German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance
CPG

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

Asia in Review

(3/5/2018)

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the third issue of CPG's *Asia in Review* in May 2018, updating you on the latest developments in law, politics and international relations in Asia.

I hope you enjoy reading!

Best regards

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Law and Politics in East Asia

China: President Xi's and the CCP's central role in foreign affairs

(jk) The Chinese Communist Party's Foreign Affairs Commission (FAC) held its first meeting on May 15. President Xi Jinping is the head of the new commission while Chinese premier Li Keqiang serves as deputy head. Chinese vice president Wang Qishan is the third-ranking member. The FAC was upgraded from a leading small group as part of the ongoing Party-State restructuring to further strengthen Party leadership over foreign affairs in March. Other leading small groups that were turned into commissions regarded cyber security, deepening reform, as well as economics and finance. For more detail on the restructuring efforts, see [SinoInsider].

According to Xi, the FAC of the CPC Central Committee should play a role in policy-making, discussion and coordination, advance the innovation of diplomatic theories and practices and provide strong guidance for foreign affairs to make new achievements. [Xinhua] Xi is continuing on his path to strengthen the CCP's grip on all aspects of Chinese politics as well as his own position at the very top of the party.

Mounting evidence on the existence and scope of China's "re-education" camps

(jk) Adrian Zenz, a German researcher at the European School of Culture and Theology, focusses on China's ethnic policy and public recruitment in Tibetan regions and Xinjiang. In a recent piece, he researched the scale and circumstances of the Chinese government's efforts to keep in control of the western Chinese province of Xinjiang which has become known as one of the most heavily policed regions of the world and is home to a significant number of ethnic Muslim minorities including Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Kyrgyz.

According to his research, "China's pacification drive in Xinjiang is, more than likely, the country's most intense campaign of coercive social reengineering since the end of the Cultural Revolution". Zenz analyzed information from government procurement and construction bids along with public recruitment notices and other documents to investigate the scale of detention facilities under construction since March 2017. He estimates that the facilities that are being build can hold up to just over one million detainees. [James Town / Academia.eu for the full report]

In addition to his report, eye witness reports have been published last week giving a disturbing report of what already is the reality for some Muslim-minority groups who had to endure "re-education" in camps which the Chinese government still claims do not exist. [AP News]

Former Taiwan president Ma Ying-jeou sentenced for leaking information

(jk) Taiwan's High Court found Ma guilty of disclosing a conversation between a former legislative speaker and political rival and the then-opposition Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) chief whip to the then-cabinet chief and his top aide in 2013.

According to the court, he is guilty of violating the Communication and Surveillance Act, which restricts civil servants from leaking classified information and protects privacy. Ma could go to prison for four months, but he can avoid this by paying a fine of roughly US$4,000. He will appeal the ruling as it is rumoured to be politically motivated and somehow fabricated or influenced by the ruling DPP which is struggling with decreasing popularity ahead of upcoming local elections later this year [SCMP].

Japan passes law to get more women into politics

(am) The Diet on Wednesday passed a bill seeking to boost the number of female lawmakers and assembly members in a nation where women have long been underrepresented in politics.

The measure, approved unanimously by the Upper House, urges each political party to make every effort to try and “equalize as much as possible” the number of male and female candidates it fields for national and local elections. [The Japan Times]

But the law includes no penalties for parties that fail to do so, nor incentives to encourage them. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has made increasing female participation in the workforce a key plank of his economic policies as Japan struggles with a labour shortage. [The Business Times]

"I hope this law will make a big change in Japanese politics," said Internal Affairs Minister Seiko Noda, one of the members who drafted the legislation, according to public broadcaster [NHK]. "I hope women who were hesitant to become candidates will be courageous" and run for election, she said.

Law and Politics in South Asia

India: Ruling BJP wins Karnataka state election

(ot/am) The southwestern Indian state of Karnataka - with the capital Bangalore and a population of around 60 Mio. - has just held its state assembly elections.

India's ruling Bharatiya Jantana Party (BJP) emerged as the by far single largest party but fell short of a majority. Of the 222 seats, the BJP won 104, while its major rival, the Congress got 78 seats and a regional party, the Janata Dal (Secular), JD(S) 37.

Both the Congress and JD(S) promptly declared an alliance claiming they would get all party member´s support to pass together the 112-majority mark. [The Hindu, BBC 1]

However, the Karnataka governor invited the BJP candidate to form the government, which resulted in a fierce overnight legal battle. In a bid to stop the formation of the BJP government the Congress-Janata Dal (S) alliance filed a petition at the state's Supreme Court which was eventually rejected with the BJP candidate having given already his oath as chief minister. The BJP now has a period of 15 days to prove its majority in the state assembly. [Times of India 1, Times of India 2]

The event could be seen a key indicator ahead of the India's general election in 2019. Analysts claim that losing Karnataka would be a major setback for the Congress, which now rules only two of India's 29 states while the BJP currently controls 21 states. The Karnataka election might be seen as another step of the BJP's continuing expansion of its political footprint and Prime Minister Modi's dominance over India's national politics. [BBC 2, NDTV]

India's first Shia Political Party

(am) Shiite Muslims announced to launch India´s first Shia political party, the Indian Shia Awami League, in an attempt to carve a separate political identity for the minority Muslim community ahead of the 2019 General Elections claiming to have party cadres already in place across 16-17 states.

Their leader is quoted saying: "Traditionally, vote bank politics has only catered the Sunnis in India, since we are in minority. But when there are riots in the country because of Sunni extremism, Shias also get targeted due to Muslim identity. The idea is to assert Shia identity and differentiate it from Sunnis". [United News of India] [The Print]

On the relation with Sunni Muslim´s he added: “The Shia-Sunni conflict is irreconcilable…They (Sunnis) don’t even consider us Muslims, but because of them our identity is under threat.” [The Print]

India´s Shia community is considered to be an especially backward Muslim minority which has been deprived of its rights assured under the various government schemes, as part of what the new Shiite party´s leadership perceive as a larger conspiracy. [Times of India]

Shiites form a significant Indian Muslim minority with around 13/14 % of the Indian Muslims. With more than 170.000.000 Muslims India is home to the third biggest Muslim community in the world.

India: PM Modi – one of the world’s strongmen?

(ot) [Channel News Asia] brings an assessment of India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi as one of the particular important and strong political leaders shaping global politics with a sort of strongman image similar to President Xi Jinping of China, US President Donald Trump, Russian President Vladimir Putin, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey, and President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines.

While PM Modi is a serious economic reformer with a successful popular touch, there are also concerns over political division, judicial independence, and press freedom that partly remind of similar concerns pertaining to the United States, China, and Turkey. The article focuses especially on comparing PM Modi with Pres. Trump, both ruling two of the world’s biggest democracies and having risen into power with claims to be represent a silent majority in their struggle against the corruption of political elites. Both are also engaged in an extreme political discourse unfolded especially also by social media and are heavily employing identity politics to bolster support, in Modi´s case that of an aggressive Hindu nationalist agenda driven by his party, Bharatiya Janata (BJP). With great personal popularity, another election victory in the coming general election next year is quite possible and would probably bring Modi in a very secured leadership position. [Channel News Asia]

Pakistan: Court dismisses treason petition against ex-PM

(ot) With a direct reference to the 2008 Mumbai attack, he had acknowledged in an interview that militant organizations being active in Pakistan were allowed to cross the Indian border enabling them to kill people “in Mumbai”.

This triggered two political parties to bring treason charges against ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif before a court which, however, dismissed the request. [The Economic Times, Geo TV]

Sharif’s remarks triggered a major controversy, sparking criticism from many sides. The country’s National Security Committee condemned the comments as “fallacious” while Indian media deemed the statement as an admission of Pakistan´s involvement in the attacks. [Gulf News, Pakistan Observer]

Pakistan: General elections face delay amid growing tensions

(ot) As the country’s general elections scheduled for July are approaching, political tensions between those who support either the elected civilian government or the military continue to increase, making many Pakistanis fear that elections may be delayed or even abrogated by a putsch.

In any case, Pakistan’s ever fragile democracy will be tested again after the country witnessed its very first smooth transition of power from one civilian government to another in 2013. Additionally, the elections will also have a significant geopolitical impact with regard to Asia´s changing security landscape. Pakistan, having been put under pressure by the US for its failure to tackle terrorist networks, has increasingly turned toward China for financial and diplomatic support. [Deutsche Welle]

Pakistan: Latest rally calls for Pashtun rights

(ot) Thousands of protesters mobilized by Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) took to the street in Pakistan´s largest city Karachi, calling for an end to alleged human rights violations of ethnic Pashtuns by the military including extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the struggle against the Tehreek-e-Taliban terrorist group.

Prior to this latest round of protest, a number of PTM leaders were detained and later charged with sedition. After the group's leader was barred from boarding his flight to Karachi, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed "grave concerns" over the authorities' action.

At the rally, the PTM also reiterated its demand to form a truth and reconciliation commission to investigate the crimes allegedly committed by the state. [Al Jazeera]

Maldives: Former president threatens to form alternative government

(jm) Former president Nasheed, now self-exiled in Sri Lanka, announced his intention to run for the presidential elections for the Maldivian Democratic Party regardless of being banned from elections due to a 13-year prison sentence. Nasheed threatened to otherwise form a parallel government of unification on the basis of a reform alliance already established with former president and decade-long dictator Gayoom and the leaders of the Jumhoory Party and the religiously conservative Adhaalath Party. All four party leaders are convicted and serving sentences on contested charges. [Avas]

Sri Lanka: New high-level corruption arrest

(jm) The newly appointed Chairman of the State Timber Corporation (STC) was arrested for an alleged involvement in a fraud case what is especially delicate as he was just appointed after the former chairman has been removed on corruption charges. [The Sunday Leader]

Sri Lanka: Beginning of a new transitional justice process

(jm) With the Office on Missing Persons having hold its first public consultation, a new process of transitional justice is claimed to be inaugurated, facing great skepticism, however, from the onset. Obviously, it es even challenge to talk not of 'missing' people but 'victims of enforced disappearances' as some affected relatives demanded at the meeting. [Daily Mirror]

Nepal: Ruling parties form a single communist party platform

(jm) After seven months of negotiations, Nepal´s two communist parties which are currently forming a governing alliance, reached an agreement of how to merge into one single party, the new Nepal Communist Party (NCP). It is supposed to be formed after the dissolution of the existing parties, the CPN-UML and the CPN-Maoist Center and will ideologically commit to both, Marxism – Leninism and Maoism. In its Standing Committee of 43 members, 25 will come from Prime Minister Oli´s CPN-UML and 18 from the CPN-Maoist Center, while the two party - leaders agreed on a power sharing model according to which they will take turns to assume the posts of unified party chairman and prime minister respectively. [The Himalayan Times]

Bangladeshi students launch a fresh movement as government fails to honour its promise to abolish quota in government jobs

(am) Thousands of university students in Bangladesh are boycotting classes as part of a nationwide protest, with demonstrators blocking the main thoroughfare in the capital, Dhaka, calling again for the abolition of a quota system regulating government jobs.

The latest protest comes a month after Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has announced the abolition of the country's decades-old quota system used in the recruitment of civil servants after no concrete steps were taken to cancel it. [Al Jazeera]

Her Cabinet Secretary said a solution regarding the quota system's abolition would soon be announced. [BD News 24]

Political parties' take on the state of democracy in Bhutan

(am) As Bhutan completes 10 years of being a democratic constitutional monarchy, representatives from various political parties gathered to discuss the current state of democracy in Bhutan.

The forum aimed at giving people and political parties a much-needed open space in the election year for healthy discussions on political issues. [Kuensel]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: First arrest using new royal insult law

(ls) A teacher has been arrested in Cambodia for allegedly insulting the monarchy in a comment posted on Facebook, the first such arrest since the country adopted a royal insult law earlier this year. The comments he made were allegedly critical of King Norodom Sihamoni, his father, late King Norodom Sihanouk and his half-brother Prince Norodom Ranariddh over their alleged role in the dissolution of the main opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). Those found guilty under the law face between one and five years in prison and a fine of between $500 and $2,500. [Reuters]

Indonesia: Government responses to IS-inspired suicide bombings

(ls) After the suicide bomb attacks on churches in Surabaya on last week's Sunday, a similar attack took place on Monday at Surabaya police headquarters. In both cases, the attacks were executed by families, including children. The Islamic State (IS) claimed the

church attacks, raising fears about its influence in Southeast Asia. [AFP]

The special Indonesian military unit Kopassus has joined the police in cracking down on terrorist cells. A source at the National Counterterrorism Agency said that the fathers of the families visited Abu Bakar Bashir, the spiritual leader of al-Qaeda's Southeast Asia splinter group Jemaah Islamiah, in prison. [South China Morning Post]

President Joko Widodo said that he will push through new anti-terror laws by emergency presidential decree (perppu) if Parliament does not enact proposed legislative revisions. The government had proposed tougher anti-terror laws that give the police powers to take pre-emptive measures in fighting terrorism. These amendments were first tabled after Indonesian militants loyal to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria mounted a suicide attack in Jakarta in 2016. [Straits Times]

Malaysian politics after the elections: Anwar released from prison – Full-scale investigations into 1MDB scandal

(ls) Last week's general election in Malaysia and the historic victory of the opposition coalition Pakatan Harapan (Alliance of Hope) led by former and new Prime Minister Mahatir Mohamad continues to dominate the news. Analysts point out that, for the first time in the nation's history, the people did not vote along the lines of race and religion. Rather, the majority of all Malaysians – including rural voters – wanted change. [The Star 1]

On Wednesday, Anwar Ibrahim, former deputy prime minister and new coalition partner of his former nemesis Mahatir, was released from prison after about three years of imprisonment on sodomy charges that were seen as manipulated by political rivals, including by ex-PM Najib Razak. Pakatan Harapan incorporated Anwar into its top leadership just a day after he was pardoned by the King. The new alliance between Anwar and Mahatir, materializing since late last year, was a surprise for many as Anwar had also been imprisoned between 1999 and 2004 on corruption and sodomy charges that were publicly supported by then and new PM Mahatir. [New York Times 1] [Straits Times 1]

The election dramatically reversed Anwar's fortunes, from prisoner to presumptive successor. "Give me a

few months, I should be back as an MP. It is the correct thing to do," said Anwar, a day after he walked free from custody. It also imperilled ex-PM Najib, who Anwar said now faces an "arduous" legal battle – without the protection of high office. [South China Morning Post 1] Referring to the likely power handover from Mahatir to Anwar, Mahatir said that "[in] an initial stage, maybe lasting one or two years, I will be prime minister (...) I will play a role in the background even when I step down." [South China Morning Post 2]

New Prime Minister Mahathir announced his government's pro-business and anti-corruption agenda in a televised address to the nation. He barred ex-PM Najib from leaving the country in the wake of the election over allegations that Najib oversaw the embezzlement of billions from the sovereign wealth fund 1MDB. In searches of Najib's homes and offices since Wednesday, police confiscated cash and jewellery. However, Mahathir said that he did not order the raids, but he supposed that the police had enough reasons to conduct them. [South China Morning Post 3] [The Star 2]

Other officials accused of covering up the corruption scandal stepped down or were placed on leave. Among them was the Attorney General, Mohamed Apandi Ali, who had cleared Najib of any wrongdoing in connection with 1MDB. The secretary general of the Malaysian Treasury and chairman of 1MDB, was also relieved of his duties. And the head of the anti-corruption commission (MACC), Dzulkifli Ahmad, also offered his resignation. [New York Times 2]

MACC, then headed by Abu Kassim, began investigations into the allegations of graft and financial mismanagement at 1MDB and the transfer of 2.6 billion ringgit (S$647.09 million) to Najib's bank accounts in 2015. In mid-2016, the Barisan Nasional government named Dzulkifli as the new MACC chief, replacing Abu Kassim who announced his early retirement. [Straits Times]

Meredith Weiss, in the New Mandala, points to the difficult task of extricating party from state which is a complicated task not only by long-time habituation, but also by ownership patterns. Whereas the election may have dispossessed United Malays Nationalist Organisation (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) of their grip on government, this is not the case as regards their holding companies, which still control major media and other key assets. [New Mandala]

Myanmar: KNU and Tatmadaw making efforts to end clashes

(jm) The Karen National Union (KNU) and the Myanmar Military (Tatmadaw) have expressed their wish to stop the conflict between the Tatmadaw and the KNU's armed branch, the Karen National Liberation Army. Nonetheless, there is still a crucial point over which the KNU does not want to concede before opening discussions with the Tatmadaw. It requests the army to stop reinforcing its troops and constructing military infrastructure in the state's capital, which, according to the KNU, is breaching the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. [Myanmar Times 1]

Tatmadaw declared that it has temporarily suspended the road construction in Hpapun township in Kayin State which was one of the most important demands from the KNU. It remains to be seen whether this decision will bring the KNU to participate at the third round of the 21st Century Panglong Conference at the end of May. [Myanmar Times 2]

Philippines: Supreme Court chief justice removal produces constitutional crisis

(ls) The removal of Supreme Court Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno continues to produce political uproar in the Philippines that is developing toward a constitutional crisis. More than half of the Philippine Senate asked the Supreme Court on Thursday to review its decision to oust its chief justice, calling the ruling a "dangerous precedent" that infringed on constitutional powers of Congress to impeach senior officials. Fourteen of the 23 senators signed the resolution, including eight who are allies of President Rodrigo Duterte. [Washington Post]

Opposition lawmakers want to impeach the eight Supreme Court judges who voted for Sereno's removal as chief justice. A majority of lawmakers in the House, however, are supporters of Duterte, who had publicly declared Sereno as his "enemy" and told Congress to fast-track the impeachment complaint against her. [Rappler 1]

The Manila Times writes that the ouster by her own colleagues was "a catastrophe for democratic institutions and the rule of law in the Philippines." [Manila Times]

Philippines: Fights against Abu Sayyaf; autonomous region about to be approved

(ls/am) Philippines security forces killed 11 Muslim militants in clashes in southern Sulu province, stronghold of the Abu Sayyaf extremist group. Three special forces soldiers died. Abu Sayyaf has pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. It has capitalised on decades of instability in the war-torn southern island of Mindanao to generate tens of millions of dollars from piracy and ransom payments. A faction of the group took part in the assault on Marawi city in May last year. [Straits Times]

The Philippine Congress is about to approve an Islamic autonomous region on the southern island of Mindanao. Both houses of the legislature are putting the finishing touches on the Bangsamoro Basic Law . Three key committees in the lower house accepted the proposal on Tuesday, and the measure looks to become law by May 30, the de facto end of the legislative session. Establishing a Bangsamoro Autonomous Region would let residents of a predominantly Muslim section of western Mindanao set up an elected government of their choosing, with the power to develop natural resources and levy taxes. [Nikkei Asian Review]

Singapore: New anti-terror law takes effect

(ls) A new law that gives the police special powers during terrorist attacks, including widely banning journalists and members of the public from reporting on the scene, took effect in Singapore on Wednesday. The law gives the police the power to block all communications on-site, ranging from photographs to videos, text and audio messages, for up to a month if authorities feel security operations could be compromised. Singapore would be the host of a possible meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korea's leader Kim Yong Un. [South China Morning Post]

Thailand: Bangkok Post editor forced to resign in another blow against press freedom

(ls) The editor of the Bangkok Post, who has held the position since July 2016, said the newspaper's board of directors had asked him to "tone down" the newspaper's reporting and editorials on the actions of the military government, particularly over their suppression of freedom of speech and the delays over long-promised elections. After refusing to curtail critical coverage, he said he has been forced to step down. [The Guardian] Thailand is ranked 140 of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index. [Reporters Without Borders]

Thailand's new cryptocurrency law

(ls) Thailand put a royal decree in place to control and regulate cryptocurrency transactions and Initial Coins Offerings (ICOs). The royal decree stipulates jail terms and fines for unregistered token brokers or those who perform token transactions through unregistered brokers as well as for fraudulent filings and unauthorized digital asset business activities. A separate decree has set a 15 per cent capital gains tax on each digital transaction. [Straits Times]4

Thailand: Draft legislation on medicinal marijuana heads to Cabinet for approval

(am) Thailand's new draft narcotics law to be proposed to the Cabinet will allow the manufacturing, import, distribution, and possession of cannabis for research purposes and medical use. Sirinya Sitdhichai, secretary-general of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), was quoted by the [Thai News Agency] on Sunday as saying he expected the legislative process to get complete by the end of this month.

Vietnam: Sentences against former high-ranking officials become final

(ls) Vietnam's highest-ranking official jailed in decades lost his bid on Monday (May 14) to set aside a 13-year sentence for financial irregularities when he was chairman of state energy firm PetroVietnam. A court upheld the sentence for former Politburo member Dinh La Thang, who was arrested and tried in a crackdown on graft, mismanagement and nepotism that felled many high-profile officials. Another

PetroVietnam official, Trinh Xuan Thanh, who was allegedly kidnapped from the streets of Berlin, withdrew an appeal against the life sentence he received in the same case. [Straits Times]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

More doubts on DPRK developments

(jk) AiR has last week gone into some detail on why there is reasonable doubt about where the announced Trump-Kim summit could lead and how likely "real" de-nuclearization of the DPRK is. [AiR]

Casting further doubts on developments and vindicating observers who tried to calm some of the optimism of late by pointing out that we have been down similar roads before, North Korea said Wednesday it is cancelling high-level talks with South Korea and threatened to pull out of the summit with the United States over ongoing military exercises with South Korea. North Korean media pronounced that the Max Thunder Air Force drills are a provocation and in fact "rehearsals for an invasion". [Korea Herald]

Further complicating matters this week were comments by new and controversial national security advisor John Bolton who compared the model that the administration is seeking to apply to North Korea to what the US has done in Libya. Considering that Moammar Gadhafi agreed to abandon his country's nuclear programme and eight years later was overthrown and killed by rebels backed by Washington, such comparisons will only stoke Kim's

fears and make it less likely that he will give up his nuclear weapons which have long been key to his survival strategy [CNN].

Despite the setbacks, the White House is "still hopeful" the summit between Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump will proceed. President Trump has also explicitly moved away from suggestions the “Libya model” would be considered and gave specific security guarantees to the North Korean leader, assuring that he “would remain in power” after a possible deal [Korea Herald II and III]. China also continues to support the meeting, urging North Korea not to cancel. Beyond that, President Xi said: “We support the improvement of North-South (Korean) relations, the promotion of dialogue between North Korea and the U.S., denuclearization on the peninsula and North Korea’s development of its economy” [AP News]. Xi has met with a delegation of visiting North Korean officials last Wednesday continuing to show that the countries are still tight.

China’s first domestically built aircraft carrier completes sea trial

(jk) The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has reported that during the five-day trial, it has tested multiple facilities and attained the anticipated objectives. The carrier set out on its debut sea trial on May 13 and returned on Friday [China Daily].

Taiwan: A war would be incredibly costly for Beijing

(jk) Grant Newsham, who has also previously been writing for CPG online [CPG Online], elaborates on the potential cost that Beijing would incur if it were to attempt a forceful unification with Taiwan. As he points out, in addition to the lives an invasion would cost on either side of the strait, Beijing would face serious economic challenges if it were to attack Taiwan and possibly face much more harm than what is currently being discussed under a potential “trade war” with the US. In spite of the apparent military superiority that Beijing has, an all-out unification war would have the potential of serious economic backlash, as well as creating the circumstances for a unified and coordinated effort by the US and its allies against the PRC. Newsham argues that to believe a short, sharp war will stun other countries and present them with a

fait accompli is misleading and ill-advice for the government in Beijing [Atimes].

Conversely, the PRC is pressing ahead with its increasingly aggressive posturing around Taiwan. Its recent live-fire drills and other military exercises around the island are a definite warning sign and have been officially labelled as such. Spokesman for the PRC's Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said last Wednesday that these measures were intended as a message to Taiwanese officials who consider their autonomous government to be entirely independent of the leadership in Beijing. [Newsweek]

Japan-Russia relations

(jk) Last week, we reported that Prime Minister Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin will hold a meeting in Moscow on May 26, aiming to reach an agreement on joint economic activities and the Russian-controlled islands of Hokkaido, a dispute over territory that has lasted over 70 years.

In a broader sweep of Japan-Russia relations, this piece provides some background on Japan's balancing act with regards to its relations with Russia, especially after the latter's invasion of Crimea in 2014. On the one hand, in the tradition of the "western powers", Japan joined the sanctions and condemnations of Russia after it seized Crimea, but on the other hand it bets on engagement and good relationships with what is a key player in East Asia's regional order. Amongst other reasons for strong Japanese-Russian ties, the avoidance of strong Sino-Russian axis ranks high. [Atlantic Council]

India looks to improve diplomatic ties with North Korea

(ot) Indian Minister of State for External Affairs VK Singh went to Pyongyang for a two-day high-level visit, the first of such in nearly two decades, notwithstanding a long established low-intensity diplomatic relationship between the two countries for the past 45 years. Not long ago, India has refused former U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's suggestion to diminish its diplomatic presence in Pyongyang. However, India's decision to resume its diplomatic outreach, is widely seen in context of the recent inter - Korean summit and the attempts of regional Asian powers to contribute to the peace

process as the leaders of the United States and North Korea are set for a historic meeting next month. [CNBC, BBC]

India: Ceasefire announced in Kashmir for holy month of Ramadan

(am) Indian military operations against rebels in Kashmir will be suspended during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan for the first time in nearly two decades, a move which comes after months of intense fighting in the disputed Himalayan region. [Al Jazeera]

However, Indian security forces, of which there are an estimated 500,000 in Kashmir, reserve the right to retaliate if attacked. [Al Jazeera]

Later the day of the announcement, an encounter between militants and security forces broke out after an army patrol party was attacked however. [The Indian Express] Earlier in the day, security forces launched a search operation in a forest area following a brief exchange of firing with militants, a police official said. [Hindustan Times]

Pakistan and China reaffirm military friendship

(ot) In a top-level meeting Chinese Central Military Commission Vice Chairman General Zhang Youxia and Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa, de facto head of the Pakistan army, discussed matters of regional security and bilateral defense cooperation.

Reaffirming friendship, trust and confidence between the countries they concluded the meeting by signing a MoU on bilateral defense cooperation. General Zhang especially appreciated Pakistan's counter-terrorism achievements sending a signal to major critics such as the US and India and also stressed the importance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. [Daily Times, Geo TV]

Maldives: improving relations with Indian military?

(jm) After month of tension between India and the Maldives, the Maldivians authorities have now allowed marine commandos of the Indian navy to train diving and tactics in asymmetric warfare in their territorial waters. [Avas]

Seychelles: Meeting with India at Joint Commission Meeting

(jm) After the controversy of the establishment of an Indian military base in Seychelles earlier this year, the two countries are meeting this week to speak about their cooperation on softer topics like health, education, human resources development and science and technology. The meeting aims to consolidate the ties between India and Seychelles after some turbulences but also marks the limits of cooperation in the foreseeable future. [Seychelles News Agency]

Nepal: Relaxation with India

(jm) After a troubled relationship with India after the 2015 blockade, Nepal and Indi seem to be on a path of relaxation after Nepal´s Prime Minister Oli´s visit in Delhi and the just ended follow-up visit of Indian Prime Minister Modi to Nepal. India has now agreed to implement past accords between the two countries without further delay and welcomed Nepal's demand for four new air routes linking the countries. [Kathmandu Post]

Bangladesh: US provides $44m additional humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya

(jm) While visiting the Rohingya refugees' camp in Cox's Bazar, USAID announced that the United States will provide, through USAID, $44 million in humanitarian assistance, firstly to support the Bangladesh's efforts in this crisis, but also for other people affected by violence and conflict in Myanmar. This help may be used for providing food, medical care, shelters, and other primordial needs. [Dhaka Tribune]

Duterte says Xi will not allow his removal from office

(ls) Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping had provided him with a personal assurance that Beijing would not allow him to be removed from office. Duterte, who did not say when Xi made the remarks, met with Xi on the sidelines of the Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan Province in China on April 10. Politicians of the opposition questioned whether Xi's assurances were the reason why Duterte was making use of substantial Chinese loans, and his reluctance to criticize Beijing's actions in the South China Sea. [Bloomberg]

China, Laos vow to boost cooperation on law enforcement, security

(am) China and Laos have pledged to boost cooperation on law enforcement and security and maintain regional stability. The pledge came as visiting Chinese State Councillor and Minister of Public Security Zhao Kezhi held talks separately with Chansamone Chanyalath, Lao minister of national defence and Somkeo Silavong, Lao minister of public security here on Monday.

Zhao said China is willing to work with Laos to boost cooperation in safeguarding national security, anti-terrorism, fighting drug-related crimes, hunt for fled suspects and recovering ill-gotten gains, and fighting against Internet gambling, telecom fraud and illegal immigration, among others. [Xinhua Net]

China-Myanmar: Ethnic conflicts on Myanmar side of the border condemned by China

(ls/jm) China condemned fighting on its border between Myanmar forces and ethnic rebels that has left 19 dead, mostly civilians, in some of the worst violence to rattle the restive frontier in recent years. The Chinese embassy in Yangon urged "relevant parties" to reach an immediate ceasefire. The violence "made people from the Myanmar side flee across the Chinese border, and stray bullets have entered into Chinese territory", the statement added. However, observers believe Beijing has influence on some rebels near its border and is an important player in a difficult peace process steered by Myanmar's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi. [AFP]

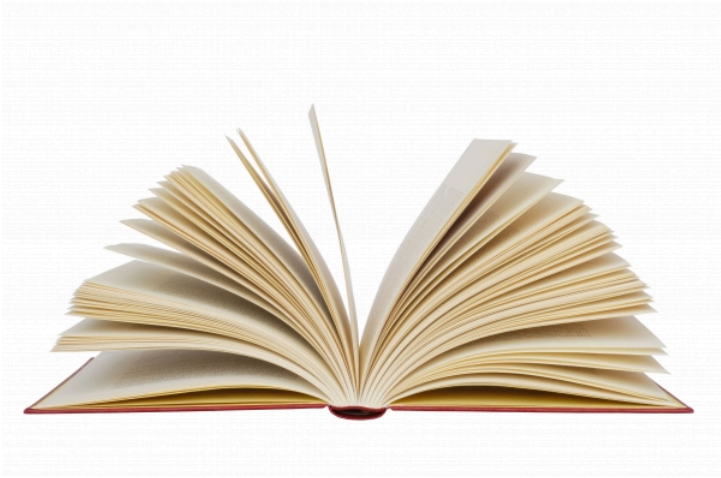
The attack led by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) against a casino run by militiamen and a

Myanmar army post, resulted in 19 people killed, including 15 civilians. A Myanmar government spokesman assured that Myanmar military are hunting down the insurgents. [Reuters]

Myanmar/India: India ramps up Myanmar ties to gain foothold in ASEAN

(jm) India's External Affairs Minister met officials from Myanmar in a two day visit last week. Several projects of cooperation between the two countries were discussed and among them, the Indian representatives expressed his wish to accelerate the construction of the India-Myanmar-Thailand highway. According to the new "Act East" Indian policy, that replaces the former "Look East" policy, it seems that the country wants to get a foothold in ASEAN and compete with China by moving closer to Myanmar. [Myanmar Times]

Background Reading



Hoover Institution's China Leadership Monitor

(jk) A new issue of the China Leadership Monitor is now online, containing five articles on Chinese affairs. They cover Chinese Views on the U.S. National Security and National Defense Strategies; The New, Slimmed-Down Central Military Commission; The National People's Congress meeting in March and the subsequent administrative reorganisation; Central and Regional Leadership for Xinjiang Policy; and the abolition of constitutional term limits which may not be as far-

reaching in its implications as is often presumed [Hoover Institution].

Security Sector Governance and the Role of Oversight - The Case of Indonesia

(am) This working paper discusses on the current progress and challenges that faces actors involved in the oversight of Indonesia's security sector governance (SSG). There are 4 main actors in focus, namely the parliament, independent or internal oversight bodies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and think tanks. The paper argues that despite progresses are evident, all four actors are still laden with problems that hamper their effort in effectively providing oversight to Indonesia's SSG. Common issues such as the lack of human capacity, funding, and coordination needs to be resolved in order for the actors to be able to effectively provide the needed oversight. [CSIS]

Book review: "Human Rights in an Unequal World"

(ls) Nils Gilman reviews Samuel Moyn's new book "Human Rights in an Unequal World" (2018). The book brings together two historical debates, the first about the history of neoliberalism and the second about the history of human rights. The question that Moyn seeks to explain in his book is: How is it that the era of neoliberalism, commonly said to have begun in the mid-to-late 1970s, coincides almost perfectly with the triumphant rise of a discourse of human rights? [Los Angeles Review of Books]

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