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 issue of the Asia in Review updating you on the latest events and developments in constitutional politics and governance, geopolitics and international relations in Asia.

I wish you an informative read.

Special greetings are extended to readers on the Marshall Islands, in the Netherlands, in Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Togo who celebrate Constitution Day, King's Day, Independence Day and Union Day respectively.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

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

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Law and Politics in East Asia

China: Elevating Xi Jinping's legal thoughts

(dql) China's lawmakers are called on to adhere to legal thoughts of President Xi Jinping as "fundamental guidance" to govern China with laws. Giving a lecture to a group of more than 250 lawmakers, Wang Chen, a vice-chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee and a member of the Communist Party's 25-strong Politburo, called Xi's legal theories the "latest achievement of the sinicisation of Marx's legal theories", adding that the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party was what distinguished China's legal system from those in the West. [South China Morning Post]

In an article in 2019 in Qiushi, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) main theoretical periodical, Xi Jinping made it explicitly clear that the development of China's legal system will not "follow the model of western

constitutionalism, separation of powers, and judicial independence." [Qiushi, In Chinese]

Wang's remarks are seen largely as part of efforts to lift Xi's personal status in the CCP's history ahead of its centenary in July as well as the 20th national congress of the party next year at which where Xi is expected to seek a third term as the party's leader.

China: Former Premier Wen Jiabao's eulogy about his mother

(dql) In a move, unusual for a retired Chinese leader, former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao published a personal reminiscence about his late mother, describing how she had been tested by hardship during the Cultural Revolution and how she taught him to live an honest, thrifty life. [China Digital Times]

After Wen's article has been blocked by Chinese internet firms, speculations have risen that the censorship is due hidden criticism of current developments of party and politics in China by a political heavyweight within the party. [Straits Times] [CNN] [The Print]

Bo Zhiyue in [Channel News Asia] provides an analysis of the article and suggests aspects which reveal a possible hidden critic of Xi Jinping's system and ideology of absolute party leadership, including the fact that Wen mentions the word retirement three times in combination with the words terms and 10 years, while the word party is not mention at all in the article.

For Wen's article, see [Macau Herald, in Chinese], which concludes with: "The China I envisioned is a just and righteous state where human feelings, humanity and human nature is always respected, and which always the temperament of youth, freedom and struggle. This is what I have cried out and struggled for. This is the truth which life has taught me and which my mother gave me."

China: Press and media freedom under pressure in Hong Kong

(dql) Revealing the increasingly precarious situation of media freedom in Hong Kong since the imposition of the National Security Law last summer, a Hong Kong lawmaker of the pro-Beijing camp has accused the

Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions of fomenting terrorism by screening a documentary about clashes between pro-democracy protesters and police at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) in November 2019, one of the most turbulent chapters of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. He called on the police to take swift action under the security law. [Hong Kong Free Press]

The documentary, titled “Inside the Red Brick Wall”, won awards at International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam and the Hong Kong Film Critics Society Awards and will be the opening film at the Taiwan International Documentary Festival which will kick off this week. [Coconut] [Variety 1] [Variety 2]

Last month, following the Oscar nomination of another short documentary on the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, Beijing had reportedly told mainland media outlets to either boycott or downplay this weekend’s Oscars film awards ceremony, with the Hong Kong television network TVB, which had broadcasted the Academy Awards for more than 50 years, announcing to boycott this year's Oscars. [Deutsche Welle]

Meanwhile, the Hong Kong government has appointed two former officials as advisor and “senior manager for special support” to Patrick Li Pak-chuen, the recently appointed Director of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), the city’s public broadcaster. The appointments are seen as the latest in a string of measures in response to complaints from the pro-establishment camp over the programs deemed pro-protest movement leaning.

Since Li assumed his post last month, he has repeatedly shut current affairs shows from the schedule at the last minute over accusations of bias and inaccuracy, while at least five senior staff members from the current affairs division had left RTHK. [South China Morning Post]

The 2021 world press freedom index of Reporters without Borders (RSF) concluded for Hong Kong that the “national security law that the Chinese government adopted in June 2020, [...] is especially dangerous for journalists,” and adds that the “public broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) is being subjected to a full-blown intimidation campaign by the government with the aim of restricting its editorial autonomy.”

China was ranked fourth to last out of 180 countries at 177 as it “continues to take Internet censorship, surveillance and propaganda to unprecedented levels.”

It is also is the world's biggest jailer of journalists, with currently over 120 of them detained. [RSF] [Aljazeera]

Japan: Elections results a significant blow to Prime Minister Suga

(dql) Marking a painful blow to Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, all the candidate of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost against their contenders in three elections respectively, including a re-held House of Councillors election in the Hiroshima constituency, an upper house by-election in the Nagano constituency and a House of Representatives by-election in a district in Hokkaido.

This outcome of the first national elections since Suga took office in September last year is widely seen as reflecting wide discontent among the population with the government's coronavirus response as well as scandals that bought about two of the elections. Approval rating of Suga's cabinet has plummeted from 70% at the time when he assumed power to below 40% in February and has since hovered around that level.

Japan: Bill to enable simpler court steps to identify cyberbullies approved

(dql) In a unanimous vote, Japan's parliament approved a bill to set up a simpler court procedure to help victims of cyberbullying to obtain the identification of individuals who made defamatory posts online. Expected to enter into force by fall next year, the new law allows cyberbullying victims to go through only one court proceeding to identify their harassers, saving them time and costs related to such requests.

Under the current law, people in general must go through at least two court proceedings – one against social media operators and the other against internet service providers to obtain the desired information. [Mainichi]

Japan: Protest against government's immigration reform bill

(dql) Organized by refugee lawyers and activists, some 100 people participated in a march in Tokyo to protest

against a bill to revise Japan's immigration law currently under review in the Diet.

Aimed at solving the issue of long-term detentions of asylum seekers who are facing deportation, the bill, submitted by the government, suggests the establishment of a "supervisory measures" mechanism, under which foreigners who have applied for refugee status or those appealing a decision may be released after paying a maximum deposit 27,500 USD, with supporters, designated by immigration authorities, monitoring their situation and reporting back.

The protesters, however, criticize the bill for providing insufficient protection of asylum seekers, as it allows only two applications for refugee status on the same grounds and fails to set a maximum detention period. It, furthermore, introduces penalties for foreigners who refuse to return to their countries of origin, including up to one year in jail for physically resisting deportation while on an airplane. [Mainichi] [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

For a sketch of the history of Japan's immigration and refugee policy, see Daisuke Akimoto in [The Diplomat] who points to the country's low refugee acceptance rate of 0.4% in 2019, compared with the US (29.6%) and Germany (25.9%).

South Korea: Appellate Court rules in favour of asylum seeker

(nm) The Seoul High Court last week ruled in favour of an asylum seeker, stating it was illegal for the Korean government to reject his refugee application simply because Korea was not his final destination. The decision was made on appeal from the Ministry of Justice after it had lost in a lower court last June.

The man had arrived and tried to apply for refugee status at Incheon International Airport in February last year, on the basis of political persecution in his home country. The immigration service at the airport, however, rejected the application, stating a transfer passenger was ineligible to file a refugee application and that it should be filed at an immigration checkpoint instead. Following the rejection, the man stayed in the airport transit zone for 14 months. He is now staying in government-mandated 14-day self-isolation in an accommodation outside the airport. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Immunity of lawmaker lifted over suspicion of embezzlement

(dql) South Korea's parliament approved a motion to lift the immunity of ruling Democratic Party lawmaker Lee Sang-jik to allow the prosecution to arrest him.

Lee is the founder of the cash-strapped budget carrier Eastar Jet and currently under investigation on charges of embezzlement and breach of trust. He is accused of colluding with his nephew and senior company official, who was indicted in February over suspicion of causing about 38.47 million USD in financial damage to the airline by paying off long-term loans early and underselling company shares to a specific subsidiary. [Korea Herald]

Taiwan to sharpen penalties for negligence leading to deaths

(dql) Taiwan's Cabinet approved a draft amendment bill that provides harsher penalties on people found guilty of negligence leading to death.

Currently, the maximum penalty for conviction on that charge is five years in prison or a fine of NT$500,000 (US$17,615).

The bill now allows for a prison sentence of one to seven years in cases of serious offenses on the charge of negligence causing death. In addition, a serious offense results in the death of three or more people, can be sentenced with jail terms from three to 10 years.

In case of an intentional offense results in death, the punishment will be 10 years to life in prison. If it results in injury, the sentence will be seven years to life.

Under current law, those convicted of intentionally committing a crime of this nature are sentenced to five years to life, while in cases of negligence the maximum sentence is three years and a fine of up to NT$300,000.

The legislative move comes in response to train crash on April 2, in which 49 people died and at least 200 were injured, marking Taiwan's deadliest in seven decades. [Focus Taiwan] [New York Times]

In an earlier development, prosecutors indicted seven individuals for offenses related to the crash, while the transportation minister resigned. [Taiwan News] [Kyodo News]

Taiwan: Government to increase child raising funding to tackle record low birth rate

(dql) In an attempt to reverse historically low birth rates which have persistently dropped since the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) took office in 2016, Taiwan's government has announced to increase funding to help couples raise children, from this year's NT$55 billion to NT$85 billion (US$3.05 billion) by 2023. Starting in August 2022, the monthly child-raising subsidy to be increased from currently NT$3,500 to NT$5,000.

Taiwan's birth rate has fallen from 8.86 per 1,000 in 2016, to 8.23 in 2017, 7.70 in 2018, 7.53 in 2019, and 7.01 in 2020, marking a record low. The number of newborns in 2020 stood at 165,249 babies, a record low, too. [Focus Taiwan]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Nepal: Prime Minister Oli tightens grip on ruling party, sidelines intraparty rivals

(lm) All signs indicate that the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) is headed for a vertical split, as party chairman and

Prime Minister has taken actions to sideline lawmakers close to his intraparty rival Madhav Kumar Nepal. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

On April 23, the prime minister used a meeting of an intraparty committee to reconstitute the party's Standing Committee, which had originally been dissolved following the post-election merger of the CPN-UML and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) (CPN(M)) in 2018 [see AiR (4/2/2018)]. The move to reconstitute the party's highest decision-making body came a day after two back-to-back meetings between the prime minister and Nepal, during which both factional leaders refused to budge an inch.

Significantly, the 19-member Committee does not include a single lawmaker close to Nepal, who the prime minister accuses of having teamed up with his archrival, CPN(M) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal, to oust him from both government and leadership of the now-defunct Nepal Communist Party (NCP). But what is more, the Committee does include the four former leaders of the CPN(M) who were recently reappointed as ministers in the Oli-led Cabinet [see AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2].

On April 25, then, Prime Minister Oli entrusted the newly constituted Standing Committee to initiate disciplinary action against as many as 27 lawmakers from the Nepal-led faction, some of whom had defied to toe the party line during a vote of confidence against a local chief minister earlier this month. In response, the lawmakers filed a writ petition with the Supreme Court, arguing they could not be removed as lawmakers for they had not violated any legal provisions. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Coming against the larger backdrop of a looming no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Oli in the House of Representatives, the move is to be considered a preemptive decision aimed at forestalling members of the rivaling faction from changing fronts.

But while both the CPN(M) and the Nepali Congress (NC) - Nepal's biggest opposition party - have signaled their intention to move a no-trust motion against the prime minister [see AiR No. 14, April/2021, 1], the formation of a new government coalition is currently in limbo. For 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. [The Himalayan Times]

Pakistan: Parliament debates expulsion of French ambassador

(lm) Pakistan's Parliament reconvened on April 26 to resume debates on a resolution calling for the expulsion of France's ambassador over the publication of cartoons depicting Islam's Prophet Mohammad. The issue was brought to the floor on April 21; a second session two days later devolved into disorder. The move is widely seen as a bid to appease a militant Islamist party that has led large protests and clashed with security forces. [France24] [New York Times]

Two weeks ago, the government declared hardline Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) a terrorist group and banned it, in addition to blocking travel documents and bank accounts of over two hundred key leaders of the organization. Previously, at least four police officers have been killed in clashes with supporters of group, and at least 11 officers have at one point been taken hostage. Police officials acknowledged the death of three protesters, but the party claims that a larger number of their supporters have been killed. [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

Intermittent protests since last winter were sparked by French President Emmanuel Macron, who last year gave a defiant eulogy for a teacher who was decapitated by an Islamist radical for using cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad in a class on freedom of expression [see AiR No. 43, October/2020, 4]. In a bid to appease public anger, Prime Minister Imran Khan's government agreed back then agreed to hold a parliamentary vote on the expulsion of the French ambassador.

The group had returned to the street earlier this year to hold the government to the commitment after the French president had defended the republication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. Protests then intensified after the government earlier this month arrested Saad Hussain Rizvi, the group's leader, in a pre-emptive move to scuttle his calls for large gatherings. [AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]

On April 20, it was clear that the government had made some wide-ranging concessions to the group to achieve the release of 11 police officers who were taken hostage during the week of protests. For under the resolution - offered by the government to assuage the group's demand for the French envoy to be expelled - any judicial proceedings against the members of the group would also be scrapped. Moreover, local media also reported Rizvi, the party's

leader, had been set free, but it could not be confirmed officially.

The fate of the resolution was unclear, but Parliament's mere discussion of the matter is widely considered a test of whether Prime Minister Khan succumbs to the pressure from the hardline Islamist group. For it illustrates that Khan's administration considers the TLP a major threat to Pakistan's stability, which is already faltering to due to a reeling economy, a new wave of coronavirus infections and spreading social unrest. [The Interpreter]

Pakistan: High Court grants bail to Leader of Opposition Shehbaz Sharif in two corruption cases

(lm) A Pakistani High Court granted bail on April 22 to Shahbaz Sharif, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and President of the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), about seven months after he was arrested by the country's anti-graft body over alleged involvement in money laundering. [Arab News]

In September of last year, a High Court rejected Sharif's application for bail on charges of money-laundering and maintaining assets beyond known sources of income and ordered his arrest [see AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5]. Shahbaz is the brother of three-time Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who the week before had broken a nearly yearlong silence from exile in London, announcing the formation of the opposition alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) [see AiR No. 38, September/2020, 4].

Prime Minister Imran Khan has made an anti-corruption drive the centerpiece of his rule. But critics say the drive has been politically motivated, using trumped-up corruption charges to target the prime minister's political opponents while leaving members of his ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) or their allies largely untouched. [The Wire]

Sri Lanka: Muslim lawmaker and his brother arrested over 2019 Easter Sunday attacks

(lm) Police on April 24 arrested a prominent Muslim lawmaker and his brother over suspected connections to the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombings that killed

more than 260 people [see AiR (4/4/2019)]. Rishad Bathiudeen, leader of the opposition All Ceylon Makkal Party (ACMP), and his brother were taken into custody under the contentious Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which rights groups consider an abusive law used to crack down on dissent and forcibly disappear people. [South China Morning Post]

Bathiudeen's arrest came amid growing demands for the government to act against the groups and individuals named in the report by the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI), which was submitted to Parliament earlier in February [see AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1]. A case in point, the head of Sri Lanka's Roman Catholic Church has accused the government of stalling investigations into the bombings. Leading commemorations on the second anniversary of the attacks on April 21, the archbishop renewed his call for swift action against the perpetrators and alleged that "political posturing and the need to safeguard alliances" was hindering the probe. [Al Jazeera] [The Straits Times]

Sri Lanka: Country will be blacklisted if government enacts Colombo Port City Bill, warns opposition leader

(lm) Former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has warned Sri Lanka could face possible blacklisting by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) if the government moves ahead with enacting a controversial bill on the China-backed Colombo Port City (CPC) project. [ColomboPage]

Earlier this month, the government introduced the Colombo Port City Economic Commission draft bill in parliament to pave the way for the establishment of a high-powered five-to-seven-member Colombo Port City Economic Commission (CPCEC). Appointed by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, members of the Commission would be entrusted with the administration, regulation and control of all matters connected with businesses and other operations in and from the CPC. [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

The former prime minister warns that the lack of direct oversight by regulators would leave the impression that the country was inviting money laundering. Blacklisting by the FATF – an inter-governmental organization that monitors global money laundering and terrorist financing – could lead to economic sanctions from institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

In 2011, Colombo for the first time was blacklisted by the FATF, and four years later moved to the watchdog's list of Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring – often externally referred to as the 'grey list'. Later in 2019, Sri Lanka was removed from the list, after having improved its anti-money laundering policies.

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Press Freedom in Southeast Asia

(nd) Watchdog group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) recently released the World Press Freedom Index, revealing an increased repression and attacks on free press worldwide. The Covid-19 pandemic has globally been used as a pretext to impose repressive legislation and narrow the range of permitted speech for the sake of public health. According to the index, which evaluates 180 countries, journalism is seriously impeded in 73 nations and constrained in 59 other, making up 73 percent of the countries evaluated.

Vietnam, 175th place, only above Djibouti, China, Turkmenistan, North Korea, and Eritrea, has intensified its crackdown on dissent leading up to the five-yearly congress in January 2021, arresting and sentencing bloggers and journalists. Malaysia fell 18 places to the 119th, prompted by the passage of an "anti-fake-news" ordinance to contain criticism on the government's reaction to the pandemic and the state of emergency, as well as an investigation against media outlet Al Jazeera for a documentary on the situation of migrant workers during the pandemic, and proceedings against online news portal Malaysiakini, which was found guilty of contempt of court. [See also AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4]

A similar “anti-fake-news” decree designed for the pandemic was issued by Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha last March, and Indonesian President Joko Widodo. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen continued his crackdown on civil society and the press with similar new powers to hinder reporting. The Philippines continued its “war on drugs”, which is also directed against media, suspending the license of the country’s largest TV broadcaster, ABS-CBN, for its critical reporting, and targeting its editor, Maria Ressa, with judicial campaigns. Myanmar, 140th place this year, but likely to drop to the bottom due to the February 1 coup and the deadly crackdown on civilians, was commented to be set back 10 years by these events.

Contrarily, Timor-Leste made it to the 71st place, with RSF noting that “no journalist has ever been jailed in connection with their work in Timor-Leste since this country of just 1.2 million inhabitants won independence in 2002.” [RSF] [The Diplomat]

Report warns of shrinking civic spaces in Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand

(lm) In a submission to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Switzerland-based organization International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) has warned that journalists and media workers in Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam face an increasingly repressive legal landscape.

In the report, the group expresses its concern about the fragility of press freedom in the three countries, highlighting the enactment of new laws and the emergence of practices that are incompatible with human rights law and standards aimed at restricting information and expression on the coronavirus pandemic. The ICJ also underscores the continued abuse of existing laws equally incompatible with human rights law to arbitrarily restrict information and expression during the pandemic, by explicitly targeting journalists and social media users. [ICJ]

Cambodia: Criticism over new law

(nd) Following a new legislation heavily criminalizing breaking Covid-19 rules [see also AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3], human rights groups alleged the country took “a step towards a

totalitarian dictatorship". The new law provides fines as well as prison terms, granting the government the power to ban or restrict any gathering or demonstration indefinitely. This estimate was shared by Phil Robertson, deputy director of the Asia division at Human Rights Watch, ranking the country at 144th place on their recently released Press Freedom Index. The law was criticized as vague, with a lack of definition opening the door for arbitrary enforcement and disproportionate sanctions, possibly targeting government critics. It is believed to be unnecessarily punitive, with fines too high for people to pay. A group of UN special rapporteurs urged Prime Minister Hun Sen to revoke the legislation.

Additionally, after authorities disclosed personal information on positively tested citizens, it is feared that people might be reluctant to even get tested. Human rights groups fear that the law and other measures taken in order to tackle the pandemic are part of Prime Minister Hun Sen's efforts to increase his power and decrease the value of human rights. [The Guardian]

Over the weekend, police arrested even more people and reportedly threatened and beat violators of the new law with a cane. Some have already been sentenced to one-year prison terms. [The Star]

Indonesia: Death sentences via Zoom

(nd) As a repercussion of the Covid-19 pandemic and high numbers in Indonesia, courts have retreated to virtual court hearings, including for cases of murder and drug trafficking, which can carry the death penalty. Since last year, nearly 100 inmates have even been sentenced to death via video ruling, according to Amnesty International, who called it inhumane and degrading.

Last week, six terrorism convicts were sentenced to death for being involved in a prison riot in 2018, killing five police officers. The riot involved 155 prisoners and lasted 40 hours. The defendants accepted the sentence and announced not to appeal. The Islamic State claimed the riot to be done by his fighters. [Benar News]

Experts argue that virtual hearings significantly violate the defendant's fair trial rights and hinder the quality of the defense. Bad internet connection plays a part, as well as the missing personal contact with the defendant. Singapore has sentenced via video at least one to hang since the pandemic has started. Although

Indonesia did not carry out executions for several years, they are still rendered due to the high public support for the ultimate punishment as a form of retaliation. [Voice of America]

Indonesia: General killed at Papuan clashes

(nd) In an ongoing clash between security forces and a rebel group in the easternmost Papua province, an Indonesian brigadier general was killed. The clashes started 2 weeks ago and was prompted by rebels who set fire to schools and shot a teacher. He is believed to have been executed by the West Papua Liberation Army, the armed wing of the Free Papua Organization. The insurgency has been going since the 1960s, when Indonesia annexed the former Dutch colony. Since last year, attacks conducted by rebels saw a rise. While the extracts of gold and copper from the Grasberg mine have created significant tax income for the government, indigenous Papuans remain poorer, sicker and more likely to die young than people elsewhere in Indonesia. [Voice of America]

Indonesia: Lost submarine sank, crew of 53 presumed dead

(nd) The sunken Indonesian submarine in the Bali Sea broke into pieces, with all 53 crew members declared dead. The cause is yet undetermined. Singapore and Malaysia have dispatched ships, and the US, Australia, France, and Germany have offered assistance in a four day international search effort. [Voice of America]

Malaysia: Mahathir urged King revoke state of emergency, unusual royal criticism

(nd) Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad called on the King, Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, to revoke the state of emergency imposed in January to counter the Covid-19 pandemic by a royal order, arguing a wide range of emergency powers and the suspension of parliament had transformed the country into a “dictatorship”. It prompted criticism of the royal families by Malays, which is very unusual. Criticism of the country’s nine royal households have been met with sedition investigations by authorities.

The imposition of the state of emergence was advised by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin, while the king as a constitutional monarch is obliged to act on for most matters. Critics claim it was a move by Muhyiddin to avoid a no-confidence vote and cling to power. Parallelly, the Committee for Ending the Emergency Declaration, a delegation of MPs from Parti Amanah Negara (Amanah), Parti Pejuang Tanah Air, DAP, and PKR, was granted an audience by the King, seeking an end of the state of emergency. [Malaymail]

Further, both the King and Queen Tunku Azizah Aminah were subjects of unusual and rare criticism. The King had allegedly returned from a trip to the UAE in December, carrying 2,000 Sinopharm Covid-19 vaccines, a Chinese-made product which is not yet approved in Malaysia, and distributed it among his family, friends and business partners. The Queen posted about an afternoon spent with chefs in the palace kitchen who were preparing dishes. Responding to a comment, whether she was inoculated already, she wrote “Dengki ke? [‘Are you jealous?’], which turned into a hashtag. [South China Morning Post 1]

Over the weekend, Malaysian graphic artist and activist Fahmi Reza was arrested for allegedly insulting the queen, which prompted an outcry among free speech advocates. He was charged under the Sedition Act, carrying a maximum sentence of three years in prison, a fine of 5,000 ringgit (US$1,220) or both, and the Communications and Multimedia Act, carrying up to a one-year jail term, a 50,000 ringgit fine, or both, for creating a playlist titled “Dengki Ke”, the cover depicting an image of the queen. In 2018 Fahmi was jailed for a month and fined for publishing a caricature of then-Prime Minister Najib Razak, as part of his criticism of Najib’s involvement in the 1MDB financial scandal.

The advocacy group Centre for Independent Journalism Malaysia, called Fahmi’s arrest “concerning”, Amnesty International Malaysia urged authorities to “immediately and unconditionally release Fahmi for peacefully exercising his right to freedom of expression”. [South China Morning Post 2]

Malaysia: Sovereign Sukuk

(nd) As the first nation worldwide, Malaysia started a sovereign, U.S. dollar-based sukuk to exclusively fund environmental projects. Sukuk refers to an Islamic financial certificate that complies with Sharia law. In contrast to a bond, which is an indirect interest-

bearing debt obligation, sukuk provides direct asset ownership interest. Malaysia issued $800 million of 10-year trust certificates and $500 million in 30-year trust certificates. The initial target size of $1 billion was oversubscribed by 6.4 times due to heavy demand. [Voice of America]

Malaysia: UMNO to cut ties with PN

(nd) UMNO election chief Datuk Seri Tajuddin Abdul Rahman confirmed to cut ties with the Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition by August. This was determined during a party supreme council meeting. The meeting did not discuss the supposed leaked phone conversation between party president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and PKR president Anwar Ibrahim. [Malaymail]

Malaysia: Government to use fund to buy vaccinations

(nd) Malaysia's government announced to use a reserve trust fund backed by state energy company Petroliam Nasional (Petronas) to pay for Covid-19 vaccines. The fund was created in 1998 and supposed to be reserved for future development. Government said its "tight" finances require special measures, with a rough need of about 5 billion ringgit ($1.22 billion). The move was criticized, for it was pushed through with a suspended parliament due to the ongoing state of emergency imposed due to the pandemic, with the former Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng saying the decision was "irresponsible, incompetent, and a bid to escape parliament scrutiny".

Malaysia recently cleared the AstraZeneca vaccine for individuals aged 60 and up, contrary to some countries' decisions to halt it due to blood clotting. [Nikkei Asia]

Myanmar: Tatmadaw extorting money from civilians

(lf) The Tatmadaw has increasingly been robbing and extorting money from civilians during raids for potential anti-junta protestors. In addition to taking money when ransacking houses, security forces also have demanded money for the return of bodies of 57 people who were killed in Bago to their families. In

Yangon, the forces have demanded money for the release of detainees. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Arakan Army not to welcome Civil Disobedience Movement in Rakhine state

(lf) On its 12th anniversary, the Arakan Army (AA) announced that it does not welcome the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) in Rakhine state. The AA announced that the presence of the CDM in their territory would hinder their aim for greater autonomy, however, the AA also stated that it would support all groups to attain their political goals. In addition, the AA voiced their grief over the death of the hundreds of civilians that have been killed since the coup. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Hunger crisis to worsen

(lf) Since the coup, the food security situation, already dire prior the coup, has gradually worsened. The United Nations have stated that around 3.4 million are expected to go hungry in the coming three to six months, with urban areas affected the most. Not only have market prices for food risen drastically, but also many have lost their jobs in recent months. As a repercussion to the military coup on February 1, the banking system has been brought to an almost standstill, causing many businesses and people to be unable to withdraw cash and make payments. This comes after the coronavirus had already taken a toll on the economy. [Reuters]

Myanmar: More Sanctions

(lf) The US has imposed sanctions on two more state-owned enterprises to increase the pressure on the military junta. This comes in addition to last week's decision taken by the EU to impose a travel ban on nine military junta leaders, as well as freezing their financial assets. The sanctions that several countries across the world have implemented are targeting one of the main ways in which the Tatmadaw has been funding itself, through state-owned enterprises, in particular in the natural resource market. [Voice of Asia] [Reuters]

Myanmar: Tatmadaw firing shots at Thai border boat

(lf) Along the Northern Thai Myanmar border, Burmese security forces have shot at a Thai boat carrying border patrol officers. Thailand has been keeping the borders closed to thousands of ethnic Karen, who are fleeing from airstrikes carried out by the Tatmadaw. According to humanitarian aid groups, this is not the first time fire has been opened on boats on the border river, stating that the military has fired shots at boats carrying aid across the river. The Tatmadaw has been trying to keep aid from reaching internally displaced people [Bangkok Post]

Myanmar's Healthcare close to collapse

(lf) Healthcare workers have been at the forefront of Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), causing most of Myanmar's health system to come to a standstill. Around 80% of Myanmar's healthcare is provided through highly subsidized public hospitals and clinics. Since the coup, medical personnel feel strongly conflicted between providing healthcare for their patients and their need to oppose the junta.

In addition, striking medical workers have been met with violence from the military: Workers have been beaten, arrested and evicted from their accommodation close to the hospitals. Still running public hospitals have been occupied by military. Medical staff have been providing free healthcare in voluntary facilities, but given regular raids many civilians are too scared to access the facilities.

The failing health system is not only worrisome in regard to the ongoing pandemic, with testing and vaccination having largely been abandoned, but also to diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis, which are on the rise again. [BBC]

Shift in Myanmar's perception of the Rohingya

(lf) Two appointed ministers of Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government have issued a public apology to the Rohingya Muslim minority and other minorities, acknowledging mistakes made by the

former civilian government, especially for ignoring human right violations. The apology echoes a public statement made by students from Yangon by the end of March, apologizing to both the Muslim Rohingya and the Buddhist ethnic Rakhine people for the brutality they suffered in the last year.

The military's extreme violence towards civilians including those from the Bamar majority seems to have changed the perception of Myanmar's ethnic minorities including the Rohingya, accounting for a major turnaround. [Benarnews]

Myanmar: KNU clashes with the military

(nd) On Tuesday, the Karen National Union (KNU) clashed with the military, attacking and burning down a military base in the East, close to the Thai border. Last month's attack by the KNU prompted retaliatory airstrikes by the military, the first in over 20 years. KNU has been very vocal against the coup and sided with the protest movement as well as the National Unity Government. Clashes have intensified, forcing more than 24,000 civilians, so flee, including some 2,000 seeking refuge on the Thai side. [Bangkok Post]

Philippines: Community pantries red-tagged, anti-insurgency funds challenged

(lp) Filipinos have set up hundreds of community pantries as an exercise of mutual aid to provide food and counter financial insecurity, amid the pandemic and inefficient response of the government. These community pantries were quickly red-tagged (accused of being affiliated with communist insurgents) by government authorities. Those at the front of red-tagging activities are ranking officials of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC) Gen. Antonio Parlade Jr., Hermogenes Esperon Jr. [The New Lens] [Rappler 1] [Inquirer 1]

Along other government authorities, many civil society actors, including the Commission for Human Rights (CHR) and student organizations, strongly condemned the intimidation and harassment of red-tagging activities. Moreover, the Philippine National Police (PNP) is to investigate police officers involved in red-tagging. Furthermore, the Senate filed a resolution to condemn red-tagging of community pantry organizers. Meanwhile, President Rodrigo Duterte has encouraged

community pantries to continue operations. [CNN] [ABS-CBN] [Manila Bulletin 1]

Due to the latest red-tagging activities, several government officials called for funds to be reduced from the NTF-ELCAC and redirected for financial assistance of those most affected by the pandemic. However, Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque and Senate President Vicente Sotto rejected these calls because the budget of the NTF-ELCAC is allegedly used to promote the development of communities cleared of communist insurgency. Without this 'development', people would be vulnerable to recruitment by communist insurgency groups. In response, some Senators challenged the efficiency of these development projects, some of which are already being implemented by other agencies. [Inquirer 2] [Rappler 2] [Manila Bulletin 2]

Most recently, a 'gag order' was issued by Esperon against Parlade and another NTF-ELCAC spokesperson, instructing them to "desist from issuing further statements on the community pantries." However, critics say that a gag order is not enough, and they should be removed from office. [CNN]

Philippines urged to increase climate change mitigation efforts

(lp) Greenpeace says the Philippines should commit to more unconditional action in its Paris Agreement pledge, which was submitted last week. According to Greenpeace, the Philippines should be able to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than the stated 2.71 percent without foreign assistance. Moreover, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) called on local government units (LGUs) to invest in the development of risk resiliency projects. [Manila Bulletin 1] [Philippine News Agency]

Parallelly, President Rodrigo Duterte stressed the need to pursue efforts that make the Philippines 'climate-resilient'. However, Duterte's message came days after he ordered a mining moratorium to be lifted, despite criticism from civil society and government officials. In fact, the Center for Environmental Concerns - Philippines (CEC) accused the national government of causing the country to incur an 'ecological deficit' of P680 billion during the pandemic. Moreover, Philippine banks were criticized by the Withdraw from Coal (WFC) campaign for significantly funding local coal projects. It seems that WFC's encouragement to advance sustainable energy projects has worked, since the

Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) committed to completely step away from financing coal by 2037. [Inquirer] [Manila Bulletin 2] [Rappler]

Philippines: Police clearance would result in labor rights violations

The Philippine National Police (PNP) proposed that transactions with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) should require police clearances. However, Senators and labor groups have criticized this proposal because it would violate workers' right to privacy, and consequently their right to join labor unions. Such mandatory collection of personal information would further endanger workers because of the red-tagging activities the PNP has been involved in. Moreover, a police clearance would run contrary to President Rodrigo Duterte's orders to reduce bureaucracy (or 'red tape'), since there is already a National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) clearance in place. [Rappler] [Manila Bulletin]

Singapore: Cabinet reshuffle

(nd) In a major cabinet reshuffle, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announced to have seven ministers switch portfolios, out of 15. Affected Ministries are the Finance Ministry, Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Health, Transport Ministry, Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Communications and Information, Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and additionally, there is a newly created Covid-19 multi-ministry task force. Some ministers were removed less than a year after their appointment. It was prompted by Deputy Prime Minister Heng Swee Keat's announcement to step aside as the leader of the fourth-generation People's Action Party (PAP) team two weeks ago. [Channel News Asia]

Thailand: Prayut to reject offer by Thaksin

(nd) Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha rejected an offer from former PM Thaksin Shinawatra to help Thailand secure more Covid-19 vaccines from Russia, a remark he made on the social networking app Clubhouse. Thaksin commented the rollout was

proceeding too slowly and that suppliers should be diversified further. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Mekong River Commission meeting

(nd) Later this year, the 28th meeting of the Mekong River Commission will be held by Thailand in an effort to mitigate impact of dams on member countries. April to May shows the transition from dry season to rainy season, which will make volatile water levels peak. The Office of the National Water Resources (ONWR) and the Foreign Affairs Ministry were assigned to work together with China on the joint management of water, as well as draft a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation for water management between Thailand and Laos with respect to hydro-power supply. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Group to protest US influence

(nd) A group called Prachachon Khon Thai (Thai people) protested in front of the US embassy in Bangkok demanding that the US stop interfering in Thailand's internal affairs and fueling conflicts among different political groups. A co-leader of the group implied the US has interfered in internal affairs of several countries over the past two decades by influencing public opinion and exerting economic pressure.

Such efforts were directed at undermining national security and toppling the monarchy, referencing recently terminated university scholar David Streckfuss. The US embassy spokesperson reiterated the US government was not funding or providing support for any protest groups in Thailand. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Lese majeste charges online, criticism for misuse of pandemic laws

(nd) Two people were filed a complaint against by the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society for sharing a Facebook post critical of the monarchy and posting a critical comment in a Facebook group called the “Royalist Marketplace” respectively. The posts were argued to be in violation of Section 112 of the Criminal

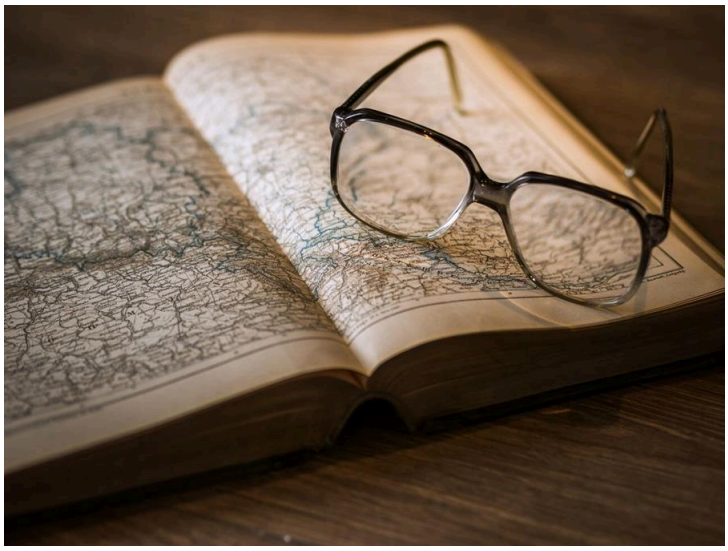
Code, the lese majeste law. As of April 20, at least 87 people have been charged. [Prachatai]

Meanwhile, a Bangkok court granted bail to two pro-democracy activists charged under Section 112, saying there was not “sufficient reason” to reject their bail request. Both were arrested for joining a protest at Sanam Luang in September. They vowed to continue their fight for the remaining jailed protesters, whose bail requests were denied earlier. In recent weeks, friends and relatives of the detained activists have held a series of protests outside jails in Bangkok and other Thai cities, calling attention to the bail less detention of activists under Section 112.

Co-protest leader Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak, has been on a hunger strike for 35 days and appeared in court in a wheelchair last Monday. With him on hunger strike is Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul. [Benar News]

Meanwhile, the governments of Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam were criticized by Switzerland-based human rights law group International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) for using the Covid-19 pandemic to enact new laws to control the media and the spread of information. They submitted a report to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), arguing the vague language of the laws makes them easy to be abused, and they foresee harsh criminal penalties, incompatible with the principle of necessity and proportionality. While their objective of containing false information is worthwhile, the laws are frequently used to further limit civil space and target journalists. [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



China, Japan, South Korea reaffirm commitment Biden-hosted climate summit

(dql) At last week's virtual Leaders' Climate Summit, hosted by US President Joe Biden and attended by 40 head of states and governments, China, Japan, and South Korea countries reaffirmed their commitment to fighting climate change.

Chinese President Xi Jinping reiterated China's climate-related goals of peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and becoming carbon neutral before 2060. He also announced that coal-fired power generation projects will be strictly controlled, while the increase in coal consumption will be strictly limited over the 14th Five-Year Plan period until 2025 before being phased down in the 15th Five-Year Plan period. [Xinhua]

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced new, more ambitious targets for Japan of reducing carbon emissions, now set at 46% from levels of 2013, a rise of more than 70% compared with the government's previous goal of 26%. [Nikkei Asia]

South Korean President Moon Jae-in, meanwhile, vowed that South Korea will cease state-backed financing of coal-fired power plants overseas and announced plans to strengthen the country's emissions reduction commitment under the Paris agreement by raising its current target to reduce emissions by 24.4% by 2030 from 2017 levels. [Bloomberg]

For a critical assessment of a rebound in global coal demand in 2021, with a rapid increase in coal-fired power generation in Asia accounting for 80% of the

rebound, see the recently released Global Energy Review 2021 of the [International Energy Agency].

Hosting the summit, US President Biden underscored his administration's efforts to reclaim US leadership in global climate governance following former President Donald Trump's withdrawal from international climate commitments.

Biden warned in his summit opening speech that climate action was "a moral imperative, an economic imperative," but asserted that it was at the same time "an opportunity to create millions of good-paying jobs around the world in innovative sectors – jobs that bring greater quality of life, greater dignity, to the people who are performing those jobs in every nation."

Confronted in the US with a resilient opposition of the Republican Party to his climate-related policies, this remark is directed not only towards the leaders attending the summit and the international community, but also and foremost towards his domestic critics.

As for the US emission reduction commitment, Biden said that the US seeks to have greenhouse gases dropped by 50% by the end of the decade from 2005 levels, almost nearly doubling the reductions that the Obama administration had committed to in the Paris climate accord. [White House] [The Hill]

China reasserts leadership aspirations in global governance at Boao Forum for Asia

(dql) Sending a muscular signal of China's claims to leadership in global governance to the US, Chinese President Xi Jinping in his keynote speech at last week's virtually arranged Boao Forum for Asia remarked that "[global governance should reflect the evolving political and economic landscape in the world," with China "call[ing] all countries in Asia and beyond to answer the call of our times, defeat the pandemic through solidarity, strengthen global governance, and keep pursuing a community with a shared future for mankind."

He also warned that the rules of global governance must not be "set by one or a few countries," and "imposed on others," adding that "[i]n state-to-state relations, … [b]ossing others around or meddling in others' internal affairs would not get one any support." [Xinhua]

Kicked off in 2001, with China as driving force behind, the Boao Forum for Asia has evolved into big platform that brings together political, business and academic elites from Asia and beyond. Often dubbed the 'Davos of the East', the Boao Forum is important for China as it regards it as a counterweight to the American- and European-dominated Davos of the World Economic Forum.

This year's forum was attended by around 2600 participants from more than 60 countries and regions. The heads of the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations addressed it by video link. [The Conversation] [ECNS]

China's military muscle flexing: New warships and radar drones

(dql) China has unveiled three new warships, an amphibious helicopter carrier, a nuclear sub and a guided-missile cruiser - in a public display of strength as President Xi Jinping watched over a commissioning ceremony that took place in a military port in the southern city of Sanya last Friday. [The Times]

Furthermore, China has unveiled new advanced radars said to be capable of detecting stealth aircraft, including drones, as well as low-flying cruise missiles. Among the "star products", displayed at last week's World Radar Expo in Nanjing exhibition, was the country's first portable and multipurpose radar, which could be carried by a single soldier. [Aljazeera]

China: New anti-espionage regulation

(dql) China's Ministry of State Security, the country's the civilian intelligence, security and secret police agency, has issued new anti-espionage regulations, the first counter-espionage working regulations at a national level and across different sectors, including government departments, social groups and companies. They allow the agency to draw up lists of companies and organizations suspected of foreign infiltration and to require them to adopt security measures to prevent foreign infiltration. The measures include, among others, reporting their activities related to national security, providing counter-espionage education to personnel before they depart abroad, and interviewing them after their return to China. Employees, meanwhile are required to sign non-

disclosure commitments prior to taking up their posts. [South China Morning Post]

The regulations come shortly after the Sixth National Educational Day at which the Chinese Communist Party and government agencies earlier this month held educational events to teach how to guard against foreign spying. [CNN]

They also come at a time when cohesion among the countries of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance – the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand – seem to be challenged in the face of a steady drifting of New Zealand away from the hardening stance towards China taken by other four countries. Earlier this month, New Zealand Foreign Minister Nanaia Mahuta asserted that her country would refuse to support efforts by its allies to expand the role of Five Eyes in responding to China. In March New Zealand its allies in joint declaration condemning China's national security legislation on Hong Kong. [Sydney Morning Herald] [NZ Herald] [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

China-US relations: US Senate sharpens bill to fight Chinese threats

(dql) Last week the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee overwhelmingly backed a landmark bill, "Strategic Competition Act of 2021," that allocates hundreds of millions of USD for a set of new initiatives aimed at "mobiliz[ing] all US strategic, economic, and diplomatic tools for an Indo-Pacific strategy" to confront challenges China poses.

First introduced earlier this month, the original version of the bill, among others, included 655 million USD in funding for foreign militaries in the Indo-Pacific region as well as 450 million USD for the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative to ensure the free operation of forces of the US and its partners in the region and address threats that arise; furthermore, 75 million USD for an "Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network" in the Indo-Pacific as a counterweight to China's Belt and Road Initiative; 100 million USD for a "Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership," to promote secure telecommunications and digital infrastructure in developing markets and promote U.S. exports; and 300 million USD for the "Countering Chinese Influence Fund," to push back against the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to promote its authoritarian model abroad.

Upon receipt, the committee added numerous initiatives to the bill, including increased aid to Africa

and Latin America, more funding for technology industries and robustly strengthening the US development bank to rival the China Development Bank which is heavily involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative. [Axios][South China Morning Post 1] [Reuters]

Quoting Steve Bannon, former US President Donald Trump advisor and China hawk, the Committee's Chairman Jim Risch highlighted China as target of the bill, saying that the "issues facing us today in foreign policy, and perhaps for the entire 21st century, is going to be China, China and China. [South China Morning Post 2]

China-US relations: US International Religious Freedom Commission calls for boycott of Beijing Olympic games if Xinjiang human rights situation does not change

(dql) The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in its annual report recommended to the US government to label China as a "country of particular concern," under the International Religious Freedom Act, for "systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom," and to uphold financial and visa sanctions against Chinese government agencies and officials "responsible for severe violations of religious freedom."

Joining similar demands of human rights groups across the world pressing governments to boycott the Beijing Olympic Winter Games 2022, the Commission also urged the Biden administration to issue a statement "that US government officials will not attend the games if the Chinese government's crackdown on religious freedom continues." [US Commission on International Religious Freedom] [Channel News Asia] [CNBC]

The USCIRF is a US federal government commission established by the 1998 the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Its Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Commission's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State, and the Congress.

China-UK relations: British intelligence chief warns of Chinese domination of global operating system

(dql) Jeremy Fleming, Director of the Government Communications Headquarters, the British intelligence and security organization, warned that China might to able to effectively grab control of the world's global operating system, as "[s]ignificant technology leadership is moving East." He urged the West to take action to prevent China from dominating key technologies, including artificial intelligence, synthetic biology and genetics. Illustrating the difference between an immediate threat of Russia and the long-term technology dominance of China, Fleming compared: "Russia is affecting the weather, whilst China is shaping the climate." [Reuters]

China-UK relations: British parliament declare Beijing's treatment of Uighurs genocide

(dql) Following similarly parliamentary moves in the US, Canada, and the Netherlands, British lawmakers backed a motion stating Uighurs in Xinjiang were suffering crimes against humanity and genocide, calling on government to use international law to bring it to an end.

But Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government again shied away from declaring genocide over what it says are "industrial-scale" human rights abuses against the mainly Muslim Uighur community in Xinjiang. So far, the British government has imposed sanctions on some Chinese officials and introduced rules to try to prevent goods linked to the region entering the supply chain. [Reuters]

US President Joe Biden, meanwhile, will reportedly call on allies in the Group of Seven (G7) to increase pressure on China over the use of forced labor in Xinjiang, when he will participate in G7 meeting in Britain in June where he is expected to reaffirm the strategic rivalry between democracies and more authoritarian states, particularly China. [Aljazeera]

China endangers peace in the South China Sea, EU says

(dql) The European Union (EU) has accused China of endangering peace and stability in the South China Sea, citing "the recent presence of large Chinese vessels at Whitsun Reef," claimed by China, Philippines, and Vietnam. Criticizing "unilateral actions that could undermine regional stability and international rules-based order," Brussels urged all parties to abide by the ruling in the 2016 South China Sea Arbitration which rejected most of China's claim to sovereignty in the sea. [EEAS] [Reuters]

The statement comes shortly after the Foreign Ministers of the 27 EU member states last week adopted the adopted the "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" which, among others, called for "free and open maritime supply routes in full compliance with international law, in particular UNCLOS, in the interest of all." [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

China-Germany relations: Foreign ministers reject decoupling

(dql) German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi stressed in a video conference the need for Brussels to engage rather than isolate Beijing, amid rising concerns on the Chinese side over the EU moving closer to the US. [South China Morning Post]

In a statement ahead of the virtual meeting, Maas reiterated the EU's designation of China as "partner, competitor and systemic rival at the same time." Calling for "strong, sustainable communication channels with Beijing," he also asserted that "[d]e-coupling is the wrong way to go." [Reuters]

The talk between Maas and Wang comes at the heels of talks between German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron with Chinese President Xi Jinping on climate cooperation earlier this month, widely seen as efforts of the European leaders to de-escalate tensions in EU-China relations over sanctions imposed by Brussels on Chinese officials for human rights abuses in Xinjiang. [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

Cross-strait relations: Taiwan kicks off week-long 24/7 simulation of Chinese invasion

(dql) Taiwan's military has begun the computerized component of this year's Han Kuang military exercises last Friday to test Taiwan's defense strategies and tactics against a possible military attack by China.

The Han Kuang exercises are Taiwan's largest annual war games and involve all branches of its armed forces, conducted in two stages: the tabletop drills and live-fire drills. The week-long simulation of a full-scale PLA invasion, done using the Joint Theater Level Simulation system, is the longest in the history of Han Kuang exercises since they were held for the first time in 1984.

The drills come amid military intimidation from China, with PLA planes flying into Taiwan's air defense identification zone for 18 days within the first 23 days in April and the largest show of force recorded on April 12, involving 25 war planes. [Taipei Times]

Chinese-Russian moon base project opened to international partners for participation

(dql) Russia and China have formally invited countries and international organizations to join the International Lunar Research Station (ILRS) project, being developed by the China National Space Administration (CNSA) and Russia's Roscosmos.

Making the announcement at a sideline event of last week's 58th session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the United Nations' Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), both partners said that the project would be open to participation at all stages and levels, including planning, design, research, development, implementation and operations.

The announcement comes after Russia and China signed a memorandum of understanding on the ILRS in March, and amid expectations that Russia will withdraw from the International Space Station (ISS) partnership with the US and the rest of the ISS partners in 2025, indicating Russia's leaving the US behind and moving towards China in space cooperation. [Space News] [ZME Science]

Japan: China threat looms large in latest foreign policy report

(dql) The Japanese Foreign Ministry this Tuesday released its latest Diplomatic Bluebook, the annual report on Japan's foreign policy and international diplomacy. While calling ties with Chinas "one of the most important bilateral relations," the report concludes that China's transparency-lacking expansion of military capabilities as well as its growing unilateral actions to alter the status quo in Asian waters is posing "strong concerns" in the region and to the international community. It, furthermore, asserts that Beijing's military build-up and activities in both, the East China Sea and South China Sea "have become a serious security concern," and criticizes China's Coast Guard Law, claiming that Chinese police vessels around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands entered "Japanese territorial waters" in violation of international law. It also expressed concerns over human rights abuses in the Xinjiang region and the crackdown on Hong Kong. Meanwhile, the Japan-US alliance is said to continue "to serve as the cornerstone of Japan's diplomatic and security policies," with its significance growing more than ever amid growing uncertainties in the region's security environment. [Mainichi]

China's Foreign Ministry was quick to hit back, accusing Tokyo of smearing Beijing's reputation with "malicious attacks," as well as of interfering into China's internal affairs, and urged Tokyo "to redress its mistakes." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Japan-China relations: Tokyo accuses Beijing of being behind cyberattack

(dql) Tokyo police are investigating cyberattacks on about 200 Japanese companies and research organisations, including the country's space agency, by a hacking group believed to be linked to the Chinese military. [Channel News Asia]

The accusation comes short after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and US President Joe Biden at their meeting in the White House earlier this month agreed on "the importance of strengthening bilateral cybersecurity and information security," one among many areas of cooperation to jointly respond to challenges China is posing to their countries. [White House, USA]

Japan to host first joint military exercise with the US and France

(dql) Japan's Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi announced that Japan will hold a joint military drill with United States and French troops in the country's southwest from May 11 to 17, in a first large-scale exercise in Japan involving ground troops from all three countries. [France 24]

The announcement comes as Tokyo seeks to deepen defense cooperation beyond its key US ally to counter Beijing's growing assertiveness in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and a week after Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's visit to the White House during which he and US President Biden agreed to work together to "take on the challenges from China and on issues like the East China Sea, the South China Sea, as well as North Korea, to ensure a future of a free and open Indo Pacific." Both leaders also agreed to "oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea," as well as "China's unlawful maritime claims and activities in the South China Sea." [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

Meanwhile, the British ambassador to Japan, announced that on its maiden deployment the UK's HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier will lead a flotilla of Royal Navy ships through Asian waters on port visits to Japan and South Korea. The carrier strike group will include the Queen Elizabeth and 18 F-35B stealth fighters, two destroyers, two frigates and two support ships. It will be joined US vessels as well as a Dutch frigate and conduct exercises with forces from Japan, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, France, the UAE, Denmark, Greece, Italy, Turkey, Israel, India, Oman and South Korea. [Aljazeera]

South Korean court sides with Japan in wartime sexual slavery case

(nm) A South Korean court last week ruled in favour of the Japanese government in a lawsuit filed by 20 plaintiffs, including eleven victims of wartime sexual slavery. The Seoul District Court dismissed the case citing sovereign immunity, contradicting an earlier court ruling from January that mandated the Japanese government to compensate the victims who are euphemistically referred to as comfort women. The plaintiffs announced they would appeal last week's decision.

The rulings are part of the victims' effort to hold the Japanese government legally accountable for forcing or luring young women into working in brothels run by the Japanese military before and during the Second

World War. The January decision was seen as a landmark victory as it was the first case won by survivors. The judge argued Japan could not claim exemption from a case involving "anti-humanity acts systematically planned and perpetrated by the Japanese Empire." Tokyo had rejected the ruling, referring to a 2015 agreement under which Japan acknowledged its responsibility, apologized, and set up a fund for the survivors. The judge in last week's lawsuit, on the contrary, cited the agreement and warned that "diplomatic clashes become inevitable" if courts make exceptions from the principle of national sovereignty.

Experts, however, have cautioned not to expect dramatic changes in Seoul-Tokyo relations which are at their lowest in years. This week, the foreign ministry again called in a Japanese diplomat due to renewed claims by Japan over the islands of Dokdo/Takeshima in its annual foreign policy paper. The United States are currently urging both countries to resolve their conflict and improve ties in order to effectively cooperate on the nuclear threat posed by North Korea, as well as on China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. [The New York Times] [Korea Times 1] [Korea Times 2] [Korea Herald]

South Korea: Speculations around vaccine swap deal with US

(nm) South Korea's Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong last week revealed that Seoul had seriously discussed vaccine cooperation with the United States, including a "vaccine swap deal." But as Washington sees little potential for sharing its stock yet, several media outlets speculated that the lack of support was related to Korea's negative stance about joining the US-led Quad alliance. South Korea's foreign ministry has since denied the reports.

South Korea is currently facing difficulties in securing enough vaccine doses. Meanwhile, a US State Department spokesperson explained last week that it had discussed vaccine arrangements with Canada, Mexico, and the Quad – the regional alliance involving Japan, India, and Australia – leading to the speculations. This week, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense dismissed claims that Korea and China had discussed the Quad alliance with "an unequivocal no." The Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post had reported earlier that Chinese officials had tried to find out from their South Korean counterparts if Seoul had any intention of joining the

alliance. [Korea Herald 1] [Korea Herald 2] [Korea Times 1]

The speculations have highlighted the dilemma that South Korea faces, as China – the country's largest trading partner – seems increasingly concerned over Seoul possibly joining the alliance that is seen by China as an "anti-China coalition." There have been media reports in the past weeks claiming Washington had "strongly requested" South Korea to participate, but the Korean government has steadily denied such reports. The US is also seeking to build a stronger trilateral alliance with Japan and South Korea, which some see as a possible mini-Nato in Northeast Asia, challenging China's influence in the region. [South China Morning Post] [Korea Times 2]

South Korea-US-North Korea relations: Moon calls for cooperation to keep peninsula peace

(nm) South Korean President Moon Jae-in urged the United States to kick-start negotiations with North Korea on denuclearization, which Moon called a "matter of survival" for the South, after two years of no diplomatic progress on the issue. In an interview with The New York Times, he also called on the US to cooperate with China on North Korea as well as on other issues, considering that escalating tensions between the US and China could undermine any effort of denuclearization.

The statements come at a crucial moment as US President Biden is expected to meet with Moon in Washington next month, while Pyongyang has resumed weapons tests. Additionally, the Biden administration is currently in the final stages of its North Korea policy review and has already started reversing some of the former administration's foreign policy decisions. Moon also stated that former US President Trump had "failed to pull it through," but equally voiced support for the 2018 Singapore agreement concluded between Trump and North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un that sets out broad goals for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Moon further called for "gradual and phased" steps towards denuclearization and a "mutually trusted road map," stressing the necessity of concessions and incentives – a strategy that several conservative critics have dismissed, arguing Pyongyang would simply undermine international sanctions.

Moon is currently in his final year of his presidency and scrambling to reclaim his diplomatic legacy. While playing a critical mediating role in the 2018 negotiations between the US and North Korea, his work has since mostly unraveled. In addition to stalling negotiations, his domestic approval ratings have also plummeted. [The New York Times]

This week also marks the third anniversary of the historic inter-Korean April summit held between Moon and Kim in April 2018. Then, the two leaders vowed to work for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula, the first such meeting between leaders of the two Koreas in eleven years. Both sides also signed the so-called Panmunjom Declaration – named after the border village where they met – in which they pledged to commit to the "complete denuclearization" of the peninsula, improve inter-Korean relations, and officially end the 1950-53 Korean War. [Korea Herald 1]

In a different vein, the chief of the US Strategic Command last week affirmed the US was ready and able to deter any aggression from North Korea, stressing the US security commitment to the South. [Korea Herald 2].

For the case made for prioritizing engagement over pressure when dealing with North Korea, please see this piece by the US research programme [38 North].

Mongolia-US relations: Foreign ministers discuss deepening ties

(nm) Mongolian Foreign Minister B. Battsetseg and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed bilateral ties in a phone call last week. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations, building on the framework of the Strategic Partnership. Battsetseg also informed Blinken of the entry into force of Mongolia's Millennium Challenge Corporation Water Compact, a $350 million partnership between a US government agency and the Mongolian government that seeks to tackle the impending water crisis in the Mongolian capital of Ulaanbaatar. [Montsame] [US embassy]

Pakistan: Bombing narrowly misses Chinese ambassador, illustrates security threat

(lm) At least five people have been killed and a dozen wounded, when a powerful explosion apparently from a suicide bomb struck the parking lot of a hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador in the southwestern city of Quetta on April 22. Pakistan's leading Taliban group Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) later claimed responsibility for the attack. [New York Times] [The Straits Times]

The Chinese envoy and his delegation had been attending a meeting with senior Pakistani army officials and were due to return when the blast occurred, and it was unclear whether the Chinese visitors had been the targets of the attack. But analysts say the bombings nonetheless shine a light on security risks associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – a key part of Beijing's international infrastructure strategy known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). [South China Morning Post]

Quetta is the capital of the restive Balochistan province, which is viewed by Pakistani officials as an arena for proxy wars between regional and international powers. Islamabad frequently accuses India of attempting to stir nationalist and sectarian tensions in Balochistan through covert operations, an allegation New Delhi denies [see AiR No. 46, November/2020, 3].

In the past, Baloch separatist have claimed responsibility for attacks on Chinese targets. The separatist movement is secular and accuses Pakistan and China of exploiting local natural resources. Previous targets of Baloch separatist attacks included a hotel in the Chinese-built port of Gwadar, the Chinese consulate in the southern city of Karachi, and the partly Chinese-owned stock exchange in Karachi [see AiR No. 26, June/2020, 5]. [The Wall Street Journal]

Pakistan committed to strengthening ties with Iran, says foreign minister

(lm) Completing a three-day official visit to Iran, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi on April 22 said relations between Islamabad and Tehran had taken a new turn in the direction of positivity and cooperation. During his visit, Qureshi met with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif and other top officials to discuss ways to strengthen stability and peace in the region. [Tehran Times]

During the talks, both sides gave border security priority. The two countries share 950-kilometer of

borders which demarcate Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province from Pakistan's Balochistan province. Especially since the United States imposed sweeping economic sanctions against Iran's oil sector in 2019, the smuggling of petroleum products has become the primary source of income for the ethnic Baluch population living across the desolated area. Repeated flare-ups along the border in recent weeks, however, have exacerbated tensions between the two countries, threatening to further destabilase an already volatile region [see AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1]. [Anadolu Agency]

The two countries also reviewed cooperation agreements, with Rouhani announcing Iran's readiness to help Pakistan meet its energy needs. In 1995, Pakistan, India, and Iran signed a deal conceived to deliver Iranian gas to India via Pakistan, but New Delhi withdrew from the agreement because of security issues and high costs. While the Iranian section of the pipeline was completed in 2011, Pakistan's energy ministry announced in 2019 that it could not continue with the project as long as Tehran was subject to US sanctions [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4].

China's Bank may fund $6.8 billion railway project in Pakistan

(lm) Against the larger backdrop of subtle signs of unease between China and Pakistan over the future direction and subsequent funding of projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Beijing has sent a revised loan proposal related to a $6 billion loan to upgrade railway infrastructure in Pakistan to one of its institutional banks for approval. [Profit by Pakistan Today]

Last August, Pakistan`s top economic body had approved Mainline-1 (ML-1), a $6.8 billion project to upgrade railway infrastructure in the Peshawar – Lahore – Karachi corridor [see AiR No. 32, August/2020, 2]. Work on the first phase of the project was scheduled to commence in January and be completed in 2024.

However, officials from both sides took months to finalize the details of the project, mainly due to Beijing trying to avoid any commitment for funding. Islamabad this February eventually softened its position on both interest rate and loan currency, agreeing to borrow $6 billion in both Chinese and US currencies [see AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4]. The remaining $800 million will be provided by the government of Pakistan as equity.

Although it is the largest among the lot, ML-1 is not the only project under the CPEC facing significant delays. According to official numbers, so far, 17 projects worth $13 billion have been completed, while another 21 projects having an estimated cost of $12 billion are under implementation [see AiR No. 6, February/2021, 2].

United Arab Emirates extends term for $2 billion interest-free loan to Pakistan

(lm) Following talks between Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and his Emirati counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has decided to rollover the payment of a pending $1 billion deposit loan by Pakistan. Qureshi concluded a three-day official visit to the UAE on April 20, his second visit to Abu Dhabi in the last five months [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4]. [Al Jazeera]

After relations between Pakistan and the two Gulf nations had taken a swan dive last year due to diverging geopolitical perceptions, both countries earlier this year ratified debt suspension agreements worth $2 billion with Pakistan [see No. 6, February/2021, 2].

The UAE had in 2019 provided Islamabad with a $2 billion loan to strengthen Pakistan's dwindling foreign exchange reserves. Against the larger backdrop of a struggling economy, Islamabad last year was forced to conclude rescheduling agreements with 21 creditor countries under the G-20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) [see AiR No. 16, April/2020, 3].

Pakistan, United Kingdom discuss repatriation of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif

(lm) During talks with the British High Commissioner to Islamabad held to review the progress towards inking an extradition treaty, Pakistan's Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid renewed efforts to convince London to repatriate former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. [The Express Tribune]

The former prime minister has been residing in the UK since 2019, after a court granted him indefinite bail to seek medical treatment [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. In Pakistan, Sharif is facing several corruption charges and is considered by the courts to have

absconded. He is also facing sedition charges for accusing the military of political interference [see AiR No. 41, October/2020, 2, AiR No. 37, September/2020, 3].

At present, no formal extradition treaty exists between Pakistan and the UK, although Section 194 of the UK Extradition Act 2003 contains provisions for special "ad hoc" extradition arrangements. In a similar meeting held earlier in February, Pakistan and the United Kingdom had advanced towards signing an extradition treaty after Rashid assured the British envoy that Islamabad did not intend to use the treaty for politically motivated extradition. [AiR No. 6, February/2021, 2]

Agreement during ASEAN summit to prompt anti-coup activist call for continuation of protests

(lf) The long-awaited summit between the ASEAN member states on the crisis in Myanmar has been concluded with an agreement on five points: to end the violence, hold a constructive dialogue between all parties, send an ASEAN envoy, accept aid of and enable entry for the ASEAN envoy. Furthermore, the states agreed on a constructive dialogue with all parties involved in the conflict, as well as a strong ASEAN role in the further development of the crisis. However, Myanmar General Min Aung Hlaing, did neither set a timeline for the end of violence, nor did he specifically agree to end the killing of civilians immediately or to release political prisoners. The meeting was the first international cooperation on the crisis in Myanmar. The United Nations, the US and China view ASEAN as the adequate body to best deal with the situation. [Reuters 1]

Myanmar's anti-coup protestors were disappointed by the outcome. Activist groups stated that the agreement did not reflect the realities of the ground in Myanmar, and did not make up for the around 750 people killed by the military since the coup began. While the state-run newspaper New Light of Myanmar reported on Min Aung Hlaing's visit, commenting he discussed the country's "political changes", they made no mention of the consensus on an end to violence. [Voice of America] Activists were in particular disappointed over the weakened stance on the release of political prisoners, as a draft paper prior to the summit featured the release of political prisoners as one of the consensus points. Since the coup over 3,000 people have been detained. Therefore, activist have

called for a continuation and deepening of the Civil Disobedience Movement and protests. Activists urge civilians to boycott schools and to stop paying their electricity bills and agricultural loans. [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3]

Already before the summit, the ASEAN bloc received widespread criticism for only inviting the military and in particular the military leader Min Aung Hlaing to the table for a discussion on the situation, and not a representative of the National Unity Government. State leaders of Thailand and the Philippines, Prayut Chan-o-Cha and Rodrigo Duterte did not attend the summit. [South China Moring Post]

Shortly after the meeting, the junta announced to "positively consider" the agreement. On Monday already, one man was shot dead in Mandalay. [Reuters 4]

UK to deepen its position in Southeast Asia

(nd) UK Foreign Minister Dominic Raab visited Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam to enhance trade and security ties with the two countries and discuss future cooperation. He also met with ASEAN Secretary General to discuss the UK's commitment as a new dialogue partner to the ASEAN bloc. This visit is part of the UK's "Global Britain" agenda, focusing on Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific after its exit from EU. As a former colonial power, particularly in Malaysia, Singapore, and Myanmar, and other places, the UK aims to reinvigorate its historic position of influence and leverage in the region.

Already, the UK is a core member of the Five Power Defense Agreement (FPDA), a security arrangement involving Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance with the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. As part of freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) meant to deter Chinese activities, the UK has sent warships to the South China Sea since 2018. As part of a multinational naval force, the new Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier strike group will be dispatched next month. It also discusses with Japan over a UK military base. In Brunei, the UK has the only remaining permanent military presence with a contingent of 1,000 personnel, and has control over the British Indian Overseas Territory, including Diego Garcia, a joint U.S.-U.K. military facility located between Tanzania and Indonesia.

Following its exit from the EU, the UK will have to maneuver its way into becoming an official dialogue partner to ASEAN now. In November 2019, the UK appointed an ambassador especially for the bloc, and concluded bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) with Singapore and Vietnam by the end of 2020. Its trade priority is the inclusion into the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a constellation of 11 Pacific rim countries. Given the tensions between US and China, the UK will have to carefully avoid to be pulled into the conflict, recently seen by the imposition of sanctions due to rights abuses against Uyghur Muslims, which was countered by retaliatory sanctions by China, as well as the UK's support of Hong Kong's democracy movement.

Additionally, the UK has provided over $385 million in development aid annually to Southeast Asia in recent years, and revitalized its Newton Fund by investing up to $132.5 million to support science and innovations collaboration in the region, using more soft power instruments. [The Diplomat]

Brunei's ASEAN diplomacy faces challenges

(nd) Brunei had made the Covid-19 pandemic priority of its ASEAN chairmanship, following its domestic success against it, also because a code of conduct for the South China Sea was deemed unlikely to be concluded from the beginning.

Following the military coup in Myanmar on February 1, though, this prioritization was forced to change, and ASEAN proved divided over how to respond. Maritime states around Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines, denounced the coup, while mainland neighbors Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam were more hesitant and invoked the principle of non-interference, two positions to be united by Brunei.

The budget for its diplomatic corps was increased by 7 % for 2021. Since the coup, Brunei has been rather active, releasing a statement within 24 hours, emphasizing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the 'will and interests' of Myanmar's people.

Brunei has met with the junta representatives, which received criticism and is further complicated by the emerge of the parallel government, the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH). A second statement by Brunei was watered down, showing the remaining divide, but also indicating that even the neutral chair denounces the violence on protesters

and that ASEAN wants a solution for the sake of stability. Following the looming of a "federal army", Indonesia called for a special ASEAN meeting, which will be in person. To invite and prioritize General Min Aung Hlaing over the newly formed National Unity Government (NUG) of the CRPH indicates that Brunei considers the General part of the solution.

At the upcoming meeting, the members have to release a joint statement, for which it will be difficult for Brunei to broker unity, with Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte absent. [East Asia Forum 1]

Thailand has been rather silent, despite increasing airstrikes in neighboring Kayin state and 23,000 displaced people, at least 3,000 of which made it into Thailand. While the government did set up temporary shelter anticipating a surge in numbers, at the same time pushed away incoming refugees, excluding NGOs and UN representatives access to the people. This reaction is unsurprising, given the approach to Rohingya refugees, who were pushed back, and other refugee groups from the 1980s still considered to be "temporarily displaced".

The influx indicates the high implications growing violence in Myanmar will have on Thailand. Parallelly, Thailand is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, so there is no legal protection for refugees. A prime ministerial regulation from 2019 provided a distinction between economic migrants and asylum seekers, but was criticized for deterring refugees and violating the principle of not sending back who might be subject to harm. Practice is based on "voluntary return" and "resettlement" to third countries. [East Asia Forum 2]

In any case, a special summit exclusively to deal with Myanmar is unusual and shows a departure from an indirect and informal diplomatic style, which was characteristic of ASEAN, and something that did not occur after the coup in Thailand in 2014. Analysts suggest, the successful role Indonesia assumed during the democratization in Myanmar in the 2010s under then-president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), and his Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, is a legacy that Indonesian President Joko Widodo does not want to see crumbling down during his term. [Channel News Asia]

Laos: Regional countries to fight for influence over China

(nd) Japan, Thailand and Vietnam have moved this year to offer new help or reaffirm the benefits of previous aid to Laos. In an effort to reinforce their respective bilateral ties, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam have reached to Laos to give aid. Japan aims to advance a strategic partnership, has offered about $1.8 million to open Covid-19 vaccine storage facilities, and announced to support upgrades to international airports. Thailand also vowed to support Laos with the pandemic and has helped in education, agriculture and health. Vietnam has developed a 2021-2030 cooperation strategy and a five-year cooperation agreement.

Development aid in total has reached up to 15% of Lao GDP, helping the economy to grow at an annual average of 5.8% during the past five years. Chinese payments to Laos have reached $11 billion per year, with financing and investment making the sum even higher. Therefore, countries in the region hope to lessen China's influence, mostly due to its domination of the Mekong River and its flow. To mitigate this, the US last year launched the aid plan Mekong-U.S. Partnership. Japan and Vietnam have additional quarrels with China over the South China Sea. While those countries aim at pushing back China's influence on Laos, the latter is mostly dependent on China, to which it owed $ 250 million for the construction of a 400-kilometer, $5.9 billion China-invested railway, according to the International Monetary Fund. [Voice of America]

Philippines to tolerate Chinese fishing, but displays disapproval

(lp) President Rodrigo Duterte said he would tolerate 'non-commercial' fishing by China in Philippine territory of the South China Sea, as long as Filipinos are not prevented from fishing themselves. Filipinos have reported huge losses in their fish catch due to overfishing by Chinese vessels. The employment and food security of Filipinos are threatened not only by overfishing, but the cumulative damages to the maritime ecosystems caused by Chinese activities in the South China Sea. Besides local governmental and civil society groups, the US has expressed concerns over Chinese illegal fishing and ecosystem destruction in the area. The European Union (EU) also called for the crafting of a legally binding Code of Conduct to reduce tensions in the South China Sea. In turn, the Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) instructed their foreign ministers to hold meetings with China and the US to improve

multilateral ties. Moreover, the EU released a new policy aimed at increasing its influence in the Indo-Pacific through areas from security to health. [Manila Bulletin 1] [Inquirer 1] [Voice of America] [Manila Bulletin 2]

Nonetheless, Duterte has not signed any fishing treaty in the South China Sea with China. Rather, the Philippines showcased its disapproval of Chinese incursion by filing two additional diplomatic protests against China. Similarly, the National Task Force for the West Philippine Sea (NTF-WPS) deployed more ships and planes to increase patrols in the area. Moreover, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) is considering building structures in the South China Sea to assert the country's sovereignty. The Philippines has not been building these structures per Articles 60, 80, 246 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. But since China already violated this agreement, the AFP awaits the consideration of the NTF-WPS on this matter. [CNN] [Reuters] [Rappler] [Inquirer 2]

Philippines seeks abolition of Kafala system in West Asia

(lp) President Rodrigo Duterte called for the abolition of the kafala system, which gives employers control over the mobility and legal status of foreign workers in a country. Duterte condemns the system because it increases the vulnerability of Filipino Overseas Foreign Workers (OFWs) to abuse and exploitation. Many Filipinas become OFWs because service work abroad allegedly provides greater financial security than the local job market. However, the link between local financial insecurity and the vulnerability caused by the Kafala system has made Filipino women targets of scams and human trafficking schemes. Moreover, immigration officers in the Philippines are under investigation for their involvement in such schemes. [Arab News] [Manila Bulletin 1]

Duterte had banned work for Filipinos in Kuwait in 2018 due to the abuse, exploitation, and murder of OFWs. Moreover, in March of this year Duterte signed a labor pact with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to halt trafficking of Filipinos via Dubai. The pact allows local recruitment agencies to deploy Household Service Workers (HSWs) legally in cooperation with Tadbeer, the new UAE labor office, which will handle the entry of all HSWs into Dubai. The two countries had signed a Memorandum of Understanding to protect

migrant workers. [Straits Times] [Manila Bulletin 2] [Khaleej Times]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

28 April 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

The UK Integrated Defense Review: A Conversation with General Sir Nick Carter

This event will feature a conversation with General Sir Nick Carter, Chief of the UK Defence Staff, on the UK Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, and how the UK military is prioritizing modernization.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [CSIS]

28 April 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT), RUSI, UK

Black Gold: Exposing North Korea's Oil Procurement Networks

This event will discuss the latest report by Project Sandstone and C4ADS which details how North Korea illegally procures oil in violation of UN sanctions.

Membership event.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [RUSI]

28 April 2021 @ 1.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Public & Business Risks: Planning for Public Purpose in Venture Capital

Fellow Liz Sisson will provide an overview and discuss her research on risk assessment and diligence with respect to early-stage startups.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

28 April 2021 @ 2.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Designing Trustworthy Data Systems for 21st Century Public Health

This January, President Biden issued an executive order calling for the modernization of public health data infrastructures, highlighting the importance of accurate data. In this panel, four practitioners will shed light on the perks of data collection, the importance of trusted data, especially during a pandemic, and governance.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

28 April 2021 @ 2.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Safe Enough? A History of Nuclear Power and Accident Risk

This online event is part of the series on Managing the Atom Seminar, featuring historian Thomas Wellock, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

28 April 2021 @ 10.00 a.m. (GMT+8), Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Malaysia

The Impacts of the Pandemic and the Stimulus Packages Introduced in Malaysia and Taiwan

The pandemic has impacted different economies in different intensities in 2020 and 2021. In the region, we mostly observed negative growths last year in the backdrop of full and partial lockdowns worldwide to curb the spread of the pandemic. Taiwan, however, recorded a 3.11% GDP growth last year largely accredited to the success of their early response — a success story to be shared and learnt from. In this webinar, we will be bringing together experts from Taiwan and Malaysia to examine the negative impacts of the pandemic and the various stimulus packages introduced since 2020.

For more information please visit [ISIS].

28 April 2021 @ 8.30 a.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

23 Years of Nonuse: Evaluating the Nuclear Taboo in India and Pakistan

In this South Asian Voices virtual roundtable, experts from India and Pakistan will be in conversation with Dr. Nina Tannenwald on her latest article, “23 Years of Nonuse: Does the Nuclear Taboo Constrain India and Pakistan?” This discussion will examine whether the nonuse of nuclear weapons in South Asia over the past two decades can be attributed to normative concerns and how the nuclear taboo can be strengthened going forward.

For more information please visit [Stimson Center].

28 April 2021 @ 11.00 a.m. (GMT-5), The German Marshall Fund of the United States, USA

Strengthening International Peace and Security

The German Marshall Fund of the United States would like to invite you to a timely conversation with Helga Schmid, the new secretary general at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The conversation, moderated by GMF's Ian Lesser, will

focus on Secretary General Schmid's priorities in her new capacity at the OSCE. This includes a focus on OSCE efforts to address the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 and Secretary General Schmid's vision on how multilateral organizations, including the OSCE, can strengthen peace building, prevent conflict, and empower women and girls.

For more information please visit [The German Marshall Fund of the United States].

28 April 2021 @ 4.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Institute for Policy Studies, USA

Biden's First 100 Days: Reflections From IPS Experts

President Joe Biden campaigned on promises to fight the coronavirus, improve the economy, respond to calls for racial justice and combat climate change. In this virtual public briefing, a panel of IPS experts will deconstruct what Biden has gotten right during his first 100 days, and what can/should be done to go further and bolder.

For more information please visit [Institute of Policy Studies].

28 April 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Switzerland

Launch | E-learning course on national human rights institutions, ombudsman, and private security

This event will launch a new training course on human rights institutions and private security, which was developed in cooperation with the technical secretariat of the Ibero-American Federation of Ombudsmen (FIO) and the secretariat of the Network of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in the Americas (RINDHCA). It focusses on the Latin American and Caribbean region.

If you wish to find out more about the course and its launch, please visit [DCAF].

28 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Egmont Institute, Belgium

Strategic Autonomy and the Transformation of the EU

This event will launch the FIIA report "Strategic Autonomy and the Transformation of the EU: New agendas for Security, Diplomacy, Trade and Technology" and delve into key trends and major disputes on the path towards a more capable and self-reliant Europe.

For more information, please visit [Egmont Institute].

28 April 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

China and the WTO: (How) can they live together?

Considering the mismatch between the WTO framework and China's economic model, this webinar asks: Can the two systems live together, or what needs to be changed in order to make them more compatible with one another and avoid continuous tensions?

If you are interested in this event, please visit [Bruegel] for more information.

28 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Clingendael, The Netherlands

Hong Kong in the eye of the storm: winds of political change

Against the backdrop of political turmoil in Hong Kong, this event asks: How should we interpret this political storm? What will the future bring and how will it impact Hong Kong's status as the international, commercial gateway to China?

Please visit [Clingendael] for more information.

28 April 2021 @ 3:30 p.m. (GMT+2), European Council on Foreign Relations, France

How the EU should approach China: The Visegrad perspective(s)

This discussion will focus on how countries of Central and Eastern Europe deal with China and how they can

contribute to a coherent EU approach vis-á-vis China, viewed from a national perspective.

If you wish to join the discussion, please visit [ECFR] for more information and mandatory registration.

29 April 2021 @ 12.15 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Technology Transfer, Control, and Re-invention of the Indian Pressurized Heavy Water Reactor

This online event is part of the series on International Security Brown Bag Seminar and explores the role of tacit knowledge in the transfer and reinvention of complex, dual-use technologies, with the example of pressurized heavy water reactors.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

28 April 2021 @ 9:30 a.m. (GMT-5), United States Institute of Peace, USA

Enhancing U.S.-China Strategic Stability in an Era of Strategic Competition

This event will discuss the tensed competition between the US and China and will explore how strategic stability by lowering the risks of military conflict, preventing a destabilizing arms race, and managing emerging technologies and frontiers of conflict are necessary to avoid further conflict.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [United States Institute of Peace]

28 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Global Development, USA

A Development Agenda for the 117th Congress: A Conversation with Congressman Joaquin Castro

This panel will discuss US development policy priorities and challenges facing the 117th Congress.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Center for Global Development]

29 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Center for Global Development, USA

The External Dimension of the EU's Green Deal: What Role for EU Development Cooperation?

This event will discuss the repercussions and chances of the EU Green Deal, which was put forward December 2019.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Center for Global Development]

29 April 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

The Future of the U.S.-Vietnam Partnership, Session Two

This second part of a webinar series will discuss the US-Vietnam comprehensive partnership.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [CSIS]

29 April 2021 @ 9:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Korea Chair "The Capital Cable" #25

This panel round event will discuss trade and economic issues on the Korean Peninsula.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [CSIS]

29 April 2021 @ 12:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Google vs. Oracle: Implications for Software Innovation?

This webinar will discuss the future of software innovation and the firm's right to use those.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [CSIS]

29 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Creating Fiscal Space During the Covid-19 Era

This panel discussion will highlight the major findings of the latest Commission report, and the panel discussing innovative, concrete options for generating financial resources for pandemic preparedness and response in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).

For more information and registration, please visit the website [CSIS]

29 April 2021 @ 2:30 a.m. (GMT), RUSI, UK

Responsible Cyber Power

This event will discuss the issues that emerge in the cyber space and elaborate the importance of diversity in addressing the challenges and opportunities of the global cyber race.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [RUSI]

29 April 2021 @ 2:00 a.m. (GMT), ODI, UK

The climate crisis and humanitarian need: taking action to support the world's most vulnerable communities

This event will discuss how climate change affects humanitarian aspects by shedding light on the world's most vulnerable places, and what steps are necessary to avoid it.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [ODI]

29 April 2021 @ 1.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Sex on the Internet

In acknowledging the fundamental role sex plays in human life, this event will shed light on how the internet can be regulated in order to protect exercising it online.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

29 April 2021 @ 2.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Closing the Government Tech Talent Gap

As part of the "Perspectives of Public Purpose Week", this panel will focus on how the U.S. federal government should tackle key technology problems through significant growth of the technical government workforce. We will hear from current and former government leaders in Technology and Human Capital, and discuss the challenges and opportunities the new administration has in hiring, retaining, and leveraging technologists in government agencies. We will explore why agency leadership should prioritize in-house tech human capital, unpack the resources they have available to do so, and re-imagine the outcomes of Government IT should they be able to accomplish this.

For more information, see [Belfer].

29 April 2021 @ 4.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

After Disengagement: U.S. Interests and the Future of Afghanistan

This online event forms part of the series on Grand Strategy, Security, and Statecraft Speaker, and will offer a panel discussion on the recent withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

29 April 2021 @ 11.00 a.m. (GMT+10), Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australia

What's So Special about Asian Security? Dealing with Non-state Actors and Non-traditional Security

Are the security landscape and dynamics in Asia significantly different compared to those in other world regions? Is there anything 'special' about Asian security that necessitates alterations or additions to the theories, concepts or methods of standard international relations or security studies research? This Roundtable explores two potent themes that could make Asia's security order and practices distinctive: the plurality of actors – including many types of non-state and trans-state actors – and the wide range of so-called 'non-traditional' security challenges that preoccupy regional policymakers.

For more information please visit [Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs].

29 April 2021 @ 2.30 p.m. (GMT+1), Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, Belgium

Artificial Intelligence and Governance: Going Beyond Ethics

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is changing our world. This new phenomenon carries many threats, but also offers many opportunities. The Martens Centre will present its research paper dedicated on: 'Artificial Intelligence and Governance: Going Beyond Ethics', authored by Michał Boni, Senior Research Associate of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

For more information please visit [Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies].

29 April 2021 @ 1.00 p.m. (GMT+0), International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

A French perspective on defence innovation

Innovation in the defence sector seeks to solve two interrelated challenges: maintain the operational superiority of the forces deployed in the field and guarantee a military power's autonomy of action. The French Ministry of Armed Forces decided in 2018 to meet this double challenge by creating the French Defence Innovation Agency. The agency's founding director, Emmanuel Chiva, will in this Defence

Innovation Talks webinar explain how it seeks to generate, capture, amplify and ultimately integrate disruptive technologies in the French military structures and forces.

For more information please visit [International Institute For Strategic Studies].

29 April 2021 @ 11.00 a.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

A New Agenda for U.S. Drone Policy and the Use of Lethal Force

Join the Stimson Center for the launch of Stimson's new report, A New Agenda for U.S. Drone Policy and the Use of Lethal Force. The event will feature an expert discussion on the ways in which the security infrastructure that arose from the attacks on September 11, 2001 has transformed U.S. engagements in the world and opportunities to reassess the U.S. government's approach to the use of lethal force abroad.

For more information please visit [Stimson Center].

29 April 2021 @ 3.00 p.m. (GMT-5), The German Marshall Fund of the United States, USA

EU-Turkey Relations: Towards a Positive Agenda?

This virtual panel will be discussing the results of two surveys recently conducted by the GMF: The Delphi study, with the theme "EU-Turkey Relations: In Search for a Positive Agenda," surveyed a group of experts from Turkey and European countries regarding the feasibility as well as the potential impact of positive agenda items. The public opinion survey conducted in Turkey investigated the perceptions of Turkish citizens on Europeans, the EU, and Turkey-EU relations.

For more information please visit [The German Marshall Fund of the United States].

29 April 2021 @ 5.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

Book Launch: 'Peace in the Age of Chaos' with Steve Killelea

Join Liz Hume, Acting President and CEO at the Alliance for Peacebuilding, and Richard Ponzio, Director and Senior Fellow at Stimson Center, in conversation with Steve Killelea about his new book, why he believes peace is a prerequisite for survival of society as we know it in the 21st century, and how Positive Peace provides an exciting new approach to solving some of the most intractable problems of our time.

For more information please visit [Stimson Center].

29 April 2021 @ 10.00 a.m. (GMT-5), The Dialogue, USA

Energy Transition in Latin America – The Role of the Private Sector

This event will shed light on the repercussions of the green economy transformation on the private sector, from business models to investment portfolios and will explore how companies in Latin America can further adapt to the changes.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [The Dialogue]

29 April 2021 @ 3.00 p.m. (GMT+1), Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

"Young Women and Next Generation Initiative"

At the second outreach event of the series, the panelists will discuss the role of the EU in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action negotiations, as well as the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Network. Additionally, the panelists will shed light on changes in the fields and possibilities for women and young people.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Istituto Affari Internazionali]

29 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Foreign Policy Research Institute, USA

FPRI Book talk: After Engagement

This event will discuss US policy towards China and its implications on international relations.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Foreign Policy Research Institute]

29 April 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Global Development, USA

Convergence or divergence? Assessing Biden's 100 days

This event will feature an assessment of US President Joe Biden's first 100 days in office.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [American Enterprise Institute]

29 April 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Global Development, USA

Why the innocent plead guilty and the guilty go free: A book event with Judge Jed S. Rakoff

This event will shed light on troubling parts of America's criminal justice system and the damage done to it by plea agreements, and discuss possible reforms.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [American Enterprise Institute]

29 April 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Foreign Policy Research Institute, USA

Gender Equality: The Time Has Come by Ms Corinna Lim

This lecture series will examine the situation of women in Singapore with respect to gender equality. This event, Lecture I: "Herstory: The Road to Equality", is part of IPS-Nathan Lectures by Ms Corinna Lim.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Institute of Policy Studies]

29 April 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT+1), Devex, Spain

How World Bank health funding adapted during the pandemic

This event will discuss the impact and practical implementation of the Covid-19 response package of $160 billion, the World Bank announced last year.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Devex]

29 April 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT), South African Institute of International Affairs, South Africa

Inclusive Green Recovery Towards Carbon Neutrality

This event will shed light on possibilities for "Inclusive Green Recovery Towards Carbon Neutrality", firstly revealing the related development priorities and policies, and secondly learning previous challenges.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [South African Institute of International Affairs]

29 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

The external dimension of the EU's Green Deal: What role for EU development cooperation?

This webinar will explore the role of EU development finance in addressing climate change and delivering development impact in partner countries, asking how the EU might align its development efforts with the external dimension of the EU Green Deal, and how the union can support the transition in partner countries, while ensuring impact on human development.

For more information, please visit [Bruegel].

29 April 2021 @ 4:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

Covid-19 and the geopolitics of the Balkans

This webinar asks: How have China, Russia, Turkey, and others stepped up their activities in the Balkans at a time when the enlargement perspective is sinking below the horizon.

If you wish to learn more about this event, please follow [Bruegel].

29 April 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT), Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, UK

Predatory States and Ungoverned spaces: who assumes the responsibility to protect?

This event brings together Director of the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda, gender and human rights activist Hamsatu Allamin, and the founder of Food4Humantiy in Yemen, Mina Luqman, to discuss the growing challenge of failed governance by states, the emergence of ungoverned and "alternatively governed" spaces, and the implication for civilians. It will also take a closer look at the role of the ICC.

If you are interested in this event, please visit [CFFP] for more information and registration.

30 April 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Hudson Institute, USA

A Conversation with Australian Ambassador Arthur Sinodinos

You can join this discussion between the Hudson Institute and Australia's Ambassador to the United States on US-Australia relations and key foreign policy challenges, including the Indo-Pacific region.

Please visit [Hudson Institute] for more information.

30 April 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT+1), Center for Global Development, USA

Russian hybrid warfare in Europe: Lessons for the US

This event will elaborate on Russia's hybrid war methods challenging policymakers across Europe, accelerated by the global pandemic.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [American Enterprise Institute]

30 April 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Center for Global Development, USA

What is the future of family policy after the pandemic and beyond?

This panel will evaluate of the effectiveness of recent US government policy to provide working adults access to paid leave during the pandemic and beyond.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [American Enterprise Institute]

30 April 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Global Development, USA

The Peril and Promise of Financial Markets For Developing Countries

As part of the Future of Development series, will feature a discussion on challenges faced by developing countries and highlight trends and improvements.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Center for Global Development]

30 April 2021 @ 9.00 a.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

The Path Ahead for Climate Change Policy

This event features a conversation between HPCA Director Robert Stavins and Nat Keohane on next steps for climate policy both in the United States and abroad.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

30 April 2021 @ noon (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Whose Streets? Our Streets! (Tech Edition)

This event goes to the roots of the term “smart city” and asks the question whether citizens should be worried about current developments. It forms part of the "Perspectives of Public Purpose Week".

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

3 May 2021 @ 9.30. a.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

Biden and Congress at 100 Days – Assessing Arms Trade Policy

In light of renewed attention on U.S. arms sales and to mark the Biden administration’s and the 117th Congress’ first 100 days, please join the Forum on the Arms Trade, the Stimson Center, PAX, and the Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) for an expert conversation on the U.S. government’s approach to – as well as roles and responsibilities in – the global arms trade.

For more information please visit [Stimson Center].

3 May 2021 @ 9.00 a.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Leadership and Collaboration: A Conversation with EU Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen

In this online event, European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen will elaborate on Europe's cooperation and development policy, as well as thoughts on leadership, decision-making, building partnerships, inter alia.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

3 May 2021 @ noon (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Energy Policy Seminar: Alejandro Nunez-Jimenez on "Renewable Hydrogen Potential in the EU"

As part of the series of Energy Policy Seminar, this event will discuss the potential renewable Hydrogen Potential in the EU.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Belfer Center]

4 May 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Foreign Policy Research Institute, USA

Taiwan in the Era of Tsai Ing-wen: Changes and Challenges

This panel discussion will discuss the newly released book, "Taiwan in the Era of Tsai Ing-wen: Changes and Challenges".

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Foreign Policy Research Institute]

4 May 2021 @ 9:30 a.m. (GMT+8), RSIS, Singapore

RSIS Panel Webinar on "DAP and Malaysian Politics Post-Sheraton Move"

This panel discussion will elaborate on the current situation of the Pakatan Harapan government and options for the Democratic Action Party (DAP) on the opposition bench.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [RSIS]

4 May 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Gender Equality and Sustainability in Panama: A Conversation with Foreign Minister Erika Mouynes

As part of the conversation series "Smart Women, Smart Power", Her Excellency Erika Mouynes, Panama's Minister of Foreign Affairs, will dicuss Panama's approach to gender equality, its role as a sustainable leader in the region, and Panama's response to Covid-19.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [CSIS]

4 May 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Global Development, USA

Fiscal Policies to Address Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific

This panel discussion will elaborate on the role of fiscal policies in tackling climate change in Asia and the Pacific.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Center for Global Development]

4 May 2021 @ 2.00 p.m. (GMT+2), DiploFoundation, Malta

[WebDebate #47] Current diplomatic responses to COVID-19

COVID-19 has posed tremendous challenges to diplomacy. Practices had to be adapted while diplomats had to address the immediate crisis situation and work towards coordinated responses. This WebDebate explores two current diplomatic responses to COVID-19: the COVAX (COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access) initiative, and the work done at the 46th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).

For more information please visit [DiploFoundation].

04 May 2021 @ 1.00 p.m. (GMT+0), International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

Climate security's rise in the global agenda: national and multilateral strategies

This webinar explores how governments and multilateral institutions are dealing with the security implications of climate change, as well as what measures can be taken to further accelerate responses to the environmental challenge.

For more information please visit [International Institute For Strategic Studies].

4 May 2021 @ 4.00 p.m. (GMT+1), Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

Europe's Missile Defence, EU and Nato

At this moderated webinar, a recent study by the institute on missile defence in Europe and on the role of Italy will be presented. The panelists will also discuss chapters on NATO, and technology innovation.

For more information and registration, please visit the website [Istituto Affari Internazionali]

4-7 May 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT+2), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Sweden

Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development 2021

This year's Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development will revolve around the theme "Promoting Peace in the Age of Compound Risk," exploring novel approaches and solutions to promoting peace in the age of compound political, social, economic, and environmental risks reinforced by the Covid-19 pandemic. The focus will be on collective action measures.

To discover the full programme and any additional inquiries, please visit [SIPRI].

5 May 2021 @ 2.00 p.m. (GMT+2), GLOBSEC, Slovakia

A European Green Deal Balancing Act: The Present and Future Competitiveness of Industrial Decarbonisation

GLOBSEC would like to take this opportunity to invite you to the first Slovakia 'Fit for 55' dialogue focusing on the decarbonization of industry. In the lead-up and aftermath of the European Commission's European Green Deal revision, the Slovakia 'Fit for 55' series is meant to provide a public platform for messaging and cooperation among key public sector, corporate, association and expert stakeholders to help ensure EGD measures are fit for purpose to lead the low carbon transition.

For more information please visit [GLOBSEC].

5 May 2021 @ 4.00 p.m. (GMT+2), Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy, Greece

Online public discussion: "Cooperative Competition or Competitive Cooperation? Russian-Turkish Relations Today"

The Russian-Turkish relationship, which combines striking elements of cooperation and competition, continues to confound observers. From the Caucasus to Libya, from Syria to Ukraine, Ankara and Moscow seek to navigate some of the region's thorniest conflicts amidst continued tensions with Europe and the United States.

For more information please visit [Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy].

7 May 2021 @ 2:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Italian Institute for International Political Studies, Italy

EU, US & China: The Impossible Triangle? Global Economic Governance after the Pandemic

This webinar will take a closer look at the fragmentation and regionalization of the post-pandemic world, asking: Is time really running out for globalisation? What are the prospects for the interplay between Washington, Brussels, and Beijing? What is the impact on developing and poor countries? And: Is there still room for renewed multilateral economic cooperation?

For more information, please see [ISPI].

Recent book releases

Linda Colley, T***he Gun, the Ship, and the Pen: Warfare, Constitutions, and the Making of the Modern World***, Liveright, 508 pages, 30 March 2021, reviewed in [The Guardian]

K. S. Komireddi, ***Malevolent Republic: A Short History of the New India***, Hurst, 320 pages, 15 December 2020, reviewed in [The Hindu].

Tim Weiner, ***The Folly and the Glory: America, Russia, and Political Warfare 1945-2020***, Henry Holt and Co., 336 pages, 22 September 2020, with a review in [New York Times].

Calls

The **National Bureau of Economic Research** has opened a call for proposals for ***Research Grants on Economic Shocks and Gender***. Submission of applications must be by 20 May 2021. For more information, see [NBER].

The 1**4th Annual Conference "The Political Economy of International Organization"** to be held on 13-15 January 2022 invites paper submissions. Deadline is 30 September 2021. More details at [PEIO].

Jobs & positions

The **Asian Development Bank** is hiring a ***Director General f***or its Budget, People, and Management Systems Department, to be posted at the ADB headquarters. Closing date for applications is 3 May 2021. More information available at [ADB].

The **International Monetary Fund** is offering the position of ***Deputy Division Chief*** of its Digital Communications Division. Application deadline is 3 May 2021. More about the vacancy at [UN Jobs].

Oxford University's Centre for Criminology is looking to appoint a suitably qualified early career academic to a one-year ***Departmental Lectureship in Criminology*** to cover a temporary teaching need arising from the sabbatical leave of colleagues in the Centre. Application deadline is 14 May 2021. Further details at [Oxford University].

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