

Leadership Contestations, Succession, and Stability in Malaysia and Indonesia

Yang Razali Kassim

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)
Nanyang Technological University
isyangrazali@ntu.edu.sg

While Southeast Asia is generally stable, political leadership in two regional states is going through a period of uncertainty. The leaderships in Malaysia and Indonesia are undergoing some stress as they face the challenges of transition. Najib Razak, who was appointed Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2009, is due to call a general election to win his first mandate from the people. Najib's return to office is likely, though this is not a certainty, as Malaysian politics have become more unpredictable. Indonesia's President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is to step down in 2014 at the end of his second and mandatory final term in office. As the longest-serving post-Suharto president, his legacy as a leader will be under scrutiny. Leadership and political succession in Malaysia and Indonesia are critical for Southeast Asia as both countries occupy strategic positions to the region—Malaysia and Indonesia straddle the world's busiest waterway in the Straits of Malacca, while Indonesia is also the world's largest Muslim democracy and ASEAN's biggest member. The political stability of both has a bearing on the rest of Southeast Asia, which lies at the crossroads of major economic regions, such as Northeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, and Australia. This article looks at the dynamics of leadership contestations and succession in Malaysia and Indonesia with a view to assessing their impact on domestic political stability.

Keywords: Malaysia, Indonesia, leadership succession, political transitions, elections

Over the next three years, leadership in Malaysia and Indonesia will undergo renewed stress and tension. In Malaysia, the general election is expected anytime soon this year, although it does not have to be called until 2013. If the ruling Barisan Nasional (BN) is returned to power, then Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak will serve a second term as leader of the government. Unlike in the past, however, when serving prime

ministers could be easily predicted to return to office due to the overwhelmingly popularity of the ruling coalition, there is now an element of uncertainty whether Najib will indeed retake the premiership. The deciding factor will be the performance of the BN. Although chances are that it will win the next general election—though it will be a very close fight—the predictability this time is not as overwhelming as in the past. This new

state of affairs followed the surprising outcome of the 12th general election in 2008 when the BN for the first time since 1969 lost its two-third majority in the Dewan Rakyat (Parliament).

Soon after the coming 13th Malaysian polls, a presidential election will take place in neighboring Indonesia in 2014. A change in leadership is certain because the current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has reached his constitutionally-defined term limit and a new president will have to be elected. The emergence of a new leader, however, will not bring about any radical change in the political structure or milieu. This is because Indonesia's political system has somewhat stabilized in its post-*reformasi* model—one which is more democratic and therefore more supported by the people than during the Suharto era. Nonetheless, the post-*reformasi* system is still trying to adjust itself, such as reconciling the messiness of decentralization with the increasingly critical need for policy coordination. In that respect, there will be system stability despite leadership change, or put another way, there will be leadership change amid system stability in Indonesia.

Growing Unpredictability

As in Indonesia, Malaysia will also not likely see any systemic change, regardless of the outcome of the coming general election. If BN returns to power, then the long-standing political structure will again prevail wherein the ruling coalition is contested by an opposition alliance. This is where the BN coalition will rule through consociationalism—a fundamental feature of the Malaysian political system in which power is shared amongst the various ethnic groups (chiefly Malays, Chinese, Indians, as well as the indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak such as the Dayaks and Kadazandusuns)—as represented by their communal political parties. On the other side of the House are the three main opposition parties comprising the multiracial Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR or People's Justice Party), the Islamist party PAS, and the left-of-

center Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP), which together act in alliance but not yet in coalition through the Pakatan Rakyat (PR or People's Alliance). Should the PR opposition alliance capture power, it will also most likely rule along the BN model of consociational politics while the leader of the opposition alliance will be *primus inter pares* and elected prime minister. So far, there has not been any indication that a PR government would run Malaysia differently.

The three opposition parties are aiming to topple the BN this time by capturing Putrajaya, the seat of power. Should they succeed, the new prime minister will almost certainly be their leader, Anwar Ibrahim. While Anwar is confident of taking Putrajaya, there is some doubt, however, amongst analysts whether the opposition will achieve their goal in the next elections, with Anwar's own party colleagues projecting at best a tough fight (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies [ISEAS], 2012).¹ However, assuming they do, Malaysian politics may enter a new phase of uncertainty, primarily because people are not used to a major changeover, which has never happened before since independence in 1957. Many questions will be asked about the political system and its politics should the opposition come to power. Even if there is a change of government, it is unlikely to lead to any structural alteration in the political system because Malaysia's Westminster-style parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy is entrenched. The adjustment, in the event of a change-over, is likely to be manageable, although there have been opposition expressions of concern about politically-instigated ethnic riots should BN lose power.

In a scenario where the BN loses power, it will end up as the new opposition and fight to recapture it through the ballot box—as the system calls for. In other words, while Malaysian politics and leadership struggles have become more rambunctious and uncertain now, fundamentally, the political system is sound and will provide the fundamental stability that the economy needs. The big debate will be whether the sound and

fury of the political contestations in a multi-racial and multi-religious polity will generate a sense of instability or not. In fact, some argue that a reversed situation has emerged whereby Indonesia has become relatively more stable than Malaysia insofar as the political superstructures of both countries are concerned. It can be said that the system of leadership change and successions in the two countries has entered a new phase whereby predictability is not taken for granted anymore, unlike in the earlier years of the strongman leader in both countries—Mahathir Mohamad and Suharto.

While this element of unpredictability can be seen as positive in the sense that it is part and parcel of the democratization of Malaysian politics, it can also be negative in terms of the Southeast Asian notion of stability. The conventional Southeast Asian argument in favor of stability-at-all-costs is no longer valid today for both Indonesia and Malaysia. Neither do both countries regard unbridled democracy as good for them, however. The way forward for both Malaysia and Indonesia is likely to be somewhere in the middle—greater openness and tolerance towards contesting ideas and political aspirations, yet without sacrificing political stability. Future leaders in both countries will most likely embody this political ethos. Already, the current leaders—Prime Minister Najib and President Yudhoyono—are trending towards such an outlook.

Against this backdrop, what is the state of leadership contestations in both Malaysia and Indonesia, and how are power transitions taking place from one leader to another? I argue in this article that contestations for power and leadership struggles may have affected the sense of stability in both countries but have not undermined the fundamentals of their respective political systems. In both countries, there has been a trend towards democratization leading to more intense frictions that give the impression of conflict and instability. This trend, however, should be seen in the context of both countries becoming more plural politically as the global wave of democratization continues to influence the region's system of governance.

Correspondingly, changes in leadership are no longer easily engineered as in the past and who emerge as leaders are no longer as predictable as before.

MALAYSIA: UNPREDICTABILITY WITHIN A STABLE SYSTEM?

In terms of political outlook, 2012 did not start on a sweet note for Prime Minister Najib Razak, who had begun his premiership in 2009 with gusto. Najib was quick to position himself as a reformist prime minister for all—in other words, a leader of not just of the dominant United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) and the Malays, but as a national leader embodying the aspirations of all communities. Within two years, he reformed the way UMNO runs its party elections to cut down on corruption and warlordism, repealed the unpopular Internal Security Act, eased freedom of assembly, and transformed the economy to take it into the next stage of growth as a high middle-income country. Most of all, he branded his leadership on the unifying slogan of 1Malaysia to appeal to all ethnic groups. The campaign has been so single-minded that the mainstream media give the impression that 1Malaysia is widely embraced by the people, especially the minority Chinese and Indians. 1Malaysia is what he has hoped will define his leadership and set him apart from his predecessors by being the rallying cry for a united Malaysia.

It must have come as a shock in 2012 when a university opinion poll showed that majority of Malaysians were still not swayed by his 1Malaysia vision (“Survey reveals general acceptance of 1Malaysia”, 2012). Interestingly, the mainstream media and the online media gave contrasting slants of this poll by the University of Malaya carried out in 2011 whose results were reported on 9 February 2012. Both mainstream and online media, however, reported the poll quoting from the same source, the Bernama Online (“General acceptance of 1Malaysia, UM survey shows,” 2012). The Malaysian Insider (“Chinese, Indians

Most Suspicious,” 2012), an independent online portal, took a direct slant, saying the Chinese and Indian communities were the most suspicious of the 1Malaysia concept. The original Bernama report of the UM survey took a more toned-down approach, emphasizing a general acceptance of the 1Malaysia concept by Malaysians, but pointing to some reservations on the part of the public about 1Malaysia.

Bernama said the majority of the respondents or 79% of them stated that the government had succeeded in creating public awareness on the 1Malaysia concept but each ethnic group had “its own narrow reservations” (“General acceptance of 1Malaysia, UM survey shows,” 2012, February 18, para. 8). Bernama quoted UM’s International Institute of Public Policy and Management (Inpuma), which carried out the survey from May to July 2011, as saying that the government needed to constantly assure all communities of their place in Malaysia (Survey reveals general acceptance of 1Malaysia,” 2012, February 19, para. 3). The survey of 2,480 respondents included students from public and private institutions of higher education, households, civil servants, and private sector employees from several states.

If the survey is a barometer of his popularity, then Najib has much work to do. Fortunately for him, a subsequent survey between 10 and 23 February 2012 by another group, Merdeka Centre, came out more positive for him (Teo, 2012). This new survey showed that Najib’s popularity had surged in the six months prior to the survey following a string of government handouts to the public. His approval ratings rose from 59% in August 2011 to 69% in February/March 2012, backed by strong support from the lower-income groups. Still, it is unclear, the survey disclosed, if Najib’s popularity could translate into votes for BN in the coming general election. Despite his apparent climb back in the popularity ratings, UMNO itself has taken a fresh hit when Najib’s head of the women’s wing, Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, was forced to step down as minister. This followed a surprising financial scandal—exposed by the opposition through a whistle-blower—involving

her husband in what is dubbed the “cows and condos” or “Cowgate” controversy (Sagayam, 2012). Her husband has been charged with criminal breach of trust CBT for misusing public funds for feedlot for cows to buy condominiums. The opposition is capitalizing on such weaknesses in the Najib government in the run-up to the elections. Now, even Najib himself has come under attack as the opposition capitalized on a family matter—the engagement of his daughter to a local—to suggest some impropriety on the part of the prime minister, which he has denied.

The surfacing of such issues is likely to grow in intensity as the 13th elections get nearer. What seems to be emerging is the perception that Najib’s popularity has outstripped that of his party UMNO and his ruling coalition BN.

The question is whether his personal popularity is enough to win the ground. This coming general election is crucial for Najib as it would be his first electoral test since taking over the premiership from Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in 2009. While he had started his premiership with gusto, he seemed less sure-footed and in need of more time to stabilize himself subsequently, as indicated by the continued delay in calling for the polls. Initial talk of an early election in 2011 had still not materialized by June 2012. Najib is, nonetheless, widely perceived to be a more go-getting prime minister than his predecessor under whose watch the BN lost its two-thirds parliamentary majority for the first time since 1969. Najib, however, is under pressure to prove that he can live up to expectations by winning back the two-thirds majority in this coming general election (Kassim, 2010). If the survey results were a reflection of ground sentiment, then Najib faces a risk that he cannot afford come election time.

Indeed, not winning back BN’s two-thirds majority could be fatal for Najib. Within UMNO, he could face pressure to step down, in much the same way that Abdullah was forced out of the presidency of UMNO, and thus the premiership, when BN lost its two-thirds majority in 2008. The possibility of Najib losing his post is not

quite apparent from the perspective of distant observers—until insiders dropped hints about it. One big hint came in the form of Daim Zainuddin, the former finance minister.

On March 15, 2012, Daim, who was also a key UMNO leader in his time, predicted that Najib would be forced out by UMNO if he loses more seats in the coming elections. He told *Sin Chew Daily* in an interview that was quoted by *Malaysiakini* that, “Reclaiming two-thirds majority is a good vision but (Najib) should be more practical...if, unfortunately, he loses more seats, UMNO will oust him. This is politics” (“Daim”, 2012, para. 2). Daim was further quoted as saying that removing a political leader who fails to win an election is a global trend, and not just a feature of UMNO politics (“Daim”, 2012, para. 3). Daim’s prediction is taken seriously because he had proven prescient once before. In 2008, ahead of the general election then, he warned that BN would lose three states—Penang, Selangor, and Kedah—which proved more than accurate. Indeed, BN lost the three states as well as Kelantan and Perak, before Perak was snatched back when defections undermined the opposition government in that state.

Najib’s public admission that his political position was not as secure as it seemed was unprecedented. It is rare for an UMNO leader to openly concede that he could lose his seat should he not perform as leader. Since the time of Mahathir Mohamad, UMNO leaders had never openly talked about the precariousness of their own position. When Mahathir was prime minister, he led with supreme confidence and sure-footedness. A visionary leader, he knew what he wanted for the country, for UMNO, and for the Malays, and he knew how to get there. Indeed, Mahathir was so single-minded that he became forceful and authoritarian in pushing for his ideas. Mahathir brook no contradiction as he became a man in a hurry to realize his Vision 2020 of a developed country by that date.

Mahathir was so engrossed in the pursuit of his vision that he sacrificed leadership cohesion. Under his premiership, several political

challengers—or leaders perceived to have such high aspirations—fell by the wayside. Key amongst them were Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah, Musa Hitam, and Anwar Ibrahim. While Musa has retired into political oblivion, Razaleigh Hamzah and Anwar Ibrahim have turned into Mahathir’s nemesis, with Razaleigh remaining in UMNO as an in-house critic and Anwar transforming himself into the leader of the opposition.

When Mahathir stepped down in 2003, he handed over the leadership of UMNO, BN, and the country to Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. His style of leadership was softer and non-combative and the contrast was found refreshing by the people who were getting tired of Mahathir’s fighting and authoritarian streak. So when Abdullah went into the general election in 2004, he represented a new face after a long-serving prime minister. The breath of fresh air that he represented led to a massive surge of popularity for the establishment that the BN romped home to its best electoral performance in years. Paradoxically, Abdullah was eased out of power in 2009 when he failed to maintain that popularity and the BN lost its two-thirds majority as well as five states to the opposition—including two crown jewels: Penang and Selangor—before Perak was recaptured by UMNO/BN through a state-level coup.

Succession after Najib

Daim’s open statement about the precariousness of Najib’s position indirectly points to the question of the system of leadership succession in Malaysia (Kassim, 2005). In the pecking order, who comes after Najib? Unlike in the past, the order of political succession in Malaysia is not so clear today, even though the system of succession itself remains largely unchanged. Traditionally, the apex of Malaysia’s political leadership—the prime minister—is determined by whoever controls the presidency in UMNO, the dominant political party which leads the ruling coalition, BN. The deputy president of UMNO is traditionally the deputy prime minister and the next in line to be prime minister when the PM steps down.

The dynamics of leadership succession in UMNO is such that the deputy president/ deputy prime minister does not necessarily end up as prime minister. In fact, the post of deputy prime minister has been unstable due largely to power contests, rivalry, and splitting differences between the top two leaders in the party. Thus, Musa Hitam who was deputy prime minister (and UMNO deputy president) did not end up as prime minister because Musa stepped down following a bitter intra-UMNO clash with Mahathir that blew open in the mid-1980s.

Musa was succeeded by Ghafar Baba who himself did not end up as prime minister because Mahathir outlived him politically. Ghafar, in fact, was forced out as deputy prime minister when he was challenged by Anwar Ibrahim who was then a rising star in UMNO. Anwar, in turn, did not end up as prime minister even though he was clearly earmarked as heir apparent by Mahathir. Anwar was sacked by Mahathir eventually in 1998 over allegations of abuse of power and moral impropriety; and was succeeded by Abdullah Badawi. Breaking the taboo, Abdullah turned out to be the only deputy prime minister who eventually ended up as prime minister because he came at the right time. Mahathir chose to step down in 2003.

Abdullah himself did not last long as prime minister because he was pressured to step down when BN. Led by UMNO under Abdullah's watch, BN saw its worst electoral performance in years, losing its two-thirds parliamentary majority. When Abdullah took over the premiership, his position as deputy prime minister was filled by Najib. Like Abdullah, Najib successfully climbed a notch up and took over as prime minister when Abdullah stepped down. In his place as deputy prime minister came Muhyiddin Yassin. The question now is whether Muhyiddin will take over as prime minister should Najib step down.

If the pattern follows UMNO politics prior to Abdullah, then Muhyiddin's position as a potential prime minister is not guaranteed. On the contrary, if the pattern follows UMNO politics after Abdullah, then Muhyiddin should end up

as prime minister after Najib. This assumes that Muhyiddin is not challenged as UMNO deputy president. However, should Muhyiddin become prime minister, who then will be deputy prime minister to be in line for the next premiership? The truth is, it is too early to tell. Amongst the names likely to be in contention will be the current vice-presidents of UMNO—Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (defense minister), Hishamuddin Hussein (home affairs), and Shafie Afdal (rural and regional development).

This is based on the current UMNO leadership line-up. The decks will change when UMNO holds its next party leadership polls after the 13th general election. Whoever it is, there are some certainties—the next prime minister will still be from UMNO, and the next deputy prime minister will still be from UMNO. What is not certain is whether the next deputy prime minister will end up as prime minister.

INDONESIA: SUCCESSIONS FROM SUHARTO TO YUDHOYONO

Some observers of Indonesia view the country as being in a period defined simultaneously by political status and stability. Indonesia is seen to have not moved into the next phase of its democratic consolidation and is unlikely to do so in the current year (ISEAS, 2012). In fact, a more critical view is that in post-Suharto Indonesia, leadership transitions have become highly unpredictable, even volatile. Leadership succession after the fall of Suharto has been characterized by short-term presidents as Indonesia grappled with power struggles arising from new political forces emerging to compete for control of the levers of power. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) was elected the fourth post-Suharto president in 2004, emerging after three quick-serving predecessors—BJ Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati Sukarnoputri (Kassim, 2005). As Suharto's immediate successor, Habibie served for only one term. Although known as “the accidental

president” because he was not widely expected to succeed Suharto despite being the vice-president, Habibie ended up as a visionary reformist president. The democratization of Indonesia and the consequent decentralization of the political system—a trend that is still ongoing—is the result of his groundbreaking policies as president. The emergence of SBY as president was, in a sense, the culmination of the political reforms that Habibie introduced.

Through an innovative transformation of his own persona from an army general to a pro-democracy civilian president who fitted in well with the *reformasi* era, SBY succeeded in being the longest-serving president after Suharto. That, in itself, is an achievement. SBY formed a new party—Partai Demokrat (PD) or the Democrat Party—that did not exist in the Suharto era and successfully campaigned on a popular anti-corruption platform such that he was re-elected to a second term in 2009 (Yudhoyono, 2004). His party was seen as a fresh and welcome change in the political firmament. SBY did well in his first term and was re-elected for a second term in the 2009 presidential election—becoming the first post-Suharto president to be returned to office.

His political fortunes, however, took a surprisingly negative turn when his party too succumbed to the scourge of corruption in 2011, hurting SBY’s credibility as he goes through his second and final term (Saragih & Hajramurni, 2012). PD’s prospects as the party that could save Indonesia are now tarnished, with PD leaders not likely to enter the race for the next presidency. Even PD’s chairman, Anas Urbaningrum, cannot be said to be in the running because he too is a subject of intra-party mutual allegations. PD as a party also cannot be expected to be a credible platform now that its leaders are embroiled in a blame-game. As such, as far as the Indonesian public’s expectations are concerned, the search for a successor to SBY will mean having to include leaders from the Suharto era as well as potential new faces from the post-Suharto period.

SBY’s popularity has been declining since 2011 when his approval rating fell below 50%

for the first time in his presidency, compared to the near-90% just after he was elected to a second term in July 2009 (Political Risk Services, 2011). Even worse, the poll found that he was viewed less favorably than Suharto was. In fact, Suharto was rated the best of the country’s six presidents since 1945, including SBY, with over 40% of respondents viewing that political, economic, social, and security conditions being better under Suharto than under SBY. Given that this is SBY’s last term, there is a general expectation of an open contest for the next presidency. As such, we can expect a build-up of jockeying for candidacies amongst aspirants to the political leadership.

On February 23, 2012, the Indonesian Survey Institute or *Lembaga Survei Indonesia* (LSI) released the results of its latest survey of public perceptions of Indonesia’s potential leaders ahead of the 2014 presidential election. In contrast to SBY’s first term, the survey showed a general dissatisfaction with the state of the country, and by implication with his leadership. Those who thought the political climate was “poor” hit an eight-year high since SBY was elected (Hussain, 2012). The findings reflect the people’s unease over the SBY government’s failure to rein in corruption despite his campaign pledge. While the economy is doing well due to growing foreign investment and steady growth, there is a general perception that this is because the country is on what his critics say as “autopilot,” meaning to say the economy took care of itself without requiring political leadership (Hussain, 2012).

The results also threw up many surprises and evoked criticism from the elite class. One of the key findings was that if the election were held today, Indonesians would have Prabowo Subianto, a former commando general, as their new president. Alternatively, they could see a return of Megawati as president. According to the Jakarta Globe, the survey results drew fire from activists and observers who were in a huff over it (“Latest LSI presidential election survey draws fire,” 2012). A key reason for the negative reactions was the survey technique, which listed mostly personalities who had been prominent

in the public's minds, with no room left to elicit opinions about new faces they would like to see.

The survey, conducted by LSI from 1-12 February 2012, found that Prabowo, Megawati, and Aburizal Bakrie were the most popular candidates if the election were held today. Prabowo, who heads the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), was the choice of 39% of the 2,050 voters surveyed. Former President Megawati, chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), was at 28%, and Aburizal, the Golkar Party chairman, had 17%. "If the presidential election were held now, the election would go to two rounds and Prabowo would ultimately be elected president," said the LSI survey ("President Prabowo? LSI survey says yes," 2012, para. 4). A former commander of the Kopassus special forces, Prabowo was implicated in a number of rights abuses during the fall of Suharto, though he was never charged.

The LSI survey presented those questioned with a list of 18 candidates and were asked to name their top choice. A total of 17.6% chose Megawati, with Prabowo coming second (12.8%), former Vice President Jusuf Kalla third (9.7%), and Aburizal (7.2%) in fourth place. Last was Yogyakarta's Sultan Hamengkubuwono X (6.3%). LSI said Prabowo, however, topped the electability list, winning in firmness, intelligence, piety, and good looks. Aburizal came second and Hatta Rajasa, the coordinating minister for the economy, was third. Some Indonesian observers said the results could have turned out differently had the surveyed public known about their track records and weaknesses. Yet, Prabowo emerged again as Indonesians' preferred presidential candidate in a second survey released on 27 February 2012 by the Centre for Policy Studies and Strategic Development (Puskaptis) if the election were held today ("Prabowo receives presidential nod in 2nd public poll," 2012). Prabowo received support from 39% of 2,050 voters polled, followed by Hatta Rajasa (14.6%), Aburizal Bakrie (13.5%), Megawati (13%), and Akbar Tandjung, a former speaker of the House of Representatives (12.7%). Most parties have not named candidates for the

presidential election, with the exception of Golkar and the PAN, which have indicated they will nominate their respective chairmen, Aburizal and Hatta.

A significant aspect of the recent surveys was the emerging desire for new faces, especially those who have not previously contested for the national leadership. Interestingly, one such potential candidate is Rachmat Gobel, a prominent business leader who made his mark by successfully helping Indonesia host the recent SEA Games in spite of the huge logistical and organizational problems that had threatened to hurt Indonesia's reputation. Should he throw in his hat in the ring come 2014, it is likely that he will gain wide support given his popularity following the successful conclusion of the SEA Games (personal communication with a Golkar source, 2012).

Another issue threatening SBY's standing as he prepares to leave the political scene is the controversy over the 2008 bailout of Bank Century. In 2010, a majority of legislators deemed the bailout as irregular and marred by abuses of power. Calls for a criminal investigation were supported by two of PD's allies, Golkar and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which created a rift with the PD-anchored loose coalition running the country. The move was meant to target Vice-President Boediono, who was the governor of Bank Indonesia at the time of the bailout, and Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati, as parties responsible for the ballooning cost of the rescue. There are political implications from the controversy on the coming presidential election in 2014, especially with regard to the position of Boediono and Sri Mulyani.

The removal of Boediono and Sri Mulyani would create vacancies in powerful posts in the government that Golkar and PKS could claim, thus providing those parties with a platform to challenge the presidency in 2014 (Political Risk Services, 2011). Sri Mulyani has since left the government and joined the World Bank in May 2010, but not without raising the prospect of her campaigning for the presidency in 2014. Should she run, she will be a strong contender

for Aburizal with whom Sri Mulyani has had personality clashes over issues of economic reforms, which Aburizal deemed as targeting his business interests.

At the outbreak of the Century scandal, there was a planned mass demonstration in 2009 to mark International Anti-Corruption Day. SBY, at the time, reacted by suggesting that there were parties who wished to topple him and warned against any repeat of the May 1998 riots in Jakarta which toppled Suharto (Sihaloho, 2012).

Given that he cannot run again for president due to the term limit and the tarnished reputation of his party's current leaders due to the corruption scandal within it, SBY's interests will revolve around supporting personalities who could continue his reformist credentials and thus preserve his legacy. In this regard, SBY may eventually throw his weight behind Sri Mulyani should she decide to run in 2014. SBY may also bring in new faces into the leadership of PD—personalities who could revive his party's image by making it their platform to contest the 2014 presidency. To that end, a scenario in which new personalities like Rachmat Gobel turning to PD as their party to join the race cannot be ruled out.

Coup against SBY?

Just two years away from the 2014 presidential election, SBY again spoke of a possible coup against him. At a meeting with his party officials on Sunday, March 18, 2012, SBY told of a move by a "strange" group to unseat him as well as his vice-president Boediono unconstitutionally before 2014. National Police Chief General Timur Pradopo was quoted as saying on March 20 by the Jakarta Globe as saying that police would deploy intelligence officers and detectives to investigate the threat. "There is an unconstitutional movement conducted by those who reject competing fairly through democratic process. The bottom line is that this group wants SBY to fall before 2014 without a clear reason," he said referring to himself as the target (Sihaloho, 2012, para. 4). Yudhoyono reportedly added that the group would

use the momentum of a planned fuel price increase to spark provocation and agitation.

Politicians from other parties, however, dismissed SBY's articulation of a possible coup as imaginary. Deputy House Speaker from the opposition PDIP Pramono Anung doubted the existence of a group that would topple the president. He said it was unlikely that a coup could be launched because SBY was supported by a coalition of major parties while the military, intelligence and police were all behind him. One of SBY's coalition partners was even more critical. Nasir Jamil, deputy leader of PKS, an SBY ally, said the president should display more toughness and strength "rather than showing that he is a weak man" (Sihaloho, 2012, para. 13). Nasir was quoted as saying that, "People will feel that if their president is such a weak man then how will the ordinary people cope with the difficult conditions?" (Sihaloho, 2012, para. 14). The Jakarta Post in an editorial dismissed the president's fear as "some imagined coup plot" ("A coup plot? Seriously?" 2012, para. 8). Yudhoyono's reference to a coup attempt amid a fuel price hike is, however, reminiscent of 1998 when President Suharto fell from power. Suharto's move to raise fuel prices following an IMF-mandated removal of subsidies in the midst of the Asian financial crisis sparked riots that eventually forced him to step down in favor of Habibie.

CONCLUSION: LEADERSHIP CONTESTATIONS AND IMPACT ON THE REGION

While Prime Minister Najib and President Yudhoyono are leaders of two different countries, they share a common fate: both face the pressures of growing democratization. In the case of Najib, he is entering a period of uncertainty in his leadership as he faces an impending general election. While the chances of his ruling coalition, the BN, being returned to power are there notwithstanding BN's eroding popularity, there is no certainty that Najib can recapture the two-

thirds majority of parliament. His political fate as a prime minister may be in the balance should he fail to do so because that was what happened to his predecessor, who was eventually forced to step down by his own party—and no less than Daim has predicted such an eventuality on Najib.

Najib will therefore have every reason to fight tooth-and-nail to win, and win well, in the coming elections so that he will not go down in history as the first prime minister who could not last a second term. In trying to secure this, he has attempted to project himself as a reformist leader, easing civil liberties by scrapping unpopular laws like the Internal Security Act (ISA) and giving greater freedom of assembly. Even in a scenario where the opposition wins and forms the government, the existing political system will remain unchanged.

In the case of Yudhoyono, he clearly has to vacate his position because his term limit has been reached. While he started off well as a post-Suharto president, winning plaudits for his initial performance as a reformist and clean leader, Yudhoyono is seeing his legacy being undermined by unexpected problems of corruption within his party ranks. While Yudhoyono will not be able to stand again come the 2014 presidential election, the question is whether he will try to put up a candidate who is beholden to him. There has been talk about the possibility of his wife running for the office—a possibility that SBY has flatly denied. Whoever emerges as the next president of Indonesia, he or she will still operate within the existing political system. Since 1945, when the Pancasila state was declared and Negara Islam or the Islamic State was driven underground, no one has ever campaigned on the promise of a revamp or restructuring of the system.

In short, in both Malaysia and Indonesia, while we will be hearing the sound and fury of contestations and political rivalry, these will be operating within a macro framework of stability. No doubt there will be greater unpredictability in leadership, but this will be within a stable political system.

Issues of leadership contestations in Malaysia and Indonesia are of relevance to the rest of ASEAN because the manner in which leadership change and succession are played out could have wider repercussions for the region. Indeed, political stability in both countries is crucial for their respective economic growths, which in turn can have spillover effects on the wider region. This is especially so in the case of Indonesia, which is the largest economy in ASEAN and is also the most influential member of the grouping. Conversely, instability in Indonesia would have repercussions on neighboring countries and ASEAN as a whole. Nothing could vividly demonstrate this than the upheaval in 1998, which led to the fall of Suharto from power (Kassim, 2005). The downfall of the Indonesian leader after 32 years in office following the Asian financial crisis aggravated the economic and political convulsions in Southeast Asia and the wider Asian region.

At the same time, the financial turmoil also led to a leadership crisis in Malaysia, climaxing in the sacking of Mahathir's successor-apparent, Anwar Ibrahim, who was then deputy prime minister and finance minister. The sacking of Anwar eventually was followed by the exit of Mahathir himself five years later when he stepped down voluntarily. In total, at least four ASEAN countries were directly affected by the 1998 financial crisis—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines. Aside from Indonesia and Malaysia, the Philippines also saw a leadership change post-1998 when President Joseph Estrada stepped down. Najib and Yudhoyono are, however, two post-1998 ASEAN leaders whose political fates will help define the system of leadership and succession in the region in the second decade of the 21st century.

ENDNOTES

¹ Closed-door seminar with an opposition leader at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 22 March 2012, Future Direction of Malaysian Politics.

REFERENCES

- A coup plot? Seriously? (2012, March 7). *The Jakarta Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/editorial-a-coup-plot-seriously.html>
- Chinese, Indians most suspicious of '1 Malaysia', survey shows. (2012, February 18). *The Malaysian Insider*. Retrieved from <http://www.theMalaysianinsider.com/mobile/Malaysia/article/chinese-Indians-most-suspicious-of-1-Malaysia-survey-shows/>
- Daim: Najib has to go if he fails to win more seats. (2012, March 15). *Malaysiakini*. Retrieved from <http://www.Malaysiakini.com/news/192138>
- General acceptance of 1Malaysia, UM survey shows. (2012, February 18). *Bernama Online*. Retrieved from www.bernama.com/bernama/v6/newsindex.php?id=646435
- Hussain, Z. (2012, February 28). Is Indonesia powering ahead on autopilot?: Politicians not driving growth, critics say - to government's chagrin, *The Straits Times*.
- Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. (2012). *ISEAS Monitor: A quarterly survey of Southeast Asia*, (Issue 2012, No.1). Retrieved from http://web1.iseas.edu.sg/iseasmonitor/feb_2012_1.pdf
- Kassim, Y. R. (2005). *Transition politics in Southeast Asia: Dynamics of leadership change and succession in Indonesia and Malaysia*. Singapore: New York: Marshall Cavendish.
- Kassim, Y. R. (2010). Najib's UMNO: Gearing up for early elections? *RSIS Commentaries*. Retrieved from <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/Perspective/RSIS1352010.pdf>
- Latest LSI presidential election survey draws fire. (2012, February 24). *Jakarta Globe*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/printedition/latest-LSI-presidential-election-survey-draws-fire/2012-02-24/>
- Political Risk Services. (2011, July). *Indonesia country report June 2011*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Political Risk Services.
- Prabowo receives presidential nod in 2nd public poll. (2012, February 28). *Jakarta Globe*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/prabowo-receives-presidential-nod-in-2nd-public-poll/501043>
- President Prabowo? LSI survey says yes. (2012, February 24). *Jakarta Globe*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/president-prabowo-lsi-survey-says-yes/500184>
- Sagayam, A. (2012, March 12). Its my own decision, says Shahrizat; Minister to step down after senatorship expires on april 9 but will remain Wanita UMNO chief, *Malay Mail* p. 2. Retrieved from <http://www.mmail.com.my/story/it%E2%80%99s-my-own-decision-says-shahrizat>
- Saragih, B. B. T., & Hajramurni, A. (2012, February 9). Amir's efforts to root out bad apples in SBY's party turn sour, *The Jakarta Post*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2012/02/09/amir-s-efforts-root-out-bad-apples-sby-s-party-turn-sour.html>
- Sihaloho, M. J. (2012, March 20). Yudhoyono on alert for coup attempt before 2014, *Jakarta Globe*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/yudhoyono-on-alert-for-coup-attempt-before-2014/505925>
- Survey reveals general acceptance of 1Malaysia. (2012, February 19). *The Star*. Retrieved from <http://thestar.com.my/news/story.asp?file=/2012/2/19/nation/10765815&sec=nation>
- Teo, C. W. (2012, March 10). Najib's ratings surge: Survey. *The Straits Times*, p. C9.
- Yudhoyono, S. B. (2004). *Indonesia 2004-2009: Vision for change*. Bogor: Brighten Press.

