German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance
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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

The AiR team is presenting you this week's brief on the latest events and developments in domestic politics, constitutional law, human rights, international relations and geopolitics in Asia.

I wish you an informative read.

Special greetings are extended to readers in Georgia which celebrates the Day of National Unity this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

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

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

Main Sections

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

Law and Politics in East Asia

China: Hong Kong's prominent pro-democracy figures convicted over of participation in unauthorized demonstration

(dql) Concluding a 20-day trial in February and March, a court in Hong Kong has found seven leading pro-democracy politicians and campaigners guilty of organizing and taking part in an unauthorized march during a massive rally in the former British colony city in August 2019, attended by hundreds of thousands of protesters.

Among the convicted are Jimmy Lai, the owner of the Apple Daily tabloid known for its critical stance towards the Chinese government, and veteran activist Martin Lee, nicknamed "Father of Democracy" in Hong Kong as he was instrumental in founding the United Democrats of Hong Kong in, the city's first major political party. The other five include lawyer Albert Ho, barrister Margaret Ng, labor rights activist Lee Cheuk-yan and former legislators Cyd Ho and Leung Kwok-hung.

Sentences will be handed down later, with experts expecting prison terms of 12-18 months while the maximum possible sentence is five years. [Aljazeera] [CNN]

China: High profile corruption case

(dql) Yin Jiaxu, the former head of China North Industries Group Corporation (Norinco), the country's third largest weapons manufacturer, has been put under investigation for alleged corruption offences.

Yin is the latest high-level official from the defense industry to be caught in President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign that has seen over 1.3 million officials investigated since 2012.

In January, Hu Wenming, the former chairman of China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation, who oversaw the development of the Liaoning and Shandong aircraft carriers, had been expelled from the party for taking bribes and abusing his power. [South China Morning Post] [AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]

Norinco supplies weapons and equipment to all branches of the Chinese military and armed police force. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), it is the ninth-largest arms company in the world and third largest in China. [SIPRI]

China: Cinemas ordered to screen movies celebrating the Chinese Communist Party

(dql) China's National Film Administration has issued a directive calling on all cinemas in the country to screen and enforce viewing of movies celebrating the Chinese Communist Party as part of efforts to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Party's founding on July 1.

12 films have been selected, dealing with the Japanese invasion during World War II, the subsequent civil war against the Kuomintang government, the Korean War, and the Cultural Revolution era, and focusing on the themes of "loving the party, loving the nation and loving socialism." Until the end of year, at least two of these movies must be screened per week. [Variety] [Radio Free Asia]

Meanwhile, a film debuted last week telling the story of three young men, a Uyghur, a Kazakh and a Han Chinese, who come together to pursue their musical

dreams. The films depicts Xinjiang as model for successful ethnic integration.

The movie comes amid efforts of Chinese officials and state media to push the government's narrative about its policies in Xinjiang to counter accusations of forced labor and genocide in the region. These efforts included in 2020 a massive spread of this narrative on American social networks, as researchers at the International Cyber Policy Center of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) concluded in a recently published report on China's global effort to shape and influence international perceptions of the Chinese Government's human rights abuses in Xinjiang, including through the amplification of disinformation." [New York Times] [ASPI]

Japan: Communications Minister survives no-confidence motion

(dql) Japan's Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Ryota Takeda of the Liberal Democrtic Partu (LDP) survived a no-confidence motion in the Lower House, submitted by the opposition parties and voted down by the majority of the ruling coalition of the LDP and its junior partner Komeito Party.

Takeda was accused of dishonest remarks pertaining to ethics violations allegedly committed by senior officials of the Communications Ministry who were treated expansive dinners by the country's telecom giant Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Corp. (NTT) and Tohokushinsha Film Corp. The officials confessed the invitations, but denied to have granted any favors to NTT or Tohokushinsha. [Mainichi]

Japan: Low rank in Global Gender Index 2021

(dql) In the Global Gender Gap Index 2021, recently announced by the World Economic Forum, Japan ranks at the 120th place out of 156 countries, making it the worst country among major advanced economies. In terms of political empowerment, the result is even worse, with Japan at the 147th place. This is echoed by data of the Cabinet Office's White Paper on Gender Equality in 2020 according to which the ratio of female members in Japan's Lower House reached just 9.9%, while only two out of 21 Cabinet members were women.

The gender gap report, first published in 2006, quantifies gender equality evaluations of 14 items in four categories, including politics, the economy, education and health. The index is topped by Iceland, followed by Finland and Norway. Highest ranked Asian country are the Philippines at 17, followed by Lao PDR at 36 and Timor-Leste at 64. Iran occupies the lowest rank 156. [World Economic Forum] [Kyodo News]

For insights into factors for the resilience of patriarchal attitudes in Japanese society, see [CNN].

Law and Politics in South Asia

Bangladesh: Prime Minister Hasina slams anti-Modi protests

(lm) Following the violent protests set off by Indian Prime Minister Modi's presence at Bangladesh's 50th independence anniversary celebrations last week, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on April 4 came down hard on hardline Islamist group Hefazat-e-Islam, stressing that her government would not tolerate arson and violence in the name of Islam. [Punjab News Express]

Calling the clashes between protesters at government forces "very unfortunate and shocking", the prime minister also attacked the country's two major opposition parties, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami, alleging that both had provided support to the violent protests.

Prime Minister Modi had arrived in Dhaka for a two-day visit on 26 March, Bangladesh's Independence Day. It also coincided with the birth centenary of

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founder and father of Prime Minister Hasina [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4].

The same day, clashes between protesters and government forces began after weekly prayers in three cities – Dhaka, the capital; Brahmanbaria, near the Indian border, and the coastal city of Chittagong. Over the course of the following days, protests spread to other parts of the country, with Hefazat-e-Islam calling for a nationwide shut down on 28 March to protest the attacks on those who held rallies against Prime Minister Modi's visit [see AiR No. 13, March/2021, 5].

Bangladesh: Authorities take foreign envoys to new Rohingya camp

(lm) Ten Dhaka-based foreign diplomats on April 3 visited the remote island of Bhasan Char to get an idea of the living conditions of the more than 18,000 Rohingya refugees who have been relocated there since December of last year. [Anadolu Agency]

Bangladesh plans to relocate in phases 100,000 of the more than 1.2 million Rohingya refugees who have taken shelter in sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, where a major blaze in four conjoined camps earlier this month left at least 15 people dead and nearly 50,000 homeless [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]. The government has repeatedly justified the move by saying it would ease chronic overcrowding, ignoring concerns about the low-lying island's vulnerability to cyclones and floods [see AiR No. 49, December/2020, 2].

The first-ever trip to the island by foreign dignitaries was preceded by a United Nation (UN) delegation's three-day visit to the remote island. The UN earlier said it had not been allowed to carry out a technical and safety assessment of the island and was not involved in the transfer of refugees there [see AiR No. 50, December/2020, 3].

A five-member delegation of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also went to Bhashan Char days after the UN visit. At the time, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen had urged the OIC to help start the repatriation of Rohingya refugees to their home country Myanmar. [AiR No. 11, March/2021, 3]

Bhutan: Lawmakers draft gender scrutiny action plan

(lm) Bhutanese parliamentarians have recommended a 30 percent quota to ensure that women constitute at least a critical minority in political parties, executive positions constitutional bodies and the judiciary. To remove legal barriers while implementing the recommendations, participants of the three-day workshop by the Bhutan Women Parliamentary Caucus (BWPC) also proposed amending some legislation. [Kuensel]

In the latest Global Gender Gap Report 2021 of the World Economic Forum, Bhutan ranks 130 among 153 countries. While evaluating the progress being made by South Asian nations over the past 12 months, the report notes that only Bhutan, along with Nepal, has demonstrated small but positive progress towards gender parity. The number of women elected to parliament increased from 8.3 percent in the 2013 election to 15.2 percent in 2018 - the highest percentage of women in parliament in the country's history. [World Economic Forum]

Nepal: Key opposition party Nepali Congress takes lead to form new government

(lm) Nepal's biggest opposition party, the Nepali Congress (NC), has officially announced that it would attempt to form the next government, making a U-turn on the party's president's earlier decision to ensure a victory in a potential mid-term election, rather than seeking to topple Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's government. [The Kathmandu Post]

The decision – made by the NC's Central Working Committee on April 3 – comes after CPN(M) chairman and archrival of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, Pushpa Kama Dahal, had earlier announced that his party would withdraw its support from the government [see AiR No. 13, March/2021, 5].

While both NC and CPN(M) have signaled their intention move a no-trust motion against the prime minister in the House of Representatives, forming a new government coalition is not going to be a walk in the park. This is because the opposition People's Socialist Party, Nepal, (PSP-N), whose 32 lawmakers hold the key for any future government, is yet to align itself with either the prime minister or the opposition.

Pakistan: With its two major constituent parties at loggerheads, opposition alliance reaches crossroads

(lm) After maintaining an uncharacteristically stable union for months, the 11-party coalition of opposition parties, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), shows signs of disintegration, with its two major constituent parties at loggerheads. During a meeting of opposition parties on March 2, a five-party faction of the PDM announced to form a new opposition alliance in the Senate – skipping out on Senators from the PPP and the Awami National Party (ANP). [Dawn 1]

Previously, the appointment of former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4] as leader of the opposition in the upper house of Parliament had already widened the gulf between the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

Prior to Gilani's appointment, the PPP had agreed to giving the office of the opposition leader in Parliament's lower house to the PML-N as a quid pro quo for the nomination of Gilani for the office of Senate chairman. But the former prime minister lost the election to the incumbent after seven of his votes were rejected by the presiding officer. PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari then insisted his party had a right to nominate the leader of the opposition in the Senate and carried through with Gilani's election, despite opposition from the PML-N. [Dawn 2]

Moreover, the PDM earlier in March was forced to postpone its long march on the capital, Islamabad, after the PPP had sought more time to reconsider its position on the issue of mass resignations and said it would first consult internally with the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]. While the PML-N, alongside with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) (JUI (F)) was quite keen to resign en masse from Parliament, the PPP was understandably reluctant considering it is in power in Sindh and the second largest party in the Senate. [Pakistan Today]

Sri Lanka: Authorities to ban groups promoting LTTE ideology and separatism

(lm) The Sri Lankan government is reportedly preparing to ban all organization that are involved in promoting separatism or are affiliated with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). [Daily Mirror]

Formed in 1976, the LTTE was an ethnic Tamil militant organization that aimed to secure an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The LTTE, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by 32 countries, including the European Union, Canada, the United States, and India, was militarily defeated in 2009 following a 26-year campaign by the Sri Lankan military.

By the end of the Sri Lankan Civil War, an estimated 800,000 Sri Lankan Tamils had left the country for various destinations, including Europe, North America, and Asia. The Sri Lankan government accuses several Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora groups to be affiliated to the LTTE, most notably the Tamil Youth Organization, an international organization with branches in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and several other countries.

Coming as it does in the wake of the recently concluded 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC), the announcement assumes added significance. During the spring session, the UN HRC decisively approved a mandate to collect information and evidence of war crimes committed during the Sri Lankan Civil War. It also accepted a resolution, which ramps up international monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and mandates the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) to collect, consolidate and preserve evidence for future prosecutions and "develop possible strategies" for pursuing prosecutions of the perpetrators. In the run-up to the session, some of the foreign-based diaspora groups had openly rallied against Sri Lanka. [AiR No. 13, March/2021, 5]

Sri Lanka: Provincial Council polls to be held before year's end, says government

(lm) The Sri Lankan government has sought Cabinet approval for the introduction of a new electoral system – a mix of proportional representation and the First Past the Post System – as it is planning to hold the long-overdue Provincial Council Elections in all nine provinces before the year's end. [Daily Mirror] [The Times of India]

The previous government under then President Maithripala Sirisena had enacted a piece of legislation demarcating provincial boundaries, but failed to get the recommendations through Parliament [see AiR (3/8/2018)]. In 2019, then, the Supreme Court held unanimously that it was not lawful for the local polls to be held in the absence of a redrawing of the boundaries of electoral districts.

The announcement assumes added significance, considering that the government in January had decided to postpone the Provincial Council Elections, citing the ongoing coronavirus pandemic [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. There is a good case to believe, that is, that the resolution adapted at the recently concluded 46th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC) has triggered this change of heart.

For amidst Colombo's hectic diplomatic outreach seeking support from member states of the UN HRC, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa had reportedly urged the relevant parties to expedite the Provincial Council Elections by either withdrawing the Provincial Council Amendment Bill or by revising it. Although India abstained from voting, it supported the international community's call in the resolution for the implementation of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka (13A) which aims at creating provincial councils, while also enabling Sinhalese and Tamil as national languages [see AiR No. 5, February/2021, 1]. [The Hindu]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: Two suspicious deaths call for probe

(nd) Two recent deaths, one in police custody allegedly through torture, one in quarantine, have prompted their families and human rights groups to call for a probe by the authorities. The bloody and bruised body of the man in custody went viral and suggested the use of torture. According to local rights groups, torture is a common method for the police to obtain answers. Families rarely receive justice, and if then but only upon intervention by Prime Minister Hun Sen. The second person allegedly killed himself in quarantine, but authorities provided little information. Moreover, this is not the first death in quarantine, with another person dying in January allegedly due to a heart attack after falling and hitting his head on a toilet bowl, but again authorities released little information about the circumstances. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia: Further arrests and raids after church attack

(nd) Following the suicide bombing at a cathedral in South Sulawesi on Palm Sunday, Indonesian supporters of Islamic State (Isis) are calling for more attacks. The two attackers were the only deaths in the attack, and 20 wounded. The attack was attributed to Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), the largest Isis-linked group in the country. Counterterrorism police on Monday discovered five home-made bombs during raids in Jakarta and West Java. Security forces have upgraded their security in the week, which is holy both for Christians and Muslims.

JAD has thousands of sympathizers and supporters in the country and has been behind all major terror attacks in Indonesia over the past five years. Police and non-Muslims are their main targets. According to analysts, attacks will continue since they are rooted in a 2015 call by late Isis leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who was killed in 2019 by US special forces in Northern Syria. Following an estimate, there are currently 70 JAD members in South Sulawesi. [South China Morning Post]

On Wednesday, a woman entered Indonesia's National Police Headquarters in Jakarta and shot at officers before being shot dead by police. The 25-year-old university dropout was described as lone wolf and affiliated with the ideology of the Islamic State. Jemaah Islamiyah was considered the major terror network in

Southeast Asia, responsible inter alia for the bombings on the island of Bali in 2002, but was significantly weakened in crackdowns over the past decade. [The Diplomat]

Following the attack, further arrests and separate raids have led the police to links to the banned Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). Its leader Rizieq Syihab, who recently returned from self-exile in Saudi Arabia, is currently on trial for alleged health protocol violations. According to the government, at least 35 members or former members of the group were related with terrorism and 29 of them were convicted. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: The future of the internet and freedom of speech

(nd) The revision of the Electronic Information and Transaction Law (ITE Law), enacted in 2008 and revised in 2016, has been an often-debated project. Journalists and academics have criticized how the law threatens freedom of speech and the ambiguous provisions lead to undue criminalization of online speech. In February, President Joko Widodo announced a revision to remove ambiguous articles, without mentioning which ones. Defamation, hoaxes and hate speech have the greatest potential to suppress freedom of speech, while another Article allows the government to restrict internet access, which was inserted in 2016 and used during the political crisis in West Papua in June 2020. Analysts suggested a revision to also target regulations on internet access restrictions by the government. Also, the ITE Law did not appoint a designated independent regulatory body to regulate internet usage. The law states that the government has the authority to oversee the provision of the internet, raising questions on the independence of internet regulators, especially when opposition politicians or activists are involved. Given current public statements, a future revision is more likely to rather provide formulations of interpretation guidelines for enforcement by governmental institutions than a deeper revision. [East Asia Forum]

Laos: Political nepotism

(py) High-ranked positions in Laos's government have been mainly given to the children from influential families, with 7 out of 17 cabinet members coming from only the well-off Siphandone and Phomvihane

families. Scholars pointed out that such practice of nepotism in the country invalidates the importance of qualifications for the jobs. To investigate such topics seems impossible as Vientiane's inspection office has little power to examine the top officials. Laos' ranking in the Transparency International index has dropped from 130th in 2019 to 134th in 2020. The scope of limited transparency also extends to other realms as the government has denied access to the case of state violence against the Hmong and rejected all alleged wrongdoings by international observers. The Hmong, who fought under US advice against the communist forces in the Vietnam War, reported growing violence from government troops to clear the site for development and foreign investment. The US state of department also reported cases of arbitrary arrest, extrajudicial killings and torture in police custody in Laos. [Radio Free Asia 1] [Radio Free Asia 2] [Radio Free Asia 3]

Malaysia: Prime Minister to mitigate exit of UMNO

(nd) According to Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, an understanding was found with all ministers of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), in order to stay in his cabinet. On Sunday, UMNO president announced a withdrawal of support for Perikatan Nasional (PN) was possible anytime. Muhyiddin commented he convinced the ministers with reference to the fight against the pandemic and the people's interest. Some ministers hold key positions, possibly affecting the government's rehabilitation plan. UMNO is the biggest political party in Malaysia and supporter of Muhyiddin's coalition after the collapse the Pakatan Harapan government. However, their relation worsened lately, after two UMNO MPs had publicly withdrawn their support, and the party announced it would run the next general election on its own. [Channel News Asia]

Malaysia: Youth to sue the government and election commission

(nd) Following the decision to delay voting for 18-21-year-olds, eighteen teenagers sued Malaysia's prime minister, the federal government and the Election Commission. The Commission announced last week that the pandemic delayed the automatic registration of voters, making it possible for 1.2 million young citizens to only cast their vote after September 2022.

With their lawsuit, the teenagers aim at being able to vote by this year July, due to the delay being illegal. In July 2019, parliament under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad approved to lower the voting age and promised to implement it within two years, but his government collapsed in the following March. Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin declared his administration played no role in the postponement. [Benar News]

Malaysia: Najib to appeal sentence

(nd) Malaysia's Court of Appeal opened the appeal brought by former prime minister Najib Razak against his conviction on corruption charges linked to the 1MDB state fund scandal. Najib had pleaded not guilty to all charges but was sentenced last year to 12 years in jail and a $50 million fine. His defense will argue the court erred in dismissing counterevidence. So far, at least six countries have opened investigations into 1MDB, involving high-level officials and major financial institutions. [Reuters]

Malaysia: Rail link construction to be rerouted to original plan

(nd) The government will reinstate the original, northern alignment for the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL), which was first approved in 2017 by the Barisan Nasional (BN) government. The northern side will give the line a higher capacity and connectivity compared to the south line previously planned by the Pakatan Harapan (PH) government, while resulting in reduced costs for the overall railways. The ECRL is expected to be fully operational in 2027.

The PH government decide in 2018 to suspend the project due to its costs. In 2019, they found an agreement with China to construct a shorter route at lower costs. [Channel News Asia]

Myanmar: Trial against Aung San Suu Kyi started

(lf) With the start of her trial, after two postponements, deposed de-facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi faces new charges under a colonial era official secrets law. Her lawyer stated she was of good health, after being able to meet her for the first time since her new house

arrest. The new charge is of more serious nature than the previous charges laid against her, carrying a jail term of 4 years. The next hearing will take place April 12. [Reuters 1], [Reuters 2],[Radio Free Asia][AiR No. 7, February/ 2021, 3],[AiR No. 8, February/ 2021, 4]

Myanmar: Second month of anti-military protest raises concerns for possible civil war

(lf) Protests continue against the military takeover, with the death toll rising to unprecedented numbers. Over 500 civilians have been killed, including 43 children, with the youngest victim only 6 years old. The international community, human and children's rights groups have voiced their outrage over the casualties of children. In consequence, the US has decided to abandon all trade with Myanmar. The trade between the two countries makes up around 1,4 billion $. The UN envoy has expressed great concerns that the country might spiral into a civil war and urges the UN security council to take actions. [South China Morning Post], [The Diplomat 1], [Radio Free Asia],[Associated Press]

Myanmar's envoy to the UN, who infamously defied the junta's orders last month, urged all foreign investment to be temporarily stopped. [Nikkei Asia]

Workers for the Red Cross have been arrested, intimidated and injured on the front lines while trying to treat mounting civilian casualties. Not verified videos show security forces assaulting medics. [Reuters 1]

As the violence rises, thousands are trying to flee the country into neighboring India or Thailand. Following increased fighting in the north with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), people fled to India, where an order to send back refugees was withdrawn after a public outcry. The airstrikes, the first of such in 20 years, then targeted territory held by the Karen National Union (KNU), which earlier seized a military base, forcing some 7,000 people to flee their homes. People fled to Thailand and were reportedly sent back, with Thai authorities speaking of a voluntary return. UN officials were not granted access. [Reuters 2] [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

There is a chance looming for the formation of a federal army amid the support of many ethnic armed organizations for the Civil Disobedience Movement. Most notably though was the silence of the United Wa

State Army (UWSA) — the nation's largest armed militia, which is under Chinese control and often supplies other EAOs with arms mostly from China — and the Arakan Army (AA). The AA already did not respond to the disputes following the general elections in November. This suggests that the AA is rather looking for a deal of conditional autonomy with the Tatmadaw. [Asia Times]

On Thursday, the military has widened the internet cut, maintaining only fixed line internet services and cutting wireless access, which is used by most people in Myanmar. Access via mobile data has been cut since the beginning of the protests. [Reuters 3] Being faced with a complete cut of internet access, protesters started the FederalFM Radio Station on April 1. The station aims to inform about the current events and educate on federalism, countering military propaganda. It will first be reachable in Yangon only but is planned to be expanded further. Since the station does not dispose of a license, Actions are likely taken against it according to a state-run newspaper report. [Voice of America]

China has declared its support for ASEAN's efforts to positively influence the situation in Myanmar. This comes after a Chinese representative had attended last week's military parade, which resulted in the deadliest day since the coup. ASEAN's common response remains weak. The member states remain split over actions to be taken, despite the situation being potentially destabilizing for the whole region. [The Diplomat 2], [The Diplomat 3], [Deutsche Welle] [Reuters 4]

Meanwhile, the group of deposed lawmakers from the National League for Democracy, the Committee for Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), announced a new civilian government to run counter to the junta. CRPH also announced a new federal constitution, which will also meet the longstanding autonomy demands of the regional ethnic groups. The "unity government" declared the military-drafted 2008 constitution void upon the release of their interim constitution. It is an attempt to mitigate the widespread distrust between civil society and the ethnic groups of the country. Parallelly, the move is aiming to gather support against the military. [The Diplomat 4] The idea of a "federal army" is looming and would be a substantive threat to the military, but could also end in a civil war. Considering General Min Aung Hlaing's spoken unwillingness to hand back power, this development warrants further escalation.

Taken from most recent statements, the international community seems more determined to intervene in

Myanmar, while it remains unclear how. Suggestions of "no-fly zones" to stop the military from bombings carry either a possibility for escalating tensions by upholding it or highlighting weaknesses by ignoring violations. Arms embargos would be undercut by China and Russia, while targeted economic sanctions are so far not supported by China, India and Japan. A military intervention outside the UN seems unlikely. [The Diplomat 5]

Philippines: Mining sector transparency to be investigated by international initiative

(ldl) The Philippine mining sector, besides not being too significant for economic growth, has killed many individuals protecting the land, displaced indigenous peoples, and damaged the environment. But in 2012, the Philippines joined the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) to try to increase the accountability of the mining sector. In April, the EITI will examine the extent to which the Philippine mining sector has implemented processes that ensure its accountability in relation to civil society and the environment, and enables civil actors to participate in and contribute to how mining is done in the country. Local communities' right to be consulted before the construction of a mine has been violated frequently in the past. Mining is central to the Philippines yet untapped resources of gold, nickel and copper deposits. [The Diplomat]

Philippines: Conflict renews between the military and Bangasmoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF)

(ldl) Clashes have continued since the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) fired mortars at alleged Bangasmoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) areas on March 18. The conflict has forcibly displaced more than 66,000 people from their homes in the southern Mindanao province.

The BIFF separated from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) when, in 2014, the latter agreed to cease armed struggle against the government in exchange for the establishment of an autonomous region. The region, called Bangasmoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), was established in 2019 and its government endeavored to deter insurgent militancy.

The BARMM government is collaborating with the MILF and the AFP to disband the BIFF. This is part of the Philippine government's commitment to eliminate 'communist' insurgency by 2022. But the government has repeatedly been accused of using its anti-insurgency campaign to escape accountability after harassing, arresting, and killing activists and Duterte critics. [The Diplomat]

Singapore: Convicted blogger to fundraise damages

(nd) Following the conviction of blogger Leong Sze Hian to pay S$133,000 (US$98,867) in damages for defamation of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong for sharing a news story on Facebook without a personal comment, the entire sum was crowdfunded within 11 days. The shared article falsely alleged Lee's involvement in the Malaysian sovereign wealth fund 1MDB scandal and was shared by thousands. While Lee argued he filed the lawsuit to protect his reputation and integrity, observers said he was increasingly following his father's footsteps in suppressing opposition opinion by using lawsuits. Observers therefore argue, that the legal move has hurt Lee's political standing, particularly among voters below 35 years of age, who have already started to turn on his ruling People's Action Party (PAP). In the country's July 2020 election, PAP retained power while losing nearly nine points to the Peoples Voice (PV) opposition party, which was founded by Leong's lawyer, with analysts estimating that more than half of young voters had cast their votes for opposition parties. [Asia Times]

Thailand: Fresh lese majeste charges

(nd) After accusing the government of primarily working with a royal-owned company for the production of vaccines, opposition politician Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit was charged with defaming the monarchy, Thailand's lese majeste law. Inter alia, Thanathorn said in a Facebook livestream that the government mishandled the reaction to the pandemic and granted an unfair advantage to Siam Bioscience, owned by King Maha Vajiralongkorn. Siam Bioscience will produce 61 million doses of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine, making it the main supplier.

At the same time, leaders of pro-democracy protests remain in jail, awaiting their trial after having been denied bail multiple times. Five more activists were charged with lese majeste for confronting the royal motorcade, which was carrying Queen Suthida in October. The activists denied their intention to involv violence against their regent.

The youth-led movement emerged last year and voiced unprecedented criticism against the monarchy, and called for Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's resignation as well as a constitutional reform. [Nikkei Asia] [Channel News Asia]

Thailand: Rising household debt

(nd) Amid the ongoing pandemic, Thai household debt has risen to 14 trillion baht, or 89.3% of gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of December 2020, a rise from 78.1% in 2017, making it the highest since the central bank began keeping records in 2003. The amount of debt does not only affect financial stability but also consumer spending, which accounts for half of Thailand's GDP. The latest spikes in Covid-19 cases have fueled fears that the economic rebound will be lengthier than expected. Household debt has been high for a long time, but the pandemic has left millions of people out of work and unable to pay their debts. [Reuters]

Vietnam: Facebook user sentenced to four years in prison for criticizing government online

(lm) A Facebook user was sentenced to four years in prison on March 31 for sharing his grievances online about how the local government had handled a dispute over his family's land.

Taken into custody in September of last year, the defendant had complained to provincial authorities and other government departments to ask for compensation payments after his family's house and land had been confiscated to make way for construction of a wastewater plan. Frustrated by officials' refusal of his requests, the defendant then shared his frustrations on Facebook, leading to his arrest. [Radio Free Asia]

In a one-day trial, meanwhile, another Facebook user was sentenced to ten years in prison, with three years

of probation to be served after his release. The man was convicted under Article 117 of the 2015 Criminal Code for sharing posts and videos calling for the establishment of a "National Congress" to replace the current National Assembly. [Taipei Times]

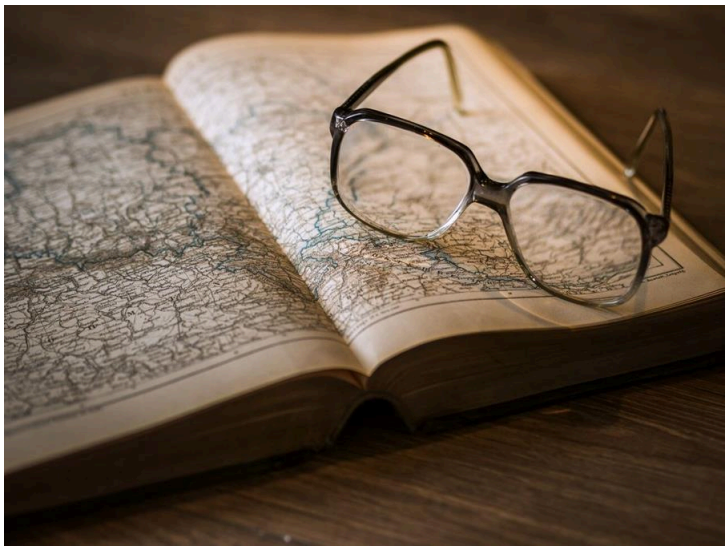
Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam low on US report on human rights

(nd) According to an annual US State Department report, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam imposed heavy restrictions on freedom of expression and the press last year, holding political prisoners and interfering with the rights of citizens to peacefully protest. All three record cases of arbitrary arrest, unlawful killings, and torture in police custody. Laos last year tightened its grip on online freedom, removing critical postings. While corruption was investigated, human rights abuses remained unpunished.

After the dissolution of the opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), the beginning of 2021 saw a politically motivated mass trial in absentia against leaders and activists. The government also engages in efforts to censor free media, through control of permits and licenses for journalists and media outlets, pushing them into self-censorship.

For Vietnam, the report mainly pointed to restrictions on political participation and a lack of independence of the judiciary, as well as arbitrary arrests and killings by the government. Reportedly, political prisoners were tortured in custody. Running up to the Communist Party Congress in January 2021, the government cracked down on independent journalists, publishers, and Facebook personalities to mute criticism. [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



US Department of State's reports and remarks over human rights in China

(dql) The US Department of State has released its annual "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" for 2020, criticizing China for a long list of human rights abuses over the past year, with a focus put on Beijing's "[g]enocide and crimes against humanity .... against the predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang,' but also addressing increased censorship amid the coronavirus pandemic and efforts to tighten control over Hong Kong. [US Department of State 1]

The release of the report was preceded some days earlier by China's own assessment of the human rights situation in the US. The report denounced – among others – systematic racial discrimination against ethnic minority groups, police brutality, a record high in gun trade and shooting incidents, incompetent pandemic containment. [Global Times]

In a separate development, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that Hong Kong does not warrant preferential treatment under US law, given that Beijing "has continued to dismantle Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, in violation of its obligations under the Sino-British Joint Declaration and Hong Kong's Basic Law." He added that especially Beijing's adoption and the Hong Kong government's implementation of the National Security Law "have severely undermined the rights and freedoms of people in Hong Kong." [US Department of State 2] For the text of the report, see [US Department of State 3]

Blinken made the remarks after announcing the submission of the US Department of State's 2021 Hong Kong Policy Act Report to Congress. The Hong Kong Policy Act, enacted in 1992, allows the United States to

continue to treat Hong Kong separately from China for matters concerning trade export and economic control after the 1997 Hong Kong handover – including lower trade tariffs and a separate customs and immigration designation, among other differences –, as long as Hong Kong is considered to be sufficiently autonomous. In May 2020, Blinken's predecessor Mike Pompeo already told Congress that the former British colony did not qualify for the special status. [AiR No. 22, June/2020, 1]

In a related move, the US State Department also sharply criticized the changes to Hong Kong's electoral systems as recently approved by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, condemning them as a move which "further erode[s] political participation and representation in Hong Kong," and "def[ies] the will of the people in Hong Kong," and "den[ies]Hong Kongers a voice in their own governance." It cited for its condemnation particularly the reduction of the number of directly elected members of the Legislative Council (LegCo), Hong Kong's parliament, and the establishment of a committee to vet candidates for office based solely on their loyalty to Beijing. [US Department of State 4]

China-US cooperation on climate change and Iran?

(zh) Scheduled for April 22 and 23 and hosted by US President Joe Biden, China is yet to decide whether to participate in the virtual "Leaders Summit on Climate" almost two weeks after it received the invitation, a long with 38 other countries and the European Union, including Canada, France, Germany, Russia, and the UK. Besides China, other Asian countries include Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Japan, Saudi-Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam. [White House]

In its first official response to the invitation, China's Foreign Ministry last week only confirmed that it is "carefully studying," the invitation. China's hesitation to immediately accept the invitation is seen by observers as highlighting China's problem of exposing itself to expectations of the international community on fulfilling its ambitious climate commitments as well as of finding the balance between cooperation and rivalry with the Biden administration. Last year, China, the world's largest carbon dioxide emitter, pledged to become carbon neutral by 2060, causing both cheers and scepticism over the feasibility to achieve this goal

among the international community. [South China Morning Post 1]

Last week, China refused to accept an invitation to take part in a similar meeting on climate change, organized by the UK and attended by ministers from around 35 countries. [BBC]

Meanwhile, the US special presidential envoy for climate John Kerry has also expressed his hope to work with China to tackle climate change during a visit to the United Arab Emirates. However, he also made clear that none of the issues US having with China is "held hostage" or "engaged in a trade" for the climate issue. [South China Morning Post 2]

In a separate development, the US has expressed its interest in working with China to curb Iran's nuclear program, saying Iran is one of the areas for Washington to "narrow tactical alignment" with Beijing. The statement came after China's foreign minister Want Yi concluded during his recent Middle-East tour a 25-year agreement exchanging China's 400 billion USD for Iran's oil supply. [South China Morning Post 3] [AiR No.12, March/2021, 5]

For critical assessments of climate change becoming the next conflict spot between China and the US rather an area of cooperation, see Deborah Lehr in [The Diplomat] arguing that climate change is "deeply intertwined with the technology competition that now bedevils U.S.-China relations, creating new fronts in the battle over economic power and influence globally."

China-Canada relations: Ottawa steps up efforts to secure critical minerals

(zh) Amid the latest tit-for-tat sanctions between China and Canada over accusations of human rights violations in Xinjiang, Ottawa is stepping up efforts to protect supply chains in critical minerals and other industries.

Canadian Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry Francois-Philippe Champagne called for more cooperation among the Five Eyes allies – the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada – to coordinate a united front on China, adding that important areas of corporation need to include policies on critical minerals and sensitive technology as well as a ban on Huawei technologies.

Champagne's call comes shortly after Canada tightened its foreign investment rules out of national

security concerns, allowing for a national security review for proposed takeovers of companies specializing in critical minerals, sensitive personal data, and investments by "state-owned or state-influenced investor".

The country's mining executives and national security experts, furthermore, have warned of China's domination of strategic mineral supplies, urging the federal government to increase its own strategic leverage against China's foreign policy tactics by taking advantage of Canada's abundance of natural deposits of minerals. [National Post][Reuters][Straits Times]

Meanwhile, China's Consul General in Rio de Janeiro, Li Yang, has dismissed Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as a "boy" in a tweet, accusing him of turning Canada into "a running dog of the US". "Running dog" is in Chinese a pejorative term often used to describe a lackey. The outburst came after Canada, along with the US, UK, and European Union imposed sanctions on China for the human abuses in Xinjiang. [The Guardian]

BBC China correspondent flees China to Taiwan

(zh) Senior BBC China correspondent John Sudworth has fled China and relocated to Taiwan citing legal threats and intense pressure from Chinese authorities over the coverage of sensitive subjects including Covid-19 origins and Xinjiang human rights abuses.

Commenting on the relocation, BBC said in [twitter] that "John's work has exposed truths the Chinese authorities did not want the world to know". The European Union (EU) has condemned Chinese authorities' "harassment" to foreign journalists. Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said Sudworth will "feel that Taiwan is a free and democratic nation", while China's Foreign Ministry identified a "guilty conscience" over producing "immoral fake news and disinformation" about China as the "only rational explanation" for leaving China so abruptly. [New York Times] [South China Morning Post] [CGTN]

In February, China banned banned BBC World News from broadcasting in the country, a move widely seen as retaliation against British media regulator Ofcom revocation of Chinese state broadcaster China Global Television Network's (CGTN) licence to broadcast in the UK. [AiR No. 7, February/2021, 3]

Sudworth's departure is part of a larger exodus of foreign journalists from China, with Taiwan becoming a preferred a destination for these journalists. Since last year, at least 18 foreign correspondents were expelled by China, some of which were framed as retaliation for the Trump administration's restriction on the number of Chinese journalists working in the US. 39 correspondents and 21 outlets have moved to Taiwan, including the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and BBC. [Taipei Times]

WHO-China joint inquiry into Covid-19 origins leaves few answers

(zh) A World Health Organization (WHO)-backed joint inquiry into the origins of Covid-19 has given no clear verdict, saying the most probable explanation was that the virus had jumped from animals to humans through an intermediate animal host. The WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has called for more research and data access, citing sources telling him that the investigation encountered difficulties in accessing raw data. [Economist][South China Morning Post]

The US and 13 other countries including Australia, Canada, Japan, and the UK have issued a [joint statement] expressing concerns that the investigation was "significantly delayed" and "lacked access to complete, original data and samples".

In response, the leader of China's side of the WHO-China team Liang Wannian rebuffed the criticism, saying no scientists had perfect information and the team had "visited all the places, met all the people, studied all the facilities and read all the documents, as they had wished". [Reuters][Washington Post]

UK pushes for hard stance towards China at G7 trade ministers' meeting

(zh) G7 trade ministers of the US, Germany, the UK, France, Canada, Italy, and Japan have issued a joint statement pledging collective action to address "harmful industrial subsidies" and other market-distorting practices without directly mentioning China by name. The statement echoed US president Joe Biden's goal to "build back better" from the pandemic and underscored the commitment to make progress on the World Trade Organization (WTO) reform and

issues including climate change and digital economy. [Politico]

UK Trade Secretary Liz Truss, meanwhile, was more outspoken and urged the WTO to "get tough on China," and to change related rules, arguing that it is no longer justified to designate China as a developing country. She also suggested to tighten human rights clauses in trade agreements. [South China Morning Post]

The UK is currently holding the presidency of the G7 group of nations.

US, Australia discuss Taiwan defense

(zh) The US and Australia are discussing potential joint responses to a war over Taiwan, according to Michael Goldman, the charge d'affaires ad interim at the US embassy in Canberra, who spoke about a potential role for Australia in a Taiwan contingency in an Australian National University podcast. He made clear that both sides would cooperate "not only in making our militaries interoperable and functioning well together, but also in strategic planning," adding that strategic planning "covers the range of contingencies that you've mentioned, of which Taiwan is obviously an important component." [Guardian] [Taipei Times]

Goldman remark comes at a time when high-ranking US military officials are warning of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan in the near future, with Commander of the US Pacific Fleet Admiral John Aquilino, nominated to become commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, saying that China's threat to invade Taiwan is serious and more imminent than widely understood, possibly as soon as within the next six years. [AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]

The statement comes also amid highly strained Sino-Australian relations over trade restrictions China has imposed in response to Australia's criticism of human rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and to Canberra's call for an independent investigation into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a latest development of the trade dispute between Beijing and Canberra, nearly 9000 liters of Australian red wines has been seized by Chinese authorities in Shenzhen and new duties of between 116.2% and 218.4%t have been imposed on wines in containers of up to two litres. [South China Morning Post] [AiR No.13, March/2021, 5].

Taiwan to purchase upgraded missiles from US

(zh) Taiwan has decided to order an upgraded version of missiles – the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) interceptor – from the US to "boost defense capacity." The missiles are to be delivered in 2025 or 2026 and be deployed by the end of 2026. Taiwan had received its first PAC-2 systems in 1997, with upgrades to PAC-3 being implemented since 2007. [South China Morning Post] [Taipei Times]

The US Department of State, meanwhile, reiterated its commitment to deepening ties with Taiwan, adding that it will consider opportunities for mutual visits of senior officials to advance bilateral relations. The statement comes shortly after US ambassador to Palau John Hennesey-Niland joined a visiting delegation from the Pacific Island nation of Palau, including Palauan President Surangel Whipps Jr., that traveled to Taiwan March 28 to launch a Taiwan-Palau travel bubble. [Taipei Times]

The visit made Hennessey-Niland the first US ambassador to visit Taiwan in an official capacity since Washington switched diplomatic recognition to Beijing from Taipei in 1979. [The Diplomat]

In response, Beijing dispatched om Monday 10 warplanes, including four J-10 and four J-16 jet fighters, along with a surveillance plane and an anti-submarine plane, through Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) to the southwest of the island while a carrier group, led by the Liaoning, the country's first aircraft carrier put into active service, was carrying out "routine" drills in the waters near Taiwan. [RT] [Aljazeera]

Cross-strait relations: Taiwan wary of China stealing semiconductor technology

(zh) Taiwan has accused China of stepping up its efforts to steal technology and poach talent from the island's world-leading semiconductor industry to boost its own industry's self-sufficiency. The risks of the 'red supply chain' – a reference to the color of China's Communist Party – have increased by the escalating trade war between the US and China as well as Washington's sanctions on the Chinese telecoms equipment giant Huawei Technologies, said Taiwanese Economy Minister Wang Mei-hua, adding that Taiwan's

chip workers are a “natural target for poaching China has latched onto since they have rich experience and speak the same language.” [South China Morning Post]

Despite attempts from the US and China to boost its chipmaker industry, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and South Korea's Samsung Electronics remain the dominating giants in the industry. [Nikkei Asia] reports at least $30 billion per year for a minimum of five years are needed for the US, China, and the EU to have a reasonable chance of succeed in being comparable to Samsung and TSMC, making the goal to competing with TSMC and Samsung “economically unrealistic.”

Japan-China relations: Foreign Ministers clash over disputed islands and Xinjiang in telephone talk

(dql) Ahead of Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga’s visit to the US for talks with US President Biden next week, where both leaders are expected to extensively discuss China’s assertive moves in the South China Sea and the East China Sea, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Japanese counterpart Toshimitsu Motegi held a telephone talk on Monday, which according to Japan’s Foreign Ministry was requested by Beijing.

In the conversation Motegi urged China to address human rights issues concerning the Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang, as well as to stop its intrusions into Japanese waters around the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. [Kyodo News]

In response, Wang called on Japan to show “basic respect" for China’s internal affairs and warned Japan against sanctioning China over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Suga has come under pressure to join other major democracies in imposing sanctions on China over human-rights violations, but has thus far shied away from bowing to this pressure. Wang also reiterated China’s stance on the Diaoyu Islands and South China Sea and reminded Motegi of Japan’s obligations to fulfill the 1978 Japan-China Treaty of Peace and Friendship. [CGTN] [Bloomberg Quint]

The phone conversation came shortly after Japan sent a destroyer and patrol aircraft to gather information and monitor the movements a Chinese carrier group – including the aircraft carrier Liaoning, one Renhai class stealth guided missile destroyer, two Luyang III class guided missile destroyers, one Jiangkai II multi-role

frigate and one Fuyu class fast combat support ship – which was spotted passing the waterway between Okinawa and Miyako Island and heading towards the Pacific on Saturday morning. [South China Morning Post]

Japan-Germany relations: "2 plus 2" set for next week

(dql) Japan's and Germany's defense and foreign ministers are set to meet next week to hold the first ever "2 plus 2" dialogue between the two countries. The ministers are expected to exchange ideas in order to elevate a "free and open Indo-pacific" against China's assertiveness in the region as well as to formally conclude a military information protection agreement. [Republic World]

In September last year, Germany adopted its policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region, signaling a "new page" in the country's foreign policy and international relations. Under the guidelines, Germany is planning its first dispatch of a frigate ship to the region in this summer. A possible port call by the vessel in Japan is expected to be among the topics to be discussed in their upcoming meeting. [Nikkei Asia]

Japan already holds "2 plus 2" talks with two other European power, France and the UK, and welcomes the talks with Germany as an opportunity to further bolster its position vis-à-vis China with the European Union's largest economy. [Nippon]

South Korea, US, Japan hold three-way meeting

(nm) South Korean, US, and Japanese top officials last week held their first trilateral meeting after US President Biden took office to discuss, amongst other topics, issues with regards to North Korea, peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, as well as supply chain security. The meeting was held in Maryland, United States.

In a joint statement following talks on Friday, the three raised concerns about Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes and reaffirmed their goal to address denuclearization through "concerted trilateral cooperation," as well as the "need for a diplomatic solution to the issue." They further stressed the "imperative of full implementation" of relevant UN

Security Council sanctions against the North. [Korea Herald 1]

The meeting comes amid the final stages of the Biden administration's North Korea policy review. A US State Department spokesman last week stated that denuclearization will be at the centre of any US policy toward the North. Efforts by Washington to engage with Pyongyang diplomatically have so far remained unresponsive. South Korean National Security Adviser Suh Hoon also used the opportunity to hold bilateral talks with his Japanese and US counterparts. In his talks with US representative Jake Sullivan, Suh pointed at the positive effect that good inter-Korean relations might have on denuclearization talks. [Korea Herald 2] [Yonhap]

According to one US officials, the three parties were also set out to discuss the current semiconductor shortages, considering that international chip supply has increasingly become a national security concern. Although Taiwan is the world's biggest contract chipmaker, South Korea is also home to the headquarters of key industry players, such as Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, coming in close to Taiwan capacity-wise. [Nikkei Asia]

South Korea and Japan currently struggle to revive positive bilateral ties due to trade issues and wartime history. In an effort to address the conflict, South Korean and Japanese diplomats held closed-door meetings in Tokyo last week, one day after Chung had also expressed hope that he would meet with his Japanese counterpart sooner than later. The United States is currently pushing for closer trilateral ties with South Korea and Japan, an effort to counter growing competition with China, as well as a defiant North Korea. [Korea Herald 3] [Korea Herald 4]

South Korea-China relations: Bilateral talks amid Sino-US tensions

(nm) On Saturday, South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi met in the Chinese city of Xiamen in South Korea's first ministerial level meeting in China since 2017, signaling an effort to rebuild relations after a fallout over the deployment of the US THAAD missile defence system in South Korea. Both sides agreed on planning new security talks and discussed a possible visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to the South. Beijing also called for increased co-operation on trade, high-tech development, and North Korea, as a number of leading

Chinese firms were hit by US sanctions. While Beijing voiced support for a China-South Korea free trade agreement, strengthening 5G technology and other high-tech issues, Seoul's statement remained more vague, referring to "strengthening substantive cooperation" and "a range of forms of cooperation." Both sides did, however, express hope to hold a trilateral summit with Japan. Concerning North Korea, they vowed to seek a process for a "political" resolution.

South Korea has recently seen its geopolitical value rise as it has become a focal point in the competition between China and the United States. Since the new Biden administration is seeking to strengthen its alliances in the Indo-Pacific and as concerns over a nuclear threat by North Korea grow, the South is increasingly seen as a strategic player in the region. Chung has, however, stated the US and China are equally important partners, adding that this stance is anything but "strategic ambiguity." While the US is considered South Korea's "sole ally" and the cornerstone of its diplomatic and security policy, China is the country's largest trading partner. [Korea Times] [South China Moring Post] [Nikkei Asia] [Korea Herald]

North Korea keeps conducting illegal cyber activities to generate revenue, UN panel says

(nm) Last week, a UN report concluded that North Korea had continued to violate UN Security Council resolutions last year by conducting illegal cyber activities to support the country's development of weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, the North is also said to have violated international sanctions by illicitly importing oil several times the amount allowed under UN resolutions.

According to one member state, the value of virtual assets illicitly obtained by the North between 2019 and 2020 amounted to about $316 million. The UN expert panel pointed at the Reconnaissance General Bureau, North Korea's intelligence agency, as responsible for the cyber threats. [Korea Herald 1]

North Korea recently launched what appeared to be two short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea in spite of having maintained a self-imposed moratorium until then. The UN Security Council decided to take no action on the testing and chose to seek dialogue and negotiations instead, foregoing a joint statement. South Korea's defence ministry, meanwhile,

announced it would be able to fully intercept North Korea's missiles, pointing at the South Korea-US missile defence system. [Korea Herald 2] [Korea Times]

The North has become even more isolated during the global pandemic, following highly restrictive coronavirus measures, including completely sealing off the country's borders. Last week, the Russian Embassy in Pyongyang stated about half of all 25 foreign embassies in North Korea had closed their missions due to pandemic-related challenges, with only nine ambassadors and four diplomats remaining, according to the embassy's official Facebook page. Simultaneously, all foreign workers of humanitarian organizations have left the country. As reported by multiple sources, however, China and North Korea have recently potentially begun to revive trade. [Yonhap] [Nikkei Asia]

Pakistan puts decision to resume India imports on hold

(lm) Just a day after announcing plans to allow limited imports of cotton, sugar and wheat from India, Pakistan did a swift U-turn over the decision, linking any "normalization" in ties to New Delhi restoring Indian-administered Kashmir's special status. Bilateral trade has been suspended since August 2019, but a series of signs of rapprochement had recently indicated a potential thaw in relations. [Reuters] [The Hindu] [The Straits Times 1]

The U-turn was considered an embarrassment for Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, in particular for the newly appointed Finance Minister Hammad Azhar, who on March 31 had announced clearances by the Economic Coordination Council (ECC) for imports of sugar and cotton from India. The decision came against the backdrop of high domestic prices coupled with low yield in Pakistan last year. [The Indian Express]

In late February, India and Pakistan had jointly announced to revive a 2003 ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control (LoC) – the de facto border that divides the disputed Kashmir valley between the two countries – and all other sectors [see AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1]. News reports later claimed that the ceasefire was the first milestone of a four-step "roadmap for peace" between the two South Asian neighbors, which was agreed upon during secret talks brokered by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that began months earlier [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4].

To be sure, even the short-term durability of this ceasefire remains uncertain, considering that progress in bilateral relations has usually been short-lived and this checkered opening will not be the last. Still, within weeks of the announcement in February, there has been some movement on multiple fronts with renewal of sports ties and discussions on the Indus Water Treaty.

Moreover, Prime Minister Khan and Pakistan's Chief of the Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, had both recently adopted a softer tone, with the latter speaking of the need for both Pakistan and India to "bury the past and move forward", whilst attending the first Islamabad Security Dialogue [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4].

Most recently, in yet another sign of thawing relations, Prime Minister Khan on March 30 replied to a letter written by his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, calling for the creation of an "enabling environment" between the two countries to resolve outstanding issues. The Indian prime minister had written to Khan on the occasion of Pakistan's Republic Day on March 23, also calling for peaceful relations between the two nuclear-armed rivals. [The Straits Times 2]

India: Maoist insurgents kill more than 20 Indian security forces in ambush, officials say

(lm) At least 23 Indian security forces were killed in an ambush by Maoist militants in the central state of Chattisgarh, officials said on April 4, India's deadliest engagement with the far-left insurgent group, often referred to as the Naxalites, since 2017.

Members of India's elite Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) unit, and the Special Task Force were carrying out an anti-insurgency operation on April 3 in a forested border district when they were attacked. During a four-hour gun battle, a further 31 Indian personnel were wounded, with seven in critical condition. The rebels also suffered heavy casualties but had carried away their dead and injured. [New York Times]

Inspired by Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, the insurgents trace their roots to an armed peasant revolt against the Indian government in 1967 and use violence against the state in the name of championing the cause of the country's poor indigenous communities. The group once was able to assert

control over vast swathes of land in central and eastern India - establishing a so-called "red corridor" - that in 2006, India's prime minister declared them the country's "single biggest internal-security challenge." In Chhattisgarh state, where the latest attack took place, years of neglect by Indian authorities have helped to isolate the local villagers, making them open to overtures by the rebels. [Deutsche Welle]

Russia, Pakistan have developed strategic trust, says Pakistani envoy

(lm) Pakistan and Russia have gradually built "strategic trust" and have developed institutional mechanisms to enhance their bilateral coordination and cooperation, according to Islamabad's ambassador to Russia. Speaking at a seminar jointly organized by two think tanks, the envoy claimed that bilateral trade had last year touched an all-time high of $730 million. [Dawn]

While a cooling relationship with Washington has already pushed Islamabad closer to China, which is investing about $60 billion in infrastructure in Pakistan, Islamabad's relations with Moscow are fairly new, evolving for less than a decade. An important part of the increasingly close bilateral relations are agreements on gas supply and infrastructure to Pakistan, one of the world's fastest growing liquefied natural gas (LNG) import markets [see AiR No. 45, November/2020, 2].

Accordingly, the envoy referred to the North-South gas pipeline, a 1,100 kilometers pipeline stretching from Lahore to the port city of Karachi, as a future flagship project for Pakistan-Russia economic relations. However, US and European sanctions against Russian state-owned conglomerate Rostec, as well as a dispute over pipeline transport fees, have held up the $2 billion project since it was signed in 2015. Since then, Moscow has routinely changed the structure of its stake – most recently this March - to avoid sanctions. Construction of the pipeline, which was recently renamed to "Pakistan Stream", is now expected to begin in July this year. [Upstream]

Indian Army delegation in Bangladesh for multinational military exercise

(lm) A 30-member contingent of the Indian Army on April 4 arrived in Bangladesh to partake in the "Shantir Ogroshena" joint military exercise, alongside with

military personnel from Bhutan and Sri Lanka. The eight-day military training is being held to commemorate the birth centenary of the country's founding leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and 50 years of independence from Pakistan[see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]. [The Times of India]

Further, military observers from the United States, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Singapore will be in attendance throughout the exercise.

India, United States hold joint special forces, naval exercises

(lm) Indian and United States special forces on March 30 concluded the 11th edition of the joint military exercise Vajra Prahar. Conducted in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, the joint training exercise included sharing of best practices and experience in areas such as joint mission planning. [UrduPoint]

Separately, naval and aerial forces of the two countries on March 28 started a two-day exercise in the eastern Indian Ocean region. The joint exercise focused on such operations as anti-submarine warfare, joint air operations, and command and control integration. The US navy was represented by the Theodore Roosevelt Carrier Strike Group (TRCSG). [Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet] [United Press International]

Both exercises occurred on the heels of US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's scheduled visit to India earlier in March. During talks in New Delhi, Austin and his Indian counterpart Rajnath Singh agreed to expand bilateral military cooperation, and discussed India's plan to purchase 30 armed versions of the US-made MQ-9B Predator drones as well as a large order for over 150 combat jets for the Indian Air Force. [AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]

India, Australia hold 6th dialogue on disarmament, non-proliferation and export control

(lm) India and Australia on March 30 held the sixth edition of their joint Dialogue on Disarmament, Non-Proliferation, and Export Control through video channel. As per the statement by India's Ministry of External Affairs, both sides exchanged views on the issues in the areas of chemical, nuclear, biological

disarmament and non-proliferation, outer space security, conventional weapons, and strategic export control. [Jagran Josh]

Indonesia, Japan to sign military equipment and technology transfer agreement

(nd) Indonesia and Japan signed an agreement for the export of Japanese-made military equipment and technology. The agreement comes amid rising tensions in the South China Sea due to Chinese expansive claims. In an effort to modernize its defense, Indonesia reportedly held talks with Japan in November last year already, possibly supplying new-generation destroyers to the Indonesian Navy. Details of the defense agreement remained unreleased. Both underscored the importance of upholding the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific based on the rule of law."

Worried about an effort to change the status quo, Japan voiced concerns about China's new coast guard law, allowing its coast guard to open fire on foreign vessels in the disputed waters. The law was criticized by other Southeast Asian countries – Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam – and the US. China and Japan have territorial dispute over the Senkaku Islands, which China calls the Diaoyu Dao. [Benar News]

Laos: Benefitting from strategic interest in the region

(py) Laos has been receiving both monetary and military assistance from the great powers in recent years. This trend seems to stay intact as Southrast Asia gains more strategic importance in the years to come. Since December 2020, Russian troops have been getting rid of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in an area of around 500 hectares in Xieng Khouang province to build a new airport and military facility. The airport will be both for civilian and military use. In 2019, the two nations also held a joint-military exercise after Russia donated an air force training center to Laos. Russia has also agreed to provide Laos with the Russian-made Sputnik V vaccine, enough to cover 25 percent of Laos population. Experts said the efforts show the country's importance to Russia in strengthening defense cooperation in Southeast Asia. Recently, the US has also provided Laos with medical and laboratory

equipment worth 600,000 USD through the Unites States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since the outbreak, the US has contributed almost 8 million USD to help Laos combat the spread of Covid-19. Parallelly, Laos has also recently received a new batch of Chinese Sinovac vaccines containing around 800,000 doses. [The Laotian Times 1] [The Laotian Times 2] [Radio Free Asia]

Malaysian Foreign Minister to clarify remark on China

(nd) Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein, during a trip to China, said to his counterpart "You will always be my elder brother", which prompted widespread criticism of the remark suggesting Malaysia was subordinate to China. Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim criticized the minister and urged him to withdraw his remark. Hishammuddin clarified his remark was directed at his counterpart Wang Yi, who was older and more senior, and therefore his personal "elder brother". He added: "Rest assured that Malaysia remains independent, principled and pragmatic in terms of our foreign policy – founded on the values of peace, humanity, justice and equality. We will continue to contribute meaningfully towards a just and equitable community of nations."

Hishammuddin's visit was part of visits paid by Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines, who were most vocal about the coup in Myanmar and were seeking for a solution together with China. China and Malaysia have ongoing disputes over conflicting claims in the resource-rich South China Sea. [South China Morning Post]

US to ban Malaysian gloves

(nd) As reaction to reports of forced labor, the US decided to ban products by Malaysia's Top Glove. The company was rocked by several scandals, including a coronavirus outbreak in dormitories that infected 5,000 migrant workers, living closely together and sleeping in bunkbeds. Last year, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) had already banned gloves from two of Top Glove's subsidiaries. The company's shares went down by 5% following the news. The Malaysian authorities have already charged the company following the poor living conditions of its staff. [Asia Times]

Japan to stop aid payments to Myanmar

(nd) Myanmar's top donor Japan announced to stop issuance of new aids in response to the coup, but will not impose sanctions. Sanctions were imposed so far by Britain, the EU and the US, targeting specific persons as well as military-owned companies. Japan traditionally entertains close ties to Myanmar and is reportedly the fifth-largest foreign investor in the country. [Channel News Asia]

Philippines: Chinese vessels remain in the disputed South China Sea, illegal facilities spotted in Philippines' islands

(ldl) The Philippines confirmed that most of the Chinese vessels that were stationed nearby Whitsun Reef did not depart away from these disputed areas, but rather dispersed across other Philippine islands in the South China Sea. Moreover, four vessels from China's People's Liberation Army (PLAN) were also sighted at the Panganiban Reef, a Philippine exclusive economic zone. Furthermore, the Philippines also found that several facilities had already been illegally built on some of the areas that Chinese vessels are patrolling around. [Manila Bulletin]

The Philippines continues to demand China leave the area, but China still claims sovereignty over it and has warned Philippine aircrafts and ships against getting any closer. Meanwhile, the Philippines affirmed its commitment to strengthen ties with the United States, with whom the Philippines shares a Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT). [The Diplomat] [Channel News Asia]

China committed to continue promoting Covid-vaccine cooperation with the Philippines and expressed willingness to work with ASEAN countries to regulate multilateral relations in the South China Sea. However, China's desire to 'maintain stability in the region' probably requires that multiple countries relinquish their claims over the South China Sea. Most recently, the Philippines filed a diplomatic protest against China, less than two weeks after lodging another diplomatic protest. [Manila Bulletin] [Inquirer]

According to Defense Chief Delfin Lorenzana, China intends to occupy more territory, given the continued presence of militia in the disputed waters. The Chinese boats were located in the Whitsun Reef, within the Philippines' 200-mile exclusive economic zone, and

sheltering from bad weather conditions, according to Chinese diplomats. This was rebuked by Lorenzana, after 44 vessels were still at the Whitsun Reef despite improved weather conditions. In 2016, an international tribunal dismissed China's extensive claims to the South China Sea. China does not recognize the ruling and has built artificial islands equipped with radar, missiles batteries and hangars for fighter jets. [Nikkei Asia]

Thailand to give humanitarian support to refugees from Karen State

(nd) Thailand announced to provide humanitarian assistance to 1,200 people who fled the military strikes in Myanmar's Karen State. Most are children, women, elderly, and patients. This followed an unusual statement of Thailand, expressing grave concern about the violence in Myanmar.

Immediately after the air strikes, about 3,000 people fled to Thailand, but many of them returned, and according to Thai authorities did so voluntarily. Recently, the military announced to attack border positions in Shan State, bordering with Thailand, letting fear rise among the thousands of internally displaced people (IDP) housed in camps. [Radio Free Asia]

Singapore's Foreign minister to visit China

(py) Minister of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan recently made a two-day visit to Fujian where he met China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. During the visit, the two have discussed a way forward for post-Covid recovery and the mutual recognition of health certification, which is hoped to enable cross-border travel between the two countries besides the existing "fast lane" scheme for business and official proposes. Dr Balakrishnan also shared Singapore's concerns over the ongoing bloodshed in Myanmar. Though they both hope for de-escalation and constructive dialogues between the military junta and the people, Dr Balakrishnan and Foreign Minister Wang Yi agreed that they should hold fast to the principle of non-interference of domestic matters.

Singapore's response to the events in Myanmar is getting louder. Experts pointed out how the statements are using harsher language to describe the situations and actions of the military junta. Some argued that Singapore's growing concerns were due to

the amount of investment in Myanmar, to which Singapore currently is the largest investor. [Reuter] [Channel News Asia 1] [Channel News Asia 2]

China hosts four maritime nations for talks

(nd) China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi hosted his counterparts from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, in an effort to counter US diplomatic efforts in the region. The invitation to the maritime nations comes in the wake of renewed tension in the disputed South China Sea. While Japan has signed agreements for the exports of Japanese military technology with Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines, the US has increased partnerships with its Southeast Asian partners, and met with the Quad, consisting of the US, Australia, India and Japan. In October last year, Wang already took an intensive trip in the region, inter alia to promote Chinese vaccines.

While China is aiming at positioning itself well with the regional powers, and has an important role to play in mitigating the crisis in Myanmar, the US will also aim to deepen relations, with the ASEAN states looking for stable relations to both powers. [The Diplomat]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

7 April 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:15 a.m. BST, International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

UK–EU strategic and security cooperation after the trade deal and the pandemic

In this webinar, Nick Crawford will discuss the prospects for UK–EU strategic and security cooperation with IISS experts Professor François Heisbourg, Sarah Raine, Dr Bastian Giegerich and Fenella McGerty. What are the prospects for defence cooperation between the UK and the EU, and EU member states? Have fractious negotiations over the trade deal and vaccine supply done lasting damage to the relationship between them? And what appetite is there for UK–EU cooperation in strategic industries and on wider geopolitical challenges?

Please register here: [IISS]

8 April 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

China's Vision of a Digital Order

China's aspiration to become a high-tech superpower poses impending challenges to others. How do countries respond to this China challenge? How do they strike a balance in their relations with China and the United States? How to live with an increasingly confident and assertive China in a digital world? Find the answers to these question at this webinar.

More about the event at [ISEAS].

8 April 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-1), Center for American Progress, USA

Putting Racial Justice at the Heart of Climate Action: A U.S. and U.K. Perspective

The Center for American Progress will discuss the interconnected nature of pursing racial justice and climate justice, both in the UK and the US, considering that while the root causes of climate change and racism are interwoven, the solutions equally are.

Please visit [American Progress] for more information.

8 April 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+9), Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan

The Indian Ocean in the Indo-Pacific framework: How islands shape great power competition

This webinar will examine the role of small islands in the Indian Ocean, a lesser examined theater in the Indo-Pacific framework as compared to the Pacific. It will take a closer look at the geopolitical implications and the interplay between islands and their security partners, asking about current security dynamics, the implications for the Indo-Pacific region, and how small islands can shape great power competition.

Follow [SPF] for more information and registration.

8 April 2021 @ 7:30 p.m. (GMT+5.30), Centre for Policy Research, India

Discussion on: Islam, Family Planning and Politics in India: Discussing "The Population Myth"

This discussion will take a closer at three focus topics: the history of family planning policy with a focus on the emergency, reflection on the compatibility of Islam and family planning, and a discussion of comparative statistics on the use of contraception.

For more information and registration, visit [CPR].

8 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+8), Philippine Institute for Development Studies, Philippines

Social Protection, Digital Divide, and Other Issues in Online / Platform Work

This seminar will try to take a closer look at the relationship between religion, identity, historical networks, and sacred landscapes to understand the formation of religious thought and practice in Pakistan. Albeit focusing on Pakistan, it also seeks to challenge prevalent assumptions about the configuration of borders and to explore the connections between distinct religious spaces and practices in South Asia.

Please visit [UMich] for more information.

8 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), European Centre for International Political Economy, Belgium

What Digital Futures for Europe? Mapping Scenarios for Digital Ecosystems and Entrepreneurship

In this webinar, speaker Meelis Kitsing argues that Europe needs to foster entrepreneurship in the digital economy. He will look at different scenarios for Europe's digital futures, considering what they would mean both for business growth as well as Europe's influence on the global stage.

For more information, see [ECIPE].

8 April 2021 @ 9:30 a.m. (GMT+2), German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Germany

Franco-German Observatory of the Indo-Pacific

Despite the mainstreaming of the concept of an Indo-Pacific region, the views and approaches of actors withing the region generally remain underexplored by Westeners and Europeans in particular. This webinar seeks to fill the vacuum by discussing visions of the region, its geo-strategic position, and the place of China, the US, and Europe within the framework withthe Indo-Pacific's key actors.

If you wish to join the event, please visit [GIGA].

8 April 2021 @ 11:30 a.m. (GMT+2), Egmont Institute, Belgium

La diplomatie d'hier á demain

This webinar – which will be held in French – invites Ambassador Raoul Delcorde to discuss the history of diplomacy, deconstructing traditional and contemporary ideas, roles, actors, and developments. Please register by 5 April.

For more information, visit [Egmont Institute].

9 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+9), Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan

Prospects for US Climate Policy in the Biden Administration

As more and more countries announce their intention to become carbon neutral, this seminar series provides up-to-date information on climate change-related policy which can become useful for private actors and local governments alike. This part of the series will take a closer look at the United States and the Biden administration's climate policy.

Please visit [IGES] for more information and registration.

9 April 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT+5), National Endowment for Democracy, United States

Forced Labor in Turkmenistan's 2020 Cotton Harvest

Against the backdrop of a new joint report by leading independent Turkmen human rights groups, this webinar will examine systemic forced labour and extortion during the 2020 cotton harvest in Turkmenistan.

For more information, please follow [NED].

9 April 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Hudson Institute, United States

Sino-US Tech Competition: Where Does Europe Stand?

Considering that the tech sector has become a vital part of the competition between the US and China, Europe's potential to play a leading role remains questionable. In this webinar, experts will therefore discuss Europe's innovative industrial basis capability and the challenge of remaining at the top of technological developments, asking: How can the EU best grapple with its weak position in the global technology market?

For more information, follow [Hudson Institute].

9 April 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Myanmar's Crisis: What are the Stakes?

Sixty days after the military in Myanmar seized power, ousting the elected government and parliamentary representatives and later nullifying the results of the 2020 general election, the situation of the Myanmar people protesting against military rule continues to be desperate. This webinar will discuss Myanmar's political and social crisis in the context of the state of terror and loathing of "national politics" in Myanmar, and the constitutional implications of the Feb 1 coup.

Further information available at [ISEAS].

9 April 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), The German Marshall Fund of the United State, USA

How can France, Germany, and Poland Revitalize Transatlantic Relations? As the countries of the Weimar triangle France, Germany, and Poland celebrate the 30th anniversary of their trilateral partnership this year, they have a key role to play in shaping a revitalized transatlantic agenda. During this online conversation, the ambassadors of the three Weimar countries in the United States will discuss their views on the new U.S. administration, the opportunities to jointly address today's major challenges, and the leading role the Weimar countries can play in strengthening transatlantic relations.

Please register here: [GMF]

12 April 2021 @ 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Institute for Policy Studies, USA

The Wealth Hoarders

This online book launch will introduce Chuck Collins' new book, *"The Wealth Hoarders: How Billionaires Pay Millions to Hide Trillions*" providing an insider account of how the wealth industry is doing everything it can to create and entrench hereditary dynasties of wealth and power. An expert on U.S. inequality and the racial wealth divide, Chuck Collins is the Director of the Program on Inequality and the Common Good at the Institute for Policy Studies, where he co-edits Inequality.org.

For more information, see [IPS]

12 April 2021 @ 4:00 5.15 p.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The Impacts of Financial Inclusion: From a global review of reviews, what can we know about Southeast Asia?

The financial inclusion of low-income people is promoted by development institutions, governments and private sector actors as a driver of poverty alleviation, welfare enhancement, macroeconomic transformation, and various other positive effects. But what do we really know about the impacts of the extension of financial services, globally and in Southeast Asia? This presentation will deliver and contextualize the findings of a first-of-its-kind study in international development, a systematic Review of Reviews of the impacts of financial inclusion in low- and middle-income countries.

Find more about the event at [ISEAS].

12-14 April 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT+1), Barcelona Center for international Affairs, Spain

Urban Mobility after Covid-19: Long-term strategies for the sustainable mobility transition in European cities

This series of three events focussed on sustainable mobility in Europe's cities will bring together policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to discuss 1) long-term planning in urban mobility transition, 2) urban access regulations and low-traffic neighbourhoods, and 3) the socioeconomic dimension of the mobility transition.

If you wish to join the discussion, please see [CIBOD] for more information and registration.

13 April 2021 @ 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen

Greenland's minerals and China's green energy dominance

This online event provides a discussion on the new Policy Brief "Greenland's minerals to consolidate China's rare earth dominance?"

Please register here:[DIIS]

13 April 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

How to Understand China: Civilization or Socialism?

To understand China, this online talk argues that we need to understand how "Socialism" and China's 20th century experience of struggle shapes Chinese identity and policy in the 21st century. It suggests that we need to understand Socialism less as a textual ideology and more as a lived-experience of struggle and loyalty, especially among elite Communist Party members. It will examine how this Socialism guides policy-making in China, and will consider how it impacts China's view of Southeast Asia.

More about the event at [ISEAS].

14 April 2021 @ 8:00 a.m. (GMT-7), Berggruen Institute, USA

After the Gig: How the Sharing Economy Got Hijacked

This event is to discuss alternative visions for how the sharing economy can be organized and how we can get there.

If you are interested in joining this event, please register here: [Berggruen]

14 April 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Sweden

Perspectives on the arms control agenda in 2021: Obstacles and opportunities

This virtual panel will explore the current state of nuclear arms control and disarmament efforts. Also, it seeks to consider the latest development sin the control of chemical and biological weapons, emerging technologies, as well as international arms transfers.

If you are interested in this event, please see [SIPRI] for more information.

14 April 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Asia Society Policy Institute, United States

Redefining the Rules: The Future of WTO Subsidies Reform

As the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures faces challenges, such as a global rise of subsidies and government spending amid the pandemic, it was not set out to address, this expert panel will take a closer look at new approaches to deal with the changed sphere of subsidies, taking into consideration types of subsidies, WTO settlement, the EU-Japan-US trilateral proposals, as well as relation to other matters, e.g. investment restrictions.

Please visit [Asia Society] for more information.

14 April 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, Germany

Climate and gender justice – Addressing the climate crisis with an intersectional feminist approach

This webinar will take an intersectional approach to climate justice and feminism, asking: How dies the climate crisis impact the current societal structures, how can it be used to reshape power structures, and how is the fight for climate justice interconnected with the fight for feminism? How can a feminist foreign policy address the current climate emergency?

If you wish to join this discussion, please visit [CFFP] for more information.

15 April 2021 @ 6:15 p.m. (GMT+1), German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Germany

10 Years After the Arab Spring

Over the course of the upcoming semester, this lecture series co-organized with the University of Hamburg, the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation Hamburg, and Academy in Exile will take a look back at the events of the Arab Spring in its broader regional and international context, tackling different perspectives each week.

If you are interested in learning more about the series, please visit [GIGA].

15 April 2021 @ 10:00 - 2:20 p.m. (GMT-4), The Dialogue, USA

The Costs of and Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic's Impact on the Education Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean

This webinar will discuss the results of a World Bank report on the costs faced by countries in the region due to school closure and emerging lessons on the subsequent reopening of schools. During this event, panelists will discuss policy recommendations for a safe return to school and learning recovery.

For more information, see [The dialogue]

16 April 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT+1), Egmont Institute, Belgium

The Future Frame of EU Humanitarian Aid

Amid a backlash against multilateral institutions, a global pandemic, and new challenges faced by the humanitarian system, this webinar explores the newly published Communication of the European Commission on humanitarian aid, its main orientations, and assesses how it seeks to meet current unprecedented challenges.

For more information, please follow [Egmont Institute].

16 April 2021, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Switzerland

Colloquium on "Integrity, Ethics and Good Governance for Peace and Security"

This online symposium will offer five simultaneous panels on the broader scheme of the colloquium, ranging from the role of the military in democratic elections to civil-military relations in Sudano-Sahelian region.

For more information and registration, visit [DCAF].

Recent book releases

The Bauhinia Project (ed.), *Hong Kong without Us: A People's Poetry*, University of Georgia Press, 126 pages, 1 April 2021, reviewed in [The Georgia Review].

Michael C. Davis, *Making Hong Kong China: The Rollback of Human Rights and the Rule of Law*, Association for Asian Studies, 166 pages, 10 November, 2020, reviewed [New Books Network].

Kent E. Calder, *Global Political Cities: Actors and Arenas of Influence in International Affairs*, Brookings Institution Press, 274 pages, 26 January, 2021, reviewed in [Booktopia].

Calls

The 5th Conference on Human Rights of the **University of Sydney** invits to submit papers on the topic "Human rights and Human Security in Asia during the COVID-19 Pandemic." Closing date for submission is 30 April, 2021. For more information, see [Sydney]

The 14th Annual Conference on the Political Economy of International Organization (PEIO), to be held on 13-15 January 2022 in Oxford, United Kingdom, invites submissions. The deadline for submission is 30 September 2021. Further details available at [PEIO].

Jobs & positions

The **University of Lapland** is seeking a ***University Researcher*** for permanent position starting June 2021 or as agreed. Application deadline is 3 May 2021. For more details, see [Academic Positions].

The **World Trade Organization** is hiring a ***Compliance, Risk and Resilience Officer*** responsible for developing, implementing and monitoring a coherent organization-wide compliance, risk management and resilience management system. Application deadline is 14 April 2021. Look for more information at [WTO].

The **International Monetary Fund** is recruiting an ***Ethics Advisor*** to be based in its headquarters in Washington, D.C. Closing date for applications is 8 April 2021. Further information available at [IMF].

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

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