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

*Grasp the pattern, read the trend*

# Asia in Review

**(4/7/2018)**

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Dear Reader,

CPG is presenting you the fourth July issue of CPG's Asia in Review (AiR) 2018 with an update 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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## Main Sections

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# Law and Politics in East Asia

### China: Concerns over sweeping power of anti-corruption body vindicated

(dql) Concerns of lawyers and legal scholars over negative impacts of the far-reaching powers of the National Supervisory Commission, the country's highest anti-corruption body created in March at the National People's Congress, on investigative procedure in China have proved true. Local police in Hunan province denied Chen Jieren, an outspoken political commentator from Hunan, and family members meetings with their lawyers, citing the local supervisory commission's launch of an investigation into bribery the family is suspected of. The group has been put under "residential surveillance at a designated location", - secret detention. [Radio Free Asia]

To observers and experts, the case shows that the supervisory commissions are not bound by the country's criminal procedure law, which grants suspects access to legal counsel in cases involving the police, prosecutors and courts. Experts fear that "[n]ow they can lead the police; later they may lead the prosecutors by commanding which cases should proceed and what should be the penalty." [South China Morning Post]

## China: Tibetan schoolchildren banned from religious activities

(dql) According state-run newspaper Global Times official regulations have been issued banning underage students in Tibet from participation in religious activities during the summer vacation**.** The ban reflects increasing efforts of the government to restrict religious practice and education in Tibet and other regions with large minority populations. [Global Times] [Channel News Asia]

[AiR] last week reported on a ban prohibiting children under 16 to engage in religious activity and studies in the city of Linxia in the Western Province of Gansu, home to one of the main religious, cultural, and commercial centers of China's Muslim community.

## South Korea: President Moon under pressure over own minimum wage policy

(dql) President's Moon minimum wage policy, calling for an increase of the minimum wage of nearly 11% to 8,350 won (7.40 USD) per hour in 2019, has caused a hefty backlash as it has met fierce opposition from both the business sector and labour groups alike.

While representative bodies of small merchants warned that more than 50% of businesses with less than five workers will be unable to pay next year's minimum wage, labour groups reject Moon's policy arguing that it significantly reduces the real increase as meals and other costs covered by employers in the form of extra payments are included in the wage hike. Even among Moon's top economic policy advisors concerns have been voiced that the stark minimum wage hike could be a burden for the economy and dampen employment. [Korea Herald]

In the wake of dissatisfaction with the government's minimum wage policy, President Moon's approval rating dropped to the lowest level in five weeks from 79% in mid June to 67% last week. [Yonhap]

## South Korea: More details on planned martial law invocation against candlelight protests 2017 revealed

(dql) AiR 2/7/2018 reported on a leaked document of the Defense Security Command (DSC) containing plans to evoke martial law and to mobilise 200 tanks, 550 armoured vehicles, 4,800 armed soldiers and 1,400 special warfare command troops to suppress the 2017 candlelight protests against then impeached President Park Geun-hye. Another document which came to light last week revealed further specific measures of the implementation of the plan including inspecting and censoring news articles, giving to the chief of the Army control of a martial law command, subjecting the National Intelligence Service to the leadership of the top military commander, as well as arresting and removing then opposition lawmakers among the protesters against Park. [Yonhap]

The deliberate provisions of the plan suggest that these measures were not ordinary military guidelines about a hypothetical situation but a plan proposed on the assumption of being carried out. [Hankyoreh]

## South Korea: Eight more years in Jail for former President Park

(dql) Seoul Central District Court sentenced former President Park Geun-hye to eight years in prison after it found her guilty of private use of government funds and of interference in the 2016 parliamentary election. Prior to this verdict Park had already been sentenced to 24 years in jail for bribery, abuse of power and coercion. [Korea Herald]

In another case, the same court sentenced lawmaker Lee Woo-hyun of the opposition Liberty Korea Party to seven years in prison for taking bribes amounting to 1 million USD in return for supporting a businessman's bid for contracts from the Korea Rail Network Authority and Incheon International Airport Corporation. [Yonhap]

## Japan: Controversial laws on electoral reform and casinos enacted by ruling coalition

(dql) Japan's Lower House, controlled by a majority of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), approved a reform bill to the Public Offices Election Act to increase the numbers of seats of the Upper House six from currently 242 to 248. While the bill has been criticised by opposition parties as a partisan move of the LDP to secure the re-election of incumbent lawmakers in certain districts, the LDP defended the passage of the bill as a measure to ensure more fairness in Upper House elections by narrowing the vote-value disparity – the difference in the weight of a single vote between urban and rural constituencies. [Mainichi]

In another development, the Diet enacted a law allowing the establishment of casinos against fierce criticism from activists and the opposition which even filed an unsuccessful confidence vote against the Upper House President in a last ditch attempt to block legislation. Opponents of the law have cited Japan's already well-documented gambling addiction and concerns over an increase of crime to reject the law. The government, however, argued that casinos will boost tourism and economic development in regions outside Tokyo. [Channel News Asia]

In a latest poll, two-thirds of the respondents rejected the passage of the casino bill emphasising deep-rooted public concern about gambling addiction and additional crime. [Japan Times]

## Law and Politics in South Asia

### No-confidence motion against Modi voted down decisively

(am) The first no-confidence vote in Indian Parliament in 15 years was rejected after 325 out of 451 participating MPs voted against the motion. The no-confidence motion was put forward by an Telugu Desam Party (TDP) MP on the first day of the monsoon session of Parliament. [New Indian Express]

## India cancels notorious tax on sanitary pads

(am) India has withdrawn a controversial tax on sanitary pads following a vocal movement led by women rights activists to enhance female education and empowerment. They had continuously condemned the 12 per cent tax, mentioning a lack of access and affordability for a vital sanitary product as a main obstacle to female empowerment in the country. The reform is part of the alterations to the national goods and services tax (GST), which is projected to decrease the prices of around 90 vital consumer goods. [New Strait Times]

## India's Upper House passes bill on jail term for bribing public servants

(am) India's Upper House Rajya Sabha approved the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2013, which proposes that any person who is caught bribing government officials can be penalised with a jail term of up to seven years. The bill also proposes protection for someone who speaks out, within a fortnight of bribing the official, that he/she was intimidated into giving the bribe. [Times Now]

## WhatsApp to limit message forwarding to 5 chats at once in India

(am) International messaging app WhatsApp has said that it is working to put a limit on forwarding messages to five chats at the same time in India. It also assumed that the app will get rid of the quick forward option which is available beside the media messages. The change came due to a rise in brutal incidents prompted by the spread of fake news on the messaging platform in the country. [WhatsApp Blog]

## Pakistan 'dirtiest election' tainted by political controversy and violence

(ot) As the country heads to the polls and campaigning enters the final stretch, political tensions are running high, blighted by a string of deadly terrorist attacks and election meddling controversy. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) said there were "ample grounds to doubt" the legitimacy of the elections. The election has also been called the dirtiest in Pakistan's history. [Al Jazeera, CNN1, Financial Times]

The jailing of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter for corruption charges last week has fueled accusations against the country's powerful military of "judicial witch-hunt" to prevent the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) from winning a second term. Further hostility between PML-N supporters and the military has continued to deepen. The party said hundreds of its activists have been detained in its political stronghold of Lahore.

Fears over security followed a series of attacks claimed by militant groups, including a suicide bombing that has killed 150 people in one of Pakistan's deadliest terrorist incidents and the worst since 2014. The violent incidents have raised speculations over the credibility of the military's claim to have defeated terrorist groups. The HRCP in this regard expressed its concern over the military's plan to deploy 371,000 troops to endure a "free and fair" election because of "the extraordinary powers accorded to security forces."

Press freedom has also been increasingly stifled in the run-up to the election. Journalists and media professionals have faced instances of intimidation, harassment, and reprisal. TV Channels, newspapers, as well as social media have also been blocked or forced to impose self-censorship. [BBC 1]

Polls indicate a close race between the PML-N and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) expected to finished in third place. If neither wins a clear majority, the support of the PPP and other parties could be crucial in forming a government coalition. Nevertheless, PTI leader Imran Khan is thought to be the military's preferred candidate, prompting allegations of widespread interference by the army. Both Sharif and the PPP allege members of the military's intelligence agency of pressuring lawmakers to support Khan to power. [CNN2]

In addition, questions still remain over Pakistan-U.S. shaky relations as a result of the ongoing war with the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan, where Pakistan is alleged to provide protection to militant groups. The U.S. has cut off its security aid paid to Pakistan for conducting operations against militant groups. Political analysts believe the elections will leave Pakistan even more vulnerable, both economically and politically. Given Khan's perceived ties with the military and accusations that he is soft on Islamist extremism, the U.S. and India may be more relieved if the PML-N wins. However, if the PTI wins, PML-N supporters could take the streets, especially if Sharif remains behind bars. No matter how the result turns out, the military will seek to maintain its grip to power in the country. [BBC 2]

## Radical Islamists push religion to centre of Pakistan election

(am) Religious parties in Pakistan have fielded more than 1,500 candidates for national and provincial assemblies. Most of the candidates are noteworthy for their suspected acquaintances with militants and their rhetorical outbreaks on mainstream political parties.

A new party, Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, is rallying with the slogan "death to blasphemers" and has solely fielded 566 candidates.

Critics have said the genuine objective of new ultra-religious political parties is to capture the conservative base of Nawaz Sharif's party PML-N and provide legitimacy to Islamist militants. [Reuters]

Jibran Nasir, a human rights lawyer and a rare secular candidate in the upcoming elections, was harassed by an angry mob humming slogans linked with the new ultra-Islamist Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan party.

Since launching his secular election campaign, a number of clerics in Pakistan have labelled Nasir as a blasphemer, a terrifying allegation which can lead to the death penalty, and also branded him as an Ahmadi, a Muslim minority sect which the radical Islamists recognise as nonconformists. [Reuters]

The citizens of Rabwah in Pakistan's Punjab province, who are mainly Ahmadi Muslims, will refrain from voting in the upcoming elections due to the state's bigoted laws that demean their minority group.

Election laws of Pakistan have placed Ahmadis on a distinct voter registration list and classifies them in the non-Muslim grouping. Prominent Ahmadi leaders have

said that these laws encroach upon their right to self-identify as Muslim. [The Wire]

## Pakistan army seeks enquiry as judge claims intel agency interfering in judiciary

(am) The Pakistan Army has requested the Supreme Court to scrutinise a high court judge's claim that the country's leading intelligence agencies were meddling with the functions of top judiciary in order to hurt the election opportunities of former ousted PM Nawaz Sharif. [The Print]

A report in [The Express Tribune] penned that in the speech, Justice Siddiqui had alleged that "members of intelligence agencies had approached the Islamabad High Court chief justice seeking assurances that deposed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and son-in-law Captain Safdar (Ret.) would remain behind the bars until the Election Day".

## Pakistan nominates its first female chief justice

(am) Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mian Saqib Nisar nominated Justice Syeda Tahira Safdar as the Chief Justice of Balochistan High Court (BHC), making her the first female chief justice of any court in Pakistan. She is part of a special court which is running the trial of the high sedition case against former military dictator Pervez Musharraf.

She will serve as the chief justice of the BHC till October 5 next year. Interstingly, she was the first female civil judge in Balochistan and also the first female high court judge in Pakistan. [The Express Tribune]

## Nepal: Ministries given deadlines to complete laws on fundamental rights

(ot) Nepal's Ministry of Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs has given relevant ministries one week to present 17 drafts laws and amendments related to fundamental rights to the Cabinet for endorsement. The laws are necessary in upholding the 31 fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution. They were formulated by the Law Ministry and sent back to

concerned ministries for further changes. The ministries, however, have yet to complete the task.

The constitution also places a three-year deadline for the laws to be in place within three years of the charter's promulgation on 20 September 2015. [Kathmandu Post]

### Nepal: Civil society calls for amendments to transitional justice bill

(ot) The government of Nepal has recently introduced the amendments to the Enforced Disappearances Enquiry, Truth, and Reconciliation Commission Act 2014, which have received criticisms from the civil society sector. Civil society organizations and human rights activists requested the government to introduce new legal provisions ensuring transparency of the appointment of members of the two transitional justice commissions. The two bodies include the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). They have been accused of failing to fulfil their duties after having been established for three years. The organizations and activists called for the commissioners to be chosen for their merits and credentials in the field of human rights. [Kathmandu Post]

In addition, three international NGOs have raised concerns over the lack of a meaningful consultation process and shortcomings of the draft law which are not in line with international law and standards. They pointed out the law's failure to ensure accountability, which will contribute to the issue of impunity. [Amnesty International]

## Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

## Cambodia: Prince and leader of main opposition party unlikely to run in election

(jk) With the former major opposition party, the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) dissolved, the Funcinpec Party is now the leading opposition party in Cambodia. The royalist party was of course involved in the request to dissolve the CNRP in the first place and is seen by many as an opposition party to Hun Sen in name only. In 2013, it only received just over 3.5% of the vote but now holds a larger number of National Assembly seats as it hugely benefitted from the CNRP's dissolvement and the subsequent re-arrangement of seats in the assembly.

Cambodian Prince and former PM Norodom Ranariddh is the party's candidate for PM and was supposed to run against Hun Sen, although with very little prospects. Now, it is doubtful that he will run at all after being involved in a sever car accident last month that killed his wife and left him seriously injured [Phnom Penh Post]. After some speculation and calls for inquiries into whether or not the accident has been accidental [Voice of Asia], rumours had it that Norodom was not as seriously injured as first thought and ready to join the election campaign soon [Khmer Times].

Getting closer to the election date however, it now seems unlikely that Prince Norodom will be able to campaign or indeed run at all, and first reports are surfacing that his state is much more serious than admitted at first.

Whether he runs or not will hardly alter the outcome of the election, though some observers claim that Hun Sen would like an opposing candidate to at least carry on with the illusion there is a real democratic contest for leadership [South China Morning Post]. In the light of what has been going in Cambodia recently though,

as reported here on AiR, this seems far-fetched. Hun Sen has not been overly concerned with appearing democratic or fair to his opponents.

## East Timor: Parliamentary Elections 2018

(jk) For the second time within the span of a year, the citizens of East Timor have elected a new Parliament. As the parliamentary elections in East Timor on 22 June 2017 failed to produce a clear majority and a stable government. Subsequently, the President called for new elections which were held in May. The new parliament convened for the first time on 13 June and then elected Taur Matan Ruak, former President, as the new Prime Minister [Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung].

## Indonesia: Suharto's youngest son, convicted of ordering an assassination, to run for parliament

(jk) Tommy Suharto, 56, wants to represent the eastern province of Papua. Papua, sharing an island with Papua New Guinea, is a region annexed by his father in the late 1960s. The view from Jakarta is, that he has liberated Papua, however, it has a history of insurgencies fighting for independence from Indonesia.

T. Suharto himself is a highly controversial figure, not least since he was convicted of ordering an assassination of a Supreme Court judge who had sentenced him to jail for corruption. Of the sentence, he served only four of fifteen years he was originally sentenced to [Strait Times]

## Indonesia: "Cleaning up the streets" before Asia Games

(jk) The Indonesian government is attempting to make sure that the upcoming Asia Games, to be held in Indonesia next month, will proceed smoothly. In the light of recent terror attacks and with little patience, police in Jakarta is engaged in a two-months security crackdown to rid Jakarta's streets of criminals before the games and make the city safer. Since the crackdown begun, police officers have shot dead at least 11 suspected criminals, wounded 52 others and arrested more than 270 people. Human Rights groups

have called for investigation into the incidents, fearing it to be a mere pretext to use excessive force [Al Jazeera].

## Indonesia: 15-year old rape victim jailed for abortion

(jk) A 15-year old girl who was raped by her own brother has been jailed for six months for having an abortion under the child protection law. It is illegal in Indonesia to have an abortion unless the life of the woman is at risk.

Her brother was sentenced to two years in jail for sexually assaulting a minor. Her mother, who allegedly aided the abortion is facing separate charges [Strait Times].

## Malaysia: Plans to reduce voting age from 21 to 18

(jk) According to the youngest ever Malaysian cabinet member – the 25 year old Youth and Sports Minister, Malaysia is looking to reduce the voting age from 21 to 18 before the next elections due in 2023. The move would increase the electorate by over 3.5 million voters [Strait Times].

## Philippines: Duterte expected to sign Bangsamoro Organic Law, but last minute delay

(jk) As reported earlier in June, a bill laying out the process of setting up a self-administered territory in an area referred to as Bangsamoro on the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, where an estimated 4 million Muslims live, was passed by Congress. The bill, which allows the region to have its own executive, legislature and fiscal powers, but not oversee defence, security, foreign affairs, and monetary policy, was expected to be signed by President Duterte this week. The law will incorporate Islamic law into the regional justice system. The peace process that is to follow is expected to be difficult however. First, this is not the first attempt and previous strategies have failed. There are many armed rebel groups in the area who would slowly be decommissioned and compensated but this will be a complex and often controversial process. A

referendum on the new law is also due to be held before the end of 2018. [Al Jazeera]

After the Senate had unanimously ratified the bill, House members adjourned early because of thus far unclear reports of a leadership challenge. Whatever the details of the challenge may be, the proposed autonomy deal has yet to be officially approved and will therefore not yet be signed by the President [Asahi].

## Myanmar: Citing lack of progress, secretary to Myanmar's Rohingya panel quits

(jm) The Thai secretary to an international panel set up by Myanmar to advise on the Rohingya crisis has quit his post. He said that the international panel was unable to do anything concrete, particularly because it had been barred from accepting international funding or setting up a permanent offices and was told to conduct meetings online. He added that: “The danger now is that it’s going to divert attention from the issues, give a false impression that things are being done.” This is the second member of this panel to walk out after the veteran U.S. politician Bill Richardson in January. [Reuters]

## Myanmar: Third round of the Panglong Peace Conference

(jm) After six days, the parties to the Panglong Peace Conference agreed on a 14 principles agreement. At this meeting, armed ethnic groups that did not sign the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) were invited to attend. [Xinhua]

During the conference which was supposed to be a symbol of peace, the Tatmadaw (military) and Karen National Union (which is a signatory of the NCA) clashed twice in Kayin State. One military soldier was reported dead [Myanmar Times].

## Thailand: Deputy PM Wissanu brushes off accusations of junta’s control of poll regulator

(ot) Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam defended the junta of looking to invite people to apply for the two remaining seats in the Election Commission (EC).

Last week, the National Legislative Assembly (NLA) voted to approve five candidates for the seven-post commission, leaving two places to be filled. Rumors were sparked that the junta would invite people that can be manipulated to be the last two commissioners, instead of having an open application. Critics also said that the delayed selection could hint at a further postponement of the election roadmap. Deputy PM Wissanu fended off the rumors, saying they were baseless and that the five commissioners are enough to function as they reach a quorum on important decisions. [Bangkok Post 1, Bangkok Post 2]

In another statement, Deputy PM Wissanu also said that the lifting of political restrictions will begin after the new commissioners receive royal approval and assume office. [The Nations]

## Thailand: Pheu Thai, red shirts suffer ongoing defections

(ot) The Pheu Thai Party and red-shirt United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD) are facing a series of setbacks as their former MPs and members defect to join the pro-regime Sam Mitr Group (Three Allies).

The Pheu Thai is losing some of its politicians in the Northeast, which is the party's political stronghold, to the Sam Mitr Group, a group of veteran politicians believed to be the junta's recruiting arm to court former MPs to join the Phalang Pracharat Party. The new party was allegedly set up to support General Prayuth Chan-O-Cha's return as premier after the election. In the latest development, the Sam Mitr has reportedly tapped into the two biggest northeastern provinces of Nakhon Ratchasima and Ubon Ratchathani, leaving the Pheu Thai increasingly unnerved.

Apart from the defections of its MPs, the former ruling party is also struggling with internal administration due to the lack of clear leadership and protracted division. Potential candidates include Khunying Sudarat Keyuraphan, who has reportedly gained the support from the party's de facto leader Thaksin Shinawatra, Chaturon Chaisaeng, a party heavyweight, former deputy leader of its predecessor Thai Rak Thai Party, and the education minister in the Yingluck

administration, and Pongthep Thepkanchana, former justice minister known to be of one Thaksin's trusted aides. According to observers, Thaksin will face a tough decision with regard to the party's future after the next poll because of the changing political landscape that is not in the party's favor. He has also been vocal in criticizing the defections and the poaching tactic. [Bangkok Post 1]

Members of the UDD, which is the main Pheu Thai's electoral support, are also on the Sam Mitr's radar. Some of its members have been poached by the Sam Mitr despite warnings from its leader that they could be expelled. The UDD also came out to oppose the junta's undemocratic attempt to prolong its grip on power. One key member of the northeastern province of Surin has admitted in switching camp. [Bangkok Post 2, Bangkok Post 3]

Despite ongoing blows, leaders from both the party and the group have downplayed the tactic and remained confident in their supporters. [Bangkok Post 4]

## Thailand: New army chief to be appointed in September

(ot) Since a coup d'-etat of Army Commander General Prayuth Chan-ocha in 2014, Thailand is governed by a military government with General Prayuth as Prime Minister and head of the constitutionally institutionalized coup-group, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) which is partly identical with the cabinet while enjoying a higher constitutional rank.

The upcoming regular annual military reshuffle is an important event indicating the future balances of power within the military and beyond. In particular, the reshuffle will see current Army commander-in-chief General Chalermchai Sitthisat retire. He is expected to be replaced by assistant army chief General Apirat Kongsompong.

The army commander-in-chief is the most powerful commanding general in the Thai Armed Forces. General Apirat is said to be one of the current regime's most trusted lieutenants and was one of the major players in the 2014 coup in which he supervised the 1stDivision, the King's Guard, a key infantry division in the operation. Nevertheless, General Apirat does not belong to the same officer's circle as Prime Minister and NCPO head General Prayuth and most of the other military men of the NCPO and cabinet who are from

the Queen's Guard which is a rival group to the King's Guard.

General Apirat is believed to play a crucial role in maintaining national security in the run-up to the next general election next year. Noteworthy, he is a son of General Sunthorn Kongsompong, a former Supreme Commander of the Royal Thai Armed Forces who was a key member of the 1991 coup group who later fostered relations with then Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

During his military career, General he participated in several programs of the US armed forces and graduated among others from the Infantry Officer Advanced Course at Fort Banning. Later he served as Assistant Logistic Officer at the Royal Thai Army Defense Attache Office in Washington D.C., USA.

Other important replacements in wake of the reshuffle include those of the commanders-in-chief of the Navy and the Air Force, the Defense Ministry permanent secretary, and the Royal Thai Armed Forces Supreme Commander. [Bangkok Post, The Nation, Posttoday, in Thai]

## Vietnam: A closer look at a controversial bill on special economic zones

(jk) Recently, Vietnam saw nationwide protests over a controversial bill on special economic zones (SEZs). People marched in major cities and the provinces affected by the zones, clashing with police, and in one province even attacking administrative buildings and setting cars on fire.

The protests were seen as mainly anti-China protests. Although the draft law on the 99-year lease of the three Special Administrative and Economic coastal zones, did not actually specify who would be given land within these zones, critics pointed out that it would most likely be Chinese companies. In addition to concerns of ceding territory and sovereignty to China in particular, the draft law allegedly gives foreign investors too much control over the three "autonomous" zones, which is likely to have detrimental effects to Vietnamese workers and their families [New Mandala].

## Vietnam: UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) coming up

(jk) Vietnam will be attending before the UN UPR in January next year. Five years ago, during its last review, Vietnam accepted most recommendations it received but according to Human Rights Watch, have done little to address them. Vietnamese authorities have used broadly defined provisions in its penal code and other laws to imprison peaceful political and religious activists. [Human Rights Watch]

### Does Impunity rule in Southeast Asia?

(jk) Southeast Asia not only has a colonial history filled with brutal episodes in different countries, it has also seen violence and mass killings since the nations in the region have become independent. These include mass killings in Indonesia in the 1960s, the brutal Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, crackdowns on protesters in Thailand, Myanmar or East Timor.

For all the injustices, little has been done in terms of bringing perpetrators to justice, supporting victims or even agree on or allow narratives that name all those who have been at fault. This history of impunity, as one author calls it, does not bode well for the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar and what people can expect from the potential establishment of a process for holding to account those in the Myanmar military and government alleged to be responsible. The UN Security Council faces its usual dilemma with some pushing for such process, but others (read in this case: China) likely to veto any moves that could make way for accountability [Nikkei Asian Review].

## International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

## China: Advancing naval power

(dql) China is reportedly developing robotic submarines. With deployment in strategic waters like the South China Sea and western Pacific Ocean expected in the early 2020s, the project is part of the government's plan to beef up the China's naval power with AI technology. The unmanned submarines will be able to handle their assignments and return to their base, completing missions without human intervention. Their cargo will be large enough to accommodate powerful surveillance equipment as well as missiles or torpedoes. Diesel-electric engines or other power sources will ensure continuous operation for months.

Involved scientists from the Shenyang Institute of Automation, Chinese Academy of Sciences confirmed that the development of a series of extra-large unmanned underwater vehicles is a countermeasure against similar weapons currently under intensive development in the United States. [South China Morning Post]

## China-USA relations: US Defense Bill 2019 with tough stance against China

(dql) The US Congress approved the National Defense Authorization Act 2019 which suggests a tough stance against China as it "makes investments and advances in its military capabilities." The 717 billion USD bill "directs a whole-of-government strategy to confront the People's Republic of China and bolsters DOD's efforts to plan for and provide the necessary forces and military infrastructure and logistics capabilities in the region" and "supports military exercises with Japan, Australia, and India and improves security cooperation

to counter China's rising influence in Asia, Southeast Asia, and other regions." It further supports the improvement of Taiwan's defense capabilities including joint training, military sales, and the use of security cooperation authorities. [Govtrack]

Meanwhile, Michael Collins, deputy assistant director of the CIA's East Asia mission centre, warned against China's "quiet kind of cold war" against the United States and the mobilisation of all of its resources to replace America as the leading power in the world. [news.com.au], while President Trump in the latest round of the US-China trade dispute  expressed his readiness to impose tariffs on all 500 billion USD of imported goods from China [ABC].

## China-Sri Lanka relations: Beijing's 295 million USD grant

(dql) In an attempt to expand its influence in Sri Lanka China offered island nation a 295 million USD grant. President Sirisena announced to have received the offer and to use the money to build houses in all electorates across the country.  Sirisena, in office since 2015, at the beginning of his presidency had halted most of the Chinese-backed infrastructure projects started under his predecessor Rajapaksa on grounds of suspected corruption, overpricing and flouting government procedures for more than a year but then allowed the projects to resume after a few changes in some of them. [Reuters]

## China-Nepal relations: Second joint military drill to take place in September

(ot) Nepal and China armies will have a joint military exercise, Sagarmatha Friendship-2, for the second time in September in China. The military drill aims at sharing expertise and skills in disaster management and fighting terrorism. The Nepal Army, which has long been holding military exercises with India and the U.S., has been increasingly extending military diplomacy and engagement with the Chinese People's Liberation Army. [The Hindu]

## China-Buthan relations: Border talks resumed

(dql/am) A year after the Doklam standoff between China and India, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou made a three-days visit to Bhutan to resume discussions on border issues centred on the Doklam plateau claimed by both China and Bhutan. In 1996 China proposed a deal under which Bhutan would obtain approximately 764 square kilometers of land in the middle and western sector of the border in exchange of 100 square kilometers land in the strategically important Doklam plateau, which serves as a tri-junction of China, Bhutan and India. [Sputnik]

Meanwhile, India's Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has finished the construction of a strategically important road in Bhutan, connecting one of Bhutan's border towns with its capital Thimphu. The 30-km long road is one of several India-funded infrastructure projects in Bhutan, which is strategically important for India due to its location and border with China. [Times of India]

## North-Korea: Pyongyang begins dismantling missile site, report says

(dql) Washington based think tank 38 North reported that satellite images suggest that North Korea has begun to dismantle facilities at a site used for the development of engines for ballistic missiles fulfilling a pledge North Korean leader Kim Jong Un made last month at the Singapore summit with President Trump. [CNBC]

Seoul voiced confidence that Pyongyang's reported decision to dismantle a key nuclear test site would positively affect the denuclearization process and bring about progress in US-North Korea talks. [Korea Herald]

## Japan-India relations: Deepening security cooperation

(dql) According to Kyodo News, citing Japanese government sources, Japan and India are expected to agree to conduct the first-ever military drill involving both country's ground forces when both defense minister will meet in August in India. The exercise is believed to be scheduled for end of the year. [The Diplomat]

The news comes after U.S. Navy mine countermeasure units, Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) MCM units, and Indian Navy Explosive Ordinance Disposal

(EOD) units began the joint mine countermeasure exercise 2018 near Ominato, Japan [Stars and Stripes] and India and Japan held the fourth round of Maritime Affairs Dialogue in New Delhi last week to discuss core issues related to the Indo-Pacific region and maritime security. [Times of India]

## European Union's warnings against Sri Lanka and the Maldives

(jm) EU ambassadors warned Sri Lanka on Monday against ending its 42-year moratorium on capital punishment and said the island risked losing trade concessions if it went ahead. Sri Lanka could lose the benefit of the generalized system of preferences (GSP Plus), which is a favorable tariff scheme to encourage developing nations to respect human rights. The system had been temporarily removed in 2010, but restored by the EU in 2017. [Ada Derana]

Meanwhile, The European Union (EU) decided to put pressure on the Maldives' government in response to the political crisis that lasts since February in the Island Nation by threatening the application of sanctions. Though no sanctions are imposed yet, "this decision makes it possible, if the situation does not improve, to impose a travel ban and an asset freeze on relevant individuals and entities," said the EU. The Maldives are reproached for breaching principles of democratic rule and separation of powers even though the presidential election should be held in a few months. [Reuters]

The Maldives' government hailed victory after this decision, saying their efforts avoided sanctions from the EU. [Avas]

## Thailand: European Parliament calls for free and fair election before resuming ties

(ot) The European Parliament's Human Rights subcommittee called on the Thai junta to ensure free and fair elections in line with international standards before ties can be normalized, including the resumption of negotiations for a free trade agreement. It highlighted that the elections should lead to having "a democratically elected civilian government with functional democratic institutions." The chairman of the subcommittee also added that the European Union would send its observers to the elections only if invited by the Thai government.

The subcommittee went on a three-day official visit to the Thai government last week where they discussed a broad range of human rights issues, including civil and political rights, labor rights in the fishing industry, migrant workers' rights, human trafficking, official impunity, and the upcoming election. The subcommittee also urged the government to adhere to its third national human rights action plan by moving toward abolishing capital punishment. [The Nation]

However, some critics are not satisfied with the EU's action, especially in calling for a fair vote when many people have been detained and prosecuted for calling for an election to be held. [Khaosod English]

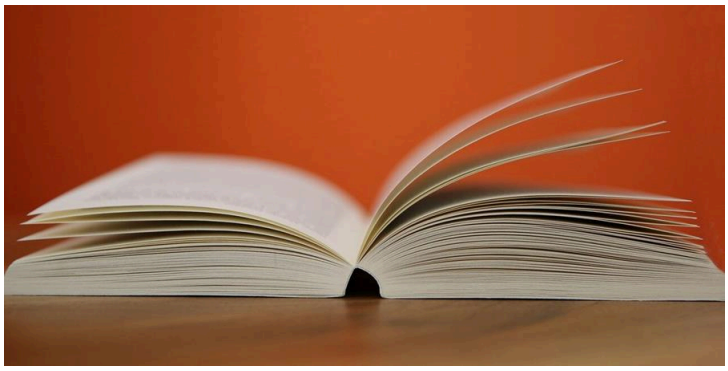
In a related event, CPG hosted a panel discussion on human rights protection participated by member of the European Parliament and Vice-Chair of the Subcommittee on Human Rights Barbara Lochbihler as one of the speakers. She raised various concerns and recommendations on human rights protection, both in Europe and ASEAN countries, including calling for a stronger transnational cooperation on human rights issues both on state and civil society levels [CPG Events].

## Singapore: Cyber-Attacks to be investigated with motives remaining unclear

(jk) In Singapore, a huge cyber-attack resulted in the infiltration of the databases of SingHealth, a group of healthcare institutions. Personal data of 1.5 million, including the outpatient prescriptions of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and a few other ministers, were stolen.

The cyber-attack happened at the end of June, was officially confirmed two weeks ago and was labelled a deliberate, well-planned and targeted cyber-attack. So far, authorities believe that this was not the work of average hackers, but rather a potentially government-backed cyber-attack. It is not clear however what exactly the motives were behind the attacks and a committee will be established to investigate. So far, speculations evolve around the idea that the health data was collected for blackmail at a later stage [Today Online]. According to the government, Singapore deals with thousands of cyber-attacks every single day [South China Morning Post].

# Background Reading



## Is the Philippines a Catholic country?

(jk) A seemingly straight forward question – but as is so often the case, the reality is much more complex and diverse as statistic make believe. The question is being discussed as part of a podcast series which aims to look at "The Philippines Beyond the Clichés" hosted by the New Mandala Philippines editor. [New Mandala]

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