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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to this week's brief on the latest events and developments in constitutional politics and governance, geopolitics and international relations in Asia.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to readers in Andorra, Brazil, Bulgaria, Eswatini, North Korea and Tajikistan which celebrate National Day and Independence Day respectively in this week.

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: Supreme Court rules that overwork culture is illegal

(tj) On Thursday, China's Supreme People's Court ruled that working 9:00am - 9:00pm, six days a week, colloquially known as '996' in China, is illegal.

The Court heard 10 cases regarding workers claiming the denial of overtime pay and personal injury claims stemming from overwork, whereby it ruled in affirming Chinese employers' obligations to respect national working hours. The Court's decision was supported by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security publishing guidelines on what constitutes overtime providing examples in varying sectors including media, tech, and construction. [BBC]

China's current labour laws prescribe a standard working day entails an 8-hour day with maximum of 44 hours per week, capping overtime work at 36 hours per month, employers required to pay overtime to workers who exceed this. However, respect for these laws has been met with weak enforcement, culminating in a number of recent deaths caused by overwork, and a significant rise in protests from food delivery workers by virtue of being overworked. [BBC] [South China Morning Post]

Despite the founder of retail tech giant Alibaba, Jack Ma strongly supporting 996 workplace culture and speaking out against the Court ruling, it appears that corporate sentiment with respect to overwork is changing. This follows decisions made last month made by tech giants, TikTok ByteDance, Kuaishou, and Vivo to formally end weekend overtime [Reuters] [South China Morning Post], and China's biggest ride-hailing service, Didi, and Meituan, China's largest food delivery service, allowing the establishment of worker unions. [Financial Times] [Al Jazeera]

Outside the corporate sphere, this changing sentiment has been mirrored by the Chinese general public, leading to the increasing trend of Chinese youth subscribing to the notion of 'lying flat' ('tang ping') evincing their disillusionment with over-ambitious work culture at the sacrifice of personal well-being and flexible work schedules. [BBC]

Albeit forming a part of a broader narrative of the CCP's ongoing crackdown on private enterprise [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3] [The Guardian], whether this ruling remains a mere fig leaf of appeasing public opinion or an ongoing obligation for employers will be determined by the adherence of enforcement by Chinese public authorities.

China: Clampdown on the promotion of 'effeminate' men in media

(tj) On Thursday, 2 September 2021, Chinese authorities banned 'effeminate' or 'sissy' men from appearing on television and streaming platforms.

Labelling effeminate men as 'vulgar influences' and 'unhealthy content', regulations issued by the National Radio and Television Administration committed to promote masculine men and criticised men who used makeup, had carefully styled hair, or projected a feminine image. [BBC] [The Times] [Reuters]

This follows the criticism voiced by the China Federation of Literary and Art Workers Professional Ethics Committee at forum held in Beijing last week stating that the feminine male image has negatively impacted society [Global Times] and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the China Association of Performing Arts stating that agencies should terminate contracts with performers who 'lack moral discipline'. [Reuters]

Albeit homosexuality is not illegal in China, Chinese authorities still ensure strict enforcement of censoring non-heterosexual relationships or references. This includes the recent banning of male blogger, Feng Xiaoyi, from Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, after an influx of complaints regarding his videos were too 'feminine' [Global Times], and previous Chinese authorities' censorship of homosexual references in international films, even extending to blurring the earlobes of some of its young male pop stars to hide their piercings, tattoos, and men's ponytails. [BBC]

This serves as another example of the CCP's headstrong goal to remove anything that purportedly transgresses traditional values, and the tightening grasp in shaping prescribed notions of morality within Chinese contemporary society, as evidenced in the crackdown on celebrity culture and showbusiness [see Reuters] and intimidation of LGBT expression [The Guardian].

China: Alibaba pledges 100b yuan by 2025 in support of 'common prosperity'

(tj) Alibaba, China's largest online retail company, has recently pledged 100 billion yuan (US$15.5 billion), roughly equating to two-thirds of its net income last year, towards the common prosperity initiative evoked by President Xi Jinping last month in encouraging Chinese companies to share wealth to ease economic disparity. [Financial Times] [South China Morning Post]

Matching the 100b yuan investment made by Tencent, the world's largest games publisher, Alibaba joins the ranks of other Chinese companies such as Pinduoduo and Geely Automobile who have pledged finance towards the initiative. [Financial Times]

Further pledging a 20b yuan 'common prosperity development fund', Alibaba's investment is specifically aimed at supporting investments in technological and

medical services in rural areas, funding subsidies for small and medium-sized businesses, and the access to social and medical insurance usually not afforded to gig economy workers. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

However, this perhaps serves as another example of Alibaba and other tech giants attempting to quell Beijing's ongoing and increasing regulatory pressure on the tech sector, earlier this year fined a record 18.2 billion yuan in an anti-trust lawsuit regarding monopolistic behaviour. [Forbes]

China: Hong Kong activists who participated in 2019 protests jailed

(tj) On Wednesday, 1 September 2021, a Hong Kong court sentenced seven activists and former legislators to jail between eleven to sixteen months each for participation, organisation, and incitement of others to participate in unauthorised protests on 20 October 2019.

The activists included Figo Chan, a former convenor of the Civil Human Rights Front, Raphael Wong and Avery Ng of the League of Social Democrats political party, and former legislators Cyd Ho, Yeung Sum, Albert Ho and Leung Kwok-hung. Wong was the only individual who was not already serving jail time for earlier convictions regarding other unauthorised assemblies.

Despite freedoms of assembly, procession and demonstration being guaranteed within the city's constitution, Judge Amanda Woodcock affirmed that these guarantees remained curtailed by limitations of public safety, public order and the protection of others' rights and freedoms. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters] [The Guardian]

Consequences for involvement in these protests have permeated across Hong Kong society, authorities having arrested dozens of pro-democracy activists previously, and have even recently cancelled a concert of popular Hong Kong singer and pro-democracy activist, Denise Ho, due to her involvement in the same protests. [The Diplomat]

China: Hong Kong University PhD student detained

(dql) Hong Kong University PhD student Fang Ran has reportedly been detained on the mainland on suspicion of incitement to subvert state power. He is currently being placed in “residential surveillance at a designated location (RSDL)”, meaning that he will be denied visits from lawyers or family on grounds that the case involves matters of national security.

According to his profile of the website of the Department of Sociology of the University, Fang’s current research is focused on the “analysis and comparison of various approaches of labor empowerment in Mainland China.” [South China Morning Post] [HKU]

China: Investigations in local government ´s forged economic data

(dql) China’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has presented results of a two-year investigation unveiling economic data fraud by local governments to fulfill target achievement missions, with figures fabricated by subordinates and enterprises at the behest of local party committees and governments at each level and in exchange for development support.

The investigation had been conducted in 19 of mainland China’s 31 provincial jurisdictions, and nine departments within the State Council, the country’s central government.

The results point at cooked-up numbers and the involved corruption as a central structural problem of China’s local governance system. Chinese provinces and cities have long been suspected of fabricating economic performance data, with the focus on local government officials, who fear for their career prospects if their respective economies fail to meet target expectations. [South China Morning Post

Japan: PM Suga gives up plan to run for party presidency

(dql) Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga announced to not to run in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s forthcoming leadership election. The decision comes amid plummeting approval ratings over public discontent with Suga’s administration’s handling of the pandemic and the Olympics as well as after Suga’s last-ditch cabinet and party leadership reshuffle attempts widely seen as directed against a

fierce phalanx of internal contenders. [BBC] [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

The race to replace him in the election on September 29 for the party leadership – which will be followed by the general election due in November – appears relatively open. So far, former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and former female Abe cabinet member Sanae Takaichi have declared their candidacies. Minister for Administrative Reform and Regulatory Reform Taro Kono, who previously had served as Foreign and Defense Minister, unveiled that he might run for party leadership after consulting with allies. [The Conversation] [New York Times]

Although he has not formally declared his candidacy, Kono, in charge of Japan's vaccination rollout, is leading in latest polls. [Japan Times]

For an account on Kono's winning chances, see Tobias Harris in [Nikkei Asia] who sees him as "clear favorite," against Kishida.

Japan: Digital Agency kick offs operations

(dql) In an attempt to spur the country's digital transformation, the Japanese government launched on September 1, 2021, its new Digital Agency. Part of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's administrative reform agenda, the move is aimed at boosting the digitalization of Japan's public sector which has been long criticized for its limited use of digital tools in administrative procedures.

The agency is staffed with currently some 600 employees, about four times more than its predecessor, the IT Strategic Headquarters. [Japan Times]

South Korea: UN special rapporteur criticizes 'fake news' bill

(aml) United Nations special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression Irene Khan submitted an open letter to the South Korean government to protest the revision of the so-called "fake news" bill, expressing concerns that the law may be in violation of article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and a serious infringement on freedom of opinion and expression.

The bill was originally supposed to be revised in the National Assembly on August 30 but was delayed to September 27 due to the heavy criticism from the opposition and civic groups for harshly penalizing media outlets for producing and distributing false information. [The Korea Times 1] [The Korea Times 2] [AiR, No. 35, August/2021, 5]

South Korea: bill aiming at carbon neutrality by 2050

(aml) The South Korean parliament has passed a bill to cut over 35% in carbon emissions by 2030 to reach carbon neutrality by 2050, making South Korea the 14th country to put carbon neutrality into law.

The enactment comes in line with president Moon Jae-in's statement to commit to the carbon neutrality goal during the 2021 P4G Seoul summit in May. The government has also planned to spend 12 trillion won ($10.3 billion) of the state budget to support the reduction of green-house gases. [Yonhap News Agency] [AiR, No. 35, August/2021, 5]

South Korea: Head of umbrella union arrested

(aml) The police arrested on September 2, 2021, the head of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), Yang Kyung-soo, for breaching social distancing rules in rallies between May and July he had led.

The KCTU reacted to Yang's arrest angrily, stating that it will further provoke the workers' anger and citing the right to assembly and free speech. They also announced to "take revenge" with a "strong full-scaled strike" in October. Furthermore, the KCTU reassured that it will continue to plan a mass strike on October 20 at which the union's 1 million members are expected to participate [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Health workers union, government reach agreement

(aml) The Korean Health and Medical Workers Union (KHMU) has reached an agreement with the government and cancelled the strike planned for September 2, 2021. To avoid a health care vacuum in

the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government agreed to come up with detailed measures by October on how to schedule working hours of nurses based on severity of the patients and on overtime benefits.

In the last year, a growing number of nurses quit over cumulative fatigue or mental stress. The KHMU represents over 56,000 nurses, pharmacists, and other health care professionals, excluding doctors. [The Korea Times] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: bill requiring surveillance inside surgery rooms

(aml) South Korea has passed a bill that requires surveillance cameras inside hospital operating rooms. Surgeries will be recorded upon the patient's request and the footage will be kept at least 30 days in event of legal disputes. The bill aims to protect patients from medical negligence or malpractice and got high acceptance in polls after "ghost operations" by unqualified doctors and sexual crimes committed on patients under anaesthesia have been reported by the media in recent times. [Yonhap News Agency]

The bill faces strong criticism from doctor's associations who fear that it may create distrust between doctors and patients because it treats all doctors as potential criminals. Surgeons have raised concerns that it might make them avoid high-risk surgical procedures, leaving patients without treatment, because of fear that the video recording will be used as a disadvantage for them in medical disputes. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Province Governor Lee wins ruling party's primary vote

(aml) Gyeonggi Province Governor Lee Jae-myung won the first round of the ruling Democratic Party (DPK)'s national presidential primary election for the presidential election in March 2022. The vote was held among registered members of the and Lee managed to receive 54.8 percent of the 25,564 votes. He was followed by Lee Nak-yon, former chairman of the DPK with 27.4 percent and former prime minister Chung Sye-kyung with 7.8 percent. The DPK plans to hold 10 more primary votes across the country [The Korea Times] [Yonhap News Agency]

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

Bangladesh: Six militants sentenced to death for killing LGBT- rights activists

(ad/lm) Six men said to belong to an Islamist militant group were convicted and sentenced to death on August 31 by a Bangladeshi court over the 2016 killings of a prominent Bangladeshi gay rights campaigners and his friend.

The editor of Bangladesh's first magazine for gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people, and and an actor were hacked to death in April 2016 in an attack claimed by Ansarullah Bangla Team, the regional arm of Islamic Jihadi organization Al-Qaeda. The killings were part of a series of targeted attacks on academics, secular writers and activists and other minorities who wrote views critical of Islam. [The New York Times]

Of the eight defendants in the case, six were found guilty of murder and sentenced to death by Bangladesh's Special Anti-Terrorism Tribunal. Four of the men are in custody, while two remain at large, including Syed Mohammad Ziaul Haque, a former major fired by the Bangladeshi Army, who in 2012 was accused of being involved in an attempted coup. [South China Morning Post]

The other two defendants, who are also on the run and were tried in absentia, were acquitted. The men's defense lawyer said he would appeal the case and

denied that the men belonged to a militant group. [CNN]

Bangladesh: 14th session of Parliament opens

(ad) The inaugural sitting of Parliament´s 14th session began on September 1 after a 59-day recess following the prorogation of the budget session. President Abdul Hamid on August 16 had summoned the session exercising the power bestowed upon him by Article 72 of the Constitution [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]. The 13th parliamentary session that passed the national budget for the present fiscal year had previously been prorogued on July 3. [The Daily Prothom]

On September 3, The Special Security Force Bill, 2021 was tabled in Parliament in order to replace the Special Security Force Ordinance, 1986, which was declared void by the Higher Court. The proposed law shall revise the existing law, incorporating the issue regarding the security provided to the family members of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – the country's founder and father of Prime Minister Hasina –and very important persons defined by the government through gazettes, heads of the foreign states or governments. The bill was sent to the respective scrutiny committee which shall submit its report within 30 days. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

The following day, The Delimitation of Constituencies Bill, 2021 was passed in the Parliament by voice vote. The Bill shall act instead of an existing Delimitation of Constituencies Ordinance, 1976 promulgated by former President Ziaur Rahman during military rule. According to the Bill, Bangladesh shall be divided into single territorial constituencies which are equal to the number of members to be elected as per the Constitution, taking into consideration the distribution of population as per the latest census report. As per the Bill, the division of territorial constituencies shall be made by the Election Commission and afterwards available to the public in form of the list published in the official Gazette, specifying the areas proposed to be included in each. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

On September 4 then, the Highways Bill, 2021 was sent to the parliamentary standing committee which shall submit its report within 30 days. The aim of the Bill is to replace the Highway Act 1925, which inadequately deals with maintenance, management and construction of highways in Bangladesh. [Dhaka Tribune 3]

Bangladesh: Opposition BNP celebrates 43rd founding anniversary, hits back at Prime Minister Hasina

(ad/lm) The Bangladesh Opposition Party (BNP) on September 1 celebrated its 43rd founding anniversary, with its Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir using the occasion to hit back at the ruling Awami League.

While laying wreaths at the grave of BNP founder and former President Ziaur Rahman, the secretary general called the restoration of democracy and the complete release of party chief Khaleda Zia – currently on conditional release in two corruption cases [see AiR No. 10, March/2021, 2] – the biggest challenges for the BNP.

Describing the current government as fascist, authoritarian and politically bankrupted, Fakhrul also said the entire administration and the judiciary had been politicized by establishing a one-party despotic regime in disguise. He also pointed out the areas in which current government has failed, including the vaccination issue and Rohingya crisis. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

On September 2 then, the BNP secretary general alleged that the Awami League (AL)-government had stigmatized the independence of Bangladesh by distorting the history of the country's Liberation War. He also alleged that the AL was spreading false information on Ziaur Rahman to squash the BNP's efforts to build movement for a fair election, and to divert people's attention away from the government's failure. [The Daily Prothom] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Earlier this month, several high-ranking members of the AL, including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, used a series of public events to further denounce the already marginalized BNP. Most notably, the prime minister alleged that the body of Ziaur Rahman – who was assassinated in 1981 in an army coup d'état – is not kept at the mausoleum complex in Chandrima Uddan. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Bangladesh: Violent clash between BNP activists and police

(ad) Violent clashes between police and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) activists in Chattogram left

several leaders and activists, and a media worker injured. The skirmish took place on September 2 on the occasion of the party´s 43rd founding anniversary. [see article above] [The Daily Prothom]

Bangladesh: New accord on Bangladesh garment workers' health and safety

(ad) A new, legally binding agreement intended to protect workers in the Bangladeshi garment industry was unveiled on August 25, after months of deadlock between international fashion retailers and trade unions and local factory owners.

The new accord – the International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry – replaces another agreement signed by almost 200 international fashion companies after a major factory fire in 2013, in which more than 1,100 garment workers died.

For the first time, these companies agreed to legally binding safety commitments, independent inspections at the factories, and contributions for safety training and factory improvements. More than 38,000 inspections had been carried out since 2013, and nearly 200 factories have lost their contracts owing to poor safety standards.

The new agreement contains many of the hallmarks of the original, and companies which sign it commit to expanding general health and safety for workers beyond fire and building safety, human rights due diligence along supply chains, and expanding the new accord to at least one other country beyond Bangladesh. The agreement is valid for 26 months, or until October 2023. [The New York Times]

So far, almost 80 companies have backed the new agreement, and more are expected to sign up to the new deal soon. But American retailers such as Walmart and Target are not expected to participate. [The Guardian]

Bangladesh: Clean feed policy to take effect after September 30

(ad) Foreign channels will not be allowed to air in Bangladesh without a clean feed policy after September 30, Information and Broadcasting Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud said on September 2 after a

meeting with the Association of Television Channel Owners, TV channel distributors and cable operators' representatives at the ministry.

In television technology, a clean feed is a video signal that does not have added graphics and text. The clean feed policy calls for foreign channels to streamline content according to region, i.e. not air commercials meant for their region in other regions. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Women trafficked to India sent back

(ad) Seven Bangladeshi women who illegally entered India two years ago were sent back to Bangladesh on September 2 after it turned out they were victims of human trafficking. [United News of Bangladesh]

India: Farmers rally, vow to defy central government on reforms

(lm) Marking the return of a months-long movement that has posed a major challenge to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, tens of thousands of farmers gathered in India's state of Uttar Pradesh on September 5 to protest contentious agricultural laws they say will leave them at the mercy of private businesses. [South China Morning Post]

Rakesh Tikait, a prominent farmer's leader, told protesters that the demonstration would breath fresh life into the protest movement, which through December saw tens of thousands of people camp around the outskirts of India's capital New Delhi, blocking major roads and paralyzing traffic [see AiR No. 48, December/2020, 1]. [CNN]

The farmer agitation took a violent turn in January when a tractor rally transformed into a rampage in Delhi that left one farmer dead and hundreds of police officers injured [see AiR No. 5, February/2021, 1]. In April then, the protests had quietened down, as India was devastated by a second wave of coronavirus infections [see AiR No. 21, May/2021, 4].

Another farmers' leader said the rally was a warning for Prime Minister Modi and his ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which next year will have to contest elections to the State Assembly in Uttar Pradesh. The contest is seen as a barometer of the popularity of the

central government, not least because the prime minister is an elected lawmaker from Uttar Pradesh. A reshuffle in July saw seven ministers from the politically crucial state being inducted into the Cabinet [see AiR No. 28, July/2021, 2]. [Reuters]

Officials said about 150,000 people attended the rally; Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Joint Farmers Front, SKM) – an umbrella body of 40 farmers' unions – said about 1 million protesters were present. Union leaders at the gathering also called for a nationwide strike on September 27 to protest the laws.

India: Priest, three others charged with rape, murder of Dalit girl

(lm) Four men, including a Hindu priest, have been charged with the gang-rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl, in a case that sparked days of protests in New Delhi, highlighting widespread sexual violence and caste-based discrimination in the country. [South China Morning Post]

The men, who were detained on August 2, have been formally charged with rape, murder, and destruction of evidence, among other crimes. Their case will be heard in a district court on September 7 and will later be sent to a fast-track court. The defendants could face the death penalty if found guilty. [CNN]

The girl belonged to India's 200 million-strong Dalit community, the most oppressed in Hinduism's caste-based hierarchy. She was allegedly assaulted by the priest and three workers on August 1 after she had gone to a crematorium to fetch water.

The four men allegedly called her mother to the crematorium and told her the girl had been electrocuted. The mother was told that if she reported the incident to police, doctors conducting an autopsy would remove her daughter's organs and sell them. The child's body was then cremated, which means a postmortem exam to confirm rape was no longer possible. [AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

India: 'Sexual activity with wife does not amount to rape, even if by force', high court observers

(lm) A high court last month discharged a man in a rape case filed against him by his wife after observing

that sexual intercourse or any sexual act with a legally wedded wife is not rape even if done by force or against her wish.

On August 26, the High Court in the state of Chhattisgarh ruled that "sexual intercourse or any sexual act by a husband with his wife cannot be rape even if it was by force or against her wish". The woman had accused her husband of "unnatural sex" and raping her with objects. The judge said the man could be tried for unnatural sex, but cleared him of the much more serious offence of rape. [The Indian Express]

The law that Justice Chandravanshi invoked is Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code. The British colonial-era law mentions several "exemptions" – situations in which sex is not rape – and one of them is "by a man with his own wife" who's not a minor. The idea is rooted in the belief that consent for sex is "implied" in marriage and that a wife cannot retract it later. [BBC] [ThePrint]

But it has increasingly been challenged across the world and over the years, more than 100 countries have outlawed marital rape. Britain too outlawed it in 1991, saying the "implied consent" could not be "seriously maintained" nowadays. But despite a long and sustained campaign to criminalize it, India remains among 36 countries where the law remains in the statue book, leaving millions of women trapped in violent marriages.

While the ruling was met with outrage on social media, the contentious topic of marital rape also appears to have divided judiciary. [India Today]

Earlier last month, the High Court in the southern state of Kerala ruled that marital rape – though not recognized under the penal code – could still be considered "a good ground" to seek divorce. The justices explained that marital rape occurred when the husband believed that he owned his wife's body and added that "such a notion has no place in modern social jurisprudence".

India: Supreme Court expresses ‘serious concern’ over treatment of women in mental health institutions

(lm) India’s Supreme Court on September 1 expressed “serious concern” over the alleged injustices and human rights violations that women institutionalized in government-run mental health establishments face,

including prolonged detention, unsanitary conditions, neglect, involuntary treatment and violence. [The Hindu]

The remarks came while a three-member bench was hearing a plea filed by advocate Gaurav Bansal, which laid out specific forms of mistreatment meted out against women in these facilities, citing two research studies conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), in 2016, and the National Commission of Women, as recently as in 2020. [Live Law]

The Supreme Court directed the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to discuss these grievances with the concerned states during its monthly monitoring meetings and to ensure compliance. The apex court also directed the central government to file a status report one week prior to the next hearing on the matter, which is slated to take place during the last week of December. [The Wire]

India: Security clampdown in Indian-administered Kashmir after death of separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani

(lm) Authorities imposed a security clampdown in Indian-administered Kashmir on September 1 after the death of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a top separatist leader who became the emblem of the territory's defiance against New Delhi.

Geelani died late on September 1 at age 92, at the home where he had remained incarcerated for most of the past 13 years. He had been ill for several months with heart and kidney problems.

A former lawmaker, Geelani had emerged as a leading ideologue of Hizbul Mujahideen – one of the major militant separatist groups that seeks Kashmir's accession to Pakistan – and for decades he had remained at the forefront of the territory's movement for the right to self-determination.

Notorious for his refusal to compromise with New Delhi, Geelani had stonewalled any efforts to pursue direct talks with India's central government and aggressively campaigned against those who took part in such efforts, making him a belligerent voice in the political camp. [The Guardian] [The New York Times]

Hours after his death police and paramilitary forces flooded the roads of Srinagar, Kashmir's biggest city, as

checkpoints were set up, while entry points into the city were also sealed off. By midnight, all mobile internet services were cut and an hour later, all phone services were also suspended across the region. [The Straits Times]

Geelani had previously wished to be buried at Srinagar's martyrs' graveyard, where the bodies of many insurgent militants had been laid to rest. However, the Press Trust of India news agency reported that officials buried Geelani's body and disallowed any mass funeral in anticipation of anti-India protests. [South China Morning Post 1]

Moreover, family members of Geelani's were later charged under India's anti-terror law – the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act – for raising anti-India slogans and wrapping his body in the Pakistani flag. They have not yet been taken into custody. [South China Morning Post 2]

Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said he was "deeply saddened" by Geelani's death, adding that his country would observe an official day of mourning. Under Khan, Geelani last year was awarded the "Nishan-e-Pakistan", Pakistan's highest civilian honor. Officials in Kashmir and in India's central government, which long regarded Geelani as a major hurdle in resolving the region's violence, declined to comment.

India: Anti-terrorism law invoked against individuals suspected of aiding revival of Tamil militant organization

(egm/lm) India's counter-terrorism task force, the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), has moved a Special Court to invoke the country's anti-terrorism law against a group it suspects of aiding the revival of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a Tamil militant organization that formerly based in northeastern Sri Lanka. [The Hindu]

The move comes after India's Coast Guard in March of last year intercepted a Sri Lankan fishing vessel off the country's southwestern coast and seized huge quantities of drugs, five AK 47 rifles and 1,000 pieces of 9 MM ammunition. Six Sri Lankan nationals aboard the vessel were detained by India's Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB).

Further probes by the NIA led to the arrest of two more Sri Lankan nationals with alleged ties to convicted cadres of the LTTE. The accused are believed

to be part of a gang operating in Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates since 2018. According to the NIA, the custodial interrogation of the accused revealed that arms, ammunition and drugs were procured through a Pakistan national for further supply in India and Sri Lanka. [The Indian Express]

Whether the LTTE insurgent group has renewed its actions or is on the road to revival is still uncertain. While some authorities such as the NIA fear that this might be the case, there is also a second theory suggesting that the reemergence of the group is not bound to occur ever again.

According to an opinion published in *The Wire*, the historical factors and climate of the 1980's where Tamil militants could undergo their operations with minimum national or international surveillance are no longer in effect today. The violence to which victims were subjected; moreover, stands as the primary reason for which the LTTE's emergence is considered unlikely. With a legacy of suffering left behind by broken up families whose members were forced to fight for the Tamil Eelam, the resentment towards the insurgent group represents its greatest obstacle preventing its revival. [The Wire]

India: Top army, police brass meet families of Kashmir militants; promise protection to surrendered youth

(lm) In the first publicized outreach of its kind, top Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police brass engaged with over 80 families of alleged militants active in the Kashmir Valley on August 31, urging them "guide their wards back into society", *The Indian Express* reported.

Speaking with the family members, Lieutenant General Devendra Pratap Pandey – the Commander of the Srinagar-based Chinar Corps – said the forces would work with the youth who shun arms, "address their concerns and help them join the mainstream". [The Indian Express]

Maldives: Leaked audio recording allegedly show trial against former President Yammeen was influenced

(lm) Leaked audio tapes have created a political storm in the Maldives, as they appear to show that three of the five judges who convicted former President Abdullah Yameen in a money laundering case were influenced by the current government.

In 2019, Yameen was sentenced to five years in prison and fined $5 million by the country's Criminal Court in a case involving an alleged payment of $1 million of government money through a private company into his personal bank account. The former president later challenged the conviction, though unsuccessfully, in the High Court. His appeal is currently pending in the Supreme Court, which is scheduled to begin appeal proceedings later this month.

Yameen's trial was originally assigned to then-Chief Judge of Criminal Court Ahmed Hailam, who was suspended at the last minute following a disciplinary investigation by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), and a five-judge bench was established to hear the case.

Alleged audio recordings of conversations by three of the judges – Hussain Faiz Rashad, Ali Adam, and Mohamed Sameer –in which they make comments suggesting the trial was influenced went viral on August 29. In one of the audio recordings – reportedly of Faiz – a person says that the sentence against Yameen was issued by holding the judges "hostage". Conversing with another individual, the person is also heard describing trials involving politicians as an "unusual business", and saying that being imprisoned unjustly can only boost Yameen's popularity. [SunOnline International 1]

The JSC, which has opened an investigation into the audio recordings, questioned all five judges on August 30. According to a statement released by JSC later the same day, the three judges, when questioned, said that the audio recordings were fake and that they did not make such comments. The other two judges also denied the allegations made in the audio recordings. [raajje] [SunOnline International 2]

A former chief judge of the High Court, and a former criminal judge have since come forward claiming the Chief of Staff at the President's Office, Ali Zahir, had attempted to influence the Criminal Court's decisions on multiple occasions while they were on the job – accusations Zahir has denied. [avas] [SunOnline International 3]

Meanwhile, opposition members submitted motions to the Security Services Committee, the Human Rights and Gender Committee, and the Judiciary Committee,

seeking an investigation into the case. Opposition parliamentarians had previously sought an emergency parliament session at the Parliament earlier on August 30, forcing the suspension of the sitting. [SunOnline International 4] [SunOnline International 5]

Nepal: Former PM Oli files writ petition against CPN(US) registration

(lm) Nepal's former Prime Minister and Chairman of the opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), KP Sharma Oli, has filed two writ petitions at the Supreme Court challenging the registration of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Unified Socialist).

Oli urged the apex court to nullify the registration of the CPN (Unified Socialist) – a breakaway faction of his CPN-UML – arguing that the new party was formed with the support of 14 lawmakers who had already been expelled from his party. The former prime minister also demanded that the court issue an interim order barring the CPN (Unified Socialist) from carrying out activities as a separate political party. [The Himalayan Times]

Last month, the CPN (Unified Socialist)'s Chairman, Madhav Kumar Nepal, that the party would be joining the ruling coalition government, just days after it had been recognized by the country's Election Commission. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Pakistan: Taliban TTP claims suicide attack on soldiers near Afghan border

(lm) At least four paramilitary guards have died and 15 others were injured after a suicide bomber on September 5 detonated his explosives near a security checkpoint in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan. [Deutsche Welle]

The incident took place near a checkpoint manned by the Frontier Corps, one of two paramilitary units involved in combating various militant groups across the province. Pakistan's leading Taliban group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), has claimed responsibility for the attack. [ABC News]

The TTP, which renewed its allegiance to the Afghan Taliban after the fall of Kabul last month, has recently stepped up its campaign against the Pakistani Army to

take control of the country's tribal border region. While there have been targeted attacks by the TTP on the Frontier Corp in June [see AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2], the deadliest recent assault carried out by the militant group was in April, when a blast outside a hotel hosting the Chinese ambassador killed four people and injured 12 others [see AiR No. 17, April/2021, 4].

A senior Pakistani official recently said that Islamabad was worried about militant fighters from the TTP crossing from Afghanistan and launching attacks on its territory. The Afghan Taliban, meanwhile, have sought to reassure their neighbor that they would not allow their territory to be used as a staging point for attacks on Pakistan or any other country. [South China Morning Post] [see also entry in this edition]

Other groups, like the banned Baluch Liberation Army and Baluch Liberation Front, have also been engaged in a low-level insurgency for decades calling for independence for the gas and mineral-rich province. They have accused the federal government of exploiting the region's natural resources.

A suicide bomber last month detonated his explosives near a motorcade carrying Chinese personnel working on an expressway in Gwadar – the fulcrum of $50 billion in projects linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – killing two Pakistani children playing by the roadside and wounding a Chinese national and two other Pakistanis. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

This attack followed another suicide attack on July 14 that targeted a two-bus convoy transporting Chinese and Pakistani workers to the World Bank-funded Dasu Hydropower project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, killing nine Chinese nationals. [AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3]

Sri Lanka: Parliament approves state of economic emergency as foreign exchange crisis worsens

(egm/lm) Sri Lanka's Parliament on September 6 approved an economic emergency previously declared by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, as the country is facing food and medicine shortages caused by the significant devaluation of its local currency. [Al Jazeera] [Deutsche Welle]

Using powers vested in the country's Public Security Ordinance, President Rajapaksa on August 31 invoked emergency regulations to counter the hoarding of

sugar, rice and other essential foods. The regulations give wide powers to officials to seize food stocks held by traders, arrest people who hoard essential food and for the government to dictate retail prices. A former army general was appointed to coordinate the supply of basic foods. [NewsWire] [The Straits Times]

The Constitution required that the Proclamation on the Emergency Regulations for the Supply of Essential Foods enacted by the president would be approved within 14 days by the 225-member Parliament, where the governing party controls 150 seats.

The move followed a surge in prices for daily goods and food products over the last 12 months, as private banks run out of foreign exchange to finance imports: Sri Lanka's foreign reserves were at $2.8 billion at the end of July, down from $7.5 billion in November 2019 when the government of President Rajapaksa took office promising robust growth. Moreover, the rupee has lost more than 20 percent of its value against the US dollar in that time, according to data from private banks.

In addition, Sri Lanka depends upon imports for gas and petrol, so an energy crisis may be lurking just around the corner. [Deutsche Welle]

To combat the financial strains, in March of last year the government banned imports of vehicles and other items, including edible oils and turmeric, an essential spice in local cooking, in a bid to save foreign exchange. More recently, the island nation became the first country in the region to raise interest rates in an attempt to shore up the local currency and help ease the inflationary pressure of the high cost of imports [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. [see also entry below]

Critics have slammed the measure for being too heavy-handed, with the nation's main opposition party, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, saying that the government declared the food emergency in "bad faith" and "with an ulterior motive of further wrongfully restricting the fundamental rights of the citizenry." [EconomyNext] [Nikkei Asia]

In a commentary on the regulations published in Sri Lankan media, a senior constitutional lawyer, in turn, argued that the government — with a comfortable parliamentary majority — “had all the time in the world” to bring in any legislation needed to deal with the crisis but opted not to do so. [The Hindu]

Sri Lanka receives $787 million from IMF and $150 million from Bangladesh

(egm/lm) Sri Lanka's Central Bank has announced that the country last month received $787 million from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as $150 million disbursed under a bilateral currency swap arrangement with Bangladesh. [Central Bank of Sri Lanka]

The allocation from the IMF was part of a $650 billion injection in Special Drawing Rights (SDR) into the global economy. SDRs are being distributed to countries in proportion to their quota shares in the IMF, which in turn which are determined by the size of a country's economy and its role in the global economy. The IMF's financial support is meant to counteract the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to the South Asian nation's economy by supplementing Colombo's foreign exchange reserves and avoiding its reliance on more expensive domestic and external debt. [The Hindu]

The currency swap facility with Bangladesh – totaling $200 million – is part of an arrangement between both nations to strengthen their economic and financial ties. The swap facility has been provided for a period of three months, with the possibility of rolling over twice for similar periods. It is being disbursed in three tranches, two of which have already been received.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka also awaits the remaining $308 million of its syndicated $1.3 billion loan from the China Development Bank. [AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]

Sri Lanka: Petition demands release of lawyer held for 17 months without trial

(egm) Over 70 individuals and organizations, including prominent religious leaders and human rights advocates in Sri Lanka, in a petition have called on the government to immediately release Hejaaz Hizbullah, a prominent human rights lawyer and government critic, who has been held in detention for more than 5 months without trial under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). [DailyMirror] [Tamil Guardian]

Hizbullah was arrested in April of last year, a day after he had written to the Sri Lankan government over a controversial ban prohibiting the burials of COVID-19 victims [see AiR No. 29, July/2020, 3]. Authorities later revealed that the arrest followed evidence allegedly

linking Hizbullah to the perpetrators of the 2019 Easter Bombings – an accusation that has since been withdrawn [see AiR No. 43, October/2020, 4].

Since the time of his arrest, Hizbullah has been repeatedly denied the right to due process safeguards recognized by international law. Moreover, while in police custody, he was prevented from accessing his legal counsel in private until an order was made by the Court of Appeal.

In February then, he was charged with "causing communal disharmony" – a speech-related offence provided under the PTA – and moved to judicial remand custody, where he was able to speak with his family for the first time in 10 months. However, hearings scheduled for March and April were cancelled, and Hizbullah has since not been able to return to court to challenge the charges against him.

Sri Lanka: UN highlights importance of the Office of Missing Persons to support victims and their families

(egm) The United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka has released a statement in honor of the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances 2021, encouraging the government to build and maintain the trust of victims and their families through the Office of Missing Persons (OMP).

In her announcement on August 30, Hanaa Singer-Hamdy described the OMP as an effective institution that counts with the necessary political support and resources to provide families and communities with information on the cases of the disappeared persons. [The Morning]

Since its establishment in 2016 the OMP has been in charge of supplying appropriate searching and tracing instruments in the cases of missing persons, providing information to their families and communities, protecting the rights of such persons and their relatives, and contributing recommendations to local authorities for the prevention of disappearance incidents. [Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation]

In February this year, UN human rights experts presented a report in which they addressed the Government's handling of cases of enforced disappearances; emphasizing the insufficient progress displayed by Sri Lanka's authorities in the investigation

of these cases and in holding perpetrators accountable. The UN experts also expressed concern with regards to the violence directed towards demonstrators and women activists who demanded accountability for the disappearances of their loved ones during last year's assembly for the International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances in the districts of Jaffna and Batticaloa. [OHCHR]

On a related note, last week's statement by the UN Resident Coordinator concluded by recognizing the commitment of families and victims to the quest for answers and describing the anguish, danger and reprisals these individuals experience -especially women who are more prone to face persecution as they stand in the frontlines of the search for information and justice. [lk.one.un]

Sri Lanka: Former justice secretary calls for Police Scotland to end Sri Lankan training

(egm) Former Scottish Justice Secretary Kenny MacAskill has called on Police Scotland and the Scottish Government to officially cease all involvement in training police in Sri Lanka following concerns about human rights abuses. [Scottish Legal News]

Police Scotland's international development and innovation unit has been running training programs for officers in Sri Lanka on an almost continuous basis since 2013. However, due to the coronavirus pandemic they have not run any training programs in Sri Lanka since February 2020, and officially paused this in May 2021 pending a risk assessment over human rights concerns.

The suspension of training followed calls from several international human rights groups on Scotland's 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. [No. 34, August/2021, 4]

Prior to MacAskill's intervention, a number of human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch, had written to incumbent Justice Secretary Keith Brown earlier this month, calling on the government official to provide details of a review of Police Scotland training for Sri Lankan police. [The Courier]

Sri Lanka Immigration and Emigration Department revises visa fees and fines

(egm) Sri Lanka's Department of Immigration and Emigration has announced the revision of visa fines and fees in accordance with the Emigration Regulations established earlier last month.

According to the Controller General of this department, the new regulations falling under the Gazette Extraordinary No. 2241/37 include an additional $500 penalty for foreigners staying in Sri Lanka without a valid visa. Moreover, the department has also stated that the price for a new visa now falls between $40 and $200 depending on the visa category. [ColomboPage] [DailyMirror]

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

Cambodia: Internet freedom regresses, says report

(nd) According to a recent report, online freedom in Cambodia regressed drastically in recent years. The Asia Centre report documents how the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has used various legislations to monitor personal communication and persecute critics for online comments, which was created a culture of self-censorship, according to the Centre.

Among other legal mechanisms, some based on the Penal Code of 2009, involving vague provisions on "disinformation" and "incitement to commit a felony", the farthest-reaching move was the establishment of a National Internet Gateway earlier this year. According to that, Internet service providers have to re-route their networks through the single gateway within 12 months, enabling online traffic to be closely monitored. An expert call for a personal data protection framework, however, is unlikely to be successful, given the subservient nature of law towards politics in Cambodia.

The report contrasted this development to conditions a decade ago, when the sudden availability of cheap smartphones saw a boom in internet access. 0.53% of the population could use the internet in 2009, while it rose to 52,6% in 2021. This tool, namely social media, was used in the national election of 2013 by the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), earning them almost one third of the seats in the National Assembly. Arguably a warning for Prime Minister Hun Sen and the CPP, they initiated a broader crackdown on civil society, following the dissolution of the CNRP by the Supreme Court in 2017 and an absolute win in the country's General Election of 2018. [The Diplomat]

Cambodia: UN to urge release of autistic teenager

(nd) UN experts called for the release of an autistic teenager detained for two months over incitement charges. The sixteen-year-old allegedly sent messages on Telegram insulting officials and faces up to two years in prison. The UN Special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Cambodia and three other UN experts said the teenager had been interrogated without a lawyer or guardian, and they called for his immediate release.

He is the son to two opposition figures; his father is a member of the dissolved Cambodian National Rescue Party and has been detained since June 2020. He is one of more than 150 other defendants facing a trial in absentia for allegedly aiming to topple the ruling party, led by Prime Minister Hun Sen. [France 24] [UCA News]

Indonesia: Four soldiers killed in West Papua attack

(nd) Four Indonesian soldiers were killed in an attack carried out by 50 gunmen on September 3 in West Papua. This latest attack is part of a larger security issue in Papua and West Papua, with sporadic attacks on security officials and civilians. Indonesia has labeled the armed separatist group in Papua and West Papua as terrorist organization, while there is no specific identification of the group.

Following an UN-sponsored vote, which is widely claimed rigged due to its low participation rate, Indonesia took over the former Dutch colony in 1960, spiking decades of violent conflict and ongoing calls for independence. [Jakarta Globe] [The Diplomat] [Channel News Asia]

Indonesia: Attackers on Ahmadiyya mosque detained

(nd) Police arrested at least 10 who allegedly vandalized an Ahmadiyya mosque in West Kalimantan. The incident was labelled as a “sensitive issue”, with Indonesian Ahmadis having been targeted earlier, sometimes lethally. The Indonesian Ulema Council, or MUI, has issued an edict on Ahmadiyya twice, labeling the group as non-Islam and its followers as apostates, in 1980 and 2005, signed by MUI’s then-chairman and now vice-president Ma’ruf Amin.

According to an estimate, there are more than half a million Ahmadis in predominantly Muslim Indonesia. They are one of the biggest sects of Islam, who contrary to the belief among the vast majority of Muslims worldwide do not consider Muhammad as the last prophet. [Jakarta Globe]

Laos: Government and IOM formalize partnership, sign Cooperation Agreement

(ct) Laos on September 1 signed a Cooperation Agreement with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to further strengthening migration cooperation and developing good relations between the two parties.

Under the agreement, the IOM will continue to expand its assistance by implementing migration programs in Laos. Current activities are aimed at improving migration governance policies and frameworks, aiding vulnerable migrants, such as victims of human trafficking, developing government officials' capacity,

and providing direct services to migrants, vulnerable individuals, and migrant communities. [The Laotian Times]

Laos: Unitel, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry plan digital transformation projects

(ct) In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Star Telecom Company (Unitel) aims to launch three model pilot projects for digital transformation in the agriculture sector in Vientiane. The project aims to cut the amount of labour needed as well as other costs; boost productivity and reduce the risk of flooding and drought; provide modern water supplies for crop cultivation in a shaded system, for farmland, fruit trees, industrial tree plantations, and pasture for the grazing of animals; develop technical services with regard to irrigation, plantations, and livestock and fishery farming. [Vientiane Times]

Laos: Five State Institutions in Laos to Trial Self-Sufficiency Policy

(ct) According to a report by *Khaosan Pathet Lao*, the government of Laos has agreed to trial a financial self-sufficiency policy among state organizations and institutions. The move follows the unveiling of another ambitious plan to restructure the country's floundering state-owned businesses [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]. [The Laotian Times 1]

The three-year experiment will see Mittaphab Hospital, Mahosot Hospital, Setthathirath Hospital, the National University of Laos, and the Pakpasak Technical College managing their own financial affairs, with greater independence in how revenue and expenditures are administered. However, the Lao government will continue to manage services at the new Mittaphab Hospital building, which was built with a loan from abroad. [The Laotian Times 2]

Malaysia: Court to demand implementation of lower voter age

(nd) The High Court in Sarawak ruled on September 3 that the government and Election Commission (EC) must take steps to enable Malaysians aged 18 to vote

in the next elections. The legal action was sought by five Malaysians demanding to lower the current voting age from 21 to 18. The so-called Undi18 was supposed to be implemented in July 2021 but postponed to September 2022, which the court called acting "illegally" and "irrationally", failing to act with "all convenient speed". The court mandated EC and the government to implement Undi18 no later than December 31, 2021.

Separate from these hearings, 18 Malaysian youths in April filed a similar lawsuit in the High Court in Kuala Lumpur, whose decision is scheduled to be delivered on October 21. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: New PM not to face confidence vote, according to attorney general

(nd) The newly-appointed attorney general commented there was no need to legitimize the appointment of Ismail Sabri Yaakob as new prime minister. Idrus Harun's assertion is in contrast to a decree by Malaysia's ruler, King Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah, requiring the new prime minister to call for a vote of confidence in parliament "as soon as possible." Idrus, in turn, said Ismail was appointed validly, and making validation dependent upon any other party than the king, referring to a vote of confidence after the king endorsed Ismail, "it means his absolute power can be overcome by other parties", which he alleged was against the Constitution. According to observers, non-compliance with the king's order could strain relations with the royal institution and might direct public opinion against the government.

Ismail was appointed prime minister on August 20, and declared he was supported by 114 of 220 members of parliament. Prior to that, the king ordered the confidence vote. In February 2020, when he appointed predecessor Muhyiddin Yassin, no confidence vote was required. [Benar News]

Malaysia: Former PM to lead economic recovery council

(nd) Recently resigned Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin was appointed chairman of a council focused on economic recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. In an effort to revive the pandemic-hit tourism industry, the popular island of Langkawi, close to Thailand's

southern border, shall be opened for domestic tourists with requirements still being sorted out. Foreign tourists are still barred from entering Malaysia. Recently, Malaysia has eased the strict pandemic measures for fully vaccinated people.

Muhyiddin stepped down in August after he lost his razor-thin majority in parliament, amid mounting criticism of his health crisis management. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore: High Court orders compensation for Prime Minister in defamation suit

(nd) Singapore's high court ordered two bloggers to pay Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong a combined S$210,000 (RM647,639) in damages. The articles were about his late father and founder, Lee Kuan Yew, and the court argued they "impugned Lee's reputation and character" by alleging he was dishonest.

The defendants announced to consider appeal. The bloggers set up a crowdfunding page for the proceedings, a move other activist did, after they were successfully sued for defamation by Lee. It forms part of a series of similar events, with figures in the ruling People's Action Party having sued foreign media and political opponents for defamation. While they refer to the defense of their reputations, activists such as Human Rights Watch argue, such moves are limiting freedom of speech and political opposition. [Malay Mail]

Philippines: Further candidate shuffles

(nd) Sara Duterte, daughter of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte further fueled discussion of her running for president next year by naming several politicians who have offered to run as her vice president. The list included her father's closest aide and preferred successor, Christopher "Bong" Go, who rejected Rodrigo Duterte's endorsement as presidential candidate, lawmaker Sherwin Gatchalia, former defence minister Gilbert Teodoro, and the son and namesake of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, better known as "Bongbong".

Currently, Sara Duterte, mayor of Davao City like her father used to, is leading opinion polls but has not officially put in a bid to run for office. While Rodrigo

Duterte is constitutionally prohibited from running a second time, his opponents believe he could extend his term through an election of an ally. He declared not to run for vice president if his daughter does not run for president. Despite his war on drugs, for which he might be charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC), he remains largely popular in the country. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Meanwhile, current vice president Leni Robredo has experienced significant support from volunteer groups in favor of her presidency. More than 200 volunteer groups signed a manifesto calling on Robredo to run for office. In opinion polls, she lags behind in fifth place after Sara Duterte, Manila Mayor Isko Moreno, and Senators Grace Poe and Manny Pacquiao. [Manila Bulletin] [Rappler]

Myanmar: Shadow government to call for nationwide “defensive war”

(nd) Myanmar’s shadow government, called for a “people’s defensive war”, urging civil servants to leave their posts and armed militias and ethnic forces to attack the military. The National Unity Government (NUG), comprised of ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) lawmakers, also declared a state of emergency. NUG labelled it as “defensive war”, a "revolt against the rule of the military terrorists led by Min Aung Hlaing in every corner of the country."

Local resistance forces have formed the People’s Defence Forces, and, in some cases, joined the existing ethnic armies for training, which saw many clashes with the military over the last weeks, displacing thousands. The communication among these groups in unclear. Maj. Gen. Nerdah Bo Mya, commander of the ethnic armed group Karen National Defense Organization, spoke in support of the NUG's announcement, referring to a “D-Day” for the downfall of the military regime.

Western diplomatic efforts as well as efforts by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have not been successful yet. The imposition of sanctions by Western countries has so far not stopped the violence in Myanmar. ASEAN envoy to Myanmar, Erywan Yusof, negotiated a ceasefire for humanitarian relief, which was criticized by activists and NUG as not being enough to end the violence. [See article in this issue]. On September 21, the UN General Assembly will begin, yet it is to be determined whether a member of the military council, or NUG will fill Myanmar’s seat, after

the military regime fired the current representative, Kyaw Moe Tun, who defied the orders and speaks for the country's deposed civilian government. [See also AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

The military staged a coup in February 2021, ousting the NLD-led government. Military chief Min Aung Hlaing made himself prime minister and installed a caretaker government last month and pledged to hold new elections by 2023. The junta has branded the NUG and People's Defence Forces as terrorist groups. The coup prompted nationwide protests and strikes, with the civil disobedience movement significantly hindering business in the country. The protests were answered with a crackdown that saw more than 1,000 casualties and over 7,800 arrested. [Reuters] [CNN] [The Irrawaddy] [Nikkei Asia] [South China Morning Post]

Myanmar: Fighting in Shan State to force hundreds to flee

(nd) Four consecutive days of fighting between Myanmar's military and a rebel army in northern Shan state have left at least 17 soldiers dead and forced hundreds of civilians to flee. On August 28, military troops attacked members of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), initiating the fighting. Sources suggested there were more military casualties. The MNDAA released a statement including photos of weapons and ammunition its fighters had captured from the military, next to confiscated uniforms with insignias denoting the ranks of Major and Captain. According to volunteers, more than 800 civilians have fled the area.

In an effort to control the nationwide turmoil, the military has targeted the periphery, home to and controlled by dozens of ethnic armies, which have been finding more and more support from local People's Defense Force (PDF) militias. Just recently, branched of the People's Defense Force (PDF) militia announced to have formed an alliance to form a more effective resistance against the military regime. Following many clashes with the military in August, a local PDF spokesman said the merger was forced by the military's advantages in ammunition and manpower. The merger will also facilitate communication, within PDFs and with the shadow National Unity Government (NUG).

The February 1 military coup has so far cost 1,040 lives, with 6,069 arrested, according to the Assistance

Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP). [Radio Free Asia] [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Power generation company to leave

(nd) Hong Kong-listed power generation company VPower announced to pull out of two projects in Myanmar. The company is involved in nine power plants across Myanmar and will cease involvement in Rakhine State and Mandalay due to post-coup challenges. Earlier expectations for economic reforms of foreign companies are unlikely to be implemented at this point. Additionally, the military council SAC could not pay for the units that it contractually had to buy, due to the withheld payments by consumers as part of the civil disobedience movement.

VPower came to Myanmar in 2019 amid bids by the National League for Democracy government in an effort to diversify the hydropower-based electricity supply, which cannot run at full capacity during hot season. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: NUG to announce budget, military defections to continue

(nd) In an effort to prepare its first budget of $ 700 million, Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government (NUG) has stepped up its revenue generation and fundraising efforts, while lobbying to cut funding flowing to the military regime.

The budget shall be unveiled next week and is mainly held in accounts outside the country. It will support humanitarian relief, Covid-19 vaccinations and striking workers inside Myanmar. The support of the striking governmental workers alone, at least 250,000 people who have joined the civil disobedience movement, will require many millions of dollars per month. The NUG is reportedly “making progress” to retrieve $1 billion of Myanmar's foreign reserves frozen by the US after the military coup.

Only swiftly did they mention their defense budget. According to defector reports, about 2,500 soldiers have broken ties with the military government and joined anti-junta forces, with the NUG actively promoting this switch, promising safety for them and their families. Within their outreach, NUG also promises to guarantee current ranks and positions.

The Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) and the Chin Regional Defense Force (CDF) armed ethnic groups made similar promises.

Parallelly, the military regime is preparing a Myanmar Economic Recovery Plan. Without mentioning the mass protests that have paralyzed the economy, the plan outlines government programs such as reducing corporate taxes, cutting imports, and promoting tourism and foreign investment. While the content is largely based on economic programs of the ousted NLD government, it does not pursue reforming state-owned enterprises and amending the tax system and project funding.

Such enticement effort come amid an announcement of branches of the People's Defense Forces (PDF) militias to form an alliance against the junta. The military regime in turn said that the NUG and other groups were aiming to disrupt government business and carry out terror attacks to intimidate the public, offering rewards to whistleblowers and informants for the arrest of people associated with anti-junta groups.

Additionally, the military is struggling to recruit new officers, with fewer people wanting to be associated with it following the coup and crackdown on protesters. A deadline for applications was extended for a second time, citing the pandemic. According to an army defector, there were only around 100 applicants by the end of the deadline. In previous years, the 400,000 men army has attracted around 12,000 applicants annually, with ten percent accepted. [Nikkei Asia] [Radio Free Asia] [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Ethnic army to declare ceasefire void

(nd) Ethnic Karen leaders have declared the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) between the government and ethnic armed groups as void. The spokeswoman of the Karen National Union (KNU) cited the February military coup, and the subsequent crackdown on civil society as reasons. Rather, the statement announced KNU's support for the parallel shadow National Unity Government (NUG), led by ousted NLD lawmakers, in administrative, military and diplomatic matters, for they share NUG's objectives for equality and self-determination for ethnic groups and a federal union. Additionally, the statement urged ethnic armed groups and People's Defense Forces to join forces against the military regime.

In May, KNU leaders announced to stick with the NCA; in June, the chief of staff of the Karen National Liberation Army, the KNU's armed wing, agreed to this procedure. The NCA was signed between the then-civilian government and eight ethnic armies in October 2015. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Nationalist monk released

(nd) The military regime has released Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu, known for his nationalist and anti-Muslim rhetoric. He was charged by the civilian government for sedition in 2019, and detained since November. The monk is known for his pro-military views, and has particularly targeted the Rohingya Muslims, delivering nationalist speeches and criticizing then-leader Aung San Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) government. Labelled by Time magazine as "The Face of Buddhist Terror?", Wirathu is one of the most prominent faces of the 969 Buddhist national movement, urging Buddhists to shop, sell property and marry only within their religion. Myanmar's highest Buddhist authority banned him from preaching in 2017. With around 54 million followers, Buddhism is the main religion in Myanmar. [BBC] [South China Morning Post] [The Diplomat]

Thailand: Prime Minister survived another no-confidence vote amid COVID-19 response and party infighting

(kk) Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-cha survived his third no-confidence motion. The vote was 264-208 in his favor despite a four-day censure debate focusing on his mismanagement of the pandemic and rumors alluding to tensions inside his ruling Palang Pracharat Party (PPRP). Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul along with four ministers also remained in their position. [CNN World] [Nikkei Asia]

In a four-day intense censure motion, the opposition parties accused Prayuth for his poor management of the pandemic and slow vaccine rollout, resulting from refusing to join the international COVAX vaccine-supply program and late alternative vaccine procurement, causing thousands of deaths and severe damage to the economy. Prasert Chanthararuangthong – the opposition Pheu Thai Party secretary-general – also raised concern over possible corruption in a certain vaccine procurement process. Prasert indicated that there was a 1.6-billion-baht difference between actual

expenditure spent on purchasing Sinovac vaccines and the budget the cabinet received. Prayuth denied the overpriced vaccinations claims, while further explaining that the prices were set by sellers and included other expenses, such as transport costs. [Prachachat, in Thai] [National News Bureau of Thailand] Prayuth also defended his handling of the pandemic for he succeeded in containing the spread of the Delta variant, citing higher number of discharged patients and the lower-than-global-average infection and fatality rates. [Bangkok Post 1]

On September 2, Wisarn Techateerawat – a Pheu Thai MP – made a bribery allegation against Prayuth. The MP accused Prayuth of giving five-million-baht cash to a group of MPs in parliament building in exchange for votes in censure debate. Chuan Leekpai – House Speaker – has ordered an investigation into the bribery allegation. Weerakorn Khamprakop, a PPRP MP who claimed he was among a group of MPs who met the prime minister to offer him their moral support, said that the PPRP had asked its member to file a complaint against Wisarn with the National Anti-Corruption Commission over the false accusation. [Thai PBS World 1] [Thai PBS World 2] [Bangkok Post]

Before the no-confidence vote on September 4, there were rumors regarding alleged collusion to oust Prayuth involving Thamanat Prompow, the secretary-general of PPRP, and some members of the ruling party along with small coalition parties. Later, Thamanat denied the rumor and went to apologize to Prayuth. He also asked Prayuth to look after PPRP MPs as it seemed to him that the prime minister cared more about coalition parties. This act of reconciliation is likely to be brought by Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon as he called for the meeting of PPRP on September 3. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3] [Thaipost, in Thai]

Even though Prayuth has survived another no-confidence motion, from the tried persons, he received the highest disapproval votes and second to the last in approval votes, suggesting that the pressure on Prayuth's administration has not vanished with the censure debate. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Daily demonstrations to return, while protests escalate

(kk) Parallel to the censure debate in parliament [see article above], protestors vowed to return to the streets on a daily basis to call for the resignation of

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha as lockdown measurements have been lifted on September 1.

On September 2, one of the biggest gatherings for anti-government group this year was held by Nattawut Saikaur - a key leader of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) referred to as red-shirts. [Aljazeera] Consecutively, on Friday, the United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration and Thalu Fha (Pierce the Sky) group led another rally. Activists vowed to stage street protests every day until Prayuth resigns. [Bangkok Post 1] Protests were initially planned in Lumphini Park where King Rama VI Monument is located, but was blocked by containers and razor wire as police feared inappropriate actions. [Bangkok Post 2] On Sunday, red-shirt leaders called for daily afternoon protests at Asoke intersection, including a car mob. [Bangkok Post 3]

On Sunday evening, Thalu Gaz group - mainly comprised of young vocational students and working-class teenagers, whose methods are more violent than the student-led protest and red-shirts – clashed with the police, who in turn used water cannons, tear gas, and rubber bullets against the protestors. [Nation TV, in Thai] [See AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

In light of the failed no-confidence motion, protesters are likely to defy a current ban on large gatherings.

Thailand: Opposition MP released evidence of military's Information Operation (IO) against citizens

(kk) On August 31, during the censure debate, Nattacha Boonchaiinsawat - a Move Forward Party (MFP) MP – revealed voice clips, documents, and footage concerning the military's information operation (IO) against people who criticize Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha and the government. Nattacha accused the PM who is also the Defence Minister and Director of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) of involvement in the operation.

The MP displayed a video presenting the tasks of "Cyber warriors" and photos of soldiers in a workshop on how to use and post on social media. One of the documents presented was an order to operate the news and cyber operations in various dimensions, which showed the name of Col Noranot Rungyanathon - chief of the Second Army Region Multimedia Operations.

Gen Chaicharn Changmongkol, Deputy Defense Minister, stated that the documents shown by the MP are fake as there are misspellings of the Second Army commander's last name, a different signature, and mistakes in ranks and names of some officers. On the same day, Nattacha urged the Deputy Defense Minister to answer whether the army is involved in the operation to infiltrate citizens. [Prachatai] Following the incident, Deputy army spokeswoman Col Sirichan Ngathong said the Second Army has filed a legal complaint against Nattacha for alleged use of fake documents. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Family member of detained activist denied access to medical information

(kk) A relative of Thatchapong or Chatchai Kaedam, one of the detained activists on charges with respect to the protest on August 2 who reportedly tested positive for COVID-19, is worried about the activist's condition. When seeing him last, Thatchapong's conditions was worse than what the correction official said at the press release. The relative noted that the Department of Corrections is likely to conceal political prisoners' conditions for his family or lawyer are not allowed to talk to his doctors and to obtain medical records is a long process.

Seven of the eleven detained activists related to the protests have tested positive for COVID-19 includes Thatchapong, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, Jatupat "Pai Dao Din" Boonpattararaksa, Sirichai Natueng, Phromsorn Weerathamjaree, Panupong Jadnok, and Sam Samat. [Prachatai English] [See AiR No. 34, August/2021, 4]

Thailand: PAD leaders sentenced to jail

(kk) On August 31, the Supreme Court sentenced three out of nine leaders of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) to eight months in prison over the group's protest against the Samak Sundaravej government in 2008. The three were Chaiwat Sinsuwong, Amorn Amornrattananont, and Therdphum Jaidee. Charges against six other leaders, including Chamlong Srimuang, Sondhi Limthongkul, Pibhop Dhongchai, Somkiat Pongpaibul, Somsak Kosaisuk and Suriyasai Katasila, have been cleared.

Before the hearing, Chaiwat insisted the PAD's protests were peaceful without weapons and non-violent unlike the current anti-government protests. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Legal proceeding against police in the fatal torture case

(kk) On September 2, the deputy chief of the national police and head of the investigation team elaborated on interim findings against the prime suspect in the case of alleged torture and murder of a drug suspect at Nakhon Sawan's Muang police station. [See AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Pol Gen Suchart Teerasawat told a House Committee on legal process against Pol Col Thitisan "Chief Joe" Utthanaphon, the arrest of the drug suspect by Thitisan and his six subordinates was lawful. Police have not found any evidence that Thitisan extorted money from the suspect. However, investigators would file another charge of giving false information to police against Chief Joe for he told hospital workers that the suspect lost consciousness during arrest, when in fact the suspect died of suffocation during interrogation. Thitisan allegedly ordered his subordinates to ensure that doctors record the cause of the suspect death as drug overdose.

Currently, the seven suspects are charged with malfeasance, coercion, murder and torture. Thitisan has denied all accusations against him, in contrast to his past statements during a phone-call press conference on August 26. [Bangkok Post 1]

Thitisan and six other detained police officers were transferred from Phitsanulok prison to Klong Prem Prison in Bangkok on September 3 on the Crime Suppression Division (CSD)'s request, which will replace Nakhon Sawan's police in handling the case. [Bangkok Post 2]

Vietnam: Prime Minister hosts virtual ceremony of the 76th National Day Celebration

(ct) Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh gave a virtual keynote address on the occasion of the 76th anniversary of the National Day of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, on September 2.

Speaking at the event, the PM said over the past 76 years, the Communist Party, State and people of Vietnam had strived to defend independence, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, national self-determination, and the freedom and happiness for the people. The current goal was the containment of Covid-19 and economic recovery. Furthermore, he reached out to the international community for more support of medical equipment, vaccines, but also technology and experience. With respect to the economic situation, he advertised for the facilitation of international investment and trade, and for the stability of supply chains. [VietnamNet] [Voice of Vietnam]

Vietnam: Prime Minister warns of long coronavirus fight as crisis deepens

(ct/lm) Vietnam could be facing a lengthy battle against the coronavirus and cannot rely on lockdown and quarantine measures indefinitely, Prime Minister Pham Minh warned on September 1, as the country struggles to contain its deadliest outbreak so far.

Driven by the highly transmissible Delta variant, the fourth wave of Vietnam's COVID-19 pandemic has hit the country hard, as cities and provinces implement strict social distancing measures, restrict people from leaving their homes, and shut down factories and other businesses, leaving many out of work. [Al Jazeera]

About 80 percent of fatalities and half the infections have occurred in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's biggest city.

Photos and videos posted on social media show widespread anger at food shortages, unemployment, and lack of government support, and authorities have imposed penalties on people posting allegedly "false information" on social networks about the pandemic's spread. With the restrictions set to last until September 15, Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has ordered mass testing for the city's residents and deployed soldiers to enforce the stay-at-home orders and help with the delivery of food. [Reuters]

In related news, a Vietnamese has been sentenced to five years in jail for flouting COVID-19 rules and transmitted the virus to members of his family as well as staff at a welfare center which he visited.

In early July, the man had reportedly travelled by motorcycle from Ho Chi Minh City to his home

province in the south of the country. There, he was found to have lied on a health declaration form which asked about his recent travel history, and also failed to comply with isolation rules. [BBC] [Voice of America]

Separately, police in Ho Chi Minh City have fined a local Facebook user for saying that lockdown measures aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19 had left residents unable to receive relief packages. [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

China-US tensions loom large at inconclusive climate talks

(dql) China and the US failed to reach an agreement at the meetings between US special envoy for climate and Democratic Party heavy weight John Kerry and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Yang Jiechi from the Central Committee and Polit Bureau of the CCP. Insisting on following its own climate plan, Beijing rejected proposals presented by Kerry to commit to more public pledges on climate change before a UN climate summit in November, including the 1.5 degrees Celsius limit of global warming, set as target in the 2015 Paris Agreement, a definite time frame for carbon emissions to peak before 2030, and a moratorium on overseas coal-fired project financing. [South China Morning Post]

During the talk with Kerry, Wang claimed a position of strength, comparing the two countries' cooperation in this area to an "oasis" that is surrounded by a desert and warning that the oasis was at risk to be "desertified very soon," before making clear that "China-U.S. climate co-operation cannot be separated from the wider environment of China-U.S. relations."

In his response, Kerry urged China to separate climate from other issues of US-China relations and to keep politics out of it, arguing that "climate is not ideological, not partisan, and not a geostrategic weapon."

Wang's remark echoes his statement on Afghanistan in his phone talk with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken August 29, during which he insisted that "all sides to contact and proactively guide the Taliban," but warned at the same time that coordination between China and the US would depend on Washington's giving in in policies towards Beijing in other areas. [Reuters] [The Guardian] [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

This muscular stance of Wang is mirrored and pushed further in a sharp anti-US editorial in the [People's Daily, in Chinese], an official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, which makes the US responsible for a cold war China is currently facing, accusing the US of "barbaric and savage attacks on China," on multiple fronts, including "military threats, economic and scientific blockade, financial attack, political and diplomatic siege, [...] biological warfare, cyberwarfare, public opinion war, space war [...], and using more and more vigorously China's internal fifth column to launch a color revolution."

China invited to attend Afghanistan's government formation ceremony

(dql) Providing an early glimpse of its foreign policy and geopolitical alignment, the Taliban has reportedly invited China, along with Russia, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Qatar to attend an event on the looming formation of its government, after "complete capture" of the restive Panjshir Valley, where resistance forces had gathered and put up a strong fight against the Taliban who, however, claim to be in control of the valley that is said to have never been conquered. [The Week] [Aljazeera]

The Taliban also revealed that in a conversation with China's Deputy Foreign Minister, China has confirmed that it would maintain its embassy in Kabul while

continuing and increasing humanitarian assistance. [NDTV]

Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said that China (and Russia) will be among the 20 participants of an online meeting on Afghanistan on ministerial level, including the foreign ministers of the G 7. It will be hosted by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his German counterpart Heiko Maas and be held possibly as soon as Wednesday, September 8, 2021. [Nikkei Asia]

All this reflects the significant role the Taliban and the major countries attribute Afghanistan's rebuilding to China.

Former US envoy to the United Nations Nikki Haley, meanwhile, warned in an interview that there is a need to closely watch China, claiming that Beijing is intending to take over the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan which was the epicenter of America's "War on Terror" for over two decades during the Afghanistan War. [Republic World]

China: Advancing space technology

(dql) China's National Space Science Center, space science agency announced that it has developed a prototype miniature helicopter for surveillance work on future Mars missions. The announcement comes after the historic landing of a robotic rover on the Red Planet a few months ago and is another testimony to China's determination to become a leader in space exploration. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, the Shiyan 6, one of China's most advanced new geophysical and seismic survey ships, has headed to the South China Sea on its maiden voyage, in latest of Beijing's efforts to spur exploration in the resource-rich and disputed waters. The ship is expected to study hydrodynamics, material transport and ecological response processes in the waters near the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area and the nearby Pearl River run-off. [South China Morning Post]

Russia's Gazprom Neft moves to payments in yuan

(dql) Gazprom Neft, the oil arm of Russian gas giant Gazprom, reached an agreement with China's national

jet fuel operator to use the yuan in China for aviation fuel settlements. The company operates 34 airports in China.

The agreement reflects China's and Russia's ongoing efforts to complement a deepening cooperation in the energy sector by a gradual reduction of the US dollar as lead currency. [Reuters]

Cross-strait relations: Taiwan warns of China's capability to "paralyze" its defenses

(dql) Taiwan's Defense Ministry assessing the threat posed by China has submitted to parliament its annual report in which it concludes that – among others – China's armed forces are capable of both "paralyzing" Taiwan's defenses and fully monitoring its deployments.

The report suggested a far graver view compared with last year, when it stated that China still did not possess the capability to launch a full attack on Taiwan. [Reuters]

The report comes amid still heightening cross-straits tensions and intensifying military activities around Taiwan. In a latest development, on September 6, 2021, four Chinese SU-30 fighter jets and two J-16 fighters entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ), marking the fifth intrusion this month. A day earlier, more than a dozen Chinese fighter jets, along with four nuclear-capable bombers, and one surveillance aircraft intruded into the Taiwan's ADIZ. [Taiwan News] [BBC]

Taiwan: Military exercises

(dql) Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) personnel and marines stationed on Taiwan's Dongsha Island conducted on September 5, 2021, a military exercise which involved Taiwan-built Kestrel rockets. The drill aimed at testing their area denial and anti-armor capabilities. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan's Air Force, meanwhile, conducted on September 6, a takeoff and landing rehearsal drill ahead of the annual Han Kuang exercise, Taiwan's largest military exercises involving all branches of the armed forces to test the country's combat readiness in case of a Chinese invasion, to be held from September

13-17. It will be a live-fire exercise, after the computer simulation component of the annual wargames was completed in April. [Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan: Defense Ministry submits US$17.05 billion budget request

(dql) Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) on August 31, submitted a budget proposal of NT$471.7 billion (US$17.05 billion) to parliament to be spent of arms purchases and other defense needs.

Still to be reviewed and passed by the Legislature, the budget proposal allocates NT$21.70 billion to the country's Air Force, for fiscal years 2022-2025, for buying four MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones to strengthen its day-night surveillance capability. Also on the Air Force's purchasing list are precision missiles for its current F-16 jet fighter fleet.

The Navy, meanwhile, will receive NT$43.15 billion for upgrading the combat capabilities of its six Kang Ding-class frigates with the Sea Sword II air-defense missile, developed by Taiwan's National Chung-Shan Institute of Science and Technology (NCSIST). [Focus Taiwan]

Australia and France support peace in the Taiwan Strait

(nds) Australia and France have issued a joint statement emphasizing the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. On the inaugural Australia-France 2+2 Ministerial Consultations, the two countries declared their support for the inclusion of Taiwan in international organizations. In addition, they agreed on closer maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. [Taiwan News]

The discussions were held by Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne, Australian Defense Minister Peter Dutton, French Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian, and French Minister of Defence Florence Parly. The two countries have close diplomatic ties and had previously listed their "shared values, interests and policies" in the Joint Advanced Strategic Partnership Report on Australia-France relations. According to both governments, the Taiwan strait constitutes a common interest that requires a joint policy. [Taiwan News] [Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade]

EU Parliament passes China-critical report in support of Taiwan

(dql) In a move, most likely to further deepen existing China-EU tensions over Taiwan, the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on September 1, passed a report and related amendments to enhance relations between the EU and Taiwan. They included a call on the EU to begin preparations for the possible signing of a Bilateral Investment Agreement (BIA) with Taiwan and to change the name of EU representative office in Taipei.

Furthermore, the report stresses the importance of trade and economic relations between the two sides, including on matters relating to multilateralism and the World Trade Organization (WTO), technology such as 5G, public health, as well as essential cooperation on critical supplies, including semiconductors.

With regards to China, the report expresses deep concern over Chinese military pressure against Taiwan, calling on the EU "to do more to address these tensions and to protect Taiwan's democracy and the island's status as an important EU partner," further insisting that that any change to cross-Taiwan Strait relations "must be neither unilateral nor against the will of Taiwanese citizens." [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan warns Honduras of switching ties to China

(dql) Fearing to lose another of the remaining 15 countries which have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry has urged Honduras to reject "flashy and false" promises by China, calling them "ploys to sabotage Taiwan's diplomatic relations with our allies."

The warning comes at the heels of pledge of presidential candidate Xiomara Castro of Honduras' main opposition party to "immediately open diplomatic and commercial relations with mainland China" in case she would prevail in the presidential election in November. [South China Morning Post] [Reuters]

Since 2016, China has poached seven of Taiwan's diplomatic allies, among them three Latin American, including Panama, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic.

Japan to deepen security cooperation with Pacific Island countries

(dql) Defense representatives from Japan and 13 Pacific Island countries pledged in a ministerial-level online meeting on September 2, 2021, to strengthen cooperation to maintain maritime order. In their joint statement, the participants in the first such gathering affirmed the importance of promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The Pacific Island countries included Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. [Kyodo News]

The pledge comes amid efforts of China to increase its presence and influence in this region and is likely to strain Sino-Japanese relations. [DW] [The Diplomat]

In August, Japan donated more than 100,000 Covid-19 vaccine doses to Tonga, Kiribati and Fiji, as part of commitment to distribute 3 million doses to Pacific Island nations by the end of the year, made by Japanese Prime Minister Yoshide Suga Ninth Pacific Island Leaders Summit. [Honolulu Civil Beat] [Kyodo News]

Japan-UK relations: HMS Queen Elizabeth first Japanese port call

(dql) The British aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth made its first Japanese port call, arriving at the US Navy base in Yokosuka near Tokyo demonstrating defensive cooperation between the UK and Japan amid concerns over China's growing military strength and influence in the Indo-Pacific, with Japan seeking to expand its military cooperation beyond its traditional alliance with the US.

The HMS Queen Elizabeth is leading a carrier strike group, consisting of eight surface ships and one submarine from Britain, the US and the Netherlands. It has been up has been deployed to the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the South China Sea for exercises with coastal countries after departing from Britain in May. [The Asahi Shimbun]

South Korea-Japan relations: Families of forced labor victims withdraw request to seize Mitsubishi Heavy assets

(aml) The families of four forced labor victims have withdrawn their request to seize bonds that were thought to belong to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. Last month, a court had allowed a seizure of 850 million won ($733,000) worth of bonds in LS Mtron, a South Korean company that was believed to have business relations with Mitsubishi Heavy. Now, the families have withdrawn their request because their lawyers confirmed LS Mtron's claim that their relations had only been with Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Engine Systems Co, a subsidiary of Mitsubishi Heavy. [The Korea Herald]

The seizure originally had been requested because Mitsubishi Heavy refused to pay damages, ordered by the South Korean Supreme Court [AiR, No.34, August/2021, 4].

South Korea-Japan relations: Court orders Tokyo to disclose assets in South Korea

(aml) The Seoul Central District Court has issued on order for the Japanese government to disclose a full list of its assets in South Korea until March 2020 to secure reparations for 12 South Korean woman who had been forced into sexual slavery by Japanese troops during World War 2. It is the second time that the court issued such an order, the first one in June after the Japanese government refused to comply with the January court ruling that ordered 100 million won ($89,000) in damages. Japan insists that all claims stemming from Japan's colonial rule over South Korea from 1920-1945 were settled in a 1965 treaty but the court held that this does not apply to "systematic crimes against humanity" and war crimes. [The Korea Times]

South Korea develops ballistic missile as powerful as tactical nuclear weapon

(aml) South Korea's defense ministry announced the development of a ballistic missile carrying warhead of up to 3 metric tons with a flight range of 350-400 km that roughly matches the power of tactical nuclear weapons. The missile is supposed to be in the last stage of development and can reach all areas of North

Korea. After South Korea was cut loose from the missile pact with the US, it is now seeking new missiles with “significantly enhanced destructive power”, according to the defense ministry.[The Korea Herald 1] [The Korea Times]

Additionally, South Korea is planning a missile ironclad defense system against North Korea fire targeting Seoul, similarly to Israel’s Iron Dome. Seoul lays within range of North Korea’s long-range rockets. Moreover, an early warning radar system is planned. Originally, South Korea expected to take over the war time operational control during president Moon Jae-in’s term which ends in May next year, but the US now seem reluctant to hand it over due to geopolitical reasons regarding China. [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea, Egypt/Oman agree to boost cooperation in defense

(aml) During his two-nation trip, South Korean defense minister Suh Wook met first his Egyptian and then his Omani counterpart with whom he agreed to cooperate in bilateral security and defense industry. Suh asked for their support in keeping peace on the Korean peninsula both vowed active backing of the inter-Korean dialogue. In return, Omani defense minister asked for South Korea to play a bigger role in peace and stability in the Middle East. Suh also thanked Omani defense minister for Oman’s support for South Korea’s anti-piracy mission in waters of Africa. [The Korea Times] [Yonhap News Agency]

US draft bill seeks possible inclusion of South Korea in ‘Five Eyes’ intelligence sharing program

(aml) A draft bill from the House of Representatives in the US would require the US administration to consider expanding their intelligence sharing program. The so-called “Five Eyes” program currently includes Australia, Britain, Canada, and New Zealand but is now discussed to be expanded to South Korea, Japan, India, and Germany. In military intelligence, South Korea and the US are already cooperating under a seven-decades old alliance. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea extends peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, South Sudan

(aml) South Korean government agencies have agreed to extend their peacekeeping missions in Lebanon and South Sudan due to the regional situations and the high recognition that the troops have gained from the UN and the local governments. The 280-strong unit in Lebanon had been operating there since 2007 as part of the US force. The extension of the mission os subject to parliamentary consent every year. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea, Uzbekistan to upgrade bilateral relations

(aml) On the occasion of Uzbekistan's 30th anniversary of independence and 29th anniversary of the development of diplomatic ties between Uzbekistan and South Korea in 1992, Uzbekistan thanked South Korea for being one of the first countries to recognize Uzbekistan's independence. It also emphasized the strengthening relations between the two countries. After they upgraded their relationship to a strategic partnership in 2011, South Korean president Moon Jae-in had visited Uzbekistan in 2017, president Mirziyoyev returned the visit in 2019. A joint declaration was singed regarding the promotion and mutual protection of investments, the exploration of space for peaceful purposes, cooperation on science, technology and innovation and the creation of an Uzbek-Korean center for cooperation on the health sector. In May this year, president Mirziyoyev had joined the second international summit "Partnership for Green Growth and Global Goals 2030" on invitation of president Moon. [The Korea Times]

India holds first formal meeting with Taliban in Qatar

(lm) India announced its first diplomatic meeting with the Taliban on September 2, their first official talks since the group's return to power on August 15.

New Delhi's ambassador to Qatar met with Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, the head of the Taliban's political office, in Doha on August 31 at the request of the Taliban. Both sides discussed the safety, security and early return of Indian nationals who are stranded

in Afghanistan as well as travel prospects for Afghan minorities who want to visit India. [Al Jazeera] [Bloomberg]

The envoy also conveyed India's fears concerns around Afghanistan being used as a base of operations for modern Islamist terrorist organizations that could carry out attacks on neighboring countries. [CNBC]

The talks came days after Stanekzai – who was trained at the Indian Military Academy in the 1980s – was quoted in the local press as saying that the Taliban wanted to continue Afghanistan's political, economic and cultural ties with India. It was reportedly the first time a member of the Taliban leadership spoke about the future of India-Afghanistan relations since the group captured Kabul. [ThePrint]

The sudden collapse of the Western-backed government in Kabul and the Taliban's accompanying return to power has erased India's presence in Afghanistan: its consulates and embassies have shut, its diplomats were evacuated and the future of more than $3 billion invested in development projects is uncertain. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

In contrast to China, India had so far been mostly reluctant to engage with the Taliban, given the insurgent group's proximity to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, although there have been unconfirmed reports of backchannel talks taking place in June [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3].

Analysts say this reluctance had cost New Delhi – which in late July still did not buy into the narrative of Kabul's impending fall and the Taliban's immanent return to power – a role in the reconciliation process, and ultimately left it with little leverage in the emerging state of affairs. [AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4]

Japan, India to conduct first-ever air combat exercises; drills to feature Sukhoi Su-30 fighters

(lm) A joint air combat exercise between the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) will be held later this year, the first of its kind between the two countries, New Delhi and Tokyo seek to strengthen their security and diplomatic ties under the four-nation Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad).

There has been a notable uptick in military exchanges between Tokyo and New Delhi in recent months, both

bilaterally and under the Quad, which groups Japan and India with Australia and the United States [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. Units from the ground and naval forces of Japan and India have carried out a number of joint exercises, with the air forces now looking to strengthen their cooperation.

The two countries had initially proposed to hold the fighter exercise in mid-2020, but had to postpone their plans twice due to the coronavirus pandemic. The plan is now to pit six of the IAF's Sukhoi Su-30MKI against the JASDF's US-built F-15 Eagle fighters in exercises from a base in Ishikawa Prefecture, on the north coast of Japan.

Importantly, the exercises will mark the first time that Japanese pilots will be engaged in simulated combat against fighters analogous to the Sukhoi Su-30MKK used by the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF). [Aviacionline]

Analysts therefore suggest it is no coincidence that Tokyo was keen for the Russian-built fighter jets to take part in the drills: Japanese fighters have come up against Su-30s flown by China over the East China Sea and by Russia close to disputed islands, and Japanese pilots will hope to get a better understanding of these aircraft during the drills in case they ever meet in combat. [The Week]

Analysts, however, say it is unlikely that the JASDF pilots will learn all the Sukhoi Su-30's secrets during the drills. For when the IAF carried out similar maneuvers with the British Royal Air Force, Russia insisted that not all of the fighter's avionics capabilities be used so that some of its electronics and advanced radar could be kept secret. India – which relies heavily on Russia for its weapons systems [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5] – acceded to that request, and there is a good case to believe that Moscow made a similar demand this time. [South China Morning Post]

Pakistan's spy chief on unannounced visit to Afghanistan

(lm) The head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, flew into the Afghan capital, Kabul, on September 4, as the Taliban shift gears from insurgent group to governing power.

It was not clear what the agenda was, but a senior official in Pakistan had said earlier in the week that Hameed could help the Taliban reorganize the Afghan military. Other media reports claimed that the visit was

to mediate among various factions of the Taliban as they are not being able to come to a consensus. [Hindustan Times] [The Straits Times]

For the Taliban were expected to announce the formation of the new government – likely to be led by the outfit's co-founder Abdul Ghani Baradar – but had to postpone the announcement until September 11. This was the second time that the Taliban have delayed the formation of a new administration since they seized Kabul on August 15. [The Week]

The United States has long accused the ISI of being a major force behind the Taliban's two-decade fight against the Western-backed government in Kabul, although Islamabad has denied the charges. More recently, Pakistan's government has said that its influence over the movement has waned, particularly since the Taliban grew in confidence once Washington announced the date for the complete withdrawal of US and other foreign troops [see AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2].

Since then, analysts have said Islamabad would enjoy more sway over Kabul under Taliban rule, giving it a strong regional ally aligned with its Islamic values. At the same time, Pakistan's historic support for the Taliban does not, however, mean it is entirely relaxed about the group's takeover in Kabul. Pakistanis have suffered hugely over the years at the hands of Islamist terror groups launching attacks over the border from Afghanistan.

Thus, Islamabad has a significant interest in ensuring the new government in Kabul cracks down on groups like Al Qaeda and the local Islamic State offshoot (ISKP) as to not allow the tribal areas along its conflict-prone western border to descend into an ungoverned space.

The other great concern of Pakistan is a refugee crisis. The country already has about three million Afghan refugees from previous wars and, with its ravaged economy, it cannot afford to support any more. [BBC]

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi meets with British counterpart in Islamabad

(lm) British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab on September 2 arrived in Pakistan for a two-day visit to meet with his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Prime Minister Imran Khan. Discussions focused on securing a safe passage for those leaving

Afghanistan, combatting terrorism, the humanitarian situation and regional stability, among other issues. [BBC] [Dawn]

Before coming to Pakistan, the foreign secretary visited Qatar to discuss Afghanistan, and how regional partners can play a role in resolving the situation. [GOV.UK]

During his visit, the foreign secretary also met with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa on September 4, with the army chief promising that Islamabad would "assist" the Taliban with forming an inclusive administration in neighboring Afghanistan. [The Indian Express]

Raab's visit followed on a phone conversation between Prime Minister Imran Khan and his British counterparty Boris Johnson last month, in which Johnson urged Khan to not recognize the Taliban as Afghanistan's new government without wider agreement from the international community. That phone call came just days after Khan had portrayed the Taliban's victory as a triumph, claiming that Afghanis had "broken the shackles of slavery" [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3].

Raab's was the latest in a recent series of visits by foreign officials to Pakistan, following the Taliban's takeover of Kabul on August 15: Dutch Foreign Minister Sigrid Kaag arrived in the country on September 1 and promised to raise the issue of a possible refugee crisis in the region in the then-upcoming EU Foreign Ministers Meeting on September 3. [Kingdom of the Netherlands]

That visit followed on a stop-over by German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas last month. The German top diplomat also visited Turkey, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Qatar.

Bangladesh ready to work with Myanmar, others for durable solution to Rohingya crisis, foreign minister says

(ad/lm) Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has again laid stress on the international community's responsibility towards establishing accountability and justice for the human rights violations perpetrated against the Rohingya people in Myanmar.

While meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in Geneva on August 31, the top diplomat also his country's strong commitment to promoting the safe, dignified and voluntary return of the Rohingya.

He also conveyed Dhaka's readiness to work with Myanmar, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UN CHR), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and other concerned parties to bring about sustainable and durable solution. [United News of Bangladesh]

The meeting was part of a three-day visit by Momen to the Swiss capital, during which he also participated in the Asia-Pacific regional review meeting on the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action (IPoA) until September 2. The meeting was held in preparation for the fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5), which will take place in Doha early next year.

Momen also met with the Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and International Labour Organization (ILO) Director General Guy Ryder. [Dhaka Tribune]

On September 7 then, the Bangladeshi foreign minister met with his British counterpart Dominic Raab in London. While in London, Momen is also scheduled to have a separate meeting with Alok Sharma, President of the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), which will take place from October 31 to November 12 in Glasgow. [The Business Standard]

Before returning to Dhaka, Momen will stop-over in the Netherlands to meet with his Dutch counterpart Sigrid Kaag, and attend a board meeting of the Global Centre on Adaptation, an international organization hosted by Amsterdam that works as a solutions broker for climate change adaptation solutions. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Bangladesh's Army Chief on official visit in India

(ad/lm) Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed left Dhaka on September 3 for an official three-day visit to India.

The COAS, who is leading an eight-member delegation, will be meeting with India's national security adviser, the Indian chief of defence staff, chiefs of the three

military forces and other senior military officials to discuss bilateral relations and mutual cooperation between the armed forces of Bangladesh and India. [The Daily Star]

The trip to India comes just days after the general on August 26 had returned from an eight-day official visit to Turkey, which saw top military officials from both sides discussing possible areas of defense cooperation. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Early in April, Indian Chief of Army Staff General Naravane had visited Dhaka as the two countries were jointly commemorating the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan [see AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]. That trip followed on the heels of an official two-day Dhaka visit from Indian Prime Minister Modi, a trip that had sparked both violent protest and enthusiasm that relations between the two neighbors would continue to grow [see AiR No. 13, March/2021, 5].

US Congresswoman advocates stronger US-Sri Lanka ties

(egm) While addressing members of the Sri Lankan expatriate community in the United States, Congresswoman Dina Titus on August 30 called for the strengthening of the legislative partnership between the US and Sri Lanka, saying it was critical to encourage reforms to the rule of law and democracy in the South Asian nation. [The Island]

An active member of the US House of Representatives' Sub-Committee on Asia-Pacific – under whose purview Sri Lanka falls – Titus has previously advocated for further socio-economic engagement between the two nations to support Sri Lanka's democratic progress and peaceful governance.

Myanmar: Chinese Special Envoy to Myanmar to wrap-up trip

(nd) Chinese special envoy Sun Guoxiang wrapped up his unannounced one-week visit in Myanmar on August 28. Sun met junta leader Min Aung Hlaing and other senior figures, who "exchanged views... on the political landscape in Myanmar" and the political future of Myanmar, according to a statement released by Beijing's embassy in Myanmar. The statement did not mention meetings with the shadow National Unity

Government (NUG), consisting of lawmakers of Aung San Suu Kyi's ousted NLD.

Following the February 1 military coup and a crackdown on protesters, Myanmar has been isolated internationally by Western nations, while allies Russia and China have been accused of blocking the imposition of an arms embargo by the UN Security Council. China never labelled it a coup and was quick to recognize the military regime and resumed the pursuit of its strategic goals in Myanmar, not least with respect to the Belt and Road initiative, providing China with access to the Indian Ocean. Following the visit, the newly opened railway within the China-Myanmar corridor was tested. To continue this course, the recent visit signals China's full return to diplomatic normalcy in Myanmar. [Mizzima] [The Diplomat] [The Irrawaddy]

Indonesia, UAE to negotiate bilateral economic agreement

(nd) Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates announced to be in the course of negotiations for a new free trade and investment agreement. The two Muslim nations discussed a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, with a focus inter alia on sectors biotechnology, the digital economy, energy transition and space development, aiming to finalize it within a year. While Indonesia was eyeing to expand its reach beyond the Gulf countries to Africa, the UAE side was looking for a "five to 10-fold" increase in the bilateral trade volume, which was $2.93 billion last year.

Diplomatic ties were established 45 years ago, with only recently seeing a reinforcement as President Joko Widodo is seeking new sources of investments to finance 's an ambitious infrastructure program. UAE, however, is aiming to navigate itself off reliance on oil. Earlier this year, the UAE announced plans to invest $10 billion in Indonesia's newly-created sovereign wealth fund. [Nikkei Asia]

Indonesia, China to reach local currency settlement

(nd) In a local currency settlement (LCS) effective immediately, Indonesia and China will use either rupiah or yuan in their bilateral transactions, lessening their dependence on the US dollar.

The memorandum of understanding on the LCS was signed by Bank Indonesia and People's Bank of China September 2020. Both banks have selected a list of qualified banks as the appointed cross-currency dealers (ACCD). The framework allows for direct exchange rate quotation, and shall support currency stability due to the lesser dependence on a foreign currency. Conversion costs will be lower and direct investment in local currency facilitated.

China is one of Indonesia's biggest trading partners, with bilateral trade expected to reach $79 billion this year. Indonesia has already established LCS frameworks with Japan, Malaysia, Thailand. [Jakarta Globe]

Myanmar: Envoy to negotiate ceasefire for humanitarian relief

(nd) The military regime has agreed to a ceasefire until the end of the year to enable the distribution of humanitarian aid. The agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was brokered by the bloc's envoy Erywan Yusof. Erywan added, the ceasefire was to ensure safety and security to humanitarian workers, not a political ceasefire; he had also passed his proposal indirectly to parties opposed to the military regime. Additionally, Erywan is still negotiating terms for his planned visit in October, seeking access to detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi. ASEAN nations and dialogue partners had pledged $8 million in aid for Myanmar. Meanwhile, the National Unity Government (NUG) criticized the outcome, arguing it should have included an agreement to cease civilian arrests, and an assurance to allow Erywan to meet Suu Kyi, for the current violence was motivated politically.

The civilian government was ousted in a military coup in February, followed by a crackdown on protesters and civil society. The alleged irregularities at the general election cited by the military leaders were rejected by international monitors and the electoral commission in Myanmar. [Reuters] [The Irrawaddy]

Thailand: Chinese Embassy condemns critics over Chinese-made vaccine

(kk) The Chinese Embassy in Bangkok issued a statement on their official Facebook page, alleging some individuals and organizations in Thailand

attempt to discredit Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine without scientific-based evidence, undermining China's intention to help Thailand in fighting the pandemic. The embassy asked people who engaged in this activity to stop their actions. Eventually, the embassy said China will continue to cooperate with Thailand to fight the pandemic. [Facebook, in Thai] [Thai PBS World]

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Thailand Don Pramudwinai expressed concern over opposition parties' claims, Chinese-made vaccine were of poor quality, as he feared it would damage China-Thailand relations. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: New Chinese Ambassador to Thailand amid increasing western influence

(kk) On August 11, the Chinese Embassy in Bangkok formally introduced Han Zhiqiang, as the new Chinese ambassador to Thailand, nearly two years after the departure of former ambassador, Liu Jian, in December 2019. The long absence of a new ambassador created concern over a rift in Chinese-Thai relations.

There have been speculations that Thailand adopted a more pro-US stance, prompting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to issue a statement in June 2021, insisting that Thailand's foreign policy approach is to maintain a balanced position between the US and China.

Ambassador Han stressed that China and Thailand are as "one family" and pledged to provide "unconditional support" to Thailand in dealing with the pandemic in his first message upon arrival to Thailand.

The timing and background of the new Chinese ambassador's arrival nurtures the notion of China engaging more in light of growing western presence in Thailand threatening China's interests. Recently, Thai people have been favoring US donated vaccines, welcomed US support of a "free and open Mekong", which encourages Thailand and other mainland Southeast Asian countries to address security issues regarding Chinese dams. Han is an experienced diplomat who was prior assigned to Japan – one of the most complex bilateral relation with China – reflecting his skills in conflict management.

His appointment indicates that it will be more difficult for Thailand to maintain a balanced stance between

China and the West. [The Diplomat]

Laos, Vietnam strengthen digitalization development

(ct) On Wednesday, Minister of Technology and Communications Prof. Dr Boviengkham Vongdara and Vietnam's Minister of Information and Communications, Mr Nguyen Manh Hung signed an agreement during an online meeting. The two sides will strengthen their cooperation in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and foster further development in digitalisation, these include postal services, telecommunications, Internet, frequency allocation, satellite orbits, digital government, information security, digital transformation, and innovative digital technologies. They will also provide personnel training for the purpose of capacity building in digital development. [Vientiane Times]

The agreement was signed as preparations are underway to celebrate the Year of Solidarity in 2022, which will mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Laos and Vietnam as well as the 45th anniversary of the signing of the Laos-Vietnam Friendship and Cooperation Treaty. On 20 August, The Ministry of Technology and Communications' E-Government Centre signed an agreement with Vietnam's Star Telecom (UNITEL) to speed up the usage of digital technology by the government.

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

7-9 September 2021 @ 9:30 a.m. - 4:50 p.m. (GMT +7), DIGIWEEK, Indonesia

Governing Indonesia's Digital Economy

This online conference will discuss the importance of Indonesia's Digital Economy focusing on recent issues and policies that affect Indonesia's digital economy landscape.

Find more information in [Digiweek].

8 September 2021 @ 6:00 p.m.- 7:00 p.m. (GMT +3), Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy, Greece

20 years since 9/11: What does the withdrawal from Afghanistan mean?

This online panel with discuss the impact of the withdrawal from Afghanistan for the country and the region.

Learn more about the event at [Eliamep].

8 September 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. - 1.30 p.m. (GMT-4), Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center, USA

Intelligence Project Series - America's Retreat From Afghanistan: What's Next?

This webinar will address questions rising from US withdrawal from Afghanistan, such as :Will the Taliban in 2021 govern differently that 1996? Will new terrorist threats arise in South Asia? Will global al Qaida and ISIS be reinvigorated? Will America's withdrawal prove to be a strategic pivot which will strengthen America's ability to face more central challenges, or will it reflect America's Suez moment?

Access more information via [Belfer Center].

8 September 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. - 4.30 p.m. (GMT +2), Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

The Reform of the World Trade Organization: Key Priorities for the G20

This webinar will introduce to the key recommendations for the G20 in support of WTO reform, for specific issues like dispute settlement, trade tensions, and sustainable development.

Find more information at [IAI].

8 September 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. - 4.30 p.m. (GMT+2), Institute for Security Studies, South Africa

How to fix policing in South Africa

The July unrest raised many concerns about the police's ability to prevent and respond to widespread public violence and criminality. This virtual seminar will explore solutions to the multiple and complex challenges facing the police and whether there are opportunities for change at this point.

Visit [ISSA] for registration information.

8 September 2021 @ 5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m. (GMT-7), Pacific Council of International Policy, USA

How Could Less Red Tape Make Societies More Equal?

The online event offers insights into about how cutting down bureaucracy will significantly increase the balance and equality within the society, by boosting various aspects that contribute to it.

Find more information at [Pacific Council].

9 September 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Hudson Institute, USA

How Anti-Corruption Efforts in Latin America and the Carribean Can Accelerate COVID-19 Recovery

This webinar will explore how transparency and accountability have direct effects on the speed recovery of COVID-19 in the Caribbean and Latin American economy, with the president of the Inter-

American Development Bank as one of the main speakers.

Find out more information on [Hudson Institute].

9 September @ 3:00 p.m, (GMT +2), Italian Institute for International Political Studies, Italy

Dialogue with Geir O. Pedersen, Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary - General for Syria

In this online talk, Special Envoy for Syra Geir O. Pedersen will share insights and ideas based on decades of political and diplomatic experience.

Visit [ISPI] for more information.

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

The Global Impact of 9/11: Twenty Years On

This online panel will examine the lasting impact of 9/11 and the global war on terror internationally, with specific regional focus on the Middle East, South Asia, and Europe. It also will discuss the enduring legacy of 9/11 in terms of conflict and regional instability, jihadism, politics, and U.S. global leadership.

Further details on registration can be found at [Wilson Center].

9 September 2021 @ 7:00 p.m. (GMT+5.30), Observer Research Foundation

UNSC 2021: Takeaways from the Indian Presidency

This online event will provide insight into the takeways from India's presidency in the UN Security Council.

Further information can be found at [Observer Research Foundation].

9 September 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

A Clash of Contagions: The Impact of COVID-19 on Conflict

Adressing the question how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected democracy and peace, this event will further delineate the recent Mercy Corps reports and ongoing analysis in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Colombia.

Find more information at [Carnegie].

9 September 2021 @9 a.m. (GMT-8), Hoover Institution, USA

Return of the Taliban: A Conversation with Yalda Hakim, BBC World Service

This online event features a conversation with Yalda Hakim who travelled to Afghanistan weeks before the Taliban returned. She had an extensive exchange with a Taliban commander from the front line and will be sharing her experience and insights from being in the battlegrounds.

Visit [Hoover Institution] for more information.

10 September 2021 @ 10:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. (GMT -4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Uzbekistan: America's Strategic Partner in Central Asia

This online event will discuss how the US partnership will play a part in Uzbekistan's transition to a more market-based economy.

Visit [The Heritage Foundation] for more information.

10 September 2021 @ 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Brazil-USA Economic Relations: A Partnership for Development

This webinar will address the partnership between Brazil and USA aiming for development, with highly-

experienced and qualified speakers in the economics field.

Learn more information from [Wilson Center].

10 September 2021 @ 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. (GMT +9), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Symposium on Taliban's Return and the 20th Anniversary of 9/11

This symposium will be addressing detailed information, discussion, and perspectives on what is going on in Afghanistan. With the Taliban's return, what does it mean to Afghanistan's future prospects and what can the Australian Government do under these circumstances? Go find out!

Details on registration can be found at [AIIA].

13 September 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. - 1:00 p.m. (GMT +10), Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Australia

The road from 9/11: The evolution of counterterrorism and extremism

With respect to 20 years since the 9/11, this event will be discussing Global War on Terror in order to counter terrorism and extremism as well as strategies in response to the continuously evolving world.

Please check out [ASPI] for more information

14 September 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m. (GMT +9), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

The Current Situation of the Indo-Pacific, and the Importance of Future Cooperation between Japan and Australia in the Region

The recent changes in the geopolitical climate in the Indo-Pacific region has resulted in greater attention in maintaining its stability. Join this online discussion to find out how Japan and Australia's strategic partnership can be of help in this circumstance and bring economic prosperity to the Indo-pacific region.

Check out [AIIA] for more details.

14 September 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-8), Hoover Institution, USA

The Fracture Himalaya: How the Past Shadows the Present in India-China Relations

This online panel will offer insights into the origins of how the history between Indian and China affects their fractious relationship today.

Learn more about the event at [Hoover Institution].

14 September 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Fraser Institute, Canada

Is Capitalism Sustainable?

This online seminar will discuss the claim made by market advocates that capitalism harnesses self-interest for the common good. In a democracy, however, public choice theory suggests that capitalism has a strong tendency toward cronyism. Dismissing this objection by saying "That's not REAL capitalism!" misses the point, which is capitalism is unsustainable.

Find out more in [Fraser Institute].

Recent Book Releases

David Brophy, ***China Panic: Australia's Alternative to Paranoia and Pandering***, La Trobe University Press, 315 pages, June 1, 2021, reviewed in [The Intepreter].

Bill Birtles, ***The Truth About China: Propaganda, Patriotism and The Search For Answers***, Allen & Unwin, 281 pages, April 26, 2021, with a review in [Financial Review].

Calls for Papers

The **Department of Asian Studies of SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Department of Regional and Global Studies, Faculty of Political Science and International**

Studies, University of Warsaw, invites paper and panel proposals for their international conference ***"China in Contemporary International Relations: Beyond the Boundaries of Western and Non-Western Intellectual Traditions"*** to be held June 23-24, 2022. Closing date for submissions is November, 30, 2021. For more information, see [SWPS].

The **National Bureau of Economic Research** is calling for paper submissions for its ***45th Annual International Seminar on Macroeconomics***, scheduled for June 20-21, 2022. Deadline for submissions is September 30, 2021. Find more about the call at [NBER].

The **4th World Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities**, to be held on March 18-20, 2022 in Prague, Czech Republic, is seeking submissions in Social Sciences, Humanities, Language and Literature. Closing date is February 25, 2022. If you are interested, visit [SHCONF] for more details.

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations** welcomes applications for the position of ***Assistant Secretary General for Peacebuilding Support***, United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), which is based at United Nations Headquarters in New York. Applications are to be submitted no later than September 20, 2021. Further information can be found at [UN].

The **United Nations** is seeking applications for the position of ***Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)*** to be based in New York, USA. Closing date for applications is September 20, 2021. Further details of the vacancy are provided at [UN].

The **United Nations** invite to submit applications for the position of ***Deputy Executive Director***, UN-Habitat, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Application deadline is September 15, 2021. Find more about the vacancy at [UN].

The **European Commission** is recruiting a ***Director-General of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations***. Closing date for applications is September 24, 2021. For more information, visit [EC].

The **European Commission's Directorate-General for Budget** is seeking a ***Hors Classe Adviser***, with core

responsibilities lying in providing strategic advice on the implementation and possible evolution of the EU's diversified funding strategy, used to finance the expenditure under Next Generation EU. Applications can be submitted until September 24, 2021. If you are interested, you can find further details at [EC].

The **International Organization for Migration** is recruiting a ***Senior Migration Crisis Analyst*** to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Closing date for applications is September 16, 2021. For more details see [IOM].

The **International Labour Organization** is offering the position of a ***National Project Officer*** to be based in Sanaa to support its work in Yemen. Deadline for applications is September 23, 2021. Visit [ILO] for more information.

The **Pacific Department of the Asian Development Bank** is seeking a ***Regional Director*** for its Pacific Subregional Office in Suva, Fiji. Applications can be submitted until September 9, 2021. Further information is available at [ADB].

The School of Government and International Affairs of Durham University is hiring ***Lecturers in Politics or International Relations***. Application deadline is September 11, 2021. If you are interested, you can find further details at [Durham University].

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