



Touchbutton

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Politics – poisonous, presidential or positioning – take your pick

After a very welcome respite during the latter part of the summer, politics is once again centre stage in the UK and across parts of Europe. Angela Merkel's victory in Germany has been to some extent overshadowed by the emergence of the far right, conclusive proof, as if it were needed, that the so-called populist ripples in the pond have certainly not receded. In the UK, Theresa May hangs on by her finger nails as the Conservatives seem apparently unable to resist the temptation to self-destruct with another general election sooner than 2021 seeming very likely. It is hard not to be totally disheartened – but probably not surprised – at the sheer self-obsessed career driven and power grabbing nature of most of this country's politicians. It is also extraordinary to witness the liquid poison that our politicians past and present dish out on a daily basis. George Osborne's recent unhelpful and deeply offensive remarks about Theresa May would have landed him in very hot water if they had been about virtually anyone else on the planet, but it seems fair game if it's about the Prime Minister.

With a number of notable exceptions, things are very different in some parts of South East Asia. You might have missed it, but in Singapore a couple of weeks ago, the election saw Madam Halimah Yacob elected as President of the city state for a six-year term in an unopposed, walkover election. Why a walkover? In essence, the Singapore government some time ago instituted changes to the election process, a key one of which is the reservation of an election for an ethnic community if five terms have passed without a president from that community. Consequently, this year the government said the election would be reserved for the Malay community. Whilst several other eligible Malay candidates did express a desire to stand, they dropped out for other technical reasons. A walkover was confirmed on a Monday, she was elected on Wednesday and sworn in on Thursday! We all knew Singapore is super-efficient, but wow!

And it's not just in Singapore that they do things differently to us: in Thailand, the opposition Chartthaipattana Party has publicly backed Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-Cha to continue to run the country for the next ten years, so long as he commits to help boost incomes across the country. This might be seen as playing it safe in a country that bans public discussion about democracy, and locally is seen as a move to be in the right place at the right time in the event of a coalition ever being formed, but it's hard to see anything similar happening here in the mother of all parliaments.

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