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Grasp the pattern, read the trend

Asia in Review

(2/6/2018)

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the second issue of CPG's *Asia in Review (AiR)* in June 2018, updating you on the latest developments in law, politics and international relations in Asia.

I hope you enjoy reading!

Best regards

Henning Glaser

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Law and Politics in East Asia

China: Remembering Tiananmen protest 1989

(dql) Tens of thousands of people gathered on 4 June in Hong Kong for a vigil to mark the 29th anniversary of the military crackdown against the student-led reform protest at Tiananmen Square. In contrast, in the rest of mainland China activities to remember the crackdown are banned and postings are scrupped from social media. [New York Times]

In a related move, the police raided a southwestern underground church in Sichuan which was preparing a service to commemorate the Tiananmen crackdown. [South China Morning Post]

For an account on the human rights situation of human rights lawyers, autonomous labor groups, and underground churches in China under Xi Jinping see the article in [China Brief: Jamestown Foundation] emphasizing that while all three groups were enjoyed some space to operate under the Hu Jintao administration, they have been considered threats to the rule of the Communist Party within the frame of Xi Jinping's crackdown on organization and expression and treated accordingly.

Japan: Finance Minister ready to accept pay cut to take responsibility in document forgery scandal

(dql) In the ongoing scandal over documents forged by the Finance Ministry in the context of the sale of land belonging to the state [AiR] Finance Minister Aso, while refusing to resign from office over the scandal, announced that he is ready to renounce the ministerial component of his annual pay amounting to 15,500 USD to take responsibility for officials under him who altered documents. [Bloomberg]

In a related development, Prime Minister Abe instructed his cabinet to work out measures to improve government official compliance with standards of proper handling of official documents. Abe's instruction is a reaction on a number of scandals that have damaged public confidence in the government. Besides the land sale document forgery case, Abe has also come under pressure after a failed cover-up of activity logs for Ground Self-Defense Force troops in Iraq between 2004 and 2006 which were first declared discarded, but were found later . [Japan Times]

South Korea: New minimum wage law endorsed by cabinet amid strong labor groups' protest

(dql) Following parliamentary passage, President Moon's cabinet approved the revision of the minimum wage act raising the hourly minimum wage by 16.4 percent to 7,530 won (7 USD), the biggest increase in almost two decades. Under the new law, South Korea plans to further increase the threshold to 10,000 won by 2020. Labor groups called on President Moon to veto the law. They criticize that the law offsets the effect of the rise in the legal wage threshold by counting bonuses and benefits into the minimum wage which was among the demands of the business sector. [Yonhap]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Pakistani Journalist critical of military abducted, then freed

(am) The brief abduction this week of Gul Bukhari, a prominent Pakistani-British journalist and social activist known for her fiery criticism against Pakistan's military, has once again raised concerns of a revived suppression on dissent in South Asia's most politically turbulent country.

Bukhari's abduction was done by unknown men came just after a day when military spokesman notified at a press conference that the Army is keeping an eye on citizens who criticize the state and the army. [Al Jazeera] [RFE/RL]

Pakistan: Former PMs to face corruption probe

(am) Pakistan's anti-corruption agency National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has authorized an investigation against two former prime ministers Nawaz Shareef and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi over the supposed abuse of power during their recently ended five-year term. As petroleum minister when Sharif was prime minister, Abbasi was the brainiac behind Pakistan's push to embrace liquid natural gas (LNG). During the meeting of NAB, Chairman retired Justice Javed Iqbal ordered an investigation over a 15-year contract of LNG given to a company against the prevailing rules, causing a loss of billions of rupees to the national exchequer. [Anadolu] [Reuters]

Nepal: Govt to tighten regulations on NGOs, INGOs

(ot) The Nepalese government has decided to tighten the regulations for Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs). It said that some ill practices have increased because of a lack of monitoring. Local offices will then have to send reports about NGOs and INGOs and the property details of office bearers of these organizations will be made public. [Himalayan Times]

Maldives: Former President receives 'ticket' for presidential election

(dql) The presidential ticket from biggest opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has been officially handed to former president Mohamed Nasheed, who had overwhelmingly won the party's primary, despite a court order to cease the primary and efforts of the police to stop the elections, after the Election Commission had deemed the primary unconstitutional because Nasheed is a convict subjected to serve a 13 year jail sentence. Following Nasheed's victory, rumors spread that the Election Commission was intending to dissolve the (MDP) over what it has described as an illegal presidential primary to pick self-exiled former president Nasheed for the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for September 23. Dispersing these rumors, a member of the Election Commission clarified a few days after the primary that the Commission has no desire to dissolve any political party, but warned that repeated legal infringements could ultimately force its hand. [Avas 1] [Avas 2]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia & Vietnam: New cyber security laws likely to limit freedom of speech

(ls) With freedom of speech shrinking in several Southeast Asian countries, the main tool of state control remains to regulate the internet. In a move seen as a further attempt to control unwanted online messages, Cambodia's entire domestic and international Internet traffic will soon pass through a Data Management Centre (DMC) created by state-owned Telecom Cambodia. It will enable government minders to monitor and censor government critics and exert controls over Western business interests that face stiff competition from a rapidly expanding China. Freedom of speech has been under particular pressure in Cambodia with the closure of the Cambodia Daily and the purchase of the Phnom Penh Post by a Malaysian businessman with ties to Hun Sen's government. [The Diplomat]

Under a new Vietnamese cyber security bill, which will likely come into effect on 15 June, service providers must take down offending content within 24 hours of receiving a request from the Ministry of Information and Communications or Ministry of Public Security. Further requirements prescribe that internet companies must store data locally (in Vietnam), "verify" user information, and disclose user data to authorities without the need for a court order. The law will make illegal the use of cyberspace to prepare, post, and spread information that "has the content of propaganda opposing the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," or "offends the nation, the national flag, the national emblem, the national anthem, great people, leaders, notable people, and national heroes". The bill's measures have been summarized by [Human Rights Watch].

Indonesia: Government clamps down on Papua's independence movement

(ls) In Indonesia's Papua region, independence activists continue to be the subject of arrests and detention. Petitions for an independence referendum are viewed as acts of treason by the authorities. Indonesia continues to be criticized for the plight of its easternmost region which is split into the provinces of Papua and West Papua.

Despite being some of Southeast Asia's richest regions in terms of natural resources, the two provinces remain among the country's poorest. Papua is home to one of the world's largest gold and copper mining operations. Indonesia annexed the former Dutch-controlled region in 1963, and took sovereignty after the 1969 Act of Free Choice, a vote on whether to remain part of Indonesia of which opponents say it was rigged. [New York Times]

Indonesia: LGBT issue likely to play a role again in next year's election

(ls) Over the past two years, Indonesia's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community has been (ab)used as a political weapon in efforts to seize voters' support in local elections. Febriana Firdaus argues that, ahead of the upcoming national election in 2019, there is a risk that the issue will be used in this way again in the country with the world's largest Muslim population. Though attempts to outlaw the LGBT community led to an eventual government backdown, Firdaus describes how efforts to discriminate against the LGBT community continue, particularly at the local level. [Lowy Institute]

Malaysia: A non-Malay Attorney General and other post-election developments

(ls) Malaysia's newly elected government has appointed a new Attorney General. The lawyer Tommy Thomas is the first person from outside Malaysia's Malay majority to hold the powerful position in more than half a century. His main job will be to lead the investigations in the 1MDB scandal in which former prime minster Najib Razak and his wife are among the main suspects. Thomas's predecessor, Mohamed Apandi Ali, in 2016 cleared Najib of any wrongdoing in

the 1MDB case which was now re-opened by the new prime minister Mahatir Mohamad. This week, Najib's wife was questioned by the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission. [Associated Press]

Prior to Thomas's appointment, which was consented by the King, there have been concerns from Malay and Muslim groups he would be unable to up-hold Islam's status in Malaysia, given his assertions that the country is a secular state. Responding to these concerns, PM Mahathir and Deputy PM Wan Azizah Wan Ismail said that the new Pakatan Harapan (PH) government will continue to safeguard Islam. Thomas' appointment followed PH's pick of an ethnic Chinese, Lim Guan Eng, as Finance Minister – a post which was continuously held by ethnic Malays since 1974. Malaysian politics have traditionally been characterized by issues related to ethnic representation. According to Malaysia's federal constitution, Islam is the official religion, with freedom for other religions. [Straits Times]

In an informative interview with the South China Morning Post, Anwar Ibrahim, who is likely to take over the office of prime minister from Mahatir in two years, has talked about foreign policy, the hours spent in prison, the need to accommodate dissenting voices in the coalition for the sake of unity, and why moving with caution on dismantling race-based policies is the wiser option. [South China Morning Post]

In the Washington Post, Josh Rogin argues that Malaysia after the election presents an opportunity for the United States to score a rare victory over China in Asia. Mahathir has either paused or canceled several major Chinese-funded investment projects amid allegations of kickbacks to Najib and predatory deal terms. Beijing was heavily invested in Najib, and, as Rogin writes, the Malaysian people resent it. [Washington Post]

Myanmar: Government launches talks to close all IDP camps

(jm) Discussions were launched for establishing a strategic program to close Internal Displaced Person's (IDP) camps in Kachin, Shan, Kayin and Rakhine states. The government still makes a difference between refugees in Kachin and Shan states who are victims of the fights between Tatmadaw and armed ethnic groups and those in Rakhine state who fled because of inter-communal violence. According to an official, there are more than 140 IDP camps holding 160,000 people in these four states. [Myanmar Times]

Myanmar: Ethnic National Ceasefire Agreement signatories to meet for planning Union Peace Conference

(jm) The ethnic NCA signatories are scheduled join a meeting to discuss in Chiang Mai (Thailand) about the holding of the Union Peace Conference which has constantly been delayed these last months. The main disagreement remains the question of a unitary or federal State, but the Chief of the insurgent PaO National Liberation Organization which administers the Pa-O Self-Administered Zone consisting of the three townships Hopong, Hsi Hseng, and Pinlaung townships in southern Shan State assured that federal principles are only about delegating power and not about granting a right to secede. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar: Government accused of double-speak on political talks ban

(jm) Angriness has risen up after the Ministry of Education released two statements about speeches in universities. The first one directly banned talks on political issues and required details to be submitted in advance for the organization of seminars or talk shows, including their titles, concept notes, names and biographies of all panelists, a list of participants, the place and date. The second one withdrew the interdiction of political matters but kept the prerequisite of the details submission and added that the topic must not differ from the one that was forecasted. Student unions, teacher associations and the public are urging the government to withdraw this statement. [Myanmar Times]

Thailand: New party vows to defend charter

(ot) A new political party was found by former prominent protest leaders, with determination to protect the 2017 Constitution. The Action Coalition for Thailand Party (ACT) was launched and held its inaugural meeting this week. The Party's main position is to protect the 2017 Constitution and oppose any attempt to pardon political prisoners. They also vowed to protect the monarchy and tackle corruption problems in Thailand.

One of its key co-founders include Suthep Thaugsuban, former politician from the Democrats and Secretary-General of the now defunct People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) that ousted then prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra and her Pheu Thai Party from power. Suthep once said not to be involved in national politics anymore, but has continued to openly endorse the junta and Prime Minister General Prayut Chan-O-Cha. However, he vowed he would not take any executive position or any political position the Party becomes the government.

Suthep's latest political stunt has drawn many criticisms. The establishment of the party and Suthep's decision to return to politics have also led many observers to believe it to be a reincarnation of the PDRC set up to support General Prayut's return to power after the general elections. [Khosod English, Bangkok Post 1, Bangkok Post 2, Thai PBS]

Thailand: Constitutional Court ruling on NCPO order on political parties

(ot) Thailand's Constitutional Court ruled that the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Order 53/2560 amending the organic law on political parties was constitutional.

The Order, issued on 22 December last year under Section 44 of the interim constitution, amended Sections 140 and 141 of the organic law on political parties. It sought to extend the deadlines for political parties to attend to administrative work. The amendments required members of existing political parties to reconfirm their membership by verifying their qualifications and pay membership fees within 30 days from 1 April. Parties are also required to hold general assemblies, elect leaders and executives, write regulations, and establish provincial branches within 90 days of the NCPO ban on political activities being lifted.

The Court ruling was in response to separate petitions filed through the Office of the Ombudsman by two main political parties, Pheu Thai and the Democrats. They claimed that the new requirements violated the 2017 Constitution by restricting their rights as well as imposing unreasonably heavy burden on their members, and as a result putting them at a disadvantage ahead of the election. [Bangkok Post 1, Bangkok Post 2, Matichon]

The Court, however, ruled against these allegations, clearing the last legal controversy that could push back

a general election tentatively scheduled for February next year. Despite that, a ban on political activities is yet to be repealed amid growing calls from political parties. Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha said that political parties should not expect to run their election campaigns freely, and political activities will still need to be approved on a case-by-case basis. He also said that the NCPO would hold a dialogue with parties and related agencies over election preparations this month. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Pro-democracy activists hear charges for demanding elections

(ot) Scores of pro-democracy activists marched to a police station to support those summoned by the police over last month's rally calling for elections.

A group of 45 protesters from the "People Who Want Elections" group went to acknowledge charges pressed against them over a protest against the repeated postponement of the general elections earlier on 22 May which marked the fourth anniversary of the coup. A total of 62 people from the movement were accused of disturbing public order, disobeying law enforcement officers, and violating the political assembly ban, among other allegations. The police decided not to detain the protestors.

The six leaders of the movement had already been arrested on the day of the protest and later released. They were additionally accused of sedition. [Bangkok Post, Khaosod English, Prachatai, Thai Lawyers for Human Rights]

The event received much attention from international rights agencies as well as the diplomatic community in Thailand who went to observe the activity. The United Nations Human Rights Council also made public three letters it had sent to the Thai government between December last year and February. [The Nation]

Vietnam: New economic zones raise suspicion of increasing Chinese influence

(ls) The Vietnamese parliament debates a controversial bill to create three new special economic zones (SEZs), raising fears of Chinese encroachment on Vietnamese soil. The law would allow 99-year leases in some cases within the three new zones. The fact that the proposed

SEZ in Quang Ninh province is not far from China's Guangxi autonomous region is of particular concern. According to analysts, the South China Sea dispute, along with memories of the 1979 border war, run deep in the national psyche, making SEZs very unpopular. [South China Morning Post]

Meanwhile, however, Vietnam is joining its neighbors Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Thailand to create a regional fund that aims to back infrastructure and other development projects and to lessen reliance on Chinese investment. Thailand's Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha is expected to propose the idea to the leaders of the five countries in Thailand on June 16 at the 8th summit of the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, or ACMECS. China is rapidly stepping up its presence especially in infrastructure investment in line with its Belt and Road Initiative. Through a multinational framework between China and the five Mekong countries, Beijing has promised more than 10 billion yuan ($1.5 billion) in concessional loans. [Nikkei Asian Review]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Sino-Russian deepening relations: Xi and Putin celebrate close China-Russia ties amid growing cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

(dql) Ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit at the weekend, China and Russia on Friday concluded contracts for nuclear cooperation projects

worth 3.13 billion USD and a 1 billion USD industrial investment fund. [South China Morning Post] On this occasion, Chinese President Xi and his Russian counterpart Putin reassured their pledge that their countries would support each other on key global issues. China's state Xinhua News quotes Xi confirming "that the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership is mature, firm and solid" and that "[n]o matter how international situations change, China and Russia always firmly support each other in defending their respective core interests". [Xinhua]

The demonstration of closing ranks between both countries facing strained relations with the USA was reinforced by Putin being the first to be presented friendship medal, China's highest award for outstanding contributions of foreign experts to the economic and social progress of the country. [Straits Times]

The concord between Beijing and Moscow who are jointly leading the Shanghai Cooperation Organization stands in stark contrast to the disunity displayed between US President Trump and the other leaders over at the G7 summit on Friday and Saturday culminating in Trump's rejection to endorse an joint communique on trade, environment and the Iran nuclear deal after the seven leaders appeared to have agreed on such a communique. [Deutsche Welle]

In a latest development reflecting growing cooperation between member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (China, India, Kazahkstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), China and India signed two MoUs at the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit, under which China agrees to share hydrological data of the Brahmaputra River, whose origin is in Tibet, to predict floods and to import non-Basmati rice from India, a step which increases India's share on the Chinese (the world's largest) rice market and expected to decrease the ballooning trade deficit with China. [Financial Express]

Furthermore, India earlier this week reiterated that it will continue to push for the purchase of Russian-made S-400 Triumf advanced Air Defense Systems despite possible US punitive actions following the US Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) which punishes countries and entities engaged in transactions with the defence or intelligence establishment of Russia. [The Diplomat]

This reassurance of Indian-Russian cooperation comes a few weeks after the summit between Prime Minister Modi and President Putin at which they agreed "that the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership

between India and Russia is an important factor for global peace and stability" and that both countries "recognised each other's respective roles as major powers with common responsibilities for maintaining global peace and stability." [The Quint]

China-US relations: Ties remain strained over unsuccessful trade talks and hacked secret Navy warfare data

(dql) The relations between Beijing and Washington continue to be strained over trade issues after the latest round of negotiations led by US Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross and Chinese Vice President Liu He failed to reach a breakthrough in the dispute over the latest customs duties proposed by the Trump administration. [CBS News]

Further souring the relations, US officials confirmed that Chinese government hackers have been able to hack an US Navy contractor and secure sensitive undersea warfare data, including secret plans to develop a supersonic anti-ship missile to be used on US submarines by 2020. [Washington Post]

China-Japan relations: Maritime security hotline launched

(dql) In a sign of a deepening rapprochement between China and Japan, both countries launched a communication mechanism between their defense authorities to prevent accidental clashes at sea and in the air. Besides the hotline, Beijing and Tokyo will host in turn annual senior official and expert-level meetings to monitor the system's operation and technical problems. Furthermore, both sides agreed that the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and the Chinese military will continue to abide by existing communications protocols between vessels and aircraft to prevent an escalation of tensions. [Kyodo News]

Cross-Straits relations: Chinese invasion simulated in annual military drills

(dql) Amid strained Cross-Straits relations, Taiwan conducted this week its annual five-day live-fire Han Kuang military drill including anti-landing exercises with non-live-fire "strategic confrontations" simulating

military actions in case of an invasion of Chinese. [Focus Taiwan]

In a related move expected to spark Beijing's anger, the US Senate Armed Services Committee has passed a draft bill calling for the participation on American troops the Han Kuang exercise. The bill follows previous recent passage of the a number of pro-Taiwan laws, among them the Taiwan Travel Act and the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act encouraging high-level official and military exchanges. [South China Morning Post]

South China Sea: U.S. confronts China – ASEAN allies pursue a softer approach

(ls) The U.S. Air Force flew two bombers from a base in the Indian Ocean to near the South China Sea's Spratly Islands this week. The flight by the two bombers is not the first in the South China Sea, but it came shortly after remarks by U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis in Singapore accusing China of "intimidation and coercion." The move also came after Mattis oversaw the renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command last week, another symbolic gesture to underline the importance Washington affords to the region, as Ankit Panda writes in [The Diplomat].

The movement followed seven passages of U.S. naval vessels through the same sea since President Donald Trump took office in 2017. However, analysts believe that the U.S. military movement may challenge China without emboldening other countries, all with smaller armed forces than the People's Liberation Army, unless Washington offers the others more naval cooperation or diplomatic and economic support. [Voice of America]

Prateek Joshi argues in the South China Morning Post that, whereas the U.S. expects India and other allies to play a greater role in confronting China in the South China Sea, the reality is that India and its maritime neighbours may have little to gain from this, taking into account the existing regional balance. [South China Morning Post]

Also, Collin Koh writes that ASEAN's desire to maintain peace and stability is working to China's advantage. Negotiations with Beijing on the proposed Code of Conduct in the South China Sea are expected to commence in August. In the same month, the inaugural ASEAN-China joint maritime exercise is scheduled to take place. Koh concludes that ASEAN is

not about to rock the boat with Beijing. [Channel News Asia]

In the meantime, new analysis from an Israeli intelligence firm suggests that Chinese missile systems deployed to the Spratly and Paracel Islands may have been removed or relocated. Missile launchers and a radar system on Woody Island in the Paracel chain have disappeared. However, the U.S. has assessed that the missile systems have likely been concealed inside buildings. Another possible explanation could be that the missiles were not suited to deployment where they might be vulnerable to salt water damage, and therefore may have required replacement or repair. [CNN]

China-Laos relations: Laos' president Bounnhang Vorachithh on state visit in Beijing

(ls) Chinese President Xi Jinping and Lao President Bounnhang Vorachithh met in Beijing to discuss the two communist countries' future relations. They agreed to further cooperation in several aspects, among them the cooperation in major projects under the framework of the "Belt and Road" initiative. In terms of security cooperation, they agreed to enhance coordination and cooperation in multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations, East Asia cooperation, and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, according to an official statement of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Lao People's Democratic Republic and the People's Republic of China are long-time allies due to their similar political systems and ideology. [PRC Foreign Ministry]

Myanmar reviews $9bn China-backed port project on cost concerns

(jm) Myanmar's concerns about the project of a Chinese backed port in Rakhine State grew up recently. This construction, which is part of the Belt and Road Initiative, is supposed to cost $9 billion but the Burmese government, fearing to default on its debt, is now negotiating with China to reduce the price. Lawmakers and government are afraid that the port could come under Chinese control if Myanmar fails to service its debt as it happened to Sri Lanka with the Hambantota's port. An economist estimated that the amount of debt Myanmar would need to take on for

this project would be around $2 billion, which means 3% of the country's GDP. [Financial Times]

Myanmar: UN sign pact on initial steps for Rohingya return

(jm) The cooperation between Myanmar and UN agencies passed a symbolic milestone with the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) about the Rohingya crisis. The agreement should lead to the establishment of a "framework of cooperation" for creating conditions for "voluntary, safe, dignified and sustainable" repatriation of refugees.

Nonetheless, some Rights groups are reluctant to see that as a real progress. Partly it is because the MoU doesn't address Myanmar's denial of citizenship for the Rohingyas. Their legal recognition as an ethnic group has been denied by a law in 1982 which prevents them from having the country's citizenship. Human Rights defenders don't see how this agreement can guarantee a safe repatriation of the refugees and even less because Myanmar's government already cooperated with UN agencies a quarter century earlier in repatriating 230,000 Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh, with the result that we know today. [ABC News]

Maldives/India: Deterioration of bilateral ties

(jm) The Maldivian government asked India to remove its second 'gift' naval chopper after it requested the same for the first helicopter 2 months ago. The island nation doesn't feel comfortable with the presence of Indian navy staff who are stationed for the maintenance. These choppers were gifted by India for maritime surveillance but were located in Laamu and Addu. It is believe that China is considering planning ports there. [Times of India]

At the same time, the majority leader of the Maldivian parliament was denied entry into India. He was accused of "bullying" the Indian nation. [The Wire]

These two events reflect the current deterioration of the bilateral ties between the two countries.

Pakistan asked by World Bank to accept India's proposal for neutral expert in dam dispute

(am) The World Wank has asked Pakistan to step down from its traditional stand on Kishanganga and Ratle dam dispute and to negotiate with India's proposal of appointing a neutral expert. Pakistan was asked to withdraw its plea for setting up a court of arbitration.

Pakistan has incessantly opposed the construction of dams in Indian's Jammu and Kashmir state claiming it as a misdemeanour of a World Bank-mediated six-decade-old treaty on the sharing of waters from the Indus and its tributaries. India, on the other hand, reckons that the dams are not violating the 1960 Indus Water Treaty. [Dawn] [Tribune]

Afghanistan: Endorsement of UAE's bid for troop deployment with NATO Command

(am) The Afghanistan government on Wednesday endorsed the UAE's bid for deploying troops in their territory under NATO's command for training and mentoring.

The move came after the announcement of General John Nicholson, top US commander in Afghanistan, who had announced a week earlier that UAE and Qatar had asked to deploy their soldiers in Afghanistan.

The UAE is the first Islamic nation to send soldiers to Afghanistan under NATO, where ISIS and Taliban have intensified their onslaught in the recent months. [Arab News

Background Reading

Cambodia's troop deployments to UN peacekeeping missions

(ls) Since 2006, Cambodia has sent more than 5,000 troops on UN peacekeeping missions. The country is currently the 32nd-highest contributor whereas it is only 72nd in terms of total population. Many Cambodians see it as a way of repaying the UN peacekeepers that once helped the kingdom as it emerged from civil war and the horrors of the Khmer Rouge. However, more than one hundred Cambodian peacekeepers have lost their lives since 2006. Erin Handley and Mech Dara report in the [South China Morning Post].

"Timor-Leste is not a failing state"

(ls) Last month, Timor-Leste's citizens elected a new government, with Xanana Gusmao the likely new prime minister. But the country's prospects remain uncertain. In the New Mandala, Bobby Anderson argues that Timor-Leste is not a failing state. Rather, he writes that Timor-Leste's bureaucratic problems, which can be described concretely, are concentrated in its capital Dili, an often insular center that lacks understanding of, and experience in, the rural areas where most Timorese live. According to his analysis, the problems involve ineffective logistics, haphazard supply chains, a lack of facilities standardization and maintenance, centralization of fiscal policy and procurement that takes no account of local conditions, and lengthy delays in payments and financial acquittals. [New Mandala]

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