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Asia in Review

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Dear Reader,

Wishing you a good start of the week, CPG is presenting you the fifth April issue of 'Asia in Review' 2018 with updates on and insights in latest developments in law and (geo)politics in Asia.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

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Main Sections

- Law and Politics in East Asia
- Law and Politics in South Asia

- Law and Politics in South East Asia
- International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia
- Background Reading

Law and Politics in East Asia

China: Civilians' increased role in security crackdown in Xinjiang

(dql) In China's sweeping security crackdown on separatism and terrorism in Xinjiang which has transformed the far western region into a virtual police and surveillance state, civilians sent by the government to rural areas of Xinjiang are playing an increasing role. Grouped in 'work teams', they not only support local authorities to implement the social engineering policies of the government, but also assume functions of investigating and interrogating villagers on suspicion of being brainwashed by extremists and a threat to the state. Since last year more than 10000 such civilian groups have been recruited to reinforce local authorities' surveillance work in villages across the far western region. [Hong Kong Free Press/AFP]

For an interesting account and comparison of police budget spending among regions in China see Adrian Zenz in [China Brief: The Jamestown Foundation].

Japan: Opposition parties boycott parliamentary session

(dql) Six out of seven opposition parties boycotted this week's House of Representatives' session, in a move to

increase pressure on the government coalition to meet their demands for full clarification of a series of cronyism scandals in which Prime Minister is suspected to be involved. They also demand Finance Minister Aso's resignation to take responsibility for the forgery of documents by officials of the Ministry in the Moritomo school operator favouritism scandal as well as for appointing the Ministry's highest bureaucrat Junichi Fukuda who stepped down over allegations of sexual harassment of female reporters. However, the ruling parties commanding a two-thirds majority, appeared unimpressed and convened on Friday in the Diet to begin deliberations on the work-style reform legislation while Prime Minister Abe dismissed speculations about a dissolution of the House of Representatives to pave way for snap elections. [Mainichi] [The Japan Times]

South Korea: Online rigging scandal threatens constitutional revision timeline of ruling party

(dql) The online rigging scandal in which a high-ranking lawmaker from the ruling Democratic Party (DP) is allegedly involved [AiR 4/4/2018] threatens the preferred time-frame of the DP for the constitutional revision in June as the opposition parties has made the launching an independent counsel probe into the scandal a precondition for resuming talks on the constitutional revision, following their submission of a joint bill to mandate a special prosecutor's investigation into the scandal. The ruling party, however, so far has refused to meet the opposition's demand, saying it would decide whether or not to accept the independent investigation after receiving the results of the ongoing investigation of police [Yonhap], which opposition parties have rejected as "too slow and lenient." [Korea Herad 1]

Meanwhile, three opposition parties agreed to push for a revision of the Newspaper Act and tighter regulations for news service and comments sections of large internet portals. [Korea Herald 2]

Taiwan: Violence over government's military pension bill

(dql) Violence broke out when military veterans clashed with police forces during a demonstration against the cabinet's military pension reform, leaving

84 police officers and 12 reporters were injured. [Focus Taiwan] The cabinet's bill allows for for a gradual cut of interest rates of pensions of military veterans. While President Tsai vowed not to succumb to the violence and to push for military pension reform, the backlash is another challenge to her in the wake of steadily declining approval ratings since assuming office last year. [South China Morning Post]

Misinformation on the content of the pension reform disseminated online from China with the aim to foment anger among the military veterans against the Tsai administration, is another example for the use of propaganda and 'fake news' in the history of the information war between China and Taiwan, Russel Hsiao writes in [China Brief: The Jamestown Foundation].

Taiwan: Universities want government to stay away from universities' selection of administrative personnel

(dql) In a high-profile case of conflict between the government and National Taiwan University, the Association of National Universities of Taiwan has come forward with a statement calling on the government to refrain from interference in a university's decisions on the selection of a university administrator. [Focus Taiwan] The statement's background is the Ministry of Education's (MoE) refusal on Wednesday to confirm National Taiwan University (NTU) professor Kuan Chung-ming, former Minister for National Development under Ma Ying-jeou, as new president of NTU chosen by its election committee in January. [Taipei Times]

Law and Politics in South Asia

India rape cases: solution death penalty?

(jk) AiR last week reported on the rape and murder cases in India, that have been sparking public outcry and protest across the country. [Air 4/4/2018] The cases have both a significant political, as well as religious dimension. PM Modi's BJP party has been criticized for attempting to protect the men implicated in two rape cases, while offering no protection to women, children and minority groups. One of the outrageous rape cases in January this year, included a Muslim girl, gang-raped in a Hindu temple, stirring up religious tensions in addition to the heinous crime itself. According to police the girl was held, raped and killed in a Hindu temple and the crime was part of an effort to drive the girl's Muslim nomad community, the Bakarwal, out of the region. The perpetrators allegedly had political and bureaucratic backing and it is important to note that this happened in the province of Jammu and Kashmir in India's north. The province borders Pakistan and for many Hindu nationalists, this is one of the frontlines in the fight against Muslim separatist. [South China Morning Post 1]

In an effort to combat violent crimes of that kind, the Indian government has issued an ordinance to apply the death penalty for convicted rapists of children below 12 years of age. The move is yet to be approved of by parliament and doubts remain as to the real effect such a change in law might have.

After a gang-rape case in 2012 that had been widely discussed and condemned in the country, laws had already been toughened. Prison terms were doubled, voyeurism and stalking criminalised and the age at which a person can be tried as adults for crimes such as rape and murder was lowered by two years to 16. The ongoing rap cases since then, instil little confidence that deterrence by harsher laws will be all that effective. [South China Morning Post 2]

According to the National Crime Records Bureau in India, conviction rates of rapes have been low with

between 24% and 29% over the past few years. [Hindustan Times] According to 2016 crime data, four in ten female rape victims were minors, one in ten female minor victims was below the age of 12 [Boom].

In yet another high-profile rape case, an Indian court on Wednesday found spiritual guru Asaram Bapu guilty of raping a teenage female follower in 2013 and he faces a maximum of life in prison.

India: How fake news is killing people and press freedom

(jk) In addition to an alleged onslaught on democracy, election meddling or just sowing fear and uncertainty, fake news is seen to have a very direct and sometimes fatal impact on the lives of some in India. In relation to the rape case referred to above, protests have heated up after a video emerged that allegedly showed the girl who was raped and killed singing a song. In response to the video, which was rapidly shared and viewed thousands of times, protests erupted and increased in intensity, presumably stirring up the emotions of the viewers. The video turned out to be fake and the girl singing was neither the same girl who got raped, nor was the content current, according to a small group of "fact-checkers", working for the website "Boom". [Boom]

More often than not, if a "fake" is discovered at all, the damage has already been done and this is especially true in a society where violence seemingly spreads fast or where many people often come together in smaller spaces. Examples include an alleged salt shortage, sparking panic across four states last November. One of the immediate results of this fake story were stampedes outside marketplaces that left one woman dead and countless injured. In eastern India a mob beat seven men to death in May after they were accused of child trafficking in unverified messages online. [South China Morning Post 1]

The government as well as online platforms claiming to be dedicated to combatting fake stories are still grappling with finding effective strategies. In India, as in other countries, Facebook is cooperating with local organisations to get a handle on the issue. One strategy deployed by the Indian authorities recently to calm down protest, again in relation to the aforementioned rape cases, was to shut down the internet until things have calmed [South China Morning Post 2].

AiR has also extensively reported on the flip side of this and how in India and elsewhere, particularly Southeast Asia, increasingly restrictive regimes use fake news as an excuse to stifle dissent and silence critics. Press and civic freedom is under increasing pressure by vaguely formulated laws that can be used to target activists, journalists, and everybody else who expresses discontent with the authorities. India again scored low in the recently released World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (138th out of 180 countries, see below), and bold actions on "regulating" fake news could easily see it slip further.

India: Country falls two spots in World Press Freedom ranking

(ot) India this year has fallen two places from last year on the Reporters without Borders (RSF)' 2018 World Press Freedom Index. In the report published on Wednesday, India ranked 138th position out of 180 countries.

The RSF cited growing self-censorship in the mainstream media as well as increasing online and physical threats against journalists by Hindu nationalists under PM Modi's government. The organization reported that three journalists were killed in the last year, while those overly critical about the government were repeatedly prosecuted. Coverage of issues deemed sensitive by the authorities, such as Kashmir, continued to be difficult, as foreign reporters were barred from the region, and the internet was often disconnected. [The Economic Times] [Reporters without Borders]

India: "Save the Constitution" campaign launched against PM Modi

(ot) On Monday, India's National Congress Party President Rahul Gandhi launched the nationwide "Save the Constitution" campaign at Talkatora Stadium in Delhi. The campaign aims to safeguard the constitution and protect the rights of the Dalits under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharitya Jantana Party (BJP)-led government. At the event, Gandhi asserted that PM Modi's administration has failed to protect the constitutional values and institutions. He promised that his party would work to protect the Constitution, the institution, as well as the Indian citizens.

The campaign came in the wake of the Indian Supreme Court's order diluting the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes Atrocities Act (SC/ST Act), which has resulted in a public outrage and violent protests across the country. Gandhi criticized PM Modi's administration for remaining silent on the issues of violence against the Dalit community and women's safety.

The campaign will run until 14 April 2019, and is seen as the Party's effort to reach out to the Dalit community ahead of the general elections in 2019. [The Indian Express] [India Today]

In response to the event, BJP President Amit Shah said that the campaign was an attempt to weaken the country's democratic institutions and to save "the dynasty", referring to the Gandhi family. [Hindustan Times]

India: North-south division deepens

(ot) India is as diverse as it is populous. It has for years lived in compromise, with English as the language linking the states. The Hindi-speaking northern hinterland and the non-Hindi coastal states have long muddled along together. Recently, however, the uneasy, decades-old accord has broken down. PM Modi's BJP party, which has become the dominant power in Indian Politics, only represents the north and the west, with little or no presence in richer southern states, such as Tamil Nadu. The north and south have also diverged economically and demographically, with the south doing better on human development indices.

Today, neither the BJP, representing the north, nor the regional parties that dominate the southern coasts are interested in seeking a compromise. India's two halves have strongly disparate interests, demands, and expectations, leaving future leaders to heal these growing divisions. [Bloomberg]

Pakistani Foreign Minister disqualified from Parliament

(jk) After ousted PM Sharif was banned for life from holding public office recently, Pakistan's Islamabad High Court now disqualified staunch Sharif ally and foreign minister Asif from parliament. Charges against him regard the concealment of foreign assets and an

employment contract in the United Arab Emirates in violation of Pakistan's election laws.

Asif is a high-profile politician of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party (PML-N) and was tipped as a potential successor. Asif will appeal against the verdict that critics say is based on bias and a targeted effort by the country's judiciary against the PML-N. Should the verdict be upheld, he will not be able to run in the upcoming elections later this year. [Voice of America] [New York Times]

Pakistan: Thousands rally for the rights of Pashtun

(ot) On Sunday, over 8,000 people took the streets in Lahore to protest for basic rights of ethnic Pashtun citizens. The rally was led by Manzoor Pashteen, the leader of the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), calling for an end to enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and other human rights abuses committed by Pakistan's military in its war against the Taliban. The movement has expanded across the country in recent weeks, despite a government ban. The PTM also accused the military for restricting media coverage of the movement. [Al Jazeera]

Many activists and protesters were arrested by the police, according to a statement issued by the Institute of Peace and Secular Studies (IPSS). Meanwhile, in Karachi, nine people from the Progressive Youth Alliance reportedly went missing after demonstrating in support of the ethnic rights movement on Sunday. The IPSS called for the release of those exercising their rights to peaceful assembly. [Pakistan Today] [Reuters]

Pakistan: Amendments to anti-terrorism law approved

(ot) On Wednesday, the National Assembly voted to approve amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), allowing the government to act against people or organizations in accordance with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions. Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal said the amendments would reaffirm that Pakistan is serious about taking action against terrorism. [Pakistan Today]

Pakistan: Conviction on child pornography

(jk) In early 2016, the upper house of Pakistan's federal legislature, the Senate, passed a bill amending Pakistan's Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure. The amendments criminalised child sexual abuse, child pornography, and domestic human trafficking. The legislation included exposing children to obscene and sexually explicit material as well as prohibiting the production of child pornography, punishing such acts with from two to seven years of imprisonment and a fine.

Now, for the first time, a man has been sentenced under the law. He was found to be part of a global child pornography ring spread across Sweden, Italy, United States and United Kingdom and possessed more than 650,000 pictures and videos related to child pornography. The sentence included a fine of approximately USD 10.000 and seven years imprisonment [Gulf News].

Bangladeshi brothels and Rohingya sex workers

(jk) One of the many terrible facets of the Myanmar refugee crisis that has put close to million Rohingya in peril, is the human trafficking of vulnerable and often desperate Rohingya women to work in forced prostitution. An investigative journalist has visited the refugee camps and brothels in Bangladesh where more and more Rohingya are being forced to work. Many report they fled the rape of Myanmar soldiers, but now face no better future with both Bangladeshi as well as Rohingya men forcing them to have sex. [PBS]

Maldives top court backs law to remove arrested judges

(hg) The Supreme Court justified a controversial amendment to the Judges' Act passed by the government controlled parliament to remove two other Supreme Court judges who were accused to plot to overthrow the government with oppositional forces.

The amendment was passed without the constitutionally required quorum as opposition lawmakers boycotted the session. The verdict acknowledges the lacking quorum but argues with a

'doctrine of necessity' justifying the amendment. According to the amendment, judges convicted of a criminal offence would be automatically removed from office with immediate effect after the sentence. The amendment also allows to bypass the constitutional article on removal of judges stating that it does not relate to the lawful conduct of judges and orders that formally charged judges will not receive their salary. This latter change raises concerns regarding the presumption of innocence. Moreover, the amendment has also limited the time for appeal which must been filed within 10 days whereas the deciding instances have 30 days for the verdict. [Avas]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Indonesia: Former parliament speaker convicted of corruption

(ls) The Jakarta Corruption Court sentenced Setya Novanto, the former speaker of the Indonesian Parliament (People's Representative Council, DPR), to 15 years in prison for embezzlement, one of the most high-profile convictions in the nation's history. He was convicted of masterminding the theft of more than $170 million from a national identity card program. Dozens of other current and former lawmakers and senior political figures have been implicated. Before Novanto, the country's highest-profile corruption conviction was that of Akil Mochtar, a former Constitutional Court chief justice who in 2014 was sentenced to life for taking bribes to issue favorable verdicts in provincial election disputes. [New York Times]

Indonesia's massive universal health care system faces challenges

(ls) Indonesia is one year away from completing a five-year roll out of what is already the world's biggest universal health insurance programme. So far 185 million people, about three quarters of the population, have signed up. However, its implementation is facing serious constraints, as Jeffrey Hutton reports in the South China Morning Post: The government does not cover nearly enough of what it costs to treat the poor, while the wealthy are not paying their fair share. Deficits are soaring, hospitals are having trouble getting paid and waiting times are lengthening. [South China Morning Post] However, many continue to consider universal healthcare systems as major tools for human development and the fight against poverty.

Malaysia: Will the upcoming general elections take place under fair conditions?

(ls) The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) will not be allowed to monitor the country's general election on May 9. The Election Commission informed Suhakam that its application to monitor the election was denied. [Straits Times 1] In past parliamentary elections, there have frequently been allegations of irregularities and voter fraud.

Meanwhile, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (PPBM), the political party of Mahathir Mohamad who is the major opponent of incumbent Prime Minister Najib Razak, can operate as usual for now after it was granted a stay by the Kuala Lumpur High Court, against a temporary deregistration order by the Registrar of Societies (ROS). The party had been ordered to suspend its activities due to a failure to submit documents and details on its annual general meeting as requested by the registrar. [Straits Times 2]

Earlier this month, AiR also reported about the gerrymandering exercised by the Election Commission ahead of the elections. Pin Lean Lau criticizes the role of the Commission and the fact that its actions are protected against judicial review. With references to constitutional and socio-legal backgrounds, she holds that the EC, tasked with the responsibility of maintaining fair and equitable elections, has proven itself to be a toothless tiger, working in the shadows of the ruling party. [Verfassungsblog]

In the New Mandala, Danesh Prakash Chacko argues that the redelineation exercises of 2016 to 2018 further erode Malaysia's democratic institutions, emoralizing voters, preserving the urban-rural divide along racial lines, and suggesting the impossibility of change. At the same time, however, he holds that the redelineation process itself may not be as significant to the election's outcome as some argue. [New Mandala]

Philippines: Duterte sets deadline for talks with communists

(ls) Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte set a 60-day timeframe for peace talks he is seeking to revive with communist guerrillas, urging the rebels' exiled leader to return and negotiate a deal. Earlier this month, Duterte ordered his cabinet to work on a truce to enable talks, but the communist rebels have rejected any preconditions. Ending the conflict was among Duterte's priorities when he took office in 2016. But he abandoned peace efforts in November, infuriated by repeated rebel attacks during the talks. [Reuters]

Philippines: Foreign critics are deported on personal orders from President Duterte

(ls) A politically active Australian nun has been detained in the Philippines and is expected to be deported. President Rodrigo Duterte claimed to have personally ordered her detention. Her arrest came a day after an Italian official with the Party of European Socialists who has also been a critic of Mr. Duterte's antidrug campaign was deported as well. [New York Times] Duterte has often complained about what he considers foreign interference, particularly where human rights issues are concerned. In response to preliminary investigations by the International Criminal Court into his war on drugs, he declared the Philippines' withdrawal from the court.

Singapore: Prime minister succession still undecided

(ls) A cabinet reshuffle by Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong kept three ministers viewed as top contenders for succession into the office of prime minister in the race. Chan Chun Sing was moved from

his role as chief of the government-linked trade union congress to be the new minister of trade and industry. Heng Swee Keat, the current finance minister, was given additional charge over the National Research Foundation. And Ong Ye Kung was given full control over the education ministry, which was previously led by two ministers. However, Lee retained his current deputies Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Teo Chee Hean, thus keeping the race for succession open. Lee's move departs from a long-standing practice in the People's Action Party (PAP) for new leaders to be named early and to have a long lead time before they come into power. [South China Morning Post]

All three of the touted successors are ethnically Chinese men who went to the same high school (Raffles) and studied in British universities under government scholarships which contractually binds high-performing students to return to Singapore to work in the government. Prime Minister Lee has previously said he does not think any of his four children will enter politics. The protracted process has already caused a rare disagreement between the current and former prime ministers, and raised questions about whether there is enough time to groom a capable successor. [Reuters]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Inter-Korean relations: Era of peace on the Korean peninsula to come?

(dql) At the peak of the long-anticipated summit between South Korean President Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un on Friday both leaders signed a declaration whose unexpected far-reaching statements on and aspirations for unification and denuclearization took observers and analysts by surprise. The declaration assures that "South and North Korea will reconnect the blood relations of the people and bring forward the future of co-prosperity and unification led by Koreans by facilitating comprehensive and groundbreaking advancement in inter-Korean relations, ..., and confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula." [The Korea Times, with the full text of the declaration in English] In a press conference following the signing of the declaration President Moon declared in the name of both signatories 'a new era of peace' for Korea. [Youtube]

In a latest development, the office of President Moon on Sunday revealed that Kim Jong-un confirmed at the summit to dismantle North Korea's nuclear weapons testing facility in May and to permit inspection by South Korean and US experts and media. [Korea Herald]

Analysts caution against leaping to overly strong optimism for a unified and nuclear-free Korean peninsula, citing unchanged geopolitical and strategic fundamentals and interests of involved powers. [The Diplomat] [Vox] [East Asia Forum]

China-US 'human rights dispute': Beijing issues report on human rights in the USA

(dql) Short after last week's release of the US Department of State 2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices which labelled China's government "morally reprehensible" violating human rights of those within their borders on a daily basis" [AiR 4/4/2018], China's State Council countered with its "Human Rights Record of the United States in 2017" accusing the US – among others – of infringement on civil rights, systematic racial discrimination, and money politics making "inequality worse" than in the years before. [Xinhua]

In a related move, Beijing rejected an US Senate resolution passed on Wednesday
which denounces China's installation of the 15th Dalai Lama as an "invalid interference in the right of religious freedom of Tibetan Buddhists on Tibet" [US Senate Tibet Resolution 2018]. The US was urged with

reference to the above mentioned human rights report “to properly manage its own country before blaming others.” [Global Times]

Meanwhile, Reporters without Borders’ Freedom of Press Report 2018, released this week, ranks China 176 among 180 countries (with Norway as best on 1 and North Korea as worst on 180) stating that “President Xi Jinping has succeeded in imposing a social model in China based on control of news and information and online surveillance of its citizens” while at the same time “trying to export this oppressive model by promoting a ‘new international media order’ under China’s influence.” [Reporters without Borders 1] The USA are ranked 45 with freedom of press having been “under increasing attack over the past few years, and the first year of President Donald J. Trump’s presidency has fostered further decline in journalists’ right to report.” [Reporters without Borders 2]

China-India summit: Ties improved?

(dql) During Prime Minister Modi’s two-days informal summit with President Xi Jinping this week, both state leaders agreed to boost communication between both countries’ military aimed at building "trust and mutual understanding and enhance predictability and effectiveness in the management of border affairs”, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale announced. [Nikkei Asian Review]

Modi and Xi also agreed to undertake a joint India-China economic project in Afghanistan to be identified and designed in subsequent talks, a move analysts expert to strain relations between China and Pakistan, . [The Pioneer]

The conciliatory encounter between the leaders of world’s two most populous countries comes a year after a more than two-months long stand-off over the Doklam crisis and amid the countries’ struggle for dominance in Asia.

Indian strategic ties after the Modi-Xi meeting: the case of the US, Russia, and Australia

(hg) After the first ‘informal’ summit between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping was concluded with a careful rapprochement between the countries, it is interesting to assess Indo-

Pacific´s strategic environment on more general terms. Worth mentioning in this regard are some recent developments concerning India´s relations with the US, Russia and Australia.

Starting from the finding "it appears the Asia-Pacific region is due for a grand strategic makeover", a recent article in the [The Diplomat] takes a historical perspective to highlight the dynamics of the current Indian-American alignment. Regarding the ongoing strengthening of military, diplomatic, and economic ties between India and the US, the author is looking at "the last time the US and India were this aligned", namely in the 1780s when both tried to jointly contain the British Empire.

The article´s quintessential conclusion – "if history rhymes, it tells us that a U.S.-India strategic alignment is not so new" – sounds a bit trivial though. After all, it seems debatable if a short and unsuccessful strategic alignment around 220 years ago makes a strong case for the actual prospects of US-Indian relations and their impact on China. The point is, however, that it is exactly the fact that the still limited depth and momentum in Indian-American relations warrants the sort of narrative underpinnings the article is trying to provide. From this point of view, media attention might be read as part of the very pattern that are forming or accompanying the competing trends of the currently emerging geopolitical order of Asia.

Another article focuses on the Indian withdrawal from plans to jointly develop a stealth fighter jet with Russia earlier this month, tracing back the long decline in bilateral attempts between the countries to finalize the project. Against this background and given the fact that "New Delhi shares more political interests with Washington than it does with Moscow", India´s further steps concerning its air force modernization will be of interest "as a gauge of how comfortable New Delhi is with further deepening its relationship with the United States". [National Interest]

The picture is complex indeed. On the one hand, the US wish that Delhi might decide for American weapon systems. At the same time, the US Countering America's Enemy's Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) is a disincentive for Delhi to deepen its already profound relations with Russia regarding arms supply from Moscow. Section 231 of the CAATSA mandates secondary sanctions to any nation entering into high-value deals to procure military hardware from Russia.

Whereas a Bloomberg report suggests the US – probably Lockheed Martin – might provide the Indian Air Force with its combat jet technologies in the near

future [Bloomberg], [Sputnik] features an Interview with Indian Air Force chief Air Chief Marshal B. S. Dhanoa, who says that "it is incorrect to report that we are interested in F-35 [or F-35 technology to equip F-16]". The Indian Air Force chief has also categorically denied any threat to India-Russia defense deals due to the American CAATSA. [Sputnik]

Meanwhile, India seeks US exemption to buy the legendary Russian S-400 air defense missile system from Russia worth about $5.5 billion. Reportedly, the Indian government has informed the US that India cannot abruptly scale down its reliance on military hardware from Russia after decades of bilateral defense cooperation and applied for a waiver from sanctions. The S-400 long-range air defense missile system with its capability to destroy incoming hostile aircraft, missiles and even drones at ranges of up to 400km can fire three types of missiles and simultaneously engage 36 targets to create a layered defense is also effective against stealth multi-role fighter jets. The system, which Russia has started supplying to China, is expected to be delivered to Turkey next year and has also been deployed by Russia in Syria. [Economic Times]

The Indian application for a waiver to obtain the S-400 is a sensitive issue due to the reputation of the S-400 as setting the gold standard of comparable weapon systems including American ones, its success in action and the fact that Turkey as a major NATO member decided to buy the system before Turkish-American tensions grew to the current degree.

An example for the high benchmarks set to obtain a CAATSA waiver is the Trump administration´s announcement last Friday that it would not issuing waivers to U.S. companies, including oil giant Exxon Mobile, authorizing drilling in the Black Sea prohibited by current sanctions against Russia. [New York Times]

Moreover, on the sidelines of a NATO gathering April 27, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has just explicitly warned his Turkish counterpart against purchasing the S-400. [Radio Free Europe]

Against this background, the ongoing attempts of the Pentagon to enable a waiver for India are remarkable. US Defense Secretary Gen. Jim Mattis appealed last Thursday to the Congress to urgently provide India the requested national security waiver, saying imposing sanctions on it would only hit the US. [Times of India]

In other words, the ongoing Indian S-400 story is worth to be further observed. This is even more true as Vietnam, another regionally important country, is

generally in a similar situation as India, both being interested to lever a strategic partnership with the US against China, while being highly depended on Russian arms supply.

A serious setback for the emergence of a solid anti-China coalition formed around the US- Indian-Japanese-Australian axis has meanwhile just manifested regarding Indian-Australian relations. Australian Defense Department spokesman has confirmed Australia won't participate in a major Indian-lead multilateral naval drill, reportedly because it has not been invited by the Indian government.

The Indian silence is significant after India, the US, Japan and Australia have revived their plan to form a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the so-called Quad, a military partnership to contain China. In January, Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said discussions on Australia returning to multilateral naval exercises with India were progressing well. The eventual non-invitation by Delhi might be seen as a casualty of India's just improving relations with China and is definitely a blow for the Quad. [The Australian]

Concerning the long-term character of Sino-India relations, the recent, basically positive meeting between Modi and Xi should not be overloaded with highflying expectations for the long-term future. A temporary betterment of bilateral relations seems to express both countries´ current strategic considerations. This notwithstanding, India seems too important as a strategic weight, its leadership too determined, and its South Asian backyard too volatile, to not eventually being inclined to decide either in favor or against China and the US respectively. This, at least, is the perspective reflected by the headline and conclusion of a [Forbes] article that conjures up "the coming clash between China and India" without, however, providing much substantive arguments.

The China-India-Nepal Triangle

(hg) On occasion of the visit of Nepal's Foreign Minister in China from April 16-21, [The Diplomat] addresses the ongoing Chinese-Indian competition over influence in Nepal with a thorough analysis that gives China the advantage over India. The most recent meeting of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chinese President Xi Jinping might, however, slow the harsh tone of the competition down for a while. [The Diplomat]

Pakistan and India to hold joint military drills

(jk) Authorities in Pakistan have confirmed that they will hold joint military drills together with India and other regional countries, including China, for the first time under the roof of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Russia coming August. Both South Asian nations joined the SCO as their full members in June last year. The military drills will reportedly focus on preventing terror attacks and dismantling terror networks.

While the two countries have participated together in United Nations peacekeeping missions in the past, this will be the first time the two militaries will participate in joint counter-terrorism drills. [Geo].

India-Nordic Summit

(hg) After two U.S.-Nordic Leaders Summits had been held in 2013 and 2016, India and Sweden co-hosted the first India-Nordic Summit, the third ever. On this occasion, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Swedish Prime Minister in Stockholm as the first Indian leader in 30 years and additionally held bilateral meetings with the prime ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway. The first India-Nordic Summit focused on boosting trade, investment, and expanding mutually beneficial collaboration in areas where Nordic strengths match with India's developmental needs. Given the shared interest in making the United Nations (UN) Security Council more representative, both in the permanent and nonpermanent categories, the Nordic states expressed also support for India's bid for permanent membership as well as India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group. The Nordic states also recognize India's and other Asian states' growing involvement in Arctic affairs and supported their admittance as permanent observers in the Arctic Council in 2013.

Arguably, the summit also reflects new realities concerning the contemporary international order as well as a demand of a growing number of countries to contribute to its structure. On the one side, India is acting increasingly global, looking for new partners. The Nordic states on the other side, pursue a more coordinated foreign policy which seems to be in their interest in contributing to global order while being supported by their sheer weight: After all, the Nordic states, though being small in terms of population, are

among the wealthiest in the world, exercising considerable international influence and form a highly integrated region. [The Diplomat]

ASEAN Summit: South China Sea issue on the schedule – Rohingya issue most likely not

(ls) Southeast Asian leaders will focus on trade wars and security tensions in the disputed South China Sea at the 32nd ASEAN summit in Singapore this weekend. ASEAN hopes that a code of conduct it is currently negotiating with China will ease the dispute in the South China Sea. Critics have said the code, which is expected to be non-binding, would only be an incremental step since it would not force China to back-track on its moves. Referring to the Rohingya crisis, Singapore Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said before the summit, "the political responsibility and accountability have to be with the Myanmar government. They have to find a political solution." [Reuters]

However, ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights have urged Southeast Asia's leaders in an open letter to address pressing human rights issues when they meet. They asked ASEAN not to overlook human rights concerns, even as the regional grouping focuses on tackling regional security challenges and promoting economic integration. [Straits Times]

Myanmar's unofficial leader Aung San Suu Kyi will not attend the summit. This is the first time for her to skip a summit since her party came to power in 2016. A government spokesman did not explain why Suu Kyi, who has dual roles of state counsellor and foreign minister, will miss the summit and whether it might be due to criticism of her and the government's handling of the Rohingya refugee crisis. [South China Morning Post]

Ahead of the summit, The Diplomat has received draft copies of two important policy documents that are set to be released at the conclusion of the summit: the ASEAN Leaders' Vision for A Resilient and Innovative ASEAN and the Zero Draft of the Chairman's Statement of 32nd ASEAN Summit. Carl Thayer provides a summary of the two papers. [The Diplomat]

South China Sea: Philippines quiet over Chinese advancements

(ls) The Philippines' have opted to say little for now about China's recent activities in the South China Sea, including its erection of a monument on Kagitingan Reef and landing military planes on Mischief reef within the Philippines' exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Philippine lawmakers said the landings were not just an affront to Philippine sovereignty but could be a precursor to the deployment of long-range bombers and fighter aircraft to the reefs that China has transformed into artificial islands. [Straits Times]

Cross-Straits relations: Taiwan simulates assaults on island in upcoming military drills

(dql) Following China's massive show of military force in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait in the recent weeks [Air 4/4/2018], Taiwan will conduct life-fire exercises in June, simulating surprise coastal assaults to reflect increased military threats from Beijing, Taiwanese officials revealed. [South China Morning Post/Reuters]

Meanwhile, the spokesman of the Chinese Defense Ministry confirmed on Thursday that a new missile, dubbed the "Guam killer" for its ability to hit the U.S. Pacific Ocean base with a conventional or nuclear warheads, has been put in service. [ABC News]

U.S.-Thai-relations: Strengthened cooperation agreed on Prawit's visit in Washington

(ls) Thailand and the United States have agreed to strengthen cooperation on various aspects of security affairs including cyber and marine security, terrorism as well as transnational crimes. The agreement was reached during a visit of Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Prawit Wongsuwon in Washington at the invitation of US Defence Secretary Mattis. The visit included a meeting with Claire Grady, Under-Secretary for Management of the US Department of Homeland Security. Prawit's visit was aimed at reinforcing bilateral ties on security affairs in the year that marks 200 years of Thai-US relations. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand/Cambodia/Laos: Cooperation to track down political enemies

(ls) Thai immigration police have detained Sam Serey, head of the Cambodian opposition group Khmer National Liberation Front (KNLF). A Cambodian official said the government was in discussion with Thailand on the man's extradition. In 2016, a Cambodian court sentenced Sam Serey in absentia to nine years in prison for plotting an attack. This month, Prime Minister Hun Sen accused Sam Serey and his group of plotting attacks in Cambodia, calling him a "traitor". [Reuters]

In March, Thailand and Cambodia had agreed on cooperation in searching for "fugitives". Concerns have formed about an authoritarian alliance of sort emerging between the ruling junta in Thailand led by Prayut Chan-o-cha and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) led by Hun Sen as they seek to suppress dissent and consolidate their authority at home, as Prashanth Parameswaran describes in [The Diplomat].

At the same time, the government of Laos has assured Thailand that Thai political fugitives in Laos will be kept under strict surveillance to prevent them from engaging in lèse majesté activities. The Chief-of-staff of the Lao People's Armed Forces, on a visit to Thailand, added that "We [Thai and Laos people] are like siblings. (...) we have to help, love and respect each other. We also have to help preserve our traditional rituals and uphold Buddhism so it lasts forever." [Bangkok Post]

Security Council visits Bangladesh and Myanmar; EU extends arms embargo on Myanmar

(ls) The United Nations Security Council will have a firsthand look at the situation of 700,000 Rohingya Muslims who fled a military crackdown in Myanmar and the several hundred thousand who remain in the country's northern Rakhine State. The U.N. ambassadors have scheduled an inspection of Cox's Bazaar in southern Bangladesh, where the Rohingya who fled are now living in camps. They also will visit the Bangladesh capital, Dacca, and Myanmar's capital, Naypyitaw, for talks with government officials before traveling to Rakhine on Tuesday. [Washington Post]

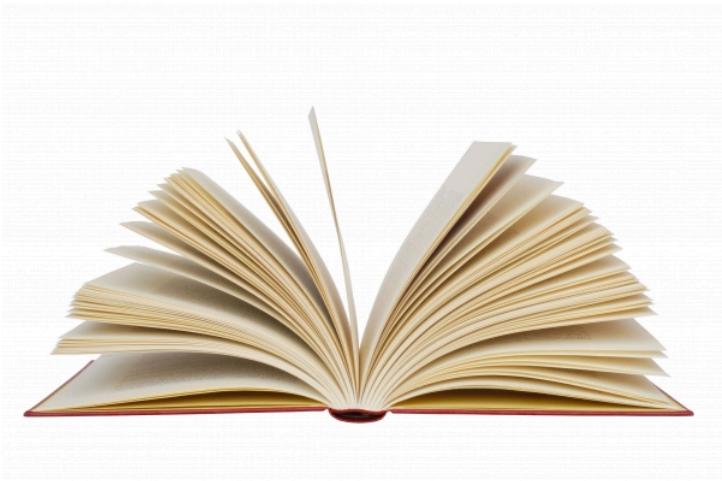
Meanwhile, the European Union has extended for one year its embargo on arms and equipment against the Myanmar military amid concerns these weapons could be used as tools for 'internal repression'. The prohibition also covers the export of dual-use goods for use by the military and border guard police and that of equipment for monitoring communications. [Myanmar Times]

Malaysia as an "epicenter of international intrigue"?

(ls) A Palestinian lecturer suspected by Israeli intelligence services as a technology expert for the military wing of the Gaza-based Hamas movement was shot dead in Kuala Lumpur. Israel has officially distanced itself from allegations that it was responsible for the act. Malaysia has long served as a way station for extremists and is known as a transit hub for illicit goods. Moreover, the New York Times describes the country as an epicenter of international intrigue, pointing also to the killing of Kim Jong-nam, the half brother of Kim Jong-un, by two women last year. [New York Times]

In the most recent case, Hamas acknowledged that the lecturer was one of its members. Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman said it was likely that he was killed as part of an internal Palestinian dispute. However, he also said that the lecturer was "no saint". [South China Morning Post]

Background Reading



Mapping the Indonesian political spectrum

(ls) Whereas many observers have suggested that Indonesian parties differ little on matters of policy and ideology, with the only obvious division between them being the degree to which they believe Islam should play a role in public affairs, a group of researchers conducted a survey among members of Indonesian provincial legislatures to learn more about their actual ideological leaning. A summary of the findings is presented in the [New Mandala].

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