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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Please enjoy this week's update on the latest events and developments in domestic politics, constitutional law, human rights, international relations and geopolitics in Asia.

Special greetings are extended to readers in Belarus, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia and the United States which celebrate Independence Day in this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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Law and Politics in East Asia

CPC's white paper on human rights in China amid new report on secret prisons

(dx/dql) Shortly ahead of this week's celebration of the centenary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), China's State Council issued a white paper on the country's human rights practice and record. Summarizing the development and implementation of the Chinese concept of human rights and human rights protection "[e]mbedded in [g]overnance" over the past seven decades since the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the report identifies successes in ensuring economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, and in establishing "integrated law-based governance with human rights protection."

The white paper, furthermore, insists on a country-specific way of advancing rights protection, closely connected with securing development: "There are no ready models to copy in respecting, protecting and developing human rights. China must proceed from its prevailing realities and go its own way," adding that "[based on its prevailing realities, the CPC considers the rights to subsistence and development to be the primary rights; this is the secret of China's progress in

human rights. The right to subsistence comes before any other right, and the right to development is closely connected to the right to subsistence."

The report concludes that under the party's leadership "China has won the battle against poverty, and achieved major strategic results in building a moderately prosperous society in all respects," predicting that further progress will be made in the course of the realization of the Chinese dream by 2049, the centenary of the PRC, with "all rights of the Chinese people [...] safeguarded at a higher level." [State Council, China] [Global Times 1] [Global Times 2]

Meanwhile, human rights NGO Safeguard Defenders has published a report on the secret prison system in China, known as "residential surveillance at a designation location (RSDL)." Citing testimonies of RSDL victims, the report concludes that RSDL is an extra-judicial measure, exposing victims to "physical and psychological tortures including sleep deprivation, food deprivation, extended time in combined shackles and cuffs (sometimes for weeks), beatings, forced medication, denial of medical treatment, sexual abuse, stress positions held for extended periods (such as being hung by the wrists) and threats of physical harm to them and their loved ones." [Safeguard Defenders] [The Guardian]

China: Pressure on Hong Kong's Apple Daily continues

(dx) As reported last week, the pro-democracy Hong Kong newspaper Apple Daily was shut down following police raids, the arrest of executives and asset freezing last week. The executives are accused of colluding with foreign forces and held accountable for reports calling for foreign sanctions against Hong Kong and mainland China. [see Air No. 25, June/2021, 4] [Reuters]

Currently, the parent company of Apple Daily, Next Digital, is weighing a Security Bureau request to hand over a list of employees and other "sensitive information" to have frozen assets released. Meanwhile, a senior editorial writer of Apple Daily was arrested at the airport while attempting to flee to Britain. The editorial writer was the seventh Apple Daily senior executive to be arrested in two weeks. [South China Morning Post1] [South China Morning Post2]

In a related development, the pro-democracy web media Stand News, announced its decision to suspend

subscriptions and remove older commentaries for now, citing concerns that “speech crimes” have arrived in Hong Kong. Stand News is an independent online media outlet founded in 2014, which has mainly focused on political and court news in the wake of the 2019 anti-government protests. [Global Voices]

Japan: Supreme Court rules forcing couples to share surname constitutional

(dx) Upholding a previous judgement from 2015, Japan’s Supreme Court ruled that, legal provisions in Article 750 of the country’s Civil Code and family register law, forcing married couples to use the same surname, are constitutional. It dismissed requests filed by three couples to keep their separate surnames after local governments refused to accept their marriage registrations, leaving Japan the only country in the world known for having a law forcing married couples to share a surname.

The court’s decision reiterated that the surname issue should be discussed in parliament rather than seeking a judicial settlement. Although the 2015 ruling called for parliamentary discussions, they haven't progressed much as the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) members' opinions are sharply divided. LDP’s working group also gave up drafting a specific proposal regarding the surname issue ahead of the House of Representatives election this fall. [Mainichi]

Japan: Official campaigning begins for Tokyo assembly election

(dx) Official campaigning for the Tokyo metropolitan assembly election kicked off, an event regarded as the prelude to the House of Representatives election this fall. The main focus of the election is whether the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its junior coalition partner Komeito will prevail over Tomin First, which currently holds the largest number of seats in the assembly – 46 out of 127.

Major issues for the race include parties’ responses to the Covid-19 pandemic and how to stage the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. The LDP and Komeito, the 2nd and 3rd largest parties in the assembly, are vowing to safe and secure Olympics and Paralympics with proper anti-COVID-19 measures. Tomin First, calls for the hosting of the event without spectators. The Japanese Communist Party demands that the Tokyo

Games be cancelled, while the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan is pushing for another postponement or cancellation. [Kyodo News1] [Kyodo News2]

South Korea: Presidential race heats up

(nm) With several high-profile politicians announcing their plan to declare their bid for presidency over this and next week, South Korea's presidential race is considerably picking up speed nine months ahead of the March 2022 election. Ex-Prosecutor-General Yoon Seok-youl officially declared his bid this Tuesday after stepping down in March over disagreement with government plans to overhaul the prosecution. Yoon is seen as the leading conservative candidate, although he has yet to decide if he will run for the main opposition People Power Party (PPP). [Korea Herald] [Korea Times 1]

In addition to Yoon, chairman of the government Board of Audit and Inspection, Choe Jae-hyeong, offered his resignation this week in what is seen as the first step towards declaring his presidential bid as opposition candidate. Similar to Yoon, Choe was also in conflict with the Moon government, in his case over the government's anti-nuclear push. Due to the disagreement and several remarks, his resignation had been anticipated by political observers. The emerging picture of both Choe and Yoon running as possible opposition candidates, despite having been appointed by Moon, has led to some irritation on the side of Moon's ruling Democratic Party (DP). [Korea Times 2] [Korea Times 3]

Meanwhile, the DP decided not to postpone their primary elections to pick their candidate, terminating internal division on the issue. The DP primary is now set for September 10In the DP camp, Gyeonggi Province governor Lee Jae-myung and former DP chairperson Lee Nak-yon are expected to declare their candidacies on Thursday and next week respectively. [Korea Times 4]

South Korea: Ruling party expels proportional representation lawmakers over property speculation scandal

(nm) Preliminary results of investigations into the major real estate speculation scandal which had become public this March have led to political

consequences in South Korea. Following first allegations by the state Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission (ACRC), the ruling Democratic Party (DP) expelled two of its proportional lawmakers, thus terminating their mandate. Six additional DP lawmakers voluntarily left the party on recommendation. The ACRC will now also conduct a probe into lawmakers of the main opposition People Power Party (PPP).

The decision by the DP to expel its two lawmakers comes after the ACRC had found in early June that 12 DP lawmakers or their families were allegedly involved in the real estate scandal surrounding the state-run public housing company, Korea Land & Housing Co. (LH). The ACRC subsequently relayed its findings to a police-led special government investigation team. Following the results of the DP investigation, the commission is now also investigating 427 people related to the major opposition PPP, including its 101 lawmakers and their family members, on request of the party. The investigation is set to last a month with the possibility of extension. [Korea Times 1] [Korea Herald 1]

This week, the chief of a government task force investigating LH employees due to the same scandal further found that "several dozen" people were allegedly involved in founding a company to handle speculative property transactions, including LH employees, their relatives and acquaintances. He also spoke of a separate investigation into allegations of collusion between former LH employees and realtors to speculate in redevelopment areas south of Seoul. [Korea Herald 2]

Unrelated to the LH scandal, presidential secretary for anti-corruption Kim Gi-pyo who had been appointed in March resigned last week over mounting criticism over the extent of real estate speculation he allegedly partakes in. Kim is reported to be owning millions worth of real estate with large portions of it apparently purchased through loans, a practice that the government has criticized for contributing to property speculation. [Korea Times 2]

South Korea: Major police reform puts local governments in charge

(nm) South Korea's biggest reform of the country's police force since 1945 is to take effect on July 1, according to the National Police Agency. Pursuant to the plan introduced in 2018, local governments will be

put in charge of regional police forces while many duties are being transferred over from the national police, including investigating certain forms of crime. The reform is part of the Moon administration's larger efforts to adjust the investigative power of the nation's law enforcement agencies. One of the most contentious issues of the current administration remains a major prosecution reform which aims to decentralize power and to create a special investigative office that could handle high-level cases. [Korea Herald]

North Korea: Pyongyang's fight against "non-socialist and anti-socialist behavior" in border region

(nds) In order to fight "non-socialist and anti-socialist behavior," Pyongyang has reinstated a "unified command" at the country's border with China in mid-June. This unified command was created last year after the promulgation of a law, aiming to eliminate "reactionary thought." The complaints of several citizens prompted North Korean authorities to act. The difficult economic situation and the COVID-19 crisis made the living conditions difficult for the North Koreans. However, many locals, including brokers and the families of escapees to South Korea, live comfortably by illegally receiving money and goods

Meanwhile, the Ministry of State Security reportedly randomly arrests illegal cell phone users in the same region. North Korean authorities are putting to trial those detainees and even executing some of them. [Daily NK 1] [Daily NK 2]

Law and Politics in South Asia

Bhutan: Parliament's upper house passes bill to strengthen civil society

(lm) The upper house of Bhutan's Parliament, the National Council, has passed an amendment bill seeking to strengthen civil society organizations (CSOs) in the country. There are currently 63 registered CSOs in Bhutan; another 25 are awaiting registration.

The Civil Society Organizations (Amendment) Bill 2021 was tabled earlier this month following an initial review of the original 2007 legislation by the Foreign Affairs Committee. Later, the Legislative Committee proposed amendments to about 20 sections in the Act.

Under the revised legislation, the government is now inter alia required to make adequate financial provisions for the independent administration of the CSO Authority, a government body that is supposed to mediate between the government and the various organizations.

India: Prime Minister Modi holds first talks with Kashmir leaders since removal of autonomy

(ad/lm) India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has told leaders from Jammu and Kashmir that elections would be held in the union territory after the region's parliamentary constituencies were reconfigured. [South China Morning Post] [The Straits Times]

The talks on June 24 were the first between the Indian prime minister and Kashmiri leaders since the federal government in August of last year unilaterally abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, breaking the state of Kashmir into two union territories – one

comprising the Hindu-dominated Jammu region and the Muslim-majority Kashmir valley, known as Jammu and Kashmir, and the Buddhist enclave of Ladakh. [AiR No. 32, August/2019, 1].

With its special status removed, Kashmir lost its privileges as an autonomy, with major political leaders and journalists being placed under house arrest, schools and colleges being shut as well as suspension of internet services.

The meeting was attended by all leaders of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD), an amalgam of six local political parties that is pro-India but favors self-governance in the Jammu and Kashmir union territory. Two of the PAGD's constituent parties - the National Conference (NC) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) – have filed a petition with India's Supreme Court, challenging the constitutionality of the 2019 Reorganisation Act that nullified Jammu and Kashmir's statehood. [The Indian Express 1]

Many Kashmiris fear that the demarcation process is used by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party to divide the union territory on religious lines by manufacturing a Hindu dominance in the Kashmir valley – concerns that led one of the PAGD's constituent parties to pull out of the Delimitation Commission in May of last year. [AiR No. 36, September/2020, 2].

Modi had first made similar promises during his Independence Day address to the nation in August of last year [see AiR No. 36, September/2020, 2]. Experts therefore believe the prime minister's change of heart might have been dictated by geopolitical considerations in India's neighborhood rather than domestic concerns.

The first development pertains to the ongoing rapprochement between India and Pakistan, which started this February but hit a roadblock earlier this month when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said his country was ready to restart talks with India only if New Delhi provided a road map towards restoring the special status of Kashmir [see AiR No. 22, June/2021, 1].

Moreover, observers emphasize that the meeting comes at a time when direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government have reached a critical stage and the ground realities in and around Afghanistan are evolving rapidly. Specifically, New Delhi likely expects Afghanistan to again turn into a save haven to terror groups that will attack India

following the withdrawal of US and NATO troops. [The Hindu]

India: Farmers renew protests against contentious agricultural laws

(ad/lm) Thousands of farmers in India renewed their protest across the country on June 26, marking seven months of demonstrations demanding the repeal of three controversial agricultural reforms that they say will leave them at the mercy of private businesses. [Arab News]

Some marched toward the capital, New Delhi, while others rode tractors from neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. They were part of a mass gathering called by Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Joint Farmers Front, SKM) - an umbrella body of 40 farmers' unions - despite fears of a resurgence in COVID-19 cases after a slow recovery from a debilitating second wave in recent months.

In a memorandum addressed to Indian President Ram Nath Kovind, the union complained that three farm laws introduced by the government were "unconstitutional and prepared without the consultations with farmers."

They also accuse the federal government of having an undeclared Emergency in India, as they have repeatedly stopped farmers from continuing their protests and have supposedly implemented authoritarian methods to do so. The agricultural minister, turn, appealed to the farmers to "end their agitation" saying that the Centre was "ready to discuss and to resolve any provisions of the laws". [The Hindu]

To end the stalemate and to assuage farmers' fears, the government had held a series of talks with the protesting groups and offered to postpone implementing the new laws for 15 months. The protesters, however, rejected the offer and continued demanding that the laws be revoked, calling on Prime Minister Modi in May to resume talks [see AiR No. 21, May/2021, 4].

India: Twitter executive resigns amid tussle with federal government

(ad/lm) A senior executive at the local subsidiary of US microblogging giant Twitter has quit amid growing

tensions between the company and the Indian federal government. [BBC]

His was one of three positions that every intermediaries with more than five million users is expected to fill under the contentious new digital media rules, which took effect in February [see AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1].

Earlier, India's Ministry for Electronics and Information Technology had said that two of the new officials the company appointed were not employees, that its listed office address was that of a law firm, and that it had not given details about the third hire, the chief compliance officer, who is criminally liable for non-compliance.

Recent developments come after Indian media reported earlier this month that Twitter lost its so-called "safe harbour" immunity from prosecution for "unlawful" or "inflammatory" tweets, after the company had allegedly failed to comply with the new rules for social media companies. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

The resignation of the company's senior official is likely to complicate matters further, especially as it comes just days after the firm's country manager on June 24 earned a temporary reprieve from court from a police summon. [The Straits Times]

Before, police in the country's state of Uttar Pradesh had summoned the Twitter official on allegations for failing to stop spread of a video that showed some men beating an elderly man of a different religion. The video was used by numerous journalists to report on hate crimes against minority religions in India [see AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]. The order currently protects him from arrest, but the case is still open.

India: Opposition leaders gather to look for alternative vision for country

(ad) Eight opposition parties excluding the Indian National Congress (INC) have come together to discuss and debate on an "alternate" and "inclusive" vision for India.

The meeting was organized by Rashtra Manch, a cross-party platform launched in 2018 that opposes the current establishment. Whilst representatives of the INC did not attend the meeting, they have agreed to the alliance to challenge the current establishment. [The Indian Express] [Times of India]

Nepal: Supreme Court scraps appointment of 20 ministers in blow to caretaker PM Oli

(lm) Nepal's Supreme Court has delivered a fresh blow to embattled Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli by removing 20 recently appointed ministers, pending a ruling on whether a caretaker prime minister can make such sweeping Cabinet changes.

In May, Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved Parliament's lower house and scheduled fresh elections for November, while letting Oli staying on as caretaker prime minister until the elections are held [see AiR No. 20, May/2021, 3]. In a bid to hold consolidate his power and ditch opponents within his own party, he earlier this month dropped most ministers from his Cabinet and named 20 replacements, most of them lawmakers for a new junior coalition partner, the People's Socialist Party, Nepal [see AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2].

Responding to six different petitions filed against the expansion of the Cabinet, Nepal's apex court on June 22 issued an interim order, observing that the ministerial appointments had been "against the spirit of the constitution," as Oli was only a minority prime minister. The court's removal of the 20 ministers means the Cabinet is left with just five members, including the prime minister. [The Kathmandu Post]

In related news, the Supreme Court on June 23 continued hearing dozens of petitions challenging the dissolution of the House, including one filed by 146 lawmakers from an opposition alliance that calls for the immediate restoration of the lower chamber, with Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba as the new prime minister [see AiR No. 22, June/2021, 1]. [Outlook India]

Nepal: President makes appointments to constitutional bodies while case is sub judice in court

(lm) Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari on June 24 appointed 20 chairs and members in various constitutional commissions without the parliamentary hearing mandated by the constitution, even though the case remains sub judice in the Supreme Court. [The Kathmandu Post]

Prior to the appointments, the KP Sharma Oli-led government on May 4 had issued an ordinance to enable the Constitutional Council (CC) – a key agency that appoints officials at various constitutional bodies – to achieve quorum if as few as three of its current five members attend a meeting.

The ordinance had originally been issued in December of last year, after which the CC had met with the newly reduced quorum and made 38 nominations to vacant positions on 11 constitutional bodies [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4]. But the ordinance then failed to get tabled in the inaugural session of the reinstated lower house of Parliament on March 7 - as mandated by the Constitution – and thus, had to be re-issued.

Further, as per the Constitution, a 15-member joint committee representing both chambers of Parliament is mandated to conduct hearings for the justices recommended by the Judicial Council and those recommended for appointment in constitutional bodies by the CC. But days after the CC had made its nominations to the vacant positions, Oli had dissolved Parliament's lower house and announced snap elections, thereby effectively thwarting the vetting process [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4].

According to the regulations governing the work of parliamentary committees, there would be no obstruction for the recommended individuals to assume their positions in constitutional bodies if the hearing committee fails to take any decision within 45 days of receiving the list of nominees from the CC. Some experts, however, argue that this provision of the regulations comes into effect only after the hearing process begins.

Pakistan: Opposition lawmakers, supporters clash with police outside Balochistan Assembly

(ra) Chaotic scenes erupted outside the local Assembly of Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan on June 25, as scores of opposition lawmakers and supporters holding a protest outside the assembly were baton-charged by security forces. [Geo News]

Police said the protesters had locked all entrances to the building to prevent a parliamentary session that would see the presentation of the next fiscal budget from taking place. Their main issue with the budget was that it did not factor in funding for certain development projects that would have been built in

constituencies held by the opposition. Supporters of the opposition have also protested by blocking the highways of cities in Balochistan. [The News]

Sri Lanka: Suspected Tamil Tigers convicted under terrorism law pardoned

(lm) Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has pardoned 93 prisoners, including 16 individuals linked to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an ethnic Tamil militant organization that aimed to secure an independent state of Tamil Eelam in the north and east of Sri Lanka. [The Hindu] [The Straits Times]

The LTTE suspects were behind bars for more than a decade, held 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 [see AiR No. 11, March/2021, 3]. Government officials said their pardons was the first phase of a plan to release all individuals who have been detained on suspicion of supporting the separatist LTTE.

Further, the government is planning to revise or repeal the PTA, pending the report by two committees appointed by the Cabinet. Justice Minister Ali Sabry said the first will be a ministerial committee, while the second will be a technical group of experts. Both committees will be given three months to submit their findings. [Arab News]

Recent decisions come at a time when Colombo is facing renewed pressure from both the European Union and United Nations Human Rights Council (UN HRC).

On June 10, the European Parliament urged Sri Lanka to "amend the PTA [...] immediately" and recommended the European Commission to temporarily withdraw Colombo's GSP+ status, which provides better access to EU markets in return for progress implementing international human rights treaties. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

Last week, then, the UN HRC's Core Group on Sri Lanka comprising Canada, Germany, Malawi, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and the United Kingdom, expressed concern over what it called a "lack of progress" in addressing the legacies of the the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983 to 2009) and protecting human rights. [GOV.UK]

Earlier in March this year, the UN HRC decisively approved a mandate to collect information and

evidence of war crimes committed during the civil war, and urged Colombo to review the PTA. [AiR No. 13, March/2021, 5]

Law and Politics in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: Authorities charge environmentalists with insulting king, plotting against government

(lm) A Cambodian court has charged four environmental activists with royal defamation and conspiracy to plotting against the government, after three of them were arrested last week as they investigated river pollution in the capital Phnom Penh. [South China Morning Post]

The three activists from the group *Mother Nature* were arrested on June 16 while documenting runoff into a city river. Over the weekend, then, they were variously charged with “plotting” and “insulting the King”, which carry maximum prison sentences of 10 years and 5 years, respectively. [Human Rights Watch]

Mother Nature's Spanish founder, who was deported from Cambodia in 2015 after he criticized the government’s plans for a controversial dam was also charged in absentia. He said the charges were "completely fabricated" and reflected government paranoia about its own citizens. [Amnesty International]

Use of lèse majesté in Cambodia is a relatively new phenomenon, with the legislation only enacted in 2018. Back then, they triggered alarm from rights

groups who warned they could be wielded to target dissent.

Moreover, the tussle over Cambodia's environment and resources has long been a contentious issue in the kingdom, with environmentalists threatened, arrested and even killed in the past decade. The United States last week scrapped a wildlife conservation program with Cambodia for what it said was a failure to tackle logging and intimidation of environmentalists [see AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4].

Especially *Mother Nature* has faced a raft of legal troubles from authorities. Last month, three environmental campaigners affiliated with the group were sentenced to between 18 and 20 months in prison for seeking to protest government plans to fill and privatize a major lake in Phnom Penh [see AiR No. 19, May/2021, 2].

Indonesia: Religious leader receives second jail term

(sa) On 24 Jun 2021, extremist religious leader Rizieq Shihab of the banned Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) received another four years of jail time for spreading false information on Youtube regarding his Covid test. The same court had already handed him an eight-month jail term in May for violating Covid restrictions through several mass events, including his daughter's wedding.

After the verdict was delivered, the leader rejected the ruling and said he would contest it, calling the rulings against him politically motivated in a bid to silence him. Outside the East Jakarta Court, where he was being tried, hundreds of his supporters had gathered. As his followers tried to approach the court, police dispersed the crowd using tear gas and water cannons, while detaining anyone who refused to leave the area. [Al Jazeera 1]

Rizieq's organization FPI was banned in December due to the group's interests' conflicting with that of the nation state ideology, which emphasizes unity and diversity, in contrast to the FPI's use of violence, provocation, and division. Rizieq in November 2020, after returning from a self-imposed exile, called for a "moral revolution" in Indonesia. [Al Jazeera 2]

The growing clout of radicals such as Rizieq mirror the results of a report written by Yatun Sastramidjaja and Amirul Adli Rosli at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore, who argue that religious micro-influencers

such as Rizieq spread anti-Covid belief through propagating anti-vaccine messages accompanied by conspiracy theories, anti-government narratives, and anti-Chinese sentiment. These micro-influencers have between 10,000 to 50,000 followers and use their Muslim identity to reach out to what is the world's largest Muslim-majority population through social media. One of the examples of the messages being found was a video by a channel supporting the FPI that called the vaccines a "tool by the Jewish to depopulate Muslims" and further casted doubt on the efficacy of Chinese vaccines. The report further revealed that zealots further propagate anti-government and anti-Chinese sentiments in similar manners. [ISEAS] [South China Morning Post]

Malaysia: Fake letter vying for premiership sent to King in foreign minister's name

(tcy) The communications team of Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein has denied the legitimacy of a letter sent to the King in the minister's name, decrying it as "fake" and "untrue". The letter claimed that the minister had the Barisan Nasional's (BN) unanimous support to become the next prime minister, and reportedly also contained his proposed Cabinet line-up. The minister lodged a police report on the fake letter, and condemned the act as a political provocation meant to confuse the public. [Malay Mail 1] [Bernama]

The incident comes after UMNO lawmaker and former cabinet minister MP Mohamed Nazri Aziz announced that 25 BN MPs had signed a statutory declaration stating that they had lost confidence in the transparency of UMNO president Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, and now supported Hishammuddin instead. However, Mohamed Nazri previously clarified that the move was not intended to trigger a change in prime minister, as some speculated, but only to give Hishammuddin the mandate to be the spokesman of the BN MPs before the King. [Malay Mail 2]

Though Zahid dismissed Mohamed Nazri's assertions that he had lost the backing of UMNO's lawmakers, the statutory declaration masterminded by one of the party's most experienced members is significant in revealing a deep split within the biggest party in Malaysia's ruling Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition. [The Straits Times]

Malaysia: Hybrid Parliament sitting expected in late August or early September

(tcy) In a joint statement, the Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives) and Dewan Negara (Senate) have announced that the proposed hybrid Parliament session may take place in late August or early September. The announcement comes amidst growing calls and the King's decree for Parliament to reconvene immediately after the emergency expires on August 1 to discuss the escalating COVID-19 situation and to avoid a constitutional crisis. [see AIR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

Various politicians and lawmakers have also promised not to support any motion of no-confidence against Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin in the next sitting of the Parliament in a bid to urge the government to reconvene Parliament as soon as possible. [Malay Mail 1] [Malay Mail 2]

In response to the announcement, the King has summoned both Houses' Speakers and their deputies to the palace on June 29 to discuss matters pertaining to the reopening of the Parliament. [Malay Mail 3]

In the statement, the two Houses said that a grace period was needed to sort out the required mechanism for the hybrid Parliament session to ensure that its execution would go smoothly, and expressed their commitment towards expediting the process. It was also mentioned that the matter had been conveyed to and well-received by the Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. [Malay Mail 4] [Bernama 1]

In addition, despite the King's decree, Attorney-General (AG) Tan Sri Idrus Harun spoke out to clarify that it is the Cabinet's jurisdiction to determine when both houses of Parliament would meet, citing Article 40 of the Federal Constitution which states that the King is to act in accordance with the advice of the Cabinet. [Bernama 2] However, the move by the AG received backlash and calls for his termination for a breach of confidentiality as he made public his advice to the King, which can potentially be construed as a form of transgression that belittles the views of the Malay Rulers in the present context. [Malay Mail 5]

Despite this uncertainty on when Parliament would reconvene, several states have already announced their plans to reconvene their state assemblies following the King's decree. Johor, Negri Sembilan, and

Selangor have confirmed that their state assemblies will reconvene in August. [Bernama 3] [Malay Mail 6] [Bernama 4]

Malaysia proposes stricter sharia laws for insulting Islam and "promoting the LGBT lifestyle" on social media

(tcy) In response to social media posts celebrating the LGBT community as part of Pride Month in June, a Malaysian government taskforce with representatives from other government agencies has proposed amendments to sharia law that would allow enforcement bodies to take action against those who insult Islam and "promote the LGBT lifestyle" on social media.

As a Muslim majority country, Malaysia has a dual-track legal system, with Islamic criminal and family laws (sharia law), running alongside civil laws. The proposed amendment reflects growing intolerance towards the LGBT community in Malaysia in recent years. In 2019, five men were convicted under Islamic law for attempting gay sex, and a minister and Muslim groups protested after LGBT activists attended an International Women's Day march. [Reuters]

Malaysia palm oil giant under US probe over forced labour allegations

(tcy) The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has opened an investigation over forced labor allegations against Malaysian palm oil company IOI Corporation. The accusations pertain to the payment of deposits by workers, reimbursement of workers' recruitment fees, and a need for an ethical, low-cost recruitment process for foreign workers.

Malaysia is one of the world's largest palm oil producers and exporters, and the industry relies heavily on migrants from Indonesia, India, and Bangladesh. Amidst mounting allegations on the industry of human rights abuses, IOI is the third palm oil giant in Malaysia to face scrutiny over its treatment of migrant workers after the CBP banned imports from FGV Holdings and Sime Darby Plantations over similar allegations last year. [Reuters]

Myanmar: Military junta reorganizes legal team for ICJ Rohingya genocide case

(lm) Nearly fivemonths after seizing power, Myanmar's military junta has restructured the committee to represent its defense in the Rohingya genocide case currently being heard by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). According to reporting by *The Irrawaddy*, the new eight-member team is to be led by Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin and will include other high-ranking military officials. [The Irrawaddy] [The Wire]

The case was brought to the ICJ by The Gambia in November 2019, two years after a brutal military crackdown in the country's Rakhine state had forced hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya to flee across the border to neighboring Bangladesh. Ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi defended Myanmar's military, the so-called Tatmadaw, against the allegations of genocide when she appeared at the ICJ during the preliminary hearings in December 2019.

As the case could take years, Gambia asked the ICJ to order Myanmar to take "provisional measures" to prevent more violations. Going further than the measures requested by The Gambia, the ICJ in June of last year ordered Myanmar to report on its compliance with the provisional measures in four months and then every six months thereafter. The Suu Kyi-led civilian government submitted two reports prior to the military takeover on February 1.

In January, however, Myanmar filed a preliminary challenge to the jurisdiction of the Court and the admissibility of the Application. Specifically, it questioned whether The Gambia had the right to bring the case because it not been "specifically" affected by the alleged genocide and had brought the case not on its own behalf but as a "proxy" for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The Court then fixed May 20 as the time-limit within with The Gambia was to present a written statement of its observations and submissions on the preliminary objections raised by Myanmar, and, crucially, reserved the subsequent procedure for further decision.

Myanmar: Shadow government prepares evidence for lawsuit against junta in international court

(lm) Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) – a shadow government formed by civilian lawmakers deposed by the military – has announced it was preparing to file a lawsuit against the military junta and its leader Senior General Min Aung Hlaing at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity. [Radio Free Asia]

The NUG said it had compiled 400,000 pieces of evidence of atrocities committed by the military regime against civilians since its takeover earlier in February. The evidence is in the form of testimony from witnesses that the NUG and supporting groups plan to narrow down to 200 testimonies that meet international standards and are deemed the most accurate for submission to the ICC.

The latest announcement comes nearly three months after legal representatives of the Committee for Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) - a group of parliamentarians from the ousted government – had met with officials from the UN's Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar to discuss the modalities of dialogue and cooperation in relation to the alleged atrocities committed by the military junta. [AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]

The announcement also comes after the NUG earlier this month released a progressive policy position statement, clarifying that it intends to support the current ICC investigation on crimes committed by military forces, the so-called Tatmadaw, against the minority Rohingya community in the country's Rakhine state. Previously, the NUG had only mentioned that it would consider accepting the ICC's jurisdiction to investigate the Tatmadaw's crimes since the coup, which would not cover earlier periods of violence against the Rohingya. [AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3]

However, the NUG's attempt to bring Myanmar's military leaders to the ICC are likely to be an uphill struggle, as the group would first have to get recognition as the official government of Myanmar and become a party to the Rome Statue, the treaty that established the ICC.

Myanmar: Deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi back in junta court

(lm) Deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi appeared in a junta court again on June 28, with the court hearing three separate testimonies on criminal charges brought against her. Journalists were barred from both proceedings. [Voice of America]

The first hearing involved two witnesses testifying on charges Suu Kyi violated the country's Natural Disaster Management Law for flouting coronavirus restrictions during last November's elections that her National League for Democracy (NLD) won in a landslide. Government prosecutors have been presenting evidence in the case since June 14. They will have until June 28 to finish their presentation in the court in the country's capital, Naypyitaw, after which Suu Kyi's defense team will have until July 26 to present its case [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3]

The second hearing pertained to charges the ousted leader improperly imported walkie-talkies. During the hearing, the court sustained an objection to the defense team's cross-examination of a police officer on grounds the question may affect the court's verdict.

The final hearing involved charges she violated the country's Export-Import Law.

The ousted civilian leader faces seven separate indictments, ranging from the initial charge of illegally importing walkie-talkies to the much more serious charges of breaking the Official Secrets Act and committing corruption. It is these more recent charges that pose the greatest concerns, as they hold sentences of up to 14 and 15 years, respectively.

Myanmar: Anti-junta militia battle security forces in country's second biggest city, Mandalay

(lm) Myanmar security forces backed by armored vehicles clashed on June 22 with a newly formed guerilla group in the country's second largest city, Mandalay, resulting in at least two casualties. [The Straits Times]

While the city had been a center of anti-military resistance since the junta staged a takeover on February 1, clashes between security forces and the People's Defense Force, affiliated with Myanmar's ousted elected leadership, had occurred mainly in small towns and rural areas.

The shootout began after soldiers from the Tatmadaw, as the Myanmar military is known, raided a building where members of the civilian resistance were sheltering, according to accounts from both sides. Both the Tatmadaw and the People's Defense Force claimed

casualties on the opposing side and denied deaths among their forces. [The New York Times]

Philippines: Arming civilian groups to reduce crime?

(lp) President Rodrigo Duterte has expressed support for the idea of arming a recently launched coalition of citizen volunteers, the Global Coalition of Lingkod Bayan Advocacy Support Groups and Force Multipliers, to increase the forces of the government for keeping peace and order in the country. Duterte's call to arm the coalition received overwhelming criticism, rejection from senators, the left-wing organizations' alliance Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, and civil groups arguing the move would only intensify violence, crime, impunity. [Inquirer 1]

Before arming civilians, the government should consider preventing abuse, eradicating impunity at the hands of existing law enforcement agencies such as the Philippine National Police (PNP). Besides the cherry-picked 81 cases of deaths in drug war operations being reviewed by the Department of Justice, irregularities committed by law enforcers resulted in the Supreme Court acquitting six persons jailed in illegal drugs cases. [Manila Bulletin 1] [Manila Standard]

Moreover, arming civilians is even more dangerous when considering the administration's armed conflict against the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA), who recently killed one, injured two civilians in their attack against a construction site in Lanuza. In another recent encounter, the military killed an NPA member who had killed a farmer. Meanwhile, fifteen barangays, the country's smallest administrative units,received twenty million Philippine pesos as part of anti-NPA projects, 316 will follow until 2022. But the benefits of these programs might be jeopardized by arming civilians. [Philippine News Agency] [Inquirer 2] [Manila Bulletin 2]

Philippines: Those refusing vaccination to get arrested?

(lp) Last week, President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to arrest those who refuse vaccinations. While the Chief Presidential Legal Counsel Salvador Panelo attempted justifying arrest as a means to maintain 'national

security' amidst a national health emergency, the National Union of People's Lawyers (NUPL), the Integrated Bar of the Philippines (IBP) clarified that Duterte's threat has no legal basis. [Philippine Star] [Rappler] [Manila Bulletin]

Thailand: One out of 13 constitutional amendment bills passed by joint sitting of Parliament

(pr/lm) A joint sitting of Parliament on June 24 approved only one out of 13 constitutional amendment drafts submitted by political parties in the first reading. An examination committee consisting of 30 lawmakers and 15 Senators will now scrutinize the bill within 15 days, starting on June 29, after which the proposed bill will need to go through another vote in its final reading.

Sponsored by the ruling government coalition – save the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) – the endorsed bill proposes to adjust the proportions of lawmakers from currently 350 constituency MPs and 150 party-list MPs to 400 and 100, respectively. It also sought to revert from the current single ballot for constituency and party-list MPs to two separate ballots – a system that is believed to benefit large and well-known parties capable of mounting energetic nation-wide election campaigns. [Bangkok Post 1]

In related news, lawmakers from two government coalition parties on June 28 threatened to petition Thailand's Constitution Court to rule on the bill, claiming it might violate other charter provisions governing the voting system. [Bangkok Post 2]

Twelve other bills secured a comfortable majority in both Houses but failed to get the support of at least of one-third, or 84, of the 250 Senators, as required as per Section 256 of the Constitution. Notably, two bills that both sought to amend Section 159 of the 2017 Constitution (restriction of the choice of prime ministerial candidates to those nominated by parties or lawmakers) won as many as 441 and 440 votes, or more than half of Parliament [see AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]. [Bangkok Post 3] [iLaw, in Thai]

A PPRP-sponsored bill that also sought to revert to the system in which a voter casts two ballots – one to vote for a candidate, and another for a party – was rejected by a majority of Senators, because it also targeted Sections 144 and 185 of the Constitution, both of which are considered as its core protection against

corruption [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3 & article in this edition].

Other bills that were scratched sought to amend sections of the Constitution pertaining to decentralization, more corruption checks, further protection of civil and consumer rights, universal basic income, and improvement to the 20-year National Strategy Plan.

In related news, a constitutional amendment bill proposed by the Re-solution group has gathered 70,000 signatures - more than the minimum requirement of 50,000 – and will soon be submitted to Parliament. The group is led by many political figures such as Parit Wacharasindhu, a former member of the Democrat Party, Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw), and Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit and Piyabutr Saengkanokkul of the Progressive Movement. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4] [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Referendum bill sails through joint Parliament session

(pr) A joint sitting of Parliament has passed a referendum bill, unlocking a process for an overhaul of the 2017 Constitution, one of the key demands by a youth-led protest movement that continues to sweep Thailand since last year. Lawmakers and Senators on June 22 voted 611 to 4 to endorse the legislation, with two abstentions. [The Straits Times]

Deliberation of the bill picked up from where a joint sitting had left it in April, when the exercise had to be suspended after too few lawmakers and Senators showed up to reach the minimum quorum [see AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]. The bill will now be submitted to the King for royal endorsement within 90 days.

Under the proposed bill, a plebiscite may be held under particular circumstances, including constitutional amendments, issues deemed necessary by a Cabinet resolution, issues specified by law that a referendum is required, issues that Parliament votes to be put to a referendum, and, in cases at least 50,000 voters propose to the Cabinet for approval.

In the case of constitutional amendments, the president of Parliament would ask the prime minister to announce a date agreed upon with the Election Commission within 90 to 120 days from being informed. On other issues decided by the Cabinet, the timeframe for a referendum is also 90 to 120 days from the date the Cabinet approves it.

According to Section 13 of the bill, a resolution is reached when more than half of eligible voters exercise their right to vote and, of that number, more than half vote either "yes" or "no" on the question.

Therefore, this section of the law marks progress towards the attempts by both the government and opposition to amend the Constitution [see AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]. For the ballot followed a Constitutional Court decision in March that ruled that Parliament has authority to write a new constitution only on the condition that a public referendum be conducted prior to and following the amendment process [see AiR No. 11, March/2021, 3].

An opposition-sponsored constitutional amendment bill to establish a Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) was tabled for parliamentary consideration earlier this month, after the draft proposal had been rejected by Parliament's legal advisory committee over fears it may violate the ruling by the Constitutional Court. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

Although the process for a referendum and overhaul of the charter has now been endorsed, it is unlikely that Thailand's Parliament will pursue more significant changes any time soon, as it focuses for the next several months on making minor changes that would not require any public endorsement. Only the opposition Move Forward Party has already announced that it would push for a referendum to scrap the 2017 Constitution and set up an elected CDA to write a new one. [Bangkok Post 1] [see also article above]

The law also allows Thais living abroad to vote from countries where they reside; voting can be done electronically or by mail. Further, the Election Commission will act as a watchdog on the expression of opinions ahead of the vote. Campaigns by both sides are allowed.

The new piece of legislation also provides penalties, most notably a maximum jail term of five years for spreading false information of matters put toward to the referendum. During Tuesday's debate, some lawmakers expressed concerns that the prescribed penalty might be used to suppress dissent. [Bangkok Post 2] [BBC Thai, in Thai]

Thailand: PPRP-sponsored constitutional amendment proposal draws criticism

from observers and Senate

(pr) A joint sitting of Parliament on June 24 rejected a bill that sought to amend 13 provisions of the 2017 Constitution, after it had drawn heavy criticism from both experts and Senators who said some of the proposed revisions would weaken mechanisms to tackle graft and malfeasance.

The ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP)-sponsored bill sought to revise Sections 144 and 185 of the Constitution, inter alia. Section 144 prohibits lawmakers from proposing changes to financial and budget bills for their benefit and supporters of such changes will be held liable for any damage caused by the change. Under Section 185, in turn, lawmakers and Senators are prohibited from using their status to interfere in budget spending or state project approvals except those in parliamentary affairs.

The PPRP argued that the amendments would be necessary to ensure additional flexibility in the budgetary system.

Former Election Commissioner Somchai Srisuthiyakorn, in turn, came out criticizing the proposals saying the bill would do away a number of mechanisms aimed at dissuading politicians from reallocating funds for their benefit. In the same vein, the Senate Committee on Poverty and Inequality Reduction expressed its opposition to the PPRP draft to amend Sections 144 and 185, arguing the proposed changes were drastic and would undermine anti-corruption efforts. [Bangkok Post 1]

Prime Minister Praut Chan-ocha had reportedly also expressed his opposition to the proposed changes. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Pro-democracy protesters return to the streets

(pr/lm) Several groups of protestors gathered at various locations in the Thai capital, Bangkok, on June 24, reviving a pro-democracy movement after a six-month lull, despite warnings of legal action by authorities and the risk of spreading COVID-19. The day marked the 89th anniversary of the Siamese Revolution, a bloodless coup that brought an end to Thailand's absolute monarchy and ushered in constitutional rule. [Al Jazeera]

The street agitation began in earnest in July of last year, reaching its peak in October when hundreds of thousands demonstrators joined calls for the government's resignation and for increased transparency and accountability from the monarchy. However, momentum slowed in 2021 because of an uptick in COVID-19 cases.

In the first major demonstrations since the hiatus, at least four groups joined gatherings in several locations across Bangkok. Many of the groups' leaders had previously been put under pre-trial detention for various criminal charges such as sedition and royal defamation, which carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in jail [see AiR No. 22, June/2021, 1, AiR No. 20, May/2021, 3]. They were released from detention on conditions that include not protesting, but leaders including Anon Nampa, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, and Panupong "Mike" Jadnok were out on the streets again on June 24 – at the forefront of the rallies. [Bangkok Post 1]

The day after the protests, police announced they were preparing cases against those involved in the rallies, most notably for violating the Emergency Decree that prohibits all large gatherings, as well as activities that may lead to the spread of infections and unrest. [Bangkok Post 2]

But on June 26 hundreds returned to the streets to apply more pressure on the government. The rallies ended with no major incident, but longtime political activist and Chairman of the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship, Jatuporn Prompan, called for more rallies with bigger numbers next week. [Bangkok Post 3] [Voice of America]

The following day, police said they would gather evidence to press five charges against organizers and participants of the anti-government rallies, including Nitithorn Lamlua and Jatuporn Prompan. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Domestic workers organizations urges government to ratify Convention on Domestic Workers

(pr) A network of domestic worker rights groups is urging the government to ratify the International Labor Organization (ILO)'s Convention on Domestic Workers to better protect the rights of domestic workers, as the Ministry of Labor prepares to amend its regulations to meet international standards.

The ILO's 189th convention, the Convention on Domestic Workers sets the labor standards for domestic workers, including the right on entitlement to a minimum wage and the right to choose the place where they live and spend their leave. Ratifying states parties are also called upon to take protective measures against violence and should enforce a minimum age which is consistent with the minimum age at other types of employment.

The Convention entered into force in 2013 and has so far been ratified by 32 countries, excluding Thailand. The Department of Labor Protection and Welfare said the Labor Ministry's amendment includes 10 changes such as the setting of a minimum wage, limit of eight working hours per day and prohibition of job termination due to pregnancy [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Ministry prepares to sue Facebook for not closing accounts of eight individuals

(pr) Thailand's Ministry of Digital, Economy and Society (MDES) has announced it was seeking legal action against Facebook for refusing to close the accounts of individuals who allegedly posted false information and criticized the royal institution. [Bangkok Post]

A Thai court earlier this month instructed internet service providers to block or remove accounts of eight individuals alleged to have posted false information on websites and social media platforms. But Facebook has so far not complied with the order [see AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2].

In the last quarter of 2020, the MDES had obtained court orders to block 8,440 URLs - mostly on Facebook – but only 5,025 URLs had been blocked by January. [AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]

Thailand: Military defends purchase of new transport plane

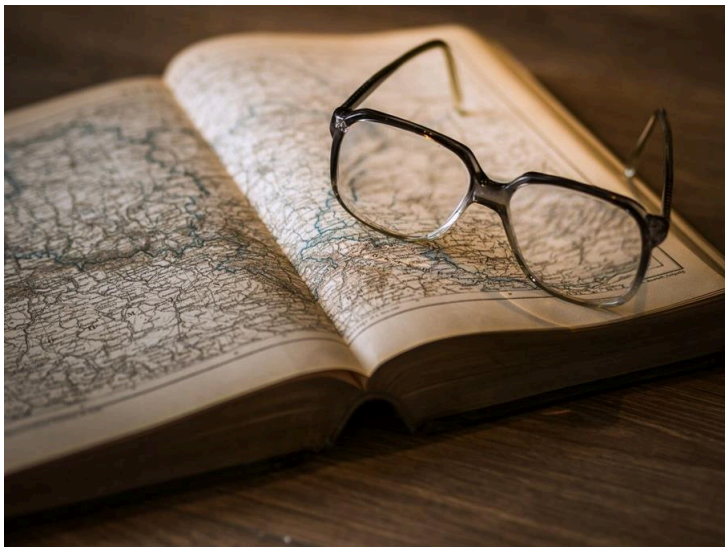
(pr/lm) Following public outcry, Thailand's Defense Ministry has defended its decision to purchase an Airbus C295 airlifter at a time when the country is battling the worst wave of COVID-19 infections so far is struggling with the economic repercussions of the pandemic.

According to army officials, a total of C295 is supposed to replace four transport planes that were scheduled to be decommissioned in 2023 after 30 years of service. The army requested it for delivery of personnel, tactical movement of special warfare units, replacement of border forces, and medical and disaster zone evacuations. [Bangkok Post 1]

In related news, Deputy Defence Minister Chaichan Changmongkol and armed forces leaders have been summoned to defend their $6.34 billion budget allocation before the 72-member parliamentary committee tasked with examining the budget bill for the 2022 fiscal year [see AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2]. Out of the military divisions and organizations allocated budget, the Army is allocated the highest amount of $3.1 billion.

Besides weapon procurement, the military leaders are expected to be grilled about classified funds that make up 0.03 percent, or $29.8 million, of the total budget. A significant amount of these secret budget allocations is said to be earmarked for security operations in the deep south of Thailand, where conflict has been ongoing for 16 years [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3].

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



China-US relations: Ban on Chinese solar panel materials, legislation to boost US

competitiveness against China, and proposal for a "NATO for trade"

(dql) The Biden administration has banned imports of polysilicon, a key solar panel material, from Chinese firm Hoshine Silicon Industry and put trade restrictions on four other Xinjiang companies. All are believed by Washington to use forced labor and to be implicated in human rights violations and abuses in the region.

China dominates the global supply chain for solar power, with nearly 50% of the world's polysilicon used in solar panels coming from Xinjiang. Hoshine imports are estimated worth 150 million USD over the past 30 months. [CNBC] [South China Morning Post]

Furthermore, the US House of Representative passed legislation in attempt that to strengthen scientific research to increase US competitiveness vis-à-vis China. The two bills – the National Science Foundation for the Future Act and the Department of Energy Science for the Future Act – will provide the National Science Foundation with 7% more funding annually and establish a new directorate for science and engineering to expand research opportunities. It also authorizes research funding for the Department of Energy's Office of Science. [The Hill]

Meanwhile, the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, a Washington, DC-based US non-profit public policy think tank with links to the US government and big tech companies, and the China Research Group, a group of conservative British politicians and China hawks, have come up with a proposal suggesting Western allies to establish a "NATO for trade" to counter what they see as China's "weaponisation of policy tools to punish any nation that does not kowtow to Beijing". Similar to the NATO, where members agree to defend any one of them that is attacked, the proposed Democracies' Alliance Treaty Organisation (DATO) would retaliate in response to coercive measures taken by China against any member. For example, DATO nations would ban Chinese students if Beijing would withdraw its students from a member country that relies on income from Chinese overseas students [South China Morning Post]

China-Canada relations: Tensions flare up over allegations of human rights violations and seeds

(dx/dql) At the 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council, Canada led a group of over 40 countries to

release a joint statement expressing concerns over repressive actions of the Chinese government in Xinjiang, Hong Kong Tibet and demanding free access to Xinjiang for an inquiry into reported human rights violations. Ottawa's move comes amid highly strained Sino-Canadian relations over conflict on several fronts including human rights, trade and allegations of 'hostage diplomacy'. [The Guardian]

Interestingly, Ukraine withdrew its signature form the Canada-sponsored statement. Diplomats believe that Kyiv's move was due to Beijing's threat to hold back Chinese-made Covid-19 vaccines prepared for Ukraine. [AP]

Hitting back, China called on the UN to investigate crimes against Indigenous people in Canada, accusing it of "robb[ing] the Indigenous people of the land, kill[ing] them and eradicate[ing] their culture." A related address, issued by Belarus and rejecting "politically motivated and groundless accusations against China based on disinformation," was backed by 65 countries. [CBC] [Newsweek]

In a separate development, China has blocked a first request of Canada to establish a World Trade Organization (WTO) panel to probe Beijing's restrictions placed on imports of Canadian canola seeds.

In March 2019, China suspended imports of canola seeds from a Canadian agricultural and food industry company and also made shipments from other Canadian firms subject to enhanced inspections, claiming that inspectors detected pests. [South China Morning Post]

China accuses UK of "colonial mindset" over Falklands

(dql) Amid Sino-British tensions over London's accusations of human rights violations in Xinjiang and a crackdown on political rights in Hong Kong, China expressed its support for Argentina's sovereignty claim over the Malvinas Islands, also known as the Falklands, at a session of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization, warning that "[t]oday in the 21st century, the days when Western colonialists had free rein are long gone." [South China Morning Post]

Argentine Foreign Minister Felipe Sola, for his part, called on both countries to resume negotiations over the islands, while insisting: "Our

claim to sovereignty is an imprescriptible constitutional mandate." [Express]

As a British overseas territory, the Falklands have internal self-governance, while the UK responsibility for their defense and foreign affairs. Argentine military forces invaded the islands in April 1982. However, two months later at the end of the Falklands War British administration was restored. Neither country is willing to relinquished its claim over the islands.

China-Russia relations: Extension of friendship treaty

(dql) Taking another step to cement Sino-Russian ties, the two countries extended the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation for five years. The treaty was signed in 2001 between Vladimir Putin and then Chinese leader Jiang Zemin, with both sides agreeing to resolve their historical border disputes and laying out strategic cooperation in areas including military and defence. Expiration was due next month.

During a video call arranged on the occasion of the treaty extension, both Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping hailed the close relationships between their countries as “an example of intergovernmental cooperation in the 21st century,” and as “model example of a new type of international relations” respectively. [South China Morning Post]

China holds Belt and Road conference

(dql) China held on June 23 a virtual conference on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Attending countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Chile, China, Colombia, Fiji, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkmenistan, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam. Unlike the two previous conferences in 2017 and 2019 when heads of state and heads of government took part, this year’s forum was held at ministerial level.

Equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and ensuring climate-friendly growth in the post-pandemic era topped the conferenced agenda. Among the major outcomes of the conference were two initiatives: first,

the Belt and Road Partnership on COVID-19 Vaccines Cooperation" which addresses especially developing countries in boosting international cooperation in vaccine research and development, production and distribution, and improving accessibility and affordability of vaccines globally; and second, the Initiative for Belt and Road Partnership on Green Development, which seeks to strengthen cooperation among BRI countries in several areas including as green infrastructure, green energy and green finance, and promote green, low-carbon and sustainable development." [The Diplomat]

Growing presence of private security companies in Mekong region

(dql) According to findings of the Washington-based Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), Chinese businesses with risky investments in economic development zones in the Mekong region are increasingly turning to China-based private security firms for protection. Among the 49 foreign private security firms operating in Cambodia and Myanmar, 29 are China-based ones.

Given the range of services these companies provide to Chinese businesses and tourists – including running safety trainings for companies, developing security apps for tourists, and providing armed guards for individuals or property as well as even conducting pandemic control activities – the report concludes: "Chinese private security companies are increasing China's soft power in Mekong countries. They also, down the line, could serve as vectors of hard power." [C4ADS] [The Diplomat]

South Korea and United States considering ending North Korea working group

(nm) According to the South Korean Foreign Ministry, Seoul and Washington have agreed to terminate a controversial working group on North Korea as newly-appointed US special representative for North Korea, Sung Kim, is calling for dialogue with Pyongyang. Kim Yo-yong, sister of North Korea's leader Kim Jong-un, however, responded that the US had wrong expectations.

The working group had been established in 2018 to discuss a host of issues in relation to North Korea,

including denuclearization, sanctions enforcement, humanitarian aid, and inter-Korean dialogue, but Pyongyang said the channel was preventing any inter-Korean progress due to its focus on sanctions. Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun said Washington and Seoul would continue their dialogue and were hoping to send a signal to the North.

The announcement came amid Sung's five-day visit to South Korea to meet with top government officials, including President Moon Jae-in. The visit focussed on reiterating US efforts to seek dialogue with Pyongyang and to meet "anytime anywhere without preconditions", as well as to stress the importance of trilateral cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo. [Korea Herald 1] [Korea Herald 2]

In a separate development, a South Korean defence committee presided over by Defence Minister Suh Wook this week approved 2.56 billion USD plans to develop the nation's own interceptor system to defend South Korean key military and security infrastructure against long-range artillery threats. The project is expected to begin next year and is set to be completed around 2035. [Korea Times]

For a close-up examination of President Moon's role in inter-Korean peace efforts, please see this recent editorial in the [Time].

South Korea-Indonesia relations: Strengthening cooperation on joint fighter jet project

(nm) Last week, the South Korean and Indonesian foreign ministers agreed to strengthen cooperation on a joint fighter jet project, in addition to other mutually beneficial projects. The agreement was reached during Chung Eui-yong's last stop of his five-day trip to Southeast Asia which had also included visits to Vietnam and Singapore.

Under a 2015 bilateral agreement, Indonesia agreed to contribute 20 percent of the cost for the joint development of the KF-X-fighters by Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), which is seen as a cheaper alternative to the US-built F-35 which Seoul is so far using. Prototypes of the fighter had been unveiled in April, but Indonesia has been seeking renegotiations of its share since 2018. In addition to strengthening their commitments to the joint jet project, Chung and his counterpart Retno L.P.Marsudi also discussed

expanding cooperation regarding vaccine procurement and public health efforts. [Korea Herald] [SCMP]

South Korea to participate in US-Australia joint military exercise

(nm) This week, South Korea's defence ministry announced plans to participate in a large-scale Australia-US joint naval exercise that is set for mid-July, the "Talisman Sabre" war games. It will be the first time that Seoul participates in the exercise,

Seoul's participation comes after a joint South Korea-United States statement that highlighted the importance of "freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea and beyond". China had responded disapprovingly to the statement. As Seoul is becoming increasingly integrated into the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, it becomes more difficult for the Moon government to strike a balance between the competing interests of the US and China. [SCMP] [Korea Herald]

Japan stresses importance of Taiwan's security

(nds) In line with Japan's recent diplomatic efforts to position itself against China's threats towards Taiwan, Japan's Minister of Defense Nobuo Kishi assured in an interview that the security of Taiwan is directly tied with that of Japan, adding that Japan is "closely monitoring ties between China and Taiwan, as well as Chinese military activity."

His remark comes as recently 28 Chinese warplanes flew near Taiwan. At the closest point, they were 110 km from Japan. [Taipei Times] [Eurasia Review]

In a latest development, Japan's Deputy Defense Minister Yasuhide Nakayama this week warned of a growing threat posed by Chinese and Russian collaboration and urged allies to "wake up" to Beijing's pressure on Taiwan and protect the island "as a democratic country." He also raised the question whether the decision of Japan and United States and many other nations to follow a "one-China" policy would stand the test of time. [Reuters]

Cross-strait relations: Taiwan must prepare for war, Taiwanese Foreign Minister says

(nds) Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu warned that the island "needs to prepare" for a possible military conflict, citing China's ongoing military intimidation.

Wu's warning comes after 28 Chinese warplanes recently flew near Taiwan and the Arleigh Burk-class guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur transited the Taiwan Strait, marking the sixth transit of a US warship in the region since President Joe Biden took office

It comes also as Taiwan and the US are set to resume trade talks under the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement in this week, signaling deepening cooperation between the US and Taiwan. [Taipei Times] [Taiwan News]

In another statement, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council condemned the closure of Kong Kong's government critical newspaper as political oppression, adding that the move has "not only sounded the death knell for freedom of press, publication, and speech in Hong Kong, but has also allowed the international community to see for themselves the Communist Party regime's totalitarianism and autocracy." [Reuters]

Taiwan buys French locators beacons, takes delivery of new corvette

(nds) The Air Force has ordered 96 Sarbe 6-406G personal locator beacons from France to help rescue pilots more quickly after a crash. The beacons can assist rescue teams in locating the site of a plane after a crash or disappearance and find survivors. The Air Force has allocated a budget of 1.44 million USD to buy the new military equipment. Delivery is expected to be completed by the end of 2022.

The Air Force began purchasing its first Sarbe 6-406G beacons after a sputter in 2015. At that time, Taiwanese lawmakers criticized the military for using outdated PRC-90 survival radios, dating back to the Vietnam War. Although the army has denied those allegations, it has begun the process of renewing its military equipment.[Taiwan News]

Taiwan,s Coast Guard Administration (CGA), meanwhile, took delivery of a new corvette, the

Chenggong which will be deployed in eastern Taiwan to protect Taiwan's maritime rights and the interests of local fishermen. It can be equipped with anti-ship missiles and converted into fast attack crafts in wartime. [Focus Taiwan]

Pakistan will shut border if Taliban take over Afghanistan, says foreign minister

(ra/lm) As Afghanistan's future remains in limbo, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said on June 27 that his country would shut its border to its eastern neighbor if violence and lawlessness reign in Afghanistan following the military withdrawal of both NATO and the United States. [USA Today]

Qureshi was speaking after his country last week announced that it would complete fencing along its Afghan border by the end of June. Construction began in 2017, despite Kabul's protests that the barrier – which runs along the boundary known as the Durand line – would divide members of Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, the Pashtun. [The Hindu]

Renewed attempts by Pakistan to secure its northern border come at a harrowing moment for Afghanistan: Last week, the Taliban entered two provincial capitals in the north of the country, the culmination of an insurgent offensive that has overrun dozens of rural districts and forced the surrender and capture of hundreds of government forces and their military equipment in recent weeks. Moreover, donations to the Taliban are on the upswing in Pakistani border regions. [The New York Times 1] [Voice of America]

Qureshi's remarks came hot on the heels of Prime Minister Imran Khan in an interview with *The New York Times*saying his country was seeking an "evenhanded" relationship with the United States based on "trust and common objectives". In the same vein, in an op-ed for *The Washington Post* published on June 22, Khan said his country was "ready to be a partner for peace in Afghanistan with the United States" while also emphasizing that Islamabad would "avoid risking further conflict". [The New York Times 2] [The Washington Post]

Timing and context of the publication of both articles are noteworthy: On June 25, US President Joe Biden pledged his government's support to war-torn Afghanistan while meeting for the first time with Afghan leaders Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah in the White House. [Al Jazeera]

That meeting, in turn, followed on dire warnings by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and General Mark Milley, who told Congress on June 17 that would take groups like al-Qaida or Islamic State "possibly about two years" to regenerate the capability to strike the United States and its Western allies. These remarks clearly echoed the findings of a report by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, which was submitted to the United Nations Security Council on June 1 and suggested that Al Qaeda and the Haqqani network prepare to strike as soon as the opportunity arises. [United Nations Security Council]

India shifts 50,000 troops to China border, indicates shift towards strategic offensive principle

(ad/lm) Over the past few months, India has reportedly redirected at least 50,000 additional troops to three distinct areas along its border with China, in a historic shift toward an offensive military posture against Beijing. All in all, New Delhi now has roughly 200,000 troops focused along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), which constitutes an increase of more than 40 percent from last year. [The Straits Times]

Whereas previously India's military presence was aimed at blocking Chinese moves, the redeployment will allow Indian commanders to use helicopters to airlift soldiers from valley to valley along with artillery pieces, as part of a strategy that favours a strong offensive action over a passive attitude.

Indian media outlets reported earlier this month that New Delhi was pressing on with infrastructure in the border area, building roads, tunnels and bridges to narrow the gap with China [see AiR No. 21, May/2021, 4]. On the Chinese side, in turn, a new high-speed railway line began operating in Tibet on June 25. taking passengers from the regional capital Lhasa to the eastern city of Nyingchi, close to the border.

Reports about the move were first published on June 28, the same day when India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh in a thinly veiled reference to China said his country would seek resolve disputes with neighboring states through dialogue, but also asserted that India's safety and security would not be compromised at any cost. Singh was on a three-day visit to eastern Ladakh, where he also visited troops and veterans and inaugurated 63 infrastructure projects by the Border Roads Organisation. [Economic Times] [The Indian Express]

The remarks assume added significance, coming as they did a week after India and China held the 22nd meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs. The latest round resulted in both sides agreeing to hold the next round military commander talks at an early date to achieve "complete disengagement" from "all the friction points" in the Line of Actual Control (LAC)'s Western Sector, the site of the 2020 China–India skirmishes.

Singh's comments also come after India's Foreign Minister Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar last week said persistent uncertainty over whether China will fulfil its promise on troop reductions would remain a challenge for relations between Beijing and New Delhi.

During an interview conducted on the sidelines of the Qatar Economic Forum on June 22, India's top diplomat said China is yet to show an inclination to withdraw from Hot Springs, Gogra Post and the Depsang Plains in eastern Ladakh, which did not feature in a piecemeal disengagement process agreed upon in February [see AiR No. 45, November/2020, 2]. [South China Morning Post]

Against the larger backdrop of fears that the warmer weather in the Himalayan heights could reignite conflict between India and China, the foreign minister also cited bilateral relations built upon "mutual sensitivity, mutual respect and mutual interest" as a premise for a normalization in ties with China. [The Wire]

In response, China's Foreign Ministry the following day dismissed the remarks, while also referring to the military deployment along the country's western section as a "normal defense arrangement aimed at preventing and responding to encroachment and threat on China's territory by relevant country". [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China]

Indian, Pakistani NSA attend Shanghai Cooperation Organization conference

(ra/lm) The National Security Advisors (NSAs)of India and Pakistan came face to face for the first time last week, during a meeting of high-ranking officials from the eight member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in the capital of Tajikistan, Dushanbe on June 23.

Prior to the meeting, Pakistan's NSA Moeed Yusuf had ruled out the possibility of a private talk with his Indian counterpart Ajit Doval on the sidelines of the SCO gathering. [Hindustan Times]

During the meeting, India's NSA Ajit Doval proposed an action plan against Islamist terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1] and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) [see AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4] as part of the SCO framework. New Delhi has long accused Pakistan, of supporting both groups to carry out cross-border activities in India, particularly through its intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence. [The Indian Express]

The Indian top official also recommended the adoption of international standards to counter terror financing, including a Memorandum of Understanding between SCO and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental organization that monitors global money laundering and terrorist financing. [see article in this edition]

Moeed Yusuf, in turn, said achieving peace in Afghanistan was the region's most immediate priority. In a thinly veiled dig at New Delhi, he also criticized regional "spoilers" who he accused of attempting to derail the Afghan peace process. [Al Jazeera] [Geo News]

India also held bilateral negotiations with his Russian counterpart Nikolai Patrushev to discuss "further plans of the Russia-India interaction in the security sphere, cooperation among the security and law-enforcement agencies". [TASS]

Bomb denotes near house of Lashkar-e-Taiba founder in Pakistan

(ra) A car bomb attack in a residential area of Pakistan's eastern city of Lahore on June 25 killed four people and wounded 25, but there was no immediate claim of responsibility. [Al Jazeera]

The powerful explosion occurred near the residence of Hafiz Saeed, founder of the outlawed Islamist terrorist Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) group which is accused by India and the United States of plotting the 2008 Mumbai attacks that left at least 174 people dead and more than 300 wounded. Saeed has denied any wrongdoing and currently runs the charitable wing of the LeT, called Jama'at-ud-Da'wah, which has been designated by both Pakistan and the United Nations as a front for the armed group.

An anti-terrorism court sentenced Saeed to fifteen-and-a-half years in prison on charges of terrorism financing in December of last year – his fourth conviction on similar charges lodged by the Pakistani government as it tightened financial laws and restrictions as part of its review by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) inter-governmental body [see AiR No. 52, December/2020, 5]. [see article in this edition]

In a thinly veiled dig at India's foreign intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, local Pakistani authorities later claimed a "hostile intelligence agency" was involved in executing the bomb. Officials also said that the possible mastermind is from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a Pakistan province along its border with Afghanistan, but was raised in Punjab. Security forces on June 24 arrested one of the alleged perpetrators at the airport as he was trying to leave the country. [Dawn] [Sputnik News] [The Washington Post]

Pakistan to remain on FATF greylist

(lm) The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has decided to retain Pakistan on its list of Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring – often externally referred to as the 'grey list' – citing Islamabad's failure to investigate and prosecute senior leaders and commanders of UN-designated terrorist groups. [FATF] [The Hindu]

The decision was announced on June 25, the fifth and final day of the intergovernmental organization's virtual Plenary Session, during which the FATF noted that since February 2021, Pakistan had made progress to complete two of the three remaining action items [see AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4]. Islamabad has now completed 26 of the 27 action items assigned to it in its 2018 action plan.

A FATF's regional affiliate earlier this month had retained Islamabad on "enhanced follow-up" status for sufficient outstanding requirements, while improving the country's rating on 21 of the global watchdog's 40 technical recommendations against money laundering and terror financing. [AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2].

During the Plenary Session, Pakistan is believed to have sought to show that it has prosecuted around 30 designated terrorists and their associates, including firebrand cleric Hafiz Saeed [see AiR No. 47, November/2020, 4] and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, leader of the Islamist terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. But Indian representatives in

particular called most of the cases an "eyewash", pointing out that many of the charges and convictions were timed ahead of various FATF meetings.

Reacting to the FATF's decision, high-ranking Pakistani officials have accused New Delhi of attempting to "politicise the process". [The EurAsian Times]

Cannot lodge Rohingyas for an indefinite period, says Bangladesh's Prime Minister Hasina

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has renewed her call on the global community to ensure a timely repatriation of the more than 1.2 million Muslim Rohingya refugees currently seeking shelter in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar.

Addressing the 9th Moscow Conference on International Security via pre-recorded video message, the prime minister called the Rohingya refugees a "huge security threat to Bangladesh as well as the region", adding that "such a huge population can't be lodged for indefinite period." [The Independent]

Anger as Sri Lanka frees former lawmaker sentenced to life term for murder

The United Nations and human rights groups have criticized the pardon of Duminda Silva, a former Sri Lankan legislator sentenced to death for the 2011 murder of a rival lawmaker from his own party. [BBC]

Silva, a close ally of Sri Lanka's powerful ruling Rajapaksa family and member of their People's Liberation Front, worked for the country's Defense Ministry when current Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa served as President from 2005 to 2015.

He is among 94 prisoners given a presidential pardon last week. [see article in this edition]

The Bar Association of Sri Lanka and the eight-party opposition alliance Samagi Jana Balawegaya also slammed Silva's release, with a former justice minister saying that "those found guilty of the most serious crimes in our law enjoy presidential protection while the judges and police officers who brought them to justice have targets on their backs".

British foreign minister's Asean trip highlights UK's plan to shift trade and foreign policy focus

British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab last week concluded a three-leg tour of Southeast Asia, in what observers describe as an attempt of putting meat on the bones to the United Kingdom's plan to reinvent itself in the region in the post-Brexit era. [South China Morning Post 1] [GOV.UK]

This was Raab's fifth visit to Southeast Asia since becoming Foreign Secretary, demonstrating the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific, as set out in the UK's "Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy" in response to China's growing influence on the world stage [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4].

Significantly, the trip coincided with Britain on June 22 formally launching negotiations to join the 11-member Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade deal, a key part of London's attempt to pivot trade away from Europe after Brexit. [South China Morning Post 2] [The Guardian]

The UK applied to join the free trade agreement in January, a month after Prime Minister Johnson had invited three Indo-Pacific countries - Australia, India and South Korea - to attend the recently G7 summit as guests [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4]. The existing members of the trade alliance are Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

While in Vietnam, Raab delivered opening remarks at the 5th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on London's ambitions for its Indo-Pacific tilt to an audience of representatives from more than 50 countries. He also met with Vietnamese leaders, including President Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh and Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son to discuss the implementation of the UK-Vietnam Strategic Partnership Agreement, in addition to subjects such as global health security, climate change and combatting serious organized crime.

The Foreign Secretary then travelled to Cambodia to meet Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, marking the first Foreign Secretary visit to Cambodia since the British Embassy was reopened 30 years ago. During the meeting, Raab set out his country's ambition to

formally ascent as a new “dialogue partner” of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) ahead of Phnom Penh taking up the ASEAN chair. The 10-nation bloc’s leaders in April said they backed the Foreign Secretary’s recommendation for such a move. This status would give London the closest form of relationship with ASEAN. [Associated Press]

Raab wrapped up his three-nation trip in Singapore, where he met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan on June 24 to discuss geopolitical security and climate change, as well as the international response to COVID-19. The Singaporean Premier said after the meeting that the two countries had a “shared interest in upholding free trade, multilateralism and a rules-based international order”. [The Straits Times]

The visit also comes at a time of growing defense and security cooperation with the region, as the UK’s Carrier Strike Group 21 led by the HMS Queen Elizabeth, makes its maiden visit to the region. The 28-week deployment to Asia assumes added significance, considering that it marks the largest concentration of maritime and air power to leave Britain in a generation. Last week, stealth jets carried out operational sorties for the first time from HMS Queen Elizabeth in support of the ongoing British and US military intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. [Naval News]

Indonesia: Indonesia opens new maritime center with US in Batam

(sa) On 25 June 2021, Indonesia and the US broke ground for the construction of a new maritime training center at the Batam Navy Base in a ceremony attended by US Ambassador to Indonesia Sung Y. Kim and representatives of Indonesia’s Coast Guard. [Antara]

The training center, as is the base it belongs to, is strategically located at the intersection of the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. [Reuters)

Indonesia: Foreign Minister attends G20 conference in Italy

(sa) Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi is visiting Italy for the G20 Conference as she drums up support for its’ G20 presidency next year and reaffirms ties with Western allies.

Before the G20 meeting, she engaged in meetings with her Italian and Canadian counterparts, Luigi di Malo and Marc Garneau in Rome on 27 June, 2021 to discuss Indonesia's G20 2022 Presidency. Both di Mali and Garneau expressed their support for Indonesia in taking leadership of the bloc. [Antara]

With her Italian counterpart, they further engaged in trade, investment, vaccines, as well as other issues regional and international in scope. With regards to trade relations between Indonesia and Canadia, both ministers recognized the initiative of the Indonesia-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and its scope to accelerate trade between their two nations. [The Jakarta Post] [see Asia in Review No. 25, June/2021, 4)

The Minister for Foreign Affairs is soon to travel to the Italian city of Bari for the G20 meeting with several other G20 foreign ministers and other strategic partners. It is expected that the meeting will discuss several issues from the Covid pandemic to maintaining peace and stability.

Malaysia: Members of FPDA to enhance cooperation in military training and exercises in conventional warfare

(tcy) At the virtually held 20th Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) Defence Chiefs' Conference, chaired by Malaysia on June 23the defense chiefs of Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK stressed the importance of FPDA as a constructive and transparent defense arrangement that is also part of the regional defense structure, and agreed continue developing non-conventional warfare capability in line with current and future security challenges.

The FPDA were established by a series of multi-lateral agreements between the Commonwealth members Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Kingdom signed in 1971, ensuring consultation among each other in the event or threat of an armed attack on any of these five countries for the purpose of deciding on countermeasures to be taken jointly or separately. [Bernama]

Malaysia, Brunei to enhance collaboration in cultural tourism

(tcy) Malaysia's Tourism, Arts, and Culture Ministry (MOTAC) announced that Malaysia and Brunei will enhance collaboration in exploring the growth potential of cultural tourism to support industry players in both countries. The statement compared the collaboration to the Asia Traditional Orchestra (ATO) 2020 performance held in conjunction with South Korea, and said details of the initiative with Brunei would be discussed in the near future. [Bernama]

Malaysia enhances international cooperation to fight the COVID-19 pandemic

(tcy) Malaysia last week used two international stages to express its willingness to engage in enhancing international cooperation in combating Covid-19. During the Asia and Pacific High-Level Video Conference on Belt and Road Cooperation, Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Tun Hussein called for enhanced collaboration among partners of the Belt and Road Initiative to make sure that all countries have sufficient vaccines. Hishammuddin participated in the video conference at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi. [The Star]

At the virtual launch of the EU-ASEAN Programme to Support COVID-19 Response in Malaysia, Health Minister Adham Baba announced that Malaysia will collaborate with the European Union (EU) in the field of research and development (R&D) to strengthen its overall emergency preparedness and healthcare system capacity. It was also mentioned that the EU had approved the export of about five million doses of vaccines to help Malaysia accelerate its COVID-19 National Immunisation Programme. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Minister urges adoption of UN cyber norms to reduce risk on international peace and security

(tcy) In his address at the virtual ASEAN Cyber Security Forum at the Cyber Defence and Security Exhibition and Conference (CYDES) 2021, Senior Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob called for the adoption of voluntary, non-binding United Nations (UN) cyber norms to prevent conflict in the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) environment and increase the global social and economic development. He also suggested that ASEAN could become the champion in

implementing these norms, sharing that ASEAN leaders are committed to strengthening confidence and building measures in safeguarding cyberspace by agreeing to recognize and operationalize the norms.

The 11 voluntary, non-binding UN cyber norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace are a set of recommended standards on the way states should conduct themselves in cyberspace that aims to prevent conflict between states in the ICT environment. [Bernama]

Philippines: One hundred more Chinese ships in Philippine territory

(lp) A report by the US-based geospatial intelligence firm Simularity reported that Chinese vessels increased from 129 in mid-May to 238 in mid-June. As of late, not much debate has happened regarding China's continuous incursion into the Philippines' exclusive economic zones. But Senator Risa Hontiveros recently called on the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to summon China's ambassador to the Philippines once again to inquire about their increasing presence. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines receives arms, HIV-prevention drugs from the US

(lp) The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) received 183 million Philippine pesos worth of weapons, defense equipment from the United States (US), including machine guns, mortars, communication equipment, personal protective equipment, night fighting equipment, and other combat and support equipment. [Manila Bulletin]

Moreover, the US launched the P500 million President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) in the Philippines and donated over twenty thousand bottles of HIV-prevention drugs or pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to help the Philippines' Department of Health. [Philippines News Agency]

Singapore's foreign minister to embark on working visit to Italy

(tcy) Singapore's foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan is scheduled to visit Italy from June 27 to July 1. During the trip, she will attend the Ministerial Meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS in Rome, which will be co-chaired by Italy's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Luigi Di Maio and United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken. In addition, Balakrishnan will also attend the Group of 20 (G-20) Foreign Ministers' Meeting and the Foreign and Development Joint Ministerial Session, and the Development Ministerial Session at the invitation of her Italian counterpart Di Maio. [The Straits Times]

Singapore, UK in negotiations for digital economy agreement

(tcy) On June 28, Singapore's Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations S. Iswaran and British Secretary of State for International Trade Elizabeth Truss held a videoconference to discuss the UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement, marking the launch of negotiations for an agreement that will establish rules to enable trusted cross-border data flows and ensure high standards in data protection was announced. [The Straits Times]

Iswaran shared that this will be the first digital economy agreement between an Asian and a European country and will build on the momentum of the UK-Singapore Free Trade Agreement signed last December. So far, Singapore has finalized two digital economy agreements with Chile and New Zealand, as well as Australia. Negotiations on another agreement with South Korea have also been in the works since last June.

Laos-Vietnam relations: Deepening cooperation

(dql) During a meeting between General Secretary of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) Central Committee and Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith, and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Committee Nguyen Phu Trong in Hanoi, both leaders agreed on close coordination to promote cooperation between the two nations more comprehensively and practically. They also discussed cooperation between the two nations at multilateral forums, in particular the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Greater Mekong

Sub-region, as well as collaboration among Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

After the meeting, the two countries signed a series of agreements on Monday to strengthen their "friendly and cooperative ties," in several areas including investment, business, information, culture and tourism.

Furthermore, the agreements on the Vietnam-Laos cooperation strategy for 2021-2030 and on their bilateral collaboration for 2021-2025 were signed. [Vietnam+] [Xinhua]

Brunei releases defense white paper

(dql) Brunei recently launched its latest defense white paper which identifies five key challenges for the next 15 years, consisting of major power dynamics, regional and global instability, terrorism and violent extremism, technology, and natural disasters. It also calls for meeting the country's strategic defense capability requirements including "training and education, equipment, personnel, intelligence and information, policy, doctrine and concepts, organization, infrastructure, and logistics." [Ministry of Defense, Brunei] [The Diplomat]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

30 June 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Lowy Institute, Australia

The Communist Party's big birthday

China's ruling communist party celebrates the 100th anniversary of its founding on 1 July. Not only is it the world's largest political party, with over 90 million members, it is also the richest, presiding over an economy en route to surpass that of the US. This online panel will discuss what this birthday means for Australia.

Further information is available at [Lowy Institute].

30 June 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

Looking South, Looking West: Manila Views Security Threats to the Philippines

The Philippines faces security challenges from within –maintaining peace in Muslim Mindanao and managing armed insurgency by the Communist Party of the Philippines'–as well as in the contested waters of the South China Sea where Chinese aggression threatens Philippine territorial claims. Although the military alliance with the U.S. is viewed as key to sustaining Philippine defense capabilities by the Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Duterte administration has sent mixed signals about the U.S. alliance. Join this online panel discussion to learn more about the Philippines' security problems from Manila's perspective.

Visit [Stimson] for more details.

30 June 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), The Dialogue, USA

Education and Technology Strategies – Lessons Learned and Opportunities in Latin America

This webinar, organized by the Education Program at the Inter-American Dialogue and the World Bank, will present the new educational technology strategy, Reimagining Human Connections – Technology and Innovation in Education at the World Bank, as well as showcase the experiences of Brazil, Panama, and Uruguay implementing innovative EdTech strategies to address short- and long-term challenges.

For further information, see [The Dialogue].

30 June 2021 @ 3:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, USA

In Defense of a Bold U.S. Approach toward North Korea

While U.S. administrations over the past three decades have tried various forms of North Korea policy, denuclearization remains elusive. As time passes, the situation continues to deteriorate. Thirty years ago, North Korea was at an embryonic stage in terms of nuclear development. Today it is a de facto nuclear weapons state. What factors led to the current state? Is there a way forward in addressing this urgent situation? Former South Korean Foreign Minister Young-kwan Yoon will give answers to these questions in this webinar.

See [Belfer Center] for mir details.

30 June 2021 @ 1:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Overseas Development Institute, UK

Cities: new narratives for a stronger Africa-Europe partnership

This webinar will explore the crucial role of cities and mayors are playing in resetting the relationship between Africa and Europe in the post-Covid-19 recovery. Mayors across the two continents are already working together, showing leadership and progress in areas where states struggle to find common ground. These pragmatic alliances between cities can reinvigorate a more equal partnership between Africa and Europe, making a real difference in the lives of all urban residents.

If you want to learn more about the event, visit [ODI].

30 June 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Royal United Services Institute, UK

Prisons and Terrorism

In this webinar, Professor McConville, Queen Mary University of London, will offer a wide-ranging analysis of the role prisons can play in furthering the aims of paramilitary prisoners and the possibilities for

countering this, comparing the policies and approaches of the three jurisdictions, including Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and England.

Find more information at [RUSI].

30 June 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Assessing the 2021 G7 Summit: The Sherpa Perspective

The 47th G7 summit was held from 11-13 June in Cornwall in the United Kingdom, with leaders from each country convened for a discussion on the most pressing issues facing the global community. This online event will highlight the most important commitments on vaccine distribution, climate change, global taxation, and sustainable infrastructure.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

30 June 2021 @ 2:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Diversity and Inclusion in Diplomacy

As the world marks Pride Month, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community and championing their rights abroad remains as important a task as ever for the United Kingdom and the United States. That effort starts at home, where both countries face the challenge of how to break down barriers to opportunities for LGBTQ+ diplomats and creating a more inclusive and diverse workplace. This webinar will discuss the challenges and advances for the LGBTQ+ community in diplomacy.

Learn more about the event at [CSIS].

30 Jun 2021 @ 5:30-7:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

The Taiwan Test: How to Keep Democracy Alive in Asia

While Cross-Strait relations and the competing narratives between the mainland China and Taiwan continue to burgeon, analysts and observers describe the issues surrounding Taiwan, chiefly its political

independence and national security as becoming increasingly “hotter”. Against this backdrop, the webinar will address the following questions: As a neighbouring democracy, what exactly is Australia’s Taiwan policy? How is it managed alongside chilling relations with China? As tensions escalate, what do experts see as the next flashpoint in the region?

Learn more about the event at [AIIA].

30 June 2021 @ 9:30-11:30 a.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

Decarbonizing the global energy system and its implications for China

High emission scenarios pose a serious risk to China’s economic development and accelerated decarbonization is not only critical for China to achieve its 2060 target but also a key to ensuring a stable climate globally. Oxford University has devised a new, simple and transparent model which finds that a decisive green transition – in which current growth rates for renewables continue over the next decade – can bring the world close to the ambition of the Paris Agreement to keep global warming to well below 2 °C. This event presents the findings of the research and discusses its implications for mitigation targets.

For further information, see [Chatham House].

30 June 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Venezuela’s Democratic Unity Platform and the Search for Democratization

In this webinar, leading representatives of the opposition in Venezuela will discuss the recent call of numerous political parties and civil society organizations on the government to “alleviate the suffering of our people, contribute to the re-institutionalization of the country, with an electoral timetable with conditions that permit Venezuelans to freely decide our future,” in the wake of the devastating fallouts of the pandemic. Of particular interest in the discussion will be the questions: Can negotiations resolve Venezuela’s overlapping crises? How can the international community best support the efforts to achieve a peaceful, democratic outcome in Venezuela?

Find more about the event at [Wilson Center].

30 June 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA

The Artificial Intelligence Revolution

In this webinar, technology and security experts will discuss the latest developments of AI and their impacts on national security.

For further information, see [Hoover Institution].

30 June 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, USA

Building Better Black Futures

More than 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed and exacerbated the inequalities and systemic racism Black communities still endure. In this webinar, activists reflect on how building long-term political power and representation for Black communities is essential to shape policy discussions, overcome historical barriers, and achieve an equitable future for everyone.

If you are interested, learn more about the event at [The Chicago Council].

30 June 2021 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

Vaccine diplomacy at a time of extreme rivalries

This (members-only) online discussion will address the geo-strategic rivalries between states and the potential winners and losers, with a focus laid on the following issues: How can the United States and China, for example, put their differences aside and focus on the global supply of vaccines? How will China and Russia capitalize on the deals they have brokered with states in the Global South in need of vaccines? And is Covax the 'only truly global solution' to equitably distribute vaccines around the world?

To learn more about the event and how to become a member, see [Chatham House].

30 June 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Trusted Connectivity: Securing digital infrastructure in an era of strategic competition with China

In this webinar, President of Estonia H.E. Kersti Kaljulaid will discuss the future of trusted connectivity in an era of strategic and technological competition as well as the question how democratic nations can work with each other and with the private sector to incentivize ambitious infrastructure investments, boost economic growth, and promote regional and global security.

If you want to join the event, see details on registration at [Atlantic Council].

30 June 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

The geopolitics of tech design: How to be human-centered at a global scale

This webinar will explore the impacts of advances in design, data and new technologies on geopolitics and global collaborations.

Visit [Atlantic Council] to learn more about the event.

1 July 2021 @ 3:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Fight and flight in modern air warfare: A conversation with Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr.

Atlantic Council invites to this online conversation with Chief of Staff of the Air Force Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr. on the question how the US Air Force must accelerate change or lose in twenty-first century warfare against China and Russia which are leveraging cyberspace, space, advanced surface-to-air, and stealth capabilities, with an intent on denying and degrading US air operations, and thus the ability of the United States to project power in key theaters.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

1 July 2021 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

American Perspectives on Transatlantic Data Flows

The EU and the United States are facing an impasse in their negotiations of data transfers after the invalidation of the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield. Negotiators on both sides of the Atlantic are trying to find a way forward to guarantee privacy rights and enable transatlantic data flows. How do U.S. views on privacy rights and data flows compare with European understandings? What might a "comprehensive deal" look like between the U.S. and the EU? What are the fundamental roadblocks and how can they be overcome? Has the appetite for stricter regulations increased in the U.S.? Find the answers to these questions at this webinar.

More information is accessible via [Wilson Center].

1 July 2021 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Legislating US-China Policy: The Strategic Competition Act of 2021

This online event will explore the US Innovation & Competition Act which includes the Strategic Competition Act. Passed by the Senate recently, it is the most ambitious one among hundreds of bills aimed at shaping US policy towards China.

For further information, visit [Wilson Center].

1 July 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Critical Race Theory in the Military

Imposing anti-American Critical Race Theory on our troops directly threatens our national security by spreading ideas that undermine confidence in the principles underpinning our Constitution and destroying trust in our system of government. Traditional Americanism promotes unity, cohesion and equality among service members. Indoctrinating

troops against those values runs directly counter to the mission of the force.

If you want to join the event, register at [Heritage Foundation].

1 July 2021, 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Middle East Institute, USA

The Future of Hamas and Gaza: Integration or Continued Isolation?

The fragile ceasefire between Israel and Hamas has been in place since May 21 but is increasingly showing signs of strain. Will the precarious ceasefire give way to renewed fighting? What will it take to end the crippling blockade on Gaza? More fundamentally, can (or should) Hamas be integrated into Palestinian politics? Is it time for Israel, the United States and the broader international community to acknowledge Hamas as a political reality? Find the answers to these questions at this webinar.

If you want to know more about the event, visit [MEI].

1 July 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Pacific Council on International Policy, USA

Israel, Palestine, and Governance Challenges

The recent alignment of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and those possessing Israeli citizenship could presage a new chapter in Israel-Palestine tensions, with options for a peaceful resolution narrowing, the leadership deficit on both sides of the Israel-Palestine dispute becoming increasingly apparent, and the United States finding itself exactly where the Biden administration wished not to be, namely back in the Middle East and in the thick of the region's most intractable and timeless conflict. Against this backdrop, this online event will discuss the current state and future prospects of the relationship between Israel and Palestine.

For further information, see [Pacific Council].

1 July 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Contrasting Approaches to Malaysia's Transport Policy

This webinar will analyse the key transport initiatives put forward during Pakatan Harapan's tenure. From there, it will compare and contrast them with the emerging transport policy framework advanced by Perikatan Nasional. Last, the webinar will set out a vision for transport policy in Malaysia going forward.

Learn more about the event at [ISEAS].

1 July 2021 @ 3:00-4:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Institute for Security Studies, South Africa

Harnessing the benefits of a SADC Standby Force in Mozambique

Southern African leaders agreed on 23 June to deploy a Standby Force of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to help Mozambique deal with violent extremism in its northern province. This could be a turning point in efforts to address the four-year insurgency. What factors will determine the standby force's success against insurgents who have so far resisted local and foreign troops, and controlled strategic towns in Cabo Delgado for more than a year? Lessons from other parts of Africa where similar missions have been deployed show mixed results. This seminar will discuss the prospects and options for SADC's forces in Mozambique.

If you want to know more about the event, visit [ISS].

1 July 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT+2), European Council on Foreign Relations, Germany

Carbon border adjustment design: Opportunities for international cooperation

Although the exact design of it still remains open to debate, the proposal of a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) by the European Union has stirred some debate. In light of this debate, this policy dialogue considers international reactions to the different designs under consideration, opportunities for cooperation with international partners, as well as the role of international institutions in the debate. Registration is required.

If you wish to learn more about the debate, please visit [ECFR].

2 July 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Egmont Institute, Belgium

Risks and opportunities in a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific"

In light of the growing importance of the so-called Indo-Pacific region, which is not limited to global trade, yet the simultaneous degradation of its security environment, this webinar will take a closer look at possible counter-escalation strategies and the role played by the EU-Japan Strategic Partnership Agreement.

For more information, please visit [Egmont Institute].

5 July 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Egmont Institute, Belgium

The Future of European Defence and the Priorities of the Slovenian Presidency: EU-NATO partnerships, Western Balkans and energy efficiency in the defence sector

In light of the Slovenian presidency of the Council of the EU, this webinar invites Slovenian Minister of Defence Matej Tonin to discuss his key priorities regarding the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy, with particular attention given to the dynamics in the transatlantic relations and EU-NATO cooperation, European security partnerships, and missions in the Western Balkans.

Please see [Egmont Institute] for more information. Registration is desired by 01 July.

6 July 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Spain

The European Union and migration challenges: Discussing the role of differentiation

In this webinar, Dimitires Avramopoulos – former European Commissioner for Migration, former Greek Minister for National Defence, and former Foreign

Minister of Greece – will discuss migration and differentiation, looking at the policy preoccupation of the main stakeholders during the 2015 migration influx, as well as his vision of the best way to organize the EU's migration policies.

Please visit [CIDOB] if you wish to learn more about the event.

6 July 2021 @ 8:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Asia Society, United States

A Conversation with Kurt Campbell, White House Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific

This webinar invites Kurt Campbell, appointee of the newly established role of US White House coordinator for the Indo-Pacific and key player in developing the "pivot to Asia" strategy, to discuss the Biden administration's goals and strategy in the region.

To learn more about the event, please visit [Asia Society].

6 July 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT+2), German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Germany

A Multilateralism for the People: International Launch of Germany's White Paper on Multilateralism

As Germany has approved its first White Paper on Multilateralism setting out the scope of the nation's multilateral engagement and importance for the international order, this event launches the English-language version of the paper and invites key representatives from three federal German ministries to elaborate on aspects of it.

Please see [GIGA] for more information.

6 July 2021 @ 5:00 p.m. (GMT+9), Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan

Progress and Challenges Toward Eliminating IUU Fishing and Harmful Fishing Subsidies and Achieving Sustainable Fisheries

As unreported and unregulated fishing remains one of the main reasons for the depletion of fisheries resources, while more than half of all high seas fisheries are estimated to be impossible without government subsidies, this webinar will discuss how Japan and other countries can cooperate to eliminate illegal fishing and harmful subsidies, promoting a sustainable fishing industry.

Please visit [SPF] for more information.

6 July 2021 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

The Gaza Ceasefire: What's Next?

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict once again rose to the international agenda in May, as Israel and Hamas engaged in a bloody 11-day war. On May 21, the fighting stopped when a ceasefire mediated by the Egyptian government took effect. This online panel will discuss Egypt's role in brokering the negotiation.

Learn more about the event at [Wilson Center].

6 July 2021 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Royal United Services Institute, UK

Disrupting the Ransomware Ecosystem

Ransomware attacks hold businesses and public services hostage and yield millions for the criminal groups behind them, as outlined in a recent RUSI report. With high rewards and relatively low costs, ransomware groups continue to operate with impunity and invest in developing more effective tactics and tools to maximize their returns. What should be the response to demands for ransom payment? How can the private sector and law-enforcement agencies collaborate to track cryptocurrency payments and cash-outs? What role does cyber insurance play? Can lessons be learnt from the decades of experience on ransoms in the offline world? Join this webinar to get the answers to these questions.

For more information, see [RUSI]

6 July 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT+5.30), Observer Research Foundation, India

The Dynamics and Implications of India's Vaccine Diplomacy

In this roundtable, ORF scholars dissect the dynamics of Covid-19 vaccine diplomacy in India's neighbourhood. The panellists will explore themes related to these countries' vaccine rollout, China's own vaccine outreach, and the implications of these developments on the larger geostrategic picture in the region. And how does India's vaccine diplomacy impact its own domestic requirements? This discussion will also seek to answer that question.

For more information, visit [ORF].

6 July 2021 @ 6:00-7:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Middle Power Diplomacy in 2021: Making a difference in unsettling times

In the world of diplomacy, 2021 is a continuation of the tumult of 2020. International diplomacy was facing an active agenda prior to the pandemic. The agenda has only grown, and the ways in which diplomats, Minsters and Leaders are engaging has evolved to meet the challenges. What is role of Middle Powers in this context, is the question discussed at this webinar.

You find further information about this event at [AIIA].

6 July 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Leading oil and gas into a net-zero world

In this online panel, oil industry experts will present and discuss the state of the oil and gas industry's movement towards net-zero, its geopolitical implications, and the greater role of oil and gas in a net-zero future.

Find more about the event at [Atlantic Council].

6 July 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-5), The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, USA

The Curious Resilience of Modern Monarchies

Monarchs – whether cultural heads of states, religious figures, or heads of government – are seldom seen in the twenty-first century and often deemed a relic of the past. However, forty-four nations are currently governed by some system of monarchy. This online panel will explore the monarchies' resilience and recent resurgence, focusing on the following questions: What is the role of modern monarchies in a rapidly changing world, and how do these vastly varying systems of government connect to issues of governance, democracy, and the rule of law?

More details are provided at [The Chicago Council].

7 July 2021 @ 5:30-6:30 p.m. (GMT+1), London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Reset: reclaiming the internet for civil society

This webinar will explore the disturbing impact of the internet and social media on politics, the economy and the environment, and asks us to consider how best to construct a viable communications ecosystem that supports civil society and contributes to the betterment of the human condition.

Visit [LSE] for more information.

7 July 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

The U.S. Legacy in Afghanistan: Past, Present, and Future

After almost 20 years since the United States engaged in a military conflict in Afghanistan, U.S. and coalition troops are withdrawing personnel, despite active violence and an uncertain peace settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The United States must now reflect on its history and past engagements in Afghanistan to determine how to respond to the future possible threats from extremist groups and revanchist powers seeking influence in the region. Against this backdrop, this webinar will discuss the U.S. legacy in Afghanistan.

For more details, see [CSIS].

7 July 2021 @ 5:30-7:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Party Time! China's Communists Celebrate Their Extraordinary Century

In this online talk, world renowned Australian sinologist Geremie Barmé will discuss the rise of the Chinese Communist Party since its inaugural meeting in Shanghai from July 23 1921, becoming today the most powerful political organization in the world. Barmé's conversation will cover not only the politics of the CCP's century but also the cultural settings and the deeply personal drivers and shapers of events.

If you are interested in joining this event, register at [AIIA].

7 July 2021 @ 5:00 p.m. (GMT-5), The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, USA

Confronting China's Rise to Regional Dominance

As China's military and economic power increase, so does the likelihood that its growing interests and ambitions will conflict with other nations – particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. Experts from the United States, Japan, and South Korea will discuss in this online event how these three allies might develop a trilateral approach to regional defense and de-escalation.

Visit [The Chicago Council] for more information.

7 July 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Cato Institute, USA

The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth

In this online launch of *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth*, author Jonathan Rauch will discuss norms and institutions that keep people collectively tethered to reality and attacks on a community's shared understanding of the world.

Find more information about the event at [Cato].

7 July 2021 @ 6:15 p.m. (GMT+1), Institute for Public Policy Research, Great Britain

IPPR Webinar and Keynote by David Lammy MP: Firm Foundation and the Rule of Law

In this webinar, MP David Lammy will outline the Labour Party's proposals for the protection of democracy and strengthening rights in the United Kingdom, including plans to change the justice system.

For more information, please see [IPPR].

7-8 July 2021 @ 9:00 a.m./9:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Indonesia Forum 2021

This tw0-day forum will explore the changes Indonesia, as a country, had undergone over the last two decades and highlight the challenges and prospects faced by the country as it progresses into the post-pandemic era.

If you are interested to join the event, register at [ISEAS 1], [ISEAS 2], and [ISEAS 3].

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

The Future of EU-MENA Trade Relations post-Covid-19

This webinar will focus on the EU's trade relations with the MENA region in the post-Covid world, presenting key findings of a recent study on the existing networks of EU-MENA bilateral free trade agreements and the impact of the pandemic on the intra- and inter-regional trade. It also considers recent trade-related proposals of the European Commission with regards to the MENA region.

Please see [Egmont Institute] for more information. Registration by 6 July is desired.

Recent book releases

Martha Minow, ***Saving the News: Why the Constitution Calls for Government Action to Preserve Freedom of Speech***, Oxford University Press, 256 pages, July 1, 2021, briefly reviewed in [Kirkus Review].

Matt Taibbi, ***Hate, Inc.: Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise One Another***, OR Books, 320 pages, April 13, 2021, reviewed in [The Indiependent].

Ezra Klein, ***Why We're Polarized***, Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, 352 pages, June 15, 2021, reviewed in [The Wall Street Journal].

Calls

The **Centre international de formation européenne** welcomes submission for its international colloquium ***"The challenge of the Universal Basic Income in the EU"*** to held on November 29-30, 2021. Closing date for submission is September 15, 2021. For more information, see [Cife].

The **7th International Conference on Digital Arts, Media and Technology (DAMT)** and **5th ECTI Northern Section Conference on Electrical, Electronics, Computer and Telecommunications Engineering (NCON)**, scheduled for January 26-28, 2022 invites students, academics, and industry researchers to submit papers. Deadline for submission is September 6, 2021. Learn more about the call at [ICT].

Jobs & positions

The **Danish Refugee Council** is hiring a ***Danish Demining Group Head of Programme*** to be based in Yangon at Council's main office and expected to conduct regular visits to programme activities in all Mine Action site locations. Closing date for applications is July 6, 2021. For further information, see [UN Jobnet].

The **Asian Development Bank** is seeking a ***Policy and Institutional Development Expert – Individual Consultant***for its Infrastructure Development of Industrial Estates in Tripura. Interested candidates can apply until July 8, 2021. Visit [UN Jobnet] for more details.

The **International Organization for Migration** is offering a position of a ***Programme Coordinator (DTM)***, to be based in Erbil, Iraq. Deadline for applications is July 5, 2021. For more information, see [UN Jobs].

The **United Nations Secretariat** is recruiting ***Political Affairs Officer*** for the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Yemen. Applications can be submitted until July 11, 2021. If you want to know more about the position, visit [UN Jobnet].

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