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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

With the best wishes for the week, we hope you will enjoy another issue of your 'Asia in Review' (AiR) provided to you by the German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance (CPG) and the Asian Governance Foundation (AGF).

Special greetings go to Alexander Pforte and Hall Gardener and our readers celebrating the national days of Ukraine, Uruguay and Moldova.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in East Asia

China: President Xi goes after big money, calls for wealth redistribution

(lm) President Xi Jinping last week put China's wealthiest citizens on notice, calling for stronger "regulation of high incomes" in the latest sign that a 10-month campaign targeting the country's largest technology companies is rapidly expanding.

A meeting of the Communist Party (CCP)'s Central Financial and Economic Affairs Commission on August 17 emphasized the need to "regulate excessively high incomes and encourage high-income groups and enterprises to return more to society". [Xinhua News Agency, in Chinese]

Significantly, the meeting was the first publicly chaired by Xi since late July. Party leaders traditionally retreat to the seaside resort of Beidaihe in early August for policy deliberations, although there has been no official confirmation of the annual retreat in recent weeks. [Financial Times]

The commission agreed that while the CCP had embraced Deng Xiaoping's famous words in allowing some people and regions to "get rich first" in the early decades of China's reform and opening period, it was now prioritizing "common prosperity for all".

Deng´s phrase carries a lot of historical significance in China, and President Xi's use in the context of wealth redistribution calls to mind its use by Chairman Mao Zedong in the middle of the last century as the country's founding father advocated for dramatic economic reforms to take power away from rich landlords and farmers, the rural elite. [CNN]

Noteworthy enough, the government identified the eastern province of Zhejiang, home to Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and known for its robust private sector, as a pilot zone for the new initiatives. [The Straits Times]

Economists say the development suggests Beijing may be moving closer toward taxes on property and inheritance. Authorities have long talked about a property tax and have tested taxing residential property in Shanghai and Chongqing since 2011. A high-level meeting in May indicated officials may be making a renewed push to implement it. [The Guardian]

The directive is the latest in a series of regulatory measures unveiled in recent weeks by various Chinese regulators to place limits on numerous sectors and businesses in the name of protecting national security and social stability. The State Council and the Communist Party's Central Committee earlier this month released a five-year blueprint calling for greater regulation of strategic sectors including technology, healthcare, market supervision, and environmental protection [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3].

The development can be seen as another step towards both even tighter party control and an attempt to increase Xi´s support by the broader population at the expense of certain economic elites.

China to set up state conglomerates focusing on new strategic sectors

(dx) The tougher stance on private big business as reported above is complemented by the decision to set up new central state-owned enterprises (SOEs) focusing on strategic emerging industries at an appropriate time, the State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) announced on August 19. [Reuters]

Founded in 2003 through the consolidation of various other industry-specific ministries, the SASAC is a special commission directly under the State Council, China' chief administrative authority. It currently oversees nearly 100 centrally owned companies with a combined estimated stock value of $7.6 trillion, making it the largest economic entity in the world.

In last week's statement, the SASAC proposes that central SOEs should step up innovation and strengthen tech research for industrial machines, high-end chips, new materials and new energy vehicles. They should also replenish and strengthen the industrial chain, strengthen the coordination of upstream and downstream industries, and actively promote the development of micro, small and medium enterprises. [State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the States Council, in Chinese]

China: Top legislature passes new law to tame big tech, protect 'legitimate rights' on personal data

(dx/lm) China has passed a far-reaching privacy regime that curbs the collection, storage usage and sharing of personal information in China, according to state media, a move that is expected to push forward authorities' campaign to further limit big tech's influence. [CCTV, in Chinese]

China's top legislative body, the National People's Congress Standing Committee on August 20 passed the Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL). The law will take effect November 1, China's official state-run press agency, *Xinhua News Agency* reported.

The PIPL is widely seen as Beijing's interpretation of the world's most robust framework for online privacy protections, the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation. But unlike European governments, which themselves face more public pressure over data collection, China is expected to maintain broad access to data under the new PIPL. [The Wall Street Journal, $]

Details of the new legislation were not immediately released but earlier drafts – first issued in October of last year – included the ban on "algorithmic discrimination" – a common practice among Chinese internet companies where a platform charges different prices to different users based on how much it thinks they are willing to pay. [South China Morning Post]

The legislation is also expected to ban entities from automatically collecting personal data, which can longer be used for "unreasonable" price discrimination. Users will likely also be able to seek clarification as to how their personal data will be used and given the option to opt out of the data collection process.

Companies found breaking the rules could face fines of up to $7.7 million or 5 percent of their annual revenue. [Bloomberg]

One of the most challenging aspects of the law for businesses is its exterritorial jurisdiction: The PIPL expressly expands the jurisdiction to overseas domiciled companies that target the mainland China market.

The National People's Congress Standing Committee passed a related piece of legislation – the Data Security Law – in June that also contains provisions regulating the usage, collection, and protection of data in mainland China. Violations of the law, which will take effect on September 1, will trigger penalty fines and even suspension of business and revocation of license or permits.

Both legislations, in addition to local data regulations, come at a time when frustration grows within the government, and in Chinese society at large, over online fraud, data theft and data collection by Chinese technology giants.

China under President Xi Jinping has been cracking down on its most powerful tech stars, including Alibaba Group Holding Ltd., Tencent Holdings Ltd and Didi Global Inc. [see AiR No. 52, December/2020, 5], in a bid to ensure its grip on society.

China: Three-child policy formally passed into law

(dx/lm) China's top legislative body has formally passed a legal amendment that will allow couples to have up to three children, marking a key move to legalize a major policy shift announced in May to tackle the nation's ageing-population challenge. [BBC]

Against the larger backdrop of growing concerns over the nation's rapidly ageing population, a key meeting of the Politburo of the ruling Communist Party on May 31 put an end to the country's existing two-child policy – which had failed to lead to a sustained upsurge in births – and replaced it with a three-child limit. [AiR No.22, June/2021, 1]

As the decision was yet to be legislated, the draft amendment to the Population and Family Planning Law was submitted to an ongoing session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) for its first reading on August 17. [The Straits Times]

In a document published in late July, central authorities set out a number of supportive policies to encourage couples to have more children [see AiR No. 31, August/2021, 1]. Many of the policies – which include reducing the cost of giving birth, raising a child and education, and abolishing the country's fines for violating birth control policies – were now included in the amendment.

China: Communist Party expels internet censor who 'lost faith in party'

China's ruling Communist Party (CCP) has expelled a former leading internet censor – Peng Bo – and accused him of a range of crimes and rule-breaking, including corruption and failure to properly guide public opinion, the party's disciplinary watchdog body said on August 17.

Peng had been deputy head of the Leading Group for the Prevention and Handling of Cults, a body set up after the CCP launched a sweeping crackdown against the spiritual practice of Falun Gong that it viewed as a threat to its authority. Later, he had direct responsibility for regulating the internet industry as deputy head of the Cyberspace Administration, China's central internet regulator, censor, oversight, and control agency. [South China Morning Post]

In March the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) announced that Peng was under investigation. His case has now been referred to state prosecutors, after an investigation found that his "ideals and beliefs collapsed, and that he had been disloyal to the party, deviated from the Party Central Committee decisions on the online public opinion struggle (and) gave up on positions taken on managing

the internet," the CCDI said on its website. [Associated Press]

China: State media calls for cleanup of online fan behavior

(lm) An editorial published in the official newspaper of the ruling Communist Party on August 17 condemned irrational and undesirable online fan behavior in China, which would interfere with the socio-economic and cultural order in the country, and should therefore be addressed and corrected. [The Straits Times]

The commentary in the state-owned *People's Daily* observed Chinese regulators had achieved some success in "rectifying undesirable fan culture", closing more than 4,000 illegal social media accounts, removing more than 150,000 pieces of what it termed negative and harmful information, and closing down groups and topics of discussion.

But it added that fan groups presented a considerable challenge to governance given "intertwined chains of capital and interests" as well as "undesirable tendencies" including money-worship, noting that fan groups mostly comprise teenagers in need of positive guidance.

The editorial is the latest in a string of similar commentaries recently published in *People's Daily* calling on regulators to rein in the over-promotion of celebrities, and for crackdowns on industries such as gaming and alcohol – which it condemned as "spiritual opium" for teenagers.

Last month, China's internet watchdog, the Cyberspace Administration, said it had ordered some of the country's biggest online platforms, including microblogging website Weibo, to "rectify" and "clean up" child-related content deemed inappropriate.

China: Beijing postpones vote on adding anti-sanctions legislation to Hong Kong's charter

(dx) China's top legislative body has postponed a vote on a proposal to introduce a far-reaching anti-sanctions law into Hong Kong's Basic Law, delaying a move that could leave many foreign entities and their employees caught in rising tensions between Washington and Beijing.

The National People's Congress Standing Committee ended a closed-door session on August 20 without announcing the passage of a resolution adding the legislation to Hong Kong's charter. The central government "hopes to listen to further views on the matter," the *South China Morning Post* reported, citing a person familiar with the matter. [South China Morning Post]

Beijing adopted its own "anti-foreign sanctions law" in June in response to sanctions imposed on the country by the United States and Europe. The legislation authorizes the Chinese government to take countermeasures against foreign individuals and entities in discriminatory restrictive measures that "violate international laws and basic norms". [AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3]

Earlier this month, Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam expressed her support for the implementation of an anti-sanctions laws in the former British colony, sending the strongest signal yet that the financial hub was set to adopt the legislation. [AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

The latest decision to postpone the vote puts on hold one source of concern for the city's financial markets, which have been battered by a wave of Chinese government crackdowns on sectors from technology to education [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]. While much about the legislation is left vague, if implemented robustly, it could force companies to navigate two contrary regulatory requirements, leading to a bifurcation of Chinese and US operations in Hong Kong. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China: Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam tells solicitors' group to stay out of politics

Hong Kong's government may cut ties with one of the city's key professional legal associations if it gets involved in politics, the city's Chief Executive Carrie Lam said on August 17, as authorities in the territory continue to ramp up pressure on civil society and professional organizations.

The chief executive's comments come before an election on August 24 for five of the 20 seats on the council of Hong Kong's Law Society, the professional association and regulator for the city's 12,000 solicitors. There appears to be concern from Hong Kong's leadership that potential candidates with liberal

and pro-democracy views may get elected. [The Straits Times]

In April, another of the city's legal organizations, the Bar Association, was warned by Lam, after the body's chairman Paul Harris was labelled an "anti-China" politician by top Beijing officials after he spoke out about jail terms handed to some pro-democracy politicians. [Deutsche Welle]

The comments come on the back of a spate of disbandment of groups said to have links to the 2019 unrest, including the Civil Human Rights Front and the city's largest educators' group, the Professional Teachers' Union. Both groups had cited diminishing civil liberties and a shrinking public sphere as the reasons behind their disbandment. [AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

China: Hong Kong police arrest four university students over motion mourning police assailant

(lm) Hong Kong's national security police arrested four University of Hong Kong (HKU) undergraduates on August 18 on charges of advocating terrorism, with Chief Secretary for Administration John Lee later saying the city had to find its way back to developing a "law-abiding culture".[The Straits Times]

The four suspects, aged 18 to 20, were among more than 30 members of HKU's student union who attended a meeting last month during which a controversial motion was passed mourning and "appreciating the sacrifice" of a man who stabbed a police officer in the back before killing himself. Under Article 27 of the national security law, anyone convicted of advocating terrorism or inciting terrorist acts faces a mandatory sentence of five to 10 years.

Speaking on the sidelines of a Legislative Council meeting the same day, Secretary for Security Chris Tang Ping-keung dismissed concerns that the arrests constituted part of a wider crackdown on critics of the government. [South China Morning Post]

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reasons behind their disbandment. [AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

China: PLA Hong Kong Garrison conducts comprehensive military exercise

(dx/lm) The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Hong Kong Garrison has conducted a joint exercise involving ground, sea and air operations to test its capability in performing various military missions.

According to a video that was uploaded to the garrison's official social media account last week, the drills took place in the third quarter of this year. However, no information was provided on where or when the exercise was staged, how long it took, or the number of personnel involved. [South China Morning Post] [The Standard]

Article 14 of Hong Kong's Basic Law, the city's *de facto* constitution, states that the People's Republic of China is responsible for the defence affairs of the Special Administrative Zone, while local authorities are in charge of maintaining public order.

The garrison includes elements of the PLA Ground Force, PLA Navy, and PLA Air Force; these forces are under the direct leadership of the Central Military Commission in Beijing and under the administrative control of the adjacent Southern Theater Command.

Japan: In major blow to Prime Minister Suga, opposition-backed candidate wins Yokohama mayoral race

(dx/lm) In a major political setback for Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on his home turf, opposition-backed Takeharu Yamanaka defeated seven other candidates in the race to become mayor in Yokohama, the second-most populous city in the country after Tokyo.

The victory by Yamanaka, who was endorsed by the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan and received the support of the Japanese Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party, was a crushing personal and political blow for Suga. The prime minister, who represents a constituency in Yokohama in Parliament's lower house, had thrown his support behind his long-time friend and supporter, Hachiro Okonogi. [The Japan Times, $]

Especially in the closing days of the campaign, Yamanaka – a data scientist whose work includes analyzing vaccine efficacy on coronavirus variants – had criticized the Suga administration for ignoring calls from infectious disease experts to take stronger measures to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Okonogi, who quit from his position as Chair of the National Public Safety Commission and the lower house to run in the election, was endorsed by Cabinet members as well as members of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)'s junior coalition partner Komeito.

But he only managed to secure votes from 42.7 percent of LDP supporters, according to *Kyodo News* exit polls, a sign of growing dissatisfaction with Suga among his base. A solid chunk, 19.7 percent, went with hitherto Mayor Fumiko Hayashi, who had been backed by some of the party's members in the city assembly. [Kyodo News]

The inability of Suga to get Okonogi elected is expected to accelerate debate this week among members of his LDP. Many were already concerned about whether the prime minister is the best choice to lead the party as it looks toward a party presidential election and the 49th general election of members of Japan's House of Representatives in the coming months. [Asahi Shimbun]

Prior to the mayoral race in Yokohama, media polls taken in the first half of August showed the Suga-led government with a support rate of between 28 and 35 percent. [AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

While key party figures, including former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and LDP Secretary-General Toshihiro Nikai, have said they would back Suga's intention to seek re-election as LDP president, there have been movements by others in recent days to challenge him.

So far, former Internal Affairs Minister Sanae Takaichi, a close ally of Abe, and LDP policy chief Hakubun Shimomura have indicated they will also run. Another probable candidate is former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida, who lost to Suga in the September 2020 election [see AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]. Kishida is expected to formally announce his candidacy by August 26.

The election result is also likely to weigh on Suga's long-held ambition of opening one of Japan's first casinos in Yokohama, given Yamanaka's opposition to the idea. Suga, who started as a local assemblyman in

the city, sees gaming resorts as a way to expand foreign tourism, despite local opposition to the plan. [Bloomberg]

Japan: Prime Minister Suga unlikely to call election in early September, coalition source says

(lm) Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is unlikely to call for an early snap election as previously expected, with his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) gearing up to vote on its next leader in September, *Kyodo News* reported on August 19 citing ruling coalition sources. [Kyodo News]

Suga's earlier strategy had been to vaccinate the population against COVID-19 as quickly as possible, stage a successful Olympic Games to get a boost in public sentiment, and dissolve the lower house of Parliament for a general election after the Tokyo Paralympics close on September 5. Once he had secured a victory for the LDP, Suga envisioned, he could then secure a second term as the party's President unchallenged, before his term expires on September 30.

But the Suga administration's approval ratings continue to slump amid dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the pandemic. Making matters worse, Hachiro Okonogi, a long-time friend and supporter of the prime minister on August 22 lost to opposition-backed Takeharu Yamanaka in the mayoral race in Yokohama. [see entry in this edition]

Against this backdrop, former Internal Affairs Minister Sanae Takaichi – a close ally of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who is also running for the LDP presidency – and LDP policy chief Hakubun Shimomura are among those arguing that the party leadership race should be held first. The LDP's presidential election committee will convene August 26 to determine the schedule for selecting the next party leader [see AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]. The timeline will likely see campaigning kick off September 17 and votes tallied twelve days thereafter.

If Suga holds on as party leader, he may call the general election in early October, not least because the current state of emergency covering many of Japan's metropolitan areas is set to expire September 12. But with the resurgence of infections showing no signs of abating, the country could see Parliament's lower house serving out its four-year term to October 21,

with the 49th general election to be held after that. [Nikkei Asia]

Japan: Opposition seeks extraordinary parliamentary session to meet spreading pandemic crisis

(dx/lm) Blasting the government's slow response to the coronavirus pandemic, the opposition bloc has repeated its demand for an extraordinary parliamentary session to compile a supplementary budget to tackle the deepening health crisis.

The latest demand on August 18 came the same day as the government extended its state of emergency in the capital Tokyo and other regions and announced new measures covering seven more prefectures to counter a spike in COVID-19 infections. [Reuters]

Japan's parliamentary session closed on June 16 after a no-confidence motion in Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's Cabinet filed by four opposition parties was voted down in Parliament's lower house on the previous day. The motion was submitted after Suga refused opposition parties' demand for a three-month extension of the regular parliamentary session to grapple with the virus response. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

Since then, members of various parliamentary committees have met to deliberate pressing issues while Parliament's lower house is in recess. However, their powers in such a setting are limited as they cannot legislate or compile a budget unless Parliament is in session.

North Korea: Pyeongyang draws up new legal provisions against failure to pay electricity bills

(nds) North Korean authorities have reportedly amended the Administrative Penalties Act, revised in 2020, to punish irregularities in the payment of electricity fees, according to Daily NK.

Article 123 of this law includes a new provision on "violations of the legal order on the payment of electricity fees." Anyone who violates this provision will likely receive severe warnings, fines, or up to three months of unpaid work or reform work. In "serious

circumstances," violators face more than three months of unpaid work or reform work, or even demotion, dismissal. Violation of this law constitutes as serious misconduct, owing to more than 20,000 KPW in due electricity fees and repeated offenses.

With these new legal provisions, it seems that Pyeongyang is trying to eradicate the corruption generated in the payment of electricity fees. [Daily NK]

South Korea: Ruling party to advance bill against fake news

(aml) The ruling democratic party (DPK) pushed forward a bill to punish media outlets for producing false or fraudulent news reports, also called “fake news”. On Tuesday, the bill was approved of by the responsible parliamentary committee and is supposed to be voted on in the general assembly on August 25th.

Strong protest against the bill that revises the Act on Press Arbitration and Remedies comes from the opposition, especially the People Power Party, which criticised the DPK’s initiative as an effort to block media criticism of the government and therefore to give party members an advantage in the upcoming presidential election in March 2020, deeming the bill unconstitutional. [The Korea Times]

The media and other civil organisations, such as the International Press Institute and the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers, fear a restriction on the freedom of press. Because concepts like intention or gross negligence, which determine whether an act is punishable or not, are too vaguely defined and could be interpreted arbitrarily, media institutions might self-censor their articles to avoid being sued, possibly discouraging critical reporting. [Yonhap News Agency] [The Chosuniblo][The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Ruling party chief to call for OPCON transfer

(aml) Chief of the ruling democratic Party, Song Young-gil called for a transfer of South Korea’s wartime operational control (OPCON) from the US. The statement was a direct answer to a twitter post of Marc Thiessen, a Washington Post columnist who claimed that South Korea would suffer the same consequences as Kabul if the US withdrew their troops.

The wartime operational control had been handed over to the US during the 1950-53 Korean war, and while South Korea retook the peacetime operational control in 1994, the wartime control remains within the US. Song emphasised the importance of the US - South Korea alliance but stated that the transfer is necessary to further strengthen the will and capability of self-defence against a backdrop of the Afghanistan crisis. Furthermore, he described Thiessen's comparison of South Korea, which has the 6th strongest military and 10th largest economy worldwide, with Afghanistan as slander, since Afghanistan was "tainted with corruption and incompetence". [Yonhap News Agency] [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Presidential election updates

(aml) On Friday, former finance minister Kim Dong-yeon announced his independent bid for the presidential election in March 2022. He explained that he planned to race outside of the political establishment because the ruling party and the main opposition were only interested in maintaining their vested rights rather than improving the livelihoods of the people. Kim had been president Moon Jae-in's first finance minister from June 2017 until December 2018 before resigning after reportedly clashing with senior presidential aides over the administration's income-led growth policy. [The Korea Times 1] Kim's bid is expected to shake up the presidential election next year because he is likely to appeal to uncommitted voters and centrists. Although Kim was already asked by the ruling Democratic Party as well as the People's Power Party (PPP) to join them, he refused their offers, stating he didn't want to "piggyback on the conventional political community". However, given the history of South Korea's presidential elections, it is not clear yet whether Kim will be able to finish the race as an independent candidate. [The Korea Times 2]

The day before Kim's announcement, five-term lawmaker Hong Joon-pyo, a member of the PPP announced his 2nd presidential bid. Hoon had lost the 2017 presidential election against current president Moon and now wants to "correct the nation heading in the wrong direction", especially criticizing the administration's "populist" welfare programs and warning about a massive government-driven dept. In March last year, Hoon had distanced himself from the PPP, after he was disqualified from running in the 2020 parliamentary election. However, he was admitted

back to the PPP in June due to a unanimous decision by the PPP's supreme council. [Yonhap News Agency]

Meanwhile, the PPP faces problems within the party, as the process to select the final presidential candidate starts soon. On September 15th, 8 out of currently 14 contenders will be selected, on October 8th, they will be reduced to 4 and on November 9th, the PPP will finally pick their presidential candidate. The main conflict is between Lee Jun-seok, the PPP's 36-years old chairperson and the leading candidate and former prosecutor general Yoon Seok-youl. Yoon had previously failed to show up to campaign events and now, there is controversy around recordings of a phone call in which Lee allegedly talked badly about Yoon. [Yonhap News Agency][The Korea Times] Since other promising PPP candidates continue to criticise Lee and distance themselves from his events, questions have been raised about Lee's leadership style. Lee, who was elected as the chairperson only two months ago, was originally expected to bring positive change. [The Korea Herald]

Gyeonggi Province Governor Lee Jae-myung, the leading contender in the ruling Democratic Party, pledged on Sunday to meet with US president Joe Biden and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un to reach a denuclearization deal. Furthermore, he would persuade the United Nations to provide a comprehensive sanction exemption on key inter-Korean programs, such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex. [The Korea Times][The Korea Herald]

Less than seven months before the presidential election, the leading contender of both parties, Lee and Yoon are still neck to neck, as polls showed this week, with both candidates getting almost 30% in surveys on who is suitable to become the country's next president. [The Korea Times]

Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in South Asia

Bangladeshis largest group of illegal migrants entering Europe due to climate change

(ad) For the first time since the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) began documenting the arrivals, Bangladeshi nationals have constituted the largest group of migrants coming to Europe, exceeding the combined number of those travelling from Syria, Afghanistan and North Africa. [The Telegraph]

By the end of June, over 3,300 Bangladeshis had entered Europe via dangerous sea crossings, mostly travelling via Libya. And while the overall number of Bangladeshis crossing the Mediterranean has fallen compared to previous years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions, this decrease has been far smaller compared to other nationalities.

Experts say that climate change drives the displacement, for few countries are considered as vulnerable as Bangladesh, where two-thirds of its 166 million citizens live less than five meters above sea level. It is estimated that by 2050 the number of Bangladeshis displaced by the varied impacts of climate change could reach 13.3 million, making it the country's number-one driver of migration. Currently, however, this climate-driven movement is limited to internal migration, as these typically poorer Bangladeshis cannot afford to send themselves and their families abroad.

Practitioners and rights advocates have called on the government to take a strong stance against human trafficking, and lamented a lack of proper and prompt implementation of related laws. Using a similar language, in its latest Trafficking in Persons Report on Bangladesh, the U.S. Department of State noted that Dhaka was making significant efforts to meet the

minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. [U.S. Department of State]

At present, however, there are more than 5700 lawsuits over human trafficking but barely 1 percent of the cases have led to a conviction. Further, police cannot rely on victims' cooperation in the matter of investigating and convicting traffickers because they do not want to provide authorities with necessary information nor fill complaints, according to Bangladeshi law enforcement officials. [Anadolu Agency]

Bangladesh: New data protection law must not be used to infringe on individual rights, editorial says

(ad) A recent editorial in Bangladesh's largest circulating daily English-language newspaper – *The Daily Star* – emphasized the need for a future data protection law to protect the privacy and data of users from anyone, including state actors. [The Daily Star]

At present, the basic framework for data protection and privacy is laid out by the rights of privacy granted under the Constitution, along with the Information Communication Technology Act 2006 and the contentious Digital Security Act, 2018 (DSA).

Relying instead on provisions within a number of laws, however, Bangladesh lacks a comprehensive data protection and privacy law that regulates the collection, storage, and dissemination of personal data provided to various organizations, companies and corporations.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh's government is currently drafting a new data protection act, according to the minister of post and telecommunication.

However, experts and rights activists have expressed concerns that the new law will focus less on data protection, and instead be used to infringe on individual rights — for example, by suspending social media handles of journalists, media outlets, and politicians.

Throughout the last year, more than 40 people have been arrested over social media posts about the COVID-19 pandemic, lending credence to concerns that the DSA in particular is being used as a pretense to muzzle critics of the government's handling of the pandemic. [AiR No. 24, June/2020, 3]

Bangladesh: Supreme Court upholds death sentence for raping and killing a child

(ad) The Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court on August 18 upheld the death sentence of one convict and commuted that of three others to life imprisonment in a case of raping and killing a child in 2004. [United News of Bangladesh]

In light of a surge in sex crimes in Bangladesh and subsequent protests on streets and social media, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last October approved an increase in the maximum punishment in rape cases to death from life imprisonment. [AiR No. 41, October/2020, 2]

Women's rights campaigners, however, called the elevation of the punishment for rape a 'regressive step' that would not reduce violence against women. Instead, rights groups suggested far-reaching reform of the legal system and more education to bring about real change.

Bangladesh: Violent clash between rivalling factions of governing party leaves 50 people injured

(ad) An intraparty feud between two local chapters of Bangladesh's ruling Awami League (AL) on August 18 resulted in clashes between stalwarts of both sides in the city of Barishal, leaving at least 50 people injured. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Twelve individuals have so far been arrested and police are conducting raids to arrest more people suspected of being involved in the incident. Cases have been filed against 30 leaders and activists of the AL and the party's student organization, Bangladesh Chhatra League. Further, a 10-member unit of the Border Guard Bangladesh has been deployed, while police and Rapid Action Battalion have intensified patrols in the city. [Dhaka Tribune 2] [The Daily Prothom]

Being in firm control of the country, AL – once a grassroots party – increasingly appears intertwined with the state apparatus. While party and state are governed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as both undisputable leader, fragmentation and rivalries are common at lower echelons of the party structure.

Bangladesh: Over 150 supportes of opposition party sued over clash with police in capital

(ad) Police in Bangladesh on August 18 lodged cases against 155 leaders and activists of the oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in connection with violent clashes between security forces and some party members in the capital, Dhaka, the day before. The skirmish took place early on August 17 when a newly-formed local convening committee went to place wreaths at the grave of former President and founder of the BNP, Ziaur Rahman. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Officials face non-judicial punishment for illegal arrest and torture of journalist

(ad) Bangladesh's Ministry of Public Administration has taken disciplinary action against officials from the country's Kurigram District over the illegal arrest, detention and torture of a *Dhaka Tribune* journalist. [Dhaka Tribune]

In March of last year, the journalist was tortured while held in custody in the office of the district's deputy commissioner, and later sentenced to a year's imprisonment on charges of possession of narcotics. Ten months earlier, he had criticized the district administration in a report which highlighted the deputy commissioner's purported intention to name a government pond in the town after herself following its renovation. [bdnews24.com]

India: In case that riveted country, opposition politician cleared of charges in wife's death

(lm) An Indian court on August 18 cleared influential lawmaker and former UN diplomat Shashi Tharoor of all charges in connection with the death of his wife, in a case long criticized by the opposition Indian National Congress (INC) as politically motivated.

Tharoor was charged with cruelty and abetment to suicide in 2018, four years after his spouse, Sunanda

Pushkar, was found dead under mysterious circumstances. [BBC]

A court in Delhi last week exonerated Tharoor of all charges citing lack of evidence, after a lawyer for the lawmaker had argued that Pushkar's cause of death had still not been clearly established, undermining the abetment to suicide charge. [The Indian Express]

Supporters of Tharoor, who had been widely seen as prime minister material, said the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was threatened by him and was trying to ruin his reputation. In fact, among those pressuring the police to bring charges against the INC lawmaker was Subramanian Swamy, a member of Parliament's upper house from the BJP, who insisted that Pushkar had been poisoned. [The New York Times, $]

The BJP politician expressed dissatisfaction with the court ruling on August 18, saying in an interview that he would offer his assistance again if it were appealed. [The Hindu BusinessLine]

Nepal: Supreme Court moved against ordinance amending Political Party Act

(lm) Nepal's President and ceremonial head of state Bidhya Devi Bhandari on August 18 promulgated an ordinance to ease party split, a move that was recommended by the government of Prime Minister Deuba a day before, and that has since drawn criticism.

Prior to the amendment, the Political Parties Act 2017 required a faction within a political party to secure at least 40 percent support in both the party's parliamentary group and central committee to claim the party name or register a new party with the Election Commission. The ordnance lowered the threshold to 20 percent. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

The government recommended the ordinance a day after it prorogued the lower house of parliament, which had reconvened on July 18 following its restoration by the Supreme Court on July 12. According to observers, the prime minister was reluctant to present any bills in the House because his coalition government – comprising of Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and People's Socialist Party, Nepal, – could potentially have fallen short of reaching a majority. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The government of former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in April of last year also sought to amend the Act, and introduced an ordinance to change the "and" provision to "or", keeping the required number of members at 40 percent. Deuba's then oppositional Nepali Congress party had described the decision as an "unacceptable move", saying it would undermine the supremacy of Parliament.

As many as six writ petitions have been filed with the Supreme Court since the ordnance's promulgation. The petitioners argue that the government has acted mala fide in allegedly deliberately proroguing the House of Representatives to issue the ordinance. [The Himalayan Times] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: Dissident groups register two new parties

(lm) Dissidents in two political parties on August 18 separately registered to parties with Nepal's Election Commission (EC), just hours after the country's President and ceremonial head of state Bidhya Devi Bhandari promulgated an ordinance that significantly facilitated party split. [The Kathmandu Post]

The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), the largest political party in Nepal, is heading for split, after 95 members of the party, including 58 of the existing Central Committee, applied to the Election Commission for the registration of the Communist Party of Nepal Unified Marxist-Leninist (Socialist).

The new party is to be headed by Madhav Kumar Nepal, an intraparty rival of former Prime Minister and CPN-UML chairman KP Sharma Oli, with former Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal serving as his Deputy. While it remains to be seen how many parliamentarians will join the new party, one of its leaders said they have support of at least 30 lawmakers.

The disputes between Nepal and Oli had deepened after the Nepal-led faction supported the bid for the premiership by Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba against Oli and helped Deuba win a vote of confidence on July 18 by garnering a majority of votes in the House of Representatives. [AiR No. 22, June/2021, 1]

The ordinance also facilitated the formation of the People's Socialist Party, Nepal (Democratic), a party to be led by Mahantha Thakur, currently a factional leader of the People's Socialist Party, Nepal, (PSP-N).

In June, the EC announced it would recognize the rivalling Yadav-Bhattarai faction of the PSP-N as the authentic party, saying that 34 members of the party's 51-member Executive Committee had supported the faction during the verification process [see AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4]. Earlier this month then, Thakur suffered another political blow as the Supreme Court refused to stay the EC's decision [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3].

Mahato told *The Kathmandu Post* that his new party enjoyed the support of 15 – out of 32 – lawmakers of the PSP-N.

Once the two new parties have been officially registered with the EC, Nepal's lower house of parliament will have six major political forces: The ruling coalition comprising of Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), and PSP-N, in addition to the two newly registered parties and the oppositional CPN-UML.

Three other parties — Rastriya Janamorcha, Nepal Majdoor Kisan Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party — have their representation with one lawmaker each as independents because they are not recognized as national parties.

Sri Lanka: EU give Colombo wake-up call on trade policy and GSP+ membership

(egm) Sri Lanka has received a warning from the European Union, with the EU's ambassador to Colombo stressing the need for the country to align its policies in light of a significant imbalance of trade. [Daily FT 1]

The EU is Sri Lanka's second-largest trading partner after China and its second main export destination, absorbing more than 22 percent of Colombo's exports in 2020. The same year, Sri Lanka was the EU's 69th largest trading partner in goods accounting for 0.1 percent of EU trade. [European Commission]

Against this backdrop, the EU ambassador on August 18 raised concerns on the serious trade imbalance while addressing a webinar organized by local chambers of commerce. Pointing out that the balance of trade with the EU had always been in favor of Sri Lanka, the diplomat said the imbalance had been further exacerbated by import restrictions imposed by the Sri Lankan government since March 2020 without previous notification to the World Trade Organization (WTO). [The Morning]

These restrictions include a ban on several imports such as motor vehicles, appliances, spices and essential household items. Since the placement of import restrictions, EU exports to Sri Lanka have reached the lowest recorded amount in a decade.

During the webinar, the ambassador also revealed that an EU mission is expected to evaluate the South Asian's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP+) status in the coming months. Until now, Sri Lanka enjoys preferential access to the EU market through the resumed GSP+ concession benefits, which included the removal of duties on 66 percent of tariff lines.

However, the recent resolution submitted in June by the European Parliament to the European Commission demanded to temporarily withdraw Sri Lanka's GSP+ status. The decision was based on the Parliament's description of Colombo's lacking human rights reforms and the continued existence of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which enables Sri Lanka's authorities to detain individuals without a previous charge or trial. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

In order to maintain its GSP+ privileges Sri Lanka must comply with the conditions placed by the EU concerning the country's progress in advancing human and labor rights and working towards sustainable development.

Sri Lanka: Cabinet reshuffle sees health minister replaced amid surge in COVID-19 cases

(egm) Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa last week replaced the country's health minister who publicly endorsed alternative remedies to battle COVID-19 in a cabinet reshuffle, as daily infections and deaths hit record highs.

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health, Nutrition & Indigenous Medicine under hitherto Minister Pavithra Wanniarachchi came under intense criticism after daily infections crossed 3,000 last week, with government health workers saying the actual number of infections could be three times higher. [Al Jazeera]

Wanniarachchi was reassigned to the Transport Ministry. Former Media Minister and official spokesperson for the Cabinet, Keheliya Rambukwella, was named the new Health Minister.

In the cabinet reshuffle, Education Minister Gamini Lakshman Peiris will swap portfolios with Foreign Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, as Colombo is facing renewed pressure from both the European Union and United Nations Human Rights Council over its human rights performance [see AiR No. 26, June/2021, 5]. [CNBC]

Furthermore, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has also assigned his nephew and current Minister for Youth and Sports Namal Rajapaksa additional responsibilities with the portfolio for Development Planning and Monitoring. Namal is also State Minister of Digital Technology and Enterprise Development [see AiR No. 28, July/2021, 2].

Sri Lanka: Scotland suspends police training over human rights concerns

(egm) Police Scotland has temporarily suspended a scheme to train officers in Sri Lanka pending a risk assessment over human rights concerns. [Tamil Guardian] [The Times]

The suspension of training follows calls from several international human rights groups on the national force to "suspend assistance programmes until there is progress on accountability and reform", citing concerns of contributing to an abuse of power by Sri Lanka's police during the COVID-19 pandemic, including extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary detention. These demands follow the rising international unease which accompanied the announcement in January of the training program's renewal for 2023. [Human Rights Watch] [The Sunday Post]

The misdemeanors linked to the Sri Lankan police according to reports by Human Rights Watch, the United Nations and several organizations include torture, extrajudicial killings, the targeting of ethnic and religious minorities and repression of dissent. Despite the training received from Police Scotland since 2013, the human rights groups claim that these abuses have not diminished under the administration of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. [Colombo Gazette]

Sri Lanka: Psychiatrist association calls on authorities to decriminalize homosexuality

(egm) Sri Lanka's prime psychiatrist association has called on the government to decriminalize homosexuality, after a self-proclaimed psychological counselor in a workshop for local police had called homosexuality a "mental disorder". [Daily Mirror] [Human Dignity Trust]

In a statement published on August 18, the Sri Lanka College of Psychiatrists said that diagnosing homosexuality as a mental disorder was not in line with the consensus of scientific research and clinical literature, and called on authorities to halt criminal proceedings against same sex conduct. [Lanka News Web]

Sections 365 and 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code prohibit "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" and "gross indecency between persons" commonly understood in Sri Lanka to criminalize same-sex relations between consenting adults, including in private spaces. Those convicted of engaging in same-sex sexual activity in private or in public face 10 years' imprisonment. Antidiscrimination laws do not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

This is not the first time Sri Lanka's policy towards homosexuals has been criticized. In 2018, for example, the U.S. Department of State 'Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Sri Lanka' said police used the threat of arrest to assault, harass, and sexually and monetarily extort LGBTI individuals [see U.S Department of State]. In the same vein, the Health Ministry's National HIV/STI Strategic Plan-Sri Lanka, 2018-2022 highlights the impediments created by the Penal Code towards the effective prevention of HIV for homosexuals. [National HIV/STI Strategic Plan-Sri Lanka, 2018-2022]

Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: Last Khmer Rouge leader to deny responsibility in appeal proceedings

(nd) During his hearing last Thursday, the last surviving leader of Cambodia's Khmer Rouge regime on denied involvement in genocide and crimes against humanity. Former President Khieu Samphan, 90, initiated the proceeding by appealing a 2018 guilty verdict. [See also AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3] He insisted he was in charge of securing national sovereignty and independence from Vietnam, which toppled the regime and said "I categorically refute the accusation and the conviction that I had the intention to commit the crimes" adding "No matter what you will decide, I will die in prison, I will die always remembering the suffering of my Cambodian people."

The Khmer Rouge ruled Cambodia between 1975 and 1979, during which an estimated 2 million people died in South East Asia´s worst genocide through mass murder, starvation, and torture. Pol Pot's vision was the creation of an agrarian utopia. He was never tried for he died in 1998. [CNN] [The Diplomat]

Cambodia: Union leader convicted

(nd) A prominent Cambodian union leader and government critic, Rong Chhun, was sentenced to two years in prison for inciting social unrest, after commenting on the border with Vietnam. This is the maximum penalty for Rong Chhun, the president of the Cambodian Confederation of Unions and member of the Cambodian Watchdog Council, an umbrella NGO of unions representing teachers, workers, farmers, and students, who was arrested in July 2020. He stated that the demarcation of the eastern border with Vietnam had taken away land from farmers.

He was convicted alongside two other defendants, both arrested during rallies supporting Rong Chhun's cause. Upon hearing the verdict, Rong Chhun shouted out "It is injustice [...] it is implemented based on a plan and order from the ruler. The court is under the influence of a politician, so the court cannot find justice for me."

Local rights groups as well as the ambassadors to Cambodia from Australia and the US condemned the verdict, emphasizing that the constitution guarantees freedom of expression and the right to peacefully gather.

The lack of independence of the court Rong Chhun pointed to illuminated the sensitive nature of the border between Cambodia and Vietnam. The former French colonies have not resolved all border areas, causing sometimes violent local incidents. Due to this territorial challenge, Cambodian nationalism has always been spiked with a fear of disappearance through Vietnamese encroachment. Opponents of CPP, which was installed by a Vietnamese invasion in 1979, frequently use the CPP's close ties to Vietnam to claim a sellout of Cambodia.

The verdict follows the six-year ongoing crackdown on political and societal opposition, after the Supreme Court dissolved the main opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) in 2017. This prompted a further crackdown, enabling the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to win all seats in the 2018 general election. [Radio Free Asia] [The Diplomat]

Papuan pastor to accuse Indonesian state of injustice

(nd) In an open letter, Pastor Dr Socratez S. Yoman criticized the Indonesian government with respect to police forces once again dispersing protesters forcefully. He was referring to Reverent Dr Benny Giay, chair of the Kingmi Synod in Papua and moderator of the West Papua Council of Churches (WPCC) being refused entry to the Papuan People's Representative building while conducting a vigil march on August 16.

The protests days before this incident were organized by a network of civil organizations behind the Papuan People's Petition (PPP), who reject Jakarta's plans to renew Special Autonomy in Papua. [See also AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3] During protests in May, Victor Yeimo leading figure in the West Papuan pro-independence movement and foreign spokesman for the West Papua National Committee (KNPB) was arrested and charged

with inter alia treason and incitement, for his alleged role in anti-racism protests in 2019. Protesters were forcefully dispersed by police, using water cannons.

Protesters also called for Yeimo's unconditional release from prison. With Yeimo's health reportedly deteriorating, human rights advocates, including the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights defenders have voiced concerns.

The protest was also directed against a recent decision to label the West Papua Liberation Army as terrorists. The ongoing armed conflict between guerillas of the Liberation Army and the Indonesian military have escalated after the killing an Indonesian intelligence chief in July.

West Papua was granted Special Autonomy status 20 years ago, being criticized by the community as having failed to enable Papuan self-determination. The newly passed billed allows for the region to be organized into provincial or district divisions, thereby dilluting Papuan leadership. [Asia Pacific Report 1] [Asia Pacific Report 2] [Radio New Zealand 1] [Radio New Zealand 2]

Indonesia's reluctance to encourage more Chinese language proficiency

(nd) Despite China being Indonesia's largest investor and trading partner and the approximately 7 million ethnic Chinese in the country, a 3.3% of the total population, there is seems to be no increased incentive for Indonesians to learn Mandarin, which can be attributed to political reasons.

Historically, president Suharto cut ties with China in 1957 to fight the spread of communism, during which a regulation foresaw the forced naturalization of Chinese defendants, which created a social stigma. During the still tabooed mass killings 1965-66, ethnic Chinese formed a large group of victims. Likewise, ethnic Chinese were prominently targeted in the May 1998 riots following the Asian Financial crisis of 1997 that were leading to the downfall of President Suharto and the democratic transition period. While interest in learning Mandarin increased since 1999, after the naturalization regulation was abolished, some education institutions offered Mandarin but often failed to provide sufficient standards due to a lack of teachers and respective university-level language education.

Since 2000, the Chinese community in Indonesia has supported Indonesia's Ministry of Education to bolster

Chinese language classes, eventually leading to the implementation of Confucius Institutes (CI) as a Chinese-Indonesian joint initiative with the first having been established in 2011. As part of scholarships, students travelled to China. Despite a stipulation in their contract obliging them to teach upon their return, most graduates, however, opted to work for Chinese companies in better paid positions instead. Still, however, Chinese language proficiency stays behind the potential. [Jakarta Post]

Malaysia: UMNO back in power

(nd) Last Friday, Malaysia´s King has appointed UMNO's Ismail Sabri Yaakob as the nation's ninth prime minister, after earlier this week, Muhyiddin Yassin resigned, following his loss of majority support. Besides UMNO, Muhyiddin's Bersatu, the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), and the Gabungan Parti Sarawak (GPS), as well as some smaller outfits and independents, are backing Ismail, constituting of 116 seats.

Earlier, the King interviewed members of parliament to reassure Ismail would be able to receive support from a majority in parliament, which equates 114 out of 220 seats. In an effort to ensure a more stable government, the King announced earlier, the candidate elected will have to face a vote of no confidence in parliament as soon as possible. Such restriction was not put on Muhyiddin last year.

Usually rather performing more ceremonial function, the monarch stepped into the political arena uncommonly active after the collapse of the government in February 2020, which was followed by Muhyiddin's ever-shaky alliance, who never succeeded in consolidating his power.

Ismail has the support of the Barisan Nasional alliance and the former ruling Perikatan Nasional coalition, while lawmakers from the opposition Pakatan Harapan coalition backed Anwar Ibrahim as prime minister, as well as the Sabah-based Warisan party. This constellation already hints to that fact that the future prime minister will in any case inherit a deeply divided political spectrum in parliament. Being faced with increasing Covid-19 case numbers and a weakening economy, it will be challenging to organize majorities.

Given the broad political spectrum backing him, it could prove difficult for Ismail to appease who helped him into office. Additionally, it is the first time that the sitting prime minister from UMNO is not also the party

president, which could upset the two factions within UMNO. But news that Zahid agreed to back Ismail Sabri suggested that concessions have been made, likely that Ismail will only temporarily hold the position, and him not disposing full autonomy with regards to UMNO. Otherwise, as analysts suggest Ismail is likely to challenge the corruption-battled Zahid, resulting in politicking within UMNO.

Another challenge will be the picking of a cabinet lineup, considering the immense loss of confidence with regards to the pandemic management that the PN government was heavily criticized for. Such speculation emerged when it was rumored that former home minister Hamzah Zainuddin might be nominated as deputy.

Ismail has practiced as a lawyer and held several ministerial posts in UMNO governments. In Muhyiddin's cabinet, he was defense minister; due to his entanglement with the former, analysts called him a poor choice and it likely for his government to be shaky as well.

With Ismail's appointment, Malaysia's biggest party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), will be back in power. UMNO has ruled Malaysia since its independence in 1957 until it was ousted in 2018 over the 1IMBD multibillion-dollar financial scandal. The next national election will take place in 2022. [Bloomberg] [Malay Mail] [Benar News] [The Diplomat]

Myanmar: Rohingya give first testimony in universal jurisdiction case in Argentina

(mt/lm) Members of the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority have testified in court for the first time on the alleged atrocities faced during their persecution in Myanmar, in a case that could create an important precedent for future cases. [TRT World]

Investigations on crimes allegedly committed by Myanmar military forces, the so-called Tatmadaw, against the minority Rohingya community in the country's Rakhine state are already under way at the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the United Nation's International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In 2019, the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK (BROUK) filed a complaint in Argentina over the crimes committed in Myanmar against Rohingyas, including mass killings, sexual violence, torture and forced displacement. In July of this year then, a lower court dismissed the case based on the existence of the

ongoing investigation before the ICC on crimes committed against the Rohingyas. The complainant appealed the decision.

The latest court hearing took place on August 17 when six Rohingya women now living in refugee camps in Bangladesh testified remotely before the Federal Criminal Appeals Court in Argentina's capital Buenos Aires. [The Straits Times]

The Argentinian Appeal Court will decide whether to invoke the principle of "universal jurisdiction" – which allows for the trial of international crimes committed by anybody, anywhere in the world – to open a case against Myanmar's leaders for genocide and crimes against humanity.

Thus, the upcoming decision will set an important milestone: does the complementary principle of the ICC – which stipulates that States bear the primary responsibility for prosecuting international crimes – allow a State to investigate and prosecute under universal jurisdiction similar allegations that are being investigation by the ICC? In other words, does the ICC take precedence over national authorities using universal jurisdiction? [Trial International]

Myanmar: Shadow government reports to UN Security Council as death toll tops 1,000

(mt) Myanmar's shadow government on August 17 reported last month's alleged massacres of civilians by security forces in the Sagaing Region to a meeting of the United Nation Security Council.

In a letter sent to UN Secretary General António Guterres, Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations earlier this month claimed 40 bodies had been found in various locations near a township in Myanmar's Sagaing Region throughout July [see AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]. According to the National Unity Government (NUG), the latest report on the alleged killing provides strong evidence that the junta is guilty of war crimes. [The Irrawaddy]

Timing and context of the report assume added significance: On September 14, the 75th UN General Assembly will open, and the question de jour will be who will represent Myanmar – the military's representative or the representative of the democratically elected, ousted government? [The Interpreter]

In related developments, the death toll as a result of Myanmar's military takeover topped 1,000 on August 18, according to Thailand-based activist group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), which has been tracking detentions and killings by security forces. [The Straits Times]

Myanmar: AA leader says group is 'monitoring' military as fears of renewed conflict grow

(mt) The leader of one of the largest ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar, the Arakan Army (AA), said the group was closely monitoring the activities of military forces, as concerns over the stability of a ceasefire in Rakhine State grow.

In an interview on August 15, the AA's military chief said that the military junta appears to be reacting to moves by the armed group and its political wing, the United League of Arakan (ULA), to establish its own judiciary and other administrative functions in western Rakhine State. [Myanmar Now]

In seeking greater autonomy for the western Rakhine State, the AA has battled against the military since 2018, with hundreds of fatalities caused and more than 200,000 residents being displaced due to the conflict. In November of last year then, the AA surprisingly ordered its armed members to fall back as it entered an informal ceasefire with security forces. [AiR No. 49, December/2020, 2]

Since the military coup in February, the AA and ULA have significantly accelerated their effort to assume administrative control in Rakhine State. Earlier this month, for example, the ULA announced the establishment of a dispute resolution mechanism – an initiative that has largely been welcomed by civil society groups and prominent members of Rakhine political parties.

In response, the junta has moved to reassert its control by imposing new restrictions on the pretext of containing the spread of COVID-19, after the ULA/AA had issued stay-at-home orders of its own in late July. But what is more, the junta apparently also strengthened its forces in the northern part of the State since the second week of August, a move that has raised fears among local civilians of a return to open hostilities.

Myanmar: Trial against former leader Suu Kyi postponed until September

(mt/lm) Court proceedings against ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi have been postponed until September 6 and 7, after a nationwide lockdown imposed amid soaring COVID-19 cases has been extended until the end of August.

The hearings pertain to sedition charges, which have also been levelled against ousted President Win Myint and another senior member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3]. The court proceedings were first adjourned in mid-July, and members of the legal defense team have not been able to meet their clients since then. [The Irrawaddy]

Moreover, Myanmar's Anti-Corruption Commission earlier this month filed additional corruption charges against Suu Kyi, Win, and several other members of the now-defunct NLD administration in connection with land permits they granted in the country's capital, Naypyitaw. The military junta has charged the defendants under Section 55 of the Anti-Corruption Law, which carries up to 15 years imprisonment.

Myanmar: Two more journalists arrested, charged with sedition

(mt) Myanmar's military government has arrested two more local journalists last week, the latest among dozens of detentions in a sweeping crackdown on the media since the February 1 military takeover.

On August 15, security forces arrested Sithu Aung Myint, a columnist for news publication *Frontier Myanmar* and commentator with*Voice of America*, and Htet Htet Khine, a freelance producer for *BBC Media Action*, according to news reports citing a military-owned television broadcaster. [The Straits Times]

Authorities charged Sithu Aung Myint with spreading false news, a crime under Article 505(a) of the Penal Code punishable by up to three years in prison, and sedition, under Article 124(a) of the Penal Code, which can carry a life sentence. [The Irrawaddy]

Htet Htet Khine, in turn, was charged under Section 17(1) of of the colonial-era Unlawful Associations Act for allegedly working for a banned radio station and harboring Sithu Aung Myint while she fled an arrest

warrant; if convicted, she could face two to three years in prison for each offense. [Myanmar Now]

Human Rights Watch late last month said the military junta had arrested 98 journalists since the coup and should stop prosecuting media staff. Of those arrested, 46 remained in custody as of the end of July.

Myanmar: Shadow government launches guerrilla radio program

(mt) The shadow government formed by civilian lawmakers deposed by the military junta on August 20 launched the first daily radio program as it seeks to challenge junta's supremacy and control of the media infrastructure in post-coup Myanmar.

Since the February 1 military takeover, representatives of the National Unity Government (NUG) have been supporting the resistance on international news broadcasts from abroad. The daily radio program seeks to inform the people of Myanmar on junta troops-carried-out atrocities on civilians across the country, giving voice to democracy activists hiding from the junta through their direct letters read on-air, and reporting on local 'self-defense' initiatives implemented from various resistance and ethnic groups in the different regions and states. [The Straits Times]

The same day, however, the military regime reacted by confiscating radios from shops in the city of Yangon and placed restrictions on radio imports. The junta has also issued an official order to every police officer, ward, and village administrator to seize radios, which have witnessed an increase in demand following junta-imposed growing restrictions on internet access and NUG announcement of the launch of its station and program. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Vaccination program ineffective in tackling COVID-19 crisis, residents say

(mt) Senior citizens who were vaccinated last week declared that Myanmar national vaccination program against CODIV-19 implemented under the junta is ineffective and prioritizes military categories.

Military leaders said Sinopharm vaccines were to be given to hotel and restaurant staff first, other than the elderly. However, senior citizens claim military-

implemented vaccine roll out plan has not been able to meet junta-given purposes as the prioritization criteria are not respected and as ever more citizens are refusing to get their jabs if administrated by the military.

A Myanmar independent researcher has released a statement saying that from a poll of almost five thousand citizens, 59 per cent would not get a junta-given jab and that the 29.9 percent accepted to receive the vaccine under the national program but has not yet been given one. Senior citizens who made the statement remain anonymous. [Mizzima]

Moreover, as infection and number of daily deaths continue to rise and as ever more people refuse to accept a military junta-provided vaccine, people are turning to brokers on social media to purchase at a way higher price a vial of Indian-manufactured Covishield vaccine. One vial of anti-COVID-19 vaccine produced by the Serum Institute of India is usually priced at the relative cost in Kyat of $49. Local brokers however have been selling it now for more than $1,215 each. [Myanmar Now]

Myanmar: Homes raided, relatives arrested when NLD members cannot be found by junta

(mt) Junta troops have raided the homes and arrested relatives of three elected members of the National League for Democracy (NLD) on August 18 as they could not be found themselves. [Myanmar Now] [The Irrawaddy]

Arbitrary detention of family members of MPs, political opponents, and anti-military activists is not new in post-coup Myanmar. The military junta has been detaining relatives and children of both political and civilian activists who are still on the run and remained unlocated by the junta's authorities to push them to come forward and free their loved ones. [AiR No. 27, July/2021, 1]

Philippines: Duterte to announce his vice-president candidacy

(nd) Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has agreed to run for the ruling PDP-Laban party as vice president in next year's election, arguably prolonging his hold on power in another position. This would likely mean a

continuity of the government's programs. During the national assembly on September 8, Duterte is expected to endorse his aide and incumbent senator Christopher "Bong" Go to be the presidential candidate for next year's election. Observers say his candidacy as vice president was a backdoor to the presidency, taking over when the ally-president Go resigns.

Another incentive for Duterte to run for vice-president is arguably the immunity the position grants, shielding him from possible legal action coming from the ongoing investigation by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity for his war on drugs.

The presidential office is limited to one consecutive six-year term. The president and vice president are elected separately in polls, with candidacies for next year's election have to be filed by October. [Reuters] [Inquirer] [Nikkei Asia]

Singapore: Report on restraints in university freedom

(nd) According to a recent survey, Singapore-based academics studying "politically sensitive" topics say they feel constrained from exploring certain topics in their work. The survey was conducted with 198 scholars, out of a third stated to know of academics who were told to withdraw or modify research findings for non-academic reasons. Sixteen per cent of survey respondents said they were not free to choose their preferred research area and broader agenda, while a third reported knowing of academics

Almost 40% felt that they were "not free" to invite guest speakers as they wished, often reporting the university requires them to obtain permission. Respondents also said pressure was indirect and invisible, due to the fact that "political regulation is mostly decentralized and institutionalized within universities, and enveloped within a culture of self-censorship".

The ruling People's Action Party (PAP), has been criticized for limiting civil rights and cracking down on critics. They claimed such restrictions were necessary to maintain social peace and has faced accusations that it takes a tough approach against critical scholarship of its 62-year rule of the island nation. [South China Morning Post]

Thailand: Eight protestors denied bail, three believed to have contracted COVID-19

(pr) The court denied bail of eight protestors including protest leader Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak. They were charged for violating the protest ban and COVID-19 restrictions at a border patrol police headquarters earlier this month. [Bangkok Post 1] Parit and two others have contracted COVID-19. Their lawyer believes they contracted the virus from inside prison as they tested negative before detainment [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Former leader of dissolved opposition party summoned for two royal defamation charges

(pr) Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, leader of the Progressive Movement and former leader of the dissolved Future Forward has been summoned by the police for two royal defamation charges, according to his lawyer.

In one case, on August 13, the police summoned Thanathorn to forward the case to the prosecutor. He was charged with royal defamation and under the Computer Crime Act in relation to a livestream in January, in which he was criticizing the government's COVID-19 vaccine strategy, which was purely relying on Siam Bioscience Company. The company is wholly owned by the Crown Property Bureau, and manages the king's personal investment and assets. [see, AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]

For the other case, on August 10, he was summoned by the police as he was accused by a person within the ruling Palang Pracharat Party's legal department for royal defamation. However, the lawyer does not yet know the circumstances of the accusation. [Thai Rath, in Thai]

Thanathorn is currently in France attending an event until the end of the month and said he will return to meet with the police as summoned [Prachachat, in Thai]
Royal defamation is a criminal offense under the Thai Criminal Code and carries a maximum sentence of 15 years imprisonment.

Thailand: Lower House approves 2022 budget bill, to be debated by the Senate

(pr) The House of Representatives has approved the $9.28 billion budget bill for fiscal year 2022 in its second and third readings. The bill will now be forwarded to the Senate for deliberation.

After a five-day debate, the bill was passed with 257 votes in favor, 189 against with three abstentions, and one did not vote. The lower house reduced the funds allocated to ministries, including the Defense Ministry, and transferred $17.6 billion to the central budget for the government to be able to make fast disbursements in emergencies in light of the pandemic. The transfer of funds to the central budget previously caused a disagreement between two opposition parties, Pheu Thai and Move Forward during the scrutiny by the budget examination committee [see, AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

During the debate, the opposition also criticized the Public Health Ministry's $1.1 billion budget for lack of transparency, misallocation of medical resources, and inappropriate budgeting for COVID-19 test kits and vaccines. [Thai PBS World] The spending for the Foreign Ministry was also criticized but was defended by the ministry as necessary and in accordance with regulations. [Bangkok Post 1]

The $262 million budget for the monarchy was not reduced despite calls by opposition lawmakers for cuts. The budget was 2.4 percent lower than last year and is the first reduction since the royal agencies were merged after the succession of King Vajiralongkorn in 2017. [Reuters]

The bill, which passed its first reading in June, [see, AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2] will be forwarded to the Senate and the senate is expected to begin deliberation by the end of August. Observers expect the bill to sail through the Senate as the senators were handpicked by those associated with the 2014 military coup led by the then-General and current Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Observers weigh in on the street protests and the status of the opposition camp

(pr) According to unnamed observers and experts, the anti-government protests are losing their legitimacy

and public support due to the violence that ensued from the protests in the past few weeks. As for the opposition camp, a recent signal of a rift between major opposition parties was seen in the censure debate motion.

With regard to the street protests, the more violent the situation becomes, the worse it is for the anti-government protest movement. Moreover, it diverted the public's attention from the pandemic as the source of anti-government sentiment and the source of support for the movement by people who were frustrated by the government's handling of the pandemic. One of the reasons for the violence is due to the multi-faction composition of the protests and lack of clear leadership and thereby control. [see, article in this edition]

Turning to the status of the opposition, experts and observers say another crack has appeared in the opposition from the planned motion of no-confidence filed against the government. [see, AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

Move Forward Party (MFP) supporters questioned why controversial figures in the cabinet like Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon, and Deputy Agriculture and Cooperatives Minister Thamanat Prompow, who are also leader and secretary-general of the ruling Palang Pracharat Party (PPRP) respectively, were excluded from the censure debate amidst a rumor between a political alliance between the PPRP and the main opposition party, Pheu Thai (PTP).

For the PTP, the accusation of the PTP-PPRP alliance created unwanted tension. The two figures had been targets in the last two motions but no new information justified targeting them this time. The current motion will focus on the government's mishandling of the pandemic and the two are not directly responsible for the issue. It was agreed that they would aim at bigger targets like Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul instead. According to a PTP source, the MFP withheld information that they would use against the two ministers which was unfair to the rest of the opposition parties. Pheu Thai, backed by other opposition parties save for MFP, excluded the two ministers.

However, despite tensions, the two major opposition parties still have to band together until the election. The censure debate is expected to take place the end of this month or early next month. [Bangkok Post]

Previously, the PTP and the MFP had a disagreement over the transfer of funds to the central budget during

the scrutiny of the budget bill by a house committee on budget bill examination. [see, AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

Both Prawit and Thamanat had been allegedly linked to corruption scandal, and drug trafficking [see, AiR No. 19, May/2021, 2] [see,AiR No.(1/1/2019)]

Thailand: Protestors and police clashes heat up as police adjusts rally-control strategies

(pr) Throughout last week from August 16-22, the protesters and police continue to clash prompting the police to adjust their strategy and investigate video clips of alleged crowd control police officers using unnecessary force against civilians and protestors. The police fired tear gas, and rubber bullets at protestors while the protestors use firecrackers, rocks, marbles and projectiles. The primary demand of the protestors is the resignation of the prime minister. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

On August 16, a minor was critically injured and comatosed by live bullet, which the police denied to have used. [See, AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3] Another protestor confirmed loss of sight in his right eye after being allegedly hit by a tear gas cannister during the clash on August 13. He is the scion of a property development business and former member of the Democrat Party. His family vowed to take all legal action against those responsible. [Bangkok Post 4] He rejoined the protests on 22 August after receiving surgery. [Bangkok Post 5]

After complaints by the residents of the communities around the protest sites affected by crowd control operations and the protests such as the effects of tear gas, the police chief has instructed the crowd control police to adjust their rally-control strategy. The police will stop entering the communities and will safeguard main roads and locations instead.

The police chief has also ordered the investigation into video clips shared online of alleged unnecessary force. One clip showed the police firing rubber bullets at an approaching protestor on a motorcycle and other showed the firing of rubber bullets at people in a flat. He urged the police to be patient with young protestors and respect international standards of crowd control.

According to the chief, “over the past two months, 807 criminal cases have been pursued against 468 suspects in violent protests, including 211 people who have been detained”. [Bangkok Post 6]

The Piece the Sky Group and leaders of vocational students have denied leading violent protests and maintained a non-violent stance. [Bangkok Post 7] On Sunday, the Ta Lu Fah (Pierce the Sky) Group seemed to changed their tactics and held protests in the form of a sports event. A more hardcore group of protestors calling themselves the Ta Lu Gas Group (Pierce the Gas, seemingly in reference to police tear gas) ended up clashing with the police in another location. [Thai PBS World 1] [Bangkok Post 8]

In a related development, a group of protestors led by Pierce the Sky Group submitted letters to the Chinese, Swiss, and US embassies calling for probes into Pfizer vaccines donated by the US, Chinese Sinovac vaccines deals with the government, and accused the security forces of violent treatment against protestors in violation of the Geneva Convention. [Bangkok Post 9] The group also visited the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and urged the OHCHR to investigate the judiciary’s execution of political cases against protestors whether their rights have been violated. [Bangkok Post 10]

Anti-government protests, which called for the resignation of the prime minister due to the mismanagement of the pandemic, regained momentum in July after a hiatus due to the pandemic. They are the same groups that called for charter amendment, cutting the Senate’s role in selecting the prime minister, and reforms to the monarchy since last year. Although they have the same goal of removing Prime Minister Prayut from power, the subgroups have distinct origins and underlying interests. Due to the diversity of protest groups, protest organizers only have limited control over the protestors. Last week, a protest leader vowed to lead a peaceful protest, which still ended in violence. [See, AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3] He scheduled another car mob on August 29 while the police have charged him for his earlier protest. [Bangkok Post 11]

The four main subgroups that lead the protests are the youth, university students, rural activists, and political activists that supported ousted Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. [Thai PBS World 2]

Thailand: Veteran politician prepares to launch a new political party

(pr) Chaturon Chaisaeng announced that he is establishing a new political party. [Bangkok Post] He was a former deputy prime minister and former chief policy strategist of the now-defunct Thai Raksa Chart Party (TRC). He was with the Pheu Thai Party until he moved to TRC ahead of the 2019 general election. The establishment of TRC was viewed as a move to gain more parliamentary seats for the Pheu Thai- led collation. Under the single-ballot system of the 2017 Constitution, small and middle-sized parties would gain more party-list seats than big parties which makes the formation of a single-party majority in parliament difficult. [Khaosod English]

However, the TRC was dissolved by the Constitutional Court ahead of the elections for naming a member of the Royal Family as its prime ministerial candidate. The TRC's fielded candidates were disqualified from running in the election and The TRC's 14 party executives were banned from politics for 10 years. [see, AiR No. 2/3/2019]
Since Chaturon was not a party executive of the TRC, the ban did not extend to him. [PPTVHD, in Thai]

Thailand: Party dissolution lawsuit initiated over published remarks

(pr) Ruangkrai Leekitwattana, a member of the ruling Palang Pracharat Party (PPRP) filed a petition with the Election Commission for the dissolution of the Move Forward Party (MFP) of the opposition. The case will be forwarded to the Constitutional Court.
The petition filed pertains to the remarks made by the lawmakers of the MFP during the debate to review the funds earmarked for monarchy institutions under the budget bill for fiscal year 2022. [see entry in this edition]

The remarks were also shared online via the party's Facebook page and Ruangkrai claimed the remarks should not have been passed on to the public as decided by the majority of the parliamentary committee scrutinizing the budget bill. [Facebook 1] [Facebook 2]

He alleged that the comments constituted "an act which may deemed hostile to the constitutional monarchy" which warranted MFP's dissolution under Section 92(2) of the 2017 Political Parties Act.

Meanwhile, MFP secretary-general said the party lawmakers had carried out their duties honestly. [Bangkok Post]

One of the remarks reportedly made by an MFP lawmaker was "Loyalty is not measured by the number of security detail, courtiers, royal commemorative arches, or the dissemination of 112 to the people". [Prachachat, in Thai] 112 seemingly is in reference to Section 112 of the country's penal law on royal defamation. It carries a maximum prison sentence of 15 years.

Ruangkrai was a former member of the opposition Pheu Thai Party but had changed sides and joined PPRP. He served as member of the parliamentary committee scrutinizing the 2022 fiscal bill under the PPRP's quota [see, AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2]

In 2019, the Constitutional Court ruled that a political party's nomination of a member of the royal family as its prime ministerial candidate was in contravention of the provision in the political party law and dissolved the party. [see, AiR No. 2/3/2019]

Thailand: Country has lost development opportunities since coup, says former PM

(pr) Former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra said that her policies announced 10 years ago would have come to fruition by now if not for the coup in 2014 led by the-then General Prayut Chan-ocha, which overthrew the Pheu Thai-led coalition. Her main policies were investments in high-speed trains and the rice-pledging scheme.
She was removed from office due to a judgment from the Constitutional Court and in the same month her government was ousted by the coup. She left the country ahead of a Supreme Court ruling, which found her guilty of negligence of duty for ignoring corruption in the rice-pledging scheme and was sentenced in absentia to five years in prison. [see, AiR 29 September 2017 edition] [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Businesses file class-action lawsuit for damages from COVID-19 restrictions

(pr) 172 massage parlors and spa operators filed a class action lawsuit with the Civil Court against the

Finance Ministry and the government, demanding compensation for losses caused by lockdown restrictions since last year.

Two Move Forward Party lawmakers brought the business operators together and supported them in their lawsuit. [see, AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3] The party's deputy leader said the lawsuit will set an example for other business groups affected by the measures imposed by the government.

The businesses have been closed since last year due to its nature as a high-risk business of spreading COVID-19. They alleged that they have not received compensation or financial assistance for the closures. [Thai PBS World]

Vietnam Court Sentences Member of 'Provisional Government' to Three-Year Prison Term

(ct) On August 16, the People's Court of Nghe An province conducted a first-instance trial of the criminal case against defendant Tran Huu Duc, charged with the crime of "Activities against the people's government" under Article 109 of Vietnam's Penal Code.

According to the indictment, from June 2020 to January 2021, Duc used the social network Facebook to contact members of the "Provisional National Government of Vietnam" (PNGV) organization headquartered in the US. He gathered information on Nghe An residents to contact for a referendum on naming a group member, Dao Minh Quan, as president of Vietnam. Duc was also accused of publishing anti-government political information online and defaming officials of Vietnam's ruling Communist Party.

After members of this group were accused of plotting to assault Tan Son Nhat International Airport with petrol bombs ahead of a major holiday the year before, Vietnam authorities classified them as a terrorist organization in January 2018. The group's leader, Dang Hoang Thien and 14 other members of the group were sentenced in December 2017. Also, in early March, four members of the same family were sentenced for their involvement in the group. All had been charged with subversion.

The PNGV was founded in 1991 by former soldiers and refugees loyal to the South Vietnamese government. [RFA]

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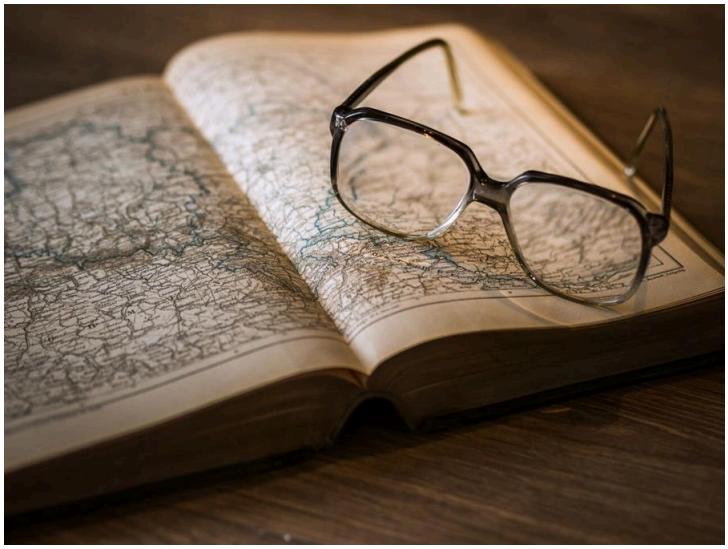

China's Xi Jinping pledges support to Iran and Iraq

(lm) China continues its efforts to entrench its foothold in the Middle East, with President Xi Jinping engaging his Iranian and Iraqi counterparts with pledges of help, as the United States executes a hasty, haphazard withdrawal from Afghanistan and remains in a deadlock with Tehran.

In a phone conversation with Iranian President Ebrahim Rais on August 18, the Chinese leader reiterated his country would support Tehran's "legitimate demands" in negotiations over its nuclear program, and remained committed to developing friendly relations with the country irrespective of changes in the regional and international landscape. [Global Times] [The Straits Times]

The phone conversation came after the two countries earlier in March signed a 25-year, $400 billion trade and military partnership which included Chinese investment in exchange for regular, heavily discounted oil and a strengthened cooperation between the military, security and defense departments [see AiR No.12, March/2021, 5].

Later the same day, President Xi used a similar language as when talking on the phone with Iraqi President Barham Salih, saying Beijing would support

the country's reconstruction effort. [South China Morning Post]

The calls were the latest push by Beijing for a more prominent role in the region: Over the past few months, China has offered to help Middle Eastern nations battle the COVID-19 pandemic, and pushed for talks on a free-trade deal between Beijing and the six-nation Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf.

As for Iran, Beijing is seeking close ties with Tehran because it is key to China's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative: Situated between the Caspian Sea and Arabian Gulf, it is the only viable land bridge out of Central Asia for China.

Notably, both phone calls coincided with the launch of the fifth China-Arab States Expo in China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. The main objective of the four-day event is to increase cooperation and trade volume between the two sides, especially in the fields of science-technology and medicine. [Foreign Brief]

In a congratulatory letter, President Xi said China was ready to work with Arab states to jointly build the Belt and Road with high quality and advance the China-Arab States Strategic Partnerships to a higher level. [People's Daily Online]

OIC holds emergency meeting, offers to help Afghanistan peace, facilitate evacuations

(ad/lm) The 75-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during an emergency meeting on August 22 called upon Taliban authorities to promote national reconciliation and adhere to the United Nation's charter and resolutions. [Saudi Gazette]

The emerging gathering of the OIC Executive Committee at the level of Permanent Representatives on the situation in Afghanistan was held in the port city of Jeddah at the invitation of Saudi Arabia, chair of the 14th Islamic Summit, and the OIC Executive Committee.

At the meeting, OIC member states reiterated their commitment to helping Afghans reach a comprehensive and lasting political solution. Chairing the meeting, Saudi Arabia's permanent representative to the OIC reiterated the Kingdom's support for the people of Afghanistan and called on all member states

to fully support the Afghan people and their choices "that they decide" without interference. [Arab News]

Possible religious extremist spillover from Afghanistan to Southeast Asia

(nd) Policymakers, security officials and experts in Southeast Asia are alarmed that the Taliban's takeover might inspire religious extremism in the region, while also preparing for a refugee influx. The return of Taliban has boosted the morale of militant groups in Southeast Asia, and has inspired some to undertake military and other training in Afghanistan, according to analysts and a former militant.

Fear rose in Muslim-majority nations Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, as well as Muslim communities in the region, including in southern Thailand and the southern Philippines, who have long been fighting against the spread of religious extremism. The worst attack were the Bali bombings of 2002, killing 202 people at popular nightclubs. Al-Qaeda's Southeast Asia branch, Jemaah Islamiah (JI), was responsible for the attacks.

The southern Philippine island of Mindanao, for instance, has long been a base for Muslim militants, also allied with the Islamic State group, the largest of which is the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, is a likely hotbed for rising extremism. Despite a peace deal in 2014, separatists in 2017 laid siege in Marawi for five months.

An Indonesian security source said seven Indonesians that had joined the Islamic State (Isis) in Afghanistan were among 5,000 prisoners freed by the Taliban from a former US airbase last Sunday. Authorities announced to be on alert for their possibly attempt to return to Indonesia. According to researchers, JI distributed an Arabic-language manual containing Taliban strategies and fighting tactics via WhatsApp chat groups, including proposals to invite the Taliban to set up a branch in Indonesia.

In Malaysia, the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) and largest Islamist political organization applauded the Taliban's victory for freeing Afghanistan from "the clutches of inhumane colonialism".

Additionally, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, nearly 400,000 people have fled their homes this year, in addition to those 2.9 million internally displaced Afghans by the end of 2020. [South China Morning Post] [Nikkei Asia]

China conducts anti-terror drill with Tajikistan, as Afghan spillover worries grip central Asia

(lm) China started a two-day joint anti-terrorism exercise with Tajikistan on August 18, as growing security concerns in the region following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan push Moscow, Beijing and Central Asian governments toward closer cooperation. [South China Morning Post]

The latest maneuvers, taking place just outside the Tajik capital of Dushanbe, came only three days after the Taliban had swiftly ousted the Western-backed government in the Afghan capital, Kabul, stirring deep concerns that the country could once again become a base of operations for modern Islamist terrorist organizations that could carry out attacks on neighboring countries. [AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

The joint exercises also follow on a visit to Tajikistan by Chinese Defence Minister General Wei Fenghe on July 27, which saw both sides agreeing jointly combatting the "three evil forces" – terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

Three of the five central Asian states – Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – have been rendered particularly vulnerable to a possible rising instability next door, as each they share a long border with Afghanistan.

For China, in turn, no issue is as pressing as ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a staging point for minority Uyghur separatists in the sensitive border region of its Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, which also shares a border with Tajikistan.

Earlier this month, Tajikistan hosted troops from Russia and Uzbekistan in trilateral military exercises staged in close proximity to the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border, while China and Russia carried out joint military drills focused on counterterrorism in China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region [see AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2].

The situation in Afghanistan is also expected to be high on agenda when Tajikistan hosts the leaders of the eight-member Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) next month. The foreign ministers of the SCO –China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and India – on July 14 had called

for an end to violence in Afghanistan against civilians and the authorities, and urged the Afghan government to strengthen its position for the sake of stability [see AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3].

Afghanistan implications for Taiwan

(nd) Amid the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban, the rapid collapse of the Afghan National Army and the US military's hasty withdrawal, the US's commitment to defend Taiwan has been put into question, following a respective Global Times article, potentially in an effort to draw Taiwan closer to China. [CNBC] The Chinese comments coincided with China's latest military exercise near Taiwan last Tuesday. [Reuters, See also AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

Premier Su Tseng-chang commented Taiwan would not collapse like Afghanistan, warning "foreign forces" not to be "deluded" they can invade the island, indirectly addressing China. Additionally, President Tsai Ing-wen said Taiwan needs to be more united and more resolute in defense said Taiwan needs to be united and focus on its military capabilities, bolstering their commitment to defense. Currently, Tsai Ing-wen conducts an ambitious military modernization program to boost capabilities of the Taiwanese army with advanced, highly mobile weapons to make a Chinese invasion as difficult as possible.

Earlier voiced concerns if the US would be willing and able to defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese attack, have been refueled with the fall of Kabul. With respect to the comparison, a US State Department spokesperson said Taiwan and Afghanistan are two "very different" policy issues. While the US went to Afghanistan "with a mission to deal with the terrorists who attacked us on 9/11," its policy on Taiwan emphasizes maintaining "peace and stability" in the Taiwan Strait, according to the spokesperson. Also, analysts say Taiwan and Afghanistan are incomparable, with Taiwan at the core of US interests. In a recent spat between China and Lithuania over Taiwan, US President Joe Biden referred to the US commitment in Taiwan as "rock solid". [See also AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2] Following the victory of the Taliban, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan called Washington's commitments to its allies, including Taiwan, as "sacrosanct", and White House press secretary Jen Psaki rejecting conflicting reports by Chinese and Russian outlets as propaganda. President Biden said the US would "respond" if Taiwan was attacked or invaded by China, verbally expanding

NATO protection mechanism over Taiwan and South Korea.

The US and Taiwan have no formal defense treaty, the current Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 does not guarantee US defense in the event of an attack, but provides for the supply of arms. Biden's promise seems like a departure from official US policy and long-term position of "strategic ambiguity" over Taiwan, while a senior official was quoted saying that Washington's "policy with regard to Taiwan has not changed", citing analysts as suggesting that Biden had "misspoken."

Nevertheless, according to analysts, the current global situation is likely to embolden China to test the US over Taiwan, due to the much referred to decline of the US and a possibly overconfident China. Yet, according to a recent analysis for the East Asia Forum, Chinese leaders till rather doubt Chinese capability to conquer Taiwan and fight the US. Additionally, taking over Taiwan forcefully would arguably have detrimental effect on China's economy, foreign relations and global image. Also, Chinese leaders are more likely to continue to hope for a "peaceful reunification" while pursuing its decades-long military modernization process and thereby grow in strength.

According to another analysis for Politico, the withdrawal demonstrates the US seriousness with respect to security challenges from China, which in turn, when recognized as peer competitor, leads to a more mutual, strategic stability seeking approach to such conflicts, stressing a need for cooperation. Still, this take would happen against the backdrop of a stronger-growing China, frequently demonstrating its military capabilities and preparedness.

As part of its "One-China" policy, China claims Taiwan as part of its territory and has recently ramped up military and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan. Like most other countries, the US has no official diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but is its most important international supporter and arms supplier. [Taipei Times] [Taiwan News 1] [Reuters] [Taiwan News 2]

Similarities between South Vietnam and Afghanistan

(nd) Frequently these days, the rapid fall of Kabul and the chaotic retreat of the US army in Afghanistan have prompted many, often superficial comparisons between the falls of Saigon and Kabul.

According to a recent article in The Diplomat, the one similarity to be acknowledged in order to avoid similar situations in the future is the failure of nation-building due to its underlying imperial logic. While the Vietnam War is often seen as an effort by the allied forces providing local security and development in the villages, it can only be understood in the context of nation-building and thereby, the US's effort to facilitate the emergence of effective and legitimate governing institutions in South Vietnam.

Due to the thinking that isolated local governments in rural areas are highly likely to succumb to a coordinated insurgency if they do not dispose of a strong, effective central government backing them, in both Vietnam and Afghanistan, the US tried to implement structures at a central level, hoping such structures would then radiate into the provinces. In Vietnam, the Johnson administration created the Office of Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support, which established a tightly integrated presence at every level of the South Vietnamese government. This unprecedented effort, however, according to the author, was also tainted with the imperial flaw, meaning one nation to apply a certain pressure with the desired goal to transform or at least radically redirect the politics of another nation. It is often characterized, however, by a lack of knowledge of the politics, history, and culture of the respective country, assuming is was somehow lacking something fundamental and therefore needs to be saved.

Despite the unparalleled establishment of the Vietnam Training Center, which educated 2,000 nation-builders on the country, its effect was the creation of stereotypes that created even more ignorance towards the local reality. There was no language training, nor with respect to local specialties, resulting in an inability to communicate effectively. And specifically on the local level, the author argues, lies the central battlefield, as seen in Afghanistan and South Vietnam, where the US failed to impose its will on local politics, but rather local politicians reaching deals with the Taliban for the post-US era, and military commanders pocketing money meant for the army. As instable as they are, such governance structures usually collapse under the weight of inherited political and social circumstances, which tend to be ignored by the nation-builders.

US considers bases in South Korea for Afghan evacuees

(aml) The US is considering using American military bases in South Korea as housing for evacuees from Afghanistan, alongside other overseas bases such as Japan, Germany, Kosovo and Italy, as already existing housing sides in Qatar are filling up quickly. However, on Monday, foreign minister Chung Eui-yong said that the possibility had only been discussed "rudimentary" and that there are not consolidated plans yet. [The Korea Herald]

Opinions on the idea are split. South Korea's ruling Democratic Party raised concerns about whether the idea is "appropriate" considering the logistical problems and possible violations of agreements between Korea and the US. The US-Korea Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) requires the US to respect South Korean laws, which demand that evacuees who want to enter South Korea need a permission from the justice minister. The People Power Party called for an elaboration from a humanitarian perspective but called for precaution as well. More progressive lawmakers, however, have stressed Korea's humanitarian role and criticised the country's low admission rate of asylum seekers. [The Korea Times] [Yonhap News Agency]

Taliban hope for South Korea's diplomatic recognition and economic exchange

(aml) In an interview via text message, Taliban spokesperson Abdul Qahar Balkhi expressed hopes to be recognised not only by South Korea but the international community as the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan", the same name the Taliban used when they ruled the country in the 1990s. He especially hoped for an economic engagement with South Korea since "Afghanistan is replete with untapped mineral resources [...] Korea as a leading world manufacturer of electronics can work with our country based on mutual interests, where we can also serve as an economic corridor connecting South and Central Asian countries". Furthermore, he expressed interested in meetings with "the leaders and businessmen of Korea" to "strengthen both economic and people-to-people relations". [Yonhap News Agency]

North Korea declared a no-ship zone

(nds/nd) North Korean authorities have declared a no-ship zone near the east coast from last Sunday until Monday. Ministeries of defense usually use this move

before military tests and exercises to warn ships to stay away from areas likely to be affected. However, according to officials at the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee in Seoul, no ballistic missile launches or artillery firings occurred. Amid tensions over the execution of the annual US-South Korean military exercise, experts expect a provocation soon, be it the launch of a submarine-launched ballistic missile, or, less provocative, possibly involving a short-range missile or artillery. [Voice of America 1]

While Pyongyang's action can be seen as a provocation in response to the exercises, it could very well also form part of a larger strategy by North Korea to withdraw US military forces stationed on the Korean peninsula. Experts are ambiguous about what the fall of Kabul might mean for North Korea. Usually, in the wake of major crises, North Korea ramped up its anti-US rhetoric, with the demand of troop removal a recurring theme. Therefore, experts argue it will once again use the situation to voice such demands. It is also possible it could encourage its nuclear ambitions. Additionally, North Korea wants to undermine and possibly end the alliance between the US and South Korea. The image circulated of the hasty withdrawal have caused some concern among US allies, triggering debates over national security especially in South Korea and Taiwan. [see article above] This thinking, however, could prove counterproductive to North Korea's goals of troop withdrawal. Others, however, argue, that North Korea's most needed subject, sanction relief by the US, might prove of less interest and urgency to the US amid the chaos in Afghanistan.

However, US national security adviser Jake Sullivan said President Joe Biden "has no intention of drawing down our forces from South Korea." The US has been present in South Korea for 70 years, with approximately 28,500 U.S. troops stationed there. [Voice of America 2]

Inter-Korean relations: South Korea detains UN-sanctioned oil tanker

(nds) Seoul has detained a North Korea-linked tanker since May after it entered the Busan area disguised as a Mongolian ship, according to NK News.

The UN-sanctioned the ship for illicit fuel deliveries to North Korea in 2017. According to a document released on 15 July by the South Korean fisheries ministry, authorities have prevented the tanker from leaving the Korean port since 10 May. The ship is one

of 14 foreign vessels on a list of suspended ships, but South Korea did not specify why. This case was hardly mentioned by the South Korean authorities, except for a short line on the Ministry of Fisheries website. Moreover, an upcoming UN report supposedly only indicates that an unspecified member state detained the ship.

Presumably, Seoul wanted to keep a low profile not to jeopardize its attempts at reconciliation with North Korea. The ship was sized as President Moon Jae-in, and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un exchanged letters before reopening communication lines. [NK News 1]

The Moon administration continues its efforts to re-establish talks with its northern neighbor. Speaking at a biennial conference organized by the Korea Political Science Association, the Minister of Unification, Lee In-young, said the second half of 2021 is a "very important" time to resume diplomacy with North Korea. Lee added that the 30th anniversary of the two Koreas' entry into the UN in September, the G20 summit in October, and the Beijing Olympics early next year are good opportunities to build trust with North Korea.

Nevertheless, South Korea's 2022 presidential election in March and the US midterm elections later this year could dampen the momentum of the peace process on the Korean Peninsula, according to Lee. The Moon administration is mindful of the short time available and focuses on building the foundation for a strong relationship with Pyeongyang. [NK News 2]

South Korean and American nuclear representatives meeting amid heightened tensions

(nds) On 23 August, Special Representative for Peace and Security Affairs on the Korean Peninsula Noh Kyu-duk and US Special Representative for North Korea Sung Kim began talks on joint efforts to resume dialogue with North Korea. It was an opportunity for the two governments to explore ways to encourage Pyongyang to return to the discussion table, including through humanitarian initiatives. During the talks, the US made clear its commitment to inter-Korean humanitarian projects and reaffirmed its commitment to South Korea's defense. It could reassure Seoul after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. [Korea Times] [NK News 1]

However, this meeting comes amid heightened tensions with Pyongyang over the annual US-South Korea joint military exercise. The decision of the two countries to maintain the exercises has not only angered the North but also drawn criticism from Chinese and Russian authorities. China's special representative for Korean Peninsula affairs, Liu Xiaoming, met with the Russian ambassador to China, Andrey Denisov. Denisov accused the United States of provoking North Korea and called for reducing pressure on the country. [NK News 2]

Meanwhile, South Korean officials host Kim and Noh's Russian counterpart and Moscow's top nuclear envoy to North Korea, Igor Morgulov. Tensions on the Korean peninsula could complicate talks with Russia. [NK News 1]

China prepares to build airport on reclaimed land near Taiwan

(lm) China is gearing up to build an airport on land claimed from the sea in the contested Taiwan Strait, *Minxi Daily* reported on August 17, as Beijing moves ahead with plans to integrate development with the Taipei amid rising tensions and near-constant drills by its military forces. [South China Morning Post] [The Times]

The $463 million project would be between the isles of Dasha and Xiaosha near Pingtan Island, which is the nearest territory to Taiwan controlled by the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The plan, which was disclosed a day after Chinese military began its latest round of live-fire war games near Taiwan [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3], seamlessly links with the ambitious infrastructure-building guidelines announced by the southeastern Fujian Province earlier this month.

According to the development plan, local authorities will continue to push forward the study of land connectivity with Taiwan while accelerating construction on the mainland side of bay bridge projects linking with the Kinmen groups of islands. Located off the southeastern coast of mainland China, Kinmen is close to Fujian Province but under the control of Taiwan.

All these plans share the goal of using transportation infrastructure to convert the PRC's coastline opposite Taiwan into a leading conduit for trade, investment and travel between mainland China and Taipei. Beijing

intends for this increased engagement to promote the integration and eventual unification of Taiwan-controlled territories with mainland China.

In the past decade alone, the push to build out Pingtan's transportation infrastructure has resulted in several new and improved linkages, with still more in the construction or planning stages. The opening of the Pingtan Strait Road-Rail Bridge — first to automobile traffic in October of last year and then to high-speed rail traffic in two months later — marked the island's connection to the PRC's integrated transportation system.

India and Vietnam to conduct naval exercise in the South China Sea

(ct) On August 18, India and Vietnam carried out bilateral maritime exercise in the South China Sea. Accordingly, the VPNS Ly Thai To missile corvette of the Vietnamese navy and INS Ranvijay and INS Kora of the Indian navy carried out joint drills in the South China Sea with formation content and communications under the Western Pacific Navy's Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES). The exercises included surface warfare exercises, weapon firing drills and helicopter operations. According to the Indian Ministry of Defense's statement,

> frequent interactions between the navies of Vietnam and India over the years have enhanced the interoperability and adaptability of the two countries' forces. [India Today]

Both Vietnam and India are wary of China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific. In a webinar between the defence ministries of the two countries in April, New Delhi offered to assist Vietnam in the construction and maintenance of warships, building upon its earlier assurance of further assisting the country in modernizing and training its armed force. Also, India is in advanced talks with Vietnam to sell Brahmos hypersonic missiles and Akash surface-to-air missile defence systems. But its export remains undecided since selling Brahmos missiles to Pacific countries can be seen as a challenge to China. [The Times of India] [The Times of India 2] [The Wire] [Naval Post]

Vietnam seeks stronger cooperation with Middle East nations

(ct) Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Pham Quang Hieu on August 19 held an online meeting with nine resident and non-resident ambassadors and chargé d'affaires of Middle Eastern countries to Vietnam. The meeting is part of a series of contact activities between the leaders of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ambassadors and Charities of the Middle East - Africa countries to inform about Vietnam's foreign policy and economic development after the 13th National Party of Vietnam Communist Party congress, discussed major orientations in cooperation between Vietnam and Middle Eastern countries, reviewed and promoted bilateral cooperation in the new situation. Speaking at the event, Hieu highlighted encouraging results of cooperation between Vietnam and the Middle East countries despite the COVID-19 pandemic, with nearly 7.3 billion USD in two-way trade in the first half of this year, up 33.5 per cent year on year. Similarly, the diplomats stated that fostering comprehensive engagement with Vietnam has always been a priority, and they recommended measures in politics, diplomacy, economy, trade, and COVID-19 prevention and control to improve bilateral ties in the near future. [VietnamPlus]

Malaysia: Navy to present its capabilities in exercise

(nd) Malaysia's Navy successfully tested three live anti-ship missiles last week, demonstrating preparedness amid Chinese intrusions into its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea. The exercise was conducted after the intrusion of 16 Chinese military planes into Malaysia's maritime airspace in May, making it a sign to show China Malaysia's operational capabilities and will to defend. In May, a Chinese military aircraft flew 60 nautical miles from Kuala Lumpur-administered Beting Patinggi Ali –known as Luconia Shoals – which China claims as part of its territories in the maritime region. Additionally, Chinese coast guard ships have been pressuring Malaysian oil and gas projects in the South China Sea off Sarawak state on Borneo Island since early June, according to Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, a US-based think-tank researching ship-tracking data.

The six-day exercise involved 1,000 soldiers, nine ships, five Fast Combat Boats, a submarine, two Super Lynx helicopters, four Royal Malaysian Air Force F/A-18D Hornet fighter jets, and was the first one conducted since the start of the pandemic. The anti-ship missiles are made by French defense manufacturer MBDA

Systems, with a target reach of 35 and 22 miles, respectively.

Other claimant states to the South China Sea, which China claims almost entirely, are Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan; Indonesia does not consider itself as party to the dispute but China claims historic rights to parts of that sea overlapping with Indonesia's EEZ.

Earlier this month, Malaysia also participated in the annual multilateral exercise Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) with the US and 20 other countries earlier this month, as an effort to deter Chinese assertiveness and strengthen regional security. [Radio Free Asia]

ASEAN not as effective and quick on Myanmar as hoped, Singapore's foreign minister says

(mt/lm) The 10-member Southeast Asian regional bloc (ASEAN) has not been as effective on the crisis in Myanmar as hoped, Singapore's Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said in an interview last week, as protests and a violent crackdown continue in the country.

Calling the situation in Myanmar "dire", the Singaporean top diplomat said ASEAN was trying to be constructive, facilitate dialogue and deliver humanitarian assistance. He also said that his country and the regional bloc had "maintained lines of communication" with Myanmar's shadow government formed by civilian lawmakers deposed by the military junta, the National Unity Government. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore is small but wields strong economic and political influence in Southeast Asia: The city-state is Myanmar's biggest foreign investor, overtaking China in 2019 to bring in more than $24 billion of investments through lucrative real estate projects, banking, shipping, sand exports and construction, as well as arms sales. [The Irrawaddy]

In June, Singapore supported a resolution passed by the United Nations General Assembly in June, which called on member states "to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar" and release Aung San Suu Kyi and other imprisoned leaders. Besides Singapore, ASEAN member states Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines,

and Vietnam voted in favor of resolution. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]

Earlier this month then, alongside with Indonesia and Malaysia, it "pushed for tougher language" in a communique published following the appointment of Brunei's Second Foreign Minister Erywan Yusof as ASEAN's special envoy to Myanmar. [AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

Balakrishnan said he hoped there would be progress to report on Yusof's visit to Myanmar before the 39th semi-annual ASEAN summit in November. But he also cautioned that the military had to grant the envoy access to all stakeholders for the visit to be meaningful.

US Vice President to visit Singapore, Vietnam

(nd) As part of her visit to Southeast Asia in an effort to rebuild regional ties, US Vice President Kamala Harris met Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to enter a series of agreements, including cybersecurity, climate and public health and economic cooperation, including a dialogue to boost cooperation on supply-chain resilience. They also discussed the role of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as China and Myanmar. Amid the current crisis in Afghanistan, Harris emphasized US commitment to the region and reiterated strategic and economic interests. [Bloomberg]

Following the fall of Kabul to the Taliban and the chaotic troop withdrawal, the US has faced global criticism, urging Chinese state media to draw a line to Taiwan not being able to depend on the US and being a "weak and unreliable power" [CNBC]. Similar fears rose with respect to South Korea and Japan. While such comparisons are too simplistic, it is still likely to leave a mark on regional ties with Southeast Asia. Even before the withdrawal, many regional governments questioned US commitment to the region. The recent events highlight all the more that the US will prioritize its own interests over those of its allies and partners. With respect to security, for example, the withdrawal has an effect on Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, fighting against a growing presence of the Islamic State, with Afghanistan possibly once again becoming a safe haven for extremist groups. [See article below] Even if the US refers to strategic interests in the region, such are primarily perceived as

referring to containing China, prioritizing security and defense relations.

Other experts argue the withdrawal is likely to free up much needed resources to counter China in the region, not only with respect to the South China Sea. Also, with respect to economic regional economic dependency, China looms over the visit, which is why it was considered central to establish trust in the region. To highlight that, a US official was quoted saying Harris's trip is to show that the US was in Southeast Asia "to stay", another official commenting she "will make clear throughout the trip that we do have an enduring commitment to the region".

After three days in Singapore, Harris will visit Vietnam on Tuesday for two days. Her visit is part of a recent diplomatic charm offensive by the Biden administration in Southeast Asia, following Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman's visit in May and US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin's trip to Singapore in July. [See also AiR No. 31, August/2021, 1, AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2] The Biden administration is the third to promise a renewed focus on this region. Barack Obama's "pivot" was supposed to redirect US diplomacy away from the Middle East towards the Asia-Pacific, while Donald Trump's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific', was directed against Chinese influence. Analysts argue the current US strategy should include economic aspects, given the recent passage if the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and be framed positively, to not be perceived as purely confronting China. [Channel News Asia] [South China Morning Post] [Al Jazeera] [BBC] [Bloomberg] [The Diplomat]

China halts rail freight to Lithuania as feud deepens over Taiwan

(lm) China's train state train operator has suspended direct freight operations to Lithuania "until further notice", in the latest gambit in a simmering geopolitical feud over Taiwan, although there has been no official confirmation as of August 18. [South China Morning Post]

The apparent suspension of service comes after hostilities between the two countries had ratcheted up earlier this month, with China recalling its ambassador from Lithuania and asking Vilnius to do the same, over plans by the European country and Taiwan to establish reciprocal diplomatic offices. [AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

Lithuania does not yet have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but it maintains increasingly friendly relations with Taipei. Vilnius has been an increasingly vocal critic of China's actions towards Taiwan, as well as in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, has withdrawn from China-led multilateral groups and has announced vaccine donations to Taiwan.

Trade volumes between Lithuania and China are relatively low, with many analysts saying that the country's lack of economic exposure to Beijing has helped sharpen its tongue.

Sri Lanka, China sign $308 million loan agreement as rupee falls to record low

(egm/lm) Sri Lanka on August 17 signed a $308 million loan agreement with China to combat the strain produced by the coronavirus pandemic on its economy. The loan comes as the second installment of the $1.2 billion bailout which Sri Lanka first received in March of last year and again in April 2021 [see AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]. [NDTV]

For the past year, Sri Lanka has battled against a severe economic crisis generated by the pandemic which decreased its exports, tourism earnings and foreign remittances. The country's foreign reserves were at $2.8 billion at the end of July, down from $7.8 billion in late 2019 when the government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa came to power promising robust growth. The rupee has lost nearly 20 percent of its value against the US dollar in that time, according to data from private banks.

To combat the financial strains Sri Lanka previously secured a $1.5 billion currency swap line from China in March, and is expecting inflows including a $250 million swap facility from Bangladesh's monetary authority and a $500 million loan from South Korea [see AiR No. 20, May/2021, 3]. The country also sought a $400 million facility from the Reserve Bank of India, which Colombo settled earlier in February; however, this facility has not been extended.

But early last month, ratings agency Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) announced it had placed cash-strapped Sri under review for a downgrade, citing the risk of default due to falling foreign exchange reserves. [AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4]

The first test came on July 27, when the South Asian nation had to repay a $1 billion bond to investors [see AiR No. 28, July/2021, 2]. Two more payments – a

$500 million bond and $1 billion of debt – become due next year, with Colombo saying arrangements have been made for the transactions. [The Bharat Express News]

Against this backdrop of a looming currency shortage, Sri Lanka's central bank on August 19 raised its deposit and lending rates for the first time in nearly three years as the rupee hit a record low amid a crippling foreign exchange shortage. [France24]

China, Japan to compete over Indonesian auto market

(nd) China and Japan are increasingly likely to compete over Indonesia's growing automotive market. After an aborted attempt in the early 2000s, China's Chery Automobile Co. Ltd. has announced last week to re-enter Indonesia in 2021, with a wider range of products and besides investing in a production facility in Indonesia. Wuling and Dongfeng Sokonindo (DFSK) are other Chinese manufacturers increasingly popular, for they all cater successfully to the Indonesian need for reliable after-sales service assurance. Indonesia has both recently built the infrastructure to stimulate demand for cars and a still low ratio of car ownership of 99 cars per 1,000 people in 2021. Also, as part of President Joko Widodo presidential regulation on electric cars in 2019, it was announced to collaborate with Chinese manufacturers, who relocated to Indonesia.

In this market, however, Japan has operated successfully since the 1970s, with a 2016 report stating the majority of cars in Indonesia are Japanese, who are also determined to produce electronic vehicles. In comparison with the Japanese, the Chinese electric models are cheaper while offering a comparable quality, also due to China being the world's leading producer of electric vehicles, and the manufacture of many components. In 2020, China had 93 battery factories, granting privileged access to materials and hosts production plants.

CATL, China's largest producer of lithium-ion batteries, plans to establish a component production site in Indonesia in 2024, while the world's two largest plants for nickel processing, the Weda Bay Industrial Park and Morowali Industrial Park, are located in Indonesia, and majority owned by Chinese firms.

Recently, Japan and China also competed bidding for the construction of a railway between Jakarta and Bandung, which China won. [The Diplomat]

Philippines, Australia to boost cooperation

(nd) The Philippines and Australia signed an agreement to boost logistical support and cooperation amid regional security challenges. The Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (MLSA) was commented to deepen longstanding defense relations, being similar to an existing pact between Australia and India from 2020, allowing for the mutual access of military bases. Without naming the South China Sea as one of such challenges, Australia is one of the Philippines' top supporters against China's expansive claims, also overlapping with Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and Taiwan.

Already in 2012, Australia and the Philippines signed the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement, enabling Australian troops to enter the Philippines, which helped rapid deployment of medical help after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013, and in 2017 Australia sent troops to fight militants linked to the Islamic State who took over the city of Marawi.

Meanwhile, following the full restauration of the VFA with the US recently, the USS Charleston arrived in the Philippines on Monday for a port call, the first since 2019. [Benar News]

Taiwan, Japan to hold bilateral talks

(nd) For the first time, ruling officials from Japan and Taiwan are planning to hold bilateral talks to address security threats posed by Chinese coercion tactics.

Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its Taiwanese counterpart, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), will hold the first of their "two-plus-two" security dialogue, which is normally held between governments. The talks were initiated by Japan. Despite promoting general exchange, the only talks shall address recent security issues in the Taiwanese Strait, amid the scenario of a Chinese invasion. [Taiwan News]

North Korea-China relations: work underway on Sino-Korean oil pipeline

(nds) Beijing and Pyongyang have been carrying out work on the Sino-Korean pipeline since June, according to Daily NK.

The Sino-North Korean oil pipeline, which was completed in 1975, is old and in poor condition. Thus, it is regularly causing excessive leakage and distributing poor quality oil. In recent years, the state of the structure has deteriorated as China has only sent enough oil to prevent the pipeline from clogging. Beijing had decided to reduce the oil supply due to UN sanctions. Following North Korea's sixth nuclear test and ballistic missile launch, the United Nations (UN) Council passed resolutions 2375 and 2397 restricting the supply of oil products to the North.

As tensions between China and the United States intensify, Beijing and Pyongyang move closer on political, security, and economic issues. The pipeline project reflects this trend. Last June, China supplied about 10,000 barrels of refined oil to North Korea, the most significant monthly amount in 11 months, according to Chinese data provided to the UN. The volume was the largest monthly shipment since July of last year. Improving the oil facility that connects the two countries would allow China to move oil more efficiently and allow more exports. [Agence de presse Yonhap in french]

The pipeline represents a strategic advantage for Beijing, which uses it to consolidate its ties with Pyongyang and punish or pressure it. While a possible easing of sanctions has been mentioned several times by US authorities, some speculate that China is preparing to extend its support to the North accordingly. It can be expected that the XI administration will continue to increase the amount of oil flowing to North Korea without exceeding the 500,000-barrel threshold allowed by the UN. [Daily NK] [Agence de presse Yonhap in french]

South Korea, Kazakhstan to agree an expanding strategic partnership

(aml) South Korean president Moon Jae-in and Kazakh president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev agreed to expand their strategic partnership to cover industries related to the fourth industrial revolution, public health care and space exploration. They issued a joint statement at the end of their summit, declaring the expansion of the cooperation program called “Fresh wind” into nuclear energy, ferroalloys, and gas plants.

During the summit, Moon congratulated Kazakhstan on the 30th anniversary of independence and stated, that Kazakhstan is South Korea's "largest trading partner and investment destination in Central Asia" and affirmed its importance as a major partner in Moon's New Northern Policy to boost economic and political ties with the north of South Korea. Tokayev expressed his special interest in Korea's advanced technologies and his plan to introduce them to Kazakh economy.

Tokayev had been the first leader to visit Seoul in person after the unfolding of the global pandemic. In the course of his visit, the remains of independence fighter Hong Beom-do were returned from Kazakhstan [AiR No.33, August/2021, 3] and Moon expressed his gratitude for this, seeing the efforts as a reminder of the countries' friendship. [The Korea Times]

South Korean court allows seizure of payment to Mitsubishi Heavy

(aml) South Korean Suwon District Court has allowed the seizure of a payment to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, to compensate victims of wartime forced labour. The plaintiffs had won damages from Mitsubishi Heavy in a 2018 Korean Supreme Court ruling but Mitsubishi had failed to pay the 850 million won ($ 723,000). The court now has approved that seizure of a payment that South Korean LS Mtron owes to Mitsubishi Heavy. [Nikkei Asia]

The Japanese government warned South Korea of serious ramifications if the ruling was to be enforced, claiming that a 1965 bilateral agreement resolved all claims stemming from Japan's colonial rule from 1910-1945. [Reuters] The situation could worsen the continuing diplomatic feud over the restitution for Koreans forced to work in Japanese firms and military brothels during the colonialization. [AiR No.33, August/2021, 3]

South Korea, Nigeria to discuss bilateral ties and maritime security

(aml) First vice foreign minister Choi Jong-kun has met with Nigeria's foreign minister Zubairu Dada to discuss the countries' cooperation, noting that it has steadily developed over the last decades, and vowing to further their relations, using South Korea's advanced technologies and Nigeria's human and natural

resources. They also talked about the frequent kidnapping of foreign vessels and sailors by pirates in the Gulf of Guinea, and Dada stressed that South Korea's and the international community's efforts to enhance maritime security in the region were essential to help Nigeria. [The Korea Herald]

Vietnam's first consular office in India opens in Bengaluru

Vietnam opened the first consular office in India in Bengaluru and appointed NS Srinivas Murthy as Honorary Consul of Vietnam in Karnataka. India is Vietnam's 26th investment partner, while the two countries are aiming to extend their partnership. According to Phan Sanh Chau, Vietnam's Ambassador in India, the consulate was established to strengthen investment relations between the two countries. The ambassador also mentioned pharmaceuticals, manufacturing of automobile parts and information technology as some of the sectors in which Bengaluru and Vietnam could collaborate. Meanwhile, NS Srinivas Murthy said the ambassador met Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai along with an 18-member delegation to discuss economic and industrial cooperation. Vietnam is already India's fourth-largest trading partner in the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Also addressed during the conference was a proposal for a sister city arrangement between Bengaluru and Danang, Vietnam's third-largest city. [The New Indian Express] [Deccan Herald]

South Korea supports training program of the publishing sector in Lao PDR

(ct) Lao PDR and the Republic of Korea are partnering to support the publishing sector in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR through the Cultural Partnership Initiative (CPI) Program. The program is hosted by the Korean Foundation for International Cultural Exchange (KOFICE) and aims to promote international cultural cooperation and cultural industries in the partner country. The online training course will take place for 8 weeks from August 17 to October 8 in Lao PDR. The Vientiane Times reported this project cooperation will support the national ICT policy of the government of Lao PDR by recognized Information and Communication Technology as an increasingly crucial tool for achieving socio-economic and educational development. Moreover, it also seeks to bring Lao PDR

into the information age by creating the required human resources and institutions, human capability, sectoral circumstances, and legal frameworks for leveraging and utilizing ICT to address the country's issues and requirements. [The Vientiane Times]

Vietnam to attend ASEAN's AIPA-42

(ct) A Vietnamese National Assembly (NA) delegation led by NA Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue attended the 42nd General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA-42) in Brunei on August 23. According to the agenda, the first plenary session focused on several issues including women's empowerment, climate change, cyber security, and international economic integration. In his welcoming remarks, the AIPA-42 President and Speaker of the Legislative Council of Brunei noted that the theme of this year's General Assembly highlights parliamentarians' important role in supporting the ASEAN vision of a politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible community towards the ASEAN Community in 2025. Also, NA Chairman Hue presented a key-note speech on the situation in the region and throughout the wider, highlighting the role of multilateral cooperation of ASEAN. [Việt Nam News]

Maldives, Saudi Arabia discuss relations

(lm) Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Shahid held a phone conversation with his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan on August 17 to discuss bilateral relations and ways of developing and strengthening them in various fields. The two ministers also discussed aspects of enhancing joint coordination in regional and international issues, in addition to many issues of common interest. [Arab News]

Bangladesh's Army Chief on official visit in Turkey

(ad) Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed on August 18 left for an official eight-day visit to Turkey. The Army chief, who is leading an eight-member delegation, will be meeting with a number of senior Turkish defense officials, including Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and the Chief of the General Staff,

Yaşar Güler. Thus, further cooperation between the Armies of both countries is likely to be discussed. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh's foreign minister on official visit in South Sudan

(ad) Bangladeshi Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on August 21 met with South Sudanese President Salva Kiir Mayardit in Juba, with both sides pledging to strengthen bilateral engagements. Momen also met with his South Sudanese counterpart, and the country's acting defense minister. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

During the meetings, Momen offered to build a development partnership with South Sudan and suggested that cooperation between the two countries may be built in areas like pharmaceuticals, ready-made garments, agriculture and Information and Communications Technology sectors. [The Policy Times]

Nearly 1600 members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and Police are currently deployed in South Sudan under the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) to consolidate peace and security and to help establish conditions for development. [United Nations Peacekeeping]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

25 August 2021 @ 2:00-4:05 p.m. (GMT+9), Asian Development Bank Institute, Japan

ADBI Annual Forum on Expanding Women's Participation in the Asian Economy: Securing Livelihoods for an Inclusive Recovery

The online event will spotlight priorities for achieving a gender-inclusive pandemic recovery in the region, with a focus on policy adjustments that could help to ensure and build upon progress toward expanding women's education, employment, and entrepreneurship.

If you want to know more about the event, go to [ADB]

25 August 2021 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Malaysian Political Dynamics: The Making and Remaking of Political Alignments and Social Cohesion

At the webinar, the speaker will discuss these developments, comparing the fissures and alignments within the Malaysian body politic with previous episodes in Malaysia's history, and drawing out the distinctive features of the present in light of the past.

More information is accessible via [ISEAS]

25 August 2021 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Afghanistan Aftershocks

The conversation will cover critical questions surrounding human rights under the Taliban, the impending refugee crisis, the proliferation of Salafi-Jihadist terrorist groups, the United States' global reputation, the responses of Russia, China, and Iran, and the broader geopolitical impacts in South and East Asia, among other topics.

For more information, please visit [CSIS]

25 August 2021 @ 9:00-10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

POSTPONED – Bloody fatwa: Iran's new president and the 1988 prison massacre

This webinar is a discussion with a distinguished panel of speakers with firsthand expertise and knowledge of the legal, historical, and political ramifications of the events of July 1988.

Please see [Atlantic Council] for more information

25 August 2021 @ 02:00 p.m. (GMT +2), Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Colombo

Virtual Policy Dialogue: Planning for Universal Health Coverage Amidst the 4Ds of Health Transitions

This online forum will provide a platform for stakeholders to build consensus on how Sri Lanka can better prepare for health emergencies, while navigating several global health transitions in its pathway towards achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Please see [Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka] for more information.

26 August 2021 @ 4:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Global Britain in Southeast Asia: Ambitions, Strategies and Challenges

This webinar will discuss the UK's Southeast Asia policy in the context of its overall Indo-Pacific vision, the priorities and prospects in ASEAN-UK dialogue relations, and the challenges and constraints the UK faces as it looks to increase its engagement with the region. It will also consider Southeast Asia's expectations and concerns over the UK's geopolitical ambitions, and the specific areas where both sides can strengthen cooperation for mutual benefit.

For more information, please visit [ISEAS]

26 August 2021 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Royal United Services Institute, UK

Career Pursuit: Understanding the Needs of UK Armed Forces Families

In this wide-ranging conversation, the speaker will discuss the key challenges facing military families on the move, and the importance of providing free access to expert and valuable career support.

If you want to attend the event, find out how to register at [RUSI]

26 August 2021 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Nothing is Impossible: America's Reconciliation with Vietnam

This event will highlight the launch of Ted Osius, former U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam new book, Nothing is Impossible: America's Reconciliation with Vietnam.

For more information about the book event, please view [CSIS]

26 August 2021 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Foreign Policy Research Institute, USA

African views on U.S.-China competition in Africa

With China's Belt and Road Initiative expanding around the world, the African continent has become one of the newest arenas for U.S.-China competition. But what exactly do the African people want from the U.S. and from China in terms of economics and trade, international relations, and even media and culture?

This webinar will discuss U.S.-China competition from the African perspective.

If you want to attend the event, find out how to register at [FPRI]

26 August 2021 @ 6:00-8:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Space law, good governance, and advancing our space strategy

This event will discuss the space law and governance landscape, highlight national legislative and strategic developments, and explore some areas for future development.

Further event details are available at [AIIA]

27 August 2021 @ 10:00-10:45 a.m. (GMT-5), The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, USA

World Review with Ghosh, Luce, and Robbins

In this online event, speakers will discuss the week's top news stories. They will also talk with reporters from some of the world's leading media outlets to get their perspectives on emerging global stories, and how they might unfold.

Find out more at [The Chicago Council]

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

The Geopolitics of COVID-19 Vaccine Diplomacy in Southeast Asia

As Southeast Asian countries ramp up massive inoculations to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, securing sufficient vaccine doses in a timely manner has become their top priority. This event will discuss several questions on geopolitics factors in vaccine diplomacy towards Southeast Asia

Visit [ISEAS] to learn more about the event.

27 August 2021 @ 3:30-5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Chinese Intellectuals at a Crossroads: Post-1989 Critiques of Radicalism in Sinophone Discourse

This talk highlights some of the major debates of this period on radicalism in history, culture, and politics

from a transnational perspective. It traces intellectual exchanges between scholars based in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and the United States as China repositioned itself in Asia and the world.

If you are interested in this event, please visit [EAI]

28 - 30 August 2021, Clingendael Institute, Den Haag

State of the Union Conference 2021

This online conference is dedicated to the theme of **"European narratives"** and will bring together a broad range of speakers and participants to reflect on the strategic relevance of narratives for EU governance in various policy domains, such as the green deal, strategic autonomy and the rule of law. We are delighted to announce that **Clément Beaune**, French State Secretary for European Affairs, will open the conference with a keynote speech.

For more information, please see [Clingendael Institute].

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

The Myanmar Economy Six Months after the Coup: What's Next?

In this webinar, two experts following the coup's impact on the economy and people's lives in Myanmar will share their insights and assessments on the impact on the ground, the devastating effects of the most recent Covid-19 wave, how different economic actors and interlocutors are navigating the ground, and the relevance of alternative visions for responsible investment proposed by the National Unity Government.

Find more about event details at [ISEAS]

30 August 2021 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Australia

ASPI Webinar: Cybersecurity, critical technologies and energy: Japan and its role in the Indo-Pacific

This webinar will discuss the various challenges and national security threats Japan is likely to face, and the opportunities that many of these emerging issues bring. It will also explore opportunities for Japan and Australia to collaborate more closely across these policy areas.

More information is accessible via [ASPI]

30-31 August 2021 @ 12:30-15:15 p.m. (GMT+9), Asian Development Bank Institute, Japan

Virtual Policy Dialogue on Women's Economic Empowerment in Asia: Challenges and Ways Forward

This virtual policy dialogue will assess the progress of gender-related policies and the COVID-19 pandemic's implications for gender equality in Asia. It will also explore onward policy strategies for promoting women's economic empowerment, with a focus on associated trends and challenges, women-oriented pandemic recovery, support for women in business, and boosting gender equality in the workplace.

If you want to attend the event, find out how to register at [ADB]

31 August 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT +2), The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Stockholm

COP26: Stepping up climate action?

This webinar will deal with the question, what the status of international negotiations and ambitions on climate change is, in the months leading up COP26. Dr. Elin Jakobsson, researcher at the Programme for Global Politics and Security at UI will moderate the talk between Ms. Judith Gough, British ambassador in Sweden and Mr. Vinicio Mati, Italian ambassador in Sweden.

For more information, please see [The Swedish Institute of International Affairs].

31 August 2021 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN) and the Future of Research and Development in Indonesia

This webinar will provide insights on the rationale for BRIN's establishment, the challenges faced by Indonesia to build a more conducive environment for research and technological development, and BRIN's strategy to respond to those challenges. It will also discuss the implications of research re-organization on future research collaboration with foreign researchers.

For more information, please see [ISEAS]

31 August 2021 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

A Mission to Mars: A Conversation with Her Excellency Sarah Al Amiri, UAE Minister of State for Advanced Technology

In this event, the UAE Minister of State for Advanced Technology and Chairwoman of the UAE Space Agency will discuss her historic work leading the Hope spacecraft mission to orbit Mars, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as international space cooperation, and her role as a leader for women working in science.

More information about the event is provided at [CSIS]

31 August 2021 @ 6:00-8:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Our Exceptional Friend: Australia's Fatal Alliance with the United States

This webinar will look at Australia's relationship with the United States, highlighting the need to look beyond the US and to diversify to find new strategic partners.

For more information on the book discussion, please visit [AIIA]

31 August 2021 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore

RSIS Panel Webinar on "Malaysia's Policy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Drivers, Players, Consequences"

This webinar will explore questions on Malaysia's Policy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

If you want to know more about the event, click [RSIS]

31 August 2021 @ 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Stimson Center, USA

Analyzing Diversion Dynamics: Lessons Learned

This event will shed light on some of the key factors that facilitate the diversion of conventional arms. Speakers will share some of the "red flags" that national authorities should keep in mind when seeking to prevent, detect, eradicate, and address diversion. The UNIDIR, CAR, Stimson issue brief, "Diversion Analysis Framework," will be launched at the event.

For more information, please see [Stimson]

01 September 2021 @ 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Maritime Security Dialogue: An Update on the Marine Corps with Commandant Gen. David H. Berger

This webinar will discuss the current state of the Marine Corps, future demands, and the implications on force posture and force design.

If you want to know more about the event, go to [CSIS]

01 September 2021 @ 8:00-9:00 a.m (GMT-4), The Stimson Center, USA

Changing the Discourse on Taiwan: Japan-Taiwan Ties in 2021

In 2021, the public discourse about Taiwan in Japan has shifted, with affirmations of the importance of Taiwan for regional security from political leaders and discussion of Taiwan in the annual defence white

paper. How do these unprecedented changes impact Japan-Taiwan relations and Taiwan's engagement with international partners?

This webinar will discuss the growing significance of Japan-Taiwan ties.

More information is accessible via [Stimson]

01 September 2021 @ 5:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

Inequality and the pandemic

In the session, speakers will present the IMF's recent research findings on the pandemic-related causes of rising inequality and the most appropriate policy response.

If you want to join the event, you can register at [Chatham House]

1 September 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Global Development, USA

The Future of EU-Africa Relations

In this session, speakers will discuss the EU's renewed partnership with Africa, with a specific focus on human development (health, vaccines, education).

For more information, please see [CGDEV]

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