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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

The AiR is presenting you this week's update on the latest events and developments in constitutional politics and governance, geopolitics and international relations in Asia.

I wish you an informative read. Special greetings are extended in this issue to readers in Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, and Saint Kitts and Nevis which all celebrate 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: K-Pop crackdown

(tj) China's social media giant, Weibo, has recently banned a fan account for South Korean K-pop band BTS for 60 days, citing illegal fundraising, days after the account raised over 1 million yuan in 3 minutes to customise a Jejeu Air aeroplane with images of Jimin to celebrate the pop star's 26th birthday. [Al Jazeera] [BBC 1]

This follows as Weibo suspended 22 other accounts supporting other K-pop groups such as Blackpink, GOT7 and EXO, all given 30-day bans, Chinese authorities citing reasons of 'irrational star-chasing behaviour'. [BBC 2] China's internet regulator says it has shut down and banned 1,793 so-called self-media accounts since August 27. [The Guardian]

This move comes amid a wider clampdown on the entertainment industry in China including the recent increase of regulatory pressure on celebrity fan culture, including Chinas internet watchdog releasing a 10-point plan in stopping the dissemination of "harmful" information in celebrity fan groups with concomitant commitments of social media platforms and the recent release of guidelines prohibiting the promotion of 'effeminate' men in Chinese media. [AiR No. 36, September 2021, 1] [BBC 2] [South China Morning Post]

China: Hong Kong authorities tighten grasp on democratic activists

(tj) On Wednesday, September 8, activist and barrister Chow Hang Tung of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements ('the Alliance') in China was arrested along with three others for reasons of organizing the annual fourth of June rally to commemorate those who died in the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

Sending a letter to Chow to the Alliance in August 2021, police accused the Alliance of being "an agent of foreign forces", requesting information about the Alliance's membership, finances and activities by 7 September 2021, stating that failure to procure such information by the deadline could result in a HK$100,000 penalty and six months in jail.

Chow refused to provide any information and was subsequently arrested hours before Chow was due to defend the detained opposition political, Gwyneth Ho, at a bail hearing for charges of subversion under a Beijing-imposed Hong Kong national security law.

All arrested plead not guilty, while their bail request denied by the court on the basis that the accused were violating the law by not submitting information requested by the authorities. [Reuters 1]

Hours later after Chow's arrest, Hong Kong police raided a museum commemorating 1989 Tiananmen victims. The reason for conducting the raid remains unclear, despite the museum operating independently from the Alliance and having all operations conducted online since June 2, 2021, for a purported licencing issue, reopened online as "8964 Museum". [Reuters 2]

Both of these police actions form part of broader efforts in Beijing's expansion into repressing

democratic activism, following last week's sentencing of 7 Hong Kong activists who participated in the 2019 Hong Kong protests. [AiR No. 36, September 2021, 1]

China: Beijing implements further restrictions on gaming and technology firms

(tj/dql) On Thursday, September 9, 2021, Beijing temporarily suspended approval of new online games after meetings held a day earlier between the publicity department of the Chinese Community Party and gaming watchdog National Press and Publication Administration and gaming firms, Tencent and NetEase.

Serving as the latest example of the ongoing regulatory pressure by the CCP on the online gaming sector, the meetings were convened to announce Beijing's suspension and to ensure that companies implemented strict rules to curb gaming addiction among minors and reinforcing the ban on under-18s playing video games for more than three hours a week

As a result of this recent decision, gaming shares of both Tencent Holdings and NetEase were significantly impacted, shares dropping by 8% and 11% respectively, re-energizing debate as to whether China's megalith esports sector can survive under Beijing's incremental restrictions. [Reuters 1] [South China Morning Post] [AiR No. 36, September 2021, 1] [Al Jazeera]

Furthermore, on Saturday, September 11, Beijing's industry ministry instructed technology companies including Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, Baidu, and ByteDance to revise purported monopolistic practices by ceasing blocking each other's website links from their platforms. [Reuters 2] [AiR No. 36, September 2021, 1] [South China Morning Post]

In a latest development, Beijing is reportedly planning to break up Alipay, the popular payments app owned by Jack Ma's Ant Group, and create a separate app for the company's highly profitable loans business. The plan will require Ant transfer the user data, on the basis of which lending decisions are made, to a new, partly state-owned credit scoring joint-venture. [Financial Times]

China: Leading publishing house retracts articles involving Chinese DNA research in Xinjiang

(tj/dql) Two scientific journals published by Springer Nature have retracted two articles on DNA research written Chinese scientists and involving the collection of genetic material of Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Both journals – the International Journal of Legal Medicine and Human Genetics – cited for the retraction concerns about whether full consent had been provided by the subjects.

The retraction of the studies points at the accusations against China of mass DNA profiling and blood sampling as part of a pervasive, modern-technology supported surveillance system and policy in Xinjiang. [New York Times] [Springer 1] [Springer 2]

China: Chinese developed mRNA vaccine to commence mass production in October

(tj) China's new mRNA vaccine known as 'ARCoVax' is expected to go into mass production in Yuxi, Southwest China's Yunnan Province in October 2021 with an expected annual capacity of 200 million doses to boost the country's mass vaccination drive.

Jointly developed by the Academy of Military Medical Sciences, Suzhou Abogen and Yunnan Walvax Biotechnology Co, the vaccine will be manufactured by Chinese biotechnology firm, Sinopharm.

Beijing has previously rolled out 'inactivated' vaccines under the auspices of Sinopharm, using dead viral particles to produce an immune response, administering more than 2 billion doses across the country. However, this new mRNA vaccine is purported to be much safer, precise, convenient, and less burdensome, utilising different biotechnology that only requiring a single dose and can be stored at room temperature for longer periods of time. [Financial Times] [Global Times]

Japan to tighten law against cyberbullying

(dql) Aiming to strengthen legal measures against online defamation, Japan's Justice Ministry announced to consult with an advisory body over a possible

amendment to the country's Penal Code to introduce harsher punishments for the crime of insult more severe.

A proposal will be laid out at general meeting of the Ministry's Legislative Council on September 16 which seeks to replace the current "penalty detention (for less than 30 days), or a fine (of less than 10,000 yen (about $90))" with "imprisonment with or without work for up to one year" and "a fine up to 300,000 yen (about $2,726)". [The Mainichi]

Japan: Lawmaker handed down 4-year jail sentence

(dql) The Tokyo District Court on September 7 sentenced lawmaker and former Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) member Tsukasa Akimoto to four years in prison and a fine of about 7.6 million yen ($69,000) after finding him guilty of accepting bribes worth 7.6 million yen between September 2017 and February 2018 from a Chinese gambling operator in return for support in entering the country's casino market. Akimoto was also found guilty of offering money to two former advisers to a Chinese company in exchange for providing false court testimony favorable to him last year.

Akimoto had been in charge of the government's initiative to legalize casinos at so-called integrated resorts with hotels and conference facilities while he was vice minister in the Cabinet Office for about a year from September 2017. Following bribery suspicions, he left the LDP in December 2019. [The Japan Times]

His conviction is a blow to the ruling LPD shortly ahead of the general election, likely to be held in the first half of November, following the party's leadership election on September 29, and the dissolution of the parliament by the new LDP leader, expected for November 7 or 14. [Kyodo News]

The race for the LDP leadership is, meanwhile in full swing, with Minister for Administrative Reform and Regulatory Reform Taro Kono, who previously had served as Foreign and Defense Minister and is currently in charge of the country's vaccination rollout, having officially declared his candidacy, making him the third contender following former Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and former female Abe cabinet member Sanae Takaichi. [Nippon.Com]

South Korea: Presidential contender Yoon charged for abuse of power

(aml) South Korea's Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials (CIO) has charged Yoon Seok-youl, presidential contender for the main opposition People Power Party (PPP) and former chief prosecutor for abuse of power, interference in the exercise of a right, divulgence of classified information while on public duty, violations of the Personal Information Protection Act and the Public Official Election Act. Yoon is suspected of prodding the PPP to lodge criminal complaints against pro-government figures ahead of the parliamentary election in April last year while serving as prosecutor general.

Yoon had been prosecutor general from 2019 until March 2021 when he resigned to join the PPP to run for presidency in next year's election. The investigators now try to determine whether the national prosecution service under Yoon played a role in the delivery of documents to the PPP. [The Korea Herald 1]

Yoon denied all allegations, which were raised by an anonymous informant and first published in Newsverse, a small internet-based news outlet, and called them a "political maneuver." [The Korea Times 1] [The Korea Times 2].

While Yoon's poll ratings suffer from the scandal, his intraparty rival and five-term lawmaker Hong Joon-pyo is gaining popularity after he announced his presidential bid three weeks ago. In latest opinion polls, Hong marks 15.6 percent, up 4.2 percentage points from a week earlier. He is currently in third place, behind Yoon with 24.2 percent and the leading democratic candidate Lee Jae-myung with 27 percent.

After losing the 2017 presidential election against president Moon Jae-in, Hong is now trying to appeal to the younger generation and polls show that he is indeed widely supported by younger voters in their 20s and 30s. [The Korea Herald 2] [The Korea Times 3]

South Korea: Ex-finance minister declares independent presidential bid

(aml) Former finance minister Kim Dong-yeon officially announced his candidacy for the presidential election in March next year as independent. Kim wowed to turn South Korea from a "republic of the privileged" into a "republic of opportunities". His plans include an

amendment of the constitution to limit the power of the presidency and the terms of legislators to strengthen people's power over elected officials.

He served as president Moon Jae-in's first finance minister from 2017 to 2018 and resigned after conflicts over the government's income-led growth policy. Kim, a life-long bureaucrat is known for being a self-made man because of his working-class background. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Lawmaker resigns over father's alleged land speculation

(aml) The main opposition People Power Party (PPP) has approved Yun Hee-suk's offer to resign because her father is allegedly linked to a land speculating scandal. Yun, a rising PPP member gave up her seat and presidential bid after she had been included in a group of PPP members who had themselves or their families been suspected of partaking in speculative real estate deals.

The PPP expelled five of it's members last month for there involvement in the scandal but decided that Yun's father was no object to disciplinary actions. However, she decided to give up her seat which leaves the PPP with 104 seats in the National Assembly. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Metro unions expected to walk out

(aml/dql) Seoul Metro has reached a last-ditch agreement with its unionized workers that prevented a strike originally planned to begin on Tuesday, September 14.

Under the agreement, the subway operators will scrap its the restructuring plan that included laying off almost 10 percent of its 16,700 employees, cutting benefits, freezing wages and partially outsourcing its works to the private sector as part of efforts to mitigate losses around 500 billion won ($435 million) in three consecutive years.

Seoul's metro unions had been expected to go on strikes to protest these restructuring plans. The unions attributed the ongoing losses to the company's generous discount policy and the free rides for people

over 65. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times] [AiR, No.32, August/2021, 2]

South Korea tests SLBM, launches frigate with anti-submarine torpedo

(aml) According to military sources, South Korea has successfully tested a submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) from a new submarine, becoming the 8th country worldwide and the first non-nuclear state to possess the weapon.

The SLBM has a flight range of around 500km and unlike conventional land-based missiles, it is harder to detect. North Korea had recently showcased its new types of SLBMs, but the South Korean defense ministry refuses to confirm that South Korea is developing their own, that could reach anywhere in North Korea. [The Korea Times 1] [The Korea Herald 1] [Nikkei Asia]

The South Korean Navy also launched a new 2,800-ton frigate with anti-submarine capabilities on Wednesday. The frigate will be able to carry various weapon, including ship-to-ship and ship-to-surface missiles and a helicopter for naval operations. It also has an improved capability to detect and attack submarines with a towed array sonar system and a long-range anti-submarine torpedo. The warship will be delivered to the Navy in 2023 after a trial period. [The Korea Herald 2] [The Korea Times 2]

South Korea: Advancing spy technology

(dql) South Korea's Defense Ministry revealed a military project under which South Korea will establish a fleet of ultra-small spy satellites to be used to quickly detect asymmetric threats from North Korea's nuclear weapons and missiles. The project is expected to start in 2022 and to launch the first ultra-small satellite in 2025.

The project reflects efforts of South Korea, which relies heavily on American reconnaissance assets to monitor North Korea, to possess an independent reconnaissance satellite system. The combination of a military reconnaissance satellite and ultra-small spy satellites would help Seoul to boost its early warning capabilities and quickly monitor signs of provocations.

The government plans to spend more than 1.3 billion USD on this project by 2030. [Aju Business Daily]

[Kyodo News]

Taiwan: President Tsai Ing-Wen accused of academic dishonesty

(tj) Taiwan's president Tsai Ing-Wen is facing renewed accusations of forging her doctoral dissertation and her academic credentials from the London School of Economics and Political Science ('LSE').

At an international press conference in Taipei on Thursday, September 9, eight pieces of evidence of Tsai's alleged academic fraud were presented including the change of topic of Tsai's doctoral dissertation on her resume, the reissuing of Tsai's fake doctoral certificate in 2015, and the forged "Kennedy document" that certifies Tsai's doctoral degree.

Dispelling the allegations, Taiwan's government stated that the LSE had issued a formal statement to confirm that Tsai was correctly awarded a PhD in Law in 1984. Tsai's academic credentials have been the subject of discussion in local media since June 2019 when Tsai was seeking re-election. [Global Times]

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

Bangladesh: Court accepts charges in DSA cases

(lm) A high-profile cartoonist and a Sweden-based journalist were among seven men charged on September 12 under Bangladesh's contentious Digital Security Act (DSA) 2018 that critics say is being used as a pretense to muzzle and intimidate critics of the government.

Following street protests, the cartoonist was granted bail in March after he had been held for ten months in pre-trial detention for drawing cartoons mocking a powerful businessman close to the government. According to his lawyer, he had developed major health problems and had been tortured in custody. [AiR No. 10, March/2021, 2]

The men were charged with publishing offensive and false information, defamation and intentionally publishing digital content that creates unrest or disorder. The court has also issued warrants of arrest against four of them who have been absconding. They face up to ten years in prison if found guilty. [The Daily Star] [The Straits Times]

Earlier the same day, the court accepted charges against a photojournalist allegeldy for publishing false information on his Facebook account regarding the arrest and alleged crimes of an expelled politician. [Dhaka Tribune]

Separately, a young man who has been in jail for nearly six and a half months, has moved the High Court for bail in a case filed under the DSA, after the lower courts repeatedly rejected his bail petitions. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Personal Data Protection Law leaves door ajar for misuse, observers say

(lm) Observers have expressed concerns that the data protection act currently being drafted by the government leaves loopholes for certain state agencies, including law enforcement. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh's government is currently preparing a comprehensive data protection and privacy law that regulates the collection, storage, and dissemination of personal data provided to various organizations, companies and corporations. [AiR No. 34, August/2021, 4]

The law gives citizenz the right to know about what kind of data is being collected about them, and whether any data profile is being created. To this end,

as per the proposed act, it will be mandatory for private and public organizations to appoint or designate individuals as data controllers and data protection officers.

Importantly, however, the draft contains a provision that will enable the government to officially publish gazettes exempting certain data controllers, or "class of data controllers" – persons responsible for collecting or processing personal data – from having to follow any provision of the law.

Moreover, the Director General (DG) of the Digital Security Agency – who will be investigating violations, levying fines and ensuring overall compliance – will be exempted from prosecution along with employees of the Data Protection Office for violations to be considered as "done in good faith".

Further, the law will not be applicable for government agencies building a case against someone under existing Bangladeshi laws. In other words, someone being prosecuted under any law will not have the right to data protection, meaning the specter of the contentious Digital Security Act (DSA) – where digital data is the main evidence used – would continue to loom large.

Another touchy feature of the draft law is that foreign organizations with a branch, agency or even a single piece of equipment in Bangladesh will have to store domestically generated user data on servers within the country. The law would also force the tech companies to hand over any piece of user or account information the government deems necessary. [Nikkei Asia]

Bangladesh is not alone in tightening social media controls: In neighboring India, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government enacted new IT rules to regulate content on social networks and other web services [see AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1]. In response, Facebook-owned WhatsApp filed a court complaint, arguing that new guidelines were unconstitutional and undermine the fundamental right to privacy [see AiR No. 22, June/2021, 1]. The proceedings are in the hearing stage.

Bangladesh: Suspension of BNP chairperson Khaleda's prison term extended for another six months

(ad/lm) The suspension of the prison sentence of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chairperson

Khaleda Zia will be extended for another six months, media reports said on September 12, citing Law Minister Anisul Huq. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

An arch-rival of Prime Minister Hasina's, Zia had served 25 months out of 17 years of prison sentences in two corruption cases when the government granted her conditional release for six months in March of last year to seek medical treatment in hospital under the supervision of the prison authorities [see AiR No. 13, March/2020, 5]. Since then, Zia´s temporary release was extended twice, the last time earlier in March [see AiR No. 10, March/2021, 2]. Her health condition deteriorated after she was infected with COVID-19 twice in April.

Last week then, the family of Khaleda filed a plea with the Home Ministry seeking an extension of her suspended prison sentence on the grounds of her treatment for post-coronavirus and other complications at home. Thereafter, the Law Ministry sent its recommendations to the Home Ministry. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: BNP general secretary calls for impartial Election Commission

(ad/lm) Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the Genera-Secretary of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), on September 9 said his party would have only one demand – arranging a credible election under a neutral government and an impartial Election Commission.

While speaking with journalists, the BNP leader alleged that the ruling Awami League – which he said had once struggled for establishing the people's rights and democracy – was now repressing the people and snatching their rights. Fakhrul also accused the leaders of the Awami League of engaging in widespread corruption, deviating from the party's old tradition and stance on democracy. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Using a similar language, BNP Standing Committee members, during their weekly meeting on September 11, said the Awami League was giving corruption an "institutional shape" in all spheres of the state. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: Prime Minister Hasina urges her Awami League to become stronger

(ad) Bangladesh's Prime Minister and President of the ruling Awami League Sheikh Hasina has called on her party leaders and workers to make the party stronger at the grassroots as the national election is approaching.

The prime minister spoke in person for the first time after more than a year at the occasion of Awami League's Central Working Committee meeting. During the ALCWC meeting Sheikh Hasina also reminded that no other political party besides the Awami League supported and stood by people in need while tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. [The Bangladesh Today]

The next Bangladeshi general election is scheduled to be held by December 2023

Bangladesh: Journalist acquited from ICT case

(lm) A Bangladeshi tribunal on September 9 acquitted a journalist in a case filed against him under the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, 2006, six years ago. In the verdict, the judge said that prosecution had failed to prove the charges against the accused. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Strategic Plan to ensure gender equality within Bangladesh Police released

(ad/lm) The Bangladesh Policewomen Network (BPWN), an organization dedicated to expanding the prospect for women police in profession, on September 7 released its Strategic Plan (2021-2023), which seeks to ensure higher gender equality within Bangladesh Police. [Dhaka Tribune] [United News of Bangladesh]

The purpose of Strategic Plan is to ensure higher gender equality through safety and security of women and girls on one hand and meaningful participation, representation, empowerment and contribution of female police officers, on the other. It will also act as an important steppingstone for Bangladesh Police to fulfil its commitments within the Bangladesh National Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325), over a 3-year period. [BPWN]

India: Every hour, 21 people evicted during COVID-19, advocacy group says

(lm) As many as 257,700 people were evicted across India between March 2020 and July 2021, and millions more are at risk of being uprooted or, as authorities eye projects for faster economic growth, housing rights campaigners warned on September 9. [Housing and Land Rights Network]

At a time when the country saw two deadly waves of the coronavirus pandemic, about 21 people per hour were forced to move out of their homes, the annual report of the advocacy group the Housing and Land Rights Network (HLRN) showed.

Most of these people were laborers in the informal sector and had been living in the demolished settlements for decades. Most of the colonies were cleared out to make way for development projects and some for environmental conservation [see AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3].

In nearly all cases, officials did not follow due process including giving sufficient notice, and a majority of those evicted did not receive compensation from the central government. Many evictions were carried out on court orders, including from the Supreme Court, even as several courts directed the authorities not to demolish homes during the pandemic. [The Straits Times]

Further, nearly 16 million people are at risk of being evicted and displaced, according to HLRN, including about two million whose claims to forest land have been rejected.

India: Police raid home, question four journalists in Indian-administered Kashmir

(lm) Police in Indian-administered Kashmir raided the homes of four journalists on September 8, triggering concerns of a further crackdown on press freedom in the disputed territory.

Police seized documents and electronic devices, including cellphones and laptops, belonging to the journalists and their spouses. After the raids in Srinagar, the region's main city, the four journalists

were summoned to local police stations where they were questioned.

According to police, the detentions were made in connection with a case filed last year under Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) – India's anti-terrorism law – and Section 506 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Section 13 of UAPA deals with suspects who "advocate, abet, advise or incite the commission of any unlawful activity" while 506 IPC is filed in the cases of "criminal intimidation". [The Wire]

The case was filed against the unknown handlers of a blog, which has been issuing death threats against Kashmir-based journalists and political activists, accusing them of acting as the "collaborators" of New Delhi.

The latest detentions have bolstered concerns of a further democratic backsliding and erosion of civil liberties in Kashmir. Journalists have said harassment and threats by police increased after the central government in 2019 unilaterally abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution and broke the state of Kashmir into two union territories. [Associated Press]

In June of last year, the government of Prime Minister Modi introduced a media policy that gives authorities more power to censure independent reporting.

In April then, in its influential annual rankings of countries across the world, the United States-based democracy watchdog Freedom House downgraded India from a free democracy to a "partially free democracy" citing the central government's crackdowns on freedom of speech – and in particular, expressions of dissent – as a key factor driving India's slide down the index.

India: Member of Supreme Court-appointed committee demands release of report on farm laws

(lm) A member of the Supreme Court-appointed committee on the three agriculture laws that triggered farmer protests last year has urged the Chief Justice of India to release the panel's report and forward it to the central government. [The Indian Express]

The committee was set up in January to mediate between the government and representatives of protesting farmers. At the time, the top court also temporarily paused the implementation of the three

agricultural laws that had caused farmers to stage a mass protest against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and block major roads leading to New Delhi since December of last year. [AiR No. 2, January/2021, 2]

During its two-month tenure, the committee held around two dozen meetings with different stakeholders. However, protest leaders refused participate in discussions with the committee, alleging that all four panel members were pro-government. [AiR No. 3, January/2021, 3].

The committee submitted its report on March 19, but no action has been taken to make the report public.

India: National Defense Academy admits women in historic ruling

(lm) India's central government on September 8 informed the Supreme Court that the three service chiefs had agreed to open the country's top military school to women seeking full-time career in the armed forces, in a move that signals a first step towards gender equality. [BBC] [The Times, $]

The decision comes less than a month after the top court issued an interim order allowing women to sit for examinations to the National Defence Academy (NDA), a joint defense service training institute that takes cadets to senior posts in the armed forces. Back then, the judges noted that the policy preventing women from accessing the elite institution was based on gender discrimination.

While the top court welcomed the government's decision, it also said it would like the armed forces to take a "more proactive approach towards gender equality" instead of the court directing them to do so. [Radio France Internationale]

The central government sought an exemption from allowing women candidates for this year's examination, which has been postponed until November. But the bench granted authorities two weeks to file an affidavit to frame guidelines for women candidates to take courses in the NDA. The next hearing in the matter will take place on September 22.

Women at the moment are inducted into the army through the Short Service Commission, and are only allowed permanent commission in the military's legal, medical and educational wings. Life-time service will offer women the same opportunities including ranks,

promotions and pensions, and be allowed to serve longer tenures with full retirement perks. [Hindustan Times] [JURIST]

Nepal: Government team to visit border region to study landgrab accusations

(lm) Nepal's government has formed a fact-finding committee to look into the alleged encroachment by China on territory along the Himalayan border between the two nations. The decision to set up the committee was taken on September 8 at a meeting of the Council of Ministers. [The Kathmandu Post] [The Hindu]

In August of last year, a report by Nepal's Survey Department had shed a light on China's salami-slicing activities on border regions, claiming that Beijing had been encroaching on about 33 hectares of Nepali land at multiple locations spreading over seven bordering districts [see AiR No. 34, August/2020, 4]. An inspection team that visited the region a month later found that the Chinese People's Liberation Army had indeed crossed the border and built nine concrete structures about one kilometer inside the country's northwestern Humla district, which borders the Tibet Autonomous Region.

But despite the findings, Nepal's Ministry of Foreign Affairs later said that an inter-ministerial team in 2016 had already found the buildings in question to be located approximately one kilometer inside the Chinese territory from the Nepal-China border [see AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5]. Thereafter, the opposition accused the then-ruling Communist Party of trying to cover-up the issue by ignoring accumulated evidence [see AiR No. 42, October/2020, 3].

Pakistan: Two soldiers killed in IED blast

(lm) A bomb blast in Pakistan's northwestern tribal district of North Waziristan has killed two soldiers. [Dawn] [Xinhua]

There has been an uptick in attacks on security forces in recent months:

Earlier this month, at least four paramilitary guards died, and 18 others were injured after a suicide bomber detonated his explosives near a security checkpoint in Pakistan's southwestern province of

Balochistan. Pakistan's leading Taliban group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), later claimed responsibility for the attack. [AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]

Sri Lanka: UN Human Rights chief calls for 'close attention' on country

(egm/lm) The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, on September 13 said she was looking forward to "concrete actions" from the Sri Lankan government on its promises, while urging members of the UN Human Rights Council (UN HRC) to continue paying "close attention" to the island nation. [OHCHR]

Delivering an update on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka at the 48th session of the UN HCR, Bachelet sought "credible progress" in advancing reconciliation, accountability and human rights in the island nation. The high commissioner also observed that the current challenges faced by Colombo were indicative of "the corrosive impact that militarisation and the lack of accountability continue to have on fundamental rights, civic space, democratic institutions, social cohesion and sustainable development." [The Hindu]

Bachelet also touched on Sri Lanka's terrorism law, the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), pointing to the prolonged detention of prominent human rights lawyer and government critic Hejaaz Hizbullah [see AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1], and of Ahnaf Jazeem, a poet detained without charge since May 2020.

Her statement is a follow-up on her scathing report in January this year, which inter alia put emphasis on the continued impunity, retrograde trends on human rights and transitional justice, in addition to increased militarization and the re-emergence of ethno-nationalist rhetoric. In the report, Bachelet also called for the International Criminal Court to investigate the commission of international crimes during the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983 to 2009) and the entrenched impunity. [AiR No. 5, February/2021, 1]

The report informed a debate in March, before the Council decisively approved a mandate to collect information and evidence of war crimes committed during the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983 to 2009). The vote was 22 countries in favor, with 11 against – including China, Bangladesh and Pakistan – and 14 abstentions, including India. [AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]

Prior to the opening of the 48th session, Human Rights Watch in a statement appealed to the United Nations

for the increased scrutiny over human rights issues in Sri Lanka. The rights watchdog alleged that under President Rajapaksa's administration, authorities are using their intelligence and security resources to surveil and intimidate victims of forced disappearances and their families as well as to suppress opposition from minorities such as the Tamils and human rights activists. [Human Rights Watch]

Thus far, the government has addressed diplomats of the UN HRC in relation to its current accountability mechanism consisting of a particular presidential commission in charge of reviewing previous commissions' reports on human rights violations and the implementation of their recommendations.

Sri Lanka: Political detainees tortured in custody, rights group says

(egm) The International Truth and Justice Project (ITJP) on September 8 published a report detailing incidents of torture by Sri Lankan police and military against political prisoners, just days ahead of the opening of the 48th UN Human Rights Council. [Al Jazeera] [ITJP] [JURIST]

The rights group took statements from 15 members of the Tamil minority community who were illegally detained and tortured since the government of former Defense Minister Gotabaya Rajapaksa took power in 2019. The report recounts in detail experiences of beatings, burnings, asphyxiation, and sexual assault while under political custody.

Together, their testimony is the most detailed account of alleged new abuses in the island nation since former wartime defense chief Gotabaya Rajapaksa became president in 2019. Details of the abuses include photographic evidence of scars, medical reports confirming instances of torture, and interviews with lawyers and human rights investigators describing the abusive treatment and torture that victims underwent.

The report notes that almost half of the victims were under the age of 25, meaning they were just children when the Sri Lankan Civil War ended in 2009. In fact, only three of the victims were ex-members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the main group fighting against the government during the war. Moreover, none of the victims was formally charged with any crime prior to or during their detention, although all but five of the victims had been involved in peaceful protests for democratic rights before they were abducted.

The government has denied the report's accusations, while spokespeople for Sri Lanka's military and police refuse to comment on the allegations.

The timing of the release assumes added significance, coming as it does just days before a session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which began on September 13 and will look at Sri Lanka. [see article above]

Sri Lanka: Navy intercepts foreign shipping vessel carrying narcotics

(egm) The Sri Lanka Navy has seized a foreign fishing vessel in international waters south of the country after receiving a tip-off from Sri Lanka Police. Seven foreign nationals aboard were apprehended along with more than 330 kilograms of narcotics and handed over to the Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) for further inspection. [DailyMirror]

According to authorities' suspicions, the vessel was meant to be stationed in international waters so smugglers could receive the narcotics and transfer them into Sri Lanka under pretense of multi-day fishing activities. [Sri Lanka Navy]

Sri Lanka's government currently follows a militarized approach to drug control which enables the military to partake in anti-drug trafficking operations such as the one above and to become involved with drug treatment and prevention. Under the present domestic legislation, any dealings with a variety of narcotic substances, from import, export, trafficking or possession of such is criminalized with a fine or imprisonment.

Due to the considerable number of people incarcerated for such offences since the increased militarization of drug control under President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's term, there has been a severe overcrowding within prisons in the country. With the outbreak of COVID-19 new guidelines were issued in January this year, aiming to ease restrictions on bails while still allowing State Councils to reject this outcome [see Harm Reduction International].

Earlier this month, India's counter-terrorism task force 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.

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. [AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]

Sri Lanka: Opposition parties testify before parliamentary committee

(egm) Six Sri Lankan opposition parties testified before a parliamentary committee charged with identifying reforms of the Election Laws and the Electoral system and Recommending Necessary Amendments.

The political parties invited included the United National Party, the EPDP, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress, the Muslim National Alliance and the Desha Vimukthi Janatha Party, and the MEP [see also ColomboPage 2].

Speaking before the Parliament Select Committee (PSC), representatives of the Mahajan Eksath Peramuna (MEP) asked for the use of a mixed electoral system with single and proportional representation. The representatives also expressed the need to retain the number of Parliament seats at 225 while establishing that 140 of those must be elected on a divisional basis, 70 based on district and the remaining 15 from the national list. [ColomboPage 1]

Additional suggestions also included the development of new amendments that abide by the present election system which would either establish Sri Lanka as one constituency or require the vote or Parliament Members to elect a president. Furthermore, the MEP, also addressed the opportunity of holding by-elections as indicated by the requirement in the future.

The remaining five parties which were present at the meeting presented additional opinions and recommendations. Among these, the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna declared that the time and date of elections should be scheduled according to the law without interference from public authorities and measures should also be set in place to prevent harmful advertising or slandering of candidates in any kind of media.

Meanwhile, the Deshavimukthi Janatha Party emphasized the demand for political representation for minority parties and the use of a common system to carry out Parliamentary, Provincial Council and Local Government elections.

Sri Lanka: Legendary musician Sunil Perera dies at age 68

(egm) Sunil Perera, one of Sri Lanka's internationally renowned musicians, passed away on September 6 aged 68 due to COCID-19-related complications. Forming part of the baila genre, his band known as The Gypsies produced songs reflecting life and politics in Sri Lanka. [DailyMirror]

Sunil himself openly discussed controversial topics such as sex and spoke out against the country's political system, notorious murderers, and political interventions within the police. He was also vocally against Sri Lanka's current administration, particularly President Gotabhaya Rajapaksa and his brother incumbent Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. [BBC]

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

Cambodia: Incitement charges for social media users

(nd) Seven activists were sentenced to 18 months in prison under incitement charges for using social media to criticize the government for its handling of the coronavirus pandemic. The activists created a Facebook page called "CNRP Fighters", criticizing government policies that led to nearly 2,000 deaths and 97,000 infections from COVID-19. One of the

convicted said he was merely making use of his freedom of speech, while accusing the court of collusively working together with Prime Minister Hun Sen's ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to silence critics.

CNRP was dissolved in 2017 by the Supreme Court over an alleged plot to overthrow the government. This was followed by a broader crackdown on civil society and enabled Hun Sen to win all seats in the 2018 elections.

Also on September 9, two CNRP activists were questioned for facilitating CNRP Deputy President Mu Sochua's return to Cambodia in December 2020, which eventually failed due to a refused visa. Both have been jailed for eight months after being convicted of "conspiracy." Other CNRP leader, including acting President Sam Rainsy, were sentenced in absentia in March to between 20 and 25 years in jail. Nine defendants were prohibited to return to Cambodia and banned from participating both active and passive in future elections.

A local rights group said the questioning did not comply with court procedures, and their convictions were "politically motivated". [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia: Prison fire kills 46 inmates, triggers debate on drug law

(nd) On September 8, a fire in an Indonesian prison has so far cost the lives of 44 inmates, injuring 80. In Tangerang Penitentiary, on the outskirts of Jakarta, the affected block held 122 inmates; three times the number it was built to contain. The penitentiary itself was designed to house 1,225 inmates but currently holds more than 2,000. The cause of fire was suspected to be an electrical fault, caused by a short circuit in one of the block's cells.

Most of the deceased were imprisoned for drug-related offences. Therefore, the fire triggered a debate about Indonesia's strict drug laws, including many small-time users and non-violent offenses. Indonesia's chief security minister Mahfud MD visited the site and said out of 200,000 inmates detained across the country, more than half were incarcerated for drug-related crimes. He pledged a re-evaluation in light of these numbers, also referring to introduce rehabilitation for drug-related offences to ease overcrowding.

Another strain of the problem is inadequate funding. According to the Institute for Crime and Policy Justice Research, Indonesia ranks 22nd out of 206 nations, while Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines are among the top 10 nations with the most overburdened prison systems in the world. In the Philippines, which has the world's second most congested prison, following the Republic of the Congo, the capacity is at 464 %. Due to the ongoing pandemic, Human Rights Watch foreshadowed "a major crisis" brewing in Asia's prisons due to overcrowding. According to the Thai government, nearly 3,000 inmates at two prisons Bangkok had tested positive for COVID-19, prompting the Thai government to release inmates to reduce the pressure on the system. [Reuters] [The Diplomat]

Indonesia to raise budget for Papua

(nd) The Indonesian Home Affairs Ministry announced a raise of the special autonomy budget of Papua. The 2.25% raise makes Papua the region with the eighth largest budget allocation. [Tempo]

Relations between Papua and Jakarta are tense. An announcement to review the special autonomy law for Papua spiked protests recently, also with respect to the labelling of the West Papua Liberation Army as terrorist organization. [See also AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3, AiR No. 34, August/2021, 4]

West Papua was granted Special Autonomy status 20 years ago, but people in the community say this status has failed to enable Papuan self-determination. The recently passed billed to prolong the Special Autonomy Law allows for the region to be organized into provincial or district divisions, thereby diluting Papuan central leadership.

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.

Indonesia: Petition to protect religious freedom in light of Ahmadiya Mosque attack

(nd) More than six thousand have so far signed an online petition calling on the government to protect religious freedom. The petition follows an attack on an

Ahmadi Mosque in West Kalimantan. [AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1] The police have so far arrested 21 suspects.

A researcher at Human Right Watch Indonesia pointed to the 2008 joint ministerial decree banning the Ahmadiya community from disseminating their beliefs and teachings, which has to be revoked. Ahmadiya 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. 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. [UCA News]

Laos: Lower trade deficit

(nd) According to information provided on the Lao Trade Portal, the country has a trade deficit of $ 24 million in August 2021. Exports from Laos in August totaled USD 428 million, while imports totaled USD 452 million, the lowest trade deficit of this year. Exports included copper ore, bananas, gold bars, cassava, clothing, coffee, sugars, rubber, tobacco, and fruits. Significant imports were land vehicles, electrical equipment and appliances, steel and steel products, fuel, vehicle spare parts, fertilizers, chemical equipment, and food factory waste. Most relevant countries with respect to trade are China, Thailand and Vietnam. [Laotian Times]

Laos to continue dam construction despite insecurities of buyer

(nd) Despite insecurities about Thailand's commitment to buy electricity, Laos continues construction of more hydroelectric dams. Currently, Laos is operating 78 dams, and, in an effort to become the "battery of Southeast Asia", has signed a memorandum of understanding for 246 other hydroelectric projects. The electricity created is mostly exported to neighboring countries, primarily Thailand. Last month, however, Thailand announced to not have decided yet whether to purchase the electricity, and has consequently not signed any power purchase agreements (PPAs). Additional buyers are China, Vietnam and Cambodia. Previously, transboundary

environmental impacts of the dam projects, including fluctuations in the water level of the Mekong, disruption of seasonal fish migration, and a lack of sedimentation, were cited by the Thai Mekong People's Network, which is opposed to the dam projects. Additionally, frequent flood disasters have occurred, some of which have killed villagers. Furthermore, reports of unpaid compensation were frequent. [Radio Free Asia]

Malaysia: Landmark ruling on automatic nationality transfer

(nd) In a landmark ruling, the Kuala Lumpur High Court rendered that women also enjoy the automatic right to transfer their citizenship to overseas-born children.

Along with 25 countries in the world, Malaysia does not grant mothers and fathers equal rights under the country's citizenship laws, with the constitution only giving the father the automatic right to confer citizenship, without mentioning the mother. Activists praised the ruling as a giant step toward gender equality.

The judge referred to existing laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender, in whose light the citizenship norms have to be interpreted, emphasizing there was no need for a policy change. It was not known yet if the government would appeal the decision. [Bloomberg] [Voice of America]

Malaysia: King agreed to no confidence vote, law minister says

(nd) The Law Minister claimed the country's king agreed that is was not necessary to hold a vote of confidence in parliament. This follows last weeks' tension around newly-appointed Prime Minister Ismail Yabri refusing to hold a vote of confidence, and the opposition asserting he was going against the monarch by doing so. [See also AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1] Still, opposition lawmakers want to see the King's agreement in writing.

The next parliamentary session is scheduled for September 13, without a confidence vote on the agenda. Similar to his predecessor Muhyiddin Yassin, Ismail only has a slim majority. According to analysts, due to the riff in his own party United Malays National

Organization (UMNO), Ismail was wary to lose majority support and likely to dodge a vote.

A lawmaker from Bersatu expects a general election to be called in next year, rendering a confidence vote unnecessary. Following a recent High Court decision on lowering the voter age, likely 7.5 million young voters will be added to the electoral rolls. [Benar News]

Malaysia: Government and opposition to sign cooperation pact

(nd) The coalition of newly-appointed Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob and the main opposition Pakatan Harapan announced to sign a cooperation pact to ensure stability. Following Muhyiddin Yassin's resignation, Ismail took over power with a comparably slim majority in parliament and a rather similar cabinet, prone to continuing political tension and instability. The King has called for a vote of confidence, which has not been complied with by Ismail's government yet.

The pact comes after Ismail announced to introduce political reforms including laws to limit a prime minister to ten years in office, while the pact promises inter alia bipartisan agreement on every bill to be introduced in parliament, to consider input from opposition parties on a national recovery council, and the immediate lowering of the minimum voting age from 21 to 18, which will affect the general election in 2023. Also, parliament will not be dissolved before August 2022. According to observers, the pact could help Ismail survive a vote of confidence, if scheduled.

Since the defeat of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) in the general election of 2018, which had governed for more than 60 years since independence, the country has been in political turmoil. [Reuters] [Benar News]

Myanmar: Repercussions of the declaration of "defense war"

(nd) Following the shadow government's declaration of a "people's defensive war" against the military regime, Southeast Asian and Western countries urged all sides in Myanmar to refrain from violence and allow in humanitarian aid. On September 8, the National Unity Government (NUG) declared a nationwide emergency, urging all civil servant to strike and all armed

resistance groups, the newly formed People's Defense Forces (PDF) and ethnic armies, to actively fight the military. [See also AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]

The army has suffered increasing numbers of attacks by PDF since the declaration of the NUG, intensifying the already ongoing fighting between the military and ethnic armed groups and PDF respectively, which was confirmed by both sides. Over the weekend, 50 more casualties of the military were reported, and at least ten of the local defense forces. Additionally, over 80 telecom masts owned by the military-owned Mytel have been destroyed.

Emerging street protests that same day could yet not have been sourced to the NUG's call, for it remains to be seen how much influence they have on society. While there were enthusiastic reactions on social media, observers doubt the NUG's capacity to fight the well-equipped military and the notion of "war" might backfire with the international community, narrowing political options. Already, the comments of the US and UK suggest they do not support the NUG's declaration, urging all sides to remain peaceful.

As reasons for this step, analysts cited the NUG's frustration with the junta's brutality and inaction by the international community. Since the coup in February, more than 1,000 protesters were killed and over 7,000 arrested. The PDFs were declared terrorist organizations.

Analysts are wary about a successful outcome for the NUG. In an effort to support its democratic legitimacy, the NUG in May released a military code of conduct stating that its forces "must not threaten, target or attack civilians" or target places where civilians might be located. With the now-declared war, civilian casualties among supports of the military are likely. Additionally, the PDFs are loosely organized, without an effective command, which makes it unclear if such a code can even be enforced. Moreover, with respect to the ethnic armies, each has its own interests, making it unpredictable if ultimately all will participate in the uprising. Even more problematic is the likely reaction of the military, which has historically always responded with overwhelming force. Such a reaction could develop into an even more intense civil war. [Reuters] [The Diplomat] [The Irrawaddy 1] [The Irrawaddy 2] [The Irrawaddy 3] [Radio Free Asia] [The Irrawaddy 4] [Voice of America]

Myanmar: Reporters blocked from covering vaccine drive for Muslim refugees

(nd) Reporters were blocked from covering a vaccination campaign for internally displaced people (IDP) in Myanmar's Rakhine state. According to local journalists, security forces prevented news crews to visit a camp for IDP. Reporters said they have been able to visit other IDP camps, which was not possible for the two housing Muslim Rohingya. In late August, a military spokesperson announced that Rohingya would be given COVID-19 vaccines, in light of the recent surge in cases, further straining Myanmar's already struggling health system.

According to estimations, Rakhine State has more than 200,000 Muslim refugees. Muslim Rohingya were targeted in 2017 in a campaign labelled by the UN as "a textbook example of ethnic cleansing." Since the military coup in February, over 7,000 people have been arrested, with dozens of journalists among them, both national and some foreign, including American national Danny Fenster, managing editor of Frontier Myanmar who is still in custody. [Voice of America]

Myanmar: Children of activists held hostage, says AAPP

(nd) According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), more than 100 civilians including children are being held hostage by Myanmar's military regime. The affected are the relatives of wanted anti-regime activists and arrested in place of the activists at their home. In the first week of February, the military took 177 people hostage, with 137 still remaining in custody. Of the 15 detained children, six are remaining in custody.

Human rights groups said this was not only violating children's rights but also international humanitarian law. Since the coup in February 2021, 1,058 people have been killed, while 6,343 remain in detention and 1,984 people are wanted on arrest warrants. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: NUG to lobby with governments for UN seat

(nd) The shadow National Unity Government (NUG) is campaigning with the world's democracies to support it to take control of the country's UN seat, also contested by the military, in the 76th UN General Assembly. According to NUG's foreign minister Zin Mar Aung, leading the recognition drive from exile, there is already diplomatic success. The Czech Republic, France and Australia have recognized their representatives. Zin Mar Aung announced to appoint a representative in the UK and Japan, and to continue talks with government officials elsewhere. Also, the US and Korea have reached out to NUG. Additionally, the many Myanmar nationals living abroad have been lobbying for the case of the NUG with foreign governments. This has led to a growing number of countries at the UN to support the Myanmar opposition as a critical voice, according to senior UN sources.

Such efforts remain important for the NUG since according to the international convention, only countries recognize states; additionally, it does not control Myanmar as a state nor a territory. On top of that, NUG has been engaging successfully with China, having been invited to an online summit for Asian political parties hosted by the Communist Party of China (CPC) on September 9. NUG intends to show that the military does not in fact control the country, which warrants for instabilities. [Nikkei Asia] [The Irrawaddy 1]

Over the weekend, 358 local and international civil society organizations addressed UN members and their representatives in an effort to keep Ambassador U Kyaw Moe Tun, who has been representing the NUG. [The Irrawaddy 2] Also, NUG is collecting evidence for the UN Council on Human Rights with respect to the military committing massacres and war crimes by junta forces conducting village raids. [The Irrawaddy 3]

According to diplomats, however, the US and China have come to an agreement to effectively block the military rulers from addressing the UN General Assembly in the following week, while the U Kyaw Moe Tun shall act more carefully, such as not to denounce the coup any more. This move, also endorsed by the EU, ASEAN and Russia, is a blow to the junta's quest for international legitimacy and will delay any effort to press for UN membership to recognize it as the legitimate government in Myanmar. According to several members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Chinese ambassadors were quietly lobbying at the UN to keep U Kyaw Moe Tun in the UN seat. During a recent visit to Myanmar, the Chinese envoy urged the military leaders to talk to the detained ousted leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and also appealed not to disband the NLD. China has in recent

years built solid ties with Suu Kyi and her NLD and has an interest in stability in the country due to its infrastructure projects, securing access to the Indian Ocean. [The Irrawaddy 4]

Myanmar: Ousted leader unable to appear at court

(nd) Ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi could not appear at a court hearing on September 13 for health reasons. Her legal team described her condition as dizziness caused by motion sickness after travelling in a vehicle after long absence, denying a serious sickness. On the following day, she was able to attend her court hearing, on the occasion of which she denied rumors about her being contacted by military forces. Suu Kyi has remained detained since the February 1 military coup on various charges, including violation of Covid-19 restrictions, possession of walkie-talkies, sedition and violating the Official Secret Act, as well as corruption, facing a potential prison sentence of 75 years. The single communication channel with her legal team is limited and monitored by authorities. [Reuters] [The Irrawaddy 1] [The Irrawaddy 2]

Myanmar: Timber sales to refinance military regime

(nd) The military regime will auction off 12,500 tons of hardwood on September 16 and 30. Myanma Timber Enterprise, the state-run entity which controls Myanmar's timber sales, will sell inter alia 1,500 tons of teak logs and 1,000 tons of sawn teak in an online auction. In May already, the military regime auctioned off nearly 10,300 tons of timber for around US$5 million, and another 14,000 tons in June, which reportedly originated from a stockpile of 200,000 tons of illegally-harvested timber seized by the ousted National League for Democracy government.

The sale of the illegally collected wood is an effort to reach further funding amid international sanctions, withdrawal of international companies and the striking civil disobedience movement, which has crippled the economy. According to the UK and US-based Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA), however, twenty-seven Italian timber traders imported teak into the EU despite existing regulations against it, with an estimated value between US$1.5 million and US$1.77 million between March and May 2021. The shadow National Unity government (NUG) has announced to

blacklist any bidder and government staff involved in the timber auctions. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: President Duterte to run for vice president, daughter denies presidential bid

(nd) Sara Duterte announced not to run for office in next year's election. This comes after her father accepted the ruling PDP-Laban party's nomination to run for vice president. Earlier, both Dutertes pledged they would not run if the respective other was to.

Sara Duterte still tops opinion polls, with speculations running high amid her mixed statements. Both positions are elected separately, with the president being limited to a single six-year-term. Rodrigo Duterte is suspected to plot for once to remain grip on power and also to be insulated from possible legal action against him at the ICC for his war on drugs.

Sara Duterte is not a member of PDP-Laban, but of the regional Hugpong ng Pagbabago party (HNP). Last week, she said several politicians have offered to be her running mate. With Senator Christopher "Bong" Go's decline of the PDP-Laban's presidential nomination, the party vacancy might pressure her to run. In her continued denial of her presidential bid, observers commented to be reminded of Rodrigo Duterte's last-minute replacement for the 2016 election candidate, which was widely dismissed as a choreographed stunt.

The deadline for candidacy filing is October 8, with substitution allowed until November 15. Until now, only Senator Panfilo Lacson has formally declared a presidential bid. Other prospective candidates include opposition party member and Vice President Leni Robredo, former Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr., and Manila Mayor Isko Moreno. [Reuters] [Nikkei Asia]

Singapore: Bill introduces against online foreign interference

(nd) A parliamentary bill was introduced against the use of hostile information campaigns and local proxies by foreign entities intending to interfere in domestic politics. In the latest effort to control potentially threatening online content, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) introduced the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Act. The MHA shall be equipped to

order internet service providers and social media platforms to disclose information and take down content. Such measures shall be in the event of a suspicion or reason to believe that content has been or is planned to be communicated by or on behalf of a foreign principal, which shall be published in Singapore, and public interest warrants for an interference. It shall not apply to a foreign individuals or foreign publications when reporting Singapore politics. According to MHA, foreign interference poses a significant threat to Singapore's political sovereignty and national security.

Since February 2019, the government has considered such a law in light of foreign state-linked disinformation efforts occurring in Singapore. In May 2019, the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) was enacted, which warrants similar measures from the authorities. Since October 2019, 70 orders under the POFMA have been issued.

Most prominently, US intelligence community found that ahead of the 2020 US presidential elections, foreign actors established troll farms who influenced votes by amplifying controversial domestic issues, which was repeated with relation to the US' governments handling of the pandemic. Inter alia, France and India also introduced laws against foreign interference. [Channel News Asia] [Bloomberg]

Thailand: Court denied warrants request for Asoke rally leaders

(kk) The South Bangkok District Court rejected a police request for warrants of arrest of anti-government protest leaders at Asoke intersection including Nattawut Saikuar – a leader of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) referred to as red-shirts. [Bangkok Post 1]

On September 8, the court suggested police to issue a summon for the two leaders first, considering that the sentence for the alleged charges are not more than three years. On the same day, Seksakol Atthawong – a former red-shirt leader and assistant minister at the Prime Minister's Office – registered complaints at Thong Lor police station for more serious charges including incitement, sedition, attempting to overthrow a government, along with violating the emergency decree and the disease control law against Nattawut, Sombat Boonngam-anong, and Thanat Thanakit-

amnuay – a royalist and military supporter turned democracy activist. [Bangkok Post 2]

Prior to the court's rejection of warrants, Nattawut cancelled off Wednesday's protest to avoid possible police and protestors confrontation due to his warrant. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Opposition to file legal action after censure debate

(kk) The Chief Opposition Whip stated that the opposition will seek legal action against Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha and some ministers, concerning the no-confidence motion last week. [Bangkok Post]

Sutin Klungsang – a Pheu Thai MP and Chief Opposition Whip – said that six opposition parties were satisfied with the MPs performance in the censure debate. Sutin said that Prayuth failed to provide answers to many inquiries including the purchasing price of Sinovac vaccine. The opposition will pursue legal action with regards to the purchase of Sinovac, the PM's use of power to intervene or failing to procureantigen test kits (ATK), also corruption in rubber projects and the procurement of weapons in the air force.

In the censure debate, Wisarn Techateerawat – a Pheu Thai MP – accused Prayuth of giving five million baht to MPs in exchange for supportive votes. [See AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1] Sutin said the party would collect more evidence and then lodge a complaint to the National Anti-Corruption Commission and the Constitutional Court, adding the opposition has solid evidence including images from CCTV and witnesses. [Thaipost, in Thai]

Thailand: Controversial Deputy Agriculture Minister dismissed from the cabinet

(kk) Thammanat Prompao – Deputy Agriculture Minister and the secretary-general of ruling Palang Pracharat Party (PPRP) – has been dismissed from the cabinet amid an unresolved conflict between him and Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha. Deputy Labour Minister, Narumon Pinyosinwa, was also dismissed.

The Royal Gazette published a royal command on September 9, stating that the PM said it would be

appropriate for some ministers to be removed, without giving a reason. Meanwhile, Thammanat had announced his resignation on the same day in a press conference at the parliament. He said the administration was not going in the direction he expected and he would like to return to serve as MP for his province – Phayao. Thammanat also responded that he had not decided yet whether to leave the ruling party. However, he hinted at the possibility of founding his own party. Thammanat commented his conflict with Prayuth has not been resolved. He insisted that his relationship with Prawit Wongsuwan – Deputy Prime Minister and the ruling party leader – remained intact. Thammanat is regarded as a protégé of Prawit [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World] [Matichon, in Thai]

In last week censure motion, Thammanat was accused of plotting to oust Prayuth, which he denied after Prayuth survived the confidence vote. [See AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]

Thailand: Charter amendment bill passes third reading

(kk) A joint sitting of Parliament approved the constitutional amendment bill, proposed by the Democrat Party, in the third reading. The vote was 472 to 33 in favor of the amendments, while 187 abstained. [Bangkok Post 1]

The bill, which passed the first reading in June and second reading in August, proposes amendments to Section 83 and 91, including raising the number of constituency MPs from 350 to 400 and adjusting the number of party-list MPs from 150 to 100. It also seeks to revert from the current single ballot for constituency and party-list MPs to two separate ballots – a system that is believed to benefit large and well-known parties capable of mounting energetic nation-wide election campaigns, including the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) and the main opposition Pheu Thai Party. [See AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5] [See also AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

Thammanat Prompow – the ruling party MP, dismissed from the cabinet one day prior to the sitting [See article above] – did not attend the parliament session for the charter amendment vote, along with three PPRP MPs who were his supporters. [Bangkok Post 2]

Some government legal experts believe the return of the two-ballot system would also favor Thammanat's possible new party, since the group of his supporters, who are rumored to leave the ruling party to form the

new party with him, has a political stronghold in the North of Thailand. [Bangkok Post 3]

Although the change would benefit all major parties, the constitution allows 250 senators appointed by the military to vote for prime minister. Hence, the ruling party, backed by the military, would still have an advantage in the next election. [Thairath, in Thai] [Bloomberg] The next step is for the bill to be forwarded for royal endorsement in 15 days.

Thailand: PM denied cabinet reshuffle rumors amid uncertainty over future

(kk) Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha insisted there will not be any cabinet reshuffle in the near future despite the recent dismissal of two deputy ministers. [See article in this edition]

Prayuth said the respective ministries had the situation covered as other deputies or ministers would be responsible for the tasks of removed deputy ministers. Prayuth also vowed to be more approachable for the ruling Palang Pracharat Party (PPRP) MPs and denied rumors of Prawit Wongsuwon's – Deputy Prime Minister and PPRP leader's – resignation. According to a political expert, if Prayuth can settle the internal rifts within the PPRP, the ruling party MPs would likely support him for another term. [Bangkok Post 1]

In addition, government spokesman Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana said the government would serve its full term. Thanakorn ensured the coalition parties are in support of Prayuth as prime minister. The spokesman added Prayuth prioritized the immediate tasks of dealing with the pandemic and reviving the economy and a house dissolution would affect these tasks, worsening the situation.

Meanwhile, Pheu Thai Party (PTP) deputy leader - Yutthapong Charasathien - believed the House will be dissolved next year ahead of the government's full term in March 2023. Yutthapong said PTP planned to propose a rewrite of the organic law on election after the parliament session on November 1, following the approved of the constitutional amendment bill. [See article above] He added that when the amended organic law is passed, it should bring about the process of next election. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Mass arrest at Din Daeng protest

(kk) Seventy-eight people were arrested at the Din Daeng protest following a clash between protestors and crowd control police on the night of September 11.

Thai Lawyers for Human Rights (TLHR) stated that 78 people were detained including twenty people who were not participating in the protest, for example, taxi drivers and food vendors at the rally site. Twenty-five of the detainees were volunteer medics and released later that night.

During the clash, police used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the protestors, who retaliated with firecrackers and small explosives. Local residents asked officers to leave as they were affected by tear gas and rubber bullets coming through their residence. Journalists claimed that the police attempted to block them from covering the protests by ordering them to leave the area. [Prachatai English]

On September 12, The Metropolitan Police Burau (MPB) said 52 protesters, including two Cambodians, were arrested. All would be charged for violating the emergency decree, and the two Cambodians deported back. Five police officers were injured during the clash, one seriously hurt by firecracker at his right eye. On the same day, two anti-government groups including The United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration, along with the Thalu Fah group sent observers to Din Daeng junction following the clash on the day before. [Bangkok Post]

Din Daeng intersection has been a spot for daily protests clashing with the police for the past month as a more hardcore anti-government group – Thalu Gaz – is based there. Earlier on September 7, police arrested eighteen protesters from Thalu Gaz group for allegedly damaging state properties with respect to the protest on September 6. [Thai PBS World] [See AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]

Thailand: New public health emergency law to replace decree

(kk) The Thai Council of State is currently reviewing a new public health emergency law, which shall replace the current emergency decree.

Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam indicated a new disease control law to replace the state of emergency may be presented in the next parliament session in November. Wissanu stated that the Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) may cease to exist legally once the emergency decree ends, which has been in place since March 2020. However, under the new law, another disease control unit larger than CCSA may be established.

The new health emergency law would allow the government to declare a state of public health emergency without invoking the emergency decree for the new law would be specifically designed to suit the country's current public health emergency. The current emergency decree empowers prime minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha to directly address an emergency situation, including banning public gatherings in certain areas, for which he was accused of protesters to use the decree for political purposes.

The Council of State, said that it is reviewing some additional points of the new law added by ministers before it proceeds to the parliament. The actual number of people infected with COVID-19 in Bangkok was estimated by an advisor to the CCSA to be as many as 7 million people – five to six times higher than 1.2 million of confirmed cases. [Bangkok Post] [Thai Examiner]

Thailand: Thai police alerted to arrest Myanmar's shadow govt members; migrants denied entry

(kk) Thai police have been notified to arrest those related to Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government (NUG) staying in Thailand, and to raid places suspected of sheltering NUG members. The parallel government comprises of ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) lawmakers and their ethnic allies, opposing Myanmar's military regime. Although, no one from NUG has been arrested yet, many are in fear of Thai authorities' crackdown. [The Irrawaddy]

Since the coup, thousands of people from Myanmar have attempted to cross the border to Thailand following military attacks and crackdowns on protests in late March. Thailand has not granted them any formal protection; some were forced to return to Myanmar. [Aljazeera]

Just recently, Thai authorities continued to deny entry for migrants from Myanmar fleeing political and economic hardships as many were arrested for crossing borders illegally over the past week. On September 12, six migrants from Myanmar were detained for entering the country illegally. They told the authorities that they had paid 18,000 to 20,000 baht each to brokers who promised them employment in Thailand. Earlier, fourteen migrants from Myanmar were also arrested while attempting to enter Malaysia from a southern Thai province. Human-trafficking gangs usually offer migrants from countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia jobs in Thailand in exchange for payment.

The United States recently downgraded Thailand's status from a Tier 2 nation to a Tier 2 Watchlist nation in its latest US Trafficking in Persons Report for numerous allegations of forced labor and debt bondage in commercial fishing and related industries. The report added that Thai authorities "did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts" to solve the problem. [UCA news]

Vietnam: Woman charged for links to provisional government

(nd) On September 10, a woman was arrested and charged with "carrying out activities to overthrow the government". She is the third person in 2021 to be charged for joining a US-based exile Vietnamese organization, which Vietnamese authorities have classified as an overseas terrorist force. Via Facebook, she connected with members of the Provisional Government of Vietnam (PGV).

The PGV was founded in 1991 by former soldiers and refugees loyal to the US-backed government of South Vietnam, which was overthrown by North Vietnam in 1975, and is based in California. They were labelled a terrorist organization in January 2018, following allegations of the group plotting to attack Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Son Nhat International Airport.

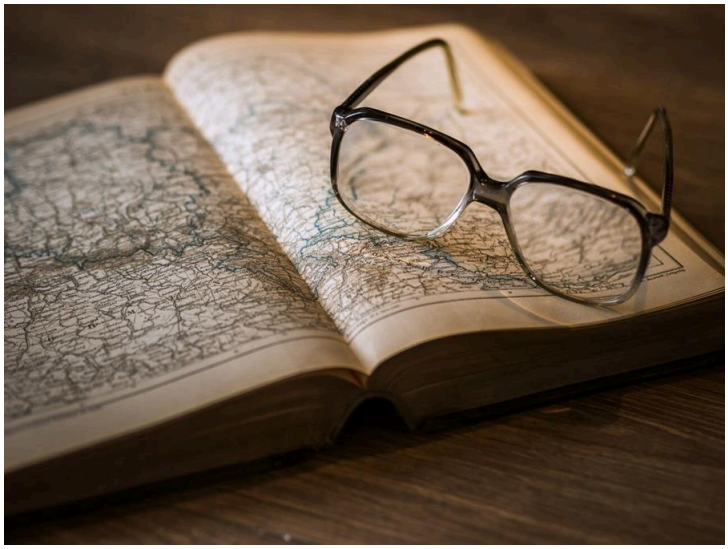
In recent years, a number of Vietnamese nationals were arrested and imprisoned for their involvement in the PGV. More generally, a number of Vietnamese citizens have been sentenced and jailed for political offenses on social media, including journalists, bloggers, and an ordinary citizen complaining about coronavirus policies. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam: Blogger's petition for case review denied

(nd) A petition to review legal proceedings for a detained blogger was denied. Authorities argued the detained does not have such a right since as a prisoner, he technically does not have the rights of a citizen of Vietnam. The blogger is serving a 11-year sentence for online articles critical of Vietnam's one-party communist government. However, authorities suggested him to file for an appeal of the original decision.

US-based watchdog group Freedom House has consistently rated Vietnam "not free" in the areas of internet and press freedom. The penal code contains rather vague provisions, which are used to detain writers and bloggers critical of the government. [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



China-US relations: Biden-Xi talk followed by quarrel over Taiwan question

(hg) Last week, China-US relations saw two major developments, a telephone conversation between both countries' leaders and a possible renaming of Taiwan's mission to the US prompting a fierce Chinese response.

Both developments emerge amid a low point of Sino-US relations – just a week ago, the NYT asked "What Comes After the War on Terrorism? War on China?" – ever closer growing Sino-Russian ties, a continuously growing military heft of both the Russian and Chinese, and a disastrous US withdrawal from Afghanistan that greatly confused close US allies such as India, Vietnam or the UK. [The New York Times]

While the White House keeps its read out on the second telephone call between the two presidents relatively brief [White House], the Chinese read out gives far more details starting with the information that it was US President Biden who called Chinese President Xi. [Foreign Ministry, People's Republic of China]

The White House reports: "The two leaders had a broad, strategic discussion in which they discussed areas where our interests converge, and areas where our interests, values, and perspectives diverge. They agreed to engage on both sets of issues openly and straightforwardly. This discussion, as President Biden made clear, was part of the United States' ongoing effort to responsibly manage the competition between the United States and the PRC". The read out continues that "President Biden underscored the United States' enduring interest in peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and the world and the two leaders discussed the responsibility of both nations to ensure competition does not veer into conflict." [White House]

The Chinese version reads in its key passages that: "Xi Jinping pointed out that for some time, due to the U.S. policy on China, the China-U.S. relationship has run into serious difficulty. This serves neither the fundamental interests of the people of the two countries, nor the common interests of countries around the world. China and the United States are respectively the biggest developing country and the biggest developed country. Whether they can handle their relationship well bears on the future of the world. It is a question of the century [...]. Getting the relationship right is not optional, but something we must do and must do well. [...]

On the basis of respecting each other's core concerns [...], the relevant departments of the two countries may continue their engagement and dialogue to advance coordination and cooperation on climate change, COVID-19 response and economic recovery as well as on major international and regional issues [...]

Biden noted that the world is changing fast. The U.S.-China relationship is the most consequential relationship in the world, and the future of the bulk of

the world will depend on how the United States and China get on with each other. The two countries have no interest in letting competition veer into conflict. The U.S. side has no intention to change the One-China policy. It is prepared to have more candid exchanges and constructive discussions with China to identify key and priority areas where cooperation is possible, avoid miscommunication, miscalculation and unintended conflict, and get U.S.-China relations back on track. The U.S. side looks forward to more discussions and cooperation with China to reach more common positions on climate change and other important issues. Both presidents agreed that in-depth communication between them on China-U.S. relations and major international issues is very important for steering the bilateral ties in the right direction." [Foreign Ministry, People's Republic of China]

Taken both read outs together, the talk was a mutual attempt to halt bilateral relations from plunging into conflict with the Chinese side claiming a US responsibility for the "serious difficulty" in the diplomatic relations that, according to both sides, are defining global wellbeing. [See for an analysis of the talks, Asia Times]

Just as Xi pointed out, however, that "respecting each other's core concerns" would be instrumental to handle bilateral difficulties, almost simultaneous developments in Washington severely challenged a seeming consensus on the need to avoid competition from transforming into conflict with the Financial Times reporting about a possible renaming of the Taiwanese mission in Washington. [Financial Times]

Apparently, White house advisor Kurt Campbell, one of Biden's key Asia policy maker, the National Security Council, and state department officials supported the plan to change the name of the "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office" into something akin to the recent rebranding of the Taiwanese mission in Lithuania as "Taiwanese Representative Office". [Financial Times] [The Defense Post]

By removing the established reference to "economic and cultural" relations and replacing "Taipei" by "Taiwan", the US would indeed effectively upgrade the status of the office to something more akin to an embassy, a move that would seriously challenge the very One-China policy Biden in his talk with Xi seems to have promised to not alter.

For the serious implications of such a renaming see a critical assessment by David Sacks in [Council on Foreign Relations].

Noteworthy among the Chinese responses is an editorial of the Global Times calling to “teach the US, Taiwan island, a real lesson if they call for it” in its headline. [Global Times]

The editorial goes remarkably fierce that China “has no other choice but take the challenge and prepare for a showdown with the US if it pushes the matter to the tipping point [...]. Should the US rename the island's mission [...]," the Chinese mainland should respond to it in a punitive way no lighter than it did with Lithuania. At that time, it's anticipated that China will recall its ambassador to the US and it is likely the "lowest diplomatic reaction." Otherwise, China cannot set up its prestige on the one-China principle it has always been upholding. [...]

Diplomatic measures alone are obviously not enough. If the US and the Taiwan island change the names, they are suspected of touching the red line of China's Anti-Secession Law, and the Chinese mainland will have to take severe economic and military measures to combat the arrogance of the US and the island of Taiwan. At that time, the mainland should impose severe economic sanctions on the island and even carry out an economic blockade on the island, depending on the circumstances.

Militarily, Chinese mainland's fighter jets should fly over the island of Taiwan and place the island's airspace into the patrol area of the PLA. This is a step that the mainland must take sooner or later. The name change provides the Chinese mainland with sufficient reason to strengthen our sovereign claim over the island of Taiwan. It is anticipated that the Taiwan army will not dare to stop the PLA fighter jets from flying over the island. If the Taiwan side dares open fire, the Chinese mainland will not hesitate to give "Taiwan independence" forces a decisive and destructive blow. [...]

Since China has declared that the Taiwan question is a matter of our core interests, we must take resolute actions to protect the bottom line of this exact national interest at any cost. [...]

It seems that sooner or later, the Taiwan Straits will be plunged into a storm that will change the situation there drastically. And judging from the current actions of the US and the island of Taiwan, we can be sure that even if they will have to take this step back, they will step forth again soon. Thus, right now we need to be fully prepared to blow them out of the water in the Taiwan Straits.” [Global Times]

China announces 31 million USD aid measure to Afghanistan

(dq) China's Foreign Ministry announced that China will provide nearly $31 million worth of food, winter weather supplies, and medicine, including 3 million vaccine doses in a first batch, to Afghanistan, reflecting Beijing's efforts to entrench its foothold in the central Asian country. [CNN]

The pledge comes at the heels of the formation of the new Afghan 33-member interim government, in which the key posts are filled with veterans of the militant group who oversaw the two-decade long war against the US and its allies. Among them, UN-blacklisted Mohammad Hasan Akhund, a close aide to the group's late founder Mullah Omar, was appointed as head of government, while Abdul Ghani Baradar, one of the group's co-founders, was made his deputy. UN-designated terrorist Sirajuddin Haqqani, son of the famous anti-Soviet warlord Jalaluddin Haqqani who founded Haqqani Network, serves as new acting interior minister. [Aljazeera] [BBC]

Despite concerns among foreign countries about the composition of the new cabinet without a female member, donor countries pledged over one billion USD to help Afghanistan at a conference in Geneva on Monday, September 13, opened by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres who warned that "[t]he people of Afghanistan are facing the collapse of an entire country — all at once." [France 24]

China-US relations: US warship first to break new Chinese ship ID regulations

(dql) The USS Benfold, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer sailed near the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea on September 8, making it the first ship to enter the waters and break a regulation which China on September instituted and which requires a range of – foreign – ships to identify their names, call signs, current positions, next ports of call and estimated times of arrival with Chinese authorities upon entering what Beijing considers as its territorial waters. [CNN] [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Meanwhile, four Chinese warships, were sailing in the waters off Alaska on August 29 and August 30 as photos taken by the US Coast Guard and posted on a Pentagon information service showed. The four vessels included a Type 055 destroyer, a Type 052D destroyer,

a Type 815 spy ship and a Type 903 replenishment ship.

According to the photo captions, the interactions between the US and Chinese vessels had been “safe and professional”, with their verbal communications being in accordance with international standards. [South China Morning Post]

China accused of misinformation operation attempting to exploit US Covid divisions

(dql) China is accused of being behind a global expansion of a large misinformation campaign on social media, focusing on false information about Covid-19 and calling on readers to join anti-US government protests. The campaign is believed to be of new quality and dynamic due to two facts identified by experts at FireEye, a California-based cybersecurity company, and Alphabet Inc., making these accusations. First, the activity is taking place not just on the big three social media giants, but on at least 30 social media platforms and dozens of additional websites and forums, while using not just English and Chinese, but also languages in countries so far less penetrated by the campaign, including German, Russian, Spanish, Korean, and Japanese, indicating an attempt to reach a variety of global audiences. Second, the attempt to physically mobilize protesters in the US provides early warning of more direct means of influence and an indication of an emerging intent to motivate real-world activity outside of China’s territories. [Fireeye] [Reuters]

China warns Vietnam not to complicate South China Sea situation by unilateral acts

(dql) During his three-day visit to Vietnam last week, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a conversation with Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh warned Hanoi against “unilateral actions regarding the South China Sea that could complicate or escalate the situation,” adding that both countries should “be vigilant to resist the intervention of extraterritorial forces.”

According to China’s Foreign Ministry, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh reassured in this meeting with Wang Yi that his country “attaches

importance to China's growing international status and influence," and "highly appreciates China's important role in international and regional affairs." He added that both countries "need to implement the consensus reached by top leaders, properly handle maritime issues, maintain maritime stability, conduct maritime cooperation in an orderly manner, promote the negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC) and contribute to the peace in the region."

Wang's statement comes at a time when Sino-US tensions over the South China Sea are growing and after Prime Minister Pahm declared that his country would not enter an alliance to confront Beijing, shortly before he met US Vice-President Kamala Harris during her visit to Vietnam late last month. In Vietnam Harris paid tribute to the late Sen. John McCain on the third anniversary of his death by visiting a monument in Vietnam where his plane was shot down in 1967, a move that might not have been perceived favorably on the Vietnamese side.

Wang's visit to Vietnam is part of his week-long Asian tour with visits also to Cambodia, Singapore and South Korea, and is widely seen as a countermove to US Vice President Kamala Harris' to Singapore and Vietnam three weeks ago during which she reiterated US accusations against China undermining the rule-based order and threating the sovereignty of nations. [Reuters] [Aljazeera] [South China Morning Post] [Foreign Ministry, People's Republic of China]

China, Cambodia vow to shield ties against outside pressure

(dql) During the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Cambodia on Sunday, September 12, and Monday, September 13, both countries demonstrated closed ranks, pledging to resist pressure from outside on their relationship, with Wang calling for ties that are "harder than steel" and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen reassuring that "Cambodia is willing to strengthen communication with China to prevent extraterritorial forces from disrupting regional affairs, and jointly safeguard regional peace and stability." He added that Cambodia would not stop to support "China's legitimate position" on its core interests, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. [South China Morning Post]

Wang Yi's visit comes shortly after the Cambodia National Assembly ratified the bilateral free trade

agreement (FTA) with China aimed at increasing the trade of goods by reducing and eliminating tariffs and non-tariff barriers. [Khmer Times]

China is Cambodia's largest investor as well as closest political partner in Southeast Asia, with Beijing's support allowing Phnom Penh to ignore Western accusation of human rights abuse. Cambodia, meanwhile, generally supports Beijing's geopolitical positions on issues such as its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Japan and Vietnam sign defense equipment export deal

(dal) Japan and Vietnam on Saturday, September 11, signed an agreement to enable the export of Japanese-made defense equipment and technology to the Southeast Asian country.

The deal signals growing efforts on both sides to deepen defense cooperation amid their shared concerns over China's military increasing military power and influence in Asia. Japan's Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi hailed the deal as signal of a "new level" of bilateral defense cooperation, adding that countries plan to conduct multinational joint exercises to deepen defense ties.

Interestingly, the deal was concluded during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Vietnam (see article above) reflecting Hanoi's self-confidence in its relations to China. [AP News]

Japan-Taiwan relations: Deepening ties demanded

(dql) In a statement further rising tensions between China and Japan over Taiwan, Japan's Deputy Defense Minsiter Yasuhide Nakayama – speaking on September 8 at virtual conference on Japan-Taiwan relations held at the Chang Yung-fa Foundation in Taipei, stated the fates of Japan and Taiwan were intertwined, comparing the geographic closeness between Japan and Taiwan with the distance between the tip of the nose and the lips, adding: "People say we are like friends, but we are not, we are family." [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Boosting indigenous naval capacities

(dql) Taiwan has commissioned a new domestically built navy warship reflecting efforts aimed at strengthening the island's indigenous defense capacity.

The Tuo Chiang-class corvette ROCS Ta Chiang – an agile, catamaran-style warship with a maximum displacement of 685 tons made by Taiwanese company Lungteh Shipbuilding – entered service on Thursday, September 9, following completed sea trials that began last December. It is the first warship in the Taiwanese navy to carry ship-launched variants of NCSIST's Sea Sword II anti-air missile, and armed with subsonic and supersonic anti-aircraft and anti-surface weapons, including torpedos as well as Hsiung Feng II and Hsiung Feng III missiles. Out of a total of 11, six more of these warships are expected to be delivered by 2023. [Newsweek]

On the day, a single People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) Shaanxi Y-8 anti-submarine warfare Chinese military plane entered Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ), the eighth intrusion by a Chinese warplane this month. A day earlier, four Chinese military planes entered Taiwan's ADIZ. [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2]

Meanwhile, the live-fire component of this year's annual Han Kuang military exercises, Taiwan's major war games involving all military branches, kicked off on Monday, September 13. The week-long drills will test the armed forces' capability to fend off a Chinese invasion. [Taipei Times]

South Korea, China possibly part of expert group monitoring Fukushima water release

(aml) The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)will send a group of experts, possibly including experts from South Korea and China to the destroyed Fukushima plant to supervise the planned water release. When Japan announced its plan to release the 1.25 million tons of water into the sea, South Korea and other neighboring countries reacted worried and angrily that they weren't included in Japan's plans. [AiR, No.35, August/2021, 5] The wastewater was collected since in 2011 a tsunami, triggered by an earthquake destroyed the nuclear power plant. The release is planned to start in 2023 and take several decades.

Because of internationally voiced concerns, Japan requested the IAES to assist in the process and monitor the procedure and safety. The 11-member multinational expert team will evaluate the safety of the release and its impact on people and the environment. The Japanese government insists that the wastewater will be filtered and diluted to remove the majority of radioactive substances. [The Korea Herald] [Reuters]

South Korea regrets Japan's decision to change term for wartime sexual slavery

(aml) South Korea's foreign ministry has expressed its regret over Japan's decision to approve of changes in history textbooks that refer to victims of wartime sexual slavery as "comfort woman" instead of "military comfort woman" and remove the term "forced conscription". The ministry called for "sincerity" in addressing historical issues between Japan and South Korea and stressed that the sexual slavery organized by the Japanese military and the forced labor during Japan's colonization of South Korea from 1910-1945 is an "undeniable fact" and has been recognized by Japan in the past as well. [The Korea Times]

South Korea, Poland/ASEAN countries to strengthen defense ties

(aml) South Korean vice minister Park Jae-min and his Polish counterpart Marcin Ochiepa agreed to further their countries cooperation in defense, as they attended the annual security forum of the Seoul Defense Dialogue (SDD). They plan to expand the bilateral defense cooperation in areas such as cyber security and Ochiepa vowed Poland's support for South Korea in security questions on the Korean peninsula. Poland has been part of the Neutral National Supervisory Commission, established in 1953, that monitors the implementation of the armistice agreement that halts the 1950-53 Korean War. [The Korea Herald 1]

On the occasion of the SDD, South Korea also held talks with the ASEAN-countries, that include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. They agreed to boost their cooperation in security and defense, as well as in non-security fields and vice minister Park vowed to continue South Korea's efforts

to ensure peace and stability in the Asian and Pacific regions. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea, Australia to strengthen defence cooperation

(aml) South Korean defence minister Suh Wook and his Australian counterpart Peter Craig Dutton agreed to further strengthen their countries cooperation in the security and defence industry during their meeting in Seoul on Monday. They talked about South Korea's participation in the large Australia – US naval exercise in July and in the Australia-led multilateral air exercise next year which will improve the militaries' interoperability. Additionally, the agreed to "launch discussions to come up with a new, future-oriented institutional mechanism" and Dutton vowed Australia's support for South Korea's effort with North Korea. [The Korea Times]

South Korea, Mongolia to upgrade ties to strategic partnership

(aml) South Korea president Moon Jae-in and his Mongolian counterpart president Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh issued a joint declaration to upgrade the countries' relations to a strategic partnership, after their virtual summit on Friday. In their first meeting after Khurelsukh had been elected as president in June, they agreed to further cooperate in health care, medical services, environmental issues, and science technology. Mongolia is South Korea's major partner in its Northern Policy to improve strategic ties with Central Asia and it contributed to the Northeast Asia Cooperation Initiative for Infectious Disease Control and Public Health which was initiated by Moon last year. Moon declared he wished to form synergies between South Korea's Northern Policy and Mongolia's 2050 vision, since more and more Korean firms are joining Mongolia's environmentally friendly infrastructure projects. Both agreed that the countries could both benefit from each other with South Korea's technologies and Mongolia's abundant natural resources. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald]

BRICS countries say Afghan territory should not be used by terror groups

(lm) Meeting for their 13th summit, leaders of the BRICS states on September 10 underscored the importance of preventing attempts by terror organizations to use Afghanistan as a base of operations to carry out attacks against other countries.

For the second year running, the annual gathering of the world's leading emerging economies – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – was held virtually due to the coronavirus pandemic. Chaired by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the summit was attended by Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, along with President Xi Jinping of China, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The group adopted the Counter Terrorism Action Plan, which last month had been adopted and recommended for consideration by the National Security Advisors of the five member-nations [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. The action plan aims to further strengthen existing mechanisms of cooperation in areas such as financing and combating terrorism, misuse of the internet by terrorists, curbing the travel of terrorists, border controls, protection of soft targets, information sharing, capacity building, and regional and international cooperation.

While there is much to be gained from mutual cooperation, the relationships between the five BRICS nations are marked by shifting alliances and diverging strategic interests – especially where Afghanistan is concerned. Although they share an interest in not having extremism take root in Afghanistan, that is, they have different interests beyond that. [Al Jazeera] [see also entries below]

Russia, for a start, will use the opportunity to step into the void left by the United States, according to observers, although Moscow is wary of the Islamist ideology of the Taliban and the threat posed by foreign militant groups to its central Asian allies such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Speaking at the opening of the summit, Russian President Putin said the withdrawal of the US and its allies from Afghanistan "has led to a new crisis" and the "entire international community will have to clear up the mess as a result." [Voice of America]

For China, then, the biggest worry in Afghanistan is the potential for a security vacuum to cause trouble within the sensitive border region of its Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]. But Beijing also has potentially beneficial economic ties it could deepen and develop with the new Taliban government, such as the mining and extraction of

Afghanistan's mineral deposits, including rare earth minerals that are vital to high-tech manufacturing. [CNBC]

New Delhi, meanwhile, finds itself isolated with the takeover by the Taliban, which has long been an anti-India group. New Delhi has emphasized that its main concern is about Afghan territory being used by terror groups that target India such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

Pakistan begins to reckon with destabilizing effects washing back across Afghan border

(lm) By the time international donors gathered in Geneva on September 13 to pledge more than $1 billion for Afghanistan under Taliban rule, neighboring Pakistan had already reached out with aid and discussions in future assistance.

Islamabad last week sent supplies such as cooking oil and medicine to authorities in Kabul, while Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi – alongside his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani – called on the international community to provide assistance without conditions and to unfreeze Afghanistan's assets. [Reuters]

Despite the close relationship it has maintained with the Taliban over the years, Pakistan is now fearful of an impending refugee crisis amid the tumult in Afghanistan. Just last week, thousands stranded at the Spin Boldak-Chaman land border crossing. And while Islamabad has said it will not accept any Afghan refugees, officials are expecting as many as 700,000 at a potential cost of $2.2 billion if the situation in Afghanistan worsens now that the Taliban are back in control. [NDTV]

The new arrivals will present political problems for Pakistan's leaders. For the country already officially houses 1.4 million Afghan refugees – the third-largest refugee population in the world – though the UN estimates that the real number is up to three million. Already, regional and ethnic leaders are telling the government to turn those fleeing away. [The New York Times]

Moreover, the migration issue has at times added tension along the border. On September 8 Pakistan's military fired artillery rounds over the border, citing firing from Afghanistan that killed five soldiers — the

latest in long-running hostilities as Pakistan forces target suspected insurgents hiding on the other side.

In order to reduce the number of militants and refugees crossing over, the Pakistani military is continuing to fence its long and porous land border with Afghanistan, despite Kabul's protests that the barrier – which runs along the boundary known as the Durand line – would divide families and friends of Afghanistan's largest ethnic group, the Pashtun. [AiR No. 19, May/2021, 2]

Against this backdrop, the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, flew into the Afghan capital, Kabul, earlier this month to remind the Taliban of Islamabad's role in its latest conquest of Afghanistan and to persuade them to talk to other Afghan groups and establish an inclusive government. [AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]

Just three days after the visit to Kabul by the Pakistani intelligence chief, the Taliban on September 7 announced a 33-member interim setup led by veteran political leader Mohammad Hasan Akhund, a close aide of the group's founder, Mullah Mohammad Omar. [Al Jazeera]

In a latest development, US State Secretary Antony Blinken – testifying before Congress on the victory of the Taliban in Afghanistan – said the US reassess its relationship with Pakistan in the coming weeks to formulate what role Washington would want Islamabad play in the future of Afghanistan. [Dawn]

India: MI6, CIA chiefs and Russia's Security Council secretary make beeline for New Delhi

(lm) Top security and intelligence officials of the United Kingdom, United States and Russia visited India last week to discuss the situation in Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover in Kabul and the implications for regional security.

Richard Moore, the Chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service, was the first to visit New Delhi over the past week, and he was followed on September 7 by US Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burn.

Burns' visit to New Delhi followed a trip last month to Kabul where he reportedly met with Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's top political leader. The

following day, Burns left for Pakistan, where he met with the head of the Pakistani Army, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, along with Pakistan's intelligence chief, Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed. [Voice of America]

Burn's trip to India also coincided with the visit of Nikolai Patrushev, the Director of the Russian Federal Security Service, a follow up to a phone conversation between President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5].

All three spy chiefs met with Indian National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, among others, to discuss security concerns linked to the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, according to Indian media reports. [India Today] [The Hindu] [The Diplomat] [ThePrint]

Russia, Belarus formally open ZAPAD 2021 military exercise

(lm) Russia and Belarus began a week-long drill across the territory of both countries and in the Baltic Sea on September 10. The live fire drills mark the culmination of a bigger three-month military exercise, ZAPAD 2021, and will run until September 16 on sites close to NATO and the European Union's borders.

ZAPAD is a quadrennial component of annual joint strategic exercises which rotate every year between Eastern, Central, Southern, and Western Military Districts. As each exercise focuses on one of these strategic directions and is led by that military district's Joint Strategic Command, ZAPAD focuses on Russia's Western Military District and Belarus and includes areas under the Northern Fleet's Joint Strategic Command. [War on the Rocks] [U.S. Naval Institute]

The exercise scenario consists of two phases: a three-day defensive phase against an attack from an opposing "Western" coalition, followed by a four-day counterattack by a joint Russian-Belarusian force to regain lost territory. The simulated opponents normally include neighboring NATO member states backed by the United States. [Reuters]

ZAPAD 2021 has a small but visible international component: About 500 military personnel from Armenia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Mongolia arrived in Russia on September 7 to also participate in the exercise, using Russian tanks and infantry fighting vehicles for its part of the event. Pakistan, China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka are observers. [TASS]

Beijing's decision not to dispatch army personal comes after more than 10,000 troops from Russia and China held a large operational-strategic exercise – West-Interaction 2021 – in China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in mid-August under the theme of jointly safeguarding regional security and stability [see AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]. That recently concluded exercise was rebranded by Russia and China as part of the ZAPAD series of events.

Indian, Australian Navies in bilateral exercise; days after MALABAR drills

(lm) Navies from Australia (RAN) and India (IN) on September 10 concluded the fourth iteration of their joint maritime exercise AUSINDEX. The four-day exercise include complex surface, sub-surface and air operations between ships, submarines, helicopters and long-range maritime patrol aircraft of the two participating navies. [Naval News] [Naval Technology]

Commenced in 2015 as a bilateral IN-RAN maritime exercise, AUSINDEX has grown in complexity over the years and the third edition of the exercise, held in 2019 in the Bay of Bengal, included anti-submarine drills for the first time.

The bilateral exercise comes less than a month after both navies, alongside with their counterparts from the United States and conducted a large joint naval exercise – Exercise Malabar – off the coast of Guam, seen as part of efforts to balance China's vast military and economic power in the region [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. For the second year in succession, the trilateral naval exercise involving the United States, Japan and India had been expanded to include Australia to include all members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), an informal group of the four largest democracies in the Indo-Pacific.

US climate envoy Kerry on second visit to India

(lm) The United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, visited India this week to push New Delhi to boost its climate ambitions, ahead of a key international climate conference.

There was "progress" in nudging India toward announcing a timetable in the coming weeks for

reaching net-zero carbon emissions, Kerry said in New Delhi, where he was meeting with India's Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav, in preparation for Prime Minister Modi's state visit to Washington on September 24. [Hindustan Times]

Pressure is mounting on governments to secure a major global breakthrough on emissions before the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) kicks off this November in Glasgow. In recent months, Kerry has therefore been crisscrossing the globe to press nations to step up their efforts to rein in carbon emissions, including a visit to Japan and China that ended last week [see AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]. [The Straits Times]

But so far, he has failed to secure concessions on two trips to India since April, with New Delhi arguing that advanced, postindustrial economies – which have historically contributed the most to global warming – need to provide more financing and technology transfers. India also maintains that ambitious climate commitments are unfair for a developing country that has some of the lowest carbon emissions when measured on a per capita basis. [AiR No. 15, April/2021, 2]

The US climate envoy said on September 13 that his country would set up a financing program with India to attract the international investment sought by New Delhi, which has set a target of deploying 450 gigawatts of renewable-energy capacity by 2030. [The Washington Post]

India to host G-20 summit in 2023; Piyush Goyal appointed sherpa for grouping

(dql) India's Ministry for External Affairs has announced that India will be the host of the G-20 summit for the first time in 2023 and will take over from Italy the Presidency of the grouping from December 1, 2022. Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has been appointed India's Sherpa for the G20.

Italy will host the next G20 Summit scheduled for October 30 to 31. [The Indian Express]

Pakistani delegation on unannounced visit to Myanmar

(dql) From September 1 to September 5, a high-level military delegation of Pakistan was reportedly on an unannounced visit to Myanmar, during which the delegation and Myanmar military leaders discussed advanced ordnance technology, aircraft repair and maintenance, and naval munitions. Separately, a training in explosives and mine-disposal techniques offered to a group of eight officers from the Myanmar Police Force is scheduled to take place in Karachi from September 10-30.

The visit is viewed by analysts as an attempt of Islamabad to reach out to military leaders in Myanmar to revive relations in the wake of the changing political landscape in Myanmar. Relations between Pakistan and Myanmar have been strained since the Rohingya crisis of 2017, which saw more than 700,000 Rohingya Muslims flee Myanmar to neighboring Bangladesh, following clearance operations of security forces in northern Rakhine State in response to a series of attacks carried out the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) on police outposts. [The Irrawaddy]

Bangladesh yet to decide on whether to recognize new Taliban government

(ad/lm) Bangladesh's State Minister for Foreign Affairs on September 8 said Dhaka was yet to reach a decision upon the recognition of the Taliban government, adding that his country was closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan following a "wait and watch" policy. [BD News 24] [The Daily Prothom]

In his analysis for the [Observer Research Foundation], Nahian Reza Sabriet identifies three relevant areas –regional stability, security, and connectivity – that will likely define the future of Bangladesh-Afghanistan relations.

Bangladesh holds the fourth Strategic Dialogue with United Kingdom

(ad/lm) Bangladesh and the United Kingdom held the fourth UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue on September 9 in London. The Strategic Dialogue involved a productive exchange of views across the entire breadth of bilateral relations between London and Dhaka, covering post-Brexit and post-COVID-19 cooperation, the situation of the Rohingya, and Afghanistan. [GOV.UK]

During the talks, the UK also underlined its concerns on the shrinking political space, continuation of extrajudicial killings and enforcement of the Digital Security Act against dissenting people in Bangladesh. [New Age]

Earlier in July, Dhaka had summoned the British Acting High Commissioner to convey disappointment over an "insinuating and misleading" comment on the current status of Khaleda Zia, the chairperson of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party who served two periods as prime minister. [AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3]

The 5th Strategic Dialogue will take place in Dhaka in 2022.

Bangladesh: Army Chief attends Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs´ Conference

(ad) Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed on September 11 embarked on a week-long official visit to the United States, where he is participating in the 12th iteration of the Indo-Pacific Army Chiefs' Conference (IPACC). [United News of Bangladesh]

Jointly organized by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USPACOM) and the Papua New Guinea Defense Force, the conference will bring together senior leaders from 17 countries of the Indo-Pacific region. The future of the operational environment is likely to be discussed during the conference.

Apart from attending the IPACC, the general is expected to hold separate meetings with his counterparts from different countries.

Bangladesh: United States provide 20 vessels to Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard

(ad/lm) The United States has donated 20 patrol vessels to the Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard to improve their abilities to conduct maritime security operations and increase their capacity to monitor, patrol and respond to threats within Bangladesh's coastal waters and Economic Exclusive Zone. Both countries will conduct joint exercises in the coming months to train sailors to utilize the new law

enforcement and counterterrorism tool. [Dhaka Tribune]

For more information on the Washington's security cooperation with Dhaka, please consider the Fact Sheet provided by the [U.S. Department of State].

Sri Lankan army delegation on official visit to India

(egm) India on September 5 said it had initiated a visit by a delegation of the Sri Lankan Armed Forces. Through this interaction the two nations aim to strengthen their defense cooperation, especially in the area of industrial expertise and promote further collaboration and understanding between their Armed Forces. [DailyMirror] [The Hindu]

During their visit, the 39 Sri Lankan officers are expected to become acquainted with the functioning of India's three Service Headquarters and the routine of tri-service field formations which focus on carrying out special operations. Additionally, the visit will also entail meetings with high-ranked Indian Armed Forces officials and tours to industries as well as cultural sites.

Prior to the scheduling of the visit, India's Deputy High Commissioner and Assistant Defense Adviser paid a call to the DSCSC offices on September 4 to discuss the relationship between India and Sri Lanka which the visits are meant to reinforce through India's 'Neighborhood First' policy.

The political relationship between the two neighboring countries has been historically constructed through their ties with Buddhism and recently marked by frequent high-level visits and exchanges such as the upcoming one. An integrated country strategy paper drafted under Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to India calls for frequent joint military exercises and high-level military exchanges. The defense and security collaboration between both countries falls in line with India's growing concerns over China's increasing influence on Sri Lanka. [Times of India]

Bangladesh's military contingent joins parade in Mexico

(ad) A 39-member strong combined military contingent left Bangladesh on September 10 to participate in the special parade marking Mexico's 200th anniversary of

independence which is celebrated on September 16. [Dhaka Tribune]

Sri Lanka to receive Rs. 1 billion from Switzerland to promote the rights of migrant workers

(egm) The governments of Switzerland and Sri Lanka signed an agreement on September 7 for the implementation of a project to ensure the rights of migrant workers and their families. A grant of 4.65 million Swiss Francs equating over 1 billion rupees, will be provided to Sri Lanka as stated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the State Minister of Foreign Employment Promotion and Market Diversification (MFE) and the Head of the Swiss Embassy in Sri Lanka. The allocation will go towards the Implementation of programs to Protect, Promote and Ensure the Rights of Sri Lankan Migrant Workers and Families in Sri Lanka according to the MoU which is overlooked by the Swiss Development and Cooperation Agency and the MFE. [ColomboPage]

Bangladesh´s Industries Minister meets Russian Ambassador in Dhaka

Bangladesh´s Industries Minister called upon Russian entrepreneurs to invest in numerous sectors in Bangladesh including fertilizer, cement, leather and ship building during his meeting with Russian ambassador in Dhaka.

On September 8, the Industries Minister Majid Mahmud Hamayun had a meeting with Russian ambassador in Dhaka regarding strengthening trade investments. Thus, both parties agreed on signing the bilateral investment agreement and already set up the following meeting during which issues related to trade, economics, scientific and technical cooperation between Bangladesh and Russia are likely to be discussed. [United News of Bangladesh]

Myanmar, Ukraine engaged in significant arms deal, report says

(nd) In a recent report, advocacy group Justice for Myanmar (JFM) shows that Ukraine has supplied Myanmar's military with arms and other crucial

components. The report, based on Ukrainian export records and other leaked documents from the Myanmar government, outlines a number of shipments of aircraft, ship, and tank parts to Myanmar since 2015 and after the coup despite Ukraine's vote in favor of a UN General Assembly resolution to halt arms sales to Myanmar.

The report adds that such were only the latest examples, with arms deals beginning already under the former National League for Democracy (NLD) government. A 2018 agreement between the two countries foresees seven points for military cooperation, "including research and development of arms, production of conventional weapons, the supply of arms and related equipment, and joint sales and marketing of arms in third countries." Also in the agreement is a potential setup of a plant in Myanmar to produce BTR-4 armored personnel carriers, MMT-40 tanks, and 2SIU self-propelled howitzers both for domestic use and export, which would significantly boost manufacturing capabilities. [Justice for Myanmar]

Mostly, deals have been facilitated through business relationships between Ukrainian arms companies and private Myanmar firms closely connected to the Tatmadaw. [The Diplomat]

Malaysia: Top Glove ban lifted

(nd) The US lifted sanctions from Malaysia's Top Glove, which can resume its US exports. According to US customs, Top Glove has improved labor and living condition in its facilities. In July 2020, US customs blocked imports from due to evidence of forced-labor at the firm's operations, including excessive overtime, retention of identification documents and abusive working and living conditions.

Recently, Top Glove began to compensate migrant workers, paying out 4.4 million ringgit (U.S. $1 million). The firm operates 41 plants in Malaysia, five in Thailand, and one each in China and Vietnam, employing 22,000 people.

Rights advocates welcomed the decision but highlighted that serious challenges to decent work and living conditions remained. Additionally, political calls for a policy review with respect to foreign workers were heard. The Human Resource Minister announced to cooperate with the International Labor Organization to formulate a national action plan on forced and child

labor, scheduled to be ready in the fourth quarter of 2021. [Benar News]

Philippines, China to provide more aid, investment

(nd) Following a tele-summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines will receive more financial aid and investment from China. Following the two leaders meeting in 2016, China announced $24 billion in aid and the speedy implementation of a number of infrastructure projects forming part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. The 2016 move was noteworthy given the Philippines are a historic US ally. While some support was given, many Filipinos believe this has fallen short of the original promise. This feeling was furthered by the growing tensions in the South China Sea, when 220 Chinese fishing vessels stayed at the contested Spratly Islands in March 2021.

The new pledge comes amid the long-debated prolonging of the US-Philippine Visiting Forces Agreement of 1999, which was inked recently. According to analysts, this renewed support for the agreement and thereby the US might worry China. [Voice of America]

Negative repercussions of Chinese investment in Laos

(nd) While Chinese investment in Laos since 1989 has reached $16 billion, according to Lao sources, little actually has benefitted ordinary citizens, with environmental downsides not calculated. Laos' GDP was $19 billion in 2020.

For the construction of the high-speed Lao-China railway, mostly Chinese workers are employed, and unskilled Lao workers paid less. Chinese-invested banana plantations in northern Laos have harmed the environment and health of people through the overuse of herbicides and pesticides, while the community is not involved in the management of the plantation. Similarly, through Chinese hydropower and mining projects, many citizens lost their lands, often without compensation.

Additionally, Laos has accumulated an estimated debt sum of at least $400 million in loans this year, which cannot be repaid due to the economic shutdown

following the pandemic. Additional $1 billion are becoming due each year from 2022-2025. China is the biggest lender, followed by Thailand and Vietnam. [Radio Free Asia]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

15 September 2021 @ 8:00-9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Asia Society Policy Institute, USA

Supply Chains: A Shifting Indo-Pacific

As a result of the pandemic, geo-political tensions, and many other disruptions, emerging economies in the Indo-Pacific region have made changes to their supply chain movements. This event is going to discuss the developments, measures, and challenges that come from this dynamic shift.

Further information is available at [ASPI].

21 September 2021 @ 8:00-9:00 a.m. (GMT+10), Asia Society, Australia

Reimagining Supply Chains in the Age of Geoeconomics

With the increasing international economic competition in the Indo-Pacific region and Australia's strategic interests being deeply intertwined with the changes in supply chains and geoeconomics, how are

investments and trade strategies going to match the new reality?

For more information please check [AS].

21 September 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), National Endowment for Democracy, USA

Cart Gershman Democracy Symposium: The Fight for a Democratic Future

This Symposium is going to discuss the challenges that come with fighting for democracy and freedom worldwide, considering the rapid depletion of democratic rights and institutions in countries like Hungary and Turkey.

For more details on the event see [NED].

20 September 2021 @ 1:05 - 2:15 p.m. (GMT+1), IPPR, England

IPPR at Party Conferences 2021 - Liberal Democrats

This conference will be looking further into policy issues and questions that dominate the political landscape of Liberal Democrats.

Visit [IPPR] for more information.

20 September 2021 @ 1:05 - 2:15 p.m. (GMT+1), Singapore Institute of International Affairs, Singapore

Embracing ESG: Emerging Challenges in ASEAN's Supply Chains

In recent months, there have been concerns about labour rights in ASEAN's manufacturing and food industries that have been brought up by the American and European regulators. This event is going to discuss the comparisons of how such issues are resolved in developed economies and what can be done by ASEAN to alleviate the situation.

See [SIIA] for more details.

15 September 2021 @ 1:00 - 2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessment, USA

Report Release Webinar - Mind the Power Gap: The American Energy Arsenal and Chinese Insecurity

This event will be addressing the security implications of the United State's energy portfolio in relation to China's efforts to expand its energy assets and position as a producer of clean energy.

Check [CSBS] for more details.

16 September 2021 @ 4:00 - 6:30 p.m. (GMT+9), Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan

The Next Chapter of Sustainable FInance in the EU and Japan: Key Implication for Financial Market Actors and Industry

As a response to further facilitate the flow of investments towards sustainable activities the EU and Japan has developed new measures and financial policies. The webinar will discuss the practical implications of the policy developments, on financial institutions and other industries.

Visit [IGES] to learn more.

17 September 2021 @ 3:30 - 5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), National University of Singapore, Singapore

Chinese Public Opinion about US-China Relations from Trump to Biden

With the continuing deterioration of the relationship between the United States and China during Trump presidency, this seminar will address several findings that show the rebound of the US-China bilateral relationship after Biden took office and what the public opinion has to say.

See [NUS] for more information.

15 September 2021 @ 1:00 -2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), IISS, England

Conflict in the Central African Republic: domestic insurgency, foreign intervention and peace prospects

This webinar will be discussing both domestic and international dynamics of the conflict in the Central African Republic, considering its root causes, geopolitical dimensions, foreign influence, and the outlook for peace in the country.

Visit [IISS] to see more.

15 September 2021 @ 9:30 - 10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Stimson, USA

Launch of the Mekong - U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue Summary Report

This conference will discuss the summary report and explore the opportunities of collaboration in finding solutions to issues like infrastructure, human resources, connectivity, and many more between the United States, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Go on [Stimson] to learn more.

16 September 2021 @ 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Stimson, USA

U.S. - Pakistan Relations after the Taliban Takeover

The discussion in this event will be focusing on implications of the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan's response to developments, and how this will affect the dynamic between

US-Pakistan relations in the future.

Visit [Stimson] for more details.

19 -20 September 2021 @ 8:00 a.m. -8:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Ocean Nations: An Indo-Pacific Islands Dialogue

This special two-way dialogue will be addressing the security, perceptions of regional priorities, and challenges of the Indo-Pacific and island nations. It is a platform where government and non-governmental actors exchange experiences exploring economic and diplomatic dynamics of the island states and external stakeholders.

Check [CEPI] for more information.

16 September 2021 @ 1:00 -2:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center, USA

UNRWA, Its Mandate, Successes, and Challenges

With the increasing intertwine relationship between public policy and public health, this event will be sharing some unique perspectives on the future strategies to support Palestinian refugees.

Find more information at [Belfer Center].

15-17 September 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. (GMT+9), Asian Development Bank Institute, Japan

Conference on improving the Quality of Basic Education in Southeast Asia

This webinar will be highlighting the contemporary analyses on improving the quality of education across the Southeast Asian nations, as well as policy and measures from the region on how to proceed forward.

To learn more, visit [ADBI].

21 September 2021 @ 2:00 - 4:30 p.m. (GMT+8), Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Singapore

RSIS Roundtable on "Defining Maritime Security: Regional Divergence on Commonalities"

RSIS Roundtable will be discussing further into the national definitions and usage of the term maritime security. It will be answering questions in order to discover regional divergences and unveil commonalities.

To find more details, check [RSIS].

16 September 2021 @ 10:00 -10:45 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

New Approaches to Understanding Chinese State Capitalism

As Chinese state capitalism blurs the relationship between commercial actors and the party state, this webinar will be discussing opportunities of using new data solutions in resolving the challenge of Chinese state capitalism.

Learn more about the event at [CSIS].

21 September 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Devex, USA

Mapping to Strengthen Food Systems: Harnessing Geospatial Data to Achieve SDG 2, Zero Hunger

Although enough food is produced everyday to feed everyone on the planet, hunger is still in a constant rise with almost 690 million people going hungry. This ecosystem event is going to address how geospatial data can be used to strengthen evidence-based decision making to create more resilient food systems that will leave no one hungry.

Visit [Devex] for more details.

20 September 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Devex, USA

Building the City of the Future: Step up Now through Collaboration and Innovation

As challenges arise in the recent years followed by a swell population growth by 2.5 billion, this event is going to explore various ways cities can incorporate innovative strategies to manage urban challenges and accelerate progress on the SDGs.

Check [Devex] for more details on the event.

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

Indonesia's Energy Transition and Climate Governance Reform

As a result of Indonesia's dependence on fossil fuel, it has become significantly challenging to segway towards renewable energy and sustainability. This webinar is bringing together Indonesian policymakers and scholars for a thorough discussion on climate governance reform and energy transition in the country.

Learn more details on [ISEAS].

21 September 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. -12:30 p.m. (GMT -5), Wilson Center, USA

Worlds Apart: A Documentary History of US-Iran Relations, 1978-2018

This event will be highlighting the core of US and Iran troubled rivalry, exploring this complicated relationship accessibly and innovatively.

Check [Wilson] for more details on the event.

16 September 2021 @ 8:00 - 9:15 p.m. (GMT-4), Brookings, USA

Becoming a digital power: Japan's path for domestic transformation and international influence

Digital transformation has never been more important for Japan as it will determine its ability to adjust to significant demographic changes due to ageing and contracting population. This event will be examining the opportunities and challenges for Japan to realize its digital transformation and to influence the rules of digital trade.

Please visit [Brookings] to find out more.

16 September 2021 @ 8:30 - 9:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Brookings, USA

Assessing the US-ROK partnership in the global trade agenda: A conversation with South Korean Trade Minister Han-Koo Yeo

Regardless of the economic ties from the US - Korea Free Trade Agreement, it is vital for this partnership to be constantly renewed to adjust to rising challenges and new opportunities. This webinar will be highlighting the variety of pressing trade issues and the importance to strengthen US-Korea economic ties.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

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

Do UN Resolutions Progress Gender Equality at the National Level?

The event will be looking further into the overview of global priorities to accelerate gender equality, exploring the role of UN Women in this cause and the effectiveness of UN in promoting gender equality.

For further information please go on [AIIA].

21 September 2021 @ 6:30 - 7:30 p.m. (GMT +10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Dying democracies - India and the world

The event will be detailing the historical roots of Indian democracy and how it is now being ruined by destructive forces of Modi-style populism.

Find out more at [AIIA].

Recent Book Releases

Isabella M. Weber, ***How China Escaped Shock Therapy: The Market Reform Debate***, Routledge, 358 pages, May 27, 2021, reviewed in [LSE].

Vijay Gokhale, ***The Long Game: How the Chinese Negotiate with India***, Penguin, 200 pages, July 19, 2021, with a review in [Asian Review of Books].

Rob Reich, Mehran Sahami, and Jeremy M. Weinstein, ***System Error: Where Big Tech Went Wrong and How We Can***, Harper, 352 pages, September 7, 2021, reviewed in [New York Times].

Peter Bergen, ***The Rise and Fall of Osama Bin Laden***, Simon & Schuster, 416 pages, August 3, 2021. A review is available at [The Guardian].

Hari Pulakkat, ***Space. Life. Matter.: The Coming of Age of Indian Science***, Hachette India, 336 pages, April 25, 2021, with a review in [The Hindu].

Kai-Fu Lee, and Chen Qiufan, ***AI 2041: Ten Visions for Our Future***, Currency, 480 pages, September 14, 2021. For a review, see [Goodreads].

Samuel Moyn, ***Humane: How the United States Abandoned Peace and Reinvented War***, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 416 pages, September 7, 2021, reviewed in [The New Republic].

Calls for Papers

Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation is accepting paper proposals for its 2021/3 issue on ***"Cities and Migration in the New Post-Pandemic Normal"***. Closing date for submissions is September 30, 2021. For more details, see [Glocalism].

The **London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research** and **Academic LAB** invite paper submissions for the international conference ***"Migrating World: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Migration and Integration"*** to be held on February 19-20, 2022. Deadline for submissions is November 5, 2021. Find out more at [LCIR].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations** is hiring a ***Resident Coordinator*** for Bangladesh. Closing date for applications is September 30. Visit [UN] for more details.

The **United Nations Secretariat's Department of Global Communications** is offering the position of ***Director of Information Centre*** in Islamabad, Pakistan. Application deadline is October 23, 2021. Find more about the vacancy at [UN].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking a ***Programme Specialist***

(Governance) at its office in Belgrade, Serbia. Applications are to be submitted no later than October 3, 2021. Further information can be found at [UNDP].

The **United Nations World Food Programme** is recruiting a ***Regional Humanitarian Advisor*** to be based at its regional bureau in Dakar, Senegal. Closing date for applications is October 3, 2021. Further details of the vacancy are provided at [WFP].

The **European Commission** is seeking a ***Executive Director*** for the Single European Sky ATM Research (SESAR) project which aims at modernizing and harmonizing Europe's air traffic management (ATM) systems. Deadline for applications is October 1, 2021. For more information, visit [EC].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** is offering the position of ***Chief of Mission*** in Lesotho to be filled as soon as possible. Closing date for applications is September 23, 2021. Visit [IOM] to find more details.

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** is seeking a Head of Panama Financial Review and Support Services. Deadline for applications is September 23, 2021. Find more at [IOM].

The **International Labour Organization** (ILO) is recruiting a ***National Project Coordinator*** to be based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Applications can be submitted until September 20, 2021. For more details, see [ILO].

Europol is hiring a ***Seconded National Expert*** (Cyber Intelligence) to assigned to the Cyber Intelligence Team in Operations EC3, Operations Directorate. Closing date for applications is October 6, 2021. Further information is accessible via [Europol].

The **European Asylum Support Office (EASO)** is offering the position of Head of Third Country Research Unit with core responsibility in managing, coordinating and supervising the activities of the Third Country Research Unit. Deadline for applications September 27, 2021. Details of the vacancy are provided at [EASO].

The **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)** is calling for applications for the position of ***Compliance Officer/Senior Compliance Officer*** to be based in Beijing. Interested candidates can apply until September 15, 2021. Find more about the job offer at [AIIB].

The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** is seeking a ***Director*** to be assigned to the Regional Cooperation

and Operations Coordination Division (CWRC) within the Central and West Asia Department (CWRD). Deadline for applications is September 17, 2021. Further information is accessible via [ADB].

The **Asian Development Bank (ADB)** is inviting applications for the position of ***Senior Project Officer*** to provide technical and operational support and input in processing and implementing of projects in various sectors including agriculture and natural resource, energy, water supply and sanitation, as well as transport. Closing date for applications is September 15, 2021. Visit [ADB] for further information.

The **Department of Political Science at the National University of Singapore** is offering two full-time tenure-track positions in International Relations at the rank of ***Assistant Professor***. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. Visit [NUS] for more information.

The **School of Social Sciences at the University of Otago** is inviting applications for the position of ***Lecturer/Senior Lecturer*** in Politics. Deadline for applications is October 10, 2021. Find more about the position at [University of Otago].

The **Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR)** invites applications to fill a tenure-track/tenured faculty position at the ***assistant, associate or full professor*** level in Labor and Employment Law. Review of applications begun on September 1, 2021, and continue until the position is filled. If you are interested, see [Cornell University] for further information.

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