed that first-time voters could hold the key to victory for more than half of the seats at stake, where they outnumber the margin of victory recorded in each one of them in 2014. Political parties have reached out to this segment, especially through rap-style videos on social media and visits to educational institutes.

Students The Straits Times spoke to cited unemployment as their key concern.

This sentiment about joblessness has been amplified by data that suggests unemployment has indeed been on the rise. A government report leaked in January stated that unemployment in the 2017-2018 period had reached a 45-year high at 6.1 per cent. The government quickly discounted it as a “draft report.”

Surveys show religious violence and discrimination, which have increased since the BJP came to power in 2014, are at the forefront of young voters’ minds. Factors such as the lack of good educational facilities and women’s safety also came up.

Ms Shalini Mishra, a 21-year-old student at Galgotias University in Greater Noida, said she would like the next government to take strong action against those who molest and harass women. “I want a strict law against rapists and a speedy trial for them so that women can feel safer.”

But the Feb 14 suicide attack in Pulwama, Kashmir, that killed 40 Indian troops – and the counter-strike that New Delhi launched in Pakistan on Feb 26 – has had a telling effect on voters.

The surge in patriotic fervour since then has boosted Mr Modi’s ratings, with national security even dethroning unemployment as the key concern for voters in an opinion tracker poll by CVoter News Services and Indo-Asian News Service.

– Debarshi Dasgupta, India Correspondent in New Delhi



# India's states hold the key to its economic destiny

Look beyond the grand election promises by the BJP and Congress. It's the state governments that are driving growth.

IN THE RUN-UP TO INDIA'S GENERAL ELECTION, the country's political leaders have, as usual, showered the electorate with extravagant promises.

In its manifesto, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has vowed to double farmers' incomes by 2022, starting by offering them zero-interest-rate loans. It will build 100 more airports, metros in 100 cities, set up 150,000 health and wellness centres in three years and boost India's GDP to US\$5 trillion by 2025 from US\$2.7 trillion (\$3.65 trillion) at present.

Not to be outdone, the opposition Congress Party, whose manifesto runs to 55 pages, assures an income of 72,000 rupees (\$1,400) a year to India's poorest, on top of guaranteeing the rural poor 150 days of employment a year. It will fill 2.2 million vacant government jobs by next March, decriminalise loan defaults by farmers, double the spending on health and education, raise the share of manufacturing from 16 per cent to 25 per cent of GDP in five years – which the BJP has also promised – and make India “the manufacturing hub of the world”.

In neither case is there any indication of how these lofty goals will be financed – no mention, for instance, of tax increases, expenditure cuts or privatisation – or of other enabling reforms that would cause the slightest discomfort to the average citizen.

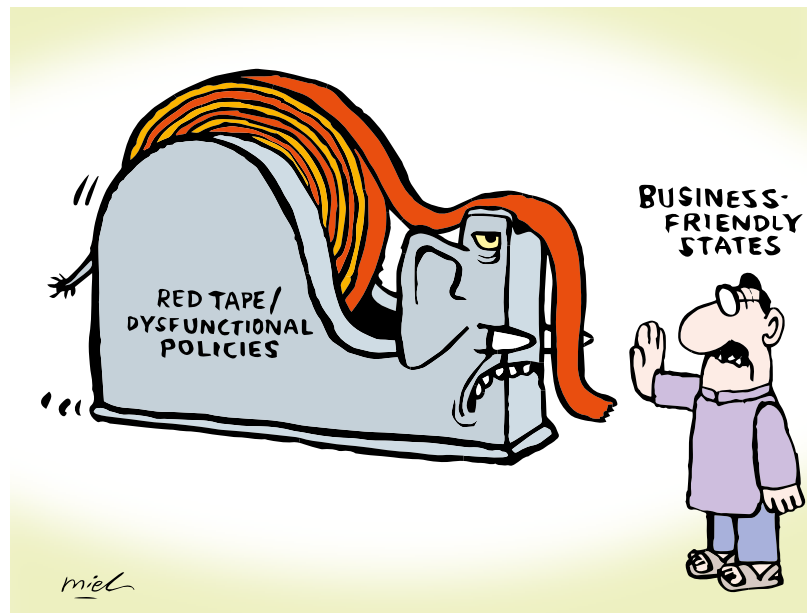
This is, of course, normal for election campaigns – and not only in India – which are all about gain with no pain. But let's look at what it will take to enable the Indian economy to deliver even some of what is being promised.

## A MIXED REPORT CARD

While the ruling BJP government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has a questionable record on social policies, which have led to widening divisions among caste and religious groups, its economic management has been more commendable.

Since 2014, when the Modi government took office, India's economic growth has averaged more than 7 per cent a year, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts that it will be 7.3 per cent in 2019 and 7.5 per cent in 2020, although economists (including at the IMF) question the way the government calculates the numbers.

Inflation has come down from 7.7 per cent to



ST ILLUSTRATION: MIEL

less than 3 per cent. The government has been aggressive in cutting red tape, which enabled India to dramatically improve its position in the World Bank's “Ease of Doing Business” rankings, from 142nd out of 190 countries in 2014 to 77th last year.

The government has managed to push through some transformational economic reforms, such as a goods and services tax, a bankruptcy code and a programme to extend banking services to almost all of India's poor, who had previously been largely excluded from the financial system. It has also opened up more sectors to foreign direct investment, which has gone up significantly.

But there are important areas where the government has fallen short. Its policies to boost manufacturing have yet to gain much traction. The farm sector, which employs about half of India's working population, is distressed. The banking system, which is dominated by state-owned institutions, is riddled with non-performing loans after years of reckless lending and poor oversight – although much of this happened during the previous government's tenure – and private investment has yet to take off.

## THE BIG JOBS DEFICIT

These weaknesses are reflected most importantly in a failure to create enough jobs – an issue that many opinion polls indicate is the most important concern among voters.

The most recent official jobs survey which was leaked to the media – the first to be conducted by a government agency since Mr Modi's draconian “demonetisation” of November 2016 – indicates

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that India's unemployment rate hit a 45-year high of 6.1 per cent in 2017-18. Private-sector estimates are even higher.

The demonetisation, under which 86 per cent of India's currency notes in circulation were invalidated overnight, led to severe job and output losses in agriculture as well as the informal sector, which are largely cash-driven.

To deliver on their economic promises, both the BJP and the Congress would, at a minimum, need to create double-digit economic growth and jobs on a scale never seen before.

The Modi government had rightly identified manufacturing as the key to mass job creation - which led to the launch, amid much hoopla, of the "Make in India" programme in September 2014.

But more than four years on, this ambitious initiative has made little headway and is being mocked by the opposition, which pointedly noted that most of the manufactured goods being sold in India are made in China.

India's manufacturing remains stuck at about 16 per cent of GDP compared to 29 per cent in China, with employment in the sector having actually fallen in recent years, according to the Centre for Monitoring the Indian Economy, an independent think-tank.

In a telling sign of the weakness of the manufacturing sector, the government resorted to imposing import duties on a long list of consumer goods, including even basic items like toys, furniture and footwear, in its February 2018 budget.

### DYSFUNCTIONAL POLICIES

India's byzantine labour regulations, of which there are 44 at the centre and more than 100 in the states, are unfit for a market economy.

The Modi government tried to reform labour regulations by consolidating 44 laws into four codes: on wages, social security, industrial relations, and occupational safety, health and working conditions. But it ran into stiff resistance from India's trade unions, which were supposed to be consulted but claimed that the "so-called consultations" were treated as mere formalities. So the labour reforms went nowhere.

The result: Companies are reluctant to hire regular workers, forcing them to enter the informal sector, where the regulations don't apply and there are no unions - but this also means there is no job security or company perks, and wages, as well as productivity, are low.

India's policies on land acquisition are equally bizarre, described by the country's former Planning Commission secretary N.C. Saxena as "pro-bureaucracy, anti-farmer and anti-industry".

Under a 2013 Act, passed by the previous Congress Party-led government, companies or state governments that want to acquire rural land for industry have to pay four times the prevailing market price (twice the market price for urban

land), plus foot the bill for the resettlement of the sellers. Their projects must then be subject to a "social impact assessment".

Infrastructure projects suffer as well. For instance, the progress of the planned US\$15 billion Japanese-financed bullet train between Mumbai and Ahmedabad, which was launched by Mr Modi and Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2017, has been held up mainly because of land acquisition issues.

### BUSINESS-FRIENDLY STATES

Despite these obstacles, there is hope for India's manufacturing, and the key to unlocking its potential lies with the country's states.

To circumvent the national regulations, some of India's states have adopted more business-friendly rules. For example, whereas the centre's laws require companies with 100 workers to seek government permission for any layoffs, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand have raised the threshold to 300 workers.

Some states have also diluted the land acquisition laws (since they control land allocation), sometimes through innovative means.


For instance, to speed up the development of its new capital Amaravati - for which Singapore companies have prepared the masterplan - the government of Andhra Pradesh has resorted to a system of pooling, whereby multiple landowners give up their land to a government agency, which then adds value to it by putting in place infrastructure and amenities and then returns part of the land back to the owners.

Growing competition between the states to attract investment is also pushing them to adopt more liberal rules and to pitch directly to foreign investors.

Some have been more progressive than others, and have succeeded in creating major manufacturing clusters - for example, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Haryana in the auto industry, in which India is now a global player; Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra in chemicals and pharmaceuticals; and Punjab and Tamil Nadu in textiles and garments.

India's states have a lot of autonomy - they control many key areas that are critical for economic development. Apart from land and labour policies, these include roads, power, education, healthcare and policing.

Their financial autonomy is growing. India's 14th Finance Commission, a government body which recommends the sharing of revenue between the centre and the states, proposed that the states should get 42 per cent of taxes collected by the centre - up from 32 per cent recommended by the 13th Finance Commission a decade ago.

While the central government will be important in setting the general tone of policies going forward, who controls the country's states, and how they govern, will be key to India's economic destiny. 





The Palang Pracharath's leader, Mr Uttama Savanayana (centre), with the pro-junta party's parliamentary candidates in front of a picture of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha during the election campaign.

PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## THAILAND

# Thaksin's era fading, but Thailand's troubles linger

Leading opposition parties are unlikely to succeed because of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's army support and incumbency advantages.

AFTER NEARLY FIVE YEARS OF MILITARY government, Thailand was supposed to find political clarity and a democratic way forward from its national elections on March 24.

But the outcome turned out otherwise. The politics of post-election Thailand is murky and precarious. Early signs suggest the country is evolving into an authoritarian state that combines elements of Myanmar's military entrenchment and Cambodia's elected dictatorship.

Culpability for the political mess besetting Thailand rests in part with the Election Commission (EC), the country's poll organiser, and the Constitutional Court, which adjudicates Constitution-related cases. Both agencies are seen as supportive of the military government at the expense of pro-democracy forces.

Critics of the EC point to its being quick to act against the Thaksin Shinawatra-aligned Thai

Raksa Chart party, while being slow to investigate alleged illegal fund raising by the pro-military Palang Pracharath Party.

After the EC accused Thai Raksa Chart of involving the monarchy in politics by nominating Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya as its prime ministerial candidate, the Constitutional Court duly dissolved the party. Concurrently, the Palang Pracharath Party was cleared of the charges against it.

While both the EC and the Constitutional Court are politicised, Thailand's Constitution drafters also have a lot to answer for. The 2017 Constitution was designed to hobble bigger parties - particularly Thaksin's party machinery, which has won all elections since 2001 - in favour of smaller vehicles.

Single ballots were used for both constituency and party-list results. While the vote count for the 350 first-past-the-post constituency Members of Parliament has been announced, with a handful of reruns due to fraud, the results for the 150 party-list MPs chosen by proportional representation have been bogged down by controversy because of unclear rules.

The upshot is that many small parties will likely end up being awarded a seat each based on decidedly low thresholds, leaving the Thai party system and the resulting government fractious and weak.

Three weeks after the elections, Thailand

**THITINAN  
PONGSUDHIRAK**

For The Straits Times



still does not have a final tally of the people's representatives, while the country's 250 senators are being appointed directly and indirectly by the junta.

Based on constitutional provisions, official MP results must be announced by May 9, a few days after the coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn. While the final results have yet to be determined, several trends are discernible.

First, Thailand may be finally moving beyond the Thaksin era.

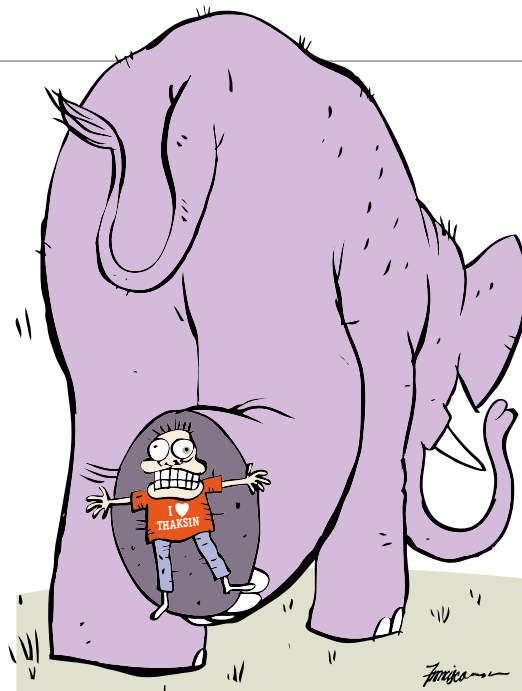
While Pheu Thai emerged as the largest-winning party in last month's election with 137 constituency seats, the results were a poor showing for a party associated with former prime minister Thaksin. The number it garnered was the lowest ever since it was originally founded as Thai Rak Thai, which was dissolved in 2007.

Pheu Thai still more or less held its ground in the north and north-east constituencies - traditional Thaksin strongholds - because it fielded only 250 out of 350 seats being contested.

The key to Pheu Thai's showing was the dissolution of Thai Raksa Chart, its complementary sister party set up to deal with the new rules against big parties.

Thaksin made two big miscalculations with Thai Raksa Chart, first with the Princess' nomination and later by having her make a very public appearance as a guest at his daughter's wedding in Hong Kong less than two days before polls opened.

These two gambits to boost Thai Raksa Chart were



ST ILLUSTRATION: MANNY FRANCISCO

more than cancelled out by clear rebukes from the palace to Thaksin that he should keep the monarchy out of electoral politics.

First came the King's command that the Princess' nomination was unconstitutional. The second was a palace statement, just hours before polls opened, urging voters to pick "good people."

Then, a week after the election, the palace



Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit attributes the attacks on his party to its success.  
PHOTO: DPA

## TAN HUI YEE

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# Young party's fate may affect political stability

ONE OF THE SURPRISE WINNERS IN THAILAND'S election on March 24 is now under siege, fighting off criminal charges and allegations that it is hostile to the monarchy. What happens next could fundamentally alter the political equation.

Promising a fresh start from the kingdom's polarised politics, the youthful Future Forward Party, set up just one year ago, won over six million votes nationwide, putting it in third place, behind the former ruling Pheu Thai and pro-junta Palang Pracharath.

It has become the main buttress of a seven-party Pheu Thai-led coalition, which has laid claim to the right to form a government and vowed to oppose the return of junta leader and Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha as premier.

Final results of the election will be out only on May 9.

Palang Pracharath is vying with Pheu Thai to muster a governing coalition. The Election Commission, meanwhile, has ordered re-election and vote recounts in eight out of the over 90,000 polling stations used during the poll.

The anti-junta coalition says it has in hand at least

255 seats in the 500-seat House of Representatives - 87 of which belong to Future Forward.

Dr Prajak Kongkirati, a political scientist at Thammasat University, said: "Anything can happen now, including the dissolution of the party. There is a history of Constitutional Court dissolution of parties, so it would not be a surprise if Future Forward is the next one."

The last party to be dissolved was Thai Raksa Chart, a splinter of Pheu Thai designed to maximise the chances of electoral success under a Constitution drawn up after the 2014 military coup, which put big parties at a disadvantage. Thai Raksa Chart tried to nominate Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya for the role of prime minister. That triggered a late-night intervention by King Maha Vajiralongkorn, who rejected the move. The Constitutional Court later judged it as threatening to the status of the royal family of being above politics.

Pheu Thai and Thai Raksa Chart are both linked to fugitive former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Despite living in exile for over a decade, he continues to be feared and loathed by royalist pro-military factions. He, in turn, needles them from abroad



revoked Thaksin's royal decorations awarded for his earlier public service as a top government official.

## FUTURE FORWARD PARTY

A second major trend to watch as a result of the elections is the rise of a new youth movement behind the Future Forward Party (FFP) and its leader, Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, that is reshaping the Thai political landscape.

With at least 80 MPs, making it the third-largest poll winner, the FFP has shot up from nowhere to become a force to be reckoned with and a focal point for those hoping for a new way of politics, as well as a departure from an authoritarian past.

But to the conservative establishment, Thanathorn is the new Thaksin. The old guard sees him as antithetical to its interests because he questions and opposes the longstanding political order based on the traditional institutions of the military, the monarchy, the judiciary and the bureaucracy.

The FFP firebrand wants to clip the military's power and its budget, and to reform politics by undoing the military-inspired Constitution.

Thanathorn and his colleagues, mostly in their 30s and 40s, are now seen as an existential threat to the military-led establishment. Thaksin's name is now hardly in the news, but Thanathorn's is front and centre.

He and his party are now facing a slew of charges, ranging from sedition to vote fraud to disloyalty to the crown. The FFP may end up dissolved and Thanathorn jailed.

## PARLIAMENTARY DEADLOCK

A third post-election development: the numbers suggest that Pheu Thai and FFP have sufficient numbers to form a solid opposition bloc with the support of one or two smaller anti-junta parties.

The two leading opposition parties tried to form the core of a coalition government, but are unlikely to succeed because of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's army support and incumbency advantages.

But this means that a parliamentary deadlock is in store because, while the military-appointed Senate can vote for the prime minister, it cannot engage in law-making.

Going after the opposition parties and their leaders, especially FFP, would look like what Prime Minister Hun Sen has done to the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party.

It will no doubt try to claim office with backing from the army and junta-appointed Senate; flanked by the EC, Constitutional Court and anti-corruption agency that will likely act against anti-junta parties in the coming weeks.

While the election outcomes unfold, what is clear is that Thailand's military has embedded itself in politics for the long term, somewhat like how the Myanmar military has entrenched itself for five decades from 1962. [ST](#)

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through media interviews and social media postings.

Future Forward has no ostensible links to Thaksin, but its electoral success and alignment with Pheu Thai against the ruling junta has placed it squarely in the cross hairs of the fervent anti-Thaksin camp.

Before the election, Future Forward leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit was already facing the prospect of being indicted for computer crime over a Facebook video in which he criticised the junta.

On April 6, he reported to a Bangkok police station to hear charges of sedition and helping others commit a serious crime. This reportedly dates back to 2015, when, according to him, he gave an anti-coup protester a ride home. The junta alleges he helped protesters flee.

Future Forward secretary-general Piyabutr Saengkanokkul, a French-educated constitutional law scholar, has been targeted by royalist camps who allege that his activities are hostile to the monarchy. In the first week of April alone, at least three parties have made complaints about him to the police and Election Commission.

Meanwhile, army chief Apirat Kongsompong, in thinly veiled criticism of Future Forward earlier in the week, warned foreign-educated left-wing elements against threatening Thailand's own brand of democracy.

Mr Thanathorn attributes the attacks on his party to its success.

"I am confident that millions of people who love justice will stand beside me and be ready to show that they will not tolerate any dark power aiming to destroy Future Forward Party," he posted on Facebook on Wednesday.

Should any of the legal challenges against Future Forward hit home, Palang Pracharath will find it easier to form a Lower House majority and smooth the path for Mr Prayut's continued premiership.

But the potential backlash from Future Forward's supporters may raise questions about the kingdom's longer-term political stability, say analysts.

"We had a youth awakening in Thailand, a political awakening. They saw Future Forward as the hope for Thailand, where politics has been going nowhere," Dr Prajak told The Straits Times. [ST](#)

**Future Forward has no ostensible links to Thaksin, but its electoral success and alignment with Pheu Thai against the ruling junta has placed it squarely in the cross hairs of the fervent anti-Thaksin camp.**



# Democracy in crisis? It's the next disruption

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Political systems have not kept up with social changes brought on by the digital revolution

THE DEMOCRATIC WORLD APPEARS TO BE FACING a crisis of some sort. Leading democracies are unable to manage the deep divisions in their societies that have been exacerbated by the very process that defined their democratic status: The act of deciding whom to vote as their leaders, and on important national issues.

British Prime Minister Theresa May suffered what has been called the greatest defeat in Parliament in modern history when her Brexit proposal was overwhelmingly voted down. Never had a sitting administration been so humiliated by its own backbenchers who snubbed their party, along with the main opposition Labour Party.

Commentators say these developments signal a tectonic shift in British politics, with power shifting from the PM to MPs.

Democrats may cheer, but Britain is now a deeply divided country with no leader able to bridge the divide.

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, almost 70 per cent of Britons say their fellow citizens had become “angrier about politics and society” since the 2016 Brexit vote, while 40 per cent say they are now more likely to take part in violent protests and 61 per cent say their views were not being represented in the political system.

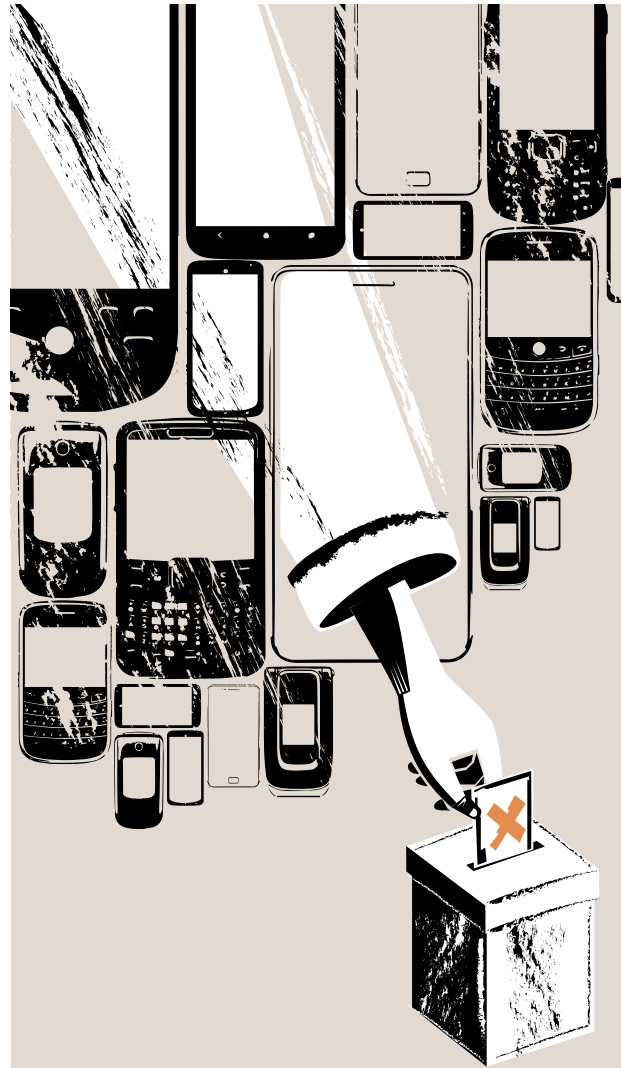
In America, the government was shut down for five weeks, the longest ever, and has reopened for just a month. No one appears to want to give in – neither President Donald Trump nor the now Democrat-controlled House.

The results of the recent midterm elections last November show that the divide has deepened, with Republican candidates doing well in rural areas, in the South and among the working class.

Democrats did better in the cities and among minorities and the better educated.

The divide in the US appears to be not along race or class lines but identity.

In France, President Emmanuel Macron faced his most severe political test when thousands of ordinary people wearing yellow vests took to the



ST ILLUSTRATION: CEL GULAPA

streets, burning cars and destroying property in Paris and other cities.

The yellow vest movement has no clear leader, no organisational structure or plan. It appears to have erupted spontaneously among people who share the same grievances, especially of political leaders who seem out of touch with the ground and do not care about their problems.

Brazil's recent presidential election was said to



be the most divisive in the country's history. Newly elected President Jair Bolsonaro faces a daunting challenge healing the sharp polarisation that has emerged from an ugly and bruising campaign.

There is a growing sense of crisis in these countries over the gulf between the people and the leadership, and among citizens.

There are many reasons in each of these countries, each shaped by its own political history and circumstances.

The electoral process, it would appear, is part of the problem.

In The New York Times, Mr Max Fisher and Ms Amanda Taub argue that much of the problem arises because of the two conflicting visions of democracy: "There is the ideal of rule by the people. And there is the more complicated reality, in which institutions and representatives balance majority opinion against considerations like universal rights and the common good."

In other words, while leaders ought to act in a way that will further national interest, they also have to respect public opinion, and the two often collide.

But these contradictory forces have always existed since the introduction of universal suffrage, and the art of politics has always been to manage the tension between the two.

What has changed to make the present problem seem more intractable, especially in established and mature democracies like Britain and France?

It used to be said that newly formed societies, especially those emerging from colonial rule and suddenly embracing democratic ideals of one-man-one-vote, were ill-suited to their new political circumstances.

The argument was that it was easy to introduce outward forms of democracy such as the ballot box, but harder to develop the other conditions necessary for democracy to succeed.

These include the rule of law, the separation of powers between the executive and the judiciary, a free press and, most important, cultural values that respect the rights of all as equal before the law.

Without these, newly democratic countries are likely to succumb to mob rule by the majority, or to corrupt leaders who abuse the democratic process for their own interests, as has happened in many countries.

It was argued that mature democracies had taken decades to develop these cultural traits and institutions, and that was why they succeeded.

But what if conditions change in mature democracies? What if they are now undergoing a transformation that alters the existing conditions?

The digital revolution has changed the way people live, work and play. It has disrupted many businesses, in particular the information industry, removing traditional gatekeepers and changing the way news is created, disseminated and received.

Governments have struggled to cope with the relentlessness of the 24/7 news cycle, and the instantaneous nature of social media.

The use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter has had an especially dramatic impact on the way modern election campaigns are run.

The issues related to such platforms are now well known: widespread use of fake news and fake accounts, hate speeches and smear campaigns to influence the way people vote.

But the transformative changes brought about by the digital revolution go beyond the media and electoral campaigns.

Profound societal changes are taking place.

Scholars such as Professor Manuel Castells, a Spanish social scientist, have done much work on how these changes affect how societies are organised, in a fundamental way.

Traditional hierarchies are being replaced by networks with multiple connections.

People now behave more autonomously, shaped by a greater sense of the individual in a me-centred world. They feel empowered because of the greater access to information, and more secure from being able to identify with like-minded people on the Internet, and believe they have greater power to influence others.

The research has shown that these are largely positive developments especially for lower-income workers and women. The Internet has increased their social space, not made them more isolated.

These are deep changes and it would have been astonishing if they did not have a significant impact on politics, especially in established democracies in which people have greater access to the new technology and are freer to act accordingly.

The explosion of individual and autonomous power, combined with the network effect of the digital world, makes it much more difficult to reach consensus on whom to choose as leaders and how to agree on national issues.


Established institutions that were the necessary pre-conditions for democracy to flourish, such as a free press, are themselves facing revolutionary change and uncertainty about their future viability.

Yet, political systems are slow to respond to these changes because of the vested interest of those in it.

Political leaders schooled in the old pre-digital days struggle to keep up with the pace of change.

Hence, it will likely be a long and disruptive transition, not unlike that happening in the business world.

Over time, new norms and institutions might emerge to deal with the new world.

In the meantime, expect more divisiveness and turmoil. 

*The writer is also senior fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University.*

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BEGINNING OF JAPAN'S REIWA ERA

# Naruhito may bring more global outlook to the throne

Changes likely to be gradual to prevent shock to the system, say analysts

**WALTER SIM**

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EMPEROR NARUHITO, WHO WAS EDUCATED at Oxford University and passionate about climate-change issues, is likely to push the boundaries of the sedate, cloistered imperial family institution.

He and his wife, Empress Masako, will bring a more global outlook to the throne, analysts say, being the first Emperor and Empress to have studied overseas.

Emperor Naruhito, 59, had previously argued for “new royal duties” that are befitting of the 21st century. He has also vowed to build on the legacy of his father, Emperor Akihito, by being close to the people, upholding tradition while updating the throne as “a new wind blows with the new era.”

Analysts say changes are likely to be gradual to prevent a shock to the system.

Associate Professor Asao Kure of Kyoto Sangyo University says: “Just like Emperor Akihito took a leaf from his father’s playbook when taking over the throne, I expect Naruhito to inherit the actions of his father. Instead of rushing changes, reforms will be more gradual.”

Emperor Naruhito, whose name comprises words that mean “benevolent” and “virtuous” in Japanese, plays the viola and studied mediaeval water systems at Oxford. He is passionate about water conservation, and is frequently a delegate at water-related conferences.

He has an independent streak, and was dogged in wooing his wife Masako Owada, now 55, in a seven-year courtship that reportedly involved him sneaking out of the Imperial Palace in a curtained van.

Empress Masako, at the time a career diplomat, rejected his hand in marriage twice before saying yes. The Harvard-educated polylinguist had agonised over whether to give up her career for the strictures of imperial life.

Fiercely resisting the pressure to get married, Emperor Naruhito once said: “I know how to operate



a washing machine without getting covered in bubbles, and I know how to handle an iron... I don’t feel guilty about being single.”

Still, they eventually married in 1993. He vowed to fiercely protect his wife from public glare and, in 2004, pointedly accused palace minders of trying to “negate her career and her personality.” This was at the height of Empress Masako’s stress-induced depression – dubbed an “adjustment disorder” by the palace.

A major part of this stress was due to her inability to produce a son, which is pivotal to preserving the continuity of the Chrysanthemum Throne under the Imperial Household Law.

While female commoners can marry into the





Princess Aiko with her parents, Crown Prince Naruhito and Crown Princess Masako, arriving at her graduation ceremony at Gakushuin Girls' Junior High School in Tokyo in 2017.  
PHOTO: AFP

imperial family, princesses are not only barred from becoming monarch, but must also give up their royal status when they marry a male commoner. Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako have only one child – Princess Aiko, now a 17-year-old woman.

Much to the chagrin of traditionalists who think that female empresses will taint the pure royal bloodline, the government began discussions on allowing female monarchs in 2005. But talks were abruptly halted a year later, when Emperor Naruhito's younger brother, Prince Akishino, fathered a boy.

However, the imperial transition has spurred calls for stronger political will to tackle the impending crisis arising from the imperial family's dwindling

male numbers.

With Naruhito as Emperor, Prince Akishino, 53, becomes Crown Prince. His son, Hisahito, 12, will be second in line. Emperor Akihito's younger brother, Prince Hitachi, is already 83 years old. What this means is that, as things stand, the pressure of bearing a son to continue the 2,600-year-old lineage will fall squarely on the shoulders of the young prince.

Historian Yuji Otabe of Shizuoka University of Welfare told Agence France-Presse: "Who would want to marry Hisahito?"

Yet another challenge is the shrinking number of royals who can shoulder public duties, given that princesses must give up their royal status and leave

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**Crown Prince Naruhito had previously argued for "new royal duties" that are befitting of the 21st century.**

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the family when they marry a male outsider.

### ABUNDANCE OF FEMALES

There are now 18 members of the imperial family, including the four male members as well as retiring Emperor Akihito and his wife, Empress Michiko, whose titles are now Emperor Emeritus and Empress Emerita. The remaining 13 are female, with six yet to marry, including Princess Aiko.

While public duties are usually spread among the other royal members when one leaves the imperial family, it was in recognition of these pressures that Princess Ayako, 28, could keep her honorary positions at two organisations even after marriage last year.

Still, she was struck off the imperial family register when she married shipping firm employee Kei Moriya, 32, in October last year. [ST](#)

## Series of rituals for accession to throne



This Imperial Household Agency file handout photo taken on June 2, 1993, shows Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito and his bride, Masako Owada, in full traditional Japanese Imperial wedding costumes at the Imperial Palace.

PHOTO: AFP

The abdication of Emperor Akihito, 85, and accession of Crown Prince Naruhito, 59, are steeped in a series of solemn rituals.

There are 11 ceremonies and rites for Emperor Akihito to step down and nearly 40 more for Crown Prince Naruhito's crowning as monarch, stretching at least until the end of the year.

The process kicked off on March 12, when Emperor Akihito reported the date of his abdication at the Imperial Sanctuary.

With his wife, Empress Michiko, 84, he has also visited central Japan to pay respects at the mausoleum of Japan's first ruler, Emperor Jimmu, in Nara prefecture on March 26, and at the ancient Grand Shrines of Ise in Mie prefecture on April 18.

He visited the tomb of his father, Emperor Showa, in Tokyo to report his abdication on April 23.

The main Taiirei Seiden no Gi ceremony to formalise Emperor Akihito's abdication – and the last of the 11 rituals – was held on April 30, during which he delivered his last official speech.

On May 1 at 10.30am, his elder son, Crown Prince Naruhito, inherited the traditional imperial

regalia, said to date back to mediaeval times – a sword, a jewel and a mirror – as proof of accession to the throne.

Only male adults with the right to inherit the throne are allowed to attend the Kenji to Shokei no Gi ceremony, along with key politicians, while female royals and minors are barred. This decision has been lambasted as being out of touch with the times, as it means only two royals would be present to witness the key ceremony: Prince Akishino, 53, and Prince Hitachi, 83.

This was followed by the Sokui go Choken no Gi ceremony at 11am, when Emperor Naruhito received his first audience and delivered his first speech as monarch.

### GATHERING OF NATIONS

Crown Prince Naruhito's formal enthronement ceremony as Emperor will be held on Oct 22, with 195 nations to be invited. About 2,600 domestic and foreign guests are expected at the event.

That same day, a public parade will be held to celebrate the enthronement.

While Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko were driven in a Rolls-Royce convertible for their parade, his son Naruhito will ride in a Toyota Century luxury sedan with his wife Masako.

The next key ritual is the Daijosai Grand Thanksgiving rite on Nov 14 and 15, during which the Emperor will eat newly harvested rice to celebrate the bounty of grain, as well as offer the rice to deities.

The government has said it will foot the 2.7 billion yen (\$33 million) bill for the ceremony, which dates back to the 7th century. But this has proved controversial.

Prince Akishino has questioned if it is appropriate for public funds to be used to cover the expense of what is a "highly religious imperial family event", saying the imperial family's private budget should be used instead.

While some experts have said using taxpayers' money is in breach of the principle of separating religion and government, as spelt out in Article 20 of the Constitution, others argue that it is a crucial imperial succession rite. [ST](#)



A file photo showing Japan's Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko waving to people at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, Japan.  
PHOTO: EPA-EFE

## END OF JAPAN'S HEISEI ERA

# Akihito steps down as Japan faces constitutional crossroads

With Japan's Emperor Akihito having stepped down on April 30, here's a look at what has led to the monarch's pacifist stance and how this has shaped his role as 'symbol of the State and of the unity of the People'

IN HIS DEBUT ADDRESS TO THE JAPANESE PUBLIC after he ascended the throne in 1989, Emperor Akihito pledged to work "together with you to preserve the Constitution of Japan."

Thirty years later, Japan finds itself at a constitutional crossroads as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe makes no secret of his desire to revise the war-renouncing supreme law of the land.

Drafted by the United States after World War II, Japan's Constitution stipulates that armed forces "will never be maintained."

At the same time as Mr Abe seeks a more proactive military, Japan's pacifist monarch has stepped down from his largely ceremonial position – the first time since 1817 that the Chrysanthemum Throne has changed hands for a reason other than the monarch's death.

Emperor Akihito's retirement at the age of 85 on April 30 due to old age will draw the curtain on the Heisei (achieving peace) era. He is now Emperor Emeritus Akihito.

His elder son, Crown Prince Naruhito, 59, succeeded him the next day, with Japan ushering in the age of Reiwa (beautiful harmony).

Amid the festivities of the abdication – approved under a one-time special law – comes a bout of introspection on the role of the monarchy in modern-day Japan.

Experts such as Nagoya University historian Hideya Kawanishi believe the widely revered Emperor Akihito's imperial legacy, in defining what it means to be "symbol of the State and of the unity of the People", might be imperilled by the government's march towards nationalism, with

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Emperor Hirohito with Empress Kojun and their son, then Crown Prince Akihito, at the Imperial Palace in the 1950s. In showing remorse for the war fought in the name of his father, Emperor Akihito became a symbol of peace, but experts say his legacy might be imperilled by the government's march towards nationalism.

PHOTO: AFP



**Emperor Akihito, in expressing remorse for the war fought in the name of his father Hirohito, has become one of Japan's top soft-power icons and a symbol of peace. Experts believe that Emperor Naruhito, born after Japan's World War II defeat, will build on the work of his father.**

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the monarch becoming seen as serving as its proxy.

Dr Kawanishi tells *The Straits Times*: “The Abe government seems to desire a return of an influential imperial household like that of the Meiji era (1868-1912, which marked the restoration of the emperor's supreme powers), but Emperor Akihito thinks this will cause a chasm between the royal family and the ordinary people.

#### WAR AND PEACE

Murmurs from the Imperial Palace show a pacifist Emperor who has been fighting an implicit tug of war against the ideals of the right-wing zealots who form the main support base of Mr Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has spelt out its vision for a “beautiful” and “normal” Japan that is more active militarily.

Emperor Akihito has repeatedly said that his three decades on the throne have been spent in deep contemplation over what it means precisely to be “symbol of the State and of the unity of the People.”

This clause defining the emperor's role, as enshrined in the Constitution, has served as his lodestar even as he said the endless search for its meaning will continue for generations to come.

Experts believe that Emperor Naruhito, born after Japan's World War II defeat, will build on the work of his father.

Emperor Akihito, in expressing remorse for the war fought in the name of his father Hirohito, has become one of Japan's top soft-power icons and a symbol of peace.

In February, at a ceremony to mark 30 years on the throne, he said: “During the three decades of the Heisei era, Japan has been free of war for the first time in modern current history, supported by the strong desire of the people for peace.”

The emperor was a powerless figurehead during

the samurai years when Japan was under the rule of feudal warlords.

But sovereign power and supreme command of the military were vested in him with the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and spelt out subsequently in the Meiji Constitution of 1889.

This would presage Japan's militarism and colonisation of the region, with Emperor Hirohito overseeing the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, China in 1937, and much of South-east Asia, as well as the bombing of Pearl Harbour.

However, modern historians have conflicting opinions on Emperor Hirohito's responsibility in World War II.

While some argue his outsize role, others cite recently found diary entries that imply a reluctance to wage a full-scale war with China in 1937, and wariness of drawing the United States into a “reckless war.”

They believe such entries prove he was but a puppet to a militaristic government that used his divine status to persuade bright young minds into suicidal kamikaze missions.

Months after Japan's surrender to the Allied forces in August 1945, Emperor Hirohito declared to the Japanese public that he was not an *akitsumikami* (divine god in a human form). The US-drafted Constitution of 1947 would then enshrine his status as an apolitical “symbol of the State and of the unity of the People.”

Indeed, Emperor Hirohito stopped visiting the controversial Yasukuni Shrine that honours the spirits of Japan's 2.46 million war dead, after 14 wartime leaders convicted as war criminals by the Allies were enshrined there in 1978.

Dr Kawanishi says: “Emperor Showa (Hirohito's posthumous name) may have relinquished the status of god, but he did not relinquish the spirit. He still saw himself as an authoritative figure, and so interacted with people that way.”

His reign oversaw Japan's rags-to-riches story, but the country plunged into the depths of economic despair with the bursting of the asset bubble soon after Emperor Akihito took the throne.

This prevailing mood contributed to the Emperor's approach to people, says award-winning Nikkei journalist Makoto Inoue, who has spent 14 years covering the imperial family.

In July 1991, a less imperial Emperor Akihito shocked the nation on a visit to an evacuation centre for victims displaced by a volcanic eruption, by rolling up his sleeves and kneeling on the floor, speaking to disaster victims at eye level and clasping their hands.

#### AN IMPERIAL 'INTERVENTION'

Dr Naoko Kumada, an adjunct fellow at Nanyang Technological University's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, says Emperor Akihito's rare public address in August 2016 to hint at his wish to step down was “the most significant imperial intervention since the end of the war.”

Imperial Palace courtiers and the government at

first favoured the idea that the Crown Prince could act as a regent by taking on more official duties, with the Emperor remaining as a figurehead “symbol.”

But Emperor Akihito said in 2016 that the role as a symbol of the state involves travelling to remote places and islands, standing by the people, listening to their voices and being close to them in their thoughts.

Dr Kumada said in a recent commentary that, to the revisionists, “he has merely to be. All the better if his body remains hidden in the depths of the Imperial Palace while his sovereign powers are articulated by the state.”

She added: “His abdication, with its stunning repudiation of (Constitution revision), ensures that his son, who holds to a similar conception of the imperial role, will succeed, hopefully to assure the continuity ‘steadily without a break’ of the symbol emperor.”

However, Mr Abe has a personal reason to push his own agenda.

He wants to complete what his maternal grandfather, Mr Nobusuke Kishi, who was prime minister from 1957 to 1960, tried but failed to do.

Mr Kishi, a founding member of the LDP, had sought a repeal of the war-renouncing Article 9, arguing that it blunts Japan’s teeth on the world stage, but this failed due to massive popular opposition.

Dr Osamu Watanabe, a constitutional scholar and honorary professor at Hitotsubashi University, wrote in the Asahi Shimbun that any discernible moves towards the remilitarisation of Japan and a return to Meiji-era values would have been opposed – albeit tacitly – by Emperor Akihito.

Together with his wife, Empress Michiko, Emperor Akihito has visited World War II battlegrounds including Saipan (2005), Hawaii (2009), Palau (2015), the Philippines (2016) and Vietnam (2017), where he prayed for the souls of both Japanese and foreign soldiers who died in the war.

He has also identified four dates in history that “should never be forgotten”, all in 1945: June 23 (when Japan lost the Battle of Okinawa), Aug 6 (atomic bombing of Hiroshima), Aug 9 (atomic bombing of Nagasaki), and Aug 15 (Japan’s announcement of its surrender in the war).

What is conspicuously missing, said Mr Inoue, is April 28, 1952, the day Japan regained its sovereignty from the Allied occupiers. Okinawa continues to see this date as the “date of humiliation and abandonment” as it continued to be under American control until 1972.

Mr Abe held a ceremony in 2013 to mark the anniversary. Emperor Akihito strongly refused to attend the ceremony, but eventually had to do so.

As Japan today is in a new epoch, it also has Mr Abe firmly entrenched in power.

Upper House elections will be held in July but, barring any sudden collapse in his political fortunes, he will become Japan’s longest-serving prime minister in November.

He was supposed to step down last year, but term limits as LDP president were extended such that he could stay in power for a third straight term, until 2021. Tongues are already wagging that a fourth term might be on the cards.

Many expect Emperor Naruhito to follow in his father’s footsteps and rebuke the government in his own implicit way were it to go too far.

He said in 2015: “Today, with memories of war set to fade, I reckon it is important to look back on our past with modesty, and to pass down correctly the miserable experience and the historic path Japan took from a generation who knows the war to a generation who doesn’t.”

### A COMMON TOUCH

Previously, royalty had been expected to marry within the different branches of the imperial dynasty. But Emperor Akihito could not, as the 11 branches of the imperial household were abolished under the 1947 Constitution.

In August 1957, then Crown Prince Akihito met commoner Michiko Shoda, the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, while playing tennis in Karuizawa in Nagano.

Dr Kawanishi says: “The fact that the empress-to-be was a commoner made ordinary Japanese feel close to the royal family.”

Their undying efforts since to reach out to citizens and unify the people have pushed their popularity to an all-time high.

Even so, public reactions among those who spoke to The Straits Times have been mixed. Undergraduate Tetsu Senoo, 19, says the role of the emperor continues to be important in modern Japan, while Ms Masumi Matsumura, 42, thinks there has been too much fuss over the ceremonies. 

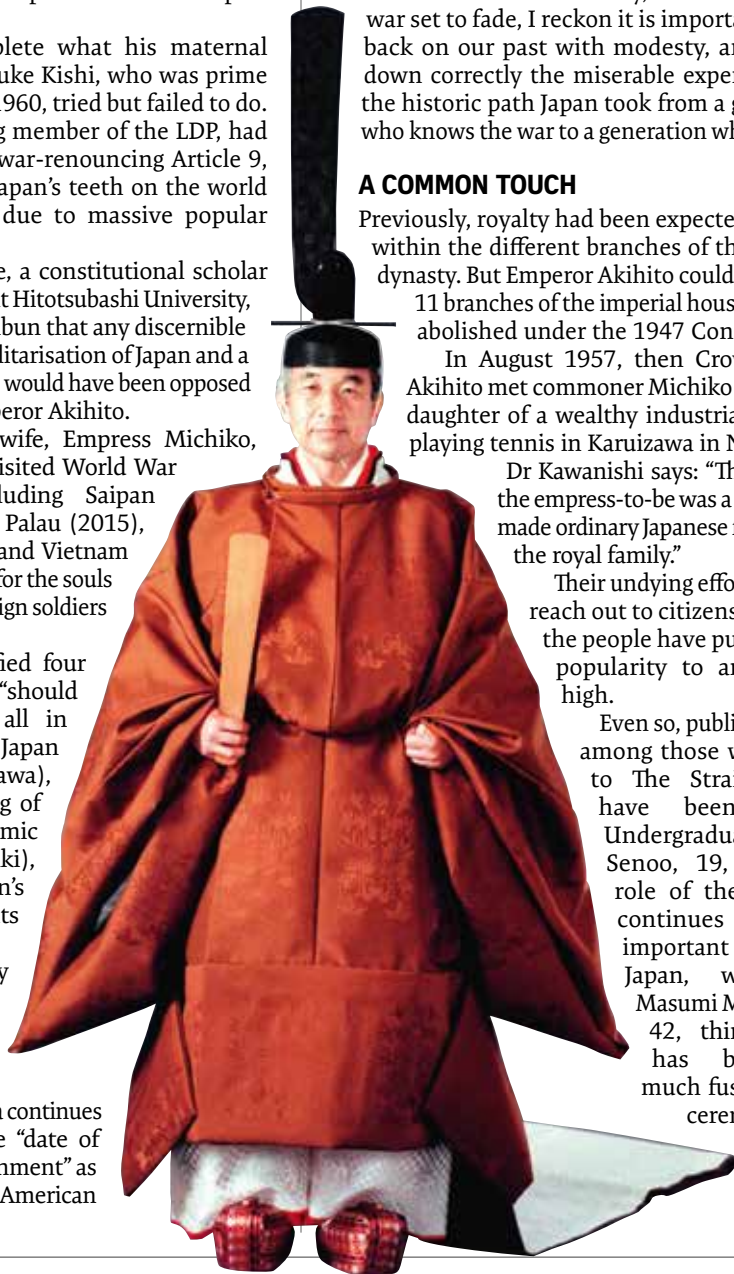
**“Emperor Akihito is not just a pacifist, but has always on his mind the happiness of the Japanese people in his pursuit for peace.”**

”

**– ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ASAO KURE** from Kyoto Sangyo University.

This undated Imperial Household Agency handout file photo shows Japanese Emperor Akihito in a full ceremonial outfit will before his enthronement in Tokyo.

PHOTO: AFP



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Asian Insider brings you insights into a fast-changing region from our network of correspondents.



Good day!

Today's Asian Insider, trade talks could be nearing the endgame, MBS wraps up his Asian tour and Asia's three tsunamis.

Ravi Varma  
Associate Editor

## WASHINGTON CONSENSUS



## 2 | ELECTION CHECK-IN: THAILAND AND INDONESIA



Here's a quick update from our bureaus on the upcoming elections in Thailand and Indonesia.

Let's start with Thailand, where elections will take place in a little over a month. Anybody just checking in today would detect nothing out of the ordinary in this round of polls.

That's because, a week after what was one of the most dramatic weekend in Thai election history, the short-lived tenure of Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya (above) as a prime ministerial hopeful seems to have dropped off the radar. Most now expect the party that nominated her to be dissolved while she appears to have quickly returned to her pre-politics persona. There may be some reaction yet from the public, but for now, everything seems to have returned to

## 3 | INDONESIANS SEE RED



Before the fall of President Suharto in 1998, the Chinese in Indonesia, the world's largest nation of Muslims, were banned from celebrating their festivals, while speaking Chinese dialects in public was also prohibited. More than 20 years after the strongman's New Order regime ended, Imlek - or what Chinese New Year is known as here - is now gazetted as a national holiday. However, says Indonesia Bureau Chief Francis Chan, prejudice against Chinese Indonesians continues today amid rising intolerance in the country.

## 4 | ASIAN MARKETS DROP



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Filipinos in front of the Chinese consular office in the financial district of Manila on April 9, protesting against China's growing sway in the Philippines. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Regional Watch

# Why Duterte is in a fix over Thitu Island

**RICHARD JAVAD HEYDARIAN**

For The Straits Times



Filipino anger over swarming of island by Chinese vessels recalls Benigno Aquino's Scarborough Shoal crisis

THREE YEARS INTO HIS PRESIDENCY, AND AMID crucial mid-term elections, Mr Rodrigo Duterte is facing his gravest foreign policy crisis yet.

Since the start of the year, hundreds of Chinese vessels, suspected of belonging to the People's Liberation Army Maritime Militia Forces (PLA-MMF), have swarmed the Philippine-held Thitu Island in the South China Sea.

The exact circumstances of the ongoing siege are unclear, but the situation has provoked widespread backlash and protests in the Philippines, where anti-China sentiment is gaining ground.

In response, President Duterte has warned China: "If you touch it... I will tell my soldiers, 'Prepare for suicide missions.'" Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr has fired off a salvo of diplomatic notes suggesting that Manila will take the case to the United Nations General Assembly if the situation remains unresolved.

The brewing crisis has called into question the

wisdom of Mr Duterte's Beijing-friendly diplomacy in recent years. He is also now having to face a rude awakening just as his predecessor Benigno Aquino did in 2012 during the Scarborough Shoal crisis, which poisoned Philippine-China bilateral relations for years.

After spending his first years in office cultivating stable relations with China, including a high-profile visit to Beijing in 2011, Mr Aquino was forced to reset bilateral relations as a result of a months-long stand-off between a Filipino warship and a flotilla of Chinese paramilitary vessels in the South China Sea shoal.

Following the failure of a United States-brokered mutual disengagement plan that had the Philippines withdraw its vessel, only to see Chinese coast-guard forces effectively occupy the shoal, Manila took the dispute to an international court at The Hague.

He also decided to fortify military relations with the US under the Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). Under the new defence deal, Manila proposed the expansion of American rotational military presence on Philippine soil, including at strategic bases close to the disputed waters.

Bilateral ties nose-dived amid diplomatic sniping. Beijing withheld big-ticket infrastructure

investments in the Philippines while accelerating its reclamation and militarisation of disputed land features in the Spratlys.

Upon his election, however, Mr Duterte did a U-turn, downplaying the disputes in favour of warmer strategic and economic relations with Beijing. To China's delight, he also denied America's request to preposition weapons and military assets at Philippine bases under the EDCA.

### CHINA'S 'GREY ZONE' STRATEGY

Instead of taming Beijing's appetite, however, Mr Duterte's soft-peddalling seems to have encouraged China's maritime assertiveness. In the past two years, China has deployed advanced military assets, including surface-to-air missiles and electronic jamming equipment, to the disputed land features in the South China Sea.

This has gone hand in hand with the deployment of ever-larger armadas of paramilitary forces to the area as part of its "grey zone" strategy of asserting dominance short of war and large-scale skirmishes.

Deliberately camouflaged as fishing vessels, Chinese paramilitary forces, especially the PLA-MME, present a strategic conundrum to other claimant states, which struggle to figure out how to respond to such strategy.

According to the Philippine military, there have been as many as 657 sightings of Chinese paramilitary vessels in the immediate vicinity of Thitu Island over the past three months.

### WHY THITU?

Thitu Island is the second-largest naturally formed land feature in the Spratlys. In the mid-1970s, the Philippines built a modern airstrip and, since then, has permanently stationed troops and civilian residents on the island.

The Philippines' grip over the island has gone largely unchallenged over the past four decades.

But China's rapid reclamation and militarisation of neighbouring land features, particularly the Philippine-claimed Subi Reef, have dramatically changed the equation in recent years.

The ongoing siege allows China to achieve multiple goals simultaneously. First, it sends a clear message to the Philippines and other claimant states that China can easily disrupt and sever their supply lines and access to the disputed land features.

Second, it allows China to also monitor the Philippines' ongoing maintenance and upgrade activities on Thitu Island, as the Duterte administration seeks to upgrade its decrepit military and civilian facilities.

Crucially, it is likely also part of China's plan to prevent the Philippines from occupying and building structures on the nearby Sandy Cay, a low-tide elevation located within the territorial sea of Thitu.

For years, the Philippines has sought to annex the land feature in order to expand Thitu's maritime



STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

zone as well as protect Filipino fishermen's access to the area.

The armada of Chinese vessels is making that prospect increasingly difficult, as Beijing itself seeks to occupy the Sandy Cay as well as gain access to the fishing grounds in Thitu's surrounding waters.

Adding insult to injury, Chinese paramilitary forces have also been surrounding other Philippine-occupied features in the area, particularly Kota Island.

In many ways, this could be Mr Duterte's own Scarborough Shoal crisis.

If anything, Manila's increasingly tough language against China evinces a deep sense of dismay, if not betrayal, among top officials in the Philippine government who had expected warm and stable relations with Beijing.

Manila has the option of leveraging its alliance with Washington, particularly through expansion of American military presence on its soil. It also has the option of asserting the 2016 arbitration ruling against China in international fora, likely with the support of US, Japan and other like-minded countries.

The Duterte administration's hardening rhetoric is also likely a response to broader public opinion. In a recent authoritative survey, only two out of 10 Filipinos expressed confidence in Beijing as a trustworthy partner.

Desperate to continue his warm relations with China, Mr Duterte has tempered his pushback against China with the remarks that Beijing remains a "friend" and that "compromise" is the only way forward.

Yet, his reassurances are falling on deaf ears as a growing number of Filipinos see an increasing dissonance between his words and the creeping intrusion of Chinese vessels into Philippine waters. [ST](#)

*Richard Javad Heydarian is a Manila-based author and non-resident fellow at Stratbase ADR Institute for Strategic and International Studies.*

**Thitu Island is the second-largest naturally formed land feature in the Spratlys. The Philippines' grip over the island has gone largely unchallenged over the past four decades. But China's rapid reclamation and militarisation of neighbouring land features, particularly the Philippine-claimed Subi Reef, have dramatically changed the equation in recent years.**







*Special Report*

# Chips on casinos

Many countries in the region are building world-class attractions around casinos to target tourists. Here's a look at some of the initiatives:



Among attractions that engage visitors at Marina Bay Sands is the casino (top). Top spenders come from China, Malaysia and Indonesia. The 600 sq m Chairman Suite at the luxurious Marina Bay Sands Singapore costs about \$17,000 a night and features a private gym, a karaoke room and four bedrooms, each with a rain shower and a jacuzzi (above). It is decorated with handmade carpets and silk drapery, and boasts a baby grand piano in the living room. There is also a dedicated butler team available. PHOTOS: KELVIN CHNG, FILE PHOTO, MARINA BAY SANDS

# Marina Bay Sands' game plan

**JOYCE LIM**

Senior Correspondent

✉ joycel@sph.com.sg



CHINESE NATIONAL JESSICA DOES NOT BAT AN eyelid dropping \$5,000 for a T-shirt or \$100,000 for a watch during her weekly shopping jaunts.

And her favourite destination is the Shoppes at Marina Bay Sands (MBS), which offers an array of her favourite luxury brands – Hermes, Chanel, Van Cleef & Arpels, Louis Vuitton, Patek Philippe.

“I am quite an impulsive shopper. There are many things that I bought here last year which I still have not used, including two “Ai Ma Shi” baobao (Hermes handbags),” the 36-year-old said in Mandarin.

Jessica, who asked that her real name not be used, moved to Singapore in 2017, but would still book the hotel’s suite to rest in between shopping. She has stayed in the most expensive 600 sq m Chairman suite which costs about \$17,000 a night. It features a private gym, a karaoke room and four bedrooms each with a jacuzzi.

Jessica, who does not work and whose businessman husband is based in Hong Kong, belongs to an elite group of big spenders both locals and tourists which MBS is aggressively wooing – and successfully winning over, to some extent.

Its mall racked in a record revenue of US\$179 million (\$243 million) last year. Top spenders come from China, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Last year, MBS, which is owned by Las Vegas Sands, scored a coup when it was featured in Hollywood rom-com Crazy Rich Asians as the go-to shopping destination for its monied characters.

Coupled with 15,000 sq m of gaming space – the size of three football fields – MBS hauled in US\$3.07 billion of net revenue last year, making it one of the world’s most profitable properties. Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou was reported to have lost \$2 million in two days at MBS’ casino which courts high-rollers with complimentary hotel rooms, meals by celebrity chefs, concert tickets and VIP airport transfers.

Over 330 million visitors – or 120,000 a day – have walked through its doors since it opened on April 27, 2010. The competition for the ultra-wealthy is global.

## BIG MONEY

To up its game, the mall doubled its luxury brand footprint in 2012, such as by bringing in new labels and housing luxury fashion houses in duplexes. There are now 17 duplexes – the largest collection

## Two IRs, 10 years

The operators of Singapore’s two integrated resorts (IRs) will pump in a total of \$9 billion to expand their attractions, nearly 10 years after they opened their doors. The Straits Times looks at how they have fared since 2010.

### MARINA BAY SANDS

**15.5ha**

cost

**\$8 billion**

to build



Attracted more than

**330 million**

visitors since 2010

Hosted more than

**700**

new-to-Singapore Mice (meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) events



**11,000**

employees by end-2019 (expansion will add an additional 1,500 to 1,800 employees)



More than

**2,500**

hotel rooms and suites over 55 floors



**15,000sqm**

approximate gaming area, with more than

**600** table games and over

**2,300**

slot machines and electronic table games machines combined



2018 net revenue

**\$4.1 billion**



### RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA

**49ha**

cost

**\$8.92 billion**

to build

Attracts more than

**20 million**

local and foreign visitors a year

More than

**13,000**

employees (expansion will add 2,800 employees)

About

**1,600**

hotel rooms across six hotels

**15,000sqm**

gaming area, with more than

**500** tables, and about

**2,400**

slot machines and electronic table games machines combined.

2018 revenue

**\$2.5 billion**



Sources: MARINA BAY SANDS AND RESORTS WORLD SENTOSA STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS



## BIG SPENDERS

**On average, in a given week, we witness multiple purchases for pieces averaging in the six-digit range, and we see discerning shoppers from the region return to purchase their one-of-a-kind pieces ranging anywhere from upwards of half a million.**



**AN MBS SPOKESMAN**

of duplexes under one roof in Singapore.

These, in turn, stock unique items such as a \$1 million Jaquet Droz Tropical Bird Repeater watch, while French perfume house Henry Jacques concocts a personalised scent for more than \$45,000 a pop.

“On average, in a given week, we witness multiple purchases for pieces averaging in the six-digit range, and we see discerning shoppers from the region return to purchase their one-of-a-kind pieces ranging anywhere from upwards of half a million,” an MBS spokesman told The Straits Times.

As Singapore’s resident rich population swells – latest statistics from Credit Suisse Research Institute shows there are 183,737 millionaires in Singapore – MBS is also going all out to entice them to shop at home rather than jet off to other destinations.

Mr Jason Tan, 35, who has been working for one of the luxury brands since MBS was opened in 2010, said: “MBS has changed a lot. It used to be deserted as there were not many big brands back then.

“My customers used to be mostly tourists. Today, about half my customers are locals and it’s normal for them to spend \$4,000 to \$5,000 per visit.”

Before the Chinese authorities started to clamp down on its people leaving the country with large sums of cash in 2017, many Chinese tourists would pay for purchases with wads of banknotes.

Some shops even have note-counting machines, said Jessica, who now pays for her purchases with credit cards linked to her bank accounts in Hong Kong.

MBS was bustling when The Straits Times visited it recently. Shoppers throng the luxury boutiques which stay open till 11pm. People streamed into a spa which offers massage and facial services till 2am.

At the waterfront promenade, house pour wine and beer were sold for just \$10 after 10pm at alfresco dining restaurant JustIN. The late night shopping and city views have kept the crowd till past 11pm, said local celebrity chef Justin Quek who runs JustIN.

To maintain its pole position, MBS has put some \$1.6 billion into capital reinvestment since 2010.



The Shoppes at MBS are an attraction. PHOTO: ST FILE


Of its total workforce of 10,000, about 3,500 are professionals, managers, executives and technicians (PMETs), in roles such as sales and marketing managers. Of these, 76 per cent are held by locals.

On April 3, the Government announced that MBS and Resorts World Singapore will pump in \$9 billion to build world-class attractions. For MBS, this includes a fourth hotel tower – adding 1,000 suites to the current inventory of 2,561 rooms and suites – and a 15,000-seat entertainment arena aimed at attracting A-list artistes.

The glitzy complex is not free of controversy. More people are seeking help for their gambling problems including those who frequent the MBS casino.

A 40-year-old Singaporean businessman who frequents MBS said that he welcomes the new levy hike to deter locals from entering the casinos. Singaporeans and permanent residents now need to pay \$150 instead of \$100, while the cost of an annual pass has been increased to \$3,000 from \$2,000.

The Paiza gold member at MBS who drops between \$100,000 and \$300,000 for every round of Baccarat said: “It’s the middle- to lower-income people who will get into debt while the wealthier can afford to lose.

“I don’t think the casinos are after them because they are not significantly contributing to the profits. I am surprised they took so long to increase the levy. 

## Japan rolls dice on Singapore-style IRs

THE OPERATORS OF SINGAPORE’S TWO integrated resorts (IRs), which this month injected \$9 billion in fresh investment, are also itching to place their bets on Japan in the race to enter the world’s largest untapped casino gambling market.

Las Vegas Sands Corp and Genting Singapore, which run Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Sentosa respectively, are among at least eight suitors for the three IRs that Japan has allowed.

Others include Macau’s Melco Resorts & Entertainment and Las Vegas’ MGM Resorts International.

While Japan has not yet decided where to build the IRs, which will likely open their doors only in

mid-2020s, casino moguls are going on a charm offensive by setting up local offices, meeting government officials and pledging multi-billion dollars in investments.

Some are pumping in money to sponsor community events and festivals, as others prove they are more than a fair-weather presence by providing disaster aid and relief.

The jockeying comes as Japan, the world’s third-largest economy, is said to hold the keys to a casino market that could be worth up to US\$25 billion (\$33.8 billion).

This will make it the world’s second-largest gaming market after Macau, whose casinos raked

### WALTER SIM

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## RWS woos with family-oriented attractions, Michelin Star eateries

WHILE MARINA BAY SANDS (MBS) IS KNOWN for its high-end shops, the stars at Resorts World Singapore (RWS) are its family-oriented attractions such as Universal Studios Singapore and S.E.A. Aquarium.

These have become huge hits with visitors over the years, as the numbers attest.

The integrated resort on Sentosa island has pulled in around 20 million people annually over the past three years. The bottom line has thrived as well with RWS, which opened 10 weeks ahead of MBS, helping parent firm Genting Singapore rack up net profit in excess of \$1 billion in 2011, its first full year of operation.

But like the roller coasters featured across its 49ha site, RWS has had its share of lows amid the highs.

In 2015, Genting Singapore reported net profit of just \$193 million while visitor numbers were down to around seven million.

Executive chairman Lim Kok Thay said at the time that the gaming performance was due to an industry downturn across the region.

It started to show a more winning hand in 2016 when RWS grabbed the honour of being the first integrated resort in the world to earn seven Michelin Stars across four celebrity-chef restaurants.

Acclaimed eateries have allowed RWS to broaden its image over the years from just a family-friendly resort to a premium lifestyle destination appealing to the high-net-worth crowd.

It reported in early April that net profit for the



2018 financial year came in at \$755 million, up 2.8 per cent from 2017.

Gaming revenue also increased, from \$1.59 billion in 2017 to \$1.68 billion, while non-gaming turnover, including hotel rooms and attractions, rose from \$777.9 million to \$834.2 million.

The resort's next stage of development was unveiled on April 3 when it announced expansion plans that will add around 164,000 sq m – the size of 30 football fields – of new attractions and lifestyle offerings.

Its star attractions, Universal Studios Singapore and S.E.A. Aquarium, will be substantially increased in size. The additions will be delivered in phases from next year, and is projected to be completed in 2025. [ST](#)

– Joyce Lim

Resorts World Singapore's next stage of development was unveiled on April 3 when it announced expansion plans that will add around 164,000 sq m of new attractions and lifestyle offerings.

ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG



in US\$37.6 billion in gaming revenue last year. Las Vegas' casinos earned US\$11.9 billion while, in 2017, Singapore's made US\$4.6 billion.

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who visited Singapore's two IRs in 2014, is looking to the Republic's playbook as it tries to mitigate the risks of problem gambling while harvesting the economic benefits of tourism spending and job creation.

"The process that Singapore used to establish a structure for and around IRs has been a model around the world," Mr Brendan Bussman, director of government affairs of Las Vegas gaming and hospitality consultancy Global Market Advisors, told The Straits Times.

Students practising at the Japan Casino School (left) in Tokyo. Japan, which has allowed three integrated resorts (IRs) to be built, hopes to mitigate the risks of problem gambling while reaping the benefits of tourism spending and job creation. But passing of IR-related laws has been acrimonious due to the notoriety of the country's pachinko parlours.

PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Japan's pachinko parlours raked in an estimated 23.3 trillion yen (\$\$278 billion) in 2015. PHOTO: AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE



“Japan did not need to reinvent the wheel, but to take the parts of the process that they believe best fits their objectives and adjust as necessary the items to meet their own cultural components.”

### FIERCE RESISTANCE

The passage of IR-related laws has been acrimonious in Japan, where Diet sessions have triggered opposition boycotts and descended into shouting matches.

The main concern, experts say, stems from the notoriety of the country's ubiquitous pachinko parlours that raked in an estimated 23.3 trillion yen (\$\$278 billion) in 2015. Pachinko has long been classified as non-gambling entertainment.

The idea of gambling has long been associated with organised crime and yakuza gangs, Toyo University tourism management expert Kazuaki Sasaki told The Straits Times. Pachinko parlours, too, have reportedly been used as a conduit to evade sanctions and siphon money to North Korea.

As the spotlight on IRs thus far has squarely been trained on casinos, Dr Sasaki said not many realise that gaming space has been capped at just 3 per cent of the total IR area.

Mr Abe said in March that Japan's IRs must be of “unprecedentedly large scale and high quality”, with hotels having more rooms than any other in the country thus far, and convention halls that can rival the largest in Japan.

Still, in recognition of public anxieties, Japan is restricting IRs to just three sites for a start.

Casino advertising will be limited to the international arrival areas of air and sea terminals to reduce Japanese citizens' exposure to such ads.

Residents must fork out an entry levy of 6,000 yen, and will be allowed up to three visits per week, capped at 10 visits per month.

Osaka University of Commerce president Ichiro Tanioka wonders if this will be chump change.

“There is not much impact - 6,000 yen is very cheap,” he said, when compared with Singapore's \$150 casino levy or the entry fees of attractions like Tokyo Disneyland, which charges 7,400 yen.

“The cap of three visits a week will be pointless if the gambler goes to pachinko parlours or bets on horses on the other four days.”

Official figures show 3.2 million people have been addicted to gambling at least once in their lives.

Dr Tanioka, whose university conducts gambling research at its Institute of Amusement Industry Studies, estimates 800,000 are currently addicted to gambling, mostly to pachinko.

Significantly, a law to fight social disorder, including gambling addiction, passed by the Japanese Diet last year, clearly includes pachinko, Mr Hitoshi Ishihara, a partner at law firm Anderson Mori & Tomotsune, told The Straits Times.

Japan plans to use facial recognition to bar entry to gambling sites to those on self-exclusion lists, or whose families have asked for their entry to be restricted.

Venues will also have to remove ATMs to make it harder for gamblers to place bets on a whim.

Some 20 major cities will open rehabilitation and support centres for addicts by next year.

Dr Tanioka suggested that big data can be used in future to track a person's gambling habits across different forms of bets, so that there could be early intervention for compulsive gamblers who fail to recognise their own addiction.

### THE WAY FORWARD

Unlike in Singapore, where the Government decided where to build the two IRs, Japan has taken a bottom-up approach.

“It is up to local governments to decide whether they want to have an IR, and to come up with the concept of what kind of IR they would like to establish so it could rejuvenate the local economy,” said Mr Ishihara. “Subsequently, the local government will have to ask for the national government's approval for a licence.”

A recent poll of municipalities by Kyodo News showed three sites keen to host the IRs: Osaka, on the reclaimed Yumeshima (Dream Island); Wakayama prefecture, in Marina City on an artificial island; and Nagasaki prefecture, at the Huis Ten Bosch theme park. [ST](#)

**The passage of IR-related laws has been acrimonious in Japan, where Diet sessions have triggered opposition boycotts and descended into shouting matches.**





# Genting stays cool as it expands over decades

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THE REGION COME and go, but in Malaysia, the Genting casino-resort has somehow managed to keep its pole position for years as a cool place to visit.

The mountain-top Resorts World Genting (RWG) was visited by more than 20 million people last year, putting it again as the most-visited tourist spot in Malaysia.

While other integrated resorts can boast about being by the sea or in the middle of bustling cities, Genting has natural cool weather to offer all year round as it is perched among the clouds at 1,800m above sea level.

To make tourists feel they are indeed visiting a cool place, RWG has kept on expanding its theme park offerings and shopping experience, piled on more restaurants and boasts a 150-shop Premium Outlets selling top branded goods at discounted prices.

"There is a nice shopping area, indoor and outdoor theme park and the weather is really cooling. My short stay here was pleasant even though the prices here are more expensive," wrote one Danny Too on a hotel booking site on his February trip.

RWG has 10,500 hotel rooms catering to both high-rollers and families on a tight budget, a far cry from 1969 when group founder Lim Goh Tong laid the foundation for the first hotel on the mountain. Tan Sri Lim died in December 2007.

The Genting group is today run by Mr Lim's son Lim Kok Thay, 67.

The Malaysian operations have, over the years, diversified into many other businesses. It moved into plantations in 1980, cruise operations in 1993, power generation and oil and gas exploration activities in 1996, and biotechnology research activities in 2006, according to the website of Genting Bhd, the group's main vehicle. Analysts say gaming contributes some 80 per cent to group earnings.

The group attracted headlines in early April with the planned acquisition of super yacht Equanimity, allegedly built using money stolen from 1MDB, for US\$126 million (S\$170 million). Genting said the 91.5m-long luxury boat will provide the company with "a unique and competitive edge for its premium customers business".

Said Hong Leong Investment Bank Research analyst Rachael Hong Hui Chee in a report on April 4: "We are mildly positive on the purchase as it will be able to complement its VIP casino segment (ferrying high-rollers to its casino and renting for private functions)."



## PLACING CHIPS ABROAD

Other analysts were not so positive. Public Investment Bank wrote in a research report that "while we agree this could help to boost the VIP business, the impact may not be material considering that the super yacht can only fit 50-plus passengers, which includes 31 crew members." The group will also incur costs from higher depreciation charges, maintenance and upkeep.

At home, RWG has a unique advantage because with conservative Islam on the rise in the majority Muslim country, the Malaysian government is not expected to issue another casino licence.

The group, meanwhile, has been busy placing its chips abroad to expand its footprint.

In 2006, it was awarded the Sentosa integrated resort project by Singapore. Resorts World on Sentosa broke ground in 2007 and was officially opened in 2010.

This was followed by Resorts World Casino New York City in 2011, Resorts World Bimini in the Bahamas in 2013 and Resorts World Birmingham in the United Kingdom in 2015.

Resorts World Las Vegas, a 3,400-room casino resort will be the first new integrated resort to open on the Las Vegas strip in more than 10 years. It is expected to open by the end of next year, said a Reuters report.

In Singapore in early April, Genting said it would invest \$4.5 billion in Sentosa in a five-year expansion plan starting next year. The project will include extension of Universal Studios Singapore to feature two new attractions - Minion Park and Super Nintendo World. There will also be a new waterfront lifestyle complex and two new hotels with up to 1,100 rooms.

Maybank Kim Eng has downgraded Genting Singapore, saying that while the Sentosa expansion is "visionary", there would be "short-term pain before long-term gain." And the higher casino entry levy and tax rate could affect short-term earnings before its potential is realised in 2024-2025, it said. **ST**

More will be done to Marina Bay Sands and Resorts World Singapore as it was announced in early April that the two integrated resorts will pump in \$9 billion to build world-class attractions. PHOTO: SCREENGRAB FROM RESORTS WORLD GENTING/ FACEBOOK

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# Social media's 'outrage machine' abets terrorism

Social media allows extremist ideas to take root in people and then amplifies the acts of terrorists. This menace has to be reined in.

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BY NOW, A FLOOD OF INFORMATION HAS emerged about Brenton Tarrant, the Australian accused of murdering at least 50 people in a mass shooting in New Zealand on March 15.

What is most disturbing – apart from the carnage itself – is the story of Tarrant's transformation into a terrorist and how the forces that enabled this process continue to thrive.

Self-described as “a regular white man from a regular family”, Tarrant lived a fairly normal life.

He had worked as a gym trainer who even gave free lessons to children, and his former employers considered him normal. He was neither a social misfit nor afflicted by a mental illness, and had no criminal record. In his normality, he resembled many other terrorists.

But like many terrorists, the outwardly normal Tarrant was inwardly radicalised, a process

in which the Internet played a major role. Tarrant was active on various online white supremacist groups, to which he felt a strong affinity. His mission was to fight non-white immigration which he feared would eventually lead to the “complete racial and cultural replacement of the European people.”

## THE '3 Rs' OF TERRORISM

In her brilliant book, *What Terrorists Want*, political scientist and specialist on terrorism Louise Richardson writes about the “3 Rs” that terrorists seek.

The first is a desire for “revenge”, which emerges in all conversations researchers have had with terrorists and their leaders.

The second is “renown”, a stronger word than “publicity” and the third “R” is “reaction.” By action, they communicate to the world that they want to elicit a reaction.

All three motivations were present in Tarrant, from what we know of him.

In his 74-page manifesto of hatred, entitled *The Great Replacement*, he reveals that he was driven to violence by a desire to avenge an episode that occurred while he was touring Europe in 2017, when a Uzbek Muslim drove a truck into a crowd in Stockholm, killing five, including a young girl.



ST ILLUSTRATION: MIEL

Tarrant also sought renown for his cause: to defend “our lands”, which he identifies as “European”, from “invaders”, which he identifies as Muslims.

He wanted his mass murder to be shared globally – he filmed it with a helmet-camera and live-streamed it on Facebook. He put his manifesto on multiple sites on social media. It was duly reported and displayed, even in the conventional media, which he would have particularly welcomed, because the message would then go mainstream.

He wanted, for himself, what many terrorists, including suicide bombers, want – namely, martyrdom – in his case, for a racist cause. He wanted to be a hero within his world, even if he went to jail, even posthumously.

It was striking that after he was arrested and handcuffed, he made the “WP” (white power) signal with his fingers (a gesture familiar to white supremacists) for the benefit of the cameras.

Tarrant was explicit about the reaction he wanted to trigger: more killings of immigrants – he called for copycat attacks – a polarisation in the West, including civil war in the US that would ultimately

result in a separation of races, and a wedge between Nato and Turkey, which he had visited.

Tarrant's assault is itself a copycat phenomenon. He wrote in his manifesto that he was inspired by another white supremacist, Anders Breivik, who killed more than 70 people in Norway in 2011, and who had also posted a "manifesto".

Ms Richardson highlights another important condition for terrorism to thrive: the existence

of a complicit society or group that is sympathetic to the aspirations of the terrorist, even if not necessarily to his or her actions.

This, too, is present in Tarrant's case. He honed his beliefs on the Internet, declaring that "you will not find the truth anywhere else." He inhabited various white supremacist forums. Before carrying out the shootings, he urged viewers to subscribe to the channel of the YouTube personality PewDiePie, a Swedish video blogger with some 80 million followers, whose videos are subtly racist and anti-Semitic but disguised as tongue-in-cheek entertainment.

Tarrant's manifesto is said to be full of references to online memes that circulate in racist-tolerant forums such as 4chan and Stormfront. Symbols familiar to members of these forums were painted on the semi-automatic rifle he used in the shootings.

## THE WEAPONISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

While Tarrant's message was different from those put out by other perpetrators and instigators of violence, their means of outreach had one great similarity: they all succeeded in weaponising social media.

ISIS and Al-Qaeda have used Facebook and YouTube for recruitment, coordination and even to live-stream executions. When planning to launch a rocket from Batam to attack Singapore's Marina Bay in 2016, Indonesian terror group KGR@Katibah GR learnt how to assemble firearms and explosives through Facebook.

Myanmar's notorious hate preacher, the Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu, who called himself "The Burmese Bin Laden", used social media to fan hatred against the Rohingya minority.

In India, WhatsApp has been repeatedly used to spread false rumours and conspiracies about child abduction using doctored videos, leading to mob lynchings, which have then been filmed, shared and re-enacted in other parts of the country.

The obvious question that arises is why social media companies cannot, or do not, delete such incendiary material, when many cyber-security experts suggest they have the capacity to do so.

Yet, as Bloomberg reported, Tarrant's footage of his mosque massacre was still on YouTube 12 hours after it happened. Facebook claimed to have deleted 1.5 million videos of the shootings from users' posts, but not before the footage was widely shared and commented upon.

In a world where a high proportion of people now rely on social media to get their news, this is unacceptable.

To some extent, one can sympathise with what social media companies are up against. For example, Facebook, which hires thousands of contractors



Brenton Tarrant was charged with murder in the Christchurch District Court, on March 16, 2019.  
PHOTO: AFP

to moderate content with the help of artificial intelligence (AI) software, has to deal with some 300 million photos uploaded every day (according to Gizmodo) and 500,000 comments posted every 60 seconds. While the quantity may be overwhelming, the quality is another problem.

Even the best AI is not intelligent enough to identify hate speech, especially the subtle "I'm only joking" variety put out by the likes of PewDiePie.

## THE 'OUTRAGE MACHINE'


But there is more to the story, and that relates to the business model of social media.

The longer people spend on the likes of Google, Facebook and Reddit, the more money these companies make. So their main priority is not truth, facts or promoting social harmony, but capturing and retaining attention, for which they have developed strategies and algorithms.

They have discovered that "edgy" content that shocks, excites and thrills works best. As the former Google engineer turned philosopher James Williams points out, social media has become "an outrage machine".

People enjoy being outraged and the numbers prove this. Videos of people "rooftopping" – climbing tall buildings like Spiderman – eating million-calorie meals and engaging in "ultimate fights" with no rules and bare knuckles have gone viral, enriching social media companies. The performers, who get a cut, also earn big money – even though they often risk their lives. Some of the people who performed these bizarre stunts have actually been killed.

Political outrage also sells. PewDiePie, with his 80 million followers, is a money spinner for social media and for himself. The website 4chan, which enables people to post comments and share images anonymously and has a special section for "politically incorrect" postings, has some 20 million followers. One of its current threads has a face-cut of Tarrant with the question: "Do you support this guy?" Do you think killing those people was right?" Many of the responses say yes.

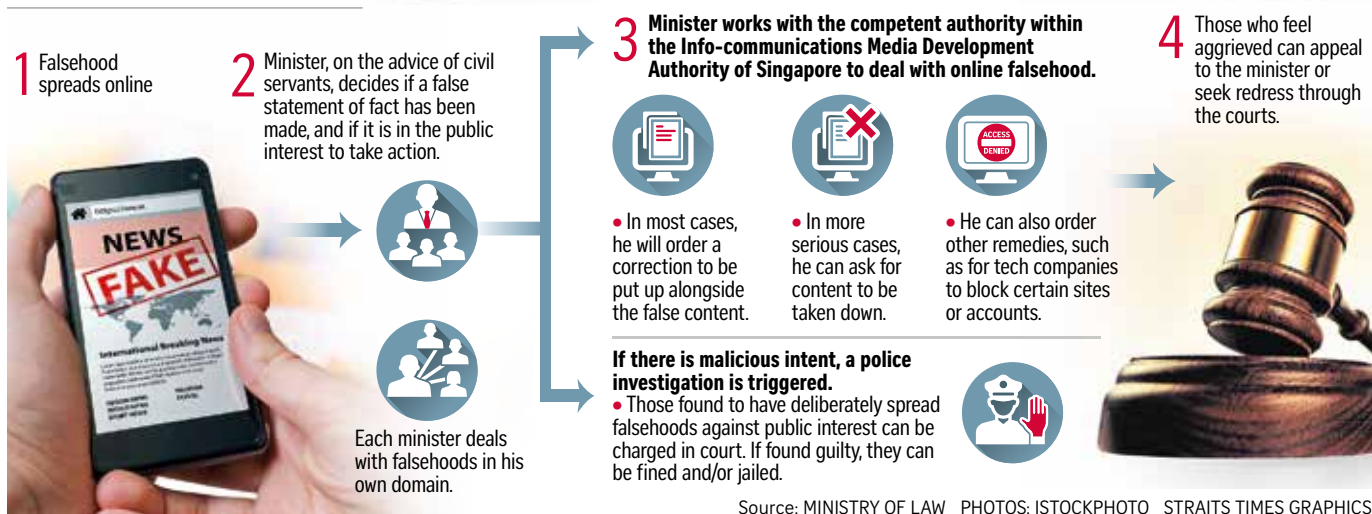
Tarrant was partly the product of social media's outrage machine, which continues to thrive, together with the communities that it empowers. The mass murder that he perpetrated is another reminder that this menace needs to be reined in. If social media companies are unable or unwilling to do this, governments must do it for them. 

# 7 things to know about Singapore's proposed law to combat online fake news

The new law will provide the Singapore Government with powers to act against online falsehoods to protect public interest.

## Who decides what is false?

Under the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill, ministers are given the power to determine if online content is false and to decide what action to take.



A BILL TO TACKLE THE SPREAD OF ONLINE falsehoods was introduced in Parliament on April 1, with Singapore set to become among the first countries to take steps to legislate this increasingly serious problem.

The Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Bill seeks to protect society from damage by online falsehoods created by “malicious actors”, the Ministry of Law (MinLaw) said.

Here are seven things about the proposed legislation, which Parliament is set to debate in the coming months.

### 1 HOW DOES THE BILL DEFINE FALSEHOOD?

The new law, if passed, is aimed at providing

the Government with powers to act against online falsehoods to protect public interest.

A falsehood is defined as a statement of fact that is false or misleading.

It does not cover opinions, criticisms, satire or parody, which the public can continue to upload and share.

The Bill lists several definitions of public interest: Singapore’s security; to protect public health, public finances, public safety or public tranquility; Singapore’s friendly relations with other countries; to prevent influence on the outcome of an election or a referendum; to prevent incitement of feelings of enmity, hatred or ill will between different groups of people; or to prevent a diminution of public confidence in public institutions.



Examples of statements of opinion that are not covered: “The Government is to blame for rising inequality”; “Singapore’s institutions and policies are often elitist”; “Recent lapses by the Government show that standards are slipping”

Examples of statements of fact that will be covered if found to be false: “The Government has declared war against Singapore’s neighbours”; “Bank X has lost S\$20 billion”; “Foreign workers vandalised several places of worship across Singapore.”

## 2 WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF A FALSEHOOD IS IDENTIFIED?

For action to be taken, there are two criteria that must be met – there must be a false statement of fact, and it must also be in the public interest for the Government to take action.

The minister, advised by his officials, will decide whether something is a falsehood and assess its impact on public interest.

Once that judgment is made, the ministers will work with the competent authority within the Info-communications Media Development Authority of Singapore on the action.

This could include an order to run a correction alongside the falsehood or to take it down. It can also involve blocking certain accounts and sites that are spreading the falsehood.

People who re-share the falsehood, especially those who are prominent and have a wide reach, could also be asked to put up a correction or take down the falsehood as they bear a greater responsibility to be careful with the content that could undermine society.

MinLaw said research has shown that corrections work and are an important antidote to falsehoods.

Website owners will have to ensure that those who read the falsehood also see the correction.

Corrections will be the primary action of the Bill. But in more serious cases, take-down orders may be issued to remove the falsehoods online. Corrections are also not criminal sanctions.

## 3 WHEN WILL CRIMINAL SANCTIONS APPLY?

Only “malicious actors”, or those who act deliberately to undermine society using falsehoods, will be subject to criminal action.

Those who deliberately spread falsehoods online, knowing it can influence the outcome of an election, can be fined up to S\$50,000, jailed for up to five years or both, if found guilty in court.

Those who use bots to amplify the spread of falsehoods will be subject to more severe punishments. They can be fined up to S\$100,000 and jailed for up to 10 years.

The courts will have the final say on what is false. This means that any decision by the Government on what is false can be overridden by the courts on appeal.

## 4 HOW ELSE CAN THE BILL PREVENT FAKE NEWS FROM SPREADING?

Fake online accounts or bots that spread falsehoods against the public interest can also be disabled.

MinLaw said this targets the use of inauthentic accounts or bots to manipulate and distort discourse among people.

The Bill will also set out a binding Codes of Practice for technology companies to keep their online platforms safe and secure.

It will focus on three areas: fake online accounts and bots, digital advertising transparency and de-prioritising falsehoods. The Codes of Practice will be legally enforceable.

## 5 WHAT IF A WEBSITE CONTINUES TO REPORT FAKE NEWS?

With the Bill, an online site that repeatedly spreads falsehoods will have its profits cut off, though it will not be shut down.

This will happen to sites that have published three different falsehoods against public interest in the preceding six months.

Internet platforms, including social media sites such as Facebook, will also be required to act swiftly to limit the spread of falsehoods by displaying corrections alongside posts or removing them.

Failure to comply could result in fines of up to S\$1 million.

## 6 WHAT HAVE OTHER COUNTRIES DONE?

France and Germany are among the countries that have adopted new laws to deal with such falsehoods.


France’s law against the manipulation of information was approved on its second reading on Nov 20 last year. It targets the rapid dissemination of fake news through digital tools.

In Germany, the Network Enforcement Act, which was passed in June 2017, requires social networks to promptly remove illegal content, including falsehoods that are criminal in nature.

## 7 HOW ABOUT ONLINE FALSEHOODS THAT AFFECT PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS?

On April 1, amendments were also tabled to the Protection from Harassment Act to strengthen the remedies and improve the speed of recourse for victims affected by online falsehoods.

The amendments will clarify that besides individuals, private entities such as companies may also obtain remedies under the Act if they are victims of falsehoods.

MinLaw said entities are just as vulnerable as individuals, where falsehoods are concerned, as their reputation can be ruined in days if falsehoods about them are allowed to go unchecked. 

## IN BEST POSITION TO DECIDE

**The domain minister, advised by his officials, is in the best position to decide whether something is a falsehood and assess its impact on public interest.**



– S. ISWARAN  
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# Ambani feud and the quality of mercy

The Ambani siblings' rivalry has taken one more turn, but troubling questions remain – for India and its corporate sector.

Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh Ambani (left) settled a 5.8 billion rupee (\$114 million) debt owed to Sweden's Ericsson by his younger brother Anil over a telecommunications contract that soured partly because Anil's Reliance Communications wilted under the fierce onslaught from his deep-pocketed brother's Jio. PHOTO: EPA-EFE



BACK IN THE 1990S, ONE OF THE CORPORATE world's most bitter rivalries took a key turn when Microsoft founder Bill Gates stepped in with a US\$150 million cheque to save rival Apple, the iconic Silicon Valley firm founded by the iconoclastic Steve Jobs, from imminent bankruptcy.

"Bill, thank you. The world's a better place," Mr Jobs had said to the man who had vanquished him.

That story did not end there, of course. Apple would rise from the ropes to emerge, in time, as the world's most valuable company. Mr Gates stayed the world's richest man for years until he was recently pipped to that post by Amazon's Jeff Bezos.

Cellular telephony has made giant strides since the late Mr Jobs placed that mobile phone call to Mr Gates 22 years ago – and none more so than in the world's hottest market for telecommunications: India. There, 1.3 billion people are using the technology to argue, travel, order food, study and, most of all, be entertained.

Mumbai, its business capital, is the home to Asia's oldest stock market as well as its most frenetic film industry. It also is home to Mr Mukesh Ambani, Asia's richest man, who this year took 13th place in the Forbes list of the world's wealthiest people with an estimated net worth of US\$54 billion (\$73.2 billion).

Among Mr Ambani's key assets is Reliance Jio Infocomm, whose network alone boasts some five billion hours of data traffic monthly and whose aggressive market practices threaten every rival, including Bharti Telecom, which is half-owned by Singtel. Indeed, the Singapore company's 14 per cent

slide in third-quarter net profit is owed mostly to the earnings of Bharti Telecom's Airtel falling by three quarters in the December quarter, a result of the cut-rate offerings from Jio.

All of the above elements have combined to produce the corporate and family drama in Mumbai that only Bollywood could have dreamt up for its size and scope.

In the latest twist of that long-running tale, Reliance Industries chairman Mukesh last week settled a 5.8 billion rupee (\$114 million) debt owed to Sweden's Ericsson by his younger brother Anil over a telecommunications contract that soured partly because Anil's Reliance Communications (RCom) wilted under the fierce onslaught from his deep-pocketed brother's Jio. This sibling intervention has given Anil a last-minute save from a three-month jail term ordered by the Supreme Court in the event he failed to produce the money.

The younger man has, in turn, been profusely thankful. "My sincere and heartfelt thanks to my respected elder brother, Mukesh, and Nita, for standing by me during these trying times, and demonstrating the importance of staying true to our strong family values by extending this timely support," Anil said in a statement. "I and my family are grateful we have moved beyond the past, and are deeply touched with this gesture."

Even if the gratitude is genuine, anyone who knows the hard-driving brothers would take the "moving beyond the past" with a measure of scepticism.

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## BROTHERLY TUSSLE

Both know – one with disappointment, the other with cruel satisfaction – that this was not how the script read just after 2002, when family patriarch Dhirubhai, who rose from petrol station attendant to his country's most celebrated modern-day businessman, died without leaving a will. At the time, Reliance Group was the country's largest private company with interests spanning textiles, petrochemicals, telecoms and energy. Group revenues accounted for 3 per cent of India's gross domestic product.

The group's vision was expansive, and Reliance was known to go out and get the best talent. Investors were dazzled by its profitability. Besides, Dhirubhai endearingly left something on the table for everyone, luring millions of Indians to turn from the safety of bank fixed deposits to taste equity investing.

Whereas Mumbai's crusty industrial barons held their annual general meetings in auditoriums, the Ambanis hired a cricket stadium and were cheered like champion gladiators.

And Anil, then, was the widely followed face of the globalised Indian corporation.

A Wharton alumnus, he was the fitness freak pounding the streets of Mumbai in New Balance sneakers. He was everywhere; appearing on the BBC, in the society pages with actress wife Tina Munim and at Singapore's Istana for Temasek's anniversary dinner. Temasek's US\$200 million fund to invest in India's energy companies had Reliance Energy as an equal partner.

Imbued with their father's work ethic, the two brothers made a fabulous pair when they worked together. Mukesh was a projects and technical man, able to get down to the nitty-gritty. Anil was the marketing genius with a tremendous ability to raise money.

Backstage, the older brother was taking charge. The cracks began to show, and it began with telecoms, which then was the most promising sector in a connectivity-starved nation. In December 2003, Anil, kept out of the planning for telecoms company Reliance Infocomm, failed to show up at its formal launch. In July 2004, Mukesh got the Reliance board to knock down Anil's operating role.

That November, the group let it be known that its chairman was Stanford-educated Mukesh, then 47 years old. In a riveting boardroom tussle, Mukesh revealed "ownership issues" and publicly asserted control after trimming the powers of his younger brother, the joint managing director.

"People begin thinking of succession when they become parents themselves and the problems begin," an aide to the late Dhirubhai told me at the time, explaining the seeds of the conflict.

Photographs of Anil with his father and brother were taken down from some Reliance plants and replaced with pictures of Mukesh and his wife Nita.

Things became intolerable for the younger man. At Seawind, the condominium-sized home in tony South Bombay's Cuffe Parade, where each brother occupied two floors, their wives Tina and Nita, seemed to share little beyond the letters in their names.

Investors were spooked and it was inevitable that a "two Reliances, two balance sheets" situation was the only workable solution. A settlement was

brokered in 2005 by their mother, who reportedly took advice from eminent Indian banker K.V. Kamath, who currently heads Shanghai-headquartered New Development Bank.

## FREE DATA, FREE CALLS – AND A MARKET FREE FALL

The sibling relationship remained uneasy, though, as Mukesh continued to consolidate his power and primacy, while Anil drifted into areas such as film production and defence. In 2010, a fresh round of negotiations resulted in an end to no-competition clauses agreed in 2005, allowing Mukesh to enter the telecoms business that had gone to Anil in 2005, and other fields where the brother operated, including power generation and distribution.

In no time, Mukesh stunned the world with a bold entry into the broadband wireless market. After a government auction of wireless spectrum, Mukesh's Reliance announced that it had bought Infotel, the only firm to emerge with 22 licences covering all of India's telecom areas. His 4G carrier Jio launched commercially in September 2016, offering free services initially. Jio gathered 16 million customers in its first month and 100 million in its sixth month. It currently has about 300 million customers.

I wrote in 2010 that if Mukesh's vision of a US\$160 billion conglomerate were to be realised, India may be at risk of having spawned an entity that increasingly takes on the shape and influence of an oligarchy.

Several Indian telcos, including Anil's RCom and Aircel, backed by Malaysia's Maxis, collapsed in debt, unable to sustain the cut-throat competition and crashing ARPU's – average revenue per user. Creditor banks, many of them state-owned, are stuck with the bill.


Anil's net worth, according to Bloomberg estimates, is down 99 per cent from US\$33 billion a little more than a decade ago. It is said that after Jio launched with dirt-cheap data and free voice calls, the cut-off marks for entry into India's most prestigious engineering institutes dropped a couple of percentage points. That was the kind of distraction Jio's free data-free calls entry caused in the market, particularly with the young.

The carnage Mukesh has wreaked on the country's telecoms sector is a matter for Indians to ponder even as they delight in the access to cheap data they may temporarily enjoy.

With his legendary ferocity in business, the talent he is able to attract, first-class corporate intelligence and government policies that seem to go his way, Mukesh seems set to dominate India's corporate landscape for years to come, health permitting.

There is no guarantee that Anil's fortunes will turn in the manner that Mr Jobs' did.

Meanwhile, there is a cautionary tale here for both Asian governments and family-owned businesses.

Governments need to ponder just how big their conglomerates and chaebols should be allowed to get before they step in to curb some of the negative influences that inevitably accompany overwhelming corporate power. And family businesses need to carve out their succession plans with clarity. 

**With his legendary ferocity in business, the talent he is able to attract, first-class corporate intelligence and government policies that seem to go his way, Mukesh seems set to dominate India's corporate landscape for years to come, health permitting.**

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Film director Guo Fan (L) and American actor Michael Stephen Kai Sui attending a promotional event for Chinese sci-fi film "The Wandering Earth" in Qingdao in China's eastern Shandong province.  
PHOTO: AFP

## Field Notes

# Sci-fi set to be the next big export for China

More people are reading Chinese authors' take on what the future holds as the Asian giant grows into a technological powerhouse

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IN THE 2013 SPACE MOVIE GRAVITY, AN astronaut played by Sandra Bullock has only one chance of returning home from low Earth orbit after a catastrophic accident – in a Chinese spacecraft.

Floating past ping-pong bats, an ink wash painting and other cultural signifiers, she stares in frustration at a control panel labelled with Chinese characters, exclaiming in Spanish, "No hablo Chino" (I don't speak Mandarin), as a Buddha statue smiles benevolently.

It is only by sheer luck that she makes it back to Earth in one piece.

In the real world, more English readers are today devouring Chinese science fiction despite the language and cultural gaps, as the once-tiny

genre has grown in international acclaim and repute.

British readers, for instance, set a record in sales of translated fiction last year, with Chinese science fiction and fantasy a key contributor to the 20 per cent year-on-year growth, according to Nielsen Book research published last month.

Leading the charge are translations of Liu Cixin's sci-fi trilogy *The Three-Body Problem* and fantasy novel *A Hero Born* by Jin Yong, also known as Louis Cha.

Chinese authors are also doing well in the short story space, a traditional bastion of sci-fi writing. For the second year running, Chinese science fiction edged out Spanish and French ones to be the most translated, said website SF in Translation.

Observers point to Liu's seminal work *The Three-*



Chinese science fiction authors and translators (from left) Fan Zhang, Emily Jin, Gu Di and Xiu Xinyu at a panel discussion during the Bookworm Literary Festival in Beijing on March 24. As a sign of growing interest in the genre, the festival had six events related to science fiction and technology this year, compared with two last year. ST PHOTO: LIM YAN LIANG

Body Problem as the beginning of the current wave of global interest in Chinese science fiction. While the 2006 serialised novel generated much domestic buzz and kicked off a trilogy, it was only a 2014 translation into English that brought the new age of Chinese science fiction into the global consciousness.

In short order, big names including then United States President Barack Obama, Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg and Game Of Thrones author George R.R. Martin praised the novel, which helped it shoot up bestseller lists.

Liu went on to become the first Asian author to win the Hugo Award, run by the World Science Fiction Society and which is the highest honour for science fiction works alongside the Nebula Award, for which he was also nominated. The Nebula Award is voted on by members of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America.

Chinese science fiction proved it was no flash in the pan when author Hao Jingfang clinched another Hugo Award – beating fellow nominee and best-selling author Stephen King in the process – for her novelette Folding Beijing, which depicts the Chinese capital divided by social class.

## GROWING INTEREST

Another watershed moment happened this year, when a movie adaptation of *The Wandering Earth*, a novella by Liu, turned out to be an unstoppable box office juggernaut. Released over the Chinese New Year holiday, the film starred action hero Wu Jing and made over 4.5 billion yuan (\$908 million) to become China's second-highest-grossing movie behind 2017's *Wolf Warrior 2*, and its international distribution rights were picked up by Netflix.

That aside, observers said there are two key reasons for the growing popularity abroad of Chinese sci-fi: more readers are looking to understand a rising China, and more nuanced translations by people native or bilingual in both Chinese and English are now available.

China's growing mastery of cutting-edge technologies, such as artificial intelligence, means its authors are well placed to write about how such technologies might shape human life in the future, author and biologist Gu Di said at a panel on science fiction here in Beijing on March 24.

His book, *The Hearts Behind*, delves into the concept of transferable consciousness and putting one's body up for rent as a way to explore the limits of the sharing economy, which, like bike sharing, was pioneered by Chinese companies.

What makes Chinese science fiction unique is that the genre often reflects many Chinese people's anxiety about how technology has shaped and will shape the future, said fellow author Chen Qiufan.

Chen's stories, for instance, include one on how smog – the by-product of China's fast-paced growth – affects a city's denizens on a psychological level, while also being a meditation on the role of non-governmental organisations in Chinese society. Another short story, *The Year Of The Rat*, both presaged China's current trade war with the United States a decade ago and can be seen as criticism of China's education system.

Better translators and more recognition for them by international organisations, such as the Man Booker International Prize, are other factors that contribute to greater readership, said Asia Literary Review managing editor Phillip Kim. "Translating a technical document where you are just trying to

## MEDIUM FOR EXPORTING CULTURE

**Chinese science fiction has become so popular that I would go as far as to say that both the Chinese side and the American side are using science fiction as a cultural battlefield.**



– Translator  
Emily Jin



The movie adaptation of *The Wandering Earth*, a novella by Chinese author Liu Cixin, became a box office success this year, making over 4.5 billion yuan (\$908 million). Translations of his sci-fi trilogy *The Three-Body Problem* are also popular among readers abroad, spurring interest in Chinese science fiction. PHOTO: REUTERS, LI YIBO



## UNIVERSAL THEMES

**That's what science fiction is made for - to discuss these bigger issues through individual narratives that cut across different languages and cultures. It's not only about Beijing or some small village somewhere in China, but also a metaphor for human beings in general.**



— Author **Chen Qiufan**, saying that while the trigger for a Chinese sci-fi story might be a local issue, the issues and themes discussed are universal.

get the facts across is one thing; it can be wooden, awkward and clunky, but what really matters is that you are getting the facts across," he said. "But literature is an art form, it's a language, it needs rhythm, it needs nuance."

For instance, the first and third books of *The Three-Body Problem* trilogy as well as *Folding Beijing* were translated by China-born American author Ken Liu, himself a heavyweight of the genre with Hugo, Nebula and Locus Award wins.

Liu, a proponent of the vibrancy and diversity of Chinese sci-fi writing, has warned against attempts to pigeonhole or define "Chinese science fiction."

"It is true that there is a long tradition in China of voicing dissent and criticism through the use of literary metaphor. However, this is but one of the purposes for which writers write and for which readers read," he wrote in the foreword of *Invisible Planets*, one of two anthologies of Chinese science fiction that he has edited.

Instead, like authors everywhere, today's Chinese writers are concerned with topics such as globalisation, technological development and wealth disparities, Liu said.

Chen noted that while the trigger for a Chinese sci-fi story might be a local issue - such as how a town neighbouring his childhood home became the electronic waste recycling capital of the world - the issues and themes discussed, ranging from bioengineering to stark inequality, are universal.

"That's what science fiction is made for - to discuss these bigger issues through individual narratives that cut across different languages and cultures," he said. "It's not only about Beijing or some small village somewhere in China, but also a metaphor for human beings in general."

### A CULTURAL BATTLEFIELD

But the genre's success has come with greater scrutiny and new expectations. Chinese science

fiction's growing popularity abroad means that even the state, which in the 1980s cracked down on its writers under the banner of the anti-spiritual-pollution campaign, has sought to co-opt the genre as a cultural export.

"Chinese science fiction has become so popular that I would go as far as to say that both the Chinese side and the American side are using science fiction as a cultural battlefield," said translator Emily Jin.

China is definitely trying hard to export culture through science fiction because for many Americans, the only contemporary Chinese literature they know is *The Three-Body Problem*, she said.

Last year, state media *China Daily* called science fiction "China's next big export after martial arts."

An op-ed urged writers not to "intentionally follow any global trend or internationalise Chinese cultural products to specially fit Western audiences."

On their part, US editors wield a lot more power than their Chinese counterparts and sometimes engage in what Ms Jin calls "counter-censorship" by urging an author to change his writing to fit their own conceptions of China.

She recalled one story where she had to go through 14 drafts with the author before both sides reached a compromise. "It's hard; you have to make compromises. You have to try to struggle your way through to survive, while at the same time being politically sensitive, and to not be led in the wrong direction by people," she said.

Avid sci-fi reader Milena Lombardi, 28, said she hopes the increased attention on Chinese science fiction will not strangle the genre, which has always been more exciting to read as writers have had more leeway than in other genres that have to be grounded in reality.

"There has been quite a large degree of freedom because until recently not many people had paid attention to it, and also because you can argue, 'Oh, I'm not talking about the present but a possible reality 100 years from now,'" said the student, who is pursuing a master's at Tsinghua University. "It's very nice to read because it's writing about Chinese society, but in ways that are very difficult to find in other genres, especially in today's political environment." [ST](#)

### KEY BOOKS

#### **The Three-Body Problem by Liu Cixin**

The first novel in a trilogy, it tells the story of how a more advanced alien race tries to stop scientific advancements on Earth.

#### **Folding Beijing by Hao Jingfang**

It depicts a society divided by social class, through the story of a father who struggles to send his daughter to school in futuristic Beijing.

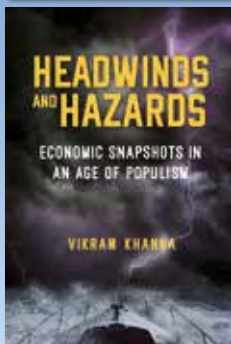
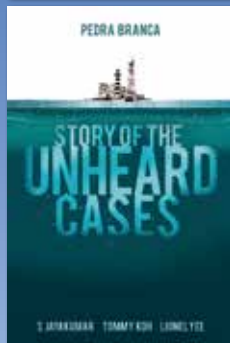
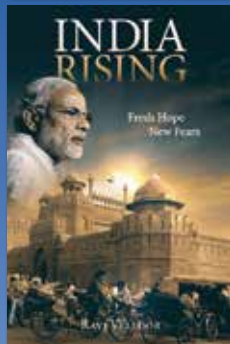
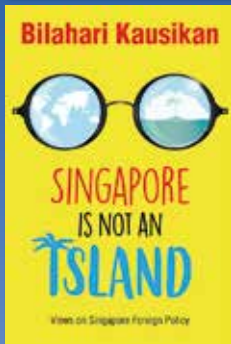
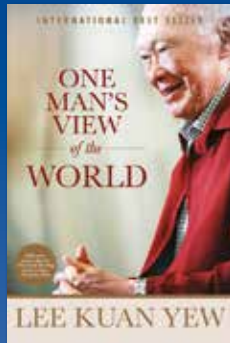


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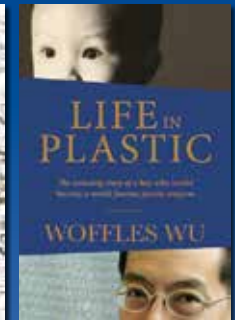
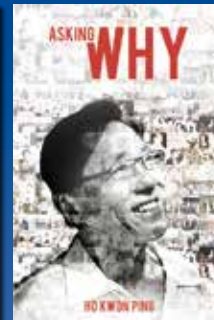
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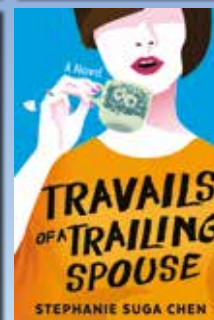
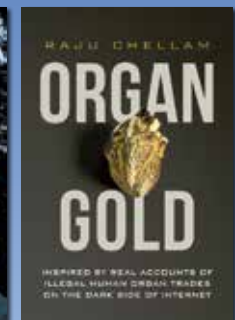
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Straits Times Press

# The crown jewel of Changi Airport

The timely investment will help Changi keep its edge as dogfight for premier status intensifies and air traffic grows

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Senior Aviation  
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ABOUT ONE IN THREE TRAVELLERS WHO FLIES to Changi Airport is just passing through.

That is more than 20 million travellers a year, going by last year's total traffic, which hit 65.6 million.

Currently, those transit passengers with more than eight hours to kill before their next flight may decide to leave the airport and explore the city, confident that they can make it back in good time.

Travellers with about two or three hours in hand are likely to just hang around the terminal.

For everyone else in between, it can be quite painful waiting for five, six or seven hours to pass.

This is a key target group for Jewel Changi Airport, which welcomed its first public visitors on April 11 and opened to all travellers on April 17.

Located where an open-air carpark used to be, it is directly connected to Terminal 1, and linked to Terminal 2 and Terminal 3 via air-conditioned travelators.

Travellers with long layovers can head to the 10-storey complex, which has more than 280 shops and restaurants, as well as an indoor waterfall and a five-storey garden with more than 2,000 trees and palms, and over 100,000 shrubs.

Jewel will also offer play attractions from June 10, such as a 50m-long suspended bridge with glass flooring, mazes and slides.

Travellers can opt for early check-in and wander around freely.



A total of 26 airlines including Singapore Airlines – representing 60 per cent of departing flights at Changi – will offer early check-in at Jewel. More airlines are expected to come on board in the coming weeks and months.

For travellers whose airlines do not offer early check-in, they can still drop their bags off at a designated area in Jewel.





Once they are done shopping, eating and relaxing, they can collect their bags and proceed to check in for their next flight.

Jewel, of course, hopes to entice not just transit passengers but all travellers flying from Changi – hoping that they will arrive a few hours before their flights to spend time and money there. The other big group is local residents.

At \$1.7 billion, Changi's Jewel is not a cheap buy. It is, however, a necessary investment in the future of the Singapore air hub, and could well reap huge benefits for Changi Airport Group (CAG) and CapitaLand.

With travellers becoming more discerning and demanding, and the dogfight for premier air hub status intensifying, an airport has to be more than

Visitors taking photos and selfies on April 11 at the Topiary Walk in the Canopy Park located at the top level of Jewel. (See also next page)  
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



just a place for planes to land and take off.

The best airports in the world today are those that also provide great shopping, dining, and other facilities and services.

Hong Kong International Airport, for example, is developing the 25ha SkyCity mega integrated development, set to be completed in phases in the coming decade.

Beyond that, an airport is the first view of a country that visitors get, and is critical to a nation's brand.

The Singapore authorities have always been aware of this and, while others try to copy the formula, they seek to stay one step ahead of the competition.

CAG chief executive Lee Seow Hiang made the point when he said: "Located on the doorstep of the award-winning Changi Airport, Jewel will be a place

where Singapore and the world meet."

The airport's investment in Jewel is timely, coming at a time when the demand for air travel, especially in the Asia-Pacific, is expected to grow strongly in the coming decades.

It is, however, not the only thing that Changi is doing.

Even as Jewel was being constructed, T1 received a makeover to improve its look and introduce improvements.

Check-in counters have been replaced, more self-service check-in kiosks have been installed and the baggage collection area has been expanded.

T2 is next, with upgrading works slated to start later this year.

When all the works are completed, Changi's total handling capacity will hit about 90 million travellers a year.

Beyond that, works have started at Changi East, which includes the construction of T5, a passenger terminal that will eventually be bigger than T1, T2 and T3 combined. T5 is expected to open around 2030.

If the proportion of transit travellers remains the same, then the number of those passing through Changi with time on their hands will grow exponentially. To this large group, Jewel beckons. [ST](#)

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**With travellers becoming more discerning and demanding, and the dogfight for premier air hub status intensifying, an airport has to be more than just a place for planes to land and take off.**

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ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG



## Lunch With Sumiko

# I feel like a semi-citizen of Singapore'

Over 40 years, architect Moshe Safdie has witnessed the country change even as he helped shape its skyline

LUNCH WITH ARCHITECT MOSHE SAFDIE IS AT one of the nicest dining spots in the new Jewel Changi Airport, which he designed.

We're at Tonito, a Latin American restaurant, whose terrace looks out to a valley of trees. Amid this lush vegetation, you see – and hear – the world's tallest indoor waterfall as it comes crashing 40m down.

It's noon but you don't feel Singapore's heat or humidity because Jewel is climate-controlled to a pleasant 24 deg C. It's like spring in a tropical jungle, if such a thing exists.

This is beautiful, I say, gesturing around me.

Thank you, Mr Safdie says.

I ask if he's happy with the way Jewel turned out. "Very, very happy," he replies with a hint of a smile. "I couldn't be happier today seeing the people – they're all smiling."

Built at a cost of \$1.7 billion, Jewel is a mega-mall addition to Changi Airport. It houses, among other things, 280 restaurants and shops, a big terraced garden called the Forest Valley, and the giant waterfall called the Rain Vortex. It is, in Mr Safdie's words, "a

marketplace in nature." The Forest Valley was inspired by the James Cameron movie Avatar.

With Jewel, the Israeli-born architect who grew up in Canada and lives in the United States has another Singapore landmark to his name.

His most famous work here is the Marina Bay Sands (MBS) integrated resort. Completed in 2010, MBS' three towers changed Singapore's skyline forever, and for the better.

In town for Jewel's public preview, Mr Safdie arrives at the restaurant with several colleagues, including from the Singapore office of Safdie Architects. They're also having lunch and take a table next to us.

He's wearing his trademark white shirt with a band-collar. I'd read somewhere that he'd designed it himself and gets it tailored in different types of fabric to suit the seasons. A Lamy pen is tucked in the shirt pocket.

I arrive before him and am planning to let him have the seat facing the waterfall, but he beckons me to take that chair instead.

He's serious, straightforward and doesn't smile much. But he looks you straight in the eye when he

At 80, Israeli-born architect Moshe Safdie keeps a full schedule with projects around the world. Jewel Changi Airport is his latest work, and with the new mega-mall, the airport can now boast not just comfort and service but also architecture, he says. Throughout his career, he has been firm in his belief that architecture is about building for people.

ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

## SUMIKO TAN

Executive Editor



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Visitors enjoying a view of the Shiseido Forest Valley from the Canopy Park at Jewel.  
ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI



**The notion that we are artists to be there for pleasure of self-expression is nonsense. Our mission is to build good environments... We affect people's lives.**



– MOSHE SAFDIE

### JUGGLING PROJECTS

At 80, the Boston-based architect has the energy levels of someone much, much younger.

His travel schedule sounds punishing to me, but he doesn't seem to think so.

While working on Jewel, he had to be in Singapore once every six weeks. He was also juggling other mega developments around the world, such as the Raffles City complex in Chongqing, China, a medical school in Sao Paulo, Brazil, a library in Idaho in the United States, and an apartment complex in Quito, Ecuador.

On top of this, he teaches and will be doing a semester in Harvard.

I ask if he's ever thought of retiring. "I couldn't possibly," he says. "I couldn't turn this off."

Projects take between five and 10 years to realise, so at any given time there'll be at least four or five under construction, and another four or five at the design stage.

speaks, is keen to hear your views on things, and his manner is altogether charming and easy to like.

The noise from the waterfall is deafening and coupled with the pop music pumping from the restaurant's speakers, we have to almost shout to hear each other, but he doesn't seem bothered by this.

We get our orders out of the way. The menu features family-friendly fare like skewers, sandwiches and tacos. We both get the corn soup – which he later pronounces "not hot but it's good" – and he opts for grilled chicken and I try the huevos rancheros.

He takes out his Lamy pen, grabs a paper napkin and sketches out for me the life cycle of a project with periods that are busy, those that are less so, and periodic peaks of crisis that are bound to happen.

Is it easy to switch your mind from one project to another? "I'm lucky that I can focus completely and reprogramme," he says. "I can spend two days or five hours in the office absolutely focused. Go upstairs, different project."

And are you a scary boss, I ask, because I can imagine him to be intimidating.

He calls out to his staff at the next table: "Am I a scary boss?" They laugh, a little nervously I sense. A woman walks over to our table and says: "He's my mentor. I stopped treating him as a boss some time ago. He's a teacher."

"Am I scary to the junior people in the office?" Mr Safdie asks again. She smiles and says: "No. He is the most hardworking person in the office and doesn't complain about work. So we can't complain about work."

### WORKING WITH SINGAPOREANS

His first visit to Singapore was in 1976. In the early 1980s, he did a condominium called the Habitat in Ardmore Park. He submitted plans for HDB's Simpong new town in the 1990s, but "it didn't get built. They thought it was too radical."

A design for the new National Library was also rejected, and his next project was The Edge on Cairnhill, another condominium. Then came MBS, which cemented his name among Singaporeans.

I suppose you stay at MBS when you're in town, I remark. He used to, until last year when he switched to the Ritz-Carlton. "Too busy in Marina Bay. Too many people, and people coming to me all the time for autographs and pictures."

(The owner of Totino also comes up to him during the meal to shake his hand. He graciously says hello.)

After MBS, he did the impressive Sky Habitat condominium in Bishan, then Jewel, and is also now working on the Surbana Jurong campus in the Jurong Innovation District.

"In many ways I feel like a semi-citizen of Singapore," he says when I ask what's the best way to describe him as he's sometimes known as Israeli, sometimes Israeli-Canadian, or American.

"I've been here around 40 years, in and out, a good part of my professional life. People ask me what countries do you feel affiliated with. I'd say Israel, Canada, very much Canada, United States but always as an observer, and Singapore."

He adds that he'd never met the late Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew. "I'd always wanted to meet him," he says, remarking at another point "you were lucky to have him."

He lets on that his firm has submitted a design for the Founders' Memorial competition. "We usually don't do competitions. I had such fondness for him that I decided we should make a submission."

You must have seen a lot change in Singapore over 40 years, I say. "Did I ever," he replies.



He's impressed with the long-term view Singapore takes in physical planning, building infrastructure "not just for need but anticipating need."

"That's true of Changi. It's true of the highways. It's true of the MRT"

What has also struck him is how the landscape has always featured in planning. While this was an idea mooted by Mr Lee, it has been embraced so strongly since. Beyond urban planning, he's struck by the political change.

"I'm always looking at Singapore as an Israeli. We both started with the British, and modified the British system. I think you've done better than Israel."

When he's in the US, he often finds himself defending Singapore when issues like the caning of criminals surface, he says.

"They flog in Singapore, you know, the usual. And I say, look at their civil service. Look at the fact that there's a clean government, there's no corruption. Look at our government," he says.

"So it's fascinating to watch Singapore evolve politically in the context of the changes to the world where democracy gets to be more in doubt in the West, and here the model gets to be more credible as time goes by.

"That doesn't mean I agree or I appreciate 100 per cent of all policies, but there's certainly transformation here towards opening up, while in the West there's a transformation towards losing confidence."

He likes how decision-making in Singapore is rational and is impressed by the quality of civil servants he has worked with. "Most Western countries, having a government job is the bottom of your profession. I don't think that's true here."

All this has made a difference not just to the way his firm has been able to operate, but also to the results. "People look at Marina Bay Sands and ask, how did you get that done? How is that possible? How did you get it done in four years?"

Jewel, too, was very complex given constraints like site size and height. But it was also able to be completed in four years.

I ask if Changi is his favourite airport.

"It's by far the most comfortable place to travel through" is his response.

I take that to mean yes, and ask which would be his second favourite.

Architecturally or in terms of comfort, he wants to know.

He likes Zurich airport but not because of its architecture, and he likes Hong Kong airport because architecturally it is interesting.

"It's very rare that you can combine architecture with the comfort of service... The fame of Changi was never for architecture, it was for service."

But with Jewel, he adds, Changi now has both.

## 'WOW' IS A TERRIBLE WORD

He was born in the seaside city of Haifa in Israel and his family moved to Canada when he was 15.

Besides Canadian and American passports, he

holds an Israeli passport and has strong views of what's happening in the country.

When I ask what he makes of the recent general election there, he shakes his head and says "tragedy."

He wasn't interested in becoming a textile merchant like his father. In high school, he took an aptitude test and scored well in maths and art. His teachers said he should do architecture, which he did at McGill University, and enjoyed.

He found success in his mid-20s when his university thesis on modular housing with prefabricated pieces and urban gardens became a reality. The Montreal property, called Habitat 67, has since been designated a heritage site.

He still has a unit there but lives in a renovated 18th century house with his photographer wife in Boston.

His eldest daughter is an architect, a son studied architecture but became a playwright, and he has two other daughters, an artist and a social worker – "the communist in the family", he says in a rare joke.

He has won many awards for his work, which are mostly large-scale urban projects with bold shapes and integrated green spaces. He's not averse to small projects "but people don't come to me with houses."

Has he done anything he has regretted? He cites a hotel he designed when he first moved to Boston. The developer was very traditional. "I go by it and I say, 'Why did we do this?' I guess we had to break in."

Throughout his career, he has been firm in his belief that architecture is about building for people.

"The notion that we are artists to be there for pleasure of self-expression is nonsense," he says. "Our mission is to build good environments... We affect people's lives."

Good architecture is measurable, he continues. "It's absolutely measurable in the way people's lives are impacted by whatever the building happens to be."

The problem with architecture today is that there's too much focus on looking for the "wow effect" and less about ensuring buildings can make people live better.

"It's 'Where is the wow?' – terrible word," he notes.

"So you get this big sensation in the magazines, something is twisted and doing this and doing that, then you never hear about it again. We need a longer-term view of quality in architecture, not just opening day."


With Jewel behind him, he has other projects here, including a new fourth tower for MBS.

I tell him there's concern the current skyline created by MBS' three towers will be marred by a fourth. Tower No. 4 isn't out to compete with the first three, he assures.

"It's like bam bam bam, boom! Stopping there," he says, using his hands for emphasis.

The new tower will complement the existing ones but still be an icon in its own right.

We've come to the end of lunch and he has a full afternoon ahead. There are more interviews to do and he has to lead journalists on a tour of Jewel.

We say goodbye and he sets off jauntily with his colleagues. It's all another day's work for him. 

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**I've been here around 40 years, in and out, a good part of my professional life. People ask me what countries do you feel affiliated with. I'd say Israel, Canada, very much Canada, United States but always as an observer, and Singapore.**

”

– MOSHE SAFDIE

THE STRAITS TIMES SAYS

## *An act of imagination produces a Jewel*

The opening of Jewel Changi Airport to the world is an example of Singapore's efforts to stay relevant to others by exceeding its expectations of itself. What once was Terminal 1's open-air carpark has been transformed beyond spatial, commercial and aesthetic recognition by the appearance of Jewel. With more than 280 shops and food and beverage outlets, it resembles a mega shopping mall. But it is more than that. The 14,000 sq m Canopy Park, the size of 11 Olympic-size swimming pools, is located on the top floor of the 10-storey development, distinguished by its dome-shaped facade made of glass and steel. Functionally, Jewel will justify its presence at Changi by offering travellers a host of aviation facilities that would enhance their experience. It should help to keep Changi and Singapore at the vanguard of the aviation industry, which is marked by intense competition, not least from regional challengers such as Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Hong Kong and Seoul.

However, what is more remarkable about Jewel is that it is an act of imaginative daring. Who would have thought that a humble carpark could transform into the site of a skyline-altering enterprise? Renowned Israeli-Canadian architect Moshe Safdie must be complimented for the transformative vision that has made Jewel possible. Of course, he could not have done so without the support of politicians, bureaucrats and others here who refused to be content with a carpark when a Jewel could do. The development is a testament to the possibilities of collaboration between administrative foresight and architectural genius.

This is the spirit in which Singapore must utilise its limited size to expand living space for citizens and its global footprint. The blueprint for that ambition was laid by Singapore's economic architect, Dr Goh Keng Swee, whose vision transformed Jurong, once a habitation of swamps, jungles and small fishing villages, into the industrial heartland of early-independent Singapore. Many did not expect "Dr Goh's folly" to last; some did not expect Singapore itself to survive. Both did.

More recently, Singapore has been on a drive to give old places new uses. The relocation of port terminals, including those in Tanjong Pagar and Pasir Panjang, to Tuas will free up some 1,000ha of land for a new waterfront city. Changes therefore are afoot for Sentosa, the adjacent Pulau Brani and the waterfront along Tanjong Pagar, with plans being made to develop new attractions and give the area a distinctive imprint. Likewise, although the Central Business District is a fixture of the financial landscape, it is envisaged to be a place for working, living and playing so that it does not exhaust its social possibilities at dusk every day. It is through such imaginative measures that Singapore can reinvent itself. Jewel must shine the way ahead for projects yet to come. **ST**

## *Singapore reinvents*

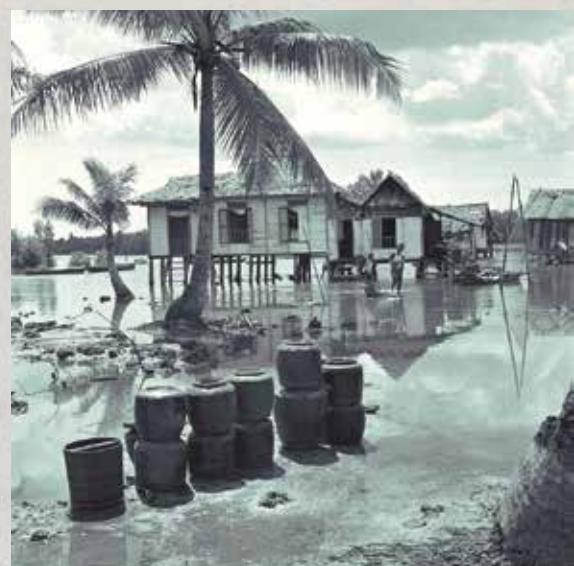
### **BEFORE** Changi's Terminal 1's open-air carpark



ABOVE: Before it blossomed into the opulent Jewel Changi Airport, the plot of land opposite Changi Airport Terminal 1 was once its open-air carpark before Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong unveiled plans to build a multi-storey complex at the National Day Rally in 2013.  
PHOTO: ST FILE

RIGHT: The star of Jewel is its 40m-high HSBC Rain Vortex, the world's tallest indoor waterfall, that features water falling through the roof at a velocity of 10,000 gallons per minute.  
PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

### **BEFORE** Jurong East





## NOW Changi Jewel



## NOW Jurong East



**FAR LEFT:** Jurong East had its own humble beginnings as it began as an area of mangrove swamps, kampongs and jungle. One of its kampongs was Kampong Teban, a fishing village located just north of Pandan Reservoir in the 1950s.

PHOTO: ST FILE

**LEFT:** Kampong Teban was later converted into Teban Gardens, an estate which lies in the Jurong East district. Today, Jurong East is home to an estimated HDB resident population of 78,000 and a major regional centre in the West.

PHOTO: CMG

– Compiled by Dominique Nelson



# An 'unreal' victory to revive belief and regain greatness

Woods' win is beyond anyone's understanding

IT WAS ALWAYS GOING TO HAPPEN IN APRIL. NOT because it is the Masters but because it is spring and what else was this Sunday (April 14) but rebirth and renewal. What else was this victory but the bloody brilliant blooming of Tiger Woods.

What else was this 15th Major but lovely lunacy, a victory which he called "unreal", a moment so astonishing that all people were saying was "Did you see that? Did you?" It's the sort of thing you might say about the return of Halley's Comet, something compelling and mysterious all at once, something – in its 11-year gap between Majors – you know you'll never see again.

What else is this but proof that we're still illiterate about how deep greatness runs in champions. We think we know talent, we think we comprehend courage, we think we fathom work ethic, but this is beyond our understanding. Only Jack Nicklaus, owner of 18 Majors, kept saying Woods will win another Major because Nicklaus knows the nature of golfing genius.

Listen, it had been 3,954 days since Woods won a Major, 1,199 was his ranking at end-2017 and 25 was the number of months he missed through injury. It's a staggering landscape of frustration, a confidence-stealing stretch of nothingness whose soundtrack was people saying No More Majors. Remember, you said all this. Me, too.

But athletes are often deaf to anything but their own urgent voices that wake them early, make them sit in painful ice baths, force them to relearn their art. Part of greatness is a survival instinct. They push because sport is sometimes all they have and

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they strive because the game is who they are. On the field, they know, they are heard the clearest.

Comebacks arrive in multiple forms. Muhammad Ali lost his right to box because he stood for principle and forfeited three years of his prime and then returned as The Greatest. Ben Hogan fractured a collar bone, his pelvis, his left ankle and chipped a rib in a car accident but healed and won six more Majors.

But with Woods it wasn't only injury but insult, it was – irrespective of how much of it you think he deserved – the incalculable punishment of public disgrace, glee over his fall, police mugshots, Internet shaming. He wasn't rebuilding just a swing, or a body but his being. In his revival there is an inherent redemption.

And so, on April 14, when his face was tight with purpose and he patiently schooled the very generation he inspired, he gave us and himself what he needed.

Proof.

He can still do it in Majors. He can still, with this glued-together body, at this age of 43, with the distance he hits (he was 58th in driving distance), and his inability to

practise as much, find a way to win.

He still has some of that quality which we've never found an adequate name for and usually leave it as Clutch or Closer. He can still make the game bend to him and rivals fold in error or is it terror? He can still keep you awake, get Michael Phelps to follow him and Serena to tweet about him.

He can still make people cry. You didn't?


He can still hit immaculate shots through a funnel of trees on the 11th and turn golf into iron poetry. He can cosy a putt from a continent away, down a slope, to a few inches on the ninth with a precision a watchmaker might swoon at. Later he said, "the body's not the same as it was a long time ago, but I still have good hands"

He can still outdo himself, like winning a Major for the first time when not in the lead after 54 holes and showing his kids, and ours, why people once made a fuss about him. Genius in the gum-chewing flesh, not Daddy in an old, YouTube video. In the end when he gathered his children to him this wasn't heroic Woods, just the human one.

He can still inspire, simply by his work ethic, by his bloody-mindedness, by his embrace of the simple, exhausting truth that "well, you never give up. That's a given. You always fight. Just giving up's never in the equation." It's what other athletes, all friends with suffering, admire deeply and when asked what Woods' win meant to him, Joseph Schooling replied: "It means that anything is possible if you keep at it."

Inside the ropes is where Woods found greatness and it is here where he, alone, had to refind himself. Where he had to face his older, less-sure self and discover if he had any history left in himself to make.

He did. He found it among the pines on a spring afternoon swollen with emotion while wearing a shirt whose colour means stop but he can't. Tiger Woods can still do stuff.

Like make you believe in him again. 

**He can still hit immaculate shots through a funnel of trees on the 11th and turn golf into iron poetry. He can cosy a putt from a continent away, down a slope, to a few inches on the ninth with a precision a watchmaker might swoon at.**

”





PHOTO: REUTERS

## Big Picture

# Welcome to Mars on Earth

IT LOOKS A LOT LIKE THE RED PLANET, DRY AND desolate, but it is not a million miles away.

China's Mars Base 1 Camp is actually in the barren, windswept hills of northern Gansu province, with the Gobi Desert as its backdrop.

The Mars simulation base, which opened in April, comprises several interconnected modules, including a greenhouse and a mock decompression chamber.

It welcomed about 100 excited Chinese teenagers on opening day.

Conceived by a media company and local officials, the facility is meant to boost tourism in the area.

Plans are also set to expand the Mars camp in the coming years, with the aim of attracting two million visitors a year by 2030.

China's space programme, with its recent lunar probe landing, has captured the imagination of the Chinese people.

The country is also developing powerful rockets to send a probe to Mars in 2020. [ST](#)



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