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Asia in Review

(3/6/2018)

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Dear Reader,

CPG is presenting you the third issue of *Asia in Review (AiR)* in June 2018 with the latest developments in law, politics and international relations in Asia.

I hope you enjoy reading.

Please note that starting with the next issue *AiR* will be published on Tuesdays.

Best regards,

Henning Glaser

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Law and Politics in East Asia

Religion in China: Holy See and Beijing hold talks on bishop appointments amid increasing government interference in religious practice

(dql) Following inconclusive talks in March [AiR 1/4/2018], the Vatican and China this week held a new round of talks on the issue of the appointment of bishops widely believed to be the last stumbling block for an agreement which would pave the way for resuming diplomatic ties between both sides after a nearly 70-year breach following the Communist takeover in China. [Reuters] Results of the talks were not available at the time of writing.

The talks come amid growing concerns over tightening control of religious practice in China. Foreign missionaries are voicing worries about a widening campaign against the Christian community following the recent demolition of the major Way of the Cross pilgrimage site in a village in Henan province and the

arrest two Koreans accused of 'Korean Christian infiltration'.

The detentions take place against the background of amendments to the 'Religious Affairs Regulation' [China Law Translate for the regulation in English] [State Council China, in Chinese], which came into force in February and allows tighter state oversight over affairs and practices of religious groups, and the adoption of a document, issued in April by Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the Public Security Bureau and the State Administration for Religious Affairs, ordering intensified investigation and prosecution of Korean Christian organizations in China. In May more than 30 Japanese and Koreans believed to belong to foreign religious groups had been detained. [South China Morning Post] [Bitter Winter]

China's anti-graft campaign: Highest financial official pleaded guilty

(dql) The former chief of China's now defunct Insurance Regulatory Commission has pleaded guilty of accepting bribes amounting to 3 million USD in return for help in securing contract, loan, and personal promotion approvals. He is the highest-ranking finance official to be convicted in the course of President Xi Jinping's anti-graft campaign in the financial sector launched back in 2016. In another prominent case, a court in May sentenced the founder and former chairman of Anbang Insurance Group, China's giant holding company with assets worth more than 300 billion USD, to 18 years imprisonment for fraud and embezzlement. [South China Morning Post]

South Korea: Sweeping victory for ruling party in local elections

(dql) Wednesday's local elections and parliamentary by-elections resulted in a landslide victory for the ruling liberal Democratic Party winning 14 of the 17 metropolitan mayor and governor posts including the mayoral race in Seoul as well as 11 of 12 parliament seats. [Korea Herald]

The sweeping victory, coming one day after the historic meeting between Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un is considered to be an overwhelming approval of President Moon's North Korea policy and is expected

to boost President's domestic reform policies, including a change of the constitution. [Korea Times]

Taking responsibility for the crushing defeat, leaders of the conservative parties, including the chief of the main opposition Liberty Korea Party, which won only two of the mayoral and gubernatorial races and 1 legislative set, resigned. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Prosecution demands 15 years jail term for former president in corruption case

(dql) In a second corruption trial against former President Park Geun-hye (2013-2017), the prosecution demanded a sentence of 18 years imprisonment on charges of accepting more than 3.3 million USD in bribes from the National Intelligence Service while in office and conducting illegal opinion polls ahead of the 2016 general elections in an attempt to nominate those friendly toward her as candidates for the legislature. In a first corruption case, the former president was already sentenced in April to 24 years in jail over abuse of power and extorting money from businesses. [Yonhap 1]

In a related case, the prosecution requested a eight-years jail term against Choi Kyung-hwan, Finance Minister in the Park administration (2014-2016). He is accused of taking bribes amounting to more than 180.000 USD from the National Intelligence Service for keeping the spy agency's off-book funds while serving as Finance Minister. [Yonhap 2]

Law and Politics in South Asia

India: 55 million pushed into poverty because of health spending in one year

(dql) According to a study of experts from Public Health Foundation of India, 5 million Indians were driven into poverty in a single year (2011-2012) because of being forced to shoulder costs for healthcare and 38 million of them fell below the poverty line due to spending on medicines alone. The study further noted that while India's Drug Price Control Order 2013 brought all essential drugs in the National List of Essential Medicines under price control, these constituted only 20% of the retail pharmacy market and that the sales volume of many of the drugs brought under price control has decreased. [Times of India]

Pakistan: Election commission disqualifies terror-linked party

(ot) Pakistan's Election Commission dismissed the request of Milli Muslim League (MML) to register as a political party. The MML and its leaders have earlier this year been added to the United States list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO). They were claimed to be tied to another U.S. designated terrorist group which allegedly masterminded the 2008 Mumbai attack. The latest decision was the second time the Commission rejected MML's request to form a political party after it was ordered by the Islamabad High Court to revisit the matter. As a result, the MML cannot participate in the country's general elections scheduled for 25 July this year. [Voice of America, Geo TV]

Pakistan: Military to prosecute ex-army officers for engineering the 1990 elections

(dql) Pakistan's Ministry of Defense sent a letter to the Supreme Court expressing its willingness to hold a trial to prosecute retired top-ranking military officers allegedly involved in the manipulation of the 1990 general elections in favor of military-backed candidates. Among them are the former army chief and the former chief of the intelligence agency. The Ministry's move comes after Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mian Saqib Nisar ordered all institutions of the country to cooperate with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in the Asghar Khan case which dates back to 1996 and in which Pakistan's intelligence agency had been accused of funding electoral campaigns, bribing politicians and journalists, and forming a short-lived political party to defeat the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. [Express Tribune] For brief background information on the Asghar Khan case and the entanglement of the military in politics in Pakistan therein see [Global Village Spare].

Nepal: No suspension of MPs facing trial

(ot) A weeks-long debate about the endorsement of the House of Representatives Regulation finally found an end in Nepalese Parliament. The ruling Nepal Communist Party proposal to include a provision that would suspend any MP accused of a crime carrying a jail sentence of three years and more met strong rejection by the opposition parties (Nepali Congress and the Rastriya Janata Party Nepal). Finally, they reached an agreement: lawmakers won't be suspended but they will be denied their pay and perks during trial. The endorsement of the regulation has paved the way for the formation of 10 House committees, among them the Parliamentary Hearing Committee which is indispensable for hearing of nominees for ambassadorial posts or constitutional positions before their appointment. The government had blamed the absence of the committee for not nominating candidates for appointment as the chief justice, chief of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse the Authority and ambassadors. [Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Government closes down UN-DPA office with immediate effect

(ot) The government closed the United Nations' Department of Political Affairs (UN-DPA) that was set up in 2011 to help the Nepalese government in its

peace process. Considering that Nepal's transition is completed with the new Constitution adopted and elections held, the Nepalese government asked the UN staff to leave within three months. [The Indian Express]

Maldives: Former president sentenced 19 months jail term, opposition parties coalition struggle for joint presidential candidate

(jm) A Maldives court sentenced former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom (1978-2008), former Supreme Court Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Supreme Court judge Ali Hameed, accused of plotting to overthrow the government of President Yameen Abdul Gayoom, half-brother of the former president, to 19 months in prison each after it found them guilty of failing to corporate with police investigations. [News 1st]

Meanwhile, former President and winner of the presidential primaries of the Maldivian Democratic Party Nasheed announced to meet Jumhooree Party leader Ibrahim's demand to renounce to run for presidency and let the opposition parties' coalition find a sustainable candidate in the upcoming September presidential election. Nasheed's move comes after rumors had spread that the coalition was struggling to maintain unity regarding the nomination of a joint presidential candidate. [Avas]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: U.S. sanctions and upcoming national elections

(ls) The U.S. Treasury Department announced that it will sanction the commander of Cambodian prime minister Hun Sen's bodyguard unit for carrying out "serious acts of human rights abuse against the people of Cambodia." The bodyguard unit, an elite force under the military with thousands of troops, is involved in internal security matters and has been linked to numerous crackdowns on the opposition. Cambodia's democracy has been in increasing trouble in recent months, with Hun Sen dissolving the main opposition party and cracking down on independent media. [Washington Post]

The upcoming general elections will take place on 29 July. Hun Sen, who has ruled Cambodia for more than 30 years, is trying to ensure victory after two close elections in 2013 and 2017 with cash inducements and a series of punishing measures against the opposition. The ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has also provided cash payments to members who make renewed pledges of allegiance to the party. Almost 2 million of 5.3 million registered CPP members didn't vote in the national election of 2013. [Reuters]

However, with the major opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), dissolved, there appears to be no real doubt that Hun Sen's CPP will win the election. But a low turnout may still undermine his credibility. Exiled opposition leader Sam Rainsy has called for a popular uprising after the national elections to force a change of government. In response, the justice minister ordered to prosecute Rainsy under the new lèse majesté laws that criminalize criticism of the Cambodian king. [UCA News]

Indonesia: No more live broadcasts of terror trials

(ls) The Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) has released a circular notifying public broadcasting bodies, television and radio networks not to live broadcast trials related to terrorism. The KPI justified its decision with reasons to uphold the authority of the court, ensure the success of trials, protect the security of court officers and witnesses, as well as curb the potential spread of extreme ideology and prevent people from idolizing terrorists. Last month, several terrorist attacks took place in different parts of

Indonesia, prompting the government also to tighten national security legislation. [Jakarta Post]

Laos: Upcoming review by UN Human Rights Committee

(ls) From July 11 to 12, the UN Human Rights Committee, which is the body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by its State parties, will examine for the first time the state of civil and political rights in Laos. The treaty body is likely to focus on reports in recent years of forced disappearances and harsh prison terms handed out to critics of the country's government. [Radio Free Asia]

Malaysia: Continued clean-up by new government as Barisan Nasional is on the verge of collapse

(ls) Post-election developments in Malaysia continue to unfold at breath-taking speed. After several senior public servants have left their posts since the former government lost power, Malaysia's top two judges will resign as well. Chief Justice Raus Sharif and Court of Appeal president Zulkefli Ahmad Makinudin are to step down on July 31. The judges had their terms extended last year despite exceeding the legal retirement age of 66 for their posts, in a move that sparked protests from now-Prime Minister Mahathir, then in the opposition, and the legal community. [Straits Times]

Evidence of corruption and financial malfeasance by former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak helped the new PM Mahathir's opposition alliance win national elections on May 9. As it becomes clear now, the country is in far worse financial shape than previously assumed. The national debt, stated at $170 billion by Najib's administration, has been reassessed, along with other government liabilities, at $250 billion. That is 80 percent of Malaysia's gross domestic product. [New York Times]

The Malaysian government meanwhile intends to seek restitution from Goldman Sachs, as it moves to resolve the huge 1MDB scandal that led to the disappearance of billions of dollars and helped put the country deeply in debt. Goldman Sachs helped the 1MDB fund raise $6.5 billion in 2012 and 2013 through bond sales. Investigators say $2.5 billion of that money was then diverted to senior officials for their personal gain. The

bank, which earned $600 million in fees for its work selling the bonds, said it was unaware of any wrongdoing. [New York Times]

At the same time, the former government coalition and now opposition Barisan Nasional (BN) appears to be on the verge of being disbanded. Four Sarawak BN parties announced their exit from the coalition. Their departure has left BN seriously weakened, with just four parties remaining from the original 13 just before the general election. BN and its predecessor Alliance Party ruled Malaysia for 61 years since independence. [Straits Times]

The four defecting parties have formed the Gabungan Parti Sarawak coalition (GPS). They said they would continue to be in the opposition in parliament, but also indicated that they would "cooperate and collaborate" with the federal government on national interest and state rights. If they side with the Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition of Prime Minister Mahatir, that would create a two-thirds majority that would allow PH to change the Federal Constitution. [The Star]

Philippines: Duterte's plan to arm community leaders

(ls) The Philippines' interior ministry plans to acquire pistols for community leaders willing to fight crime and drugs. Also, President Rodrigo Duterte said he was considering arming community leaders, known as barangay captains, after consulting with the police and intelligence community. The announcement prompted concern the measure could fuel even more violence in the country's notoriously bloody crackdown. Duterte said that such community leaders "will never go to jail" if they shot suspected criminals in the performance of their duty. [Reuters]

Thailand: Resort to Art. 44 to safeguard primaries, lift of ban on political gatherings in sight?

(ot) With a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam and law makers, charter drafters and the Election Commission, convened to address member recruitment problems of political parties arising from the tight timeline for holding primaries to select candidates for the general election under the order of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) 53/2560, ending without results, the Deputy

Prime Minister hinted to the possibility of invoking Art. 44 as a way out of the problem. [The Nation 1]

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister General Pravit Wongsuwon announced that he has been assigned to chair the first meeting with politicians later this month to discuss partial revocation of the ban on political gatherings. He, however, insisted that permission to hold election campaigns would only be granted when the organic law on the election of Members of the Parliament, which has been sent to Prime Minister Prayut for submission to the King for royal approval [Bangkok Post 1] takes effect. At the current stage, parties are only allowed to hold meetings and recruit members. [Bangkok Post 2, The Nation 2]

In related development, prominent politicians from four political parties, including Chaturon Chaisang from the Pheu Thai Party, leader of the Future Forward Party Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Democrat Party Abhisit Vejjajiva, and leader of the People's Reform Party Paiboon Nititawan, gathered at a public forum at Thammasat University for an account on the current status and prospects of country's democracy development. The People's Reform Party was the only one present that showed full support for the current government, arguing that electoral democracy had created polarization in Thai politics in the past decade. The three other parties were united in saying that the 2017 Constitution, the NCPO orders, and the involvement of the 250 selected senators are obstacles in achieving democracy in Thailand. They also said they would put forward plan to amend the Constitution if so desired by the people. [Khaosod English]

Thailand: Data Protection bill with extraterritorial applicability

(ls) After last month's entry into force of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation that sparked world-wide reactions due to its extraterritorial applicability, Thailand is about to adopt a law with a similar reach. For the first time, the concept of extraterritorial application is introduced in the current draft. Data controllers and data processors who collect, use, or disclose personal data outside Thailand but (1) any parts of such actions occurred in Thailand, or (2) the consequence of such actions intentionally occur in Thailand, or (3) the consequence of such action should occur, or it could be foreseen that the

consequence would occur in Thailand, will be subject to the new law. [Lexology]

Vietnam: New cyber security law approved

(ls) As anticipated in last week's AiR, Vietnamese legislators have approved a cybersecurity law that tightens control of the internet and global tech companies operating in the country, raising fears of economic harm and a further crackdown on dissent. The law will take effect on Jan. 1, 2019. It will require, for example, Facebook, Google and other global technology firms to store locally "important" personal data on users in Vietnam and open offices there. [Reuters]

However, the language of the law is broad and potentially captures a wide range of business activities and models. It covers all enterprises, whether based onshore or offshore, that "provide services on the telecommunication network, internet, and other value-added services on the internet in Vietnam." [Lexology]

The law will also give the authorities wide discretion to determine when expression must be censored as "illegal" as some provisions will make it easier for the government to identify and prosecute people for online activities. Unlike China, Vietnam does not block websites such as Facebook, Google and Twitter. Police, however, have stepped up crackdowns on bloggers and Facebook critics since 2016 with jail sentences. [Bloomberg]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Trump-Kim Summit: Takeaways and reactions

(dql) The much anticipated summit between US President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore concluded with a joint statement according which "President Trump committed to provide security guarantees to the DPRK and Chairman Kim Jong-un reaffirmed his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." [New York Times for the full text of the statement]. Responding to questions at the press conference following the signing of the statement Trump further confirmed that while the sanctions against North Korea would remain for the time being, they would be taken off once "we are sure that the nucs are no longer a factor". He also announced considerations of suspending the longstanding military drills with South Korea, calling them much to the surprise of the ally "expansive and provocative" "war games". [Youtube]

The outcomes of the summit have been met with mixed reactions among North Korea's neighboring powers. South Korea's President Moon Jae-in hailed the summit as "historic event" that will "break down the last remaining Cold War legacy on earth" and "write a new chapter of peace and cooperation" between the two Koreas. [Yonhap] However, Trump's statement on considering a halt of the joint annual military exercises caused much confusion in Seoul, as the exercises has traditionally been used as an instrument of deterrence and bargaining chip against North Korea. Following a meeting between US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, President Moon and Gen. Vincent Brooks, commander of US Forces Korea, to verify "whether Trump's reference to 'war games' meant the joint military exercises [Korea Herald 1], a South Korean government source on Sunday announced that Seoul and Washington are expected to announce their

decision to suspend large-scale combined military exercises in the days ahead. [Korea Herald 2]

Japan's Prime Minister Abe welcomed the statement as starting point of in the denuclearization of North Korea [Reuters] and signaled Japan's support in bearing the cost of North Korea's denuclearization under an international funding framework which. However, similar to South Korea, Tokyo appeared much irritated by Trump's announcement on the halt of joint US-South Korean military exercises as such a shift would have huge impact on Japan's national security and the role of Japan's Self-Defense Forces. Trump's announcement came especially as surprise after Japan's head of the National Security Council in a meeting with Trump's national security advisor John Bolton in Singapore was assured that the summit would not deal with the topic of U.S. troops based in South Korea. [Asahi Shimbun]

China, on the other side, was quick to point to its "positive and constructive role in getting the situation on the peninsula to where it is now" referring in particular to the suspension of US-South Korean joint military drills in exchange for North Korea's stop of conducting nuclear and missile tests, proposed as 'freeze for freeze' initiative to the USA by China last year. [The Guardian]

Russia, meanwhile, stressed that the outcome of the meeting "needs to be thoroughly assessed", but also welcomed the meeting itself as "beginning of a direct dialogue" with direct talks seen as only way for a political settlement. [TASS]

Analysts and experts cautioned against misplaced euphoria and optimism, stressing that the statement between Trump and Kim is vague and that only a follow-up negotiation process securing tangible results in term concrete steps, measures and timelines of the denuclearization process will make the summit a success. [CNBC] [East Asia Forum]

China-US trade dispute: What goes around, comes around

(dql) China-US trade relations are further deteriorating over the escalating trade dispute. Following the Trump administration's imposition of tariffs on 50 billion USD of imports from China, Beijing hit back and announced retaliatory tariffs on more than 600 US goods, worth the same amount. These tit-for-tat measures follow weeks of intense and ultimately failing negotiations

between both sides on a trade agreement. [New York Magazine]

In another development related to the China-US trade dispute, the U.S. Supreme Court overruled a lower court decision that let two Chinese vitamin C manufacturers to escape 148 million USD in damages for violating American antitrust law. The justices ruled that the lower court gave too much deference to Chinese government filings explaining China's regulatory policy. [CNBC]

Anti-China protests in Vietnam

(ls) Anti-China protests erupted throughout Vietnam and more than 100 people were arrested after demonstrators stormed a provincial government building east of Ho Chi Minh City. As AiR reported last week, many were angry about a measure that would allow the leasing of land to foreigners for 99 years in three special economic zones. In an apparent response to the protests, the National Assembly announced to delay the adoption of the measures. [New York Times]

The anti-China protests were the worst seen in Vietnam since 2014 when a Chinese oil rig was stationed in a disputed part of the South China Sea. The new protests are likely to aggravate the tense relations between the two countries. China's embassy in Hanoi issued a safety warning to Chinese nationals. In April, the foreign ministers of both countries met in Hanoi and pledged to address their disputes peacefully, particularly those over contested territory in the South China Sea. [South China Morning Post 1]

Vietnam is among the most outspoken critics of Chinese construction and militarization of artificial islands in the Spratly island chain in the South China Sea's disputed waters. However, an government spokesperson said, "It is not ruled out that the people's patriotism was abused in order to cause public disorder." [South China Morning Post 2]

Mahatir: Opting for Japan, less for China?

(ls) Malaysia's prime minister Mahatir was on a working trip to Tokyo which also involved a meeting with Japanese premier Shinzo Abe. The visit was also seen as a sign of Malaysia's move away from China, which contentiously pumped billions of dollars into the scandal-tainted previous Najib Razak administration.

Japan is Malaysia's largest foreign direct investment contributor at $13 billion last year. But also ties with China peaked in the last few years after Beijing stepped in with a $2.3 billion deal to buy 1MDB assets. This was followed by several infrastructure projects which were won by Chinese state-linked firms. [Reuters]

While in Tokyo, Mahatir said when the "Look East Policy" was first formulated when he was prime minister back in the 1980s, it was not just about drawing investments from Japan or coming to study in this country, but also about "acquiring the Japanese work ethics, the Japanese sense of shame whenever they fail to deliver what they have promised to deliver". [Bernama]

However, Mahathir also announced that he will review Malaysia's membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (TP-11), the multilateral trade deal that was brokered under Japan's leadership, after the United States withdrew from the original Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Mahatir warned that weaker economies like Malaysia were at a disadvantage under the current terms. Nevertheless, in the unlikely event of a Malaysian pull-out of TPP-11, the treaty would remain in force as long as at least six countries have ratified it. [Straits Times]

Thailand: Army chief visits China to deepen military ties

(ot) Army Chief and National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) Secretary-General Chalermchai Sitthisart went on an official visit to China this week to discuss better military cooperation between the two countries, including the progress of the Thai government's procurement of VT4 main battle tanks and VN1 armored personnel carriers from China. The countries have also agreed on defense industry cooperation as they plan to establish a weapons manufacturing and service in Thailand later this year. [Khaosod English, Matichon]

Philippines & South China Sea: Cautious complaints against China

(ls) The Philippines have demanded that China stop confiscating the catch of Filipino fishermen in the disputed South China Sea, calling the practice

“unacceptable”. China controls several reefs in the sea including Scarborough Shoal, which Beijing seized from Manila in 2012. The remarks by presidential spokesman Harry Roque were a rare public rebuke from Manila, which has taken a non-confrontational approach with Beijing. [South China Morning Post]

Meanwhile, acting Supreme Court Chief Justice Antonio Carpio has called on the government to bring China to court for violating the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea with the destruction of coral reefs in a disputed part of the South China Sea. He said the government should seek arbitration and compensation from China. In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague rejected China’s extensive claims in the South China and ruled that Scarborough Shoal was a traditional fishing ground of Filipino, Chinese and Vietnamese fishermen. [Reuters]

Indonesia voted into the UN Security Council

(ls) Starting on 1 January 2019, Indonesia will be a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the duration of two years. The country defeated the Maldives in the only contested election for a seat and will join the UN’s most powerful body along with Germany, Belgium, South Africa and the Dominican Republic. [Washington Post]

Pakistan-India relations: Islamabad rejects New Delhi’s protest over Azad Jammu Kashmir constitutional amendments

(ot) The Pakistani government rejected India’s opposition to the amendment to the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Interim Constitution (13th Amendment) Act 2018 and the country’s claim over Indian Occupied Kashmir (IoK).

The Amendment, approved earlier this month, transferred most of the powers earlier exercised by the AJK Council to the AJK Legislative Assembly and the government. India lodged strong protest over the abolishment of Kashmir council’s administrative and financial powers, reducing it to an advisory body. In response, Pakistan said that India’s claim over Kashmir as an integral part of the country has no legal basis. It cited the disputed status of Kashmir and the right to

self-determination of the Kashmiri people enshrined in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions accepted by both countries and the international community. [Pakistan Today, The New Indian Express]

In a latest development of strained Pakistan-India ties, India on Sunday resumed military operations against rebels in disputed Kashmir after ending a 30-days unilaterally declared truce during Ramadan. Despite the truce, the region witnessed a months-long escalation of violence. [Channel News Asia]

India condemns Maldives over Ex-President Gayoom's sentence

(am) India expressed its deep dismay over the Maldivian court sentencing the former president Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and the chief justice of its Supreme Court to prison terms in what India criticized as an unfair trial (see above). India's Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement that this development had raised doubts about the sincerity of the Maldives to defend the rule of law and that it also called into question the credibility of the entire process of presidential elections scheduled for September this year.

Ties between the two countries have been tense for months and India's latest remarks are expected to further sour the relations. [TOI] [Indian Express] [Maldives Independent]

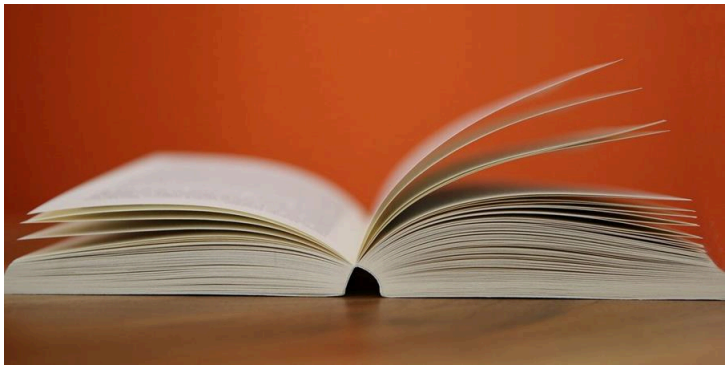
Closer India-Vietnam defense ties

(ls) On the occasion of Indian Defense Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's visit to Hanoi, Vietnamese President Tran Dai Quang urged leaders of the two countries to implement defense co-operation, including delegation exchange and collaboration in personnel training, defense industry, information-technology, strategic research and UN peacekeeping. [Vietnam News]

The meeting took place against the background of India's deepening relations with Southeast Asian countries. Two weeks ago, India prime minister Modi was on three-state tour to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. On 21 May, three Indian naval ships began a five-day visit to the Vietnamese city of Da Nang. Defense issues were also on the agenda during the Vietnamese president's visit to India in March. Defense ties with Vietnam have grown in recent years to include

also the training of personnel, capacity-building funding and equipment, coast guard collaboration, and pacts on areas such as white shipping and outer space. [The Diplomat]

Background Reading



China's crackdown on cracks down on local governments' compliance and creativity under Ji Xinping

(dql) Under the rule of President Xi Jinping China is undergoing not only a personalization of power but also a recentralization of administrative power leaving behind country's decentralization experiment during the reform era to which much of the economic dynamism of the past three decades has been attributed to, William Weightman argues in [East Asia Forum].

When will we see a Southeast Asian country at the World Cup?

(ls) If you have not been hiding under a rock in recent days, you will have noticed that the football World Cup has been kicked off in Russia. Since the 1938 appearance of the Netherlands Dutch East Indies, what is nowadays Indonesia, no Southeast Asian country has qualified for a final round ever since. With Asia having just four automatic places, it is difficult for any team in the region to get to a World Cup. However, John Duerden describes how a Southeast Asian country's qualification could further boost football enthusiasm in the region. [Fox Sports Asia]

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