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Director's note

Pakistan is a vulnerable nation, seen by many as a failed state. But Pakistan is also a frontline state, portentously positioned between Afghanistan and India, and crucial to US interests in South Asia. The country makes headlines with earthquakes, political turbulence, the battle with fundamentalists and Al-Qaeda, ethnic violence and human rights issues. Yet behind the headlines there is little understanding of this land and its people. This is reflected too in the lack of scholarship and academic interest in Pakistan. In this issue of *IIAS Newsletter* we hope to open the door a little on this complex and troubled society with a series of articles which probe deeper into underlying problems than most newspaper headlines can afford to do. I am grateful to Kristoffel Lieten for guest editing this Pakistan special.

The international financial crisis is also felt in Asia, but in a way different from the West. In his regular column, Kerry Brown explains that China will probably come out as a winner. No doubt the shifting financial balance will also lead to a shift in political power in the world.

This is the last issue of the IIAS Newsletter in the present form. The next issue will be the 50th Newsletter of our institute, and time for a new and fresh look. The name will be The Newsletter, the style will be different but it will remain recognisable as the newsletter of the International Institute for Asian Studies, made by the same editor Anna Yeadell. Most importantly, the main line will be continued: informative articles written by experts for a broad readership on all aspects of Asian societies, past and present.

Max Sparreboom,
director



The International Institute for Asian Studies is a postdoctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Our main objective is to encourage the interdisciplinary and comparative study of Asia and to promote national and international cooperation in the field. The institute focuses on the humanities and social sciences and their interaction with other sciences.

IIAS values dynamism and versatility in its research programmes. Post-doctoral research fellows are temporarily employed by or affiliated to IIAS, either within a collaborative research programme or individually. In its aim to disseminate broad, in-depth knowledge of Asia, the institute organizes seminars, workshops and conferences, and publishes the IIAS Newsletter with a circulation of 26,000.

IIAS runs a database for Asian Studies with information on researchers and research-related institutes worldwide. As an international mediator and a clearing-house for knowledge and information, IIAS is active in creating international networks and launching international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the institute functions as a window on Europe for non-European scholars and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

IIAS also administers the secretariat of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (Asia Alliance: www.asia-alliance.org) and the Secretariat General of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS: www.icassecretariat.org). Updates on the activities of the Asia Alliance and ICAS are published in this newsletter. <

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