

A Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

ONE OF THE ICONIC IMAGES of modern Asia is the ubiquitous construction crane. In all directions in countless cities throughout the region, these instruments of architectural aspiration rise into the skies, symbolizing the growing prosperity of Asia and the hopes that are invested in its cities.

But whether viewed from the ground or from the sky, all is not well with Asia's cities. From worsening air pollution and intolerable traffic congestion to festering slums and poor drinking water, the challenges of managing urban Asia are daunting, and only set to grow. The Asian Development Bank estimates that some 1.1 billion people will migrate to Asia's already teeming cities over the next two decades. The time to grapple with how best to manage urban Asia is now.

We are pleased to announce that in this issue of *Global Asia*, we have joined forces with the World Economic Forum to produce a package of essays that explore the nature of the challenges facing cities in this region. To be sure, many of these challenges are faced by cities everywhere, but with Asia's rapid economic growth, there are both special risks and opportunities. As Paul A. Oliver, head of the World Economic Forum's SlimCity initiative says in this issue, "Asia's cities are at the forefront of the global challenges of urbanization." Included in this package of stories is an exclusive interview with Seoul Mayor Se-hoon Oh, who presides over one of the Asia's great mega-cities.

Elsewhere, with the US presidential elections looming, in this issue of *Global Asia* we

feature a debate over the foreign policy priorities of Democratic candidate Barack Obama and Republican candidate John McCain. What American voters decide will have clear implications for Asia. We also present a fascinating graphical representation of research by the East-West Center on precisely why Asia matters for America, as business with Asia reaches deep into the American landscape and American lives. We look at NATO's growing interest in Asia, and raise the question whether a closer relationship is worth exploring. Turning to Malaysia, we look behind the recent political earthquakes that threaten to shake the ruling coalition's decades-old hold on power in one of Southeast Asia's most prosperous economies. We also delve into Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's surprising difficulties in his relations with the rest of Asia, following the high expectations engendered by his election last November. The recent mass protests in South Korea, meanwhile, provide an opportunity to uncover an intriguing example of how the Internet can reshape the dynamics of politics in Asia's most wired nation. Finally, we provide reviews of a series of compelling books on the need for a new regional order and the continuing challenge of Islamic fundamentalism.

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Sincerely yours,

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