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Asia in Review

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to this week's AiR issue with the latest events and developments in domestic politics, constitutional law, human rights, international relations and geopolitics in Asia.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to readers in Grenada and Sri Lanka which celebrate Independence Day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

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Law and Politics in East Asia

China: Prominent former human rights activist missing, Tibetan culture advocate released from prison

(dql) Veteran human rights activist Guo Feixiong has gone missing after he was barred from leaving China at Shanghai's Pudong Airport to reunite with his wife who is ill with cancer in the United States. He was reportedly detained at the airport over accusations of endangering national security

Guo raised to prominence Guo as defender of government critics and had been imprisoned for more than 10 years under China's state security laws. [The Independent] [Yahoo News]

In a separate development, Tibetan culture activist Tashi Wanchuk was released after five years in prison for "inciting separatism". In 2016, Wangchuk was detained following his appearance in a New York Times (NYT) video in which he criticized the Chinese government for eroding Tibetan culture and language. [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Human rights lawyers group kicks off campaign on public sharing of Covid-19 experience

(dql) A group of Chinese human rights lawyers launched a campaign on the internet to mark the first anniversary of the death of Li Wenliang, the ophthalmologist who first warned of the appearance of the coronavirus but was pressured into silence by Chinese authorities. Li later did on 6 February 2020 from Covid-19. In an open letter the group called on individuals and groups to speak out about their experiences over the past year, asking them to tell the truth the way Li Wenliang did. [Asia News]

A WeChat post, meanwhile, interprets the Covid-19 lockdown in Hebei from the perspective of Chinese cultural psychology in which the author argues that Hebei, as its surrounds Beijing, has been put in a "state of war", with the hardships, endured by the population, perceived by the people in power as a "total, selfless sacrifice" for the capital under a system which seeks "absolute security," and demands "absolute loyalty." [China Digital Times]

China: Crackdown on "self-media" announced

(dql) China's Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) – the country's internet watchdog – announced a campaign to control the distribution of information across all internet platforms to end "disruption to the order of internet broadcasts", targeting in particular "self-media", social media accounts run by independent citizen journalists and content producers.

Analysts view this move as targeting political content coming after authorities arrested and sentenced citizen journalists for reporting on lockdown conditions in Wuhan last year. [South China Morning Post]

The announcement comes also shortly the CAC's revision of rules on managing public internet accounts, specifying the type of banned actions to cover "fabricating information, inciting extreme emotions, plagiarism, cyberbullying, blackmailing and artificially inflating the number of clicks." The new rules will enter into force in February. [Yahoo News]

China: Former bank chairman executed for massive bribery

(dql) Lai Xiaomin, former chairman of China Huarong Asset Management Co., one of the country's largest state-owned bad-debt management companies public, was executed following his conviction on in one of China's highest-profile corruption cases. In January Lai was found guilty of bribery amounting to 278 million USD between 2008 and 2018. [France 24] [AiR No. 2, January/2021, 2]

In another corruption case, Wang Yong, a former leader of Hainan, was arrested on suspicion of taking bribes. The southern province Hainan has recently been designated by the government to become China's biggest zero-tariff zone by 2025. The booming property market provided plenty of opportunities for corruption. Nearly 18 senior officials in Hainan have been snared since 2019, according to official reports. [South China Morning Post] [Yahoo News]

China: Hong Kong needs rule of patriots, Xi says

(dql) During a virtual meeting with Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam, Chinese President Xi Jinping made clear that the city must be ruled by "patriots", calling it a "fundamental principle that concerns national sovereignty, security… and the long-term prosperity and stability of Hong Kong," and the "only way of maintaining Beijing's sovereignty over the region and safeguarding its constitutional order." [Hong Kong Free Press]

Xi's remarks come weeks after more than 50 democracy advocates and opposition politician were arrested and amid growing pressure from Hong Kong authorities on civil servants and public officers to swear allegiance to the government. [AiR No. 2, January/2021, 2] [AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]

Meanwhile, Beijing is reportedly expanding its liaison office in Hong Kong by 100 cadres tasked with tightening supervision and policy implementation in the city. [Reuters]

Japanese version of Magnitsky Act on the way

(dql) Lawmakers of both the ruling coalition and opposition parties in Japan have launched an initiative to push for a Japanese version of the US Magnitsky Act that imposes sanctions on foreign individuals or organizations involved in human rights violations. The group's first general meeting is scheduled for this week. [Mainichi]

Japan: Government extends Covid-19 state of emergency

(dql) The Japanese government has extended the state of emergency for ten prefectures – including Tokyo – until March 7, as hospitals remain under pressure despite declining coronavirus cases.

The extension comes after the capital reported 393 coronavirus cases on Monday, marking the lowest number in over one month and a significant decrease from the single-day record of 2.447 in early January when the current emergency was declared.

Under the state of emergency, people are called on to refrain from unnecessary outings. Restaurants and bars are being asked to close early, while businesses are urged to shift to remote working and attendance at large events has been capped. [Kyodo News]

In an earlier move last week, the parliament approved a government-sponsored third supplementary budget for fiscal 2020 to fund Covid-19related economic measures, amounting to a total of 185 billion USD. Last year, parliament passed two extra budgets for fiscal 2020 totaling more than 540 billion USD for economic stimulus packages to counter the fallout of the pandemic. [Mainichi]

South Korea: Parliament set to impeach a judge for the first time

(dql) Led by the ruling Democratic Party (DP), a group of some 160 lawmakers proposed a motion to impeach a senior High Court judge over allegations of judicial power abuse by interfering in politically sensitive trials between 2015 and 2016 in this capacity as judge at a district court back then.

The approval of the motion in this week's parliamentary session is certain as a quorum of one third of the 300 members of parliament, while the DP

commands 176 seats. It will be the first impeachment of a judge in South Korea.

The opposition People Power Party rejected the motion calling it "the mega-sized ruling party's attempt to tame the judiciary." [Yonhap]

South Korea: Constitutional Court rules new anti-corruption agency is constitutional

(dql) South Korea's Constitutional Court ruled that the establishment of the Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) – the country's new powerful anti-corruption investigation agency – does not violate the principle of separation of power and, therefore, is constitutional.

The ruling was made in response to two complaints filed in February and May last year by lawmakers from the major opposition the People Power Party and others claiming that the agency violates the constitutional value of separation of powers.

The agency is authorized to investigate corruption cases involving former and current public officials, including the president, and their families. It also has the power to indict when it comes to crimes involving the chief justice, prosecutor general, judges, prosecutors, high-ranking police and military officials.

It officially began operation earlier in January, 25 prosecutors and 40 investigators, among others. [Korea Herald]

Taiwan: Judicial Yuan planning to facilitate transnational same-sex marriage

(nm) Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) is considering options to allow for same-sex marriage between Chinese and Taiwanese. Previously, the Judicial Yuan had announced that it aims to amend regulations on transnational same-sex marriages and to open them for Taiwanese and their partners from countries that currently do not recognize same-sex marriage. According to the Executive Yuan, this would include spouses from Hong Kong and Macau, but not from China.

Taiwan had legalized same-sex marriage in 2019 as the first place in Asia after its Constitutional Court ruled that the existing law – mandating that marriage was between a man and a woman – was unconstitutional. However, Taiwanese still are unable to marry same-sex partners from a country which has not legalized such unions, creating significant hurdles to gay couples. The Judicial Yuan now approved draft revisions to the Act Governing the Choice of Law in Civil Matters Involving Foreign Elements, which would grant recognition to all same-sex marriages, stating "Nobody can put limits on love."

However, Taiwanese-Chinese marriages are governed by different laws which do not technically prohibit same-sex marriage, but require couples to register in China, which does not recognize same-sex marriage, making such unions practically impossible. According to the MAC Deputy Minister Chiu Chui-cheng, Taiwan's legal basis for same-sex marriage, the Court's ruling Interpretation No. 748, does not allow for the exclusion of Chinese spouses, adding that a "slew of legal issues," including border and resident regulations as well as the verification of certificates, however, will have to be taken into account. The MAC is now collecting further information on legal and practical implications possibly arising from changing regulations. [Taipei Times 1] [Taipei Times 2] [CNN]

Taiwan: Ministry of Interior to evaluate change of Taiwan's emblem

(nm) Last week, Taiwan's Legislative Yuan passed a motion to instruct the Ministry of the Interior to evaluate the possibility of changing Taiwan's emblem as it currently shows great similarities with the emblem of the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party. The Interior Ministry is now required to submit a report on the topic to the Legislative Yuan's Internal Administration Committee within two months.

The resolution was proposed by the small New Power Party (NPP) and passed along party lines, with the NPP and the governing Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) voting in favour and the KMT against. The five members of the Taiwan People's Party abstained.

The NPP suggested that the emblem should "incorporate elements of [...] national characteristics or culture to express the national spirit", while many DPP members associate the current emblem with Taiwan's decades of the KMT's one-party rule prior to the island's democratic transition in the 1990s. One

Interior Ministry official has pointed out that previous attempts at changing the emblem have failed. Since the design of the flag is specifically set out in the Constitution, KMT chairman Johnny Chiang supported the legally untested view that a change would require a constitutional amendment which for its part requires a two third majority in the Legislative Yuan as well as ratification by a majority of eligible voters. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: DPP lawmaker released on bail in bribery case, Judicial Yuan moving forward in high-profile corruption case

(nm) Legislator Su Cheng-ching of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was released on a bail in a major national bribery case which includes several lawmakers, judges, and police officials. He had been detained since August 2020 and is now subject to resident restrictions as well as barred from leaving Taiwan.

The allegations under the Anti-Corruption Act stem from a case related to the ownership of the Pacific SOGO department store chain, in which Su allegedly accepted bribes to illegally lend support in the company's former chairman's Lee Heng-lung's legal battle. Several other lawmakers of the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and the smaller New Power Party are also involved in the case but have been released on bail before. [Focus Taiwan]

In a different case, the Judicial Yuan forwarded allegations against six high-ranking judges to the Control Yuan for further investigation of an alleged involvement in a corruption scandal. According to the Judicial Evaluation Committee, the six judges had committed serious transgressions in their alleged involvement with Chia Her Industrial Co president Weng Mao-chung while Weng was facing nine litigation cases in the 1990s. The accusations include abuse of authority, conflict of interest, insider trading, and bribe-taking. The move comes as the Control Yuan celebrates its 90th anniversary with an exhibition on the agency's digital transformation plan. [Taipei Times]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Bangladesh: Military coup in Myanmar may scuttle plans to repatriate Rohingya refugees

(lm) The military coup in neighboring Myanmar on February 1 [see article this edition] has raised fears in Bangladesh that the new regime may not make genuine efforts to revive the stalled process of voluntary repatriation of Rohingya Muslim refugees. Myanmar had earlier said it was committed to the repatriation as per the 2017 bilateral agreement, despite to failed attempts in the past [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. [The Straits Times 1] [Forbes]

Bangladesh is hosting more than a million Rohingya refugees who fled a brutal military crackdown three years ago [see AiR No. 5, August/2017,12] at cramped makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar, which is considered the world's largest refugee settlement. Earlier this month Dhaka urged Myanmar to resume the repatriation process this year, after the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) approved a resolution strongly condemning rights abuses against Rohingya Muslims and other minority groups in Myanmar, including arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, and deaths in detention [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1].

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's government sent two more groups of Rohingya refugees to a remote Bay of Bengal island on January 30, ignoring complaints by rights groups concerned about low-lying island's vulnerability to cyclones and floods. [South China Morning Post] [Bloomberg]

Since early December, authorities had relocated about 3,500 Rohingya to Bhasan Char, an island specifically developed to accommodate 100,000 of the 1 million Rohingya [see AiR No. 52, December/2020, 5]. Bangladesh justifies the move saying it would ease chronic overcrowding in sprawling refugee camps of

Cox's Bazar [see AiR No. 23, June/2020, 2]. The government also routinely dismisses concerns of floods, citing the construction of a 2m embankment to prevent flooding along with facilities such as cyclone centers and hospitals [see AiR No. 49, December/2020, 2]. [The Straits Times 2]

India: Rally against agriculture reforms turns violent, as thousands of farmers divert from agreed routes

(lm) A rally against agriculture reforms in New Delhi on January 26 turned violent, after thousands of protesting farmers deviated from agreed routes and headed for government buildings in Old Delhi where the annual Republic Day parade of troops and military hardware was taking place. One protester died and more than 80 police officers were injured. [BBC]

Police had allowed the rally on the condition that it would not interrupt the annual Republic Day parade in central Delhi held to honor the date on which India officially adopted its constitution. Farmers were given specific routes for the rally but a group of them converged on the historic Red Fort, a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site, breached security and clambered onto the walls and domes of the fortress. In a particularly bold rebuke to Prime Minister Modi's Hindu-nationalist government, the protesters hoisted a Sikh religious flag alongside the national flag. [South China Morning Post]

Delhi's Police Commissioner told a media conference the following day some farm leaders had incited violence with provocative speeches, adding that the police were examining video footage to identify those who clashed with security forces. Moreover, the Indian government ordered 2,000 paramilitary reinforcements to New Delhi, while it also suspended mobile internet services suspended in parts of Delhi closed some metro stations. [Bloomberg 1] [Bloomberg 2]

Despite the violence in parts of central Delhi tens of thousands of farmers also marched peacefully. Farm union leaders the following day therefore condemned the violence and accused two outside groups of sabotaging an otherwise peaceful march. What is more, Indian farmers on January 30 began a daylong hunger strike, coinciding with the anniversary of independence leader Mahatma Gandhi's death, as they sought to reaffirm the peaceful nature of their movement following the violent clashes with police.

They also called off a protest planned to be held on February 1 outside Parliament when the government presents its annual budget but vowed the agitation would continue. [Associated Press 1] [Associated Press 2] [Deutsche Welle 1] [The Times of India]

In his first public comments on the months-long farmers' agitation, Prime Minister Modi on January 31 criticized the protesters that had stormed Delhi's historic Red Fort on the country's Republic Day. The day before, the prime minister told opposition party leaders that the offer to suspend the three laws for 18 months still stands [see AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]. [Deutsche Welle 2] [The Straits Times]

Some observers believe the long-drawn and physically draining protests – hundreds of thousands of farmers have been striking on the capital's outskirts since November, some 60 of them dead so far, and 11 rounds of failed talks with the government [see e.g., AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4] – could have resulted in growing frustration in the "young radicals" amongst them [see AiR No. 48, December/2020, 1].

In the run-up to the Republic Day demonstrations, fears had long been growing that the largely peaceful protests could turn violent. Observers therefore cautioned that the incident may be grist to the mill of critics of the protests, in particular the federal government. A case in point, India's Attorney General earlier this month had petitioned the Supreme Court to put a stop to the protests on the grounds that the Khalistan movement, a Sikh separatist group that the government had previously branded as "terrorists," had infiltrated the movement [see AiR No. 3, January/2021, 3].

Indian President Ram Nath Kovind in September last year approved three new agricultural laws aimed at overhauling the food grain procurement and sale of produce [see AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5] in the country of more than 1.3 billion people, almost half of whom depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly defended the legislation, saying it would bring about much needed reform that will introduce transparency, accelerate growth and attract private investment in supply chains [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4].

India: Journalists accused of sedition over reporting of farmers' protest

(lm) Several senior Indian journalists are facing charges of sedition over their allegedly misleading reporting

and online posts about the violence and death of a protester during the farmers' rally against agriculture reforms in New Delhi on January 26. Media groups condemned the police complaints and called them an intimidation tactic aimed at stifling the journalists. [The Straits Times]

A case was also filed against Shashi Tharoor, a senior politician of the oppositional National Congress who also serves as Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology [see AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]. [The Indian Express]

On the day of the protests, social networking service Twitter announced it had suspended more than 300 accounts engaged in spam and platform manipulation to protect the conversation on the service from attempts to incite violence. [The Times of India]

India: Party of Prime Minister Modi seeks to increase political influence in Indian state elections

(lm) Although election dates are yet to be announced, campaigning gets under way for Legislative Assembly elections in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and the eastern state of West Bengal. The elections in both states assumes added significance as they are among the last few left for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to conquer. [The Straits Times]

Despite two successive landslide victories in federal elections since 2014 [see AiR (4/5/2019)], Modi's BJP has a mixed record in state elections. To be sure, the party was part of the winning alliance in eastern state of Bihar in India's first major election since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Defying exit poll predictions, the BJP eclipsed its regional ally to become the senior partner in the ruling coalition [see AiR No. 46, November/2020, 3].

Nepal: Election Commission summons both factions of ruling Nepal Communist Party

(lm) Leaders of the rivaling factions of the Nepal Communist Party, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Karma Dahal, have been summoned by the

Election Commission (EC) to discuss matters related to the upcoming snap election. [The Himalayan Times]

The prime minister in December decided to dissolve the country's lower house of parliament and announce snap elections for in two phases – a controversial move amidst a prolonged tussle for power between him and his rival intraparty rival Dahal [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4]. Since then, the party is effectively divided into two factions – one led by the prime minister and another by Dahal, with both factions staking claim on the NCP, which was born out of a post-election merger of the CPN-UML (Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)) and the Maoist Centre in 2018 [see AiR (4/2/2018)].

The EC, however, earlier this month refused to give legitimacy to either faction, saying both sides had failed to follow the Political Parties Act 2017 as well as the party statue. Therefore, the electoral body continues to only recognizes the NCP which was formed in May 2018 with Prime Minister Oli and Dahal as its two chairmen. [AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]

Nepal: Nepali Congress announces fresh round of protests against dissolution of parliament's lower house

(lm) Nepal's largest opposition party, the Nepali Congress (NC), announced on January 26 a fresh round of protests against Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's decision to dissolve the lower house of parliament and call for snap elections [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4]. A meeting of the party's Central Working Committee held earlier that day shed light on the NC's intraparty fault lines, pitching an anti-establishment faction against the party's president, who wants to wait for the Supreme Court's verdict. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Interestingly, this is not the first time the NC's leadership has been reluctant to announce protests. Earlier this month the party's president also refused to hold a joint protest with the country's other major opposition party, Janata Samajwadi Party-Nepal (JSP-N). It was only after facing heavy criticism that the NC had organized rallies at the federal constituency, provincial constituency, municipal and ward level [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1].

Separately, the blatant use of force by the police on civic protesters earlier has drawn criticisms from all sections of society. On January 25, police charged batons and used water cannons to disperse protesters

who were marching towards the prime minister's residence. At least 26 demonstrators were arrested. [The Himalayan Times] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [Macau Business]

Pakistan: Supreme Court affirms acquittal of Islamist convicted of beheading US journalist

(lm) Pakistan's Supreme Court (SC) on January 28 affirmed the acquittal of a British-born Islamist and three others, who had been convicted in 2002 on charges of kidnapping and murder of a US journalist. The journalist's family filed a review petition, joining Pakistan's federal government and the provincial government of Sindh in seeking a reversal of the acquittal. The SC on February 1 refused to issue a restraining order but extended the detention of all four men by one day until February 2. [The Express Tribune] [The Guardian 1] [The Straits Times 1]

The High Court in the province of Sindh last April commuted the 2007 death sentence of the main defendant, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, from execution for murder to seven years in prison for kidnapping, and acquitted his three co-conspirators. As Sheikh had already served 18 years in jail, the court ordered his release. The following day, however, Pakistani authorities ordered the detention of the four men, citing "public safety" concerns. In December, the High Court set aside the government's detention orders and ordered their immediate release. The journalist's family and the Sindh state government both appealed against the decision in the SC and requested Sheikh's jail sentence be extended. [The Straits Times 2]

Sheikh always denied his role, and questions remained over whether he had actually carried out the killing, or just been a secondary figure involved in the kidnapping. A recently revealed letter showed Sheikh seeming to admit a "relatively minor" role in the journalist's murder for the first time, although his lawyer says this was written under duress. First the Sindh High Court in April last year, and the SC most recently acquitted all defendants because they found that that the prosecution had failed to prove the case against them. [The Guardian 2]

New US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken on January 29 expressed Washington's deep concern over the SC's ruling. While talking with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Blinken reiterated that Washington was prepared to prosecute Sheikh, who

had been indicted in the United States in 2002 for hostage-taking and conspiracy to commit hostage-taking, resulting in the murder of the US journalist. On January 31, however, Pakistan announced it was not going to hand over Sheikh. [Anadolu Agency] [CNN] [The Diplomat]

Pakistan: Government plans to set up Special Economic Zone in Gilgit-Baltistan

(lm) The government of Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan plans to establish a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in the Pakistan-administered region of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), the minister for Kashmir affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan said on January 27. [South Asia Monitor]

Last November, the prime minister's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and its ally Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Pakistan (MWM) had emerged as the largest political alliance in the provincial assembly elections, despite failing to achieve a clear majority [see AiR No. 46, November/2020, 3]. Shortly thereafter, Prime Minister Khan said that the newly formed government would work on a priority basis to grant 'provisional provincial status' to the region [see AiR No. 49, December/2020, 2].

To date, Islamabad has fallen short of declaring the strategic region as its fifth province, ostensibly to protect its claim on the entirety of Kashmir in the event of a resolution of the Kashmir dispute with India. As a consequence, the region has been caught in constitutional limbo and denied representation in Pakistan's national legislature [see AiR No. 44, November/2020, 1]. According to observers, there is a good case to believe that elevating the status of GB has been encouraged by neighboring China, at least in part. The region is already home to the Moqpondass, a region selected for one of the proposed nine priority SEZs under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). [Eurasia Review]

In this context, the GB government's public works department was instructed earlier this month to prepare a "project concept clearance proposal" for a new border road connecting China and Pakistan under CPEC. Currently, the two neighboring countries are connected only by the Karakoram Highway, completed in 1978, via a single crossing in the Khunjerab Pass. Importantly, beyond enhancing transport capacity, the proposed route would also enable great Pakistan military mobility by opening a new supply line from China to Pakistani forces deployed along the Line of

Control (LOC), which slices the disputed Indian and Pakistani governed parts of Kashmir into two. [Profit by Pakistan Today] [South China Morning Post]

Pakistan: Opposition backs out from talks with government delegation

(lm) Opposition leaders on January 25 backed out from a scheduled meeting with a three-member delegation of the Imran Khan-led government. The meeting, which was expected to lower the current rift between the two sides, was to follow up on an initial meeting held on January 22. [Dawn]

Time and context of the change of heart are noteworthy: Earlier the same day, the parliamentary group of the oppositional Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) held a meeting to discuss what strategy should be adopted for the parliamentary session. Following the meeting, which featured an address by the party's vice president Maryam Nawaz, the opposition dropped the idea of holding the talks. But what is more, the meeting of PML-N's parliamentary group came just one day after rumors of discord in the opposition alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) over tabling a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan had emerged. [WION]

Pakistan: First human rights resource portal launched

(lm) The Ministry of Human Rights in partnership with the European Union has launched Pakistan's first Human Rights Resource Portal. The portal is designed to serve as a central repository of up-to-date and cutting-edge human rights knowledge for students, academics, practitioners and the general public, according to a statement issued on January 27. [The Express Tribune]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: Political return of Cambodian Prince

(nd) Former Cambodian Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh will reassume leadership of royalist Funcinpec party, returning to politics two years after a severe car accident. Ranariddh is the son to Norodom Sihanouk, who governed Cambodia in the 1950s and 1960s and served as king from 1993 to 2004. Funcinpec won the 1993 elections that were organized by the United Nations, and lost all seats by 2013. Ranariddh and Prime Minister Hun Sen from the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) were once strong opponents, until they were coalition partners in 1997. Shortly after, Hun Sen's forces conducted an attack on and murdered many of commanders loyal to Ranariddh, who went into exile briefly. The subsequent coalition of the two partners left Funcinpec as the junior member. Additionally, in 2006 Hun Sen contributed to a split within Funcinpec, which prompted the foundation of a brief and unsuccessful successor party. Ranariddh returned to Funcinpec in 2015.

Due to his dependency on the CPP, analysts deem Ranariddh's return of no major impact. Still, his announcement highlights a necessity to maintain a democratic covering amid an ongoing political crackdown, following the dissolution of the Cambodia National Rescue Party. [The Diplomat]

Indonesia: Arrest over insult of Papuan activist

(nd) Politician Ambroncius Nababan was arrested over insults he made online. He was referring to Natalius Pigai, a former member of the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) and black human rights

activist from Papua as an ape in social media posts. Nababan is a member of Hanura Party and the ruling coalition. His comments are a possible violation of a 2008 law to eliminate racism and discrimination, which carries a five-year prison term. He issued an apology.

Many voiced their anger, sparking fears of similar protests to those in 2019, which were triggered by perceived racism of security forces. The protests left 40 people dead. The separatist United Liberation Movement of West Papua and the West Papua National Committee were blamed for the protests, which resulted in calls for a vote on self-determination. In 2020, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in the US, activists created the hashtag "PapuanLivesMatter" to criticize racist treatment of Papuans across Indonesia.

The separatist conflict has been ongoing since the 1960s, after the region declared its independence from Dutch colonial rule in December 1961, which was rejected by both the Dutch and later Indonesia, annexing it in 1963. [Benarnews]

Indonesia: Chairman of Democratic Party alleges takeover attempts

(nd) Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, current chairman of the Democratic Party (DP), alleged that officials of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's inner circle have tried to force a leadership succession, threatening DP's sovereignty and existence. Agus is the son of former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who succeeded his father as chairman last year. DP was the ruling party from 2004-2014. Currently, the party only holds 7.8% of the House of Representative's 575 seats. Agus has sent a letter to Widodo, requesting a declaration. [Jakarta Globe]

Laos: Chinese company to push soil on farmland from high-speed rail construction

(nd) China Railway Engineering Group (CREG) pushed soil from a railway construction site onto farm plots, gardens, and irrigation systems in northwestern Laos leaving the plots damaged. CREG is building a high-speed rail line to connect China with Laos and other countries in the region as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The famers filed a complaint with the company and requested compensation. The

construction began in December 2016 and has affected over a thousand households, with 133 billion kip (U.S. $14 million) in compensation already paid out. The amounts were called inadequate and below market value by landowners.

While the Lao government views the construction of multiple hydropower dams as a way to boost the country's economy, the projects are controversial due to their environmental impact, the compensation-lacking displacement of villagers, and questionable financial and power-demand arrangements. [Radio Free Asia]

Laos: US Department of Defense to aid the renovation of a medical facility

(py) The US Ambassador to Lao has signed a memorandum to accommodate the Khongsedon District Hospital's renovation in Salavan Province. The medical facility was built by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2003. For 20 years, the US Department of Defense and US Army Corps of Engineers have provided more than 4.6 million USD to Salavan Province for humanitarian assistance construction projects. Five years ago, the US-Lao Comprehensive Partnership was established to help Lao meet its sustainable development goals. [The Laotian Times]

Myanmar: Military stages a coup

(nd) Over the weekend, the Burmese military staged a coup arresting Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other leading party members. State powers were transferred to General Min Aung Hlaing. Telephone lines, the internet and media coverage were interrupted temporarily. There will be an emergency rule for one year, after which new elections will be held. In a Facebook post carrying her name, Aung San Suu Kyi called to protest the coup, which was intended to reinstate military rule in the country that has been on a careful path to democracy. Her National League for Democracy (NLD) party called on the military to release the detainees. As a first echo of the call to protest, the country's largest activist group, The Yangon Youth Network, announced the launch of a civil disobedience campaign.

Western countries condemned the step; the US urged the military to reverse its actions and warned of possible responses. China commented they "noted

what has happened in Myanmar and are in the process of further understanding the situation." It is likely that the coup will bring Myanmar further into Chinese influence, which is the biggest investor and for a long time has executed strong presence at the northern border. Additionally, the country's economy still suffers from the repercussion of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, the UN Council expressed fears for the fate of about 600,000 Rohingya Muslims, with the Council planning to meet this Tuesday.

Reactions in the region reflect the tendency of erosion of democracy. Both the Philippines and Thailand referred to it as internal matter, possibly bearing their own history and current crackdowns on protesters in mind. Current ASEAN-chair Brunei, as well as Malaysia and Indonesia, urged Myanmar to adhere the bloc's core principles, including the commitment to the rule of law, good governance, democratic principles, and a constitutional government. The principles also include a policy of non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states. The contested government in Malaysia is currently under an emergency rule until August. According to a Brookings Institute report, Indonesia's democracy is regressing, given an increase in military involvement in public life and active positions for people linked to the dictatorship of former President Suharto. [Radio Free Asia]

The Thai student-led pro-democracy protest movement showed their solidarity under the trending hashtag "coup d'etat", including Myanmar into the "Milk Tea Alliance", a social media movement uniting democratic protesters in Thailand, Hong Kong and Taiwan. On Monday, rallies were held outside Myanmar's embassy in Bangkok. Around 200 protesters clashed with 150 policemen, with three protesters arrested. [The Diplomat] [Bangkok Post]

Last week, more than a dozen embassies, including the EU and the US, reemphasized to "adhere to democratic norms" amid an already looming military coup. The military alleged widespread voter irregularities in November's election, which resulted in only 33 seats for the military's proxy Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The military urged the government and the Union Election Commission (UEC) to review the results. The UEC denied the allegation, saying no evidence supports this claim. Following, an army spokesman refused to rule out the possibility of a military takeover.

Army chief General Min Aung Hlaing commented by saying the country's constitution could be "revoked" under certain circumstances. The 2008 constitution

features a provision, which enables the military's commander-in-chief to wield sovereign power during a state of emergency, which has to be declared by the president.

In the November 8 general elections, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won the elections with 82% of the contested seats. 25% of the seats are given to the military. Myanmar had a brutal, corrupt military rule from 1962 to 2011. The result of the 1990 election, which the NLD won by 81%, was erased and Aung San Suu Kyi was held under house arrest for 15 years between 1989 and 2010. [Channel News Asia 1] [Channel News Asia 2] [Radio Free Asia] [South China Morning Post] [FAZ in German] [Reuters] [Channel News Asia 3] [Reuters]

Myanmar: Civilian protests against military presence

(nd) Civilians in Kayin and Mon states last week protested against military presence, which was in violation of a nationwide cease-fire agreement (NCA) reached in 2015. The NCA was signed by 9 other ethnic armies. Early December last year, fights between the military and the Karen National Union (KNU), the oldest ethnic rebel army, restarted, causing residents to flee their homes. The military denied troop reinforcements. Civil society groups have urged the country's leaders to end the conflict and advertised for meetings between KNU and the military. [Radio Free Asia]

Philippines: Independent probe into extrajudicial killings launched

(nd) "Investigate PH" was founded by the International Coalition of Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP) in order to conduct an independent investigation of the killings in relation to the so-called war on drugs. The international civil society organization is supposed to bring more information and evidence to the preliminary examination of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which has been going on for almost three years. A preliminary report by ICHRP is scheduled by the first week of March and to be submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the ICC.

Chief Prosecutor for the ICC, Fatou Bensouda, said she has "reasonable basis to believe" that crimes against

humanity were committed within the war on drugs, with a formal investigation yet unopened. This step requires the determination that the Philippines did not sufficiently investigate and prosecute the cases themselves. Earlier, the UN Technical Assistance Program was set up to provide better training and resources, based on the assumptions that their lack was the reason for the shortcomings on resolving the cases. During the visit of a High-Level Human Rights Delegation last year, it was reported the Ministry of Justice was not open to meetings and until today has not made their report public and shared information. Following the ICC's complaint against the Philippines, they withdrew from the ICC and threatened Bensouda with arrest if she was to enter the country.

Officially labelled a war on drugs, the administration of Duterte installed a climate of impunity, enabling thousands of extrajudicial killings. The "red-tagging" of political critics have resulted in a broader crackdown on civil society. According to a report by the office of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in June 2020, the death toll of police and vigilante operations under Duterte is believed to exceed 25,000. Still, the UNHRC in October 2019 decided against a probe into the cases but started a technical assistance program, criticized by domestic and international rights groups.

Local groups investigating human rights violations in the Philippines have often become victims of extrajudicial killings and are reportedly receiving frequent death threats. In 2019, the ICC launched an investigation into Myanmar's crimes against the Rohingya, but denied such action with respect to China and the Uyghur Muslims. While President-elect Joe Biden's administration announced to declare the actions against Rohingya people a "genocide", the US has been reluctant to condemn rights violations under Duterte. A bill to suspend arm sales to the Philippines remains pending since October. [Rappler] [The Diplomat]

Philippines: Head of BAARM to open dialogue with militants

(nd) The head of the transitional government of Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BAARM) in the southern Philippines, Murad Ebrahim, announced he made contact with members of the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and Abu Sayyaf Group in an effort to convince them to join the government and cease militant activity. The militant groups are linked to the Islamic State and were

reportedly open to collaboration. Murad also leads the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a former armed separatist group who signed a peace treaty with the central government, which prompted the BIFF to form and break away.

Murad's term as interim head of government is set to expire next year. Currently, he is advertising for a 3-year extension, referencing ongoing security threats by pro-IS militants and the coronavirus pandemic, which have prevented the implementation of crucial reforms. To that end, a proposed law is currently with the Philippine Congress. Last year, multiple fatalities were accounted for by suicide bombings on Jolo in southern Sulu, both carried out by Abu Sayyaf. BIFF's scope of action is focused on Mandanao Island, with an increase in frequency of attacks. Last week, three died in a roadside bombing suspected to be executed by BIFF. [Benar News]

Singapore: Contract for the rail link awarded

(py) The Singapore branch of China Communications Construction Company Limited has been awarded a S$180 million deal to construct a 25m-high viaduct and tunnels for the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS) link. Once completed, the 4-km journey between the two ends would take around five minutes. The line is expected to commence passenger service at the end of 2026. [Channel News Asia]

Singapore: Teenager planned attack on mosques

(nd) As the youngest person to be detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA), a Singaporean teenager was arrested in December last year for plotting an attack on two mosques with a machete. The self-radicalized teenager was inspired by the far-right extremist Brenton Tarrant, who live-streamed the massacre of more than 50 Muslims at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand. The attack was planned for March 15, the same day of the attack in New Zealand.

Terror plots in Southeast Asia have so far been dominated by Islamist threats, as opposed to racist far-right extremism known to Western countries. [South China Morning Post]

Thailand: Planned summon of Thanathorn's mother in bribery case

(nd) The mother of opposition politician Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, Somporn Juangroongruangkit, will be summoned by the Crime Suppression Division (CSD) with regards to alleged bribes given to an official at the Crown Property Bureau (CPB).

Somporn was an executive member of the Real Asset Development Company, which manages the disputed Chit Lom land lease. Her other son and brother to Thanathorn, Sakulthorn Juangroongruangkit, is the company's CEO. He is being investigated in with respect to a separate case. A CPB official and an accomplice were sentenced to three years in prison for taking 20 million baht in bribes and forging documents to enable the company to rent the land without a bidding process. Former Democrat MP Watchara Phetthong complained about the prosecutor's decision not to indict Thanathorn's brother in the land lease case. [Bangkok Post]

Thanathorn himself was meanwhile ordered by a court to remove his allegations on social media with regard to the unfair tender process of the production of Covid-19 vaccines, favoring a company which belongs to King Maha Vajiralongkorn. Thanathorn and his Progressive Movement denied the content was illegal and asked YouTube and Facebook to preserve freedom of expression. [See also AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4] [Reuters]

Vietnam: Nguyen Phu Trong re-elected as general secretary of ruling Communist Party

(lm) During the first days of the ongoing 13th National Congress of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party (CPV), incumbent General Secretary of the CPV and President of Vietnam, Nguyễn Phú Trọng, has won a rare third term as party chief. Previously, a leaked list of candidates for the politburo's offices had Trọng earmarked as one of two designated "special cases" that have already passed the customary age for retirement [see AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]. Thus, observers say securing a third term implies that other party factions do not view Trọng as a threat to their long-term race to power. [Reuters]

In the run-up to the all-important congress, the future of Trọng's rule seemed uncertain, after he had suffered

a stroke last April and has reportedly not fully recovered since [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. Frail but in strong command for now, the committed Marxist-Leninist becomes Vietnam's longest-serving party chief since Le Duan, who ruled with an iron fist after the 1969 death of Vietnam's founding revolutionary Ho Chi Minh. He has also held the largely ceremonial role of the country's president since his predecessor died in 2018.

Beyond the leadership question, the other key area addressed during the congress is the five-year economic plan, as the delegates are to officially endorse economic targets the CPV intends to set that are meant to help the country emerge from the lower-middle-income level by 2025 and gain developed nation status by 2045. Having emerged as an attractive destination for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and a new hub for low-cost manufacturing in Asian supply chains, Hanoi is now seeking to leverage the economic advantage it gained as one of the few countries to have expanded its gross domestic product in 2020 [see also AiR No. 28, July/2020, 2]. [South China Morning Post] [Nikkei Asia]

Vietnam: Jailed blogger refuses to appeal sentence, destroys petition form

(lm) A jailed Vietnamese blogger has refused to appeal his 11-year prison term, after prison guards attempted to dictate the document's wording. A prominent member of the Vietnam Independent Journalists Association (IJAVN), the jailed man is one of three dissident journalists who had been found guilty of charges for spreading propaganda against the state earlier this month [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. [Radio Free Asia 1]

Separately, villagers in Dong Tam village on January 27 marked the one-year anniversary of the death of Vietnamese activist Le Dinh Kinh, while plainclothes police loitered about keeping close tabs on the gathering. [Radio Free Asia 2]

Le Dinh Kinh, the retired local official, was shot dead by police who had entered the village in January last year, trying to secure construction of a fence around land officials were trying to seize next to an airfield. A court in September sentenced both of his sons to death, ruling that they had helped mastermind resistance against the police [see AiR No. 37, September/2020, 3].

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

US-China relations: Continuity and the formulation of a new US grand strategy

(hg) Two weeks after the inauguration of Joe Biden as US President, Sino-American relations are beginning to take shape for the foreseeable future in a way that will be definitional for both countries` future as well as for the world at large.

While U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged both powers last week to “reset” relations for the sake of the common interests [VoA], a strong sense of continuity seems to dominate President Biden’s policy towards China according to the first impression. Notably, whereas the new US President has already communicated even with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a call between Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping has not yet happened. Meanwhile, both countries have signaled messages that reflect a deep structural rivalry open for notions of a “Cold Peace” if not another form of Cold War, whose state will remain however complex and dependent on the concrete issue ranging from adversarial relations over hedged competition to partial cooperation.

On the one side, both countries have started pragmatic exchanges when their militaries held a video conference last week on the search for the remains of US prisoners of war and mutually conveyed hope for constructive mutual engagement. [Global Times 1] On the other side, both powers clearly marked their

adversarial stances towards each other as reported in last week`s AiR with new Defense Secretary Austin saying: “I think China is our most challenging, our most significant challenge going forward.” [CNN]

Meanwhile, seven People’s Liberation Army warplanes [Republic World] and a US reconnaissance aircraft have entered Taiwan’s air defence identification zone on Sunday, after the US Indo-Pacific Command had reported on Saturday a week earlier that the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group entered the South China Sea again (see entries below). [Reuters]

As widely acknowledged, almost all core members of Team Biden stressed a remarkable degree of continuity in the new administration’s China policy including Foreign Secretary Blinken, Defense Secretary Austin, and National Security Advisor Sullivan. Given the domestic division and hostility out of which the Biden administration has emerged, this degree of continuity is stunning and only explainable as reflecting an inherently structural great power rivalry.

The structural nature of the new/old China containment policy leaning has been reflected when Commerce Secretary Raimondo initially not mentioned to continue the Trump administration's ban on Chinese firm Huawei prompting an immediate backlash from the US Congress which forced the White House to affirm that Huawei was a “threat to the security of the [US].” [Global Times 2]

The inherently structural nature of rather adversarial bilateral relations and US and Chinese actions and words accompanying President Biden’s first days in office will arguably set the narrow and fragile frame in which cooperation is possible.

The Chinese stance has been formulated last week by China’s top diplomat Yang Jiechi, a member of the Politbureau of the CCP’s Central Committee and director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, who was speaking at a virtual event hosted by the National Committee on US-China Relations whose membership includes also former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger. As the highest-ranking official so far to comment on the bilateral relationship since President Biden’s inauguration Yang stressed the Chinese red lines that would have to be respected to maintain cooperation and the spirit of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect and mutual benefit which cover especially affairs related to Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan. [Yang Jiechi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People`s Republic of China] [South China Morning Post]

A spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of defense was more explicit warning that "Taiwan independence" means war, a warning Chinese analysists see not only as a warning directed to "Taiwanese independent" forces, but also to the US. [Global Times 3]

In this overall situation, the White House says to be patient in developing a "new approach" toward relations with China at a time when the two countries remain in serious "strategic competition." [VoA] While it is obvious that this approach will amount to a well-coordinated full-spectrum China containment policy aiming, the outlines of this approach are only just taking shape.

An indicator in terms of personal is the choice of Kurt Campbell as the coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs on the National Security Council who has been the architect of President Obama's Pivot to Asia indicating a coherent, differentiated and multilaterally oriented China policy. [The Business Times]

Clear is, that bilateral relations are increasingly shaped by a sense for timing with the US increasingly feeling the need to act in a closing time frame. At the same time, political redlines might become more blazing if they are supposed to mean something but symbols of inaction.

China is, moreover, too powerful and the Sino-Russian relation too close that the US could afford not to struggle to restore and expand its alliance system to the fullest, an inclination that meets the personal foreign policy preferences of Joe Biden after former President Trump did arguably more harm to the US alliance and partner system than any President before as Kurt Campell & Rush Shoshi argue in [Foreign Affairs]. See also [The Japan Times]

Important for the new foreign policy approach of the Biden administration will be the rediscovery of the normative dimension of the national interest and the enhancement of soft power. James Traub refers in this regard in the [New York Times] to the "Cold War Liberals" of the 1950s and 60s, stressing the need to align domestic and foreign affairs under the sign of democratic liberal renewal. The central claim here is that democracies can maintain a foreign policy that is consistent with their values and generally deliver better on domestic and international needs than autocracies can do. This is resounding President Biden's pledge to make the US "the leading force for good in the world" and "not merely by the example of our power but by the power of our example." Concerning the enhancement of American soft power, a piece in the [National Interest] recommends the

rediscovery of cultural diplomacy and academic exchange as a central area of soft power expansion.

Finally, the US might have to seek joining the CPTPP to prevent the China dominated Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) to become the dominant trade organization in Asia. [The Business Insider].

Regarding the prospects and focal points of an American Asia strategy with immediate impact on China the situation seems rather predictable. The fact that the region is rather friendly to a gradual rise of US influence at current might also be seen as reflecting both the velocity of Chinese rise and the degree of decline of American prowess to incontestably act as a regional hegemon. While the Biden administration has rather been well received by the US' Asian allies and partners, it will have to strike a careful balance between reliability and presence on the one side and an avoidance of any impression of moral paternalism on the other. Not only has the Washington insurrection of Trump supporters damaged the credibility of US leadership with regard of democratic values, the US' weight in the region has changed with the Chinese rise as well. This notwithstanding, the US will also have to painstakingly to avoid the perception of transience of the American foothold in the region not to speak of any half-heartedness or lack of determination concerning its commitment to the region. Altogether that means more than one target conflict and require a high-level strategy and related diplomatic effort on behalf of the Biden administration.

The most comprehensive published outline of a possible China policy for the Biden administration to date has been published recently in [POLITICO]. The author who remains anonymous is referred to as "a former senior government official with deep expertise and experience dealing with China" who seeks to emulate – as so many others – George Kennan's post-WW II "Long Telegram" that was laying out the basis for the next several decades of U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union.

According the author X it is due to the scale, speed and impact of China's rise and its radically different worldview from that of the United States, that "China's rise now profoundly impacts every major U.S. national interest" in form a defining "structural challenge" and at the same time a "serious challenge to the whole of the democratic world". This challenge is, however, perceived as much embodied by the leadership of President Xi. While all five post-Mao leaders prior to Xi were able to work with the US, Xi is said to depart from traditional Chinese foreign policy by seeking to remake the international order "in China's own image".

According to the author, Xi's leadership and his vast ambitions as well as "his endless demands for absolute loyalty" prompting elite circles in the communist party to "fear for their own lives and the future livelihoods of their families", have significantly divided the party. Consequently, so X, an American China strategy should focus on these internal fault lines within the Chinese leadership in attempt to isolate President Xi and enable a leadership with a more traditional foreign policy approach.

To counter the particular threat of the Xi system, the author recommends a consequently developed grand strategy that comprises the rebuilding of all relevant underpinnings of US power, the communication of realistic and enforced red lines, the identification of areas of cooperation and competition, the conduct of a "full-fledged, global ideological battle" and a consequent coalition policy regarding allies and partners. As consequence, author X hopes the CCP could "see a clearer route to success by staying within the existing US-led liberal international order than by building a rival order" and should understand that is "in the party's best interests, if it wishes to remain in power at home, not to attempt to expand China's borders or export its political model beyond China's shores".

At least in parts, this policy outline is based on assumptions that might be doubted. First of all, it is questionable in how far President Xi is actually representing a purely accidental leadership figure whose replacement will lead to a substantial change of the particular regime whose emergence he has initiated. Irrespective of the always inevitable internal rifts and factions of any autocratic regime, the fact that China is a de facto one-party system with a highly doctrinal cadre is rather reason to believe in continuity than change if the leader is replaced. This counts even more in times in which structural forces are increasingly in place, in the US as much as in China.

Moreover, China has dared and gained too much already in its global expansion drive to confine itself and to refrain from seeking regional dominance and even global leadership if it is not forced so by external factors.

While it is hardly imaginable that the present Chinese trajectory will substantially change without external disruption it also seems not entirely compelling to historically assume that China never tried to gain regional dominance under other leaders or that this would be alien to the Chinese form of leadership. The US Indochina engagement in concert with allies and partners like Thailand and the Philippines, the anti-

Chinese stance in Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam and the Vietnamese resolve in protecting its borders prevented that in the decades following WW II as much as the emerging Russian-Sino enmity and the fact that China was for a long time an intrinsically poor country in a world dominated first by the Cold War and then by American uni-polarity.

Today, China is economically and technologically rising, Russia and China are more aligned than ever, and the assumption that China has no allies but a few as author X indicates seems to overlook the influence China wields in a growing number of African, Latin-American, Middle Eastern, and European states.

Likewise, the assumption that the Chinese people may "over the longer term .... well come to question and challenge the party's century-long proposition that China's ancient civilization is forever destined to an authoritarian future" could be too simplifying. The Chinese social contract is based on performance and, resulting, economic well-being, not the pursuit of liberty. That might change but the same can be said about a vaguely possible departure of single Western democracies from liberalism.

Lastly, a Chinese development to national greatness measured in terms of Chinese global leadership is a foundational national narrative with great traction not only for President Xi but also for a great number of people in China and the CCP. Given all this, to target the inner fault lines of the CCP might rather not so easily provide the single silver bullet author X is envisioning.

However, the POLITICO article is significant for the consequent request for a well-coordinated full-spectrum China policy in American policy circles that reflects the deep structural antagonism between the two countries while not neglecting the need for cooperation in particular areas.

China among top early priorities of US foreign policy under President Biden

(dql) According to US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan dealing with China will be among the key early priorities for the new Biden administration, next to Iran and Afghanistan. He cautioned that the US needs to be "prepared to act, as well to impose costs," on Beijing for its actions in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. With regards to China trade and technology abuses he conceded that the US and its allies in Europe currently "don't have entirely aligned

perspectives on every one of these issues," adding that "China is right at the top of the list of things that we've got to work together on and where there is work to do to get fully aligned." [Aljazeera]

Sullivan's remarks came amid military drills that Beijing conducted over three days last week in response the entry of a US aircraft carrier strike group into the South China Sea. The exercises involved both land-based long-range missile launchers, and warships and naval docking ships that can be used for a beach invasion. [VoA] [International Business Times]

In a latest development, Chinese fighter aircraft, including a Y-8 reconnaissance plane, two J-10 fighter jets and two J-11, and a US reconnaissance aircraft entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone on Sunday past weekend. [Reuters]

China-US tech competition: Partial Sino-US decoupling in technology inevitable and preferable, US report says

(dql) A new report of the China Strategy Group is calling for some degree of decoupling of the US and China's tech sectors, arguing that – given an "asymmetric" competition in which China plays by a different set of rules that allow it to benefit from corporate espionage, illiberal surveillance, and a blurry line between its public and private sector," – "[s]ome degree of disentangling is both inevitable and preferable." It further explains: "In fact, trends in both countries — and many of the tools at our disposal — inherently and necessarily push toward some degree of bifurcation," warning that the alternative to bifurcation would be a world in which China's non-democratic norms have "won."

Among the solutions the group is proposing are "multilateral initiatives, including an alliance of democracies called the "T-12" to coordinate responses to tech competition. T-12 countries would include beside the US, Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, France, Finland, India, Israel, Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, and Sweden. The group also suggest to create an "International Technology Finance Corporation," as well as "multilateral trust zones" in which integration can be safely achieved. [Axios 1] [Axios 2, for the full text of the report]

The China Strategy Group was formed in July last year "with the purpose of tackling the most difficult questions regarding the United States' competitiveness

with China on technology." Among the members are China scholars and influential voices from the US tech industry, including Schmidt, former CEO of Google; Jared Cohen, CEO of Jigsaw, a tech incubator created by Google, and former adviser to Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton; Richard Fontaine, the CEO of the Center for a New American Security, whose co-founder Kurt Campbell now occupies a top position on Biden's National Security Council; and Liz Economy, China scholar at the Council on Foreign Relations and Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

Meanhwile, the Biden administration has decided to delay until May the implementation of a Trump-era executive order in November that banned US companies from investing in Chinese companies believed to be linked to the Chinese military, adding that the delay applies to companies "whose name closely matches, but does not exactly match, the name of a Communist Chinese military company." The original deadline was January 28. [Reuters]

China: Advancing military aircraft

(dql) A series of articles in the National Interests provides insights into China's advancement in military aircraft and into the discussion on shifting commands concepts within the US air force.

The development of China's new H-20 stealth bomber aims to put Beijing in a position to threat critical U.S. assets and infrastructure beyond the second island chain in ways that are either difficult or impossible with the China's current H-6 bombers. According to observers, the H-20 bomber resembles Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider bomber with an operational range of minimum 8.500 kilometers, and possibly as much as 12.000 km, and will carry a nuclear-capable payload of at least ten tons, with the possible option of up to four hypersonic cruise missiles. [National Interest 1]

The bomber is expected to enter service sometime in the mid 2020s, but it remains unclear how many models the PLAAF wants, and how quickly. Given the PLAAF's recent efforts to procure upgraded H-6 bombers, which are expected to fly into the 2030s, it is believed that China's military is not planning with large H-20 shipments anytime soon.

In the area of military drones, China showcased the Gongi-11 drone during a Chinese National Day parade, revealing a blended wing-body stealth exterior which

resembles in its design construction a B-2, B-21 or RQ-170 Sentinel stealth drone. [National Interest 2]

As China's and the US air force both plan and prepare for a possible military clash, David Axe in [National Interest 3] sheds light into the discussion within the US air force on adopting the 'mission command' concept.

Mission command was developed by the Prussian army as mission-type tactics doctrine, which combines centralized intent with decentralized execution subsidiarity and promotes freedom and speed of action, and initiative, within defined constraints.

China-US space competition: Commander of US Space Command demands space superiority

(dql) General James Dickinson, Commander of the US Space Command, has laid out his strategic vision of an US space supremacy in document in which he warned that US competitors have "turned space, a once peaceful environment, into a warfighting domain," adding that the growth of China's and Russia's "counter-space arsenals presents an immediate and serious threat to U.S., allied, and partner space activities." He stressed the need to achieve "space superiority," to set "the conditions to win in conflict across all domains." [Space Command, USA]

For a brief discussion of the recent achievements of China's space program and their value of for Beijing's "public opinion warfare" both within the country's and overseas, see [Space News]

Japan-US relations: Biden, Suga reaffirm alliance in phone talk

(dql) US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga agreed in the phone talk last week on the important of their countries' alliance as "the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in a free and open Indo-Pacific." Both leaders also discussed the US' "unwavering commitment to the defense of Japan" under the US-Japanese security treaty, with Biden reaffirming his "commitment to provide extended deterrence to Japan." They also agreed on the necessity of complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. [Reuters]

Japan-UK relations: Tokyo pushes back against London's plan to boost G7 Asia reach

(dql) Japan has voiced concerns about British plans to invite Australia, India and South Korea to a meeting of G7 foreign ministers and have them sign up to a joint charter with the forum, arguing that the aim of the summit should be lie in rebuilding the G-7 after a difficult year, and not in institutionalizing a relationship with the invited guests.

Observers believe that Tokyo's resistance is also motivated by it wish to remain the only Asian country in the group to sustain robust relations with the US without any impediments as well as to avoid heighten Sino-Japanese tensions by agreeing to the creation an overtly anti-China coalition. [Business Standard] [MENAFN]

South-Korea: Final stage of assembling first prototype of indigenous fighter jet

(dql) South Korea's South Korea announce a prototype of what would be the country's first indigenously developed fighter jet is in the final stage of assembling. Since 2015, South Korea has been working on the development of a homegrown cutting-edge fighter aircraft to replace the Air Force's aging fleet of F-4 and F-5 jets.

The prototype is expected to be made public in April, with 2026 eyed for the completion of development after ground and flight tests. Forty units are expected to be delivered to the Air Force by 2028 and another 80 units by 2032.

The aircraft is expected to be capable of flying at a maximum speed of Mach 1.81, with a flying range of 2.900 kilometers. [Korea Herald]

South Korea-Japan relations: Tokyo not a "partner" anymore, South Korean defense white paper says

(dql) Reflecting strained relations between South Korea and Japan, the former has downgraded the status of the former in its defense white paper by dropping

“partner”. While, In the previous 2018 version of the biannual report both countries were described as “geographically and culturally close neighbors as well as partners cooperating for global peace and prosperity,” the current one reads considers the two countries as “close neighbors that should cooperate not only for the two countries’ relationships but also for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the world.” [Kyodo News]

Inter-Korean relations: South Korea’s defense White Paper confirms North Korea not an enemy

(dql) In its 2020 defense white paper South Korea avoided to designate to North Korea as an enemy. However, it reiterates its 2018 stance saying that the military considers forces that threaten or violate South Korea's sovereignty, territory, people and property as an enemy.

Furthermore, the paper claims that North Korea has “expanded its ballistic missile units, strengthened special forces with modernized equipment and reinforced exercises to attack strategic targets,” specifying the Pyongyang possesses 13 missile brigades under its strategic force command, a rise of four units compared to 2018. The units are believed to operate short-range Scud missiles for South Korean targets, Rodong missiles with a range of about 1.300 kilometers and Musudan missiles with a range of 3.000 kilometers, capable of striking the strategic U.S. military base in Guam.[KBS]

Taiwan: United States pledges unchanged support

(nm) In several statements, the US has reassured its continued support for Taiwan. While the US Department of Defense announced that it will continue to fulfill its commitments to Taiwan’s self-defence needs and to the security of the Indo-Pacific, President Biden’s nominee for US ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, stated in her confirmation hearing that Taiwan was “one of the strongest democracies in the region”, adding that the US needs to “support” and “stand by them” as a fellow democracy. [Focus Taiwan 1] [Taiwan News] [Focus Taiwan 2]

Meanwhile, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan warned that the US must be ready to "impose costs" on China for Beijing's threats toward Taiwan and its actions in Hong Kong and Xinjiang as part of a four-point plan he suggested the US needs to take to deal with the challenges posed by China, including fostering its own domestic democracy to combat Beijing's claim that its governance model is superior than the US one, cooperating with democratic allies, and investing in emerging technologies, as the competition with China will be decided in this strategic resources. [Focus Taiwan 3]

The remarks came after recently thirteen Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) and PLA Navy (PLAN) aircraft intruded Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), followed by Beijing's warning that "independence means war." [AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4] [BBC]

Trade-wise, the US and Taiwan have planned to hold a meeting this week on current global supply shortages of automotive chips, joining Germany and Japan in asking Taiwan for support in alleviating the shortage. [Focus Taiwan 4]

Taiwan-Poland relations: Legal cooperation agreement approved by Polish President

(nm) The Taiwan-Poland Criminal Justice Cooperation which was signed by Taiwanese and Polish representatives in June 2019 was approved by Polish President Andrzej Duda last week, according to Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). It will take effect as soon as Taiwan receives formal notice.

The agreement, which is the first of its kind between Taiwan and a European country, will cover five major areas: mutual assistance with criminals, extradition, transfer of criminals, sharing of legal and practical insights, and criminal prosecution and crime prevention information sharing. According to the ministry, it will help strengthen transnational anti-crime efforts and judicial cooperation, while fully protecting individuals on the basis of human rights and the rule of law.

Taiwan currently holds similar agreements with the United States, China, the Philippines, South African, Nauru, and Belize. In 2016, Taiwan had also entered into a double taxation avoidance agreement with Poland, followed by an agreement on science and

higher education in 2018. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News]

Poland currently faces intense criticism and an infringement procedure by the European Union due to a national judicial reform which threatens to undermine judicial independence and thus a centerpiece of the rule of law principle. [EU Press corner]

Taiwan-Germany relations: Taiwan urged to step up automotive chip production amid global shortage

(nm) Amid a global shortage of semiconductor chips which are used in the auto sector, Germany has urged Taiwan to persuade Taiwanese manufacturers to increase production output. Automakers around the globe are forced to shut down assembly lines due to delivery problems, impeding economic recovery from the global pandemic.

In a letter, German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier had reached out to his Taiwanese counterpart Wang Mei-hua, asking to address the issue in talks with Taiwan's chipmakers, including Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (TSMC), the global market leader. Japan and the United States are also said to have reached out to Taiwan. According to reports, Taiwan's four biggest chipmakers pledged to further optimize production in order to meet global demands and to support the automobile industry in particular.

Semiconductors are vital parts of almost all electronic systems. After the Covid-19 pandemic had led to an initial reduction in demand for automobiles but increased demand for consumer electronics and medical technology, chip producers were unable to adjust their costly production as fast as the auto industry recovered. The problem is further exacerbated by former US-President Trump's trade dispute with China, which led car manufacturers to consider alternative suppliers, including Taiwan.

In exchange for the support, the Taiwanese government has asked German representative to Taiwan Thomas Prinz for assistance in buying Covid-19 vaccines, an exchange first raised by the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research. Prinz had said he would pass the proposal on to the German government. Although Taiwan's success in containing its local Covid-19 outbreak was lauded globally, the island is currently struggling to secure vaccines. The

opposition Kuomintang (KMT) party supported the idea, pointing at a local cluster infection at Taoyuan General Hospital with 15 reported cases. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News] [Reuters] [Zeit, German]

For more background information on the global supply shortage, see [Bloomberg]. For insights into Taiwan's political communication on the pandemic, see [Taiwan News].

Mongolia: Discussions over bilateral ties and vaccines gifted by India

(nm) State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs N.Ankhbayar and Deputy Director General for Asia and the Pacific of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, Jasper Wieck, held an online meeting last week, discussing strengthening bilateral ties, regional cooperation, and mutual support within international organizations, as well as exchanging their views on the current Covid-19 pandemic. Both sides agreed to hold a consultative meeting in Ulaanbaatar in September. [AKIpress 1]

Meanwhile, India has donated 1.5 million doses of the British-developed AstraZeneca vaccine against Covid-19 to Mongolia, adding to the 10 million doses of vaccine that Mongolia had purchased from India. The donation is part of India's vaccine diplomacy which seeks to deepen ties between India and its neighbouring states. [AKIpress 2] [Reuters]

India, China using vaccine diplomacy to deepen bilateral ties around the world

(lm) China will be providing 300,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Chinese state-owned company Sinopharm under grand assistance to Nepal, Beijing's embassy to Kathmandu announced on February 1. [The Himalayan Times]

Timing and context of the announcement are noteworthy: As part of its unprecedented Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) campaign, India ten days earlier had sent one million doses of COVID-19 vaccine to Kathmandu, marking the launch of nationwide inoculation drive in the Himalayan country. Following in the wake of the sixth meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Commission, the gesture came at a time when bilateral relations between India and Nepal continue to see an upwards trajectory, after they had initially

derailed in May last year [see AiR No. 2, January/2021, 2]. [Reuters]

But what is more, they also take place against the larger backdrop of determined efforts by India to utilize its vast manufacturing capacity to bolster bilateral ties. While commercial overseas shipments are likely to start around March, India has already shipped free consignments of Covishield (the local name for the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine developed in the United Kingdom) doses to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, and Nepal, as well as to its key Indian Ocean partners, Mauritius and Seychelles. Sri Lanka began receiving vaccine consignments earlier this month and Afghanistan will do so after it has completed regulatory clearance procedures. [The Diplomat]

The shipments reflect one of India's unique strengths: It is home to a robust vaccine industry, including the Serum Institute of India, one of the world's largest vaccine makers. The country, therefore, has a long track record of supplying medicines and vaccines to the rest of the world, especially to low- and middle-income countries. [Washington Post] [Financial Times]

These efforts put India in direct competition with China, which has made no secret that vaccine distribution is wrapped up in its broader geopolitical ambitions. For it has explicitly included vaccine distribution in its broader Health Silk Road initiative, which aims to bolster China's international soft power. To this end, Chinese companies have made an aggressive international push to sell their COVID-19 vaccines, with Sinopharm and Beijing-based biopharmaceutical company Sinovac signing deals with more than a dozen countries. [Observer Research Foundation] [South China Morning Post]

A case in point, China's "all-weather friend" Pakistan received on February 1 a free shipment of half a million doses of the Sinopharm vaccine, as Islamabad is set to launch its vaccination drive this week, starting with frontline health workers. What is more, Pakistan is due to receive a further 1.1 million doses from China by the end of this month; up to 6.8 million doses are due to arrive before the end of March. [Al Jazeera] [The Straits Times]

New India-China border clash shows simmering tensions

(lm) Indian and Chinese troops have clashed along their disputed Himalayan border. While details about

the latest skirmish remain foggy, Indian media outlets and independent military analysts said on January 25 that the clash occurred earlier this month in northern Sikkim, a mountainous Indian state sandwiched between Bhutan and Nepal. [New York Times]

Although no fatalities were reported and both sides remained tight-lipped, reports of a clash show that tensions are still simmering between the two Asian giants. This month satellite imagery revealed that Chinese forces have been slowly but steadily cutting away small pieces of Indian territory, constructing a new village on what had been an empty hillside two years ago in Arunachal Pradesh, another mountainous Indian border state. [Foreign Policy]

As Beijing quietly intensifies pressure against India, India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar has condemned China for massing troops and building infrastructure at the countries' disputed border, describing the deadly brawl in the Galwan Valley last year [see AiR No. 24, June/2020, 3] as having "profoundly disturbed" bilateral relations. [South Asia Monitor 2] [South China Morning Post]

Pakistan calls on FATF to be removed from "grey" monitoring list

(lm) Pakistan has called on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental organization that monitors global money laundering and terrorist financing, to remove the country from the organization's rating list of countries tagged as prone to illicit financial activity. In a letter to the FATF's president, the chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Interior said the international watchdog should at least extend the grace period Islamabad was given to comply with the remaining action items. [The Tribune]

Context and timing of the request are noteworthy: EU Disinfo Lab, a Brussels-based NGO, last month published a report about a global network of pro-Indian fake websites and think tanks aimed at influencing decision-making in Europe. The researchers traced the websites, which were also found to involve groups responsible for anti-Pakistan lobbying events in Europe, to an Indian company. [EU Disinfo Lab]

Moreover, during the FATF's last review in October, Islamabad was urged to complete the remaining six of the 27 parameters included in the internationally agreed action plan by February 2021 and to

demonstrate that terrorism financing probes resulted in effective sanctions [see AiR No. 43, October/2020, 4]. In the run-up to the meeting, India had mounted a determined effort to hold Pakistan responsible for its role in supporting terrorism and terrorist infrastructure.

UN report calls for urgent steps to address worsening human rights situation in Sri Lanka

(lm) The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN OHCHR) has warned that Sri Lanka's persistent failure to ensure accountability for crimes committed during its decades-long civil war has further entrenched impunity and exacerbated victims' distrust in the system. [ColomboPage]

Among the early warning signals the report highlights are: the accelerating militarization of civilian governmental functions, reversal of important constitutional safeguards, political obstruction of accountability, exclusionary rhetoric, intimidation of civil society, and the use of anti-terrorism laws. [UN OHCHR]

In the report published on January 27, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, calls on the international community to enhance monitoring and take measures against credibly alleged perpetrator of grave human rights violations, even floating the prospect of a referral to the International Criminal Court. Bachelet also suggested that Sri Lanka's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations - which totaled 655 people as of December - must be kept under review. [The Diplomat]

The report will be formally presented to the UN Human Rights Council (UN HCR) on February 24. At its upcoming 46th session, scheduled from 22 February to 23 March, the Council will also consider the steps taken to implement the Council's landmark 2015 resolution 30/1, although the government of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa last January withdrew its co-sponsorship [see AiR No. 8, February/2020, 4, AiR (3/3/2019)]. During the session, all eyes will be on a bloc of countries known as the Core Group on Sri Lanka –the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, North Macedonia and Montenegro – which is expected to present a resolution on Sri Lanka [see AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4].

Earlier this month Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed a 3-member Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate findings of preceding committees appointed to investigate allegations government troops committed war crimes during the civil war. Appointed on January 21, the commission was given 6 months to produce a final report. [AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]

UN human rights experts call cremation of COVID-19 victims in Sri Lanka a violation of human rights

(lm) UN human rights experts on January 25 urged the Sri Lankan government to halt its policy of forced cremations of coronavirus victims, a practice they warn could exacerbate existing prejudices, religious intolerance and intercommunal violence against the country's Muslims and other minority populations. [UN OHCHR]

Ignoring the World Health Organization's (WHO) guidelines which permit both burials and cremations, Buddhist-majority Sri Lanka amended its rules on burials and cremations last April, making cremations of COVID-19 victims mandatory [see AiR No. 20, May/2020, 3]. The decision to make cremation mandatory followed alleged expert advice, including by the chief epidemiologist who claimed that burials could contaminate ground drinking water. The UN experts noted that while the government in November had tasked an expert committee to reassess the mandatory cremation policy, the advice of a panel of experts to include both burial and cremations as options was allegedly ignored. [Al Jazeera]

Human and religious rights groups, as well as local Muslim associations have since raised concerns over the policy, saying authorities use it to purposely hurt the country's Muslim and Christian minorities. However, when the groups petitioned the country's Supreme Court, citing the right to bury according to rituals as a fundamental right, the court in December refused to hear the appeal and dismissed the case [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4].

Pakistan, China to form joint parliamentary committee to oversee CPEC

(lm) Pakistan and China have agreed to set up a joint parliamentary committee for effective oversight of

projects under the multibillion-dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement. The decision was made during a virtual meeting between the speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly and the chairman of China's National People's Congress on January 27. [Dawn 1]

Against the larger backdrop of mounting security concerns for Chinese interests in Pakistan, the Chinese delegation also afresh pressed Islamabad to crack down on ethnic separatist groups in the provinces of Balochistan and Sindh to protect projects linked to the CPEC [see also AiR No. 37, September/2020, 3].

Coming as it does on the heels of a telephone conversation between Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi last month [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1], the meeting lends further credence to arguments that see Beijing significantly stepping up its efforts to boost the CPEC [see AiR No. 49, December/2020, 2].

But what is more, the meeting also comes after members of the opposition staged a walkout from a Senate session on January 22 after what they perceived as the lack of a satisfactory response from the government on key issues related to the CPEC Authority. [Dawn 2]

In this connection, both countries also established the China-Pakistan Agricultural and Industrial Cooperation Information Platform to synergize efforts of their agriculture sectors and related industries. [The Express Tribune]

Multinational maritime exercise AMAN-2021 set to start in February off the coast of Karachi

(lm) Pakistan's Navy will be holding the multinational naval exercise AMAN-2021 in the port city of Karachi next month. Conducted biannually since its initiation in 2007, the exercise will bring together naval forces from 41 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Japan, Turkey, Philippines, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. Significantly, Russia last December confirmed that its Black Sea Fleet will also participate in the drills, marking the first time in a decade that the Russian navy will take part in a joint military exercise with NATO members. [The Nation]

Separately, China on January 29 launched the second Type 054A/P frigate for the Pakistan Navy, with the

Pakistan Navy Chief Naval Overseer highlighting at the launch ceremony that induction of the new warship would significantly enhance the country's maritime defense and deterrence capabilities. [Global Times]

The Pakistan Navy contracted the construction of four Type 054A/P frigates from China since 2017, and the first ship was launched in August last year [see AiR No. 34, August/2020, 4]. Pakistan's fleet of Type 054A/P warships is scheduled to grow to four by 2021. [Dawn]

Nepal plans to deregulate oil business, prepares new petroleum law

(lm) Nepal's government is reportedly gearing up to enact a new petroleum law aimed at deregulating the country's lucrative oil market. Currently, no company is allowed to import, store and distribute various petroleum products other than the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), a state-owned trading enterprise. [The Kathmandu Post]

While early attempts to deregulate the country's oil market had failed, the government now may have another rationale behind the need for a new law: Imports of petroleum products accounted for more than 15 percent (i.e., $1,850 billion) of the country's total import bill in the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

But what is more, earlier this month, a delegation from India's largest commercial oil company, Indian Oil Corporation visited Kathmandu to lay the groundwork for the construction of the second cross-border petroleum pipeline. In September 2018, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and his Indian counterpart Prime Minister Narendra Modi had jointly inaugurated the first Nepal-India cross-border petroleum pipeline, the first in South Asia.

US climate envoy phones Bangladesh's foreign minister, discusses climate change

(lm) Recognizing that Bangladesh is exceptionally vulnerable to climate change, the newly appointed United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, has assured Dhaka of continued support and cooperation on tackling the effects of climate change. [South Asia Monitor]

During a phone conversation with Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on January 26, Kerry

also said this year's 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) might be the world's last chance to hit the target of carbon emission.

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of climate change. In the 2020 edition of Germanwatch's Climate Risk Index (CRI), Dhaka ranked seventh in the list of countries most affected by climate calamities during the period 1999–2018. [Germanwatch]

Maldives, China revive bilateral talks

(lm) On January 26, Maldivian Foreign Minister Ahmed Khaleel via video link co-hosted the 7th round of China-Maldives diplomatic consultations with China's vice foreign minister. The meeting comes after Khaleel together with the country's finance minister last November met with China's envoy to the Maldives to talk about economic recovery and development cooperation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China] [raajjee.mv]

Ongoing talks between China and the Maldives come at a time, when Male is said of have been drawn deep into China's so-called debt-trap diplomacy, as the country is estimated to have accumulated $1.5 billion in debt to Beijing, equivalent to 45 percent of the island nation's national debt. China has already reduced this year's loan repayment to $75 million from the scheduled $100 million under the G20 'Debt Service Suspension Initiative', and agreed to partially suspend debt repayment applicable to $600 million in loans for a period of approximately four years [see AiR No. 44, November/2020, 1].

The majority of these loan agreements were signed during the five-year tenure of now-incarcerated president Abdulla Yameen. At the time, China was embarking on its grand Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and therefore, financed several major projects between 2013 and 2018 [see e.g., AiR No. 39, September/2019, 4].

EU and Sri Lanka hold 23rd meeting of joint commission

(lm) The European Union (EU) and Sri Lanka virtually held on January 25 the 23 session of their EU-Sri Lanka Joint Commission. During the meeting, the EU expressed its "strong concern" over import restrictions

Colombo had put in place last April as a response to economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the Sri Lankan government confirmed its intent on amending the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). [Daily Financial Times]

Under the PTA, a person can be detained for periods up to 18 months (renewable by order every three months) without charge and without being produced before a judge. Human rights groups have long been criticizing the PTA, calling it an abusive law used to crack down on dissent and forcibly disappear people [see e.g., AiR No. 48, December/2020, 1, AiR No. 43, October/2020, 4].

Nepal awards hydropower project to Indian company

(lm) Chaired by Nepalese Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, a meeting of Investment Board Nepal (IBN) decided on January 29 decided to award the contract for construction of a hydropower project to India's Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam (SJVN). Delegated under the build–own–operate–transfer (BOOT) project delivery method, ownership of the project will be transferred back to the Nepalese government after 20 years of commercial operation. [South Asia Monitor] [Investment Board Nepal]

India receives consignment of 6,000 LMGs from Israel

(lm) The Indian Army has received the first batch of Negev Light Machine Guns (LMG) from Israel as it seeks to boost the firepower of frontline troops. In the first batch, 6,000 guns were delivered, while the remaining units are expected to be supplied by March. [Army Technology]

India's Defense Ministry signed in March last year a $120.57 million capital acquisition contract with Israel Weapons Industries, an Israeli firearms manufacturer, to procure a total of 16,479 LMGs under India's Fast Track Procedure.

Sri Lanka to establish diplomatic relations with Lichtenstein

(lm) The Sri Lankan government is considering establishing diplomatic relations with the state of Lichtenstein, a member of the United Nations and a member of the European Economic Zone (EU), with a low-income tax system and a developed banking system. [ColomboPage]

China, Philippines to cancel development contract

(nd) A contract to develop Sangley Point International Airport by a consortium of China Communications Construction Co. (CCCC), which is blacklisted by the US, and Philippine MacroAsia Corp., was cancelled due to "various deficiencies" in required documents. The project volume was US$10 billion. In September 2020, the Duterte administration insisted on pursuing the project despite US sanctions on CCCC and 23 other Chinese firms and individuals for being involved in the creation of artificial islands in the South China Sea. Then, it was emphasized that Duterte would "not follow the directives of the Americans because we are a free and independent nation, and we need investors from China." The recent decision to cancel the contract was commented to have no connection to the US decision. Last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the Philippines and signed a deal to build a cargo railway, which will connect former US base at Subic with the former US air base Clark International Airport. In 2018, the Philippines and China signed 29 bilateral deals with respect to infrastructure projects forming part of Duterte's "build, build, build" initiative. [Radio Free Asia][See also AiR No. 36, September/2020, 2] [The Diplomat]

On a separate occasion, Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana referred to the US "as a stabilizing force in the Indo-Pacific region and a counter-balance to China", adding that 2021 promises "a new era for the U.S.-Philippines relations under a new U.S. president who seeks to reclaim America's status as a world leader." [Radio Free Asia]

Philippines files diplomatic complaint against China's new coast guard law

(nd) China passed a law placing the coast guard under military command, giving it authority to open fire against foreign vessels in the South China Sea. The Philippines filed a diplomatic complaint. Earlier,

Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin commented the passage of laws in China was “none of our business”. His reverse came after news reports about Philippine fishermen being blocked by the Chinese coast guard to enter fishing grounds in the Spratly island chain. President Rodrigo Duterte was called upon to firmly “denounce China’s bullying immediately” and all ASEAN members to take multilateral steps against China’s aggression. In a statement on social media on Monday, the Chinese Embassy in Manila said “forces in the Philippines” had “fabricated and spread relentlessly fake news”, and it law has been “misinterpreted”, although it was “a normal domestic legislative activity.” [Radio Free Asia]

In the disputed waters, China claims almost the entirety of the South China Sea, overlapping with the exclusive economic zones of Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Taiwan. China’s claims were rejected in a tribunal ruling in 2016, which was emphasized prominently by Duterte last year for the first time. ASEAN and China are negotiating so far unsuccessfully for a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea. [Radio Free Asia]

In a call, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken reassured Philippine Foreign Minister Teodoro Locsin of their defense support with respect to the South China Sea, even in the event of an attack. He called China’s latest law a “threat of war”. Blinken reinforced the administration of Joe Biden’s rejects China’s claims in the disputed waters. [Reuters]

Australian-Thailand bilateral relations

(nd) As a joint declaration to enhance cooperation in defense and security, cyber affairs, anti-money laundering and transnational crime, the Australia–Thailand Strategic Partnership was signed late last year. The countries established diplomatic relations in 1952 and were founding members of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954. They fought alongside each other in the Vietnam War and managed to establish good relations with Vietnam, mostly through ASEAN, to which Australia became the first partner. During the East Timor crisis of 1999, Thailand was the first Southeast Asian country to support Australia and provide military help. Academic and cultural exchanges remain frequent, with the King of Thailand, Maha Vajiralongkorn, who studied at the Royal Military College, Duntroon.

Australia is also involved in regional initiatives, such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM+),

the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit, as well as a partner to regional counterterrorism initiatives, highlighting their shared geography, as well as similar security threats.

The countries' interests also overlap with respect to trade and education. Both are founding members of APEC, signed the Thailand–Australia Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) in 2005, the ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (AANZFTA) in 2010, and just recently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). In the current situation, Australia has an interest in political reform in Thailand, according to a recent collaborative Centre of Gravity paper between the ANU and Thammassat University, but moderately so, since Australia overall wants to remain on good terms with Thailand. [East Asia Forum]

Thailand to deport Burmese migrant workers

(nd) In an effort to contain the recent Covid-19 spike, Thailand deported 158 undocumented migrant workers from Myanmar, with more expected to follow. Despite the central meaning Burmese migrant workers have for the Thai economy, Thailand announced travel restrictions last March forcing thousands of foreign workers to leave the country, with 624 arrest on the Southern border. Following this move, illegal border entries have risen, resulting in arrests of Thai smugglers. The estimated number of illegal migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos is 500,000. End of 2020, the cabinet enacted a program to temporarily legalize such undocumented workers, with nearly 2 million having applied for the two-year extension. [Benarnews]

Malaysia, China to tighten relations

(nd) While the economic cooperation between China and Malaysia is largely seen as successful, Malaysia is likely to be pulled under tougher Chinese influence. China remains a mayor infrastructure investor and presents a possibility to help the heavily contracted economy amid the ongoing pandemic. With regards to Covid-19, China offered to place Malaysia on its vaccine priority list.

In light of this support, a declaration following Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit stated both countries' opposition to hegemony and maritime big power

presence, but supporting multilateralism, which was a clear allusion to US security policy in the South China Sea. This Chinese pull came amid an unreliable US during the presidency of former president Donald Trump. While Malaysia, as other ASEAN members, is reluctant to being positioned between the US and China, the support China can give amongst instable politics is more than the US is offering currently. [Nikkei Asia]

Chinese survey vessel data in South China Sea analyzed

(nd) According to analyses of ship data conducted by Nikkei, Chinese survey vessels increased the scope of research into foreign countries exclusive economic zones (EEZ). According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, prior consent is necessary, which was not sought in the cases identified. The automatic identification system data from 32 Chinese survey vessels for 12 months until November 2020 were analyzed. The data that is collected by survey vessels can both be used for civilian and military purposes, and is also useful for submarine operations. Specifically, increased action was registered near Guam, which has rich resources of cobalt, manganese and other seabed minerals. Given the US base in Guam, the conducted surveys seem to be rather security linked. Sometimes, survey vessels are accompanied by the Chinese Coats guard, sparking further tension. According to the International Maritime Organization, the US has 44, Japan 23 and China 64 registered survey vessels built in or after 1990.

This comes amid other Chinese actions to increase its influence over the Asia Pacific region. In September 2019, China established diplomatic relations with the Solomon Islands and Kiribati. The encroachment in the EEZs of Southeast Asian countries is registered almost on a daily basis. On the basis of historic rights, China claims almost the entirety of the disputed waters for itself, which was rejected by an international tribunal ruling in 2016. [Nikkei Asia]

Philippines: Duterte to criticize EU over Covid-19 vaccine

(nd) Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte accused the European Union (EU) of restricting exports of vaccines against Covid-19, particularly AstraZeneca, which

according to Duterte was “held hostage” by the EU. The British-Swedish drugmaker AstraZeneca announced a shortcoming in delivery last week, which prompted a critical response by the EU. Subsequently, the EU decided to tighter scrutinize exports, potentially blocking them for their own usage. The Philippines registered among the highest number of confirmed cases in Asia and has not managed to secure sufficient vaccines in comparison the other countries. Overall, Duterte alleged, the ASEAN member states would lack the economic power the EU has in order to secure vaccines. [Reuters]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

2-4 February 2021 @ 10:00 am MYT, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs, Malaysia

Malaysia Outlook Conference 2021

This virtual three-day conference will discuss three main areas. On day 1, it will discuss the outlook for economic recovery in 2021, day 2 will focus on the current political landscape in both Malaysia and the world, and day 3 will finish with a discussion on how COVID-19 has affected social behaviour and what we can learn from this.

Please visit [IDEAS] for more information and registration.

3 February 2021 @ 1:00 pm EST, Queen's University, Canada

Injustices in the Globalized Food System: Migrant Agricultural Work in Canada and Greece

This webinar held by Janet McLaughlin – Associate Professor of Health Studies at Wilfried Laurier University as well as co-founder and co-coordinator of the Migrant Worker Health Project – and Reena Kukreja – Assistant Professor of Global Development Studies at Queen's University – is part of the Gender Matters Speaker Series organized by the Department of Gender Studies at Queen's University.

If you are interested in joining this webinar, please visit [QU] for details.

3 February 2021 @ 11:00 am PST, Fraser Institute, Canada

Building a Sustainable and Resilient Indigenous Economy

In this webinar, Chief Commissioner Manny Jules will present a proposal on how to build a more sustainable and resilient First Nation economy supported by a competitive investment climate, more fiscal independence and indigenous institutions and standards. There will be a subsequent question and answer period.

For more information, please visit [Fraser Institute].

3 February 2021 @ 2:00 pm CET, European Council on Foreign Relations, France

The Geopolitics of the Green Deal

In cooperation with Bruegel, this webinar will mark the launch of a paper which maps out the geopolitical implications of the European Green Deal and lays out a foreign policy agenda to manage these geopolitical implications while leading climate change efforts globally. You can join the authors of the paper and an invited panel, as well as ask questions during the event.

Please visit [ECFR] for more information.

3 February 2021 @ 2:00 pm CET, Egmont Institute, Belgium

The Broken Umbrella: Shifting Security Architecture in Europe and the United States

This webinar will introduce the topic of the international workshop "The Broken Umbrella: Shifting Security Architecture in Europe and the Asia-Pacific," which is scheduled for October 2021 by analysing the EU-US relation in light of the recent US presidential elections. The workshop stands in a broader context with a changed international security structure, as both European states and countries in the Asia-Pacific region have raised abandonment concern against the backdrop of a perceived Russia and China threat.

For more information, please visit [Egmont Institute].

3 February 2021 @ 3:00 pm JST, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan

Clear the Path for a Sustainable Future – The Harmonious Coexistence between Nature and Humankind in the COVID-19 era

This symposium endeavours to seeks ways to consider the COVID-10 era, through messages from guest speakers who have worked for a long time toward resolving global environmental issues. It is part of the International Cosmos Prize Online Symposium.

Please visit [IGES] for more information.

4 February 2021 @ 10:00 am EST, Asia Society, United States

India Prospective: 2021

As the Indian Finance Minister presents the Union Budget 2021-22, Asia Society has partnered with KPMG for an event with industry leaders and CEOs of key companies who will be sharing their perspectives on the impact of the announcements on business and economy, as well as what to expect from US-India relations in 2021-22. Registration is mandatory.

For more information, see [Asia Society].

4 February 2021 @ 12:00 pm CET, Asia Society, United States

Indonesia: A State of Permanent Potential?

As Switzerland is voting in a referendum on the EFTA-Indonesia Economic Agreement, this webinar will take India under closer inspection, asking: What has the country aspired to and achieved in the last decades? What are its main challenges and global ambitions? And what role does the agreement with EFTA play amid its economic and foreign trade developments?

Please visit [Asia Society] for details and information on how to register for this event.

4 February 2021 @ 1:00 pm CET, Bruegel, Belgium

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: Greening the EU Trade?

In June, the European Commission will submit a proposal for a carbon border adjustment mechanism to protect the EU against distortion of competition and against the risks of carbon leakage. This has raised concern on international trade and European protectionism. Against this backdrop, this webinar will consider the role of such a mechanism in global trade and how to address the fear of protectionism.

Fore more information, please follow [Bruegel].

4 February 2021 @ 2:00 pm GMT, Res Publica, United Kingdom

Post Brexit food trade and food security

This webinar will discuss the “free trade and cooperation agreement” concluded between the EU and the UK and what it really means for food producers and consumers in the UK. Among other questions, it asks how to remove technical barriers to imports and exports, how to ensure that UK producers maintain access to the workers they need, how future trade relationships can help maintain high standards of food production, and how food businesses and

Government can work together to eradicate food poverty?

If you are interested in joining this webinar, please access [ResPublica].

4 February 2021 @ 1:30 pm CET, Clingendael, The Netherlands

Dealing with China on high-tech issues | European, US and Japanese Policies Towards China

This webinar is the first of a new series called "Dealing with China on high-tech issues" and will consider in greater depth responses of the US, the EU, and Japan to China's rise as a technological power, in particular convergences and divergences between the answers. Webinar #2 and #3 will take place on 18 February and 23 March, respectively.

More details are accessible under [Clingendael].

4 February 2021 @ 11:00 - 12:00 pm EST, CATO Institute, USA

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Taskforce Report

The long-awaited report of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) taskforce is now out. Join this event to hear Todd Zywicki, who chaired the taskforce, discussing its findings and recommendations and giving his perspective on how CFPB policies are likely to change under the Biden administration.

For more information, see [CATO]

5 February 2021 @ 9:00 am CET, European Council on Foreign Relations, France

The geopolitics of cybersecurity – and what it means for Europe and Japan

Against the backdrop of strengthened digitalization and cybersecurity threats used as an instrument of power in geopolitical rivalries, this webinar will consider the following questions: How have Japan and Europe – Poland in particular – been responding to

cybersecurity threats? How can they strengthen their cooperation efforts and enhance mutual understanding – also among likeminded democratic partners? How does the new Biden administration in the US fit into these cooperation efforts?

For more information and mandatory registration, please visit [ECFR].

5 February 2021 @ 11:00 am AEDT, Lowy Institute, Australia

The Biden era with David Ignatius and Amy Walter

You can join this webinar with David Ignatius of the Washington Post and Amy Walter of The Cook Political Report on the Biden administration, American unity and recovery after the Trump administration and Covid-19, and the early indications of President Biden's international politics.

Please visit [Lowy] for more information.

5 February 2021 @ 10:00 am EST, Hudson Institute, United States

The Afghan Peace Process: Progress or Peril?

As peace talks with the Taliban are at a standstill and violence continues, this online panel on the US peace agreement with the Afghan Taliban brings together Ambassador Husain Haqqani, Ambassador Javid Ahmad, and Bill Roggio to consider: Should the current negotiations be allowed to continue, or should the Biden administration rethink the current US strategy? Can the Taliban be taken at their word that they would not let international terrorist groups operate in Afghanistan once U.S. troops leave?

More information is available under [Hudson Institute].

8 February 2021 @ 6:00 pm IST, Centre for Policy Research, India

The 5-Institute Budget Seminar 2021: "The COVID-19 Budget: Unpacking the Union Budget 2021-22"

As the Indian Finance Minister will present the Union Budget on 1 February, this webinar brings together the heads of five institutions, the CPR, ICRIER, IDF, NCAER, and NIPFP, to present a reform and development perspective on the proposed budget, taking its implications for India's healthcare infrastructure into particular consideration.

If you are interests in joining this virtual discussion, please visit [CPR].

8 February, 2021 @ 1:00 - 2:00 pm ET, Freeman Spoil Institute for International Studies, US

How networks of influential individuals helped destroy one of the world's most durable democracies and legitimize a racist, authoritarian state

This event will discuss on a counterpoint to recent political developments, including the storming of the US Capitol, using novel evidence on 95,314 extreme right-wing supporters and Nazi collaborators in France, which experienced intense polarization in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, this event will show how democratic values can be undermined by exogenous networks of influential individuals, including heroes.

Please register here: [Stanford]

9 February 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:00 am AEDT, Asia Society, Australia

Gen A | Flashpoints: Southeast Asia and US-China Competition

As the world faces ongoing fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasingly powerful and assertive China, and a new US presidency to boot, what then lies in the balance for an ASEAN region seeking political and economic security at the start of an uncertain year? Are the great power scales leaning one way over the other for the region? Find the answers on these question at this online event.

For more information, see [Asia Society].

8 / 9 February 2021 @ 1:30 pm CET, Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada

T20 Italy Virtual Inception Conference

As part of Italy's 2021 Presidency of the G20, the Italy T20 Secretariat is hosting a two-day virtual inception conference. The theme is Rekindling Multilateralism in a post-COVID World.

Please follow [T20] for more information and registration.

9 February 2021 @ 6:30 pm IST, Asia Society, India

Beyond the Vaccine: Public Health System's Revival in India

This virtual discussion, which is part of the series "Re-engineering Public Health Delivery in India" that aims to discuss Indian Public Health system's contemporary challenges, will consider the learnings from past inoculation efforts and how they apply to the current Covid situation, how the private and the public sector can work together to improve India's healthcare infrastructure, and what measures will have to be adopted post-vaccination. Please register to join leading medical experts, public health practitioners, and business leaders in this discussion.

If you are interested in this event, see [Asia Society].

10 February 2021 @ 10:30 am IST, Observer Research Foundation, India

Follows Seminar Series | Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery: Seven Priorities for India

In this online event, Abhijit Mukhopadhyay, Senior fellow at ORF, will present his latest paper, arguing that India's economic recovery will depend on demand generation by direct government fiscal intervention for which he proposes a seven-point fiscal stimulus plan. There will be subsequent panellist's remarks as well as a moderated Q&A session.

If you would like to join this discussion, visit [ORF]. Registration works on a first come, first serve basis.

10 February 2021 @ 9:00 - 10:00 am PDT, Hoover Institute, Stanford, US

Political Thinkers in the Xi Jinping Era

China's establishment intellectuals are not widely known beyond its borders, These professors, journalists, writers, and artists try to shape public debate and state policy and more or less play by the Chinese Communist Party's rules while not acting as spokespeople for it. Ownby will describe the evolution of their "thought world," which has adapted to Xi Jinping's tighter strictures, and introduce a number of its key thinkers and themes.

Please register here: [Stanford]

11 February 2021 @ 12:00 - 1:00 pm GMT+1 , Asia Society , Switzerland

Talk at the Library: Swiss Correspondents in China

What is it like to work as a correspondent in China? What is the picture of China we get in Swiss media? How has the China narrative in Switzerland changed over the last decades and years? And what are the big topics China correspondents (dis)agree on? Are reporters free to bring up their stories? And how do they deal with surveillance and censorship? Find the answers at this online panel.

Please register here: [Asia Society]

11 February 2021 @ 7:30 - 8:30 pm GMT -6 , Asia Society, Texas

Deal or No Deal? The Future of U.S.–Iran Relations Under the Biden Administration

With President Joe Biden now in office, new questions arise about the U.S.–Iran relationship moving forward. The Biden administration will reportedly take steps to reenter the deal under the condition that Iran complies more closely with its regulations. Is Iran likely to reenter the deal? What will U.S. policy toward Iran look like under a Biden administration? And how do the broader relationships between Iran and the rest of the Middle East affect the U.S.?

For more information, see: [Asia Society]

11 February 2021 @ 12:00 pm CET, Bruegel., Belgium

Building Back Greener: Sustainable Finance and the Green Deal

This webinar asks: How could additional regulation incentivise investment while upholding the integrity of sustainable finance? The panel will also explore if the EU's finance agenda has already led to a reallocation of funds, and how regulations – such as disclosure and taxonomy – could further support sustainable development.

Please visit [Bruegel] for more information.

11, 15-19 March 2021, Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan

The 7th 3R International Scientific Conference (3RINCs)

Global academics, policymakers, and business representatives, especially those from the Asia-Pacific region, will come together for interdisciplinary discussions around green recovery policies. In the "Special Session" of the conference, participants will, with respect to various countries, share information about and discuss topics such as: analytical methods of plastic waste, organic waste and food waste management, disaster waste management, and waste management during/after COVID-19. The "General Session" will cover a wide range of topics and be a good opportunity to publish research outputs as part of the proceedings e-book. There is also an opportunity to submit a full paper for the special issue of a well-known international journal.
Abstracts may be submitted until 1 February 2021; registration is required.

If you are interested in this conference, please visit [IGES] for more information

12 February 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:00 am AEDT, Asia Society, Australia

China and Cultural Diplomacy through Art

This online talk will explore how art and cultural ties can be activated during a diplomatic stalemate.

Please register here: [Asia Society]

18 February, 2021 @ 4:00 pm ET , Berggruen Institute, US

A Conversation with Danielle Allen

This event will discuss about a new partnership between the UCLA Division of Humanities and the Berggruen Institute. This semiannual series will bring some of today's most imaginative intellectual leaders and creators to deliver public talks on the future of humanity.

For more information see, [Berggruen]

23 February 2021 @ 3:30 - 5:00 PM EST, Rand Corporation, US

The U.S.-Japan Alliance Conference Series, Year VII

This online conference will discuss the future of U.S.-Japan defense cooperation against the backdrop of Japan's cancellation of the Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense system and associated debates over whether or not to procure counter-strike or "enemy base attack" capabilities and the implications of these choices for allied planning on roles and missions.

For more information see, [RAND]

Recent book releases

Ted Cruz, ***One Vote Away***, Regnery Publishing, 256 pages, 24 Dec 2020, reviewed in [Merion West].

Mauro F. Guillen, ***2030: How Today's Biggest Trends Will Collide and Reshape the Future of Everything***, St. Martin's Press, 288 pages, 25 Aug 2020, reviewed in [Eurasia Review]

Calls

International Conference on Political Regimes and Political Stability, to be held in August 09-10, 2022 in Lagos, Nigeria, invites to submit papers. Closing date

for submissions is February 15, 2021. More details available at [Waset].

International Conference on Changes in Asian Politics, scheduled for April 05-06, 2022 in Cancun, Mexico, has opened its call for papers. Deadline for submission is February 15, 2021. For further information, see [Waset].

Jobs & positions

The **International Civil Aviation Organization** is offering the position of ***Regional Director***, Asia and Pacific Office (APAC). Closing date for applications is March 9, 2021. For more information, see [UN jobnet]

The **Australian National University College of Arts and Social Sciences** is hiring a ***Lecturer in Criminology***. Applications can be submitted until February 21, 2021. More at [ANU].

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