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Grasp the pattern, read the trend

Asia in Review

(4/10/2018)

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fourth issue of CPG's Asia in Review (AiR) in October 2018 providing you an update on the latest developments in law, politics and international relations in Asia.

I hope you enjoy an informative reading.

Best regards,

Henning Glaser

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Main Sections

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

China: Tightening ideological control and censorship

(dql) South China Morning Post reports on several cases in the past months in which university professors and schoolteachers were punished or disciplined for voicing "out of line" views raising concerns among education experts over deepening ideological control of the state in the educational sector in a process which began in 2013 when universities were ordered to drop sensitive issues such as universal values, press freedom and civil rights from their curricula and students were recruited as informants reporting on teachers and classmates. [South China Morning Post]

In a related development, the world's largest academic publisher Springer Nature has complied with requests of the Chinese authorities and withdrawn from its Chinese website "politically sensitive" content published in the publishing house's Transcultural Research book series on the cultural exchange between Asia and Europe. [Chinoiserie]

China's anti-corruption crackdown: Former chief internet regulator pleads

guilty

(dql) At a trial last Friday Lu Wei, the former head of China's censorship apparatus, pleaded guilty to taking bribes worth close to 5 million USD over a span of 15 years. During his time at the helm of China's Cyberspace Administration (2013-2016) Lu, who oversaw a tightening of online censorship, was a political heavyweight dubbed the 'internet tsar' and named in 2015 among the world's 100 most influential people by Time magazine before he was abruptly removed from his position as chief internet regulator in 2016. [The Diplomat]

Taiwan: Rally demands referendum on island's independence

(dql) At rally on Saturday tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets in Taipei to demand a revision of the country's Referendum Act to pave the way for a referendum on a formal declaration of independence. The rally was organized by the Formosa Alliance, a recently founded political foundation striving for an independence referendum in April 2019, and backed by former Presidents Chen Shui-bian of the Democratic Progressive Party and Lee Teng-hui of the Nationalist Party of China (Kuomintang). According to the organizers more than 130.000 protesters joint the rally. [Focus Taiwan] [Taipei Times]

Japan: Newly appointed minister under pressure over graft allegations

(dql) Two weeks only in office, Satsuki Katayama, Japan's newly appointed Minister for Regional Revitalization and Female Empowerment, is facing graft allegations of an investigative magazine according to which she received 1 million Yen (appr. 9.000 USD) from the owner of a manufacturing company in return for her support in lobbying tax authorities for preferential tax treatment of the company. Katayama, the only female Minister in Abe's new cabinet reshuffled early October after his re-election as president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, denied the allegations and announced to sue the magazine for defamation. [Kyodo] [Japan Times]

South Korea: Seoul City Government under fire over nepotism case

(dql) Seoul City Government under Mayor Park Won-soon of the ruling Democratic Party has come under pressure over allegations of nepotism at Seoul Metro, the city-owned company. The opposition parties have announced to jointly submit a proposal for a parliamentary investigation after findings revealed that among close to 1.300 temporary employees who had been promoted to permanent workers more than 100 have family ties to workers who were already working at the company. [Korea Times]

South Korea: New Constitutional Courts Justices appointed

(dql) Following parliamentary approval last week, President Moon Jae-in appointed three new Constitutional Courts Justices, ending a month-long vacancy due to the parliament's failure to approve the nominees due partisan quarrel over the nominee's qualification. [Yonhap] [Korea Herald]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Bangladesh: Rohingya refugee girls sold into forced labour

(cc) The UN's migration agency, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), reports that young

Rohingya girls sold into forced labour are the largest group of trafficking victims in Bangladesh's Rohingya refugee camps. The report reveals that women and girls in situations of forced labour represent two thirds of the people having received support from the IOM. Traffickers approach them with false promises of work and a better life and "their situation is so desperate that they are willing to take extreme measures, perhaps sacrificing one family member for the sake of the rest of the family".

Refugees are barred to leave the camps or to work outside of the limited numbers of cash-for-work programs run by humanitarian agencies making them reliant on aid for survival and thus, an easy prey for traffickers.

More than 900,000 Rohingya now live in Cox's Bazar which has become the world's largest refugee settlement after 700,000 Muslim Rohingya fled violence in Myanmar's northern Rakhine State last year. [Reuters] [IOM] [Al Jazeera]

Bangladesh's Digital Security

(jk) After the passing of a controversial Digital Security Law was earlier this month [A-Times], the cabinet this week "approved in principle" the draft of the Broadcast Law 2018 which is going to "discipline" the broadcast media. The draft aims to outlaw airing false information, fabricated information regarding the Liberation War and rumours in broadcast and online media and carries a maximum sanction of seven years' imprisonment. Critics see the draft as a problematic barrier to free speech especially regarding the vague language for example where the draft makes spreading "misleading information" punishable. [The Wire]

Sri Lanka: Counterterrorism Law and Free Speech

(hg) Human Rights Watch comments on Sri Lanka's draft Counter Terrorism Act 2018 as a significant improvement upon the current Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which it is supposed to replace, noting, however, that the draft would still need further safeguards against rights violations.

The draft narrows the definition of terrorism, increases protections against torture and coerced confessions,

and reduces pretrial detention while it also contains over-broad provisions that might be used to prohibit peaceful protests and ban nongovernmental organizations and lacks restrictions of police powers.

Within parliament there seems to be pressure to reduce the bill's rights protections regarding for instance the use of confessions to police as evidence in court.

The legal reform of the terrorism law is part of the government's accountability and reconciliation measures in relation to the country's 26-year civil war, which ended in 2009. [Human Rights Watch]

Meanwhile, a Tamil MP was arrested by the police's 'Organized Crime Division' for having said in a public speech that people in northern Sri Lanka were safer under the Tamil Tigers who once controlled nearly a third of Sri Lanka and operated a parallel state with their own police and courts before the civil war ended in 2009 with at least 100,000 people killed. The female MP who represents Jaffna, the capital of the minority Tamil population, claimed that there was less violence against women and children in areas controlled by the Tigers before their defeat in 2009.

Later the lawmaker, who is a member of Sri Lanka's ruling party, was released on bail but was, however, forced to step down as State Minister for Children's Affairs. [Channel News Asia]

Maldives: Supreme Court upholds presidential poll results

(jk) Last week, Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen filed a legal petition with the Supreme Court challenging his significant election defeat alleging that the vote was rigged by the independent election commission. The Supreme Court has now ruled unanimously that there is not enough evidence supporting his claims. According to the Elections Commission, the September vote had been free and fair, with a turnout of just over 89%. [The Wire]

President-elect Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's party has in the meantime called on the police to issue a travel ban on Yameen to make sure he can face investigations in connection with graft cases that will be made against him. [The Wire II]

Earlier in the week, a High Court has also overturned a prison sentence against former long-term authoritarian President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom who

was was jailed after he was accused of plotting to overthrow the government of his younger half-brother Yameen earlier this year. He was already released on bail right after the elections. Gayoom, who ruled the Maldives for three decades prior to 2008, still faces some other charges relating to the alleged plot. [SCMP]

Pakistan ends military operations in its Swat valley

(hg) The Pakistani military declared victory in its decade-long anti-Taliban offensive in the unruly northwestern valley of Swat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province during a ceremony to mark the end of the operations and handover of powers to civilian authorities after 11 years of military rule in the region. The Swat valley, used to be known as the "Switzerland of Pakistan", has been a stronghold for the Tehrik Taliban Pakistan, or Pakistani Taliban. [Daily Sabah]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Nine persons arrested in relation to corruption in “Shenzhen of Indonesia” project

(cc) Indonesia’s corruption agency (KPK) has arrested nine persons for bribery in a corruption investigation related to the gigantic real estate project Meikarta near Jakarta led by the Lippo Group. The “Shenzhen of Indonesia” is a $21 billion project and Lippo Group’s biggest project so far. [Reuters]

Laos: World Bank's promotion of dams and Korean company's role under scrutiny

(ls) About three months after a dam at the Xe Pian Xe Namnoy hydropower complex in southern Laos burst, displacing thousands and officially killing at least 40 people, a panel of water experts has warned that the World Bank's promotion of another dam, the Nam Theun 2 (NT2), fails to deliver on basic promises and fuels the country's development of sub-standard hydropower projects. About 140 dams are planned to be built in the Lower Mekong basin, including two on the mainstream of the river in Laos that are under construction and two in advanced preparation or planning. [VOA]

In addition, the Korean company building the Xe Pian Xe Namnoy dam has been accused of altering the structure of the dam to massively boost its profit from the project prior to the disaster. It allegedly lowered the height of auxiliary from designs approved for Korean government assistance. [Asia Times]

New Laotian land law will bring new challenges

(ls) A new, long-delayed land law is scheduled to be tabled before Laos' National Assembly next month. According to experts, it may bring greater transparency in land management and modernization of records, but it could also curb the customary rights of rural and indigenous people, and of women. Much of Laos' land is untitled, and most citizens have customary rights without formal documentation. The government pushes to title all land by 2025. Laos is experiencing rapid transformation due to foreign investment. At the same time, it has committed to keeping 70 percent of its land under forest cover. [Reuters]

Malaysia: UMNO president charged with corruption crimes

(ls) Malaysia's former ruling party UMNO faced yet another blow to its leadership as its president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi was charged in court with criminal breach of trust, abuse of power, and money laundering. Former premier Najib Razak, his wife and party supreme council member Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim are already under investigation. Zahid became

president earlier this year after Najib stepped down due to the party's performance in the elections. In addition, insiders report the party is in disarray and has split into factions. [South China Morning Post] [Straits Times 1]

UMNO leaders appear at odds over which of three paths to take – going it on its own, formally forming an allegiance with fellow opposition Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) or finding a way to partner parties from the present government. With Zahid most likely taking a leave from his office as party president, the party will first of all need to find a new top leadership. [Straits Times 2]

Anwar Ibrahim, accomplishing next step, is sworn in as Member of Parliament

(ls) Former Malaysian deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim was sworn in as a federal lawmaker two days after a clear victory in the Port Dickson by-election, clearing another hurdle in his path to becoming Malaysia's eighth prime minister as part of a succession plan agreed upon by the ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition. [Straits Times]

Myanmar: Ambivalent results of the Tripartite Peace Summit

(cc) On October 15-16, at a tripartite peace summit between the Government, the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) and the 10 Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), the parties signed a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). [Mizzima]

Seven goals were agreed upon during the two-days summit, but no agreement was reached regarding the key issues of non-secession and self-determination. Following the joint statement it has been agreed "to convene Union peace conferences before 2020 prioritizing democratic and federal principles; to break the deadlock on the peace negotiations; to simplify the current political dialogue; to implement any agreement made between the leaders; to begin discussion on security sector integration; to seek to include the remaining ethnic armed groups who have not yet signed the NCA; and to continue discussions on strengthening the ceasefire". [The Irrawaddy]

The question of how to form a multi ethnic army is a central issue of the on-going peace process and an

agreement on a single army still represents an important step. The participants to the summit agreed to meet again in November along with the armed ethnic groups that have not signed the NCA. [The Myanmar Times]

Workers in strike attacked outside a garment factory in Yangon

(cc) About 300 workers of Fu Yuen Garment Co Ltd, a garment factory which has produced clothes for German supermarket chains and British fashion brands, have been striking for 56 days now. They demand better pay and the reinstatement of 30 labour leaders sacked earlier this year. Around 30 men wielding metal rods attacked a group of workers in strike outside the Chinese-owned factory, injuring dozens of protesters. [The Myanmar Times] [Reuters]

Family clans striving for power in the Philippines

(ls) Imee Marcos, Ferdinand Marcos' eldest daughter, began her bid to secure a Senate seat, which she is likely to win, to solidify her family's political comeback since the Marcoses fled in disgrace following a popular revolt more than 30 years ago. Imee Marcos is in her final term as governor of Ilocos Norte province in northern Philippines after being first elected as governor in 2010. In turn, congresswoman Imelda Marcos, Ferdinand Marcos' widow, is running to replace her daughter as governor. Her running mate will be her grandson, Matthew Marcos Manotoc. The Marcoses also have close ties with the Duterte family. [Straits Times]

At the same time, 81-year old Joseph "Erap" Estrada, who started as a mayor, then became senator, vice-president and president of the Philippines, is now back to being mayor of Manila, where he is running for re-election. His wife has been a senator, his common-law partner is currently a mayor. Besides the Marcos and Estrada families, other political dynasties are also competing for power, demonstrating that the building block of Philippine politics is not the party, but the family. [South China Morning Post]

Thailand: Party donations, political campaigning, and a 20 year-long policy entering into force

(ls) About four months before possible parliamentary elections in Thailand, the Election Commission said that political parties could receive donations only with approval from the supreme state body created in the wake of the 2014 Coup, the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO). The donations must also be made in line with the organic law on political parties, according to which a person is not allowed to donate more than one million baht per year and a juristic person is prohibited from giving above 10 million baht in donation per year. [Bangkok Post 1]

Meanwhile, four ministers who have announced to join a newly formed party, the Palang Pracharath Party, which is widely believed to be one of the military regime-backed parties set up to help return Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha as premier after a general election, met with civic groups, a move that critics described as political activities, which are still banned for other political parties. The Election Commission said it would only be illegal if the ministers used state resources or their office time talking about the party or its policies. [Bangkok Post 2]

Last week, the military government's 20-year National Strategy was announced with immediate effect in the Royal Gazette. It requires that governments between 2018 to 2038 adhere to strategies detailed by a committee appointed by current Prime Minister General Prayuth. The plan covers national security, national competitiveness, human resources development, social equality, quality of life and the environment and development of state administrative systems. Critics have said the plan is a tool to prolong the power of the military, which staged a coup in 2014, for 20 more years. [Khaosod English]

Vietnam to enforce its new cybersecurity law against global tech giants

(ls) Vietnam is preparing to strictly enforce the new cybersecurity law, enacted in June, requiring global technology companies such as Facebook and Google to set up local offices and store data locally. A draft decree on the implementation of the law requires companies providing a range of services, including email, social media, video, messaging, banking and e-commerce, to store user data, ranging from financial

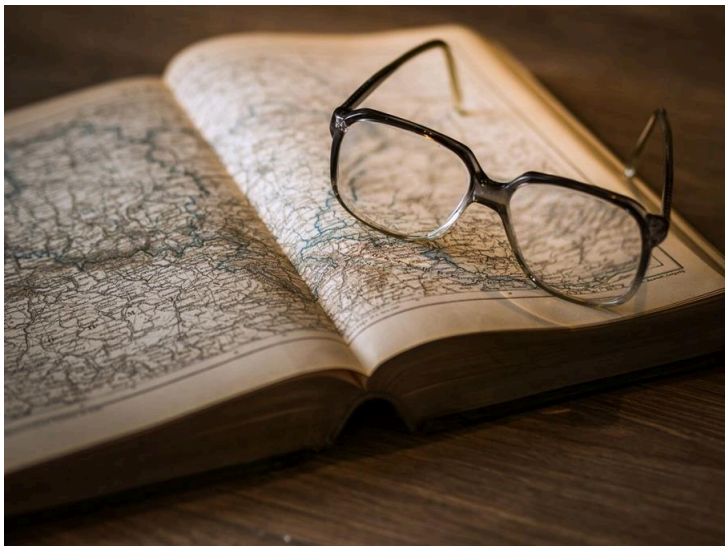
records and biometric data to information on peoples' ethnicity and political views, or strengths and interests in Vietnam. The new law and decree thereby make it easier for authorities to seize such data. In recent months, Vietnam has been increasingly aggressive in prosecuting dissidents for anti-government Facebook posts. [Reuters]

The draft decree gives the Vietnamese police's cybersecurity and high-tech crime unit authority to request data for investigation or to handle law violations on cyberspace or for national security protection. It is expected to be published within days to seek public opinion. Once approved, the law will go into effect on January 1 next year, though the provisions on local offices and data localization would not go into effect for another year. [Daily Mail]

Major liberalization in Vietnamese foreign ownership laws to come next year

(ls) In a major push to further open its economy for foreign investment, Vietnam plans to remove restrictions on foreign ownership of state-owned and listed companies by the end of 2019. Foreigners would in principle be able to acquire a majority stake in public companies in sectors not considered critical to national security. These include privately owned listed companies and state-owned enterprises that were privatized, with or without listing on the stock markets. Foreign ownership is now capped at 49% in general, with some sectors such as banking and aviation limited to 30%. [Nikkei Asian Review]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



China-US relations: Washington's withdraw from missiles treaty with Russia targets Beijing

(dql) Citing non-compliance on Russian side, President Trump's announced to withdraw from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) with Russia, which required both sides to eliminate and permanently forswear ground-launch nuclear missiles with ranges from 500km to 5,500km and eventually led to an end of the standoff between US and Soviet missiles in Europe. [The Telegraph].

The move's main rationale is seen among analysts as lying in Washington having a lever to counter Beijing which is not party to the treaty and a growing "military imbalance in Asia that [the US] are worried about" [Politico] [South China Morning Post] as the withdrawal from the treaty would allow the USA to finally rival China in building similar weapons previously outlawed by the treaty. In this light, according to Nathan Levine, Russia and European security concerns are merely sideshows of the US pulling out the INF, while the "the real game to watch is being played in Asia". [National Interest]

For an overview of US weapon systems which could be created after the treaty pullout see [Breaking Defense].

Meanwhile, the American warships USS Curtis Wilbur and USS Antietam sailed through the Taiwan Strait, a move bound to anger Beijing amid already heightened US-China tensions. [Aljazeera]

China-US trade dispute: Rising tensions at WTO

(dql) China along with the European Union (EU) have joint a group of countries requesting the World Trade Organization (WTO) to investigate the decision of the US government to impose metal tariffs on grounds of national security. The move reflects escalating disputes between China, the EU and the USA at the WTO with each of them submitting complaints over new U.S. metals tariffs, the European response to those levies, and Chinese intellectual property practices paving the way for a major clash at the WTO. [Bloomberg 1]

In a related move to counter US trade protectionism, heads of states and governments of all 28 EU states together with more than 20 Asian leaders including Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Moon Jae-in issued a joint statement at last week's Asia-Europe Summit in Brussels expressing their agreement on "the vital need of maintaining an open world economy and upholding the rules-based multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its core." [Bloomberg 2]

China and Japan strengthen military and financial ties

(dql) Signaling the ongoing thaw in Sino-Japanese relations, the Defense Ministers of both countries at the first Japan-China defense ministerial meeting in three years have agreed to bolster closer ties between their countries' defense authorities and troops and to immediately start to work out specific programs for interactions between defense ministers, high-ranking officials and troops as well as for policy dialogue. The agreement comes shortly ahead of the highly anticipated summit between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe this week. [Japan Times]

In a related development, Japan and China also agreed on the resumption of the currency swap agreement for the Japanese Yen and the Chinese Yuan with a cap of around 3 trillion Yen (appr. 26 billion USD). The previous agreement of 2002 expired in September 2013 following Japan's nationalization of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea which China also claims. [Manichi]

Korean peninsula: Continued actions and efforts to further demilitarization and

denuclearization

(dql) Indicating ongoing joint efforts to demilitarize the Korean peninsula, the two Korean militaries and the US-led United Nations Command reached an agreement to complete until Thursday the withdrawal of firearms and guard posts from the Joint Security Area, a jointly-controlled area inside the heavily-fortified Demilitarized Zone. [Korea Herald]

In another move to foster diplomacy and dialogue and to avoid confrontation in the process of denuclearization talks of the peninsula, Washington and Seoul cancelled a joint air force exercise scheduled for December. Earlier this month Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met Kim during a visit to Pyongyang to coordinate a second summit between President Trump and the North Korean leader.[Nikkei Asian Review] [AiR 2/10/2018]

In a latest development, President Moon Jae-in today ratified the Pyongyang Declaration which he and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un signed at their third summit in Pyongyang last month and in which both sides "agreed to cooperate closely in the process of pursuing complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula". [Korea Times 1] [Korea Times 2]

Cross-Strait relations: Taiwan government discusses new laws to deter citizens from mainland residence permit

(dql) In a blatant attempt to deter Taiwanese from moving to mainland China and live there, Taiwan's government is considering legislation under which Taiwanese holding a mainland residence permit would be banned from entering public office and would be required declare their residency status. Failing to do so could be fined up to 3.200 USD. While Beijing insists that its residence permit introduced in September merely serves to provide holders easier access to a wide range of social and public services, Taipei views them as a politically motivated move to foster the impression of cross-strait unification. [South China Morning Post]

Power Shift in Bhutan that might favour India

(jk) In the third elections after democracy has been introduced to the Himalayan Kingdom in 2008, voters decided for a power shift to the centre-left party (Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa - DNT) which has won 30 seats in the 47-member National Assembly, the lower house of the Bhutanese parliament. All other seats are held by one opposition party which is intended by the Constitution according to which only two parties with the highest votes in the primary round qualify for the final round. Voter turnout was relatively high at 71 percent of registered voters and Bhutan's next prime minister will be 50-year-old surgeon Lotay Tshering from DNT. [Economic Times]

The elections have been watched closely by both China and India who vow for influence in the small kingdom. India has long been a traditional partner and plays a significant role in Bhutan's development. China has been making inroads though through its Belt and Road initiative and Bhutan has been the location of stand-offs between India and China before, most recently in last year's "Doklam" dispute [Washington Times].

Due to the sensitivities, foreign policy was kept out of the election campaign. During the 2013 campaign, fearing that Bhutan was moving too close to China, India withdrew certain subsidies in an alleged attempt to influence a change of government. Relations with India remain sensitive and some candidates and activists were fined for sending statements on relations with India. Under the new government India's position as a special partner will remain secured. [SCMP]

Will Saudi Arabia come to rescue Pakistan from its Financial Crisis?

(hg) Prime Minister Imran Khan faces the urgent need to secure substantial loans be it from China, Saudi-Arabia or the IMF to serve existing debts and pay for imports. In this situation, Khan visits the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, a Saudi business forum being widely boycotted by foreign leaders following the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The difficult situation the Saudi government is facing including harsh criticism from the US Congressmen might help Pakistan to get help. After all, a Saudi loan might be preferable to become even more dependent from China or to receive the a 13th bailout from the IMF which would come with harsh conditions and not allow that money provided is used to pay off debt owed to China. [Independent] [Geo]

For Saudi Arabia Pakistan as one of the most populous Muslim nations in the world, one with an Islamic constitution, and also being one of its closest military allies, is an important partner. To increase its engagement in Pakistan could be especially tempting in the present situation. It could, however, indirectly stabilize the Chinese investment in the country giving the option of a Saudi-Pakistan deal an interesting spin.

SaudiGulf Airlines has just substantially increased its presence in Pakistan. [Anna Aero]

Meanwhile, Pakistan's foreign minister received his counterpart from Qatar, Saudi Arabia's adversary on the Arabian Peninsula, to discuss a deepening of bilateral relations. [Samaa]

Bangladesh's PM Hasina in Saudi Arabia

(cc) Prime Minister Hasina has visited Saudi Arabia at the invitation of King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud where she had an audience with the King [bdnews24] as well as Muhammad bin Salman, the Crown Prince, deputy prime minister and defence minister. [Dhaka Tribune]

Altogether five memorandums of understanding (MoUs) regarding cooperation in industrial and power sectors were signed including one on defence cooperation. [Dhaka Tribune]

Meanwhile activists called on the Prime Minister to discuss Bangladeshi migrant workers' rights in the Kingdom as exploitation of Bangladeshi workers, especially women, has been recently reported again. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star]

The state of military cooperation between India and Russia in Asia emergent security order

(hg) An important indicator for the state of the emerging Asian security order is the recent 19th bilateral summit between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A positive assessment by Russian 'sputnik news' focuses on India and Russia having now decided to create an all-new department under the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical

Co-operation to enhance military cooperation. [Sputnik News]

More differentiated are the views of Aleksei Zakharov writing for the Indian 'Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses' [IDSA] and Harsha Kakkar writing for the Indian 'Statesman' [Statesman].

For India, the defining factor for its foreign policy is China, India's militarily and economically superior neighbor that will inevitably continue to expand. While the 'China factor' greatly valuates strategic ties with the US, India still considers its long-developed defense ties with Russia highly important and also refuses to give up an autonomous foreign policy which many Indian observers see threatened by possible sanctions under the US Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) with regard of weapon deals with Russia [Statesman].

In this sense, the signing of multiple defense agreements with Russia including the particular purchase of the S-400 anti-aircraft missile defense - a symbol of Russian expertise in weapon-making -, assertively affirmed India's strategic autonomy. After India has recently shown reluctance to drive the QUAD cooperation with the US, Japan and Australia too forcefully it has now expressed its willingness to maintain relations with Russia as a trusted ally rather than succumb to pressure [Statesman].

Nevertheless, the parties of the India-Russia summit carefully refrained from provoking the US more than necessary but could also lack behind the Russia might have expected. Significantly, the joint statement does not contain a clause on the unacceptability of unilateral sanctions as some have expected it. Moreover, besides the major S-400 deal, agreements between India and Russia remained low in number and substance with a majority of them being p*ro forma* documents. Especially the expected deals on Kamov helicopters and Krivak/Talwar class frigates were not concluded (what will, however, be discussed at the Inter-Governmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation scheduled for December 2018) [IDSA].

Interestingly, the joint statement mentions Iran unusually often where especially longstanding Indian interests are under threat of US sanctions. Highly important for India is the Iranian Chabahar Port as a crucial transit point in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). There are also related connectivity projects including a transport network connecting India and Russia and the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) offshore gas pipeline to name other Indian interests while Russia is also expanding its cooperation

with Iran looking for partners to counter the reach of US sanctions [IDSA].

For the meanwhile, Asia's new security order remains in flux with India and Russia continuing ties despite a carefully growing strategic convergence between India and the US on the one side and Russia and China on the other. At the same time, both, India and Russia remain careful to not get to closely aligned with their new partners, the US and China respectively. Compared with China, the US are much more assertive however, in pressuring their partner India – against more cautionary voices such as those of US Secretary of Defense, General James Mattis.

India and China signing security agreement while Japan and India enhancing military cooperation

(hg) India and China are about to sign a bilateral agreement covering counter-terrorism operations, fighting drug and human trafficking, strategic intelligence sharing and natural disaster mitigation, the first-ever security agreement between the two countries. [Livemint]

More important, however, appear preparations of a military cooperation agreement between Japan and India that will be discussed when the countries' Prime Ministers meet later this month on occasion of the 13th India-Japan summit in Tokyo.

The agreement aims at allowing the reciprocal exchange of supplies and logistical support for the countries' forces based on mutual access to ports and bases.

For India, that would allow the use Japan's base in Djibouti between the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean, overlooking one of the world's busiest shipping corridors. Djibouti also hosts a major US special-operation forces outpost at Camp Lemonnier and, just a few miles away, China's first overseas military base.

In turn, Japan could access Indian bases in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, close to the sea lanes west of the Malacca Strait where India started to position advanced P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol planes and maritime surveillance drones.

Besides, Japan and India might also discuss at the summit later this month India's purchase of 12 Shinmaywa US-2i search-and-rescue and maritime

surveillance planes, which would also be stationed at the Andaman and Nicobar islands. [Business Insider]

US F-16 fighter jets build in and for India?

(jk) American company Lockheed Martin has partnered with India's Tata Advanced Systems to produce components of the F-16 fighter jet in Hyderabad, [TNI] a move which is partly seen as an incentive for the Indian Air Force to purchase the F-16.

Reportedly the Indian Defence Minister has been informed by her US counterpart that Delhi could avoid pending sanctions under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), if India were to give an assurance that it would buy the F-16 fighter jets. In order to be granted a waiver after the purchase of Russian arms, India would also have to "significantly reduce its reliance on Russian arms". [Dawn]

Russian Army contingent in Pakistan to participate in a Pak-Russia Joint Training Exercise

(jk) The third instalment of joint Pakistan-Russian will last until early November. The exercise was first conducted in September 2016 and a demonstration of closer defence ties between the two countries who signed a military cooperation pact in 2014. [Dawn]

Another step in ASEAN's efforts to prevent further escalation in the South China Sea

(ls/cc) Guidelines on encounters between warplanes, which had already been adopted by the ASEAN defense ministers, have also been, in principle, agreed by the ministries of defense of the U.S. and China. U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis and seven other regional military chiefs, including China's General Wei Fenghe, gave general endorsement to the rules in Singapore during a meeting hosted by ASEAN. The document follows similar guidelines on naval encounters signed in 2014 and urges military planes to establish communication with other aircraft, identify themselves and avoid maneuvers or signals that could provoke a response. The development demonstrates the ASEAN countries' efforts to prevent any further

military escalation of great power conflicts over the South China Sea. [Bloomberg]

Malaysian Defense Minister Mohamad Sabu insisted again that the South China Sea should not be a theater for the United States and China to show off their military capabilities as they vie for influence in the region. [Japan Times]

Also last week, James Mattis arrived in Ho Chi Minh City on a rare second visit to Vietnam within a year. He held talks with Vietnamese Defense Minister Ngo Xuan Lich. The visit symbolizes closer ties between the two countries amid China's growing presence in the South China Sea where Vietnam also has an overlapping territorial claim. Mattis visited Vietnam in January and held talks with Lich in Hanoi. The trip was followed by the visit of the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier in March to Danang, the first such visit since the Vietnam War. [Nikkei Asian Review]

In a related development, Susi Pudjiastuti, the Indonesian minister for fisheries and maritime affairs, qualified China's fishing activities as "transnational organized crime". Indonesia has banned 10,000 foreign vessels from fishing in its water during the last past four years. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore pursuing free trade with E.U. and U.K.

(ls) The European Union and Singapore last Friday signed the E.U.-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, expected to come into force next year, which will boost services, improve market access, and see tariffs between both parties eliminated in five years. In 2017, bilateral trade grew to US$98.4 billion, making up slightly more than 10 per cent of Singapore's total trade. Singapore is the EU's largest trading partner in the ASEAN region. [South China Morning Post]

In addition, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said his country is ready to strike a trade deal with the U.K., which would come into effect at the end of any Brexit transition period. Britain remains in the EU-Singapore deal for the time being, but it seems likely that come March, when it leaves the E.U., it will have to begin its own negotiations. Such new U.K.-Singapore agreement is likely to contain similar terms as the E.U.-Singapore agreement. [Politico]

UN Security Council: Nine members request brief from UN Fact-finding mission in Myanmar

(cc) Nine members of the United Nations Security Council requested a meeting to be held this month to be briefed by the UN independent fact-finding mission on Myanmar. In a report published in August, the fact-finding mission qualified the atrocities committed by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military) against the Rohingya Muslim minority as being conducted with "genocidal intend". While any resolution of the Security Council is likely to be blocked by China and Russia, the approval of the agenda requires a minimum of nine members and vetoes do not apply. Thus, the chair of the fact-finding commission is likely to be heard by the security council this month. [Al Jazeera]

Meanwhile, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General (SESG), Christine Schraner Burgener, concluded her third visit to Myanmar on October 20. During her ten-days visit she held meetings with State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, other government and military leaders, ethnic armed organizations, local and religious leaders, NGOs, UN agencies and the diplomatic community. Despite acknowledging the Government's effort to start informal negotiations with the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) to overcome the deadlocks in the peace process, the Special Envoy expressed concerns regarding the resurgence of armed conflict in the North of Myanmar. [The Myanmar Times] [The Irrawaddy] [UN]

Threats by radical groups in Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines

(ls) The decades-old and still ongoing conflict between the Royal Thai Armed Forces and Thai Malay secessionists in the deep south of Thailand represents a growing national security threat for Malaysian authorities, as many firearms from southern Thailand's black markets find their way to Malaysians aligned with the Islamic State (ISIS). Whereas gun control legislation is strict in Malaysia, it is more lenient north of the border. Meanwhile, though ISIS has so far struggled to get a foothold in southern Thailand, observers continue to worry about possible Malaysian ISIS sympathizers who might radicalize Thai Malay insurgents across the border. [The Diplomat]

In the Philippines, the resurgence of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of

the Philippines (CPP), takes more shape. Analysts warn that poverty and military operations, which displaced large numbers of civilians, push many into the arms of the group. The resurgence comes at a time when pro-Islamic State militants are deepening their presence on Mindanao, increasing the security threat in southern Philippines. [Channel News Asia]

Background Reading

New research on clientelistic politics in Indonesia

(ls) Despite the perceived impact of clientelistic politics in Indonesia, Ward Berenschot argues that we actually know very little about how common it is across the country. Some observers consider Indonesian politics to be highly clientelistic throughout, referring to a "patronage democracy" run by "predatory elites". Others have argued that an increasingly vocal civil society is using newly gained civil liberties to curtail clientelistic practices. Berenschot's new research provides more concrete data, showing that transactional politics is pervasive, but not all-pervasive. [University of Melbourne] The full paper can be downloaded from the [Comparative Political Studies] website.

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