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

Get the pattern, read the trend

Asia in Review

(3/6/2019)

Brought to you by CPG

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the third issue of 'Asia in Review' (AiR) in June providing you an update you on the latest developments in constitutional politics, law reform and governance as well as in geopolitics and international relations in Asia.

I wish you an informative read.

With the best wishes,

Henning Glaser

Director, German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance (CPG)

Webpage: www.cpg-online.de, Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CPGTU/

Main Sections

- Law and Politics in East Asia

- Law and Politics in South Asia
- Law and Politics in South East Asia
- International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia
- Background Reading

Law and Politics in East Asia

China/Hong Kong: Third huge rally following suspension of contentious extradition bill

(dql) Following last week's protests against the contentious extradition bill on the Hong Kong government on Sunday, June 9, [AiR 2/6/2019] and on Wednesday, at which protesters and police clashed as the former successfully prevented the bill's second hearing, [DW] a third huge rally took place in the city on Sunday, with a turnout of two million people, as claimed by the organizers.

The protesters took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the city government's earlier announcement to indefinitely suspend the bill [Youtube], failing to meet the protesters' demand for completely scrapping of the bill. They also added new demands, including an investigation into the police use of force during Wednesday's clashes with protesters, the revocation of the official description of that protest as an illegal riot, which could expose anyone arrested during the violent demonstration to long jail terms, as well as the resignation of Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam whose latest move on Sunday evening, an apology to the public and a pledge to accept criticism, was rejected as she failed to meet

the above mentioned demands. [New York Times] [Hong Kong]

Meanwhile, Lam continues to enjoy the backing of Beijing. According to China's Foreign Ministry the "central government will continue to firmly support the chief executive and efforts by the government of the Special Administrative Region to govern according to law." [Channel News Asia]

At the same time, the Chinese government has been blocking access to information on the protests in Hong Kong within China. Censorship measures taken include: 'Hong Kong' entries in Baidu, the Chinese equivalent to Google, fail to deliver results for news on the protests; songs sung at the rallies have been wiped out from online streamline services and posts in support of the demonstrations removed from Weibo, China's Twitter-like social media platform. Within China, users of WeChat, the country's popular messaging app, are not able to send and share photos and comments. [Bloomberg]

China: Harvesting organs from detainees persist, tribunal says

(dql) According to a conclusion of a London-based independent tribunal, initiated by the International Coalition To End Transplant Abuse in China (ETAC), the killing of detainees in China for organ transplants is still taking place, with members of the banned Falun Gong organization being the victims of this practice. Evidence for the tribunal's conclusion were taken from medical experts, human rights investigators and others. The tribunal estimates that as many as 90,000 transplant operations are being carried out in China annually, a figure far higher than that of official government sources.

The Chinese government in 2014 announced that China would stop using executed prisoners as a source of organs for transplants from 2015 on. Rejecting similar claims earlier this year Beijing insists that it "always follows the World Health Organization's guiding principles on human organ transplant, and has strengthened its management on organ transplant in recent years." [ABC] [The Guardian]

South Korea: Parliamentary impasse set to persist

(dql) South Korea's National Assembly has been facing an impasse for months [AiR 1/6/2019] and continues to be paralyzed after the ruling Democratic Party (DP) and the main opposition Liberty Korea Party (LKP) on Sunday failed to agree on setting up a parliamentary hearing on the country's economic situation as condition for resuming parliamentary operation. While the latter refused to give in to its demand for a hearing to question the government over what it calls the country's economic crisis, the former rejected the demand, accusing the LKP of misusing the issue for its political agenda. [Korea Herald]

North Korea: TJWG Report details on-going public executions in North Korea

(jyk) Last week, the Seoul-based non-governmental organization Transitional Justice Working Group (TJWG) published a report, detailing the 323 locations in the hermit kingdom where state-led executions have taken place without appropriate legal procedures. According to the report, a wide range of crimes, as petty as stealing a cow and as grave as murder, warranted executions in the firing squad, where hundreds of ordinary citizens would watch.

The report was compiled on the basis of interviews with more than 600 North Korean defectors over four years, but its findings are not definitive due to the lack of third-party that can confirm the veracity of the interviewee's allegations. And it may be under-representative of what is in fact going on in the country as most defectors were from North Hamgyong, close to the Chinese borders. The human rights conditions could be more destitute in areas farther away from the borders. [JoongAng Daily]

Taiwan: President Tsai wins DPP primary poll, KMT hopeful Han rejects "one country, two system" unification formula

(dql) President Tsai Ing-wen is the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's candidate for the presidential race next year, defeating her contender former Premier William Lai Ching-te in the party's in a fiercely fought primary last week. [Taiwan News]

Meanwhile, the main opposition Kuomintang's Kao-hsiung mayor Han Kuo-yu, likely to win the KMT's primary in July to become Tsai's contender for presidency, is trying to disperse claims made by the

DPP and other political opponents that he is too Beijing-friendly citing his visits to Beijing's liaison offices in Hong Kong and Macau in March where he signed trade deals. In a latest rally last Saturday, allegedly attended by more than 120.000 supporters, he asserted his resolute rejection of Beijing's "one country, two system" unification formula vowing that this formula "will never be carried out" if he was given the opportunity to lead Taiwan as president." [Focus Taiwan]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Pakistan removes spy agency head and appoints hardliner

(jk) Pakistan appointed a hard-line general as new chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency, replacing the agency's current leader after only eight month in office. The reasons for his early departure are not yet publicised. [India Today]

The ISI is an immensely powerful agency made up of the three branches of Pakistan's military (Army, Navy, Air Force) and it has been repeatedly accused of organised crime, stifling the press, influencing elections, and cracking down on human rights groups. It is further seen as close to radical Islamic extremism and in particular, the Taliban, ever since it worked with the United States in supporting Afghan mujahideen against Soviet forces in Afghanistan. It is an important player in suppressing anti-military forces in Pakistan.

India's top court orders release of journalist

(cl) A freelance journalist arrested for allegedly defaming the powerful chief minister of Uttar Pradesh is awaiting release after India's Supreme Court ordered that he be freed, amid concerns over tightening curbs on free speech. He was previously charged with criminal defamation, which carries a maximum sentence of two years' jail, for tweeting a video in which a woman claimed to have video chatted and sent a marriage proposal to a Hindu monk. [BBC News] While the police maintained that his comments defamed the monk, many journalists and media groups condemned the arrest as an attack on the freedom of expression and press freedom. In particular, the Editors' Guild called the police action high-handed and arbitrary, and said it was "an authoritarian misuse of laws". [Khaleej Times]

The media, known for its aggressive style of journalism, has faced severe challenges in recent years, including increasing reports of intimidation, death threats and trolling. One notable instance was a journalist's sentence to a one-year prison sentence under the National Security Act for a Facebook post criticising Chief Minister of the Bharatiya Janata Party. [Reuters] There is also rising concern that journalists are being targeted by those in power through the use of laws, such as the defamation and sedition legislation, as well as the National Security Act. India is ranked 140th out of 180 countries in the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, down from 138th last year and 136th in 2017. [Aljazeera]

Indian police raid ISIS cell with links to Sri Lanka bombing mastermind

(cl) On Wednesday, Indian police raided seven locations in pursuit of a suspected Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) cell with links to the suicide bombers who killed over 250 people in Sri Lanka in April. ISIS claimed responsibility for the bombings in neighbouring Sri Lanka and has been looking to bolster its presence in the sub-continent after being driven out of its caliphate in Iraq and Syria. [Dhaka Tribune]

The National Investigation Agency, India's federal agency responsible for fighting militant groups, has conducted multiple searches in southern India this year in connection with a case concerning 15 people, who apparently left the country to join ISIS in 2016.

The agency has also made more than a dozen arrests in a case involving an ISIS-inspired group that was conspiring to carry out attacks around New Delhi. [Economic Times]

Thousands of doctors go on strike in India to demand safety after assault from patient's family

(cl) Over 30,000 doctors across India went on strike on Friday to demand better security at hospitals days after junior doctors in Kolkata were attacked, leading services in many government-run health facilities paralysed. The protests were sparked by an attack on June 10 which left three junior doctors seriously injured after a dispute with a family whose relative has died. The state of West Bengal has been the worst hit by the strike, with at least 13 big government hospitals affected. [Times of India] The Indian Medical Association said that the barbaric attack at the NRS reflected a national problem, calling for a countrywide protest and demanding legislation to safeguard doctors. In response, the Federal Health Minister tried to calm the protests by promising better security at hospitals "in the larger interest of society". [South China Morning Post]

Maldives may scrap deal with China to build an observatory in the Indian Ocean

(jk) Local and not yet officially confirmed sources of the [Times of India] claim that a deal that had been made between China and former Maldivian leader Yameen was no longer "on the table". The two countries had agreed that China would be able to build an - allegedly *dual-purpose* - observatory in the westernmost atoll of the Maldives, allowing China a "vantage point of an important Indian Ocean shipping route", according to concerns raised by India. It remains to be seen whether the new Maldivian government will allow the deal to go ahead or not.

Sri Lanka: Church re-opens for first service after bomb attack

(jk) While the investigations are ongoing, and are increasingly putting pressure on the President [The Print], people in Colombo have attended the first

service since the attacks at the newly renovated St Anthony's Church in the country's capital. [Al Jazeera Video]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Indonesia: Jokowi offers Prabowo a Cabinet seat

(ls) According to the Jakarta Globe, Indonesian president Joko "Jokowi" Widodo has been in discussion with Prabowo Subianto to bring the former army general and his Gerindra party into a ruling coalition, a move which would eliminate any serious opposition in parliament. In April's elections, Jokowi's main supporting party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) led a coalition with 61 percent of the seats at the House of Representatives. Prabowo, however, is challenging the election result in the Constitutional Court which will hold a hearing this week. [Jakarta Globe]

Malaysia: Pakatan Harapan's internal feud boils over with gay sex video clip

(cl) Last week, videos of a man resembling Malaysian Economic Affairs minister and an aide to a deputy minister in bed engaging in sexual acts surfaced in a targeted leak to journalists. Sodomy and oral sex are outlawed in Malaysia, and homosexual relations are deeply taboo although it currently remains unclear if the video is evidence of a crime. [Straits Times]

That afternoon, Prime Minister Mahathir denied knowledge of the videos, sparking what may be the start of open warfare within his administration. The senior private secretary confessed that he was the man in the video and further called on the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission to investigate the minister for corruption. In response, the Economic Affairs minister, who is also the Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR) deputy president, denied this "vicious libel", claiming that he is a victim of sabotage. His supporters have further questioned the secretary's credibility, pointing to his past associations with Barisan Nasional and support of a rival candidate at polls last year. [The Star]

The Economic Affairs minister told reporters that he only knew that the secretary was a party member who joined the opposition and re-joined the PKR after the Pakatan Harapan government won the elections, calling such behaviour characteristic of "an individual who has been manipulated in this slander". It is suspected that the PKR factional infighting led to the issuing of the sex videos. [Malay Mail]

Another video clip was released on Wednesday, causing an Umno supreme council member to lodge a police report calling for an investigation into its authenticity. On Thursday, Mahathir commented that he believes that the sex videos were fake. [Asia One] Hours later, the aide accused the Economic Affairs minister of trying to get him to lie about the affair which he said had begun three years ago. [Free Malaysia Today]

The rapidly unfolding saga is reminiscent of how former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim was ousted in 1998, which began with what seemed like a coordinated attack. Then, he refused to resign and alleged conspiracy, launching the Reformasi movement which sparked violent street protests. He was eventually convicted of sodomy, though this was overturned on appeal in 2004, and abuse of power. He was accused of sodomy a second time and jailed in 2014 before being pardoned after the Pakatan Harapan government triumphed in elections last year. Yet again, at the height of an internal power struggle, allegations of sexual misconduct are threatening to be the deciding factor, especially as Mahathir is due to step down before the next general election. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore ratifies international convention on workplace safety and health

(cl) Singapore has ratified the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Occupational Safety and Health Convention, which commits it to creating, implementing and periodically reviewing a national policy on workplace safety and health, in consultation with employers and workers. [International Labour Organisation] Singapore is the second ASEAN country after Vietnam to endorse the pact, with support from the National Trades Union Congress and the Singapore National Employers Federation. To work towards this goal, several strategies were recommended in April by a Workplace Safety and Health 2028 Tripartite Strategies Committee, and which the Government has accepted. [Ministry of Manpower]

Thailand: Cabinet taking shape as possible legal battles overshadow House and Senate

(ls) Thailand's King Vachiralongkorn (Rama X.) formally endorsed former army chief Prayut Chan-o-cha as elected Prime Minister on Tuesday, 11 June 2019. [Straits Times] It is Gen. Prayut's second endorsement as Prime Minister by a Thai King. On 25 August 2014, he had received the royal endorsement from the late King Bhumibol (Rama IX.), following the military coup of May 2014. [Reuters]

However, the formation of the new government and, in particular, the distribution of some key ministries, is not yet finalized. According to sources, Gen. Prawit Wongsuwon will remain deputy prime minister, while Gen. Prayut will also be defence minister, taking over from Gen Prawit. Gen. Anupong Paojinda is likely to stay on as interior minister. The Democrats appear to have received control of the Agriculture and Commerce ministries, whereas Bhumjaithai will be in charge of the Transport Ministry. [Bangkok Post]

Former foreign minister Kasit Piromya, who is also a member of the Asian Governance Foundation's advisory board, has resigned from the Democrat Party over its support for Gen. Prayuth's second term in office. Kasit's resignation follows a string of exits after the party, under the new leadership of Jurin Laksanawisit, resolved to join the governing coalition and support Gen. Prayuth. [Khaosod English]

Gen. Prayut himself is expected to become the official leader of the Phalang Pracharat party after the new government is formed. According to sources, Gen. Prayut plans to stay in politics for the long term. Consequently, current party leader Uttama

Savanayana is expected to step down from his position. [The Nation]

The Bangkok Post has gathered the opinions of several Thai academics and experts on what can be expected from the new government during the first months in office and throughout the term. [Bangkok Post 2]

Meanwhile, the formation of the wholly-appointed Senate has drawn widespread criticism as it became apparent this week that six members of the Senate Selection Committee are now themselves senators. The military government's legal adviser Wissanu Krea-ngam defended the procedure, saying that "no member ever brought up their name in the selection process. Everything is on the record." [Khaosod English 2] The Pheu Thai party already announced to challenge the selection process in court. [Bangkok Post 3]

More legal trouble is awaiting dozens of MPs of the Palang Pracharath party, the Democrat party and other government-coalition parties after House Speaker Chuan Leekpai forwarded to the Constitutional Court petitions for rulings related to alleged breaches of media shareholding rules. The petitions were lodged by the Future Forward Party whose leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit has been suspended from his parliamentary duties on similar charges. [Bangkok Post 4]

Dozens of Rohingya people stranded on Thai island, captain and crew criminally charged

(ls) 65 Rohingya Muslims were discovered on Rawi island in Thailand's Satun province. They had reached the island's beach by boat. Authorities have charged the captain and crew with assisting foreign nationals to enter the country illegally. In recent months, many Rohingya Muslims have boarded boats to try to reach Malaysia. In 2015, about 25,000 people crossed the Andaman Sea for Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, many drowning in unsafe and overloaded boats. [Reuters]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

China-USA relations: Hong Kong protest a leverage for Washington in trade dispute?

(dql) Indicating an unexpected leverage for U.S. President Trump at the G20 Summit at the end of the month in Japan where he is scheduled to meet Chinese President Xi to strike a deal to resolve the trade dispute, U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo announced that Hong Kong human rights would be among the issues to be discussed between Presidents Trump and Xi should they meet at the G20 summit at the end of the month. [Reuters]

Hong Kong, due to its status as an independent economic and customs area separate from mainland China, has so far been largely exempted from the US tariffs. However, China-hawks in Congress last week discussed introducing legislation to revoke Hong Kong's autonomy status. [Forbes]

For recommendations on how the U.S should respond to the protests last week, centering around a public statement of President of "moral and verbal support to keep freedom's ember glowing in Hong Kong" followed by drastic economic measures including delisting the six largest China's companies from the U.S. stock exchange and a total on Huawei, see Grant Newsham in [AND].

Japan: PM Abe a mediator between Washington and Teheran?

(dql) During his visit to Iran and meetings with President Hassan Rouhani and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei last week, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe embarked on a delicate journey to

play the role of a mediator between the USA and Iran amid escalating tensions between these countries. Abe's trip to Iran was the first by a Japanese Prime Minister since the Islamic revolution in 1979 and the first by a G7 leader since US President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

The results of Abe's brokering efforts, including establishing a communication channel as well as his assurance that under "the right international environment surrounding Iran" Japan would seek to deepen economic ties and increase oil trade, appear sobering in the light of comments of his hosts. While Rouhani insisted that the "root of tensions is the US economic war against Iran. As soon as this war stops, we shall see a very positive development in the world and the region", Khamanei resolutely rejected communication with the US President saying that he does not "consider Trump as a person worth exchanging any message with and I have no answer for him" nor would he "respond to him in the future". [Kyodo] [Japan Times]

Abe's visit was overshadowed by attacks on two tankers in the Gulf of Oman. Further heightening the tensions between the USA and Iran, both sides voiced mutual accusations over the attacks. U.S. President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo accused Teheran of being responsible for the attacks. Teheran resolutely rejected the claims criticizing Washington for making accusations without "a shred of factual or circumstantial evidence." [Aljazeera] [DW] Tokyo, so far has refrained from taking sides in the question on the responsibility for attacks, despite the US Department of Defense release of video allegedly demonstrating an Iranian patrol boat removing an unexploded mine attached to the side of one of the tankers. Japanese government officials rejected the Pentagon's assessment which "has not helped us go beyond speculation". [Japan Today]

In a latest development, Pompeo announced in an interview on Sunday that in responding to the attacks on the tankers the U.S. government is considering the full range of options, including military options. [CBS]

Meanwhile, Iran's atomic energy organization on Monday revealed that Iran had increased low enriched uranium production fourfold with the limit of the nuclear deal of 300 kilograms to be exceeded by June 27. [CNN]

Japan seeks Mongolia's support in North Korean abduction issue

(jyk) Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono met his Mongolian counterpart in Ulaanbaatar on Sunday, in an effort to seek Mongolia's cooperation in resolving issues related to North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals in 1970s and 80s. The two agreed on the importance of fully implementing U.N. sanctions against North Korea toward denuclearization, according to Japanese officials. This is the first time in 9 years for a Japanese foreign minister to visit Mongolia, and the two agreed to deepen ties. North Korea has reacted coldly to Japanese Prime Minister's offer of holding a meeting so far. Japan currently lists 17 people as missing from NK's abduction, five of whom were repatriated in 2002. [Mainichi]

South Korea-USA relations: Washington wants its ally to join the boycott against Huawei

(jyk) During a security forum in Seoul on June 7th, the U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, Harry Harris voiced his concern over the security implications of Korean military's continued purchase and usage of Huawei's communications equipment, despite U.S.'s call to blacklist the company to protect the allies' security network. Several companies of U.S. allies like U.K. and Japan followed the call and suspended deals with China's rising tech giant. However, Seoul hesitated its alignment with its closest security ally U.S., and said on 13th that it will "consider measures that respect corporate autonomy without affecting military communications" through Ministry of Foreign Affairs, possibly wary of economic retaliation from its biggest trading partner, China [JoongAng Daily]. In response to the concern, a South Korean senior official said the concern was unjustified as 5G was "clearly separate from the military and security communications network in South Korea", and that Korea's "usage rate for its 5G network was less than 10%" [Hankyoreh]. The U.S. State Department nonetheless warned the problem pertained to serious national security issues, and that it will reconsider sharing sensitive intelligence with Korea if it fails to align with U.S.'s Huawei boycott. [JoongAng Daily]

China's quest for closer relations with India, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Summit

(jk) Upon Indian PM Modi's election victory last month, Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a letter to Modi in which he stated he would stand ready to "uplift the [current] Closer Development Partnership between the two countries". The Chinese Ambassador to India, now also China's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, had suggested recently that India's participation in the BRI would set the relationship of the countries off in the right direction. He has also made advances on a Sino-Indian good neighbourliness "treaty". While India has thus far refrained from embracing the BRI, some voices are heard advocating to re-evaluation the Sino-Indian relationship, with a particular focus on solving issues around BRI projects with Pakistan, which go through some disputed territories and therefore make it very difficult for India to accept. [RSIS]

Notwithstanding, China is aware of India's stance and will not be surprised that India once again refused to endorse the BRI at the latest SCO summit this past weekend. Modi stated in a thinly veiled reference to the BRI that "any mega connectivity project must respect sovereignty and territorial integrity" of the countries involved. [Times of India] Despite the headlines, India-China relations are expected to continue to expand.

Further, all SCO members (India, Pakistan, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) agreed to "expand the practice of using national currencies in transactions" between themselves, another item on the list of growing challenges to the dominance of the US dollar. [Zee News]

US-India ties ahead of Pompeo's India visit

(jk/cl) The US Secretary of State said that he would outline areas for new cooperation with India ahead of his trip to New Delhi towards the end of June. [India Post] While Mr Modi has supported greater cooperation with the US, especially on defence, trade tensions have also been rising between the two countries, with US President Trump's administration for example forcing India to stop buying oil form Iran and Venezuela. Complaining of closed markets, Mr Trump has also removed India from the Generalised System of Preferences, a key trading preference under

which India exported goods worth billions of dollars into the US in 2017. [Channel News Asia] The Trump administration however, is now also offering India alternate systems to the Russian S-400 missile defence system - the National Advanced Surface to Air Missile System-II - and potentially even the F-35 fifth-generation stealth fighter jet if India were to scrap the Russian missile deal. [MoneyControl; Economic Times]

On Saturday, India decided to raise tariffs on imports of 29 goods from the US after having deferred the move several times after announcing it last June following Washington's refusal to exempt New Delhi from higher steel and aluminium tariffs then. [CNN News] It had previously delayed raising tariffs as trade talks raised hopes of resolution. The new taxes have taken effect since 16th June 2019, and are likely to be brought up as an issue when US President and Indian Prime Minister meet at the G-20 summit in Osaka, on June 28-29. [Economic Times]

India plans to have its own space station

(jk) In addition to India's ambitious plan to launch its first manned space mission, called "Gaganyaan", by August 2022, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has now also stated India will seek to have its own space station, to be completed 5-7 years after Gaganyaan. [The Hindu] India has been trying to establish herself as a space power. The government recently established a new Defense Space Agency (DSA) and has notably increased its "space-related" activities, such as its Anti-Satellite Missile Test in March [Space] or its announcement of a second lunar mission for mid-July [Straits Times] for which it unveiled a new space ship last week. India has also launched a substantial amount of satellites over the past few years. In terms of military use, the DSA is preparing to conduct war games to explore the country's space warfare capabilities. Those are, however, yet to be developed and lag far behind others. India, for example, has only about one dozen satellites for military purposes, whereas China "probably has 10 x as many." [The Wire]

Sri Lankan and Russian Presidents discuss strengthening bilateral relations

(jk) The two leaders met at the side-lines of a conference in Tajikistan and discussed strengthening the bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and Russia as

well as how to deal with US sanctions on goods imported from Russia to Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan President further extended an invitation to Putin to visit Sri Lanka. [ColomboPage]

The Mekong: Region of geopolitical rivalry and cross-border cooperation

(ls) The Mekong remains one of Southeast's Asia geopolitical hotspots. After years of Chinese investment and support of the five countries along the region's longest river, the United States now appear to "recommit" themselves as well. Such move is expected of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's July visit to Bangkok when he will attend an ASEAN ministerial meeting. Experts point out that America's Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) has produced less tangible results than the China-led Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which offer significant funds for infrastructure and industrial development. [South China Morning Post]

One case in point is a new US$6 billion railway connecting Laos with China. It stretches 420 kilometers from Vientiane to the Mohan-Boten border gate in northern Laos. Trains are expected to reach 160 kilometers per hour, reducing a two-day journey to just three hours. So far, 47 of 167 bridges and 53 of 72 tunnels have been completed. However, the construction has led to multiple displacements of local people without proper compensation. Moreover, of the expected 7,000 Laotians to be hired for construction only 2,000 have been employed, along with 19,000 Chinese. [ASEAN Today]

Thailand and Laos on Friday signed an agreement on building the fifth friendship bridge between Thailand's Bueng Kan province and Laos' Bolikhamsai province. The bridge is part of the Greater Mekong Sub-region and ACMECS (Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy) economic cooperation between Laos, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand. [Xinhua]

New Zealand, which established the Mekong Institute with Thailand in 1996, has been engaged in the region as well. In May, the Asia New Zealand Foundation and Thailand's Institute of Security and International Studies co-convened a Track II (informal diplomacy) dialogue over current issues impacting the Mekong region. The Asia Media Centre has gathered some of

the New Zealand delegates' reactions after the dialogue. [Asia Media Centre]

Who is the winner of the U.S.-China trade war? – It's Southeast Asia

(ls) The continued "trade war" between the United States and China has produced several benefits for Southeast Asian countries. What was expected by many experts – that third parties will be the winners of the confrontation – is materializing now.

Malaysia is seeing an increased interest among Chinese companies to invest in the country. For instance, the two countries cooperate on the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park, a China-Malaysia International Science and Technology Park, an Electronic Information Industry Park, a Smart Interconnection Industrial Park and a National Bird Nest Laboratory. In April, also the previously stalled East Coast Rail Link project was resumed. [The Star]

The escalating trade war is expected to lure more Chinese manufacturers to relocate factories in an attempt to divert exports. "Malaysia has been benefiting from business relocation, as well as trade and investment diversions caused by the trade war," said Malaysia's Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng. [South China Morning Post]

In a similar vein, Indonesia has recently seen a boom in select industries. According to the Bank of Indonesia, exports in the country have dramatically increased following the shift of the supply chain from China to other Southeast Asian nations as US companies are more reluctant to buy from Chinese companies. This is especially true in the footwear industry. [Business Times]

The Philippines, one of the oldest U.S. allies in Asia, has not signed on to America's ban against the Chinese communications company Huawei. Rather, the country is moving ahead with plans to use Huawei equipment in upcoming trials of ultra-fast 5G wireless systems and a multi-city surveillance program. Southeast Asia is crucial for Huawei because mature markets such as Japan, Australia and parts of Europe have already limited their dealings with Chinese tech suppliers. [Los Angeles Times]

However, the Philippines is planning to tighten rules for foreign workers as more Chinese nationals enter to take up jobs. According to the Labour Department's latest available date, more than half of the 45,000 work

permits it issued were given to Chinese nationals in 2017. The number of Chinese workers who secured permits doubled in 2016 to 18,000. [Bloomberg 1]

Thailand, however, appears to be a less favorable location for Chinese investment due to protracted political uncertainty. Political risk is making businesses hesitant to invest in an environment of heightened global challenges. Already $20 billion of spending on transport and logistics projects has been delayed because of the three-month impasse in forming a government. [Bloomberg 2]

Philippines call for China to sanction "barbaric" fishing crew

(cl) The Philippines have filed a diplomatic protest against China via a letter to the London-based International Maritime Organisation after the crew of a fishing boat sank a Filipino vessel carrying 22 fishermen in South China Sea, potentially inflaming a dispute calmed by warmer ties between their leaders. [New York Times]

Philippines President Duterte's spokesman described the act of China's fishing vessel as uncivilised, outrageous and barbaric. He further called on China to investigate and sanction the crew members, who apparently left the injured fishermen without any assistance. On Saturday, Beijing confirmed that the Chinese trawler hit the Philippine fishing boat. [Channel News Asia]

Since Duterte's election in mid-2016, the Philippines has pivoted towards China, often setting aside a July 2016 ruling by the Hague that rejected China's sea claims. [The Diplomat] However, this incident casts doubt over his approach to the South China Sea.

The spokesman for the military unit in charge of the disputed waters found that the Chinese crew members' act of leaving the area as the Philippines boat was sinking indicates that they hit the vessel intentionally. Experts have also noted that China's vast fishing fleet has been co-opted to serve as Beijing's militia and augment its constant coastguard presence in waters also claimed by Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei. [Bloomberg]

Indonesia reveals frustration with Singapore over delay in ASEAN adopting

Jokowi's Indo-Pacific concept

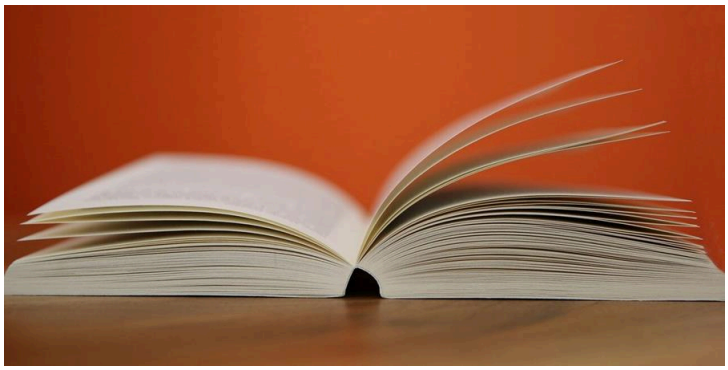
(cl) According to an Indonesian diplomat, Jakarta has been lobbying ASEAN members to have their own regional agreement on the Indo-Pacific, but the plan may not be signed off at this month's summit as Singapore has not endorsed it. The term Indo-Pacific has been used in recent years by both Japanese and US officials trying to boost economic and security ties with countries in the region amid China's expanding influence. However, Indonesia in the last two years lobbied the other nine ASEAN members to have their own regional vision, noting that the objectives would not be new but would signal enhanced cooperation. [South China Morning Post]

Malaysia's PM says has right not to extradite controversial Indian preacher

(cl) An Indian national who is a popular figure in Muslim-majority Malaysia is wanted by New Delhi to face money laundering charges. Prime Minister Mahathir stated that Malaysia has the right not to extradite the man to India if it feels he is not going to be accorded justice. In response, the India released an enforcement directorate, which stated that it would seek Interpol's cooperation to extradite him to face charges in Malaysia. The man had espoused controversial views in his lectures and videos when answering issues linked to Hinduism with his puritan brand of Islam. [The Star]

In 2014, he was charged by India's National Investigation Agency with inciting terror and delivering hate speeches. In 2017, Bangladesh suspended a television channel that featured him after the media reported that militants who killed over 20 people were admirers of him. He was also banned from entering Britain in 2010. [South China Morning Post]

Background Reading



Vietnam: A look back on the Republic of Cochinchina

(ls) In the New Mandala, Brett Reilly describes the reality and the legacy of the French-sponsored Republic of Cochinchina in Vietnam after the Second World War. He writes that the republic's president, Nguyễn Văn Thinh, saw it as a means to counter the Viet Minh-led revolution and to stop France from re-colonizing Cochinchina after World War II. Moreover, he describes the diversity of leadership within Vietnam's late colonial society and the alternative aspirations for political development that many Vietnamese supported. [New Mandala]

International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Report on LGBTQ in India: Still devoid of key rights

(jk) After encouraging rulings of late, such as the Supreme Court decriminalising consensual adult same-sex relationships in India or the legal recognition of a third gender, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) persons continue to suffer violations of their basic rights, according to a report by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ). The report "details human rights violations suffered by LGBTQ persons in their family homes, workplaces, and public spaces including streets, public toilets, public transport and shopping centres" and offers recommendations with regards to amending or repealing existing laws in order to safeguard members of the LGBTQ community. [ICJ]

We would greatly appreciate your feedback! Please send any feedback you have regarding this newsletter to: info@cpg-online.de

Also, don't forget to Like CPG on Facebook, and browse our *website* for other updates and news!

German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance - CPG
Room 204, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

Preferences | Unsubscribe