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Asia in Review

No. 41, October/2020, 2

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Dear Readers,

The AiR team is presenting you this week's update on the latest events and developments in constitutional politics and governance, geopolitics and international relations in Asia.

We wish you an informative read. Special greetings are extended to readers in Azerbaijan, Equatorial Guinea and Spain which celebrate Independence Day and National Day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

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Main Sections

- Law and Politics in East Asia

- Law and Politics in South Asia
- Law and Politics in Southeast Asia
- International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia
- Announcements

Law and Politics in East Asia

China: Teacher fired for discussing HK independence

(dql) A Hong Kong primary school teacher has been punished with a lifelong revocation of his license for promoting the city's independence after he handed out worksheets asking students to discuss independence and freedom of speech in his classes. [Hong Kong Free Press]

Hong Kong' teachers' union rejecting the punishment as "unacceptable" and "extreme" and announced to appeal the case. [Aljazeera]

Defending this unprecedented action, the city's Education Bureau claims that it was intended to "protect students' interest and safeguard teachers' professionalism and public trust in the teaching profession." Meanwhile Chief Executive Carrie Lam vowed to continue to "weed out the bad apples" from the teaching profession sparking concerns about a possible campaign against teachers. [The Guardian] [South China Morning Post]

South Korea: Massive personal information leakage

(dql) According to data of South Korea's Personal Information Protection Commission, over 280 million personal data records have been leaked from public institutions and private companies since 2012.

The number of liability insurance contracts signed up to compensate for related damage, however, stood at under 12.000 in the same period, indicating insufficient - mandatory - insurance subscription. At current, the relevant law obliges only information and communication service providers with more than 43.000 USD in sales in the previous year and a daily average of over 10 million users in the last three months of the previous year to buy liability insurance to compensate possible leakages. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2]

South Korea: Liberalizing abortion law?

(dql) South Korea's National Assembly is considering a proposal to liberalize the abortion law to allow abortions up to the 14th week in general and 24th weeks in cases of severe birth defects, pregnancy resulting from a sex crime, or health risks for the mother.

The Constitutional Court last year struck down the current Maternal and Child Health Law of 1973, which generally bans abortion but allows for exceptions in the cases of rape, incest, genetic disease, or risk to the mother's health. Furthermore, the Court ordered lawmakers to change the law by end of 2020. [Reuters] [BBC]

Taiwan: Legislature passes proposal to resume diplomatic ties with Washington unanimously

(dql) Taiwan's legislature last week unanimously passed two resolutions submitted by the opposition Kuomingtang (Kuomingtang, Chinese Nationalist Party) which calls for US military aid to counter the Chinese Communist Party's aggression as well as a resumption of diplomatic relations between the USA and Taiwan. [Taipei Times]

Both proposals came at a surprise as the KMT has been so far upholding a much more China-friendly stance, compared with the confrontational stance of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) which insists on Taiwan being a sovereign nation. At the recent party congress, the KMT – albeit after heavy internal dispute – had confirmed the '1992 consensus' which the DPP categorically rejects. [AiR No. 36, September/2020, 2]

The sudden change triggered questions about its ulterior motives, with some observers suggesting "political theater" aimed to maneuver the DPP into a difficult situation. Last month, Taiwan's Foreign Minister publicly declared that his government would currently not push for full diplomatic relations with the USA. [Taiwan News] [The Diplomat 1]

Chinese state-run Global Times, meanwhile, condemned the KMT for its move harshly calling the party "losers," and demanding that – given this "loser mentality" – China "must not count on them for future cross-Straits peace and national reunification," but "fully prepare itself for war and to give Taiwan secessionist forces a decisive punishment at any time." [Global Times]

For an account on the KMT's internal discussions on its policy towards China – a core issue in the frame of the party's reform process after the devastating defeat in the presidential and legislative elections in January –, see David G. Brown in [The Diplomat 2] who argues that the KMT is in need of a more Taiwan-centered cross-strait relations policy to remain relevant in Taiwan's political system.

Taiwan: KMT will not change party name

(ef) Amid increased cross-strait tensions and pro-independency tendencies within Taiwan, the chairman of the KMT has stated that the official party name would not be changed to omit the word "Chinese". Currently, the KMT is in a process of self-reform in which the relationship to China plays a crucial role (see above). Immediately after the KMT's defeat in the presidential and legislative elections in January, younger members of the party proposed to remove the word "Chinese" from the party's name. [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Bangladesh: Capital punishment for sexual assault introduced over surge in violent sex crime

(lm) As protests flare across Bangladesh over a recent spate of rapes and sexual harassment, the Cabinet approved a legal amendment to elevate the maximum punishment for sexual assault from life imprisonment to capital punishment. Prior, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets to demand justice and to call on the government to introduce the death penalty for offenders after a video of a group of men attacking, stripping, and sexually assaulting a woman went viral. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [South China Morning Post] [Anadolu Agency]

Sex crimes have surged in Bangladesh since the beginning of this year, with gang rapes accounting for more than one-fifth of the nearly 1,000 attacks reported between January and September, according to Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), a local human rights organization. Between April and August, as the world reeled under the coronavirus pandemic, four women were raped every day in Bangladesh, the ASK data showed. Campaigners, however, say the report only captures a small fracture of the true number of cases of sexual violence against women, as many victims are reluctant to report sexual assaults to the police. [Dhaka Tribune 2] [Human Rights Watch] [The Straits Times]

Following a large day-long protest earlier in response to a case in Dhaka this year, the country's High Court ordered the Law Ministry in January to form a

commission within 30 days to investigate the troubling rise in sexual violence, with the aim of submitting its report by June. However, more than nine months after the court order, it is unclear whether the commission is functioning, and it has not produced recommendations. [Al Jazeera]

India: Court orders release of detained sex workers

(lm) Upholding women's right "to choose their own vocation", the Bombay High Court last month overturned an order that had prevented three sex workers from leaving a state corrective institution they had been forcibly moved to. Following a raid at a guesthouse in Malad, a Mumbai court last year had concluded the three women needed state "care and protection", and, moreover, should be counselled against sex work, learn new skills and find fresh jobs – despite the women's opposition. [Deccan Herald] [Taipei Times]

The case is considered a landmark legal ruling, because India's Immoral Traffic Prevention Act – applied in brothel raids and sex worker rescues – fails to distinguish between victims of trafficking and prostitutes taking sex work by choice. According to the law, adult sex workers rounded up by police are housed in shelters for 21 days for verification and medical tests, among other formalities. After the 21 days, courts can impose a further detention of up to three years, based on a woman's family background and the circumstances that led them into prostitution. [The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956]

India: Naga insurgency – Maoist separatist group in Northeast India on the state of affairs

(lm) The National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) on October 5 made public that it had written to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in February to ask for peace talks to be held in "a third country". The Maoist group explained that it had withheld the letter for seven months before releasing it to the media, because it expected the prime minister to respond positively. [National Herald] [The Free Press Journal]

Now, the NSCN-IM accuses both, the federal government and the state governor of Nagaland and

interlocutor in the Naga peace process, of "repeated militarization and a conscious carrying out of state terrorism in the Naga areas and against the Naga people". [NDTV]

On a more positive note, the NSCN-IM added that talks regarding a separate Naga flag and constitution, which they argue are implied in a framework agreement signed in 2015, are underway with the Indian government. Disagreement about whether the proposed Naga state would have its own flag and constitution has been a major sticking point in the negotiations, because the Indian Government, until recently, had ruled out a separate flag and constitution. [The Economic Times]

The conflict in the state of Nagaland is India's longest lasting insurgency, which has continued in one form or another since the Naga National Council – the oldest Naga national organization – declared an independent Naga nation in August 1947. The main goal of the NSCN-IM is to establish a sovereign Naga state, the People's Republic of Nagalim (PRN), by unifying all the Naga-inhabited areas in Northeast India and Northwest Myanmar. In 1997, the NSCN-IM and the Indian government signed a bilateral ceasefire agreement, and the two sides have been attempting to reach a peace agreement ever since. The largest armed Naga nationalist group, the NSCN-IM has been negotiating with the Indian government to reach a conclusive and permanent agreement since August 2019. [Caravan Magazine]

Maldives: Quota for women not unconstitutional?

(lm) The Attorney General's Office (AGO) argued in the Maldives' High Court that establishing a quota for women in local councils isn't unconstitutional or constitutes an instance of gender discrimination. Previously, a constitutional motion had been filed with the High Court, challenging the constitutionality of a provision of the 2019 Decentralization Act which stipulated a quota for local council seats to provide equal opportunity for women. [SunOnline]

Initially, the AGO confirmed that a quota potentially constitutes a violation of Article 17 (b) of the Constitution which guarantees equal opportunities for disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups. The High Court will hold one more hearing in the case before issuing its ruling.

Nepal: New foreign secretary

(lm) The Nepalese government on October 9 appointed hitherto Acting Foreign Secretary, Bharat Raj Paudyal, the new regular Foreign Secretary. A career diplomat, Paudyal had joined foreign service in 1992 and is now succeeding Shanker Das Bauragi, who was appointed Chief Secretary of the Government of Nepal on October 1. [The Himalayan Times]

Pakistan: High Court acquits Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy

(lm) A Pakistani High Court (HC) has overturned the 2014 conviction of a Christian man sentenced to death for blasphemy. The convict had first been arrested in 2013 in the eastern city of Lahore on charges of insulting the Prophet Muhammad. Following his arrest, a mob set his home on fire, along with two churches and about 150 homes in Lahore's Christian neighborhood of Joseph Colony. [The Straits Times]

In his appeal against the death sentence he advanced objections on police investigation and prosecution claiming among other issues that the charges had been intentionally fabricated by locals who wanted to take over the Joseph Colony land. [The Express Tribune]

Noteworthy, an anti-terrorism court had previously acquitted all those accused of involvement in the Christian neighborhood mob attack, for "want of evidence".

Pakistan: High Court bars Federal Investigation Agency from arresting journalist

(lm) The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has restrained the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) from arresting a physically-challenged journalist over his alleged objectionable tweets. The journalist, who had filed a petition with the IHC is being provided legal assistance from the Journalistic Defense Committee constituted earlier this month by the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1]. [The Hindu]

His lawyers asserted that he was being harassed by the FIA's Cybercrime Wing solely because of opinions and views he had expressed on social media. For this reason, the FIA has served the journalist an undated notice, summoned him and later raided his house. [Dawn]

Presuming abuse of power under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the IHC adjourned the hearing in the case until October 12 and summoned the inquiry officer of the FIA's Cybercrime Wing to testify in court. [New Indian Express]

Pakistan: High Court issues proclamation against former PM Nawaz Sharif

(lm) The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has issued a proclamation against former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in two cases - Al-Azizia and Avenfield - and ordered advertisements to be published in two newspapers calling for Sharif to appear before court. The proclamation was issued after arrest warrants against Sharif had not been received in London, where he has been residing since November last year after a court granted him indefinite bail to seek medical treatment [see AiR No. 37, September/2020, 3]. In case Sharif does not appear before court until November 24, he will be declared a proclaimed offender and the IHC will order the seizure of assets. [Business Standard] [Samaa News] [NDTV]

Earlier this month, an Islamabad anti-corruption court had ordered the seizure of assets for Sharif's failure to appear in the Toshakhana graft case, two weeks after the IHC had rejected his plea for exemption from court appearance and issued a non-bailable warrant [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1, AiR No. 38, September/2020, 4].

The Al-Azizia reference pertains to the family of Sharif being unable to justify the source of funds used for setting up the Al-Azizia Steel Mills and Hill Metal Establishment companies in Saudi Arabia, making it a case of owning assets beyond means. The Avenfield reference pertains to the undeclared purchase of property owned by the Sharif family in London. Both references had been filed by the country's National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in September 2017 [see AiR (2/7/2018)]. In July 2018, an anti-corruption court had then sentenced Sharif in absentia to ten years in jail, five months after the ruling by the Supreme Court that had banned Sharif from parliament for life [see AiR (2/7/2018), AiR (3/4/2018)]. [Dawn]

Pakistan: Civil society, opposition reject plan to create new city claiming an annexation by China

(lm) A presidential ordinance aimed at developing two islands in the coastal belt of Sindh province has kicked up a political storm in Pakistan, with the opposition and civil society groups calling it an "illegal annexation" by China. While the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had hitherto managed to keep the issue out of the limelight, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Monday posted the ordinance on social media, vowing to oppose it. [Dawn 1] [The Express Tribune]

Sindh, the third-largest province in Pakistan by area, borders the Indian states of Gujarat and Rajasthan to the east, and Arabian Sea to the south. The province's coastal belt hosts around 300 big and small islands; and Pakistan's federal government twice in the last two decades has floated the idea of building a city on two, Bundal and Buddo Islands. In mid-September, Pakistan President Arif Alvi chaired a meeting to discuss infrastructure projects inter alias on Bundal Island, informing real estate players and investors that the locations were very much attractive for foreign investment. [Dunya News] [The Express Tribune] [Dawn 2]

Prior to this, on August 31, the president had promulgated an ordinance for establishing the "Pakistan Islands Development Authority" (PIDA) with the primary purpose to develop and maintain islands in the littoral waters of Pakistan. Still, only the twin islands are mentioned as "specified areas", which are to be promoted as "trade, investment and logistics centers and hubs, duty free areas and international tourist destinations". Importantly, no court or any other authority will have jurisdiction to question the legality of any action taken by the PIDA. [propakistani]

To date, the provincial government in Sindh argues that the federal government has no authority over the islands, saying that according to the constitution any island within 12 nautical miles of the maritime boundaries falls within the jurisdiction of the provincial government. During an emergency meeting held on October 6, the PPP-led government unanimously rejected the presidential ordinance and demanded that the federal government immediately withdraw it. [Gulf News]

Recent developments have to be seen against the backdrop of a wider resentment against Chinese economic expansion in Pakistan under Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) framework. In September, for example, fishermen announced a campaign against the arrival of Chinese deep-sea trawlers off the coast of Sindh and Baluchistan. Political leaders in Sindh are now fearing that the federal government is preparing to hand over some of the islands off the province's coast to Beijing. [Dawn 3]

Further, since the launch of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a part of the BRI, the list of outlawed groups has been expanded to include ethnic and sectarian groups from the southwestern province of Balochistan and the northern region of Gilgit Baltistan. In May, the federal government banned Jeay Sindh Qaumi Mahaz-Arisar (JSQM-A), a Sindh-based political party well known for criticizing China's BRI, along with two militant groups from the same province for alleged terrorist links [see AiR No. 21, May/2020, 4]

Sri Lanka: Debate on 20th Constitutional Amendment upcoming

(lm) A parliamentary debate on the 20th Constitutional Amendment that is aimed at removing the checks and balances on the presidency is scheduled to take place within the next parliamentary week, beginning on October 20. Earlier, the Supreme Court had concluded hearing from petitioners and subsequently submitted its confidential decision regarding the constitutionality of the bill to the President and the Speaker of Parliament [see AiR No. 38, September/2020, 4, AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1]. Accordingly, after the presentation of the decision of the Supreme Court on the 20th Constitutional Amendment by the Speaker of Parliament, the respective debate will be held. [Colombo Page]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia still on track to meet its financial obligations, PM says

(jn) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said during a Council of Ministers meeting on October 9 that his country was still planning to fulfill its financial obligations in full and on time despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The country was still in a relatively good shape financially compared to other nations, he said.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimated in its economic and social assessment of the effects of Covid-19 on the country that the economy may contract by about 4% this year, down from a December estimate of 6.5 % of annual growth. The poverty rate could as nearly double to 17.6% and unemployment could rise to almost 5 %. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia: Court sentences journalist to 18 months in prison, but suspends remainder of sentence

(jn) A Phnom Penh court sentenced a Cambodian journalist to 18 months in prison on October 5 for reporting on comments that Prime Minister Hun Sen made about the pandemic, while suspending the term for its remainder. Sovann Rithy, 31, who had run the news outlet TVFB on Facebook and had been in custody since April was convicted for incitement.

Media organizations – while welcoming the suspension – criticized the sentence and pointed to the threat it embodied for journalists and their work. [VOA News]

Cambodia: New legislation on fast-growing gambling sector

(jn) Cambodia's parliament passed the long-awaited Law on Commercial Gambling Management that will impose new rules on the country's hitherto unchecked gambling businesses and give the government greater control over the industry. Finance Minister Aun Pornmoniroth said in parliament that the bill was aimed at "further strengthening the management of commercial gaming facilities in Cambodia so as to contribute to boosting economic growth, promoting tourism, increasing tax revenue as well as maintaining social safety and security."

The bill provides for clearly designated gambling zones and prescribes minimum investment requirements and contains additional measures to protect the industry against money laundering and terrorism financing. [The Diplomat]

Cambodia: PM's son once again presents Chinese military vehicles to army

(jn) Hun Manet, the son of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, deputy commander-in-chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) and commander of the army's infantry, presented 75 vehicles donated by the People's Republic of China to 32 units of the RCAF on Tuesday last week. According to a defense ministry spokesperson, the vehicles are grants from the People's Republic of China within the framework of cooperation between the two countries' Ministries of Defence.

Hun Manet had already conducted a similar ceremony in June of this year during which he had unveiled a shipment of 290 Chinese-made military trucks but had claimed that those were from "unnamed donors" [AiR No.25, June/2020, 4]. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Draft cybercrime law sparks concerns over threat to free speech and privacy

(jn) A draft of a new cybercrime law has caused concerns among rights groups over provisions that could help Cambodian authorities intensify its

crackdown on freedom of expression, while also raising privacy and data collection concerns.

The bill's first formulation had already been announced in 2010 and was officially envisaged to regulate Cambodia's cyberspace and related crimes by giving law enforcement access to investigate these infractions. An August draft of the law has now become public and reveals it could be used to further curtail freedom of expression relying on broad terms. [VOA Cambodia]

Indonesia: Protests against Omnibus Bill

(nd) Following the quick passing of the so-called Omnibus Law on Job Creation – which is aimed at creating jobs, boosting economy and attracting investment, mainly through simplifying administration processes – at the beginning of this week, protest and strikes continue [see also AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1], as police detained around 1,000 protesters in Jakarta and more than 100 in other cities. Before the protests, Jakarta police issued a statement it would not issue demonstration permits, saying such gatherings would help spread Covid-19, and that they would take precautionary measures. [Jakarta Globe]

Earlier, there was a number of local riots and protests, including arrests of students. [Channel News Asia 1] [Tempco] [Bangkok Post]

While covering a protest on Jalan MH. Thamrin in Central Jakarta, Suara.com journalist Peter Rotti was allegedly beaten by police officers. Another journalist, Ponco Sulaksono from Merahputih.com, has reportedly gone missing. [Jakarta Post 1]

Academics from prominent universities called the law problematic and that it will likely be challenged legally. The largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), commented that the law would ignore the needs of ordinary people and favor capitalists and investors. Ministers meanwhile tried to calm tensions by defending the bill and claiming the criticism stems from false information.

Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan said he would inform President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo of the protesters' demand, while at least four governors told protesters they would write to the president about repealing the law. [Channel News Asia 2]

Trade unions and other civil society organizations oppose the bill and allege it will worsen labor and

environmental protections.

With respect to the alleged deterioation of environmental protection, global investors seem to agree, showcased by a letter of 35 leading investors to the Indonesian government on Monday warning of the risks to the country's tropical forests. [Reuters] [The Diplomat]

President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo in a public comment said the protests against the bill are based on "disinformation and hoaxes spread through social media", rejecting claims of negative influence on labor rights, while emphasizing the necessary creation of jobs amid the Covid-19 pandemic. [Jakarta Post 2]

Radio Free Myanmar accused of spreading misinformation and hate speech

(lf) In Myanmar, the platform Radio Free Myanmar (RFM) and connected Facebook accounts have been observed to increasingly spread misinformation and hate speech targeting the ruling party National League for Democracy (NLD) and the minority group Rohingya. The platform, which has been made to look like the independent news outlet Radio Free Asia, was founded in 2019, but their activities have spiked since August. Seemingly, the people behind the RFM are either supporters of the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party.

The misinformation and hate speech by RMF are primarily spread through Facebook posts by individual accounts. People are encouraged to copy and paste, rather than to share the original posts off from the core accounts posting articles from the website as a means to avoid links tracing back to original posts. This tactic might have been used to fall under the radar of the new Artificial Intelligence hate speech detectors installed by Facebook.

The website of RFM is built to represent an actual newspaper outlet, including showing pictures of university educated authors of articles. However, the digital rights group Myanmar ICT for Development Organization, MIDO, has flagged the Website as fake news and disinformation. Stating that the website was created to make the spread information seem more credible. [Frontier Myanmar]

Facebook is the most crucial source of information on the internet in Myanmar. For many it is even the only internet platform they use. It is well documented that

hate speech and misinformation has been spread through Facebook in Myanmar.

While Facebook has implemented new measures, as well as increased their Burmese speaking monitoring staff, these measures are very limited. For a long time, the social media platform only allocated scarce resources to Myanmar and even with the new staff, hate speech remains a widespread problem in the platform. Reactions to warnings by human rights activist and researchers have been slow over the years. Furthermore, Facebook has been accused to limit free speech in Myanmar by favouring accounts close to the government or military, while simultaneously limiting accounts belonging separatist groups, also having declined to assist investigations in the Rohingya genocide case. [The Diplomat] [Reuters]

Myanmar: Casualties in clashes between the Arakan Army and Tatmadaw

(lf) The Arakan Army (AA) and the Tatmadaw have met in deadly clashes in Rathedaung township. While the town itself has been abandoned, the fight between the two groups over the control of the hill area has been fierce. The Tatmadaw stated that the attacks were a reaction to the AA blocking important transportation routes. Currently, AA claims to have control of the area and that 30 Tatmadaw soldiers have been killed in the clashes. [Irrawaddy]

Since fights between started in August, 36,000 people have been displaced in Rakhine state. The AA is currently classified as a Terrorists Organisation by the Burmese state. The AA is an insurgence group fighting for independence for the primarily Buddhist ethnically Arakanese from the Burmese state. The conflict between the army and with AA has caused a high number of civilian casualties. The conflict has already spread into neighboring Chin state. Rakhine state additionally, is currently seeing some of the highest numbers of Covid-19. [Pulitzer Center]

Myanmar: United Democratic Party candidates disqualified

(lf) After last week's arrest of the Chairman of the United Democratic Party (UDP), this week the Union Election Commission (UEC) has disqualified 11 of their candidates from the election. Several candidates had previously been members of the Union Solidarity and

Development Party (USDP) and transferred after not making the candidate list of the USDP. Other candidates did not meet the requirements of residency needed for being elected.

Under current law, a candidate can only join a new party and run for elections after stepping down from his/her party and the resignation has been accepted by the previous party. With 11 disqualified candidates the UDP still has the second-largest candidate pool running in the coming elections. [mmtimes]

Myanmar: Government urged to release student protestors

(lf) 77 non-governmental organizations have gathered to urge the government to release several students who have been arrested last month for participating in protests in Sittwe against fightings in Rakhine state.

Currently, it is prohibited to participate in mass gatherings in order to minimize the spread of Covid-19. The organizations claim it to be unfair that the students had been arrested, while authorities have not taken any actions against gatherings by political parties. [Myanmar Times 1]

Two of the thirteen arrested students have been convicted for hanging up posters which called the Tatmadaw (Burmese military) fascist. The students face a year in prison, the trials for the other arrested students are still ongoing. [Myanmar Times 2]

Myanmar: Voting App removed and republished

(lf) The voting app mVoter2020 received large-scale criticism about labelling two Rohingya candidates as Bengali, which is seen as derogatory. It seems the app has been removed over the weekend from circulation. Critiques voiced that the prominence of ethnic backgrounds of the candidates would re-inflame conflict in the country.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, which helped to create the app, has stated that it was removed while discussions for improvements are being made. They have been advised to remove the ethnic identification of the candidates.

At the beginning of this week, the app has been re-released without the removal of the ethnic terms, which was protested by the EU. The app still shows the ethnic and religious backgrounds of the candidates and their parents.

Donors have condemned the content and have stepped away from the app, stating that all content is coming from the Union Election Commission (UEC). Critiques state that the information of the app could lead to harassment and exclusion of candidates.

Besides, one of the two Rohingya candidates has since been disqualified from the election. The UEC states that this is due to his parents not being citizens. Whether this is connected to the app, however, remains unclear. [Reuters 1], [Reuters 2]

Myanmar: National League for Democracy requests investigation into early voting in Kachin state

(lf) The current ruling party National League for Democracy (NDL) has requested an investigation into early voting by military personnel and their families in Kachin state. The NDL has requested the Union Election Commission to verify that those who have registered for early voting in Tanai township exist.

In the 2015 election, all 500 early votes in Tanai Township, reportedly coming from military personnel and their relatives, had been cast for the same party. The military has stated that the registration of early voting for military personnel is in line with the election laws and that no troop movement had been made to alter the election results in Tanai Township. [Irrawaddy]

In related development, the NDL expressed satisfaction with a new and updated voters list for the Meiktila township, where the voters comprise mostly military personnel and their families. [Myanmar Times]

Myanmar: Six Parties boycott state-broadcast of their election speeches

(lf) Five more parties have decided to boycott the broadcast of their election speeches on state media, over alleged censorship of their speeches by the Union Election Commission. Six out of ten parties that have been censored have decided to boycott the broadcast,

including the Party for a New Society, the People's Party, the United Nationalities Democratic Party, the Arakan Front Party, the Union Danu League, and the Chin National League for Democracy. [Mizzima] [AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5]

Myanmar: Increased support for Aung Suu Kyi before elections

(lf) As the elections come closer, polling of citizen's trust in public figures and institutions shows increased support for Aung San Suu Kyi and President U Win Myint. The poll is done yearly by the People's Alliance for Credible Elections (PACE) looking into public trust for several governmental institutions including the Parliament, Ministries, the Army, as well as ethnical armed groups, in addition to single public figures. The National League for Democracy (NDL) received the highest score for the closest alignment between parties and personal views. [Irrawaddy]

This, however, stands in stark contrast with reports about violent attacks against supporters of the NDL across the country. [Myanmar Times]

Myanmar: EU sends four election observers

(lf) The EU has sent four election experts for monitoring the upcoming election in Myanmar. This is a fraction of the 100-member team send in 2015 to observe the elections. The EU had previously canceled the entire mission due to the pandemic.

The four experts will look at all stages of the election, including the administration, the legal framework, the political context, the media and social media environment.

The elections have been under scrutiny for excluding groups from access to state media as well as the election process. Furthermore, in the Pandemic lockdown, the government declared journalism as non-essential business, further limiting the possibilities of covering. [Myanmar Times]

Singaporean spy sentenced to 14 months in jail

(py) Early this year, a Singaporean citizen, Dickson Yeo Jun Wei, pleaded guilty to the charges of operating unlawfully as a foreign agent for Beijing and obtaining non-public information from the United States. [AiR No. 30, July/2020, 4]

On 9 October 2020, the US court called for him to be imprisoned for 14 months. Yeo admitted to working between 2015 and 2019 for Chinese intelligence to spot and assess Americans with access to non-public information from state officers with high-level security clearances. [Chanel News Asia]

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, intelligence services in both Beijing and Washington have always tried to gain the upper hand in the game. A brief history of the espionage war between US and China can be found in the [MIT Technology Review].

Singaporean PM Lee's libel suit against blogger adjourned

(py) The defamation lawsuit by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong against the financial adviser and blogger Leong Sze Hian has been adjourned until 30 November when the court will hear further oral submissions. Mr Leong's lawyer advised his client that it was unnecessary for him to give evidence since burdens of proofs lay with PM Lee.

PM Lee is suing Mr Leong for sharing an article from the Malaysian news site "The Coverage" which falsely linked the PM to the 1Malaysua Development Berhad corruption scandal in Malaysia. [The Strait Times] [See also AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1]

Thailand: Twitter, Facebook take down accounts linked to army

(nd) Social Media platforms Twitter and Facebook took down almost 1,000 respectively 3,500 accounts and networks that reliably could be linked to the Royal Thai Army (RTA). The accounts engaged in targeting prominent political opposition figures and promoting RTA and the government.

Twitter was collaborating with the Stanford Internet Observatory (SIO), which stated that most of the accounts were set up in late 2019 and early 2020, and

had ceased operations by March. Around that time, Future Forward Party (FFP) was dismantled, and an FFP parliamentarian accused PM Prayut of waging a social media war against critics of the government and the military using fake news.

Lt Gen Santipong Thammapiya, deputy chief-of-staff and spokesman, denied the allegations, emphasizing the army uses social media to publicize its activities and give assistance to people. The accounts were unfairly linked to the army, lacking an in-depth analysis, the army spokesman added.

The accounts targeted users in 16 other countries. Following alleged meddling of Russia in the US presidential bid of 2016, the social networks are working together with US law enforcement in light of the upcoming elections in November.

This government action is in line with recent similar efforts in Malaysia, Vietnam. [The Diplomat] [Bangkok Post] [Coconuts Bangkok]

Thailand: Interpol “Red Notice” issued for “Boss”

(nd) According to Police Deputy Spokesman Col. Kissana Phathanacharoen, Interpol issued a “Red Notice” for the arrest of Vorayuth "Boss" Yoovidhya, a Thai heir to the Red Bull energy drink fortune.

In 2012, Vorayuth hit and killed a policeman with his car. A previously issued Red notice in 2017 was withdrawn without explanations after some months. In July, prosecutors dropped all charges for lack of evidence. This evoked a controversial debate about impunity of Thai elites, which spiked new court charges in August and renewed police efforts to locate Vorayuth.

According to a search by Khaosod English, there was no mention of Vorayuth on the Interpol’s public database as of Wednesday afternoon. [Khaosod 1] [Khaosod 2]

Thailand: No coup if no unrest, says new Commander in Chief

(nd) In his first press conference as Commander in Chief of the Thai Army, General Narongphan Jitkaewtae dismissed protesters' claims for reforms, urging them

to reform themselves instead. He denied the possibility of a coup but reinforced he would do what is necessary to preserve security in Thailand. While the likelihood of a coup during his tenure, which lasts until 2023, was commented as “zero”, he also gave the imperative of preserving the order. The army chief also accused protesters of a course of action that was dividing society, by alienating more traditional Thais from their cause, and in part led to criminal investigations, referencing last month's demonstration held at Sanam Luang in central Bangkok near the Grand Palace.

A recent opinion poll from Thailand revealed that 58% of the public would not rule out the possibility of a coup, it rather being likely given the growing economic crisis due to Covid-19 and the political protests that have been going on for months now and have brought about unprecedented demands. Parliamentary efforts to reform the constitution were commented to take more time than anticipated, a move that was seen as a tactical maneuver by protesters. [Thai Examiner]

Meanwhile, the police informed that there was no application for a permission yet to hold the rally on October 14. One of the protest leaders, human rights lawyer Arnon Nampa, said the rally could escalate into driving out of the government and trigger the writing of a new constitution.

In a related development, police have arrested several political activists who planned to camp out at the site of a rally scheduled this Wednesday that is along the route the king is expected to take for an unrelated royal ceremony. Among them is Jatupat Boonpattararaksa, better known as Pai Dao Din, who was sentenced to 2.5 years for lese majeste and violation of the Computer Crime Act after sharing online a 2016 biography of King Maha Vajiralongkorn from the Facebook page of the BBC's Thai-language service. [Devdiscourse]

Thailand: Protest support of Redshirts; blocked Youtube videos

(nd/py) The Redshirts are believed to join the upcoming October 14 rally in large numbers. In earlier rallies, they were represented in large and growing numbers, reportedly outnumbering student demonstrators. Redshirt activist Somyot Prueksakasemsuk said the organization has no resources to take over the movement and there was no request to speak at the student-led rally.

At a gathering earlier this week, royalists accused opposition politician Thanathorn Juangroongraungkit, former head of the dissolved Future Forward Party, of engineering the student movement, and urged him to leave the country. The student movement is led by activists and has no formal ties to any political party. [Khaosod 1] [Khaosod 2]

Meanwhile, YouTube has blocked viewers in Thailand from accessing the video of Anon Nampa's speech held on 10 August. In his speech, Anon called on the government to amend the constitution and to follow the movement's demands to dissolve parliament, hold new election and stop harassing dissidents. He also made a bold call to reform the monarchy.

Anon was later arrested and charged over a protest in Bangkok for speaking out for the reform of the monarchy. This was his second arrest after he was put on trial for sedition in July. [AiR No. 34, August/2020, 4]

According to Google's bi-annual transparency report, there have been 964 requests from Thai government from 2009 to 2019 with only 62 being court's orders. Over 26,000 items related to government criticism have been requested to be taken down. YouTube's spokesperson cited the company's commitment to follow the host's country's regulations as the reason for the action. [Prachatai, in Thai]

Vietnam: Prominent journalist and human rights activist arrested

(jn) Prominent journalist and human rights activist Pham Doan Trang has been arrested for "propaganda against the state", according to state media on Wednesday, causing widespread condemnation among international observers and NGOs. Just hours after Vietnam had conducted its annual human rights dialogue with the US, she was arrested in Ho Chi Minh City on Tuesday and charged under article 117 of the Vietnamese Penal Code for "making, storing, distributing or disseminating information, documents and items against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam."

The 42-year-old is the co-founder of the dissident blog Luat Khoa Tap Chi (Journal of Law) and has long been outspoken on issues like the human rights situation in the country. She had also covered the land dispute in Dong Tam that ended in a deadly clash between protesters and police this January and led to death sentences for two brothers and prison terms for 27 other villagers [Air No. 40, October/2020, 1]. Trang had published the 3rd edition of a report about the Dong

Tam incident; three other authors had been arrested for publishing the first edition of that report and were charged with anti-state propaganda in June.

Seemingly expecting a potential arrest, Trang had already penned a letter in May 2019 to be published in the event of her detention in which she came up with a manifesto of reform of Vietnam's political system demanding freedom for Vietnam. Friends of her have also posted a message that they say was written by her in advance, that said: "Nobody wants to go to jail, but if prison is the place for those who fight for freedom, and if it is the place to carry out set goals, then we should go to prison".

Demanding her immediate release, Amnesty International estimates that Trang not only faces up to 20 years in prison but is also at "imminent risk of torture and other-ill treatment at the hands of the Vietnamese authorities."

Human Rights Watch excoriated Vietnam's "scorched earth response to political dissent". Trang's detainment was a grave injustice that violated Vietnam's international human rights commitments and that should be met with protest by the UN and governments around the world.

A spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi said that the US was concerned about the reported arrest and was "monitoring the situation closely."

Trang's arrest could be a harbinger of the Communist Party's leadership tightening the reins ahead of the Party Congress come January. It also shows that despite the US and Vietnam inching towards each in terms of geopolitical alignment in the South China Sea dispute, the contrasts in other political questions like human rights and democratic governance remains stark. [The Diplomat] [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam plans to double renewables, cut emissions by 2030

(jn) According to government estimates, Vietnam will increase its renewable energy share in its power supply mix from now 10% to 15-20% in the next decade, while it seeks to slash emission by 15% until 2030. [Nikkei Asia Review]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

China: Joint statements pro and contra Beijing at the UN

(dql) On behalf 39 United Nations member states, Germany issued a joint statement at the General Debate of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly which expresses grave concerns about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and the recent developments in Hong Kong. The statement refers to "a large network of 'political re-education' camps" and the National Security Law for Hong Kong respectively, urging China to allow independent observers "immediate, meaningful and unfettered access" to Xinjiang as well as to uphold and respect rights and judicial independence in Hong Kong.

Japan is the only Asian country backing the statement. [Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Germany]

Counter statements by Cuba and Pakistan followed promptly. Speaking on behalf of 45 countries, Cuba expressed support of China's counter-terrorism and deradicalization measures in Xinjiang and lauded the Chinese government for a human rights respecting "people-centered philosophy" in its efforts to advance economic and social sustainable development in the region. [Permanent Mission to the United Nations, China, 1]

Pakistan, meanwhile, made a statement of behalf of 55 countries on Hong Kong, stressing the respect for non-

interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states. [Permanent Mission to the United Nations, China, 2]

Dealing with human rights, humanitarian affairs and social matters, the United Nations General Assembly Third Committee is one of six main committees at the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In a related development, human rights organizations have urged UN member states not to elect China to the UN Human Rights Council citing Beijing's attempts to undermine the international human rights system and the mass persecution and incarceration of Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. [Radio Free Asia]

The UN is scheduled to elect on Tuesday 15 seats in the 47-seats body. Countries are elected annually for staggered three-year terms. The seats are distributed along regional groupings, 13 for the African Group, 13 for the Asia-Pacific Group, six for the Eastern European Group, eight for the Latin American and Caribbean Group, and seven for the Western European and Others Group. Asia-Pacific countries currently in the Council include Afghanistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, and South Korea.

In April, China was appointed to the Council's Consultative Group which makes recommendations to the Council's President for the appointment of UN experts of Council, including the special rapporteurs. The group consists of five members. [Scoop]

China: Global and domestic perceptions towards China

(dql) China has officially signed an agreement to join Vaccines Global Access (COVAX), a global COVID-19 vaccine project led by the World Health Organization and GAVI, a Geneva-based public-private global health partnership. COVAX aims to pool financial and scientific resources to ensure poorer countries' access to vaccines.

China is the biggest economy to back the initiative so far, among 76 upper middle income and high income countries that have confirmed their intent to participate by September.

Analysts view Beijing's access to the COVAX project as a soft power win, weighing even more in the light of US President Donald Trump's announcement to withdraw

money and personnel from the WHO and not to join the project. [Aljazeera] [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

On a more general level, however, a recent Pew Research Center global survey exhibits overall negative perceptions of China at record highs in the USA and other major economies. The Chinese government's handling of the pandemic counts most strongly for this development where a median more than 60% across 14 nations say China has done a bad job dealing with the outbreak. [Pew Research Center]

This stands in stark contrast to the perception within China where the government enjoys "even more popularity than before the outbreak," according to an analysis of Sungmin Cho in [The Diplomat]. He cites the concept of "liberal nationalism" for this finding, arguing that Chinese youth can be liberal on domestic issues and critical of government performance at local level, while at the same nationalist and respond aggressively against foreign criticisms of President Xi Jinping's rule or the Chinese Communist Party.

China: Government behind Chinese FDI in Europe

(dql) According to research findings of Dutch consulting firm Datenna, Chinese state-owned enterprises are strongly involved in China's Foreign Direct Investments in Europe, with involvement in about 40% of all 650 Chinese investments in Europe over the past decade. In more than 160 acquisitions the ultimate controlling shareholder is part of the Chinese government, while in over 100 other cases the Chinese government might not necessarily be seen as controlling, but has a substantial stake in the acquiring company. [Datenna]

As revealed in a question of the European Parliament to the European Commission, the numbers provided by Datenna are much higher than those of the Commission which reported 57 foreign takeovers of European companies in the period between 2010 and 2017. [European Parliament]

China: Chinese fishing vessels activities cause concerns over food security and protection of marine biodiversity

(dql) All over the world, Chinese fishing fleets are increasingly found encroaching on foreign waters,

massively exploiting fishing grounds there and endangering food security and marine biodiversity.

In Malaysia, crews of six Chinese fishing vessels were detained for allegedly trespassing domestic waters off one of its southern states. The vessels were sailing toward Mauritania in northwestern Africa. [CNN]

In South Korean waters, reported cases of illegal fishing by Chinese boats have more than doubled from 2017 to 2019. [Yonhap]

Senegal's government, meanwhile, has granted fishing licenses to vessels of a Chinese industrial fleet accused by Greenpeace of "systematic plunder" in the Senegalese Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) from March to July. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, up to 90% of Senegal's fisheries are fully fished or facing collapse. [Quartz] [Greenpeace]

In a latest development, the Chilean government has announced that it monitoring the actions of a large fleet of Chinese fishing vessels to protect the "sovereignty" of the country´s exclusive economic zone. [Reuters]

In June, a fleet of some 300 Chinese fishing vessels swarmed around the Galápagos Islands, equipped with overhead lights and industrial jigging machines to catch squid. The boats remained around the edge of the Ecuadoran islands' exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for the next few months, before moving further to waters off Peru in September. They are believed to have logged more than 73.000 hours of fishing between July 13 and Aug. 13 which accounts for 99% of the fishing activity on the Galapagos Marine Reserve's perimeter, sparking concerns over overfishing and capture of endangered species. [Mongabay] [Oceana, with further information about China's global fishing activities and output] [The Guardian]

China-US security relations: Pompeo lashes out against CCP, reaffirms intentions to institutionalize Quad

(dql) Speaking to his Australian, Indian and Japanese counterparts at the Quad meeting last week in Tokyo, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reiterated accusations against the Chinese Communist Party of covering up the pandemic, and called on the other Quad countries to collaborate more than ever "to protect our people and partners from the CCP's

exploitation, corruption, and coercion." [Republic World]

The US Secretary of State, however, was the only one at the meeting who explicitly criticized China. His counterparts expressed their commitment to the Quad in a more nuanced language. While refraining from making allegations against China, they reassured the concept of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific as a rule-based, democratic order that respects territorial sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes. [AP] [Kyodo News]

Returning from Japan, Pompeo reaffirmed his intention to institutionalize the Quad, adding "this capacity for those four powerful economies, big nations, democracies, to work together to push back against the Chinese Communist Party is something that I hope that we here at the State Department can institutionalize in a way that provides powerful protection for the American people for decades to come." [Japan Times]

In response, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi accused the USA of "stirring up confrontation" in the Asia Pacific, warning against Washington's plan to transform the Quad into an Indo-Pacific alliance as a "security risk." Wang compared US-led alliance to NATO in Europe, adding that what the US is doing could "mark the beginning of a dangerous and slippery" path. [Aljazeera]

China-US: Pentagon presents naval "Battle Force 2045" plan

(dql) Defense Secretary Mark Esper presented details of his "Battle Force 2045" plan for a reshape of the US Navy, calling for a fleet of over 500 ships by 2045, including between 8 to 11 nuclear powered carriers, with up to six light carriers joining them, and as many as 80 larger and more lethal nuclear-powered general-purpose attack submarines. The latter was described by Esper as "the most survival strike platform in a future great powers conflict." The US fleet currently comprise a little less than 300 manned ships. [Breaking Defense] [USNI] [The Hill]

Meanwhile, at least 60 American warplanes conducted close-up reconnaissance flights near China in September and the US may be preparing for future long-distance missions in the South China Sea, said a Chinese government-backed think tank in Beijing. Among those, more than 40 were made over the disputed South China Sea. [South China Morning Post]

China-US: Bill to designate CCP as criminal organization

(dql) Republican House of Representative member Scott Perry last week introduced a bill calling for adding the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to the Top International Criminal Organizations Target (TICOT) list of the US Department of Justice. The Rep called China an "existential threat to American freedoms and liberties", the CCP a "thugocracy" that he accused of anti-American intellectual property theft, cyber-attacks, and espionage coordinated by the party. [Christian Post]

In early October, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services issued a policy alert informing about the "inadmissibility ground for membership in or affiliation with the Communist or any other totalitarian party," referring to aliens inside the United States applying to obtain permanent residency. The alert aims at effectively blocking members of the Chinese Communist Party from gaining permanent residency or citizenship in the USA.

The alert builds on the still valid 1950 Internal Security Act, the first US law to exclude foreign members of communist or totalitarian parties from becoming naturalized US citizens which it brings back to actuality. [Citizenship and Immigration Services, USA] [South China Morning Post]

China-UK: British Defense Ministry reveals new defense strategy to counter Chinese political warfare

(dql) A new UK national defense strategy paper aims at strategic challenges posed by China. Without naming China, the publicly available version of the paper warns against "authoritarian adversaries and extremist ideologies," that engage in "a continuous struggle involving all of the instruments of statecraft," and conduct "political warfare" to "undermine cohesion, to erode economic, political and social resilience, and to challenge" the UK's "strategic position in key regions of the world".

The paper emphasizes that China's political warfare campaigns are outside the West's "legal and political norms", yet still below the threshold that would prompt a war-fighting response.

As a core response, General Sir Nick Carter, UK Chief of the Defence Staff, stressed the need to re-conceptualize the notion of deterrence and add 'competition' to the traditional deterrence model of comprehension, credibility, capability and communication, meaning the need to compete below the threshold of war in order to prevent adversaries from achieving their objectives in fait accompli strategies. Carter also demanded a better integration with allies as well as across Government, in particularly across the military. As third major response he demanded military modernization underpinned by a shift from "an industrial age of platforms to an information age of systems." [National Interest] [Defence Connect][Government, UK]

Meanwhile, the House of Commons Defence Committee last week released a detailed report on the UK security strategy concerning telecommunications with regard of Huawei in particular. The report envisages Huawei as "clearly strongly linked to the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party" and supporting China's intelligence agencies. Therefore, so the conclusion, Huawei's presence in the UK's 5G networks posed a significant security risk "to individuals and to our Government". Recognizing the UK's cybersecurity regimes as one of the most active and effective in the world, the report claims that the risk changed when US sanctions deprived Huawei of some of its chip manufacturing capabilities affecting the quality of Huawei products, followed by a UK ban on the purchase and presence of Huawei products. Following the decision, the report claims, China has threatened to withdraw from some areas of the UK's economy which is seen as "a radical step with huge implications for the UK's economy", which, however, should be considered as a possibility "if threats by the Chinese state continue and worsen".

The report recommends the Government to make a provision in its proposed National Security and Investment Bill to give it the power to intervene and stop investments in critical industries. Instead the UK is advised to form a D10 alliance of democracies to provide alternatives to Chinese technology.

Moreover, a joint 5G and a wider security strategy replacing dependencies on China are advised to be speeded up including the removal of Huawei more quickly than by 2027 as originally envisioned, ideally by 2025. In addition, OpenRAN technology is seen as an opportunity for the UK to become a global leader in this technological development and production. Finally, the report criticizes the current regulatory network security as outdated and unsatisfactory and underlines the importance of the planned Telecoms Security Bill

that it recommends to be introduced before 31 December 2020.

Concluding, the House of Commons Defence Committee report is significant for the accelerating trend of decoupling between the West and China reflected by its maxim that "the Government should not allow a situation where short-term commercial considerations are placed ahead of those for national security and defence". [Defence Committee, House of Commons, UK]

The recent UK report adds further pressure on Huawei, which is facing bans from key markets like Australia and Japan as well as number of sanctions from the Trump administration that are aimed at cutting it off from key technologies like chips as also mentioned in the UK report. [CNBC] [AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5]

In a related development, Huawei was barred from sponsoring a defense conference in Slovakia, a NATO member, after President Zuzana Caputova refused to give her talk at the event over concerns the Chinese telecommunication company posed a security risk. [Bloomberg]

China-UK: British navy warns of Chinese threat in the Northern Sea Route

(dql) The British Navy warns of China as a strategic threat to the UK as the Chinese navy could reach the North Atlantic via the Arctic by a route opened up by climate change. [The Independent]

The Northern Sea Route is currently navigable only during the months from August to October, but that window is expected to expand steadily. Eventually, the route could possibly become ice free by 2030 or 2040.

For an account on China's growing space activities in the Artic see Jana Robinson in [Space Watch] who argues that there is insufficient understanding within the NATO of the implications of the Arctic as part in Beijing's global space power projection, both in terms on scale and underlying motives.

Japan: Bolstering intelligence with regard to China

(dql) In an attempt to bolster its defense against China, Japan will establish three electronic defense units on islands facing the East China Sea by March 2022, in part to gather information on Beijing's increasing activities in the East China Sea. [Nikkei Asian Review]

In an earlier move, the Japan Air Self-Defense Force announced that it has inducted the Kawasaki RC-2 electronic intelligence aircraft, a new generation of intelligence gathering aircraft equipped with multiple aircraft fairings containing antennas for detecting, receiving and classifying electronic emissions. [c4isrnet]

Japan: Rare solo maritime exercise in South China Sea

(dql) At a time when India and China are about to edge towards a war and 'Quad' cohesion is growing, Japan just deployed three warships to the West Philippine Sea for anti-submarine exercises including one of its light helicopter aircraft carriers. To replenish supply, the warships will use Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay. [Japan Times]

The exercises are one of rare occasions in decades in which Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces embark on a solo mission outside Japanese territorial waters.

Japan and South Korea resume business travel

(dql) Japan and South Korea last week agreed to resume business travels between the countries which had been halted due to the pandemic over the past months, with Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi stressing the importance of "exchanges of people from both countries, starting with businesspeople," in an "extremely severe situation" of the countries' relations.

The agreement allows for short-term business trips without requiring the traveler to observe 14-day self-isolation periods if they test negative for the coronavirus and submit travel itineraries, among other preventive measures. [Japan Today]

Tokyo and Seoul have been logged in bitter dispute over forced labor during Japan's rule on the Korean peninsula since South Korean courts in 2018 ordered

Japanese companies to compensate South Korean victims of forced labor.

Japan-Mongolia: Joining efforts to promote Free and Open Indo-Pacific

(dql) Japanese and Mongolian Foreign Ministers - Toshimitsu Motegi and Nyamtseren Enkhtaivan - last week agreed to cooperate in promoting a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific," during the former’s visit to Ulaanbaatar last week. They also agreed on stepping up security, medical and economic cooperation, and signed a 235 million USD emergency loan to help the pandemic-hit Mongolian economy and fund medical equipment. [Yahoo News] [Kyodo News]

Motegi's visit came after US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo canceled a trip to Mongolia because of President Donald Trump's COVID-19 infection. According to Shannon Tiezzi in [The Diplomat] the cancellation of the visit defrauded the USA from an opportunity to profit from an anti-China sentiment currently running high in Mongolia over the sidelining of Mongolian-language education in China’s Inner Mongolia region.

Cross-strait relations: China gears up rhetoric of war

(ef/dql) After the tensions between China and Taiwan have increased significantly in the last months, the China Central Television (CCTV) released a video of a large-scale military exercise simulating an invasion on the same weekend at which President Tsai Ing-wen expressed her willingness to enter into dialogue with Beijing in her address delivered on the occasion of the Taiwanese National Day on October 10. [Focus Taiwan]

Prospects for such a dialogue are bleak, given that Tsai reiterated that Taiwan will not Beijing's "One country, two systems" while Beijing insist on arguing that the cause for the increased cross-strait tensions was the refusal of the current Taiwanese leadership to recognize the One-China principle, thereby undermining any possibility to hold talks in the near future. [Washington Post ($)]

Furthermore, as Taiwan and the USA getting closer, Chinese propaganda is revamping the rhetoric of war by referencing a potential war with the USA over

Taiwan to the Korean War – known in China as the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea – the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of which will be commemorated next week. The narrative depicts China being drawn into the war, but ultimately and triumphantly driving the American-led United Nations forces back to the 38th parallel. Recently, a "Resist America Aid the Korea" memorial museum reopened in Dandong, a Chinese city across the Yalu River from North Korea, while a series of movies dealing with the war is also rolling out — "to carry forward the great spirit of resisting U.S. aggression," according to the description of one documentary. [The New York Times]

For a scenario of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, see [Project 2049] and [Bloomberg].

Cross-strait relations: Taiwanese citizen confesses spying on China

(ef) China accused Taiwanese citizen, Lee Meng-chu, of spying on Chinese military activity and stated that he thereby seriously damaged China's national security. On Sunday, Lee confessed and apologized for spying on China. He claimed to regret his actions that "were detrimental to the motherland or the country".

Allegedly, Lee travelled to Shenzhen (the mainland city bordering Hong Kong) to film the Chinese armored vehicles amassed there. The information collected by him could potentially be used to analyze the number of Chinese troops as well as their intention and scale of their training. He was subsequently arrested last year as part of a crackdown on suspected spies during which, according to Chinese intelligence services, China "broke hundreds of information leakage cases, arrested multiple Taiwanese spies and smashed spy networks established by Taiwanese intelligence agents."

Taipei harshly condemned the "framing" of Lee as his public confession did not follow legal procedural rules and was rather sensationalist. The Mainland Affairs Council urged Beijing to not hurt cross-strait relations any further. [Washington Post ($)] [Anadolu Agency] [Focus Taiwan] [The Guardian] [South China Morning Post]

Taiwan-India relations: Taiwan thanks India for support amid cross-strait tensions

(ef) As the Chinese embassy in New Delhi tried to influence Indian media coverage of Taiwan's National Day, India's Ministry of External Affairs reiterated that India's media was free and will report on the news as it sees fit. The Chinese embassy asked around 250 Indian journalists to not refer to Taiwan as a "country" or a "nation" when covering Taiwan's National Day.

As India's foreign minister prompted journalists to adhere to the standards of free and impartial journalism, Taiwan's Joseph Wu, the foreign minister, and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Center thanked India for its support. According to the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy, the harsh remarks from India's foreign minister stem from the fact that the attempted concealment of the coronavirus outbreak as well as the China-India border dispute in Ladakh have harnessed anti-China sentiments in India. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan reopens Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Guam

(ef) On October 10, Taiwan reopened its Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Guam. As part of the celebration, Taiwan donated four body-temperature scanners to Guam's government, parliamentary and medical facilities in order to support the territory in the fight against the coronavirus. Before the pandemic, around 30,000 Taiwanese citizens travelled to Guam each year. [Taiwan Today]

Taiwan: Allies submit joint letter to the UN Secretary General

(ef) Fifteen of Taiwan's diplomatic allies have submitted a joint letter to the UN Secretary General urging the UN to consider Taiwan as a partner in the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic and include Taiwan in the UN system. Taiwan has been excluded from the UN system since 1971 – the year the People's Republic of China took its United Nations seat. [Focus Taiwan]

US Deputy Secretary of State to visit India, Bangladesh this week

(lm) In the run-up to the US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue later this month, United States Deputy Secretary of State, Stephen Biegun, is scheduled to visit New Delhi from October 12 to 14 to meet with senior government officials and to deliver keynote remarks at the India-US Forum, a platform convened by the Ananta Centre and the External Affairs Ministry. [The Print] [The Hindu 1] [The Tribune]

Following up on Secretary Mike Pompeo's October 6 conversation with Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar in Tokyo [see below], talks will focus on how to advance the United States-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership, according to the US Department of State. While diplomatic and military ties between New Delhi and Washington have been on an upswing over the past two decades, against the backdrop of the border dispute between India and China, relations have recently accelerated quite significantly. [New York Times]

After his Delhi visit, Biegun will fly to Dhaka for meetings with senior officials to "reaffirm" the US-Bangladesh partnership, according to the United States State Department. It is significant that the US is focusing on Bangladesh, a close neighbor of India after concluding a Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Maldives in September, bringing the archipelago firmly into the 'Indo-Pacific' side of the emerging geopolitical maritime fault line pitting the US and its allies against China [see AiR No. 37, September/2020, 3]

Significantly, Bangladesh has not hosted a senior United States' diplomat of Biegun's stature since August 2016 – a clear sign that the United States is stepping up efforts to entice Bangladesh into closer embrace as a key Indo-Pacific partner. In a rare outreach, United States Secretary of Defense Mark Esper phoned Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheihk Hasina in September to explore ways to help modernizing the Dhaka's military by 2030. The conversation was soon followed by a virtual talk between Bangladeshi decision-makers and Laura Stone, a Deputy Assistant with the US Department of State. [The Hindu 2] -Nikkei Asia Review]

Speculation about Washington's interest to explore a new framework for Indo-Pacific cooperation, beyond the existing Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), had first received a boost in September, when Stephen Biegun had noted that the United States were aiming to "formalize" the groupings' military, economic and development cooperation. Though cautioning visions of an Indo-Pacific NATO at that time, Biegun still had emphasized that the format shall remain open for other countries to join but "align in a more structured

manner" [see AiR No. 35, September/2020, 1]. However, in the run-up to the second ministerial meeting of the Quad, a senior US state department official earlier this month dismissed talk of formalizing the grouping, saying the United States wanted to strengthen existing regional architectures, not create new ones [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1].

India and China edging towards a war?

(lm) In an attempt to work out steps to preserve an uneasy truce, India and China held their seventh round of military talks on Monday coinciding with the first of a three-day visit to New Delhi of US Deputy Secretary of State, Stephen Biegun. [see article above].

The composition of the Indian delegation to the border talks remained the same as that of 21 September when the two sides met at Moldo, on the Chinese side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) [see AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5]. At that time, talks had yielded a joint statement – the first since the two delegations started talks in June to end the border crisis that had started in May when India detected multiple intrusions into Ladakh [see AiR No. 19, May/2020, 2]. [South China Morning Post 1]

Expectations of a tangible breakthrough on de-escalation, however, are low. When the foreign ministers of both countries met in Moscow on September 10, they reached a "five-point consensus", agreeing to stop deploying more troops to their contested border and avoid any action that might lead to an aggravation of the situation on the ground. Yet a month later, as winter is setting in, both sides have ramped up efforts to move equipment and supplies such as winter clothing and mountaineering gear to forward locations along the LAC where tens of thousands of troops are still caught in a tense deadlock [see AiR No. 38, September/2020, 4]. Hence, observers are concerned, the disputed Himalayan border could become "permanently contested militarized zone" resembling the Line of Control (LOC) dividing India and Pakistan. [South China Morning Post 2]

The onset of winter degrees far below zero and high-speed freezing winds add to a possible mountain war scenario under high-altitude conditions for which the heavily deployed Indian T-90 and T-72 battle tanks of Russian origin could be more suited than the corresponding Chinese equipment. Furthermore, different from the Chinese troops, Indian troops have experience in high-altitude combat and winter warfare.

Meanwhile, India in recent weeks has signaled a renewed push to catch up with Chinese infrastructure development on the other side of the LAC – a move that could widen the gulf between the two countries. After all, among possible triggers cited for the most recent military contention, diverging apprehensions on border infrastructure along the unmarked boundary seems to be the most consequential [see e.g. AiR No. 25, June/2020, 4]. While inaugurating the strategically important all-weather Atal Tunnel at Rohtang in Himachal Pradesh, Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week said the government would continue to expedite several frontier projects including roads, bridges and high-altitude airstrips [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1].

On Monday, then, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh inaugurated 44 permanent bridges across seven states and union territories built by the Border Roads Organization (BRO). Further elaborating on the issue, Singh said the bridges would provide improved connectivity in the remote areas of the country's western, northern and the northeast sectors and further meet the transport and logistics requirements of the Indian troops throughout the year. [The Hindu]

During second meeting of the Quad, India commits to grouping's vision of free, open Indo-Pacific

(lm) In his opening speech at the second ministerial meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) in Tokyo, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on October 6 reiterated that India was committed to a rules-based world order, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes. The meeting was supposed to be held in New Delhi last September in a 2+2 ministerial format, bringing together the foreign ministers and defense ministers of Japan, India, Australia and the United States.

With India set to begin a two-year stint as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council next year, Jaishankar said the country looks forward to "seeking collective solutions to global challenges, including global recovery from the pandemic and reform of multilateral institutions". [Hindustan Times]

In a nod to the Indo-Pacific strategy published by Germany's Federal Foreign Office in September, Jaishankar said that it "is a matter of satisfaction that the Indo-Pacific concept has gained increasingly wider

acceptance". Germany was the second European nation to use the term 'Indo-Pacific' as a geographical and strategic construct in foreign and security policy discourse, following France which adopted its Indo-Pacific strategy in May 2019 [see AiR No. 37, September/2020, 3].

Meeting on the sidelines of the Quad-meeting, Jaishankar and his United States' counterpart Mike Pompeo reviewed the efforts by the two countries to combat the COVID-19 pandemic while also stressing the need to work together to advance security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Asia-Pacific Group keeps Pakistan on enhanced follow-up list

(lm) Citing meagre progress on a total of 40 technical recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to fight money laundering and terror financing, the Asia-Pacific Group (APG) on Money Laundering has retained Pakistan on its "Enhanced Follow-Up" list. The publication of the APG report comes just days ahead of the FATF's virtual review meeting, scheduled to be held from October 21 to 23, where the inter-governmental body is expected to decide on Pakistan's "grey list" status. [Dawn] [APG Mutual Evaluation of Pakistan]

In June 2018, the FATF placed Pakistan on its rating list of countries tagged as prone to illicit financial activity and issued 27 conditions for review for complying. After the groupings member states last year recommended that the country would stay on the grey list, Islamabad in June was given the third extension to comply with the action plan [see AiR No. 26, June/2020, 5]. If the global body finds that Pakistan has failed to meet its requirements, Islamabad may be placed in the 'black list' along with North Korea and Iran.

As part of efforts to comply with the requirements of the FATF, in September, a joint sitting of Pakistan's parliament amended at least 15 laws to match its legal system to the international standards as required by the FATF. Islamabad also tightened curbs on leaders of the banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), freezing a total of 964 assets and indicting four leaders of the JuD in four more cases [see AiR No. 38, September/2020, 4]. The government has already submitted its report to the FATF review groups and has detailed its compliance with the 13 remaining action points. [Republic World]

China provides $90 million grant to Sri Lanka

(lm) China announced on Sunday that it was providing a $90 million grant to Sri Lanka to support medical care, education and water supplies in Sri Lanka's rural areas. Further, plans are afoot to restart discussion on a free trade agreement last held in 2017 [see e.g. AiR (1/6/2018)], and to swiftly complete the China-backed Hambantota Industrial Zone and the Port City in Colombo, according to a statement from the President's Office. The announcement followed a visit to the strategically located island nation on Friday by a Chinese seven-member delegation led by Yang Jiechi, a Communist Party Politburo member and top foreign policy official. [The Hindu] [South China Morning Post]

During talks with Yang, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa reportedly asked Beijing to help him in disproving a perception that the Chinese-built Hambantota port is a "debt trap" aimed at expanding China's footprint in Sri Lanka. In 2017, Colombo had signed over control of the port, which is located near busy shipping routes, to a Chinese company for 99 years to recover from the heavy burden of repaying the Chinese loan the country had received to build it [see AiR December/2017, 3]. [Arab News] [Reuters]

Earlier this month, Gotabhaya Rajapaksa's brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, had visited the Port City project in Colombo – a flagship $1.4 billion project in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) - and called for the construction to be accelerated [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1].

India: Pakistan, China are building new missile sites along country's western border

(lm) Citing sources in India's security establishment, Indian newspaper The Telegraph reports that Chinese troops are conducting joint patrols with Pakistan's army in the Pakistani-administered territories of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. Further, Beijing is allegedly helping Pakistan set up sites for surface-to-air missile defense system near the Line of Control (LoC). Previously, Indian Air Force chief Air Marshal R.K.S. Bhadauria on October 5 had confirmed that Chinese and Pakistani armies were carrying out joint exercises, adding that there was nothing to suggest that both countries were colluding for a "two-front war". [AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1] [The Telegraph]

Sources at India's security establishment further alleged that Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), following a new modus operandi, has been instructed to push a maximum number of unarmed infiltrators into the Jammu and Kashmir union territory, who would then be provided with arms and ammunition through drones. [The Print]

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia hold phone call to ease recent friction in bilateral ties

(lm) Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud held a telephonic conversation on October 7 in what appears to be an effort by the two sides to ease the recent friction in their relationship stemming from differences on certain issues. [The Express Tribune]

In mid-August, Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa met with Saudi Arabian officials to sooth the waters, after Mahmood Qureshi had earlier expressed frustration over the response of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and Saudi Arabia, insisting that the OIC was not doing enough to pressure India on the Kashmir issue. Calling again on Riyadh to convene a special meeting of its Council of Foreign Ministers – a request that was initially turned down in February – Qureshi said that Islamabad was willing to proceed "with or without" support from Riyadh. [AiR No. 32, August/2020, 2]

At that time, Saudi Arabia had responded in the negative and even forced Islamabad to repay a $1 billion Saudi loan early, while also demanding yet another $1 billion of the loan. The original loan was part of a $6.2 billion package announced by Saudi Arabia in November 2018, when Islamabad was struggling with rapidly expanding trade deficit and declining foreign reserves. The frosty reply had been explained by some analysts by saying that Saudi Arabia does not want to risk its business interests in India for supporting Pakistan over Kashmir [AiR No. 33, August/2020, 3].

Pakistan, Malaysia committed to enhancing strategic partnership

(lm) Speaking via telephone to his Malaysian counterpart Seri Hishammuddin Hussein, Pakistan's

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Friday reiterated Islamabad's continued interest in further enhancing existing strategic-level partnership with Malaysia in the fields of economy, trade, defense, education and science and technology. Qureshi also appreciated efforts by the Malaysian government to ensure the well-being of the Pakistani community residing in Malaysia and that Malaysian nationals in Pakistan would be extended all possible assistance by the Pakistani authorities. [The Nation] [Associated Press of Pakistan]

India successfully flight-tests anti-radiation missile

(lm) After already conducting at least eight missiles tests in the past five weeks [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1], India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has continued carrying out a series of missile test flights. [Hindustan Times]

On October 9, the top research and development arm of India's Ministry of Defense successfully flight-tested its first indigenous anti-radiation missile (RUDRAM) off the coast of Odisha. Anti-radiation missiles are meant to take out designated targets that emit radio frequency, such as radars, jammers, and communication sites, thereby foiling any plans to launch surface-to-air missiles. [The Economic Times]

Against the backdrop of heightened tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), a 1,000-kilometer range subsonic cruise missile is expected to be tested within the next couple of days and to be inducted into both Indian Army and Navy soon thereafter. A limited number of missiles has already been deployed in response to Chinese build-ups in Tibet and Xinjiang, according to reports. [Swarajya] [New Indian Express]

Nepal, Bangladesh to sign preferential trade arrangement

(lm) During a virtual secretary-level meeting on trade and economic cooperation, Nepal and Bangladesh agreed to sign a preferential trade agreement (PTA) before year end. In March, both sides had initially agreed upon finalizing a bilateral PTA by June but plans had to be postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nepal would be the second South Asian nation next to

Bhutan to sign a bilateral PTA with Bangladesh. [The Kathmandu Post]

October 8's meeting also touched on ways to increase bilateral trade, including railway and air connectivity, and to improve cooperation to benefit the tourism sector in both countries, among other things. [The Daily Star]

Cambodia, China to sign free trade deal

(jn) Cambodia and China were set to sign the long-awaited Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement (CCFTA) during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang's two-day visit signaling deepening relations between the countries. In the first stop of his four-nation tour to Southeast Asia on Sunday and Monday, Wang was expected to meet Prime Minister Hun Sen, Deputy Prime Minister Hor Namhong, and Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn.

China accounts for the largest share of foreign direct investment in Cambodia and is its top trading partner, while also holding almost half of the country's foreign debt. This development could drag Cambodia into the Chinese-US rivalry in the region, as evidenced by sanctions that Washington slapped on the Union Development Group (UDG) last month, a Chinese state-owned investment, for a development project in Cambodia's Koh Kong Province [see AiR No. 38, September/2020,4]. Also in September, Cambodia razed a US-funded facility at Ream Naval Base, for the expansion of which it reportedly accepted Chinese [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1].

Cambodia hopes that the CCFTA will offset the loss of the privileged access to the European Union's common market after EU suspended its "Everything But Arms" (EBA) scheme in August [see AiR No. 33, August/2020, 3]. [South China Morning Post] [Global Times] [Phnom Penh Post] [Khmer Times] [The Diplomat]

Cambodia: Hun Sen defends Chinese naval base use and demolition of US sponsored base

(jn) Last week, Prime Minister Hun Sen dismissed fears that the expansion of Ream Naval Base might portend a future permanent Chinese military presence at the Cambodian coastline, with geopolitical implications far beyond. He said even though the base would not be

turned into an international port, changes there would allow it to be used by different countries. Foreign vessels, not only Chinese ones, would be granted permission and be welcome to dock or conduct military exercises.

On Hun Sen's behalf the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also released the transcript of a speech from June in which the he had pointed out that the erection of a foreign military base on Cambodian soil would be in violation of the Cambodian Constitution. [Radio Free Asia]

Hun Sen explicitly referred to criticism voiced by the United States over the demolition of a US-funded building at Ream Naval Base that the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) had proved with satellite imagery last week [AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1]. The US embassy expressed disappointment on Wednesday "that Cambodian military authorities have chosen to demolish a maritime security facility that is only seven years old and was a sign of US-Cambodia relations." The US would remain concerned given that a possible Chinese military outpost at Ream Naval Base "would negatively impact the US-Cambodia bilateral relationship and be disruptive and destabilizing to the Indo-Pacific region." [Cambodianess]

The Cambodian National Committee for Maritime Security (NCMS) had said on Monday (Oct. 5) that its Tactical Command Headquarters which the now-demolished building had accommodated were only a temporary structure. It had been scheduled to be relocated since late 2017 because it was too small and lacked docking facilities, with limited capacity for training and other activities. Thus, a larger facility would be established at a new location, but it would have the same function and not involve foreign partners. [AP]

While opening a $85 million amusement park in Kandal province where he also made above-mentioned comments on Ream Naval Base, Hun Sen also challenged his detractors to name any other country that could match China's clout in development aid. Referring to other "superpower nations" critical of Cambodia's perceived coziness with China he rhetorically asked, "if China doesn't build roads and bridges, who will instead?" Should anyone come up with an answer, he would step down from his office.

Until recently, Cambodia's largest donors of development aid were Japan, the United States and the Asian Development Bank. According to data from the Ministry of Economy and Finance, in the first half of the

year Cambodia borrowed almost $ 5 billion from China and almost $ 1.7 billion from Japan. [Cambojanews]

Indonesia, Singapore to enable essential travel between two countries

(nd) Indonesia and Singapore agreed on a "reciprocal green lane" (RGL) to enable travel between the two countries, making essential business and official trips possible. Travelers will have to abide by COVID-19 prevention and public health measures agreed by both countries, including pre-departure and post-arrival polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests to be placed at the airport. [Channel News Asia 1]

In the past five years, Singapore has been the largest investor in Indonesia, the PCR is sought to enable investment, giving the close economic ties. According to the Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board, Singapore was Indonesia's top foreign investor, with a total of US$2.7 billion in realized investments in the first quarter of 2020. [Channel News Asia 2]

Singapore's overall unemployment rate rose to 3.4 % in August, slightly higher than in September 2009 during the global financial crisis. The gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to contract 6.8% but still less than within the second quarter, 13.2 %, according to economic analysts, due to loosening the Covid-19 curbs. [Channel News Asia 3] [Reuters]

Meanwhile, in dealing with recession, as a common phenomenon, foreigners are singled out for blame. Expatriate workers from mainland China, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and India have long been blamed for rising unemployment and the overcrowding on public transport and housing. Recently and especially virally, the large Indian community was blamed with respect to the India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), a free trade agreement signed between the two nations in 2005. Despite several corrections from official site, social media outlets still feature widespread public misconception that the agreement has led to a large influx of Indian professionals in fields like finance and information technology, clarifying there was no provision under the CECA for Indian nationals to become permanent residents and citizens of Singapore. Despite the 1982 New Year speech of state founder Lee Kuan Yew, in which he pledged to have an all-Singaporean workforce by 1991, claiming a large migrant workforce in European countries led to their

social, political and economic problems, Singapore saw a steady growth in its population of foreign workers, which is now at 36%, around 1.5 million people. [The Diplomat]

Indonesia: Challenges for the newly appointed Ambassador to the US

(nd) Newly appointed Indonesian ambassador to the US, Muhammad Lutfi, has emphasized the need for both countries to reinvigorate their relationship. This move is part of president Joko “Jokowi” Widodo's long-term goal to transform Indonesia into one of the world’s top five economies by 2036, by enhancing infrastructure, education and the healthcare system, and expanding trade. Lufti disposed of the necessary experience in business, he is the founder of the Mahaka Group, a multiplatform media company, and has also served in a range of governmental posts, including head of the Indonesian Investment Coordination Board.

Still, the ambassador will find some challenging aspects in his new position, fighting with a decline in public opinion on the US. While the Obama administration was perceived more positively, Trump’s anti-migration policies and anti-Islamic narratives did not resonate well. Also, former Indonesian ambassador to the U.S., Dino Patti Djalal, commented on the U.S.-Indonesia relationship saying the Trump administration has “lost its soul.”

Having strategic partnerships with both the US and China, recent health-related assistance came from China. Also, the US-Indonesian economic relationship was rather stagnant over the past 10 years, residing below $30 billion dollar. A more prominent focus on foreign capital of the president is often confronted by a more protectionist view of the voters, with the result of a too little liberalized national economy. As a reaction, Lufti uttered the intention to boost Indonesian products in the US and vice-versa, ultimately extend existing trade agreements.

In light of the upcoming elections in the US, another Trump administration is likely to cause their relationships to stagnate as before. Joe Biden uttered plans to bring supply chains from China back to the US. Since realistically some will remain abroad, Indonesia could further US investment in that sector. [The Diplomat]

Indonesia: Vaccine cooperation no influence on South China Sea position

(nd) Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said the recent cooperation with China on Covid-19 vaccines will not influence its position on the South China Sea. Despite not being a claimant state in the heavily disputed waters, Indonesia and China battle over fishing rights around the Natuna Islands in the southern part. Last month, a Chinese coastguard vessel entered Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off northern Natuna islands and left after radio communication.

Indonesia also cooperates with the United Arab Emirates, South Korea and the United Kingdom, in developing its own vaccine. Indonesia is one of few candidates participating in a late-stage human trial of China's Sinovac Biotech Covid-19 vaccine candidate, and also works together with Chinese company Sinopharm. [Channel News Asia]

Malaysia: China demanding fair investigation of arrested fishermen

(nd) Following the arrest of 60 Chinese fishermen from six boats for allegedly operating illegally in Malaysian waters facing fines and potential jail time, China urged Malaysia to investigate their cases fairly. Malaysia and China have conflicting claims to territory and resources in the South China Sea, which China claims almost entirely. [Channel News Asia]

Laos: Russian vaccine trials

(py) The Laotian Government held meetings with Russia concerning its intention to trial the Russian-made "Sputnik V" vaccine against the COVID-19 virus. According to a report in Lao Phattana News, once passed, the "Sputnik V" vaccine would be imported, produced and tested with volunteers in Laos and implemented by the Pharmaceutical Factory No. 3 State Enterprise in cooperation with Atlantic Pharma. Russia has been successful with its first and second phase of the vaccine with immune response developed within three weeks in 100 percent of volunteers aged between 18 and 60. Many countries have already participated in the clinical trials with the first batch of vaccine in Venezuela arriving last week and recently in the United Arab Emirates. [Laotian Times] [CNBC]

Philippines: Cooperation with UN on human rights violations

(nd) Following investigations that found tens of thousands of killings in the so-called war on drugs and perpetrators treated with "near impunity", the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution to provide help to the government of Rodrigo Duterte, who pledged compliance. The joint program shall strengthen investigation and accountability mechanisms, establish a compliance monitoring system for the national police and highlight engagement with civil society.

Amnesty International's Philippines researcher Rachel Chhoa-Howard said the technical assistance of the resolution fell short of their appeals to establish an international investigative mechanism: “A full international investigation to effectively address the pervasive impunity in the country is urgently needed.” Government spokesman Harry Roque denied the "rehashed claims" of impunity in the report. [Bangkok Post] [Philippine Inquirer]

Analysts say the implementation will be tricky, though. The Philippine National Police (PNP) faces accusations of corruption, often acknowledged by President Duterte, and will be very reluctant to share information. With the example of numerous killings, including politicians, in Negros Island, they argue the potential involvement of security forces and question the integrity of local government. Additionally, following the newly passed Anti-Terrorism Act, state security forces enjoy protections from scrutiny. They can also be sure of the indirect support of the Duterte administration, whose denouncing political opponents and critics as communist terrorists, and thereby “red-tagging” those individuals, has led to numerous politically motivated murderers, often beyond the actual governmental control, most recently seen with the murder of human rights activist Zara Alvarez in August. She was among other 600 people listed as communist terrorists by the Duterte administration in 2018. [The Diplomat]

Thailand: German Foreign Minister urged King not to conduct politics from Germany

(nd) Responding to a question in the parliament, German Foreign minister Heiko Maas said Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn should not be conducting politics from Germany, where he resides part of the year.

Currently, King Vajiralongkorn and Thai monarchy in general face unprecedented calls for reform from thousands of protesters, holding demonstrations for the last months. Protesters are calling for reforms of the monarchy and removal of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, and a new constitution.

After the 2014-coup, which put the current PM in power, the EU halted contacts at all levels with Thailand, but resumed trade talks after the general election last year.

“Are you willing to commit to the European Council to suspend these negotiations again as long as the junta still blocks the return to democracy in Thailand?”, Maas was also asked. The Minister responded that he considered it an option but preferred to talk to Thailand first.

Following ASEAN, China, Japan, and the US, Thailand is the EU's fifth-largest trading partner, with a trade volume of US$44.5 billion in 2019, accounting for 9.2 per cent of the country’s total trade. The EU already signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Singapore and Vietnam. [Straits Times] [Thai Enquirer]

US and Vietnam hold human rights dialogue, US lawmakers call for release of democracy activist

(jn) The Unites States and Vietnam held their 24th Annual U.S.-Vietnam Human Rights Dialogue on October 6, 2020 via virtual sessions. According to a US Department of State press release, the three-hour dialogue covered a wide range of human rights issues, like the importance of continued progress and bilateral cooperation on the rule of law, civil and political rights as well as the rights of vulnerable populations. [US Department of State Media Note]

Ahead of the conference, three members of the US House of Representatives had called on US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to address with Vietnam the case of imprisoned democracy activist Nguyen Bac Truyen who has been jailed for more than a decade. Reps. Zoe Lofgren, Harley Rouda and Alan Lowenthal (all D-CA) wrote in a letter that Bac Truyen’s ongoing

detention was a clear example of Vietnam abusing the rights and freedoms of its citizens.

Bac Truyen is a former political prisoner and member of the online Brotherhood for Democracy group. His arrest in July of 2017 by Vietnamese authorities in central Quang Binh province was described by his relatives as a "kidnapping." He was sentenced to 11 years in prison for "carrying out activities aimed at overthrowing the government" after a one-day trial in April 2018.

The lawmakers said that a release could show Vietnam's commitment to improving conditions for personal freedoms and urged Mr. Pompeo to raise the case of prisoners of conscience like Nguyen during the conference. [Radio Free Asia]

US trade deficit with Vietnam surges to record high

(jn) The United States' trade deficit with Vietnam soared to an all-time high in August, a sensitive issue given that just days ago the Trump administration announced an official probe into potential currency manipulation and illegal timber trade that could lead to sanctions such as punitive tariffs [see AiR No. 40, October/2020, 1].

The US deficit for trade in goods rose by 11% between July and August to almost $ 8 billion, an almost 39% increase from a year earlier, according to US government data. [South China Morning Post]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

15 October 2020 @ 10:00 am AEST, Lowy Institute, Australia

Lowy Institute Live: In conversation with General James Mattis and Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston AK, AFC

This virtual conversation with one of America's most experienced and influential military leaders will focus on the security challenges America faces from a rising China.

See [Lowy] for additional information.

15 October 2020 @ 12:00 pm EDT, Hudson Institute, USA

How US Inflation Exposes Europe to a Third German Monetary Shock

This virtual panel discussion with Brendan Brown will focus on the influence of the degradation of the US monetary regime on Europe. Brown hypothesizes that Germany will exit the present monetary union and form a new one as a result of US inflation.

For registration details, please visit [Hudson].

15 October 2020 @ 2:00 pm CEST, Külügyi És Külgazdasági Intézet, Hungary

War in Space: Strategy, Spacepower, and Geopolitics. More space for NATO and EU.

This roundtable will address possibilities of warfare in space and which roles the NATO and the EU could play in it.

For further details, please see [KKI].

15 October 2020 @ 2:00 pm CEST, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Switzerland

Leveraging Grievances to Maintain Peace

This event analyses how data concerning the governance of the security sector can be used to proactively identify and resolve grievances before they snowball into larger disputes.

Further details are available at [DCAF].

15 October 2020 @ 2:30 pm CEST, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Sweden

Crisis, Conflict and Climate: From immediate humanitarian response to longer-term peace and development solutions

This virtual discussion will highlight key challenges and the work of actors to promote integrated and inclusive responses to climate action and sustaining peace across the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus.

Please check [SIPRI] for registration details.

15 October 2020 @ 3:00 pm CEST, Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Sweden

International Trends in Border Politics

This webinar will discuss current developments in international border politics and prospects for the future. Current examples from debated border issues combined with theoretical and philosophical aspects will be used to spur the discussion.

If you are interested in joining the event, visit [UI] further information.

16 October 2020 @ 7:00 am EDT, Asia Society, USA

'The India Way' with India's External Affairs Minister H.E. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar

In this virtual discussion, Minister Jaishankar will discuss the global challenges confronting India today as well as the policy approaches India will take to tackle them.

Please find more details here: [Asia Society].

16 October 2020 @ 10:30-11:30 am EDT, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, USA

Isolationism: A History of America's Efforts to Shield Itself from the World

Throughout its history, American foreign policy has oscillated between extremes. In the 20th century, the United States left behind its isolationist roots to assume global leadership, only to return to a position of restraint in recent years. Against this background, this webinar will explore the following questions: Is U.S. foreign policy bound to be defined by cycles of interventionism and retrenchment? Or is there a middle ground policymakers from both sides of the aisle can pursue?

Further details are available at [GMFUS]

16 October 2020 @ 2:00-3:00 pm EDT, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, USA

Decision 2020: A Running Commentary of the U.S. Presidential Race

Shortly before the U.S. presidential election on November 3, the outcome is still far from certain. This online event will address factors that might turn out decisive for the outcome.

Further details are available at [GMFUS]

16 October 2020 @ 1:00-1:45 pm EDT, The Heritage Foundation, Washington DC, USA

5G: The Emerging Market's Trojan Horse

China's burgeoning fifth-generation (5G) wireless network offers developing countries faster access to the rest of the world and the ability to expand their industries with the use of digital technology. This online event will discus the costs that come with joining China's 5G network.

Further details are available at [Technology]

16 October 2020 @ 10:00-11:15 am EDT, United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, USA

Russia's War in Donbas: Ripe for a Resolution

More than six years after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, there is little evident movement toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict. This online discussion will explore possible solutions for resolving the ongoing conflict.

Further details are available at [USIP]

16 October 2020 @ 9:00-10:00 am EDT, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, USA

The second transatlantic Pillar: Strengthening U.S. - EU Ties

The partnership between the United States and the European Union is increasingly essential to managing the most pressing 21st century challenges. Whether on issues of trade, sanctions, climate, China, or technology, Brussels is Washington's partner of choice. This online event will present how the U.S. and EU have worked together before and will ask what the two partners should collaborate on in the future.

Further details are available at [Carnegie]

19 October 2020 @ 8:00 pm EDT, Asia Society, USA

Malaysia: Prime Minister Muyiddin Yassin

This event features an address of Malaysia's Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassinm, followed by a discussion between him and Kevin Rudd, former Prime Minister of Australia.

For more information and registration, follow [Asia Society].

19 October 2020 @ 3:00-3:45 pm CEST, Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

The infrastructures of Maritime capitalism: Flags of convenience and offshoring

This webinar will discuss on legal devices, invented, facilitated and supported by all the great political powers and the largest corporations involved in the maritime industry.

If you are interested in joining the webinar, please find further details at [DIIS]

19 October 2020 @ 4:00-5:30 pm EDT, Wilson Center, Washington, DC, USA

Engaging the Evil Empire: Washington, Moscow, and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War

The received wisdom in diplomatic circles is that the beginning of the end of the Cold War came from changing policy preferences and that President Reagan in particular opted for a more conciliatory and less bellicose diplomatic approach. This online events introduces to a book that suggests to shift the focus of Cold War historians away from exclusive attention on Washington by focusing on the years of back-channel communiqués and internal strategy debates in Moscow as well as Prague and East Berlin.

Please find registration details here: [Wilson]

20 October 2020 @ 3:00 pm CEST, Clingendael, The Netherlands

Turkish Foreign Policy in the Levant

This webinar will discuss Turkey's foreign policy in the Middle East after the peace negotiations between the AKP and the PKK collapsed in 2015.

Please find details here: [Clingendael].

20 October 2020 @ 3:30-5:00 pm SGT, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, Singapore

Islamic Civil Society in Indonesia during Jokowi's Second Term

This webinar will present issues and other ongoing developments concerning the relationship between Islamic civil society organizations and the Jokowi administration.

If you are interested in joining the webinar, please find further details at [RSIS]

20 October 2020 @ 10:00-11:30 am EDT, United Stated Institute of Peace, Washington, DC, USA

Women Transforming Peace

This event will be look on how countries are expanding on the Women, Peace and Security agenda by adopting feminist foreign and development policies—and how civil society organizations have invested in masculinities programming as a complementary approach.

Further details are available at [USIP]

20 October 2020 @ 10:00-11:30 am EDT, Center for Global Development, USA

Supporting African Regional Integration for Growth: Prospects for MCC's New Regional Compacts

This event will be look on how the United States can support regional integration for growth in Africa. Centering around MCC's forthcoming regional investments in West Africa, key opportunities for impact will be explored, alignment with country and regional strategies considered, and the operational challenges that accompany complex programs discussed.

Further details are available at [CGDEV]

21 October 2020 @ 10:00 am - 12:00 pm SGT, ISEAS Yosof Ishak Institute, Singapore

35th ASEAN Roundtable – Session I: Covid-19's Multi-Faceted Challenges

In this webinar will look at the impact and implications of the current COVID-19 pandemic outbreak on ASEAN as a region.

Please find registration details here: [YUSOF]

21 October 2020 @ 10:00-11:00 am PDT, Stanford University Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, California, USA

Digital trade Wars

This panel will be discuss the exploration of the digital trade war.

Please find registration details here: [Stanford]

21 October 2020 @ 10:00-11:30 am SAST, Institute for Security Studies, South Africa

Improving African maritime security in the western Indian Ocean

This seminar will debate key maritime security questions arising in the aftermath of COVID-19. These issues are especially significant for African countries where maritime institutions that can reduce violence and promote sustainable development are often weak.

Please find registration details here: [ISS]

22 October 2020 @ 10:00 am CEST, Bruegel, Belgium

How can the EU and Japan boost collaboration and multilateralism around the globe?

This virtual discussion will assess perspectives on the impact of the EU and Japan on global collaboration and multilateralism in areas such as health, climate, and trade.

To access the discussion, please visit [Bruegel].

22 October 2020 @ 8:30-10:00 am EDT, Stimson, Washington DC, USA

Multilateralism and Armed Drones: Escaping the Gridlock

This webinar will discuss current trends, initiatives, and opportunities that could be undertaken in a multilateral and collaborative process to build

meaningful standards on the proliferation and use of armed drones.

If you are interested in joining the webinar, please find further details at [Stimson]

22 October 2020 @ 9:00-10:30 am EDT, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, USA

Turkey's Energy Policy and the Prospects for EU–Turkey Cooperation

This event will be discuss the developments of Turkish energy policy and propose new strategies for Turkey-EU cooperation in the energy domain.

Further details are available at [GMFUS]

22 October 2020, 2:00-3:30 pm JST, Asian Development Bank, Tokyo, Japan

ADBI-Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Virtual Workshop on City-Wide Inclusive Sanitation: Policy, Institutions, and Innovation for Delivering Sanitation Sustainably and Equitably

This workshop will be led by Tan Soo Jie Sheng of the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy who will present a case study-based evaluation of sanitation challenges and measures for advancing city-wide inclusive sanitation in developing Asia.

Further details are available at [ADB]

23 October 2020 @ 1:00-1:45 pm EDT, The Heritage Foundation, Washington DC, USA

Leftism's Failure and the Rise of Homelessness

In the wake of the COVID-19 lockdowns and widespread street unrest, cities are now grappling with what to do about homelessness. This online event will expose the left's counterproductive approach and bring to light thoughtful, compassionate conservative solutions for homelessness.

Further details are available at [Poverty and Inequality]

23 October 2020 @ 11:00-12:00 pm BST, Harvard Kennedy School, ASH Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, UK

China Study Student Group - Voices and Analysis from the Field

This fourth session will be led by students with relevant experience, along with Professors Saich and Cunningham, to focus on the practical and broader implications of current US-China tensions.

Please find registration details here: [ASH]

Recent and upcoming book releases

Rod Dreher, *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents,* Sentinel, September 29, 2020, 256 pages, reviewed in [Square Two].

Sarah Kovner, *Prisoners of the Empire: Inside Japanese POW Camps,* Harvard University Press, September 25, 2020, 336 pages, briefly reviewed in [Harvard].

Sean R. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign against a Muslim* Minority, Princeton University Press, September 8, 2020, 328 pages, with a review in [The Diplomat].

Chad M. Bauman, *Anti- Christian Violence in India,* Cornell University Press, September 15, 2020, 320 pages, briefly reviewed in [Bokus].

Calls

The **Humanities Bulletin** invites paper submissions for its ***Volume 3, Number 2*** issue. Closing date of submissions is October 20, 2020. More information at [HB]

The **7th Peace and Conflict Resolution Conference,** scheduled for December 3-5, 2020 is open for paper submissions until November 10, 2020. For further details, see [PCRC]

The **Open Philosophy** journal invites submissions for its topical issue ***"Ethics and Politics of TV Series"***. Closing date for submissions is January 31, 2021. For further details, see [CST Online].

The **International Journal of Legal & Social Studies** invites paper submissions for ***Volume IV, Issue 2***. Closing date for submission is November 7, 2020. For further details, see [IJLSS].

Jobs & positions

The **University of Nottingham** offers a ***UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship*** position Closing date for applications is October 15, 2020. Further information at [University of Nottingham].

The **University of Kentucky** welcomes application for a position of ***Legal Clinic Director and Assistant or Associate Professor of Law***. The application is open until filled. Further information at [Academic Keys].

The **University of the West of England** offers a permanent position of ***Senior Lecturer*** in law. Closing date for applications is October 27, 2020. Further information at [UWE].

The I**nstitute of Criminology, University of Cambridge**, offers a fixed-term contract position of ***Research Associate***. Closing date for applications is November 4, 2020. More about the vacancy at [University of Cambridge].

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