

EXPLORING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS YIN SHUI SI YUAN (RECALL THE SPRING WHEN DRINKING THE WATER)

Dear Ministers

EXPLORE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS WITH TEMASEK

As a result of a recent visit to China, Mongolia, Russia and Singapore described in the attached, I urge you to undertake immediate discussions with Ho Ching, Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Temasek Holdings and relevant others in order to develop an investment plan aimed at mutually reducing debt and improving trade relations through better coordinated, self-determining approaches to gaining sustainable development while cutting unnecessary costs. According to an article entitled 'Temasek to explore public co-investment' in The Straits Times (30.7.09 p. 1) Temasek is currently seeking to expand its pool of stakeholders and improve its performance discipline. Ho Ching reiterated Temasek's position as a long term investor and stated that it will remain focused on Asian investments due to the region's robust prospects for growth. Its portfolio mix includes 30% in Singapore with 40% in the rest of Asia, 20% in industrialised countries and up to 10% for markets such as Latin America and Africa.

The Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) to the Prime Minister (PM) of Singapore report entitled 'A Lively and Liveable Singapore: Strategies for Sustainable Growth' is discussed from a global and Australian perspective in this context later. The discussion in 2008 between the Australian PM and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono on a 'New phase of Australia, Indonesia cooperation' (New Sabah Times, 14.6.08, p. 16) also appears particularly significant. They apparently discussed an EU-style Asia-Pacific Community to be set up by 2020 to include India, China and the US. The PM pointed out the Association of South-East Asian Nations provides a model of regional cooperation which could be expanded. The leaders signed an agreement on forests and carbon trading. Implementation of the G20 London Summit Leaders Statement and Declaration on Strengthening the Financial Systems (2.4.09) requires consideration in related global and regional development contexts in which carbon pollution reduction and offset development also require close attention to introduce triple bottom line accounting, which is economic, social, and environmental. In the absence of such broadly planned and linked competitive directions, Singapore and those responsible for the IMCSD report appear highly unlikely to achieve sustainable development and humans will continue to kill off many competing and vulnerable forms of life as usual. Save yourself and others' money to spend it on something newer and much nicer. (All those guards in uniform standing at entrances in Russia look bored to tears to me.)

According to a speech by Ho Ching (Business Times 27.6.08) which she made at the Asia Society's 21st annual dinner in Washington and where she received the society's International Business Award, Temasek and the Government of Singapore Investment Corp are among sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) that have pumped money into major international banks as they floundered amid massive losses caused by the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US. She said Temasek has never been a sovereign wealth fund in

the conventional sense but was more like ‘a sovereign poverty fund’ which was set up in 1974 to manage and develop the economy as a whole. During the 1960s and early 1970s the government was desperate to get investments to provide jobs and this trying period was exacerbated by Britain’s withdrawal of its forces east of Suez. British withdrawal was compounded by an oil shock and a US recession in the early and mid 1970s. Singapore had no oil money and no natural resources and Temasek was not managing the country’s few foreign reserves. It was formed simply to take a load off an embattled government and provide an independently focuses, professionally managed and commercially disciplined approach to investments.

Ho Ching describes Temasek today as ‘a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-national 34 year old family, with non Singaporeans forming over 40% of our globalised senior leadership’. Temasek apparently continued to build on its ‘foundation for financial discipline through a maiden Yankee bond in 2005 and a triple-A credit rating by Moody’s and S&P, all with full disclosures’. Ms Ho said:

There is a phrase in Chinese: yin shui si yuan – ‘remember the source when you drink the water’. This is why Temasek donated US \$350 million (S\$500 million) last year to a Trust for the larger community in Asia and Singapore. If we continue to do well, we will continue to add to this community endowment.

According to the Straits Times (30.7.09 p.1), building long term value is also reflected in Temasek’s pay structure which is ‘geared towards a strong alignment with long-term shareholder value’. The Straits Times states that it understands a portion of each Temasek staff member’s bonus goes into a pool to be paid over several years. If the company betters an internal performance benchmark, money from the pool is paid to staff. If it does not do so, either no money is paid from the pool or the pool diminishes. Ms Ho said Temasek expected bumps along the way but that the longer term potential – which means twenty or thirty years – remains strong.

Google also indicates that Ms Ho also gave a speech to Mr Lu Hao, Beijing Vice Mayor (Foreign Investments) and others at the launch of the Capitaland (China) Investment Company in Beijing on 26.4.04. She expressed her delight at being back in Beijing with spring in the air and praised ‘an attractive capital city’ with ‘clean wide streets and extensive tree planting’. There is certainly no stronger Australian admirer of recent Chinese governments and what they have undoubtedly accomplished for their people than I. Nevertheless (and fair suck of the sauce bottle) Beijing in spring is far from Paris. Its streets appear clean mainly because of the vast armies of people industriously cleaning them of plastic water and other bottles, bags and many other things from early morning until late at night. Whenever I saw a tree successfully struggling through all the concrete I felt like cheering its efforts. Nobody could tell me whether the brown haze constantly hanging over the city and its environs is the result of the fact that the city may one day be swallowed up by the Gobi Desert or is there principally as a result of other production. According to the 2009 edition of the Lonely Planet guide entitled ‘Trans-Siberian Railway’ the Gobi is currently only 150 kilometres away from Beijing and is advancing

towards the capital at the rate of 2 kilometres per year. The Lonely Planet chapter on the environment is a good overview. It's a pity nobody else in travel seems to know much.

CURRENT AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

The article by Malcolm Turnbull, the Leader of the Opposition (LOO) in the Sydney Morning Herald Weekend Edition (SMH 1-2/8/09, p 6 News Review) asks some good questions, including:

If the Prime Minister (PM) has a detailed strategy to reduce Labor's debt, why wouldn't this be the centrepiece of debate at this weekend's Australian Labor Party (ALP) national conference?

The LOO says the PM has no plan to reduce debt. Whether this is true or not, I offer the holistic planning approach above and below which centrally involves attempts to work with Singapore and others in the region to achieve the key sustainable development goals of all as effectively as possible. In this context, your attention is primarily drawn to the recent report of the IMCSD to the PM of Singapore which is entitled 'A Lively and Liveable Singapore: Strategies for Sustainable Growth'. A critique and recommendations calling for more central recognition of human health and its related environments, to gain more effective and co-ordinated action for sustainable development are offered for discussion with Ms Ho and as many others as possible quickly.

The article by Peter Hartcher in the same edition and section of the SMH (p.9), on the close ties between Australian and US governments is also noted in this context, especially when Kurt Campbell, a senior official in the Obama Administration is quoted as stating:

Right now the Administration is still in the process of putting together its trade policy in a way that can be explained and defended internationally. I would say simply that we have some work to do in this regard. I would agree that we do have some work to do in this area.

One would appear an ignorant fool to disagree with this assessment. The Singapore direction towards sustainable development is discussed below to make recommendations to improve all trade related policy development, planning and implementation in a way which is also designed to reduce costs and debt by directing individual, organizational, national, regional and international interests more competitively. This submission argues the need to think globally before acting locally is the primary lesson of the IMCSD report on Singapore. Suggestions for ways forward are provided. Gee, I bet they never thought of any of this stuff before in Singapore. (Just kidding - for those who don't know me.)

Focus on Singapore Zoo, the Jurong Bird Sanctuary and many other key Singapore initiatives to protect beautiful biodiversity might have assisted recognition by the IMCSD of the first principle of the Rio Declaration which is that health is at the centre of sustainable development. From this perspective, policy directions to avoid the old or too many children burdening future generations are vitally necessary first considerations.

Think also about opportunities raised by the Australian Organ and Tissue Donation and Transplantation Authority Act which commenced in 2009 in this context. Its aims and related requirements need close examination in order to develop an understanding of how the health aims of everybody may be achieved more effectively and fairly.

Ideally, individuals have the right to make their own informed decisions. They should not normally be spoken for by lawyers, psychologists, ethicists and others. The Nuremberg Code stated all those involved in research must be properly informed and have the power and moral responsibility for autonomous speech and decision. The first principle of the Code states:

The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential.
The duty and responsibility for ascertaining the quality of the consent rests upon each individual who initiates, directs or engages in the experiment. It is a personal duty and responsibility which may not be delegated to others with impunity.

Code principles should be applied in any broadly scientific approach to individual or community management, as well as in medical experiments. Broader community education and debate rather than lawyer driven requirements and ethics committees are needed in this context. The latter may just produce red tape and often copy feudal assumptions and practices which are pre-scientific, let alone pre-Nuremberg. Clear information, broad public discussion and sensible record keeping are all key factors in healthy development, ideally assisted by development of communications and media.

In the above context, ministers and health directors' attention may also be drawn to the final report of the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission (NHHRC, 2008) 'A Healthier Future of All Australians' to seek general views on related direction, especially in regard to design of the patient electronic record. This may best be conducted in the light of the restructuring of the US health care system now being carried out and the general need for better service quality, access and equity at lower cost and also through better communication. Many Singaporean, Australian and related regional aims and strategies are more likely to be achieved if they are approached globally, from cooperative and competing regional perspectives in an Enlightenment or modern, scientific and competitive approach to commerce. (The feudal class can kiss my arse?)

SINGAPORE: STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The term 'sustainable development' is more common than the term 'sustainable growth' and one wonders what the report of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development (IMCSD) to the PM of Singapore entitled 'A Lively and Liveable Singapore: Strategies for Sustainable Growth' meant by both terms, which it appears to assume are intimately related through an unquestionable need for increased population to generate demand. This is not the conclusion China came to when the one child policy was designed. The Chinese today appear to be enormously enthusiastic domestic tourists, if the huge and happy groups being led around monuments behind their leaders' flags are any indication. The foreigner who has also marvelled at the dense high rise housing, road and related commercial development, brown skies and dust of Beijing and its surrounding

environment may naturally wonder if the lot of the Chinese people could ever have been improved so dramatically if the population had kept reproducing at the feudal rates normally recommended by Catholics and others who may be problems for the rest of us.

In Singapore, the IMCSD was established in January 2008 with Mr Mah Bow Tan, Minister for National Development and Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, as co-chairs for a broader group which primarily involved Mr Tharman Shanugaratnam, the Minister for Finance, Mr Raymond Lim, the Minister for Transport and Mr S Iswaran, the Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry. Its report on sustainable development states Singapore is a small island with finite space, limited water supplies and no natural resources which has overcome these constraints to grow and develop into a modern city. It claims that through imaginative design, careful planning and judicious land use, close to five million people have been housed in a clean and green city with one of the best environments in the world. It would be hard to disagree with this assessment, but what about the global future, in which the rest of us are also involved through global interconnections, whether we like it or not?

The IMCSD report aims to improve the way key resources such as energy and water are used, to expand the use of renewable resources and to become a top city in Asia in terms of quality of life. It wants Singapore to develop as a sustainable, high density city that is clean and green with excellent connectivity and a sense of space which also encourages community ownership and participation in development. It aims to achieve a 35% improvement in energy efficiency from 2005 levels by 2030 and a recycling rate of 70% by 2030. It aims to reduce domestic water consumption to 140L per person per day by 2030. The aim is also to reduce the level of fine particulates in the air (PM2.5) to 12ug/m and cap sulphur dioxide levels at 15ug/m by 2020, maintaining the same levels until 2030. The report also aims to have 0.8 ha of green space for ever 1000 persons, increase greenery in high-rise buildings to 50 ha by 2030 and to open up 900 ha of reservoirs and 100 km of waterways for recreational activities. It seeks to improve accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists and aims at 70% of journeys to be made by public transport. Many strategies for building new capabilities and testing new technologies are discussed in support of these aims. Many will be vaguely familiar to Australians who read reports from Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore. She and Lucy Turnbull should go there again.

The IMCSD report states that environmental, economic and social objectives will be considered holistically, and that the holistic approach to development starts with land use planning (p.23). However, this appears to be a comparatively short-sighted national approach, rather than one which examines Singapore in the comparative international and regional development context all nations inevitably share. Ideally, the Singapore direction needs to be on health discussed very broadly for all to achieve the best results. The World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Beder 2006, p. 18). The constitution and recommended direction of the IMCSD does not centrally recognise the first principle of the United Nations (UN) Rio Declaration on Environment which is that human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development and are entitled to

a healthy and productive life *in harmony with nature* (my italics). Nature may also be seen as wrought by the Hand of God. All this has policy and investment design implications. (Who wants to kill God's creatures even if it is only through neglect?)

Singapore is a city but also a state which has one of the highest population densities in the world living on only 700 square kilometres of land (p. 22) The IMCSD believes that growth and environmental sustainability are compatible and mutually reinforcing (p. 78). Its report states 'we need the economy to grow' because growth creates jobs, raises the standard of living and yields the resources needed to safeguard the environment. It also states that protecting the environment safeguards 'a high standard of public health for people and makes the city attractive to Singaporeans and foreigners alike' (p. 12). It points out that five million people now call Singapore home, which is nearly three times the number in 1960 and since that time squatter colonies and slums have been replaced by a modern city wired and connected to the world. New industries and good jobs have been created. The city has been greened and rivers have been cleaned. Public health (sic again) has been improved and a world-class public transport system has been built in a state where land supply is limited and energy, water and food must be imported. All this appears undoubtedly true. But I doubt the strategy for the future will sufficiently benefit the environment so that it is saved for future generations. There may be no limits to productivity (growth). However, economies are violently driven by short term interests. (This is an argument for more openly informed and intelligent, not slower, action.)

The IMCSD report states that because of a small domestic market 'we have to continually make ourselves relevant to the global economy if we want to grow and create good jobs' (p. 115). It states Singapore's population grew from 4 to 4.84 million in less than a decade and will grow further in the future. It claims a large population will support economic growth and make the city more vibrant. However, Singapore already has a comparatively dense population which overwhelmingly live in high rise buildings in a land which is 0.2% the size of the United Kingdom (UK) (p. 73) and where commercial construction is also continuing quickly. Does it need even more people to become sustainable? The IMCSD report thinks so. It also states that the growth of the city does not have to come at the expense of the quality of life and with careful planning and innovative solutions it can prosper as an economic hub yet remain a green and blue playground for all its residents. ('Playground' may appear to be the operative word.)

From a broader perspective on sustainable development in Asia, where China, India and Indonesia particularly appear historically to have suffered from high and rising population pressures, it seems better to encourage emigration from Singapore to maximize its green development potential. Nations ideally think globally. In the past ten years households in Singapore have consumed 64% more electricity, 21% more water and generated 21% more solid waste (p. 40). The IMCSD would like to manage the growth of private transport by halving the annual vehicle population growth rate to 1.5%. However, the report does not discuss replacing roads with greenery as a result of the new public transport plans and any cyclists will be expected to compete with pedestrians.

The IMCSD states Singapore has 360 species of birds or 60% of the number of species found in the UK, 'despite having a vibrant economy, one of the highest population densities in the world, and no countryside or hinterland' (p. 73). However, the natural biodiversity of Singapore suggests that devastation of plants and animals has recently occurred at far greater rates in Singapore than Britain. The National Biodiversity Action Plan points out that over 50% of Singapore's land is urbanised and that about 73 species of its bird populations are assumed exterminated ('extirpated') since 1819 with 79 more being considered locally threatened. Key indigenous eco-systems – namely the Burkit Timah Nature Reserve (lowland dipterocarp forest), Central Catchment Nature Reserve (freshwater swamp forest), Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve (mangroves) and Labrador Nature Reserve (coastal hill forest) are legally protected under the Parks Act (2005) and cover around 3,000 ha or 4.5% of Singapore's land area. Ominously, the IMCSD report states that in land scarce Singapore tough choices between different land uses will have to be made but that 'we will keep the Nature Areas for as long as possible' (p.73).

Singapore is in a region where the endangered mammal species which may easily become extinct include rhinos, timbadus (native cattle), pygmy elephants, orangutans, proboscis monkeys, sunbears and others. The range of such endangered species formerly included Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and beyond (Payne and Francis, 2005). The global development opportunities potentially afforded by current breeding initiatives in the beautiful Singapore Zoo, Jurong Bird Sanctuary and related protected areas in Singapore and around the world appear seriously overlooked by the IMCSD report which appears wrongly to assume that further population growth in Singapore is most desirable to achieve the national goal of sustainability. In the regional context, further growth of Singapore's population appears highly undesirable. Five million people now live there, which is nearly three times the number in 1960 (p. 115). Exactly how big a population does the IMCSD ideally want? Most people already live in concrete boxes in the sky and to call the recent Singapore commercial development Stalinist in its dimensions would be to insult the Russians. (Why is it always freezing cold inside?)

SUMMARY ON A MORE PERSONAL NOTE

I read the IMCSD report 'A Lively and Liveable Singapore: Strategies for Sustainable Growth' on 30.7.09 during a three day stopover, after a tour to St Petersburg which began in Beijing and proceeded by train through China and Mongolia to Lake Baikal, Moscow and other Russian places of interest. By comparison with anywhere urban or rural I have visited in Asia, I found Singapore exquisitely clean and beautiful with exceptionally well tended trees, flowers and lawns. One can drink the water from the tap, rather than a plastic bottle or only after boiling, which is of huge concern for a good environment. Singapore has the most beautiful zoo and aviaries I have ever seen and I bet the advertised butterfly, insect and floral attractions I have not seen are equally good. If there is an international prize for the most beautiful airport and approaches to it, Singapore surely wins. Not just a tidy town but an inspirationally green environment.

However, in line with the relentlessly people centred focus of current tourism portfolios everywhere, the critique of the IMCSD report is best summed up in a slightly amended rendition of the traditional Australian construction song 'Under Concrete and Glass':

Under concrete and glass, Singapore's disappearing fast,
It's all going for profit and for plunder,
Though we'd rather go away, they are telling us to stay,
So within their shopping malls we all must wander.

The response from the favourite, 'Mary Poppins', is 'Feed the birds, tuppence a bag'. We all must die eventually. The elderly are ideally invited to plan their own elimination. For example, one might finally feed the self-directing adult to zoo animals, after using her more attractive organs more cleverly in surgery or medicine to enhance the life of others. Choosing deaths similar to this could do everybody some good and save a lot of money. This is an example of dying with dignity to me. Roman Catholics may have their own visions of heaven. As far as I'm concerned, they can keep them to themselves. The Bali mynah and many other birds are increasingly endangered. Help Singaporeans and the animals and birds to develop in similar directions through related reforestation, water purification, pest removal and new garden initiatives. (Make it pay or be shot?)

Baby, I'm counting on you. See again the related discussion below and attached.

Yours truly, Carol O'Donnell, St James Court, Rosebank St., Glebe, Sydney 2037.

Dear Minister

This letter addresses preservation of many globally endangered species in the state of Sabah in Borneo and beyond. The Prime Minister discussed a 'New phase of Australia, Indonesia cooperation' with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (New Sabah Times, 14.6.08, p. 16). They discussed an EU-style Asia-Pacific Community to be set up by 2020 to include India, China and the US. The PM pointed out the Association of South-East Asian Nations provides a model of regional cooperation which could be expanded. The leaders signed an agreement on forests and carbon trading.

I have just returned from a Borneo Adventure tour organized by Kumuka World Wide Travel. It began in Kota Kinabalu in Sabah, a state in North Borneo and included visits to Kinabalu Park and the Kinabatangan River wildlife sanctuary. The latter appears to have an uncertain status, as discussed later. Other trips were made to Turtle Island to go snorkeling, see turtles lay their eggs and watch the rangers release newly hatched baby turtles to the sea. We also visited Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary. The tour was wonderful and organized very well by government bodies and related eco-tourism industry partners. However, I gained the strong impression that in many places this vital eco-tourism industry is seriously threatened by competing development, such as logging, forest clearing and hunting which seem likely to destroy many endangered species.

Borneo is 700,000 square kilometers and the third largest island in the world. Sabah is one of its seven states and Borneo is home to many national parks, according to Payne and Francis in 'A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo' (The Sabah Society, 2005). Kinabalu Park was Malasia's first World Heritage site, designated UNESCO in 2000. The park is (754 sq. km), which is bigger than Singapore island. It proceeds through lowland dipterocarp forest, montane oak and coniferous forests, towards alpine meadows and the stunted bushes of the mountain summit zone. In 2004 more than 415,360 visitors from all over the world came to the park and more than 43,430 climbed Mt Kinabalu. Considering the huge numbers of people walking, eating, sleeping and producing waste daily in this mountain setting, the government and all related tour organization to protect the environment and provide an enjoyable experience appeared superb to me.

There are seven other parks in Sabah, but Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary and Sepilok orangutan rehabilitation area appear possibly surrounded by potentially advancing palm oil plantations and much other urban and regional development. I was told villagers normally own their own land in Borneo and the normal process for development of palm oil plantations is for land to be leased from families by plantation developers whose managers usually pay the indigenous owners a continuing rental for growing palms on their properties, which take years to develop. Plantation workers are often contract labourers from Indonesia and the Philippines, whose presence assists the indigenous land owners to go to the city to work and educate their children.

The Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary is composed of ten land lots of varying size strung along the Kinabatangan River, and on which a variety of comfortable and apparently well run eco-tourism ventures are launched. Local people also live along the river, with their gardens. The Kinabatangan Sanctuary is now home to the orangutan, proboscis monkey and perhaps many other endangered species. However, one wonders if this is more like a concentration camp for animals than a sanctuary. Abai village and related development is closest to Lots 1 and 2. Burkin Garam Village is closest to Lots 9 and 10 and Sandakan is the main related urban centre.

Please inquire whether lease or purchase of more land for eco-tourism and to protect many endangered species for the world is possible. The park at Sepilok, outside Sandakan, which is the home of orphan orangutans, whose forest has often been destroyed, is only 4300 hectares. According to an undated educational video about the park, about 50 baby orangutans enter it per year, often traumatized by earlier experiences. Orangutans normally like to live alone, but one feels from watching feeding time in the sanctuary, that in any shrinking forest, these cousins have no chance. Tiny monkeys living in big family groups beat them up and take their food at every opportunity. (Turtle Island was terrific, but probably needs to be considered in the defense portfolio.)

Brunei has a population of 372,000 and is 'the oldest Malay state in Borneo (Royal Brunei Airlines inflight magazine, June 2008). Its immediate neighbours are the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak and the Indonesian province of Kalimantan. Sarawak is the largest state in Malaysia with 27 ethnic groups speaking over 45 languages and dialects. Two thirds of Brunei's population are of Malay descent. The

remainder is from other ethnic groups, including Chinese and expatriate workers. Islam is the official religion but those of other faiths are free to practice. In 5th century AD, Brunei traded in a major way with China but after the rise of European traders it became a British Protectorate in 1888. In 1906 a treaty brought the British residential system to the island. The Resident advises the Sultan of Brunei on all matters except those pertaining to the Islamic faith and Malay customs. In 1984 Brunei became a sovereign state with a Muslim Monarchy government. The Sultanate owns a land area of 5765 square miles on Borneo's North eastern shore.

Government controls 95% of land in Brunei and state control is blamed for slow industry diversification (Brunei Times, 15.6.08, p.1). The main source of Brunei's oil and liquefied gas is from the coastal towns of Seria and Kuala Belait, about 100 kilometres from the capital city. Revenue from mineral fuels accounts for over 95% of Brunei's export earnings. This has allowed the luxury of leaving pristine rain forests intact over more than 70% of the island, while providing all citizens with free education and health care, without taxation (Royal Brunei Airlines, June 2008). If neighbouring Sabah is a model of how Brunei might develop under increasing economic pressures, the latter could encourage the maximum possible exploitation of forest wood, followed by the maximum possible planting of palm oil, rubber, cocoa or other plantations.

Dipterocarp rain forest was once home to many Asian mammals which face greater likelihood of extinction partly as a result of concerns about global warming related to use of oil and other factors of production. The endangered mammal species which may easily become extinct include rhinos, timbadus (native cattle), pygmy elephants, orangutans and proboscis monkeys. Their range formerly included Burma, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and beyond (Payne and Francis, 2005) Malaysian newspapers suggest intense regional interest in higher education, which bookshop and television coverage does not appear to reflect. Australia offers some of the best television, newspaper and related educational coverage in the world. Please discuss the direction of the Prime Minister and President Yudhoyono with other relevant representatives to develop partnerships to reduce climate change and protect biodiversity.

Dear Sir/Madam

FEEDBACK ON THE ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS MUSEUM IN SINGAPORE

As a retired, female tourist to Singapore I received the visitor feedback form at the Asian Civilizations Museum in late July 2009. The information below and attached is first based on the questions on this form. I came to the museum alone and did not shop.

I cannot comment on the service of your staff as I did not have to queue at all to get into the museum and most of its captions were in English, which is my mother tongue, so I did not need a guide. I thought the exhibitions and information captions were excellent in every way and I was very grateful for this.

I hated the interactive guides because I am comparatively technophobic and don't always push the right button first. If it doesn't work right away, I wonder whether the machine or I am to blame. More importantly in this case, I also hate having to wait long periods of time for small amounts of information. I prefer to read at my own pace and in my own interest. (I spent many hours on the keyboards of the Museum of European Jewry in Berlin, which, like yours, seemed the biggest and most established museum in town.)

Although the content and captions in your museum appear excellent the building seems rather huge, cold, dark and not particularly clearly signposted. This does not do your excellent collection and captions justice, in my opinion. You appear to wish to hide your collections. Are you afraid those who linger may take offence at something you have said? In this context, the interactive guide who struck me most was the large head of the elderly man who constantly croons a love song to passers by. It has a Stephen King like quality in the gloom. One half expects him to suddenly leap out and rip one's head off.

I rate my overall experience of the museum as excellent because of the great wealth of exhibits and captions which provided cultural information from an apparently highly and broadly informed and objective historical, geographical and cultural perspective. (I am also thrilled by captions in English as I prefer it to guided or self-guided oral/aural tours.)

My favourite part of the museum was the information about the making of blue and white pottery in Vietnam because I had visited a village selling pots like them in Vietnam and thought they were very beautiful and very cheap. I carried many garden pots home to Australia with great difficulty and was pleased to see your museum confirmed my taste.

My suggestions for improvement are to have clearer signs, turn down the air conditioning and turn up the lights. (One assumes knocking down a huge concrete hotel in a park and moving your collection to a more beautiful, modest and naturally lit bamboo museum erected in its stead is not an option. The Rainforest Bites Back only at Singapore Zoo?)

Please see related discussion below and attached. I would be grateful for any support. (One assumes the world could now agree Queen Victoria and Eva Braun both appeared to be silly cows but at least Victoria fell in love with Prince Albert and not Hitler. Do your Islamists have any modern ideas on usury? Few seem willing to say anything about it.)

Carol O'Donnell