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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to readers in Azerbaijan, Zambia and Hungary which celebrate Independence Day and the 1956 Revolution Memorial Day respectively in this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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Main Sections

- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in East Asia
- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in South Asia
- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in Southeast Asia
- International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia
- Announcements

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

China: Evergrande crisis continues

(tj) Shares and bonds of Chinese real estate companies decreased on Thursday, echoing the ongoing uncertainty regarding the financial crisis faced by the Evergrande Group as the company missed a third round of interest payments on its international bonds this weeks, as other property firms warned of defaults.

However, in an act of small progress, Qumei Home Furnishings Group announced in a filing on Thursday, October 14, that it will buy out Evergrande group's 40% stake in their furnishings joint venture for 72 million yuan ($11.18 million). Yet as Evergrande's main unit, Hengda Real Estate Group Co, faces a 121.8 million yuan onshore bond coupon payment on October 19

and Evergrande has another $14.25 million dollar bond coupon due on October 30, there remains scepticism as to whether Evergrande can avoid future defaults. [Reuters 1].

Likewise, Evergrande, which has more than $300 billion in liabilities and 1,300 real estate projects in over 280 cities, has fuelled fears regarding that Evergrande's financial crisis could be contagious to the broader Chinese property development market. Reinforcing these fears were the recent downgrading of both Greenland Holdings and E-house's ratings, Evergrande's rival, Fantasia, missing a payment towards bonds due, whilst Modern Land and Sinic Holdings were reportedly attempting to delay payment deadlines. [Reuters 2] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 2]

Similarly, China Properties Group Ltd announced that it had defaulted on notes worth $226 million, whilst Xinyuan Real Estate Co scarcely avoided a default by arriving at an agreement with bondholders. [Reuters 3]

Data demonstrates that there is at least $92.3 billion worth of Chinese property developers' bonds coming due next year. [Reuters 4]

In attempting of stabilising the market, Evergrande's Group's chief executive, Xia Haijun, has held recent talks in Hong Kong with investment banks and creditors over a possible restructuring and asset sales, whilst property companies have since met with Chinese regulators pleading for an 'appropriate loosening' of policy restrictions. [Reuters 5] [Reuters 6]

Commentators have since noted that the Evergrande crisis could bode badly for China's domestic economy, with consequences that could extent to and impact the rest of the world. However, although Chinese authorities having previously remained largely silent, in a rare move, the Chinese central bank has declared that despite Evergrande's 'mismanagement', the firm's debt is 'manageable' and unlikely to spread. [Al Jazeera 1] [AP News] [Reuters 3] [Reuters 7] [The Guardian]

Yet with recent data indicating that China's GDP grew at the slowest pace in a year due to the Evergrande crisis and power shortages, a more unstable and uneven recovery may be likely. [Al Jazeera 2] [South China Morning Post] [See below entry].

China: Deadline Statute commemorating Tiananmen

(tj) Despite Hong Kong being in the midst of a T8 typhoon, the University of Hong Kong has remained insistent that a statue depicting dozens of torn and twisted bodies that symbolise those killed during the June 4 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations be removed from its campus.

Earlier this month, the University of Hong Kong sent a letter to the owners of the sculpture, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements in China ('the Alliance'), requesting it be removed, expressing that if the Alliance failed to comply with the university's order by 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, 'the sculpture will be deemed abandoned.'

The Danish sculptor of a statue, Jens Galschiot, who loaned the sculpture to the Alliance in 1997 in perpetuity, has since accused Hong Kong university of 'mafia' style tactics over its order to have it removed.

Yet, as the Alliance formally disbanded last month resulting in its leadership arrested and charged under the Beijing-imposed national security law, there remains uncertainty as to whether the sculpture will be destroyed by Hong Kong authorities. [See, AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]

In response, Hong Kong-based activists are currently seeking to capture a 3D model of the monument to preserve the sculpture in an online format. [Free Press Hong Kong] [Reuters] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 2]In a recent move, Mayer Brown, who was until recently the representative of the University, has withdrawn its status as the legal representative of the University after receiving significant public backlash from human rights groups and United States politicians. [Hong Kong Free Press 2] [Reuters]

Beijing has cemented its political narratives into university life, Beijing's national security law having manifested sufficient pressure to engender the multiple disbandment's of pro-democracy student groups, Hong Kong's judiciary having recently ruled on the granting of bail for 4 members of the since-disbanded university group 'Student Politicism'. [Hong Kong Free Press 3] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 2]

China: UN experts call for review of Hong Kong security law

(tj) Four UN international human rights experts have called for an independent review of the Beijing-imposed national security law, citing that Hong Kong

authorities have used the legislation to legitimise disproportionate charges of terrorism and sedition in the aims of stifling local political dissent, and freedom of speech and assembly.

The experts further called on authorities to 'reconsider' charges places against human rights barrister Chow Hang-tung, the former vice-chair of the now-disbanded group, the Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movement of China, the organiser behind Hong Kong's annual commemoration of the June 4 Tiananmen demonstrations.

Beijing has since responded stating that rights and freedoms 'are not absolute', expressing that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights justifies the limitation of certain non-derivable rights by virtue of concerns relating to national security, public safety, public order or rights and freedoms of others. [Hong Kong Free Press 1]

Since this announcement, additional Hong Kong democracy campaigners, including former lawmakers and a physicist who was assisting a protestor who was shot by police, were sentenced to up to 12 months in jail for their role in a protest last year against the national security law, that included a Since its enaction, more than 150 individuals have been arrested under the national security law, with more than 100 formally charged, according to the Hong Kong Security Bureau. [Hong Kong Free Press 2] [Reuters]

China: Microsoft pulls Linkedin from China

(tj) Microsoft has announced they will be removing Linkedin within China, citing increased difficulties of compliance with Beijing's tightening of internet rules, difficulties in competing with local competitors and associated regulatory problems.

Linkedin will not be wholly removed from the Chinese marketplace, rather replaced with a jobs-only version, 'InJobs', that will be devoid of any social feed.

Since launched in 2014, Linkedin has encountered perennial disagreements with respect to Beijing's government censorship. This has culminated in Linkedin's complicity in Beijing's ordering of the blacklisting of journalist accounts by Linkedin including Melissa Chan and Greg Bruno, Mr Bruno the author of a book describing Beijing's treatment of Tibetan refugees.

Similarly, in March, LinkedIn was reportedly punished by the Cyberspace Administration of China for failing to censor political content, resulting in a suspension of new user registration for 30 days, whilst in May China's internet watchdog found that Linkedin, among 100 other apps, were engaged in the improper collection and use of data.

Linkedin represents the last major US social media site to leave China, Google pulling its search engine from mainland China in 2010 after Beijing commenced censoring particular search results and hiding videos on YouTube, whilst other forms of social media including Facebook and Twitter remained blocked within China, only accessible through the use of a virtual private network. [AP News 1] [BBC 1] [Financial Times]

Beijing's tightening grasp on cyberspace has since similarly resulted the removal of a series of apps from the Apple store including Audible, and Christian and Muslim religious text apps, whilst Beijing's industry minister recently reaffirmed China's continued scrutiny of the internet sector, primarily targeting China's larger internet giants. [AP News 2] [BBC 2] [Reuters]

China: Binance bans trading of Chinese yuan in reaction to Beijing's ban on cryptocurrency

(tj) In response to Beijing's recent cryptocurrency ban, cryptocurrency platform, Binance, has announced that it will not allow the trading of Chinese yuan.

Last month, Chinese financial regulators solidified the increasing crackdown on cryptocurrencies that culminated in the blanket ban on all crypto transactions and mining, throwing investors and workers within the world's largest crypto-mining countries scrambling. [Reuters] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 2] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 1]

China: National energy crisis continues as coal imports and electricity prices soar

(tj) China's power crisis, affecting at least 17 regions, caused by coal shortages, has engendered a 76% increase in coal imports during the month of September, exacerbated by heavy flooding in the

country's biggest coal producing province, Shanxi.

As a result, domestic energy have hit record highs, leaving commentators sceptical as to whether the electricity shortage crisis will reach a timely resolution, and as to whether China's energy crisis could have global implications, global oil prices already having reached record highs. [ABC News] [Al Jazeera] [South China Morning Post]

Amid the energy crunch, Shanxi and Inner Mongolia local governments have ordered some 200 mines to boost output, but incessant rain has flooded 60 mines in Shanxi, echoing record floods struck the mining region of Henan in July. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 2]

In response, thermal coal on the Zhengzhou Commodity Exchange rose by over 10% on Tuesday whilst China's "factory gate" prices - a measure of what manufacturers charge wholesalers for products - grew at the fastest rate on record last month. [BBC 1] [BBC 2]

Despite Beijing's pledges of decarbonisation, Beijing's coal crunch ultimately presenting China with a transition dilemma that perhaps engenders discussions of a revisionist strategy on Beijing's previous promises of long-term emission reduction that similarly impact China's position at the upcoming COP26 in Glasgow. [The Guardian 1] [The Guardian 2] [See, AiR No. 41, October 2021, 2]

China: Xi rallies for common prosperity

(tj) On Saturday, October 16, Chinese President Xi Jinping has expanded initial plans to reduce income disparity in an article published in Qiushi, the leading official theoretical journal of the Chinese Communist Party, recognising the need of prioritising both education, urbanisation, and a long-awaited property tax anticipated to assist the Evergrande crisis and concomitant destabilised housing market. [See above entry]

Despite Xi's pledge to reduce wealth inequality, Xi remained hesitant on implementing any form of 'welfarism' that helps the lazy in Chinese society, perhaps directed towards the 'lying flat' ('tang ping') paradigm that remains popular among many young Chinese, choosing to disconnect from the over-ambitious work culture in favour of personal well-being and flexible work schedules. [Reuters] [See, AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: LDP and the opposition party unveiled manifesto ahead of the general election

(lnl) Ahead of the general election on October 31, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) presented its manifesto on Tuesday, October 12. The focus of the manifesto was on the Covid-19 pandemic, the economy, and security. The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), Japan's largest opposition party, also revealed their campaign platform on Wednesday, October 13. Party president Yukio Edano emphasized working for legal steps towards diversity and to stand for same-sex rights along with other policy proposals.

The announcement of the LDP include pledges of tackling the pandemic by supplying oral antiviral medication, working on boosting the middle class by shrinking income gaps and a redistribution of wealth, and expanding support for small and medium businesses hit by the pandemic. The party also vows to offer subsidies for enterprises if they move into new industries. On security, the LDP would "reconsider" its response to an increasingly assertive China in the region and China's military activity around Taiwan and the Senkaku islands, promising to double the country's defense spending, with the goal of spending two percent of Japan's GDP or more on the military to counter threats from China and North Korea. Without directly naming China, the manifesto also promises to "seek responsible actions" over human rights issues related to the Uyghurs, Tibet, ethnic Mongolians, and Hong Kong. Moreover, the ruling party expressed that it will continue to press North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons. [Japan Today] [Reuters] [The Asahi Shimbun]

However, many of the signature policies which Kishida promised during his campaign for the LDP presidency last month are absent from the manifesto. One of them is the establishment of a modern version of the Income Doubling Plan and a financial tax hike for wealth distribution. Secondly, one of Kishida's pillars of wealth distribution measures is a plan to enhance financial support for families with children to cover housing and education costs, and this was also missing in the manifesto. Thirdly, the absence of the establishment of an agency for health care crisis management as well as the appointment of a special advisor for science and technology is noticeable. Instead, the manifesto includes many conservative policies advocated by LDP policy leader Sanae Takaichi

and former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Observers see a tension between the government and the ruling party in compiling the manifesto. Moreover, the party's Policy Research Council, which is chaired by Takaichi, has many conservative members. [The Japan Times]

The CDPJ, meanwhile, pledges in their manifesto to work for legal steps to allow married couples with different surnames (under the current law, married couples must share the same name), introduce equality laws for LGBTQ people and implementing laws which recognize same-sex marriage. This is contrary from the LDP, as the Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said during the LDP leadership race that he was not in favor of same-sex marriage. [Reuters] Kishida previously indicated his willingness to change the law of same surnames, however, he has since back-tracked on the issue. The law has been criticized as outdated and sexist, as in over 90 percent of marriages wives are the ones who change their surnames. [Japan Today] The party also revealed economic measures to promote wealth distribution and revive Japan as an "all middle class" nation. The party vows to offer a one year exemption on the income tax for individuals with annual incomes below ten million yen as well as to provide a 120,000 yen cash bailout to low-income earners as two parts of a strategy to tackle the Covid-19 crisis. The CDPJ also proposed lowering the consumption tax rate from the current ten percent down to five as a temporary measure aimed at stimulating demand. In order to fund the tax breaks and cash handout, the party proposes a progressive taxation system for companies in which major firms would pay more in income tax and raising the maximum income tax rate for wealthy people. When it comes to security, the CDPJ has similar pledges as LDP but without clearly stating support for Taiwan. The CDPJ additionally promised to strengthen border controls. [The Japan Times]

For a summary of the parties' pledges see [The Straits Times].

Japan: Fumio Kishida dissolves parliament

(lnl) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida dissolved the House of Representatives on Thursday, October 14. The official campaigning for the general election starts on October 19 and the election itself is expected to be on October 31. [The Japan News]

For the first time in Japan's postwar history, a general election will be held after a term of the House of Representatives has expired. Furthermore, the period

between the dissolution of the Lower House and voting day will be the shortest ever. [The Mainichi]

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida decided to keep the campaign for the general election short in order to avoid a drawn-out debate and assessment of his political performance. For more analysis of the decision, see Naoki Kikuchi in [The Asahi Shimbun].

Japan: Opposition parties unite against LDP in upcoming general election

(lnl) Opposition parties in Japan, including the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and two smaller groups, have formed an alliance for the upcoming October 31 general election, in an effort to break the power the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has held in politics for the past six decades. The strategic aim of the alliance is to coordinate campaign promises and avoid competing for voters, with CDPJ and JCP having reached an agreement to consolidate candidates in around 220 of the 289 single-seat districts.

The House of Representatives has 465 seats, 305 of which are controlled by the LDP and its coalition partner Komeito. The CDPJ holds 110 and the JCP has 12 seats. [Japan Today]

Japan: Five plaintiffs ask North Korea to pay for human rights abuse in Japanese court

(lnl) A Japanese court on Thursday, October 14, was hearing five ethnic Korean residents of Japan who claim to have suffered from human rights violations and that they were deceived and kidnapped to North Korea. The plaintiffs demand 100 million yen each in compensation.

This court hearing became possible after the Tokyo District Court in August agreed to summon Kim Jong Un to speak regarding the issue. While not expecting any compensation, the plaintiff's lawyer expressed hope that the case will set a precedent for future negotiations of the Japanese government with Pyongyang.

After the Korean War, North Korea began a massive resettlement program in 1959 to bring home overseas

Koreans in order to make up for workers killed in the war. [The Asahi Shimbun]

South Korea: Seongnam development scandal

(aml) One of the main suspects in the Seongnam land development scandal has been questioned on Thursday, October 14th. Kim Man-bae, owner of Hwacheon Daeyu, the asset firm at the center of the scandal allegedly bribed Yoo Dong-gyu, former acting president of Seongnam Development Corp. in return for business favors and the son of now independent lawmaker Kwak Sang-do for political favors. It is in question why Hwacheon Daeyu, a previously unknown and small company earned 1,000 times their investment in profits off the project after being chosen as a partner. Kim is suspected to have collaborated with Yoo, who was arrested last month for bribery, to remove a clause that limits the amount of profit he could make. This has caused the Seongnam City government 110 billion won ($92 million) of losses. However, the request for an arrest warrant over these bribery allegations has been denied by the court due to a lack of evidence. [The Korea Herald 1] [The Korea Times 1]

The day after, prosecutors have search offices of the Seongnam City Hall, especially those of the city project team that had been in charge of establishing and authorizing details of the project. [The Korea Times 2] [The Korea Herald 2] At the beginning of the week, president Moon Jae-in had ordered a thorough probe into the scandal which had stirred opposition amongst the People Power Party who had called for a special counsel probe and suspect that Governor Lee Jae-myung, presidential candidate of the ruling Democratic Party for the next year's election, was the mastermind behind the scandal when he had been the city's major in 2015. [The Korea Times 3] [The Korea Herald 3]

Lee has again denied all allegations against him during a parliamentary audit on Monday, October 18th. However, he acknowledged that bribery took place in the project and apologized for the behavior of some of his employees. Additionally, he said that he felt betrayed by Yoo for his involvement. [The Korea Herald 4] [The Korea Herald 5] [The Korea Herald 6]

Another key suspect in the scandal, lawyer Nam Wook has been detained after he returned from the US this week to face a probe over allegations that he had been involved in illegal lobbying in the project. Wook had

joined the project as a private partner and profited 109.7 billion won ($84.14 million) with a paid-in capital of 87.21 million won. Wook has denied all wrongdoings, stating he had been "sidelined" in early stages of the project. [The Korea Times 4][The Korea Times 5]

South Korea: Presidential election updates

(aml) A Seoul Court has upheld a disciplinary measure from the justice ministry against then Prosecutor General Yoon Seok-youl who is currently the leading presidential candidate of the major opposition People Power Party (PPP). Yoon had been suspended for two months for obstructing a probe into a press-prosecution collusion case and ordering surveillance reports on judges in charge of important cases. However, the court dismissed the ministry's claim that Yoon made remarks that violated political neutrality. The disciplinary action had been taken by then Justice Minister Choo Mi-ae and was endorsed by President Moon Jae-in [The Korea Times 1] [The Korea Herald 1]

Meanwhile, the minor progressive Justice Party has chosen four-term lawmaker Sim Sang-jeung as its candidate for the upcoming presidential election. Sim won against former party leader Lee Jeong-mi with 51.12 percent of the vote. It is her fourth bid for presidency and in the last election she earned 6.17 percent of the vote, the best result ever for a progressive candidate. Sim criticized the larger parties for only offering the "lesser evil" instead of the best choice and called the PPP out for being "full of extreme right-wing populism bordering on fascism" and the leading Democratic Party (DPK) for "overflowing with fake progressives". [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea: Former Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo dies at 71

(aml) Fomer South Korean Prime Minister Lee Wan-koo died on Thursday, October 14. He had served as Prime Minister under President Park Geun-hye for two months in 2015 before resigning due to bribery allegations. Lee had entered politics in 1995 after working as a provincial police commissioner and served three terms as a lawmaker for the conservative New Party Korea, United Liberal Democrats and Saenuri Party. In 2006, he was elected as Governor of South Chungcheong Province but resigned in 2009 out

of protest against the Lee Myung-bak administration's plan for the administrative city of Sejong. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Umbrella union to hold large rally during next week's general strike

(aml) The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), one of the country's two umbrella labor organizations, announced to continue with their plans to walk out in central Seoul next week for the enhancement of labor rights including the abolition of non-regular employment and a general revision of labor laws. Although government has banned the rally due to Covid-19 concerns [AiR, No.41, October/2021, 2], the union plans to walkout anyways, accusing it of trying to restrict their freedom of assembly guaranteed by the constitution. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times].

South Korea to offer compensation to spy agents during Korean War

(aml) The South Korean defense ministry will provide 10 million won ($8,400) for each South Korean who operated in North Korea as part of the US military intelligence unites during the 1950-53 Korean War. This includes those working at the Korea Liaison Office (KLO), which had been excluded from the compensation list due to problems confirming their merits in foreign operations. The spy agents had been recruited to provide information in North Korean regions since high-tech equipment such as satellites and high-altitude drones had not been available at the time. The compensation is planned to be paid soon since most potential grantees are aged 85 or older, however, families of deceased can also apply. The decision came after in 2007 the National Human Rights Commission of Korea had already advised the parliament and the military to recognize KLO veterans. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Supreme Court upholds 42-year prison term for head of sex abuse ring

(aml) The Supreme Court upheld a 42-year prison sentence for Cho Ju-bin, the head of an online sex

blackmail ring. It also approved of the lower courts order that he must wear an electronic bracelet for 30 years, pay a forfeiture of 100 million won ($90,000), and is banned from working at children-related facilities for 10 years after his release and that his personal details are going to be made public for 10 years. Cho had been indicted in April last year for organizing a ring that blackmailed 74 minor and adult victims into filming pornographic content and sharing the material with members of a pay-to-view Telegram chatroom. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Life sentence for murderer of three woman

(aml) The Seoul Northern District Court has sentenced 25-year-old Kim Tae-hyun to life for killing an online game friend, her mother, and her sister, after he had stalked her. Kim had been indicted for murder, theft, harassment, breaking and entering, and misusing communication networks. The prosecution had requested death penalty, but the court rejected that demand because Kim had acknowledged most of his crimes and had no serious criminal record prior the murder. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald]

Taiwan: KMT demands Premier's resignation

(zh) Taiwan's main opposition party Kuomintang (KMT) has asked the island's Premier Su Tseng-chang to resign after Su made an altercation with KMT female lawmaker Cheng Li-wun during a legislative hearing. The issue stemmed from an exchange between Cheng and Su on the matter of nuclear submarine developments. After Su declined to provide a direct response, Cheng said "I'm afraid you will be the first, and President Tsai Ing-wen will be the second [to surrender to China]". In response, Su said, "we will not be as shameless as you guys."

The KMT Chairman Eric Chu has called Su's remark a display of rudeness and an insult to all women in the country; in the meantime, President Tsai Ing-wen, who is also the chairman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), has commented that "finding enemies in our own country" is not helpful for the island to face its multiple challenges. [Focus Taiwan 1]

Meanwhile, KMT has rebuked a comment by former US state secretary Condoleezza Rice, which said a

previous fistfight in the island's legislature might have been "provoked from the outside" to destabilize Taiwan, during an online discussion about the AUKUS military alliance by Australia, the UK, and the US. In the statement, the KMT said that Rice's remark does nothing to help calm Sino-US tensions and is a misunderstanding of the island's domestic political culture. The fistfight took place on 28th September when DPP and KMT lawmakers pushed and shoved each other when KMT legislators were trying to block Premier Su's way to the podium. [Taipei Times]

In another development, the KMT said it is committed to deepening ties with the US as the new-elected chairman Eric Chu is ready to engage in dialogue with Washington and a new liaison office would be opened in Washington by the end of 2021 to "better communicate policy agenda and positions". The party is also considering "national security strategy guidelines" to prevent China from launching military conflicts against Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan 2]

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

Bangladesh: Police arrest suspect of murder in refugee camp

(nd) Following the killing of a Rohingya community leader, Mohib Ullah, the police arrested almost 40 refugees at refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. While the raids were undertaken in order to eliminate criminal activities in the camps, arresting many of suspected

involvement with illegal weapons and drugs, five men were arrested in connection with the murder of Mohib Ullah in September 2021. One of the suspects has confessed to have been involved with the murder.

Most inhabitants of the camps around Cox's Bazar are Muslim Rohingya who fled Myanmar over the last years, with more than half of the estimated 1.1 million people having arrived in August 2017 after the Myanmar military's crackdown in the North of Rakhine State. Within the semi-permanent settlement, different criminal activity has developed, and the armed Islamist Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) resurged in the camps. The ARSA attacked a security post in 2017, which sparked the Myanmar military's crackdown. They are known for their tough stance towards the Myanmar government and suspected to be involved in Ullah's assassination.

Mohib Ullah, a high-profile figurehead for the more than 800,000-strong Muslim minority Rohingya was killed by unidentified gunmen as he spoke to other community leaders outside his office on September 29. As a refugee living in Cox's Bazar, he had compiled crucial records of alleged atrocities the Rohingya had suffered during the Myanmar military crackdown, which the United Nations (UN) has said was carried out with genocidal intent. Invited to the White House and to speak to the UN Human Rights Council in 2019, he was one of the most high-profile advocates for the Rohingya. [See also AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1] [The Diplomat]

Bangladesh: Casualties during mob protests

(nd) Police clashed with protesters alleging the desecration of a Quran at a Hindu festival site during Durga Puja, a Hindu festival celebrating a mythical victory of good over evil, killing four and leaving dozens injured.

After a video post showed a copy of a Quran inside a temporary religious structure about hundred kilometer from Dhaka, violent mobs attacked Hindu temples in the vicinity. Police fired aimless shots and tear gas on the several hundred people strong mob in an effort to regain control. The police confirmed the deaths without indicating if they were killed through police shots. Gatherings were banned indefinitely and Border Guard Bangladesh troops deployed in at least 22 of the country´s 64 districts. A Muslim man was detained for allegedly posting a video, at least 450 were arrested,

prompting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to reiterate legal consequences for those responsible for the mob attacks. [Firstpost] [The Daily Star]

Her comments followed Indian President Narendra Modi expressing his concern over the "vandalizing and desecration" of Hindu idols and temples, calling it "painful and shameful." On continuing protests over the weekend, protesters accused PM Hasina of being too close to India.

While Hindu leaders commented they feared for their community's safety, Islamic political party Islami Oikya Jote urged the police not to arrest those who protested but those who allegedly desecrated the Quran. The oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and governing Awami League´s arch enemy alleged, Hasina's government had orchestrated the violence to divert attention from its failure to maintain law and order. [Benar News 1]

According to a US State Department "2020 Report on International Religious Freedom", communal attacks on religious minorities in Bangladesh are increasing. [Benar News 2]

Bangladesh: Leaked UN Agreement contains no free movement clause

(nd) According to a leaked copy of a UN deal for Rohingyas, no guarantee for free movement to mainland Bangladesh was included. In an effort to start its work on Bhasan Char Island, the United Nations refugee agency signed the deal in October, which was not made public.

According to the leaked copy, travel to and from the island would be on an "as needs" basis, to be determined between the United Nations and Bangladesh. Within the document, Rohingyas are referred to as "forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals/refugees", reflecting Bangladesh's refusal to grant them refugee status. Bangladesh is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. [Al Jazeera]

Since last December, Bangladeshi authorities have shifted 18,000 out of a planned 100,000 people to the island to ease chronic overcrowding in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, where more than 1.2 million Muslim Rohingya have taken shelter. The government has repeatedly justified the move by saying it would ease chronic overcrowding, ignoring concerns about the low-lying island's vulnerability to cyclones and floods [see AiR No. 49, December/2020,

2]. Refugees and rights groups have protested the move. [see AiR No. 23, June/2021, 2]

Bangladesh: Opposition Party slams the country´s major political parties and arch-enemies Awami league and BNP

(nd) Newly-appointed Jatiya Party Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunnu claimed the country´s people were “fed up” with both governing Awami League and oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Despite repeatedly returning to power, both parties did not fulfill their promises and people’s expectations. As a consequence, he further claimed people wanted to see his party, in power after the next election. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: BNP to oppose formation process of election commission

(nd) Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) opposed the formation of the next Election Commission (EC) through a search committee, claiming the governing Awami League was not close enough to the people any more but lead by bureaucrats. BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir asked “What’s the search committee? Following this system, you’ll constitute it (EC) with persons whoever you want.”

The present EC will end its five-year term in February 2022, with the incoming EC to organize the parliamentary election by the end of 2023. [Dhaka Tribune]

According to Article 118 (1) of the Constitution, the President appoints the Chief Election Commissioner and not more than four Election Commissioners, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf. Such initiative requires, however, the counsel of the prime minister. The last two EC were formed through so called search committees.

Against this background, experts debate whether there is a constitutional obligation to enact a law to form the EC. Even if such a law was enacted, Rumeen Farhana, MP of the BNP and a lawyer at the Supreme Court, maintained his party´s stance doubting free and fair elections. [Prothom Alo]

Bangladesh: Former Prime Minister in hospital

(nd) Oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chairwoman Khaleda Zia has been admitted to a hospital in Dhaka for a health check-up, due to fluctuating body temperature. The former prime minister was convicted in two graft cases and taken to jail three years ago. [BD News 24]

India: Surge in violence in Kashmir

(dql) Violence in Indian-controlled Kashmir continues to escalate. On October 17, militants shot at three migrant workers in Kashmir's Kulgam district, killing two and wounding one. This came a day after two laborers from northern India were gunned down in two separate incidents. Earlier, on October 7, suspected anti-India militants shot dead two teachers in the region's capital, Srinagar [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2].

Nine soldiers have been killed during two separate search operations on Thursday and Monday, while 13 terrorists were gunned down in nine encounters in the past two weeks.

More than 30 people have been left dead and 570 people suspected to have links to the militants were detained in the course of both a series of militant attacks on civilians and a widespread crackdown by security forces in the recent weeks. On October 14, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested four terror associates during raids at 16 locations in Jammu and Kashmir. [Hindustan Times 1] [The Straits Times] [The Wire] [Reuters] [India Today 1] [WION] [Hindustan Times 2]

Meanwhile, the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), an affiliate of the Islamic State (IS) active in South Asia and Central Asia, has reiterated threats of more attacks in the region. [India Today 2]

India: Request to Supreme Court to direct government to tackle hate speech

(dql) Governing Bharatiya Janata Party leader Ashwini Upadhyay has filed a plea in the Supreme Court to request a direction to the central government to look

into various international laws and to take legislative steps for the implementation of recommendations made by the Law Commission in a 2017 report aiming at controlling hate speech and rumor mongering. [NDTV 1]

The plea comes after a whistleblower accused Facebook India of leaving unchecked hate speech on pages associated with right-wing, Hindu-nationalist paramilitary volunteer organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) due to a lack of Indian language editors. RSS is especially accused of promoting "fear mongering, anti-Muslim narratives". [The Telegraph India]

The request comes as analysts observe an increase of hate crimes against religious minorities combined with a trend towards impunity for such crimes in India. [News Click] [The Indian Express]

In a latest development, not related to Hindu but Sikh perpetrators, Nihangs – armed Sikh warriors constituting a distinctive order among Sikhs – admitted to lynching a Dalith Sikh farmer on Friday, October 15, accused by them of committing a sacrilege by "remov[ing] the cloth to cover the holy scripture." Four Nihangs surrendered to the police on the same day. [India Today] [NDTV 2]

India: Unrest amid fertilizer supply crisis

(dql) Amid a deep fertilizer crisis, farmers repeatedly looted fertilizer bags from trucks or blocked roads to demand distribution of fertilizers, as most of the warehouses are almost empty and the supply is lagging behind demand. [The Indian Express]

In response, the government announced to increase subsidies to enable farmers to buy fertilizers at the same prices despite the rise of the rate in the international market. [Ani News]

India: New public defense companies

(dql) On the occasion of Vijayadashami – a major Hindu festival celebrating the restoration and protection of dharma -, Prime Minister Modi designated seven defense companies as Public Sector Units (PSUs) to enter the country's defense sector.

The move follows the dissolution of the more than 200-year-old Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) whose assets, including 41 ordnance factories, were transferred to the seven firms as 100% government-owned corporate companies. [The Times of India]

The OFB has been an organization, under the Department of Defence Production (DDP) of the Ministry of Defence (MoD), which was ranked 56th among the world´s 100 arms-producing and military services companies by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in 2018, with a 1.65 billion USD in arms sales. [SIPRI]

For brief profiles of the companies, including Munitions India Limited (MIL), Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (AVANI), Advanced Weapons and Equipment India Limited (AWE India), Troop Comforts Limited (TCL), Yantra India Limited (YIL); India Optel Limited (IOL) and Gliders India Limited (GIL), see [News 18].

India: Party defections

(dql) The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) announced that a number of party members joined the oppositional party Congress Party in Assam including some high profile politicians.

The defection came shortly before the Assam by-election for assembly seats was scheduled for October 30 and days after the Uttarakhand state´s Transport Minister and his son also declared to leave the BJP and return to the Congress Party (INC). [NDTV] [India Today]

India: Supreme Court orders high court to decide on applicability of transparency law to intelligence and security agencies

(dql) India's Supreme Court has ordered the Delhi High Court to decide whether the country's Right to Information (RTI) Act applies to intelligence and security organizations of the government, following a hearing an appeal the central government had filed against a decision of the high court in 2018 to order the department from which information was sought to provide it within 15 days.

Under the 2005 RTI Act any citizen may request information from a public authority which is to be

replied expeditiously or within thirty days, or within 48 hours, in cases of matter involving a petitioner's life and liberty. Under the law, any public authority is also required to computerize their records for wide dissemination, as well as to proactively publish certain categories of information providing the citizens with a minimum recourse to formally request for information.

In Section 24 of the RTI Act, certain intelligence and security agencies are exempted from releasing information except for information "pertaining to allegations of corruption and human rights violations." [NDTV] [Government, India]

India: Supreme Court reiterates recommendation for high court appointment in defiance of government

(dql) Defying repeated reservations of the central government, India's Supreme Court collegium has reiterated twelve recommendations for appointments of high court judges. While appointment procedures require the government to accept the collegium's recommendations in case they are reiterated, the Ministry of Justice can seek 'clarifications' from the apex court, which in the past few years has effectively led – on an average – to 50% of the recommendations being rejected based on adverse findings in the course of confidential background checks and reports submitted by the Ministry. [The Times of India]

India: PM launches connectivity project

(dql) Indian Prime Minister launched the Gati Shakti initiative, a massive national plan for establishing multi-modal connectivity aimed at overcoming decades of bureaucratic entanglements when it comes to infrastructure projects. Involving 16 central government departments, the plan will use geo-mapping and real-time data in one single centralized portal enabling key departments and states access to information and data of major projects being planned. Sixteen central government departments, including Railways, Roads and Highways, Petroleum and Gas, Power, Telecom, Shipping, Aviation and others will be part of this initiative. [The Indian Express]

India: New abortion rules

(dql) The Indian government has introduced new abortions rules under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, passed in Parliament in March, increasing the gestational limit for the termination of a pregnancy from 20 to 24 weeks in special cases covering women having experienced sexual assault, rape or incest; minors, whose marital status changes during pregnancy (widowhood and divorce) and certain medical indications. The latter applies to women who are mentally ill, cases of foetal malformation containing a substantial risk of being incompatible with life, as well as cases in which if the child is born, he/she may suffer from physical or mental abnormalities and would be seriously handicapped. [India Today]

Nepal: Parliament divided on large US grant

(nd) The Nepali parliament is widely divided over the ratification of a US grant assistance valued at US $ 500 million. Currently, only 61 lawmakers of the ruling Nepal Communist Party, the Nepali Congress, and 13 members of the Loktantrik Samajbadi Party (LSP) out of the 271 parliament members are believed to support the "Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) agreement" with the US.

Alongside 45 other countries in an effort to enhance development of infrastructure such as energy and roads, the US in September 2017 signed the MCC with Nepal. While one side of the country´s parliamentarians argues the fund would be vital for the country's development, the other side says it goes against Nepal's national interest for the agreement would supersede the law of the land. With that, some fear the ratification would enable the US to control intellectual property rights. Additionally, critics see the agreement as part of the US's Asia-Pacific strategy to contain China's Belt and Road Initiative and fear to be trapped within US strategic consideration. [ORF]

Pakistan: New religious body to be established

(dql) Pakistan's President Arif Alvi has signed an ordinance to set up the Rehmatul-lil-Alameen Authority (RAA) religious body, prompting concerns over a further empowerment of the country's already

influential clerics, further undermining the rights of women and religious minorities.

Consisting of a chairman and six members, with Prime Minister Imran Khan as the patron-in-chief of the committee, the RAA will be responsible for educating the world about Islam, conducting national level consultations with religious scholars, researchers, and education-related institutions in all provinces, and also for formulating an international counter-narrative to various misconceptions against Islam. [Pakistan Today]

Sri Lanka: Government refuses talks with banned Tamil diaspora groups

(egm) Sri Lanka's government has dismissed any talks with banned Tamil diaspora groups over the country's reconciliation process. [DailyMirror]

The announcement comes after a prior meeting on September 20 at the UN headquarters in New York where President Gotabaya Rajapaksa assured the United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres that Sri Lanka's internal issues would be resolved via a domestic mechanism and through discussions with the Tamil diaspora [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4].

According to Foreign Minister Professor G.L. Peiris, any organization that has been banned by the government will not be invited for talks as this would violate Sri Lanka's law. The groups outlawed by the Ministry of Defense include The Global Tamil Forum (GTF), British Tamil Forum (BTF), Canadian Tamil Congress (CTC), Australian Tamil Congress (ATC), National Council of Canadian Tamil, Tamil Youth Organisation and the World Tamil Coordinating Committee.

Furthermore, Foreign Minister Peiris has expressed that the government is still willing to engage with other groups such as members of the NGO community, the foreign diaspora or the parliamentary opposition in Sri Lanka to gather different perspectives and feedback relevant to the process of reconciliation. President Rajapaksa is expected to meet the Tamil National Alliance upon his return from the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) summit ending on November 12.

Earlier in March, the government proscribed more than 300 individuals and various Tamil diaspora organizations for the alleged promotion of separatism and affiliation with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)- a Tamil militant organization that has been designated as a terrorist organization by 32 countries,

respectively. [see AiR No. 14, April/2021, 1]. [Tamil Guardian]

Further in this respect, on August 23, leading international Tamil rights groups published a joint statement calling on their respective governments, international and regional powers to intervene in the development of a solution to Sri Lanka's longstanding Tamil National Question [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5].

Sri Lanka: Withdrawal of indictments against former Navy Commander

(egm) The Attorney General decided to withdraw indictments against former Navy Commander Wasantha Karannagoda in relation to the alleged abduction of eleven persons. His statement presented on October 13 to the Court of Appeal follows the writ petition presented by Admiral Karannagoda before the two-judge bench. [DailyMirror] The Court of Appeal has issued an Interim Order halting the proceedings.

In January 2020, Admiral Karannagoda was charged alongside 13 others for their involvement in the alleged abduction, torture, extortion and murder conspiracy against 11 persons between 2008 and 2009 [see also AiR No. 26, June/2021, 5].

According to his writ petition, Mr. Karannagoda has accused a former Criminal Investigations Department (CID) member, Nishantha Silva, of stipulating investigations as a political vendetta and taking advantage of the petitioner's close relationship with Prime Minister Rajapaksa and President Rajapaksa respectively. The allegations, he argued, were therefore baseless and not supported by any evidence. He alleged further that Silva had offered to release suspects under criminal investigation if they agreed to testify against Karannagoda and President Rajapaksa for alleged crimes during his time as former Secretary to the Ministry of Defense. He added that Silva is currently a fugitive and believed to have claimed political asylum in Switzerland.

The Attorney General's announcement to withdraw indictments comes in the midst of growing criticism from civil society with respect to alleged unequal application of the law [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]. Particular cases cited by the media include the pardon to a former legislator charged with murder and the case of an outspoken lawyer who is held in arbitrary detention under the

Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) [see AiR No. 26, June/2021, 5] [see AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1].

The United Nations Human Rights Council had previously addressed the murder of the eleven and called for independent investigations into the extrajudicial killings that occurred during Sri Lanka's 37-year ethnic war. Investigators believe the number of victims to be at least three times higher. [Al Jazeera]

Sri Lanka: Cabinet approves President's cyber security bills

(egm) The Cabinet of Ministers approved President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's proposal to draft a bill known as 'Defense Cyber Security Commands Act' and a separate draft bill to impose cyber protection laws outside the defense purview. [DailyMirror] [Economy Next]

The second draft bill aims to prepare an institutional structure under the scope of the Ministry of Technology that will formulate a regulatory framework for a national cybersecurity strategy to monitor electronic communication and cyberspace for terrorist activities, organized crime and anti-social activities. Further provisions will enable the establishment of the Sri Lanka Cyber Protection Agency to work alongside other agencies.

The cabinet's decision comes amid ongoing investigations into the deletion of 2,000 gigabytes worth of classified information from the National Medicines Regulatory Authority (NMRA) stored in the Lanka Government Cloud (LGC). The incident led to concerns regarding the effectiveness of data protection and the potential costs of data loss and breaches.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka is facing increasing pressure from civil society actors, rights activists and international organizations to repeal the already existing Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) which has frequently been used to crack down on political dissent [see AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2]. The PTA has been heavily criticized for stifling dissent and enabling the arbitrary detention of individuals without charge under suspicion of terrorism for an indefinite period of time.

On a similar note, the European Parliament passed a resolution on June 10 calling for the removal of the act [seeAiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]. Addressing the Parliament's suggestion, the European Union (EU) Commission is currently reviewing Sri Lanka's Generalized System Preferences Plus (GSP+)

membership according to the reports made during the recent EU delegation visit which concluded on October 6 on the government's continued use of the PTA [see also AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

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

Cambodia: Arrest order issued against exiled former monk

(tl) Cambodia's Prime Minister Hun Sen issued an arrest warrant for a former monk for sharing a poem on social medias against the president's policies.

Voeun Veasna, who is living in exile in Thailand, is an activist affiliated with the former opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). On October 9, Veasna used his Facebook account under a pseudonym to post a poem titled 'Hun Sen is a Traitor' on the Prime Minister's Facebook page. The poem criticized Hun Sen for amending the constitution, for allowing the destruction of numerous forests during his presidency and for putting his personal interests before those of the nation.

Immediately, the Prime Minister decried the poem as an expression of 'extremist theory'. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia: Human rights groups call for abolishment of death penalty

(ms) Human Rights groups have renewed their call on the government to abolish the death penalty from the country's legal system, following World Day Against the Death Penalty on October 10. Indonesian judges have continued to impose capital punishments during the COVID-19 pandemic, with trials taking place via teleconference. In total, 129 convicts were sentenced to death between March 2020 and September 2021, according to data collected by human rights watchdog Imparsial. The Indonesian government justifies the death sentence by claiming it deters other people from committing serious crimes like drug trafficking, terrorism, and premediated murder. Rights groups, however, have claimed there is no evidence for such a justification. They have also spoken out against the high risk of wrongful conviction and the mental anguish death-row inmates have endured. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia continues to maintain the death penalty it inherited from the colonial era, despite a global trend away from the punishment. As of April 2021, 108 countries have completely abolished the death penalty for all crimes and 144 countries in total have abolished it in law or practice, according to Amnesty International. Numerous states in Southeast Asia, however, continue to sentence people to death, particularly for drug related crimes. Besides Indonesia, Burma, Laos, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam all recorded death sentences in 2020. [Al Jazeera] [Amnesty International]

Indonesia: Fear of punishment under blasphemy law silences criticism of mosques' loudspeakers

(ms) Despite growing grievances expressed anonymously online over noisy mosque loudspeakers used to call for prayer and sermons throughout the day, few are willing to publicly complain fearing punishment under Indonesia's controversial blasphemy law. Grievances are concerned with the noise pollution caused by the speakers, which can disrupt sleep and cause anxiety. Nevertheless, public objections have been silenced since 2018, when an ethnic Chinese Buddhist woman was sentenced to 18 months in prison under the blasphemy law for criticizing the volume of speakers at her neighborhood mosque. [South China Morning Post]

Since the blasphemy law was passed in 1965, more than 150 people have been convicted, with a conviction carrying up to five years imprisonment. The

purpose of the law is to target those who deliberately, in public, express feelings of hostility, hatred, or contempt against religions with the purpose of preventing others form adhering to any religion. Human rights groups have condemned the law, however, claiming it is mostly used against religious minorities deemed to have criticized Islam, as opposed to other religions. [Human Rights Watch]

Indonesia is just one of many countries across Asia with laws against blasphemy that restrict free expression. Many of these laws carry high penalties and have been criticized for their arbitrary application and use to silence genuine and legitimate criticism of governments and local authorities.

Indonesia: Calls for police reform mount after attack on student protestor

(ms) Human rights groups have condemned an act of police violence against a student protestor in Tangerang Regency on October 13. The groups have spoken out after a video circulated on social media, showing a police officer in riot gear holding the protestor in a chokehold before slamming him onto the pavement. The protestor can then be seen to shake uncontrollably on the ground in what appears to be a seizure. The act occurred during a student demonstration on the regency's anniversary, calling for city pollution, the unfair treatment of COVID-19 volunteers and damaged roads to be addressed. [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post]

Amnesty International Indonesia executive director, Usman Hamid, has condemned the incident as a blatant act of brutality involving unnecessary force and violence, labelling the incident a criminal act and urging the perpetrator to be tried accordingly in the courts. Tangerang City Policy Chief, Senior Commander Wahyu Sri Bintoro, has issued a public apology for the incident and promised to take stern action against the officer responsible. [Tempo 2] [VOI]

The incident comes amid declining public sentiment towards the police in Indonesia and wider calls for police reform. In recent weeks, the hashtag #PercumaLaporPolisi has trended on social media following a reported case of rape that was not investigated properly by police. Along with the hashtag, many people have shared similar experiences of cases not being followed up by police for various reasons. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Convicted terrorist's confession leads police to seize hidden explosives

(ms) Indonesian police seized 35kg of the highly unstable explosive triacetone triperoxide (TATP) buried at the foot of a mountain in West Java province earlier this month, authorities announced on Wednesday October 12. Densus 88, Indonesia's elite anti-terrorism police unit, were able to find the explosives due to the confession obtained from prisoner Imam Mulyana. His confession shows the country's deradicalization efforts are working, said the police. [Benar News]

Imam was arrested in 2017 after a failed attempt to attack an entourage of President Joko Widodo. He was later discovered to have links to Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD), an Indonesian militant network affiliated with the so-called Islamic State (IS) group. The network has been blamed for major terrorist attacks in the country, including suicide bombings that targeted churches in Surabaya in May 2018.

Malaysia: State snap elections in Malacca

(nd) A state wide snap election will be held in Malacca on November 20. This is the first test for Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob's government, which will only see a general election in July 2023. The state legislative in Malacca was dissolved in October following the declaration of no-confidence against the state's chief minister by four assemblymen, who are members of the United Malays National Organisation, and its ally Bersatu respectively. [Bloomberg]

Malaysia: Convicted ex-PM allowed to travel abroad

(nd) A three-judge panel of the Court of Appeal decided that former Prime Minister Najib Razak could temporarily have his passport back to travel to Singapore for a family event. Earlier, Najib's wife Rosmah was granted a request to receive her passport back temporarily.

Amid international probes related to money laundering with respect to the 1Malaysia Development Berhad state fund, then Prime Minister Mahatir

Mohamad confiscated Najib's and his wife Rosmah's passports. In 2020, Najib was found guilty of abuse of power, criminal breach of trust, and money-laundering. Rosmah is still facing a corruption-related trial. Similarly, United Malays National Organization (UMNO) President Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, is also facing criminal proceedings, was granted his request.

On social media, the decision was criticized heavily, also with respect to the prosecution's lack of objecting the panel's decision to hear Najib's request. After losing power in the general election of 2018, UMNO returned to power in August 2021 through the appointment of UMNO Vice-President Ismail Sabri Yaakob as Prime Minister, following Muhyiddin Yassin's resignation. [Benar News]

Myanmar: Court presses ahead against Suu Kyi as court silences lawyer

(ds) This week the figurehead for Myanmar's government-in-exile, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, appeared before a judge in a special court in Myanmar's capital, Naypyitaw. Suu Kyi formally pleaded not guilty to the charges of violating COVID-19 restrictions, while also brushing off further charges against her, including illegal importation of walkie-talkies, and those of corruption and bribery while in office. Observers have derided the litany of supposed offenses committed by the ousted National League for Democracy's (NLD) leader, which are generally considered to be motivated by political reasons. The NLD was deposed in a coup in February despite their landslide victory securing a second mandate in November 2020. [The Washington Post] [The Irrawaddy 2]

Joining Suu Kyi in court was ousted-President U Win Myint, who is accused of, among other charges, sedition in relation to his resistance to the army's requests that he steps down. The former president's democratic activism dates back to 1988 and his commitment to Burmese democracy led him to supposedly claim "he would [have] rather die[d] than consent" to military rule in February's take-over, the court heard. [The Irrawaddy 3]

The case against the deposed leaders has drawn an international gaze, to which the junta has responded by issuing a gag order against the legal counsel for the defendants. Lawyers working on the case will from now on be banned from talking to the press as per section 144 of the Myanmar criminal procedure code, most likely putting an end to an important source of

information on the criminal proceedings against Nobel laureate Suu Kyi and her associates. [The Inquirer.Net]

Anniversary of ceasefire comes amid increasing violence against minority Christians

(ds) October 15 saw the sixth anniversary of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), signed by the country's President at the time, Thein Sein, to facilitate an end to the violence between Myanmar's military and eight ethnic armed organizations. This year's anniversary is marred by continuing violence between the aforementioned groups, plus a newly formed pro-democracy insurgency. Analyst for the Asia Foundation, David Scott Mathieson, claims the 2015 ceasefire was destined to fail, citing a series of insincere "cobbled-together compromises" that did not fully end the armed conflict, especially in the Kachin, Kayin and Shan States. Further, posits Matheison, the former civilian government led by imprisoned former head Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, failed to make peace and reconciliation a priority, instead favoring relations among the Burmese Buddhist majority. [The Irrawaddy]

Observers point to such diplomatic ineptitudes as having ongoing knock-on effects for Burmese minority groups. In the latest round of tensions, sparked by February's military take-over, Human rights groups have promulgated information claiming that members of Myanmar's minority Christian clergy, particularly "church leaders and volunteers", are frequently caught up in the crossfire. Experts point to a blemished history of relations and an unresolved "deep-seated hostility" between the military and the country's non-Buddhist minority groups. [Al Jazeera]

Philippines: Commission on Elections to monitor social media spending of electoral candidates

(lt) The Commission on Elections has announced its monitoring of the social media spending habits of political candidates. In a statement, the commission stressed the importance of impartiality, vowing to solely check monetary expenditure on social media campaigns rather than limiting the number of advertisements used by candidates. The commission has cited a lack of law regarding the regulation of

election ads on social media as a reason to do so. [ABS-CBN News]

Philippines: New acting secretary of Department of Public Works and Highways appointed

(lt) Malacañang Palace has announced President Rodrigo Duterte's appointment of Southern Leyte Rep. Roger Mercado as acting secretary of the Department of Public Works and Highways.

Mercado replaces Mark Villar, who resigned from this position to file his certificate of candidacy to run for senator in the May 2022 elections. The congressman is a deputy major leader in the House of Representatives. He also holds the position of vice chairman on the Committee on Public Works and Highways. [Manila Times]

Philippines: Former Vice President withdraws from 2022 general elections

(lt) Noli de Castro, former vice president and news broadcaster, has withdrawn from the Senate race in the upcoming 2022 general elections. Stating that he would be more helpful to his countrymen in his role as a news anchor, de Castro's withdrawal was announced in a statement posted by the broadcaster's daughter, Kat de Castro on Wednesday, 13 October. [CNN] [Rappler]

Philippines: Overseas voting closes two weeks earlier than Philippine deadline

(lt) The Commission on Elections closed registration to vote on Thursday, 14 October for overseas Filipino citizens. This premature cutoff contrasts with the deadline for Filipinos in the Philippines, who have just over two weeks to register.

On 30 September, President Rodrigo Duterte extended voter's registration until October 30 through the enactment of Republic Act 11591. The statute did not distinguish between overseas and domestic voter registration.

The Commission on Elections has yet to provide reasons for ending overseas voter registration prematurely and has not responded to calls for an extension. [Rappler]

Philippines: Presidential candidates open in working with China

(lt) Presidential candidates Leni Robredo and Isko Moreno express their wish to cooperate with China should they be elected President.

In a speech before the Rotary Club in Manila, Robredo was one of the first candidates asked by the Rotary Club to discuss issues on foreign policy. The current vice-president has asserted that while she is open to trading with China, the West Philippine Sea arbitral ruling must be recognized. [ABS-CBN News]

Isko Moreno has exhibited a similar stance in working with China, though he has stated that doing business with the nation differs from surrendering Philippine rights in the South China Sea. Open to joint oil exploration with China, the current Mayor of Manila has repeatedly stated his commitment to protecting Philippine interests in the region. [ABS-CBN]

In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague established that there was no evidence for China's historic claims over the South China Sea. China has dismissed this ruling, continuing to aggravate the Philippines and other states in the key waterway in an attempt to assert its dominance. [Lowy Institute]

Almost half of Filipinos say criticizing Duterte administration is dangerous

(lt) 45 per cent of the Filipino population believe vocal criticism of President Rodrigo Duterte's administration is dangerous, a survey by the Social Weather Stations reports.

The nationwide poll was conducted in September, and asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement "It is dangerous to print or broadcast anything critical of the administration, even if it is the truth." The survey found that 45 per cent of respondents agreed with the given statement, 29 per cent were undecided, and 19 per cent disagreed. [Manila Bulletin]

Academics protest removal of National Democratic Front of the Philippines books from university libraries

(lt) Academics Unite for Democracy and Human Rights (AUDHR) protested against the removal of books and documents published by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in at least three state libraries.

Those removed from The Kalinga State University, Isabela State University, and Aklan State University included the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, NDFP Declaration and Program of Action for the Rights, Protection and Welfare of Children, as well as the Government of the Philippines-NDFP Peace Negotiations Major Arguments.

Removed to supposedly protect students against insurgent ideology, AUDHR compared the removal to censorship occurring in Nazi Germany, wherein universities and schools were raided of books and media considered subversive. [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Fall of New People's Army in Davao, Cotabato

(lt) The whole-of-nation approach to tackling the 50-year communist insurgency has culminated in the imminent fall of the New People's Army in the areas Davao and Cotabato. Lt. Cl. Ezra Balagtey, commander of the 39th Battalion based in Davao del Sur, praised the various programs implemented by agencies under the Task Force Ending Local Conflict.

Implemented under Executive Order 70, the whole-of-nation approach addresses root causes of the communist insurgency, internal conflicts and other threats the New People's Army presents. This approach acts against these issues by delivering basic needs and social development packages to those directly affected. In doing this, the whole-of-nation policy aims to foster inclusivity amongst all classes of society. [Manila Times]

Philippine militants named in Facebook blacklist leak

(lt) The Intercept, a non-profit news website, has released a 100-page Facebook document naming dangerous organizations and individuals based in South and Southeast Asia. Various militant Muslim extremist groups based in the Philippines were also named in the leak.

Among these are Ansar al-Khialfah and the Maute group. The latter is notable for its participation in a five-month militant siege based in Marawi city. Also included on the list is the Communist Party of the Philippines, led by the self-exiled Jose Maria Sison. [Benar News]

Singapore: License for political bloc suspended

(nd) The license of the political blog The Online Citizen (TOC) was suspended due to its failing to declare its funding sources. TOC was founded 15 years ago and has been more critical than mainstream media, which is viewed as pro-government.

According to the Infocomm Media Development Authority, TOC had since 2019 not fully complied with the disclosure of funding rules. Additionally, TOC's business model allowed subscribers to also provide content, which authorities argued made them sensitive to foreign influence. The TOC'S editorial said they were not willing to "betray the trust and privacy of our subscribers" by naming them as donors to meet funding declaration requirements.

Just recently, Singapore passed a new law on foreign interference, which was criticized for its wide scope and the lack of judicial review. [see AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1][Reuters]

Thailand: Pheu Thai expels two MPs for disloyalty

(kk) The Pheu Thai Party (PTP) expelled two MPs, Saranwut Saranket and Pornpimol Thammasarn, for defying the opposition whip to vote against the ministers in the latest no-confidence motion.

The party's executive committee and MPs voted to oust two MPs. Saranwut - an MP for Uttaradit - was accused of causing damage to the party by defaming and disobeying the party whip after being denied a role in

the previous censure debate against the government. Meanwhile, Pornpimol, a Pathum Thani MP, was removed from the party for not voting with the party on crucial pieces of legislation and motions, and instead voting with the government. [Bangkok Post]

According to the current constitution, the two MPs must join a new party within 30 days of their dismissal, otherwise they will lose their MP status. [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Youth resort to desperate measures to protest the government's use of lèse majesté law

(kk) A young activist cut himself to protest the use of royal defamation charges against him and other activists and protesters during his trial at the Criminal Court. He demanded the court to release all political prisoners held on charges under Section 112 of the Criminal Code ahead of their trials. The activist was tried over his speech during the protest at the German Embassy in October 2020. [See AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4, No. 43, October/2020, 4]

Over the past year, more than 150 people were charged with royal defamation, which carries a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison. Some of those who have been accused resorted to desperate measures to express their opposition to the lèse majesté law. Earlier, Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak had been on a prolonged hunger strike for about two months duration detention to pressure the court to release him and other activists accused of defaming the monarchy. [UCA News]

Numerous human rights organizations have urged the Thai government to repeal the royal defamation law, and drop charges against those who are currently facing criminal prosecution, and release those who have been imprisoned under Section 112. [See AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

Thailand: Anti-vaccine sentiment rises among young students due to distrust in government

(kk) Young students are widely reluctant to receive a COVID-19 vaccine shot as they are suspicious of the government and its handling of the pandemic.

Thailand has been giving the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA vaccine, to students aged 12 to 17 since early October. Over 25 percent out of total five million eligible students refused to receive the shots.

As of October 16, the number of Thai people fully vaccinated is at 35.9 percent, less than half of the population. [Thairath, in Thai] Students' hesitancy toward Pfizer vaccine, which was seen as the best option of the available vaccines, sparked an anger among those who desire to receive the mRNA vaccine but had to resort to other vaccines and those who still have not been vaccinated at all.

Many Thais see mRNA vaccines as superior options as they believe they are more effective than the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine, which the country is heavily reliant on. The reliance on Sinovac has been portrayed by many as the government's "increasing tilt towards China". Pro-democracy protesters have also demanded mRNA vaccines for general population instead of the Chinese vaccines since July. [See AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3]

However, there have been rising hesitancy towards the Pfizer vaccine among students circulating on social media.One of the reasons is likely to be concerns about the side-effects of vaccines. [The Matter, in Thai] Another reason is that the students fear the government would replace the mRNA vaccine with the Chinese-made Sinovac vaccine, indicating a lack of trust in the government among Thai youth. In the past few months, the vaccination program showed signs of unpreparedness and disorganization such as a sudden change of vaccine for the second shot and insufficient vaccine stocks. [The Diplomat]

Thailand: PPRP's PM candidate choices rest with Prawit amid rumors of new PM candidates

(kk) Prawit Wongsuwan – the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) leader – insisted PM candidates, as well as MP candidates in the next election are for him to decide, in order to silence MPs' concerns. The concerns rose as some PPRP constituency MPs feared that the power to select MP candidates might fall into the hands of Thammanat Prompao – the secretary-general of PPRP and Prawit's close ally – after Thammanat was dismissed from the cabinet by Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha.

Prawit also expressed his confidence in resolving problems that the ruling party faces, particularly the growing internal displeasure against his advisor, Pirapan Salirathavibhaga. Pirapan was rumored to be a potential prime ministerial candidate if Prayuth, who is receiving the party's support for the PM position, cannot return as PM due to the issue over his term limit. [See AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

Prayuth's term limit has been subject to much debate as the current charter limits maximum tenure of prime minister to eight years. The opposition insisted that Prayuth's premiership began on the day he was installed as the head of the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) following the 2014 coup, which means his premiership would end in 2022. The ruling coalition argued that Prayuth's term began when the current charter was promulgated in 2017. [See AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]

The possibility of Pirapan being an alternative candidate to Prayuth infuriated some MPs. Sira Jenjaka, a PPRP Bangkok MP, questioned the advisor's suitability for the role of PM, comparing Pirapan to a "novice monk" who requires more time to "rise through the ranks" before landing the PM nomination. Previously, Pirapan was a Democrat Party MP for five times and a former justice minister, before quitting the Democrat Party in 2019. [Bangkok Post 1] Pirapan denied the rumor, adding that he has never discussed the issue with Prawit or the PM. The PPRP leader's advisor reiterated that he has no ambition to become a candidate for prime minister. [Bangkok Post 2]

Another person involved in the rumor of a PM candidate nomination was Pathum Thani governor Narongsak Osottanakorn, a former Chiangrai governor who led the Tham Luang cave rescue of trapped boys in 2018. The rumor of Narongsak being the second choice of PPRP's prime ministerial candidate was fueled when he met with the ruling party leader. However, the Pathum Thani governor denied that he would become PM candidate for PPRP despite confirming reports that he actually met with Prawit. [Bangkok Post 3]

Meanwhile, the opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) leader Pita Limjaroenrat announced he would run as the party's candidate for prime minister in the next general election at the first general assembly of the Move Forward Party in a Northeast province of Thailand. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: 17-day security operation in the Deep South swamp forest ends

(kk) Thai forces conducted a 17-day security operation to crack down on suspected separatist insurgents in Thailand's Deep South, counting ten casualties, including four military personnel. The security operation began on September 28, after suspects hid in and around the swamp forest in Hutaelueyo, a village in Bacho district, Narathiwat province, followed by days of gun-battles between the government forces and suspected insurgents. [BenarNews1]

This wave of violence came after a message in early September linked to Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) – the largest and most powerful rebel group in the Deep South. The message urged combatants to "resume self-defense operations" as "Siam's security forces set up raids and conducted summary executions despite pandemic-related difficulties." [BenarNews 2]

In April 2020, BRN declared that it was ceasing all hostile actions against the Thai military due to the struggle against the coronavirus pandemic. Face-to-face peace talks between Thailand and BRN have been interrupted since March 2020 because of the pandemic, a month before the official declaration of ceasefire. However, both sides continued to meet online through technical-level panels. The latest virtual meeting occurred in February 2021. [See AiR No. 15, April/2020, 2] [See also AiR No. 6, February/2021, 2, AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]

Vietnam: Jailed activist was tortured in bid to extract confession

(tl) Jailed Vietnamese land activist Trinh Ba Tu was tortured in detention in an attempt by the authorities to have him confess to be guilty of "anti-state activities".

According to his lawyer, Tu was beaten during the interrogation after his arrest, and he subsequently required hospitalization. After receiving treatment, he was returned to detention and the authorities told him to sign a statement confessing to the crime of "creating, storing, disseminating anti-State materials" to serve six years instead of eight.

Trinh Ba Tu was arrested on 24 June 2020 together with his mother, his brother and an activist for posting eight videos on social media discriminating against the

government, mocking the ruling CCP and providing false information about the Dong Tam incident, a protest against land grabbing for the construction of a military airport that went violent in early 2020. While his brother and the other activist are still waiting for a process, Tu and his mother were initially denied access to a lawyer, and then sentenced on 5 May to eight years' imprisonment plus three years' probation.

Experts from the United Nations have expressed concerns about the arrest and conviction of the activists, pointing out that Article 117 of the penal code is being used to silence dissent within the country. Amnesty said that the convicted activists should never have been arrested and that if the report on Tu's torture is true, the Vietnamese government should be convicted of the crime of torture and violation of international law. [Front Line Defenders]

While all land in Vietnam is ultimately held by the state, land confiscations have become a flashpoint as residents accuse the government of pushing small landholders aside in favor of lucrative real estate projects, and of paying too little in compensation. Citizens' dissent is repeatedly silenced by the government, which not only controls the state media but also punishes and arbitrarily imprisons independent journalists and bloggers. The number of arrests regarding freedom of expression has soared in the past two years and the party often uses three articles to justify arrests, according to which, “activities aimed at overthrowing the government,” ”anti-state propaganda” and ”abuse of the rights of freedom and democracy to threaten the interests of the state” are punishable by long prison sentences. [Radio Free Asia] [Reporters Without Borders]

Vietnam: Man arrested for joining an organization classified as 'terrorist'

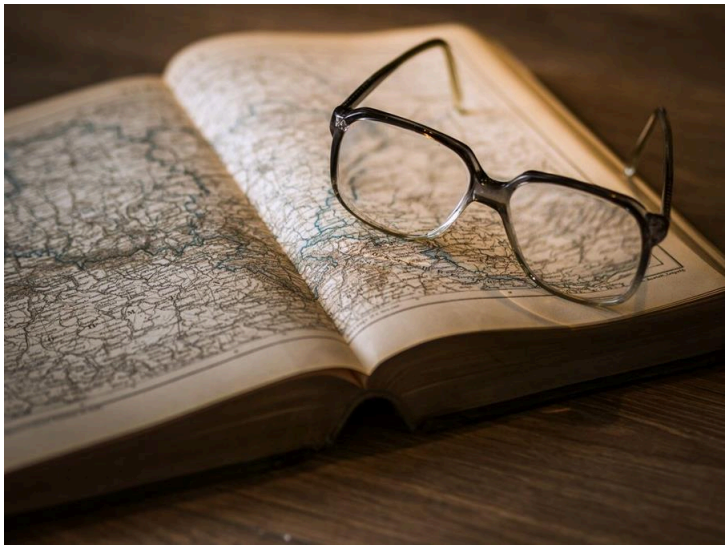
(tl) Vietnamese authorities arrested a man on charges of “carrying out activities to overthrow the government” for joining a Vietnamese organization in exile in the United States classified by Hanoi as a terrorist group.

According to the authorities, Nguyen Doan Quang Vien is guilty of participating in the activities of the Provisional Government of Vietnam, helping to promote the organization within the country and encouraging a referendum to promote the leader of the provisional government as the legitimate President

of Vietnam. Vien is the fourth person to be arrested for joining the organization in 2021.

The Vietnam Provisional Government was founded in 1991 by former soldiers and loyalists of the former South Vietnamese government and is currently based in Orange County, California. To date, the group's leader is US citizen Dao Minh Quan. According to its website, the group calls itself the Third Republic of Vietnam. [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



China: Hypersonic weapon successfully tested?

(dql) China has reportedly successfully tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic weapon, signaling yet another evolutionary step forward in Beijing's ambitious and rapid modernization of its military and indicating deepened cooperation between China and Russia, which is considered the possess the most advance technology in this field.

Hypersonic weapons are militarily interesting because of high speed, maneuverability, and low trajectory making it difficult to detect and intercept them. China, the US and Russia are all actively developing and testing hypersonic vehicles, with the latter announcing in early October the testing of its new Zircon hypersonic missile from a submarine, capable of flying at nine times the speed of sound, with a range of 1,000

kilometers. The US military, meanwhile, disclosed in September that its Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept (HAWC) achieved hypersonic speeds during a recent flight test. [Space.com] [AP News] [Intelligent Aerospace]

China, for its part, however, was quick to deny the report on the hypersonic weapon test, insisting instead that it was conducting a spacecraft check with a focus on reusable technology. [Aljazeera]

China warns of political manipulation of coronavirus origin probe

(dql) China has send a strong warning against what it sees as possible "political manipulation" of a second probe by the World Health Organization (WHO) into the origins of the coronavirus, accusing the U.S. and other states of politicizing the matter. At the same time, Beijing announced its support for the international body's efforts.

The warning comes in response to the release a proposed list of 25 experts to advise the WHO on next steps in the search for the virus' origins, following a first investigation earlier this year which concluded that it was "extremely unlikely" that the coronavirus leaked from a Wuhan lab, a theory strongly supported by the Trump administration. Since then, the probe has come under attack for being too lenient towards China which has been facing accusations of refusing to provide full access to relevant data. [ABC News]

China-US relations: Joint working group established

(dql) China's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Le Yucheng confirmed in an interview with state broadcaster CGTN that a Chinese-US joint working group has been formed to "discuss how to address some specific issues in bilateral relations," adding that "some progress" has been made.

At the same time, Le marked red lines and fired stitches against the US, accusing the US of being "busy building small blocs and playing zero-sum games in geopolitics," criticizing Washington for creating "one mess after another through 'color revolution' and 'democratic transformation'" and warning – with reference to Taiwan – that the one-China principle is the foundation of China-US relations, and that using

"the foundation as a card is as dangerous as playing with fire while holding firewood." [Foreign Ministry, China]

China-US relations: US suspicions over construction at Cambodian naval base

(dql) The US has voiced concerns over Chinese construction activities at the Ream Naval Base in Sihanoukville province, Cambodia's biggest naval base, after satellite images, released by think tank Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative (AMTI) at the Wahsington, D.C.-baseed Center for Strategic and International Studies, depicted physical alterations in August and September indicating new structures "built to facilitate a Chinese military presence in Cambodia." [AMTI] [South China Morning Post]

For a latest US assessment of the rapid modernization of China's navy, see the Congressional Research Service Report "China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities – Background and Issues for Congress," which underscores that China's navy is "posing a major challenge to the U.S. Navy's ability to achieve and maintain wartime control of blue-water ocean areas in the Western Pacific – the first such challenge the U.S. Navy has faced since the end of the Cold War," as part of Beijing's efforts to challenge the US as dominating military power in the Western Pacific. [Congressional Research Service, USA]

China-India relations: Border tensions to continue as both sides reinforce positions along LAC

(dql) Following the failed talks between Chinese and Indian army commanders over disengaging troops from key friction areas along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) earlier this month [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2], China has deployed over 100 PCL-181 light, truck-mounted howitzers – advanced long-range rocket launchers – in the conflict zone as part of the preparation for the Himalayan winter as well as in response to the India's deployment of three regiments with M777 ultra-light howitzers. [South China Morning Post 1]

India, for its part, is increasing its surveillance of border areas in Arunachal Pradesh, which shares a 1,129 km border with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. Using Israeli-made Heron medium-altitude

long-endurance drones, New Delhi is conducting round-the-clock surveillance over the LAC, providing command and control centers with crucial data and images. Along with the drones, the Indian army is also boosting infrastructure near the border to China, aiming at facilitate faster troop movements, including roads, bridges and railway infrastructure. [News 18] [Times of India]

Meanwhile, a video has been posted on Twitter by a Chinese Global Times journalist of which he said it depicts Chinese troops escorting captured and blindfolded members of the Indian armed forces. The caption to the video reads: "PLA is the most civilised military force in treating prisoners of its enemies. Those Indian soldiers and officers in the video will agree with me."

The post comes on the heels of reports in Indian media over the detention of some 200 Chinese soldiers who had been attempting to destroy Indian bunkers along the LAC. News of the detentions was then dismissed in Hindustan Times report which cited an Indian government source declaring that no Chinese soldiers were held, nor was damage caused to defences. [South China Morning Post 2]

China: Xi Jinping makes financial pledge on global safeguarding of biodiversity

(dql) At last week's Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP15), held in the Chinese city of Kunming and attended by nearly 200 countries, Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed to provide US$233 million to finance biodiversity conservation in developing countries, reflecting a culmination point of Beijing's efforts in the recent years to seek a more prominent role internationally in this field. [AP News]

More than 100 countries signed the "Kunming Declaration" pledging to come up with an "ambitious and transformative" plan to stop further loss of biodiversity and reverse the development, while declaring that "strong political momentum" was needed to cope with the "defining challenge of this decade." [Actu-Environment]

China-Russia relations: Joint naval drills to warn Japan

(dql) China and Russia on Thursday, October 14, have kicked off four-day joint naval drills in the Sea of Japan, involving several warships and at least a dozen military aircraft, including Russia's large anti-submarine warfare ship Admiral Panteleyev, the Project 20380 corvettes Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov and Gromky, two coastal-type minesweepers, the Project 877 submarine Ust-Bolsheretsk, a missile boat and a rescue tug, as well as the Chinese destroyers Kunming and Nanchang, the corvettes Qinzhou and Luzhou and also a diesel submarine, a supply ship, and a rescue vessel participated in the naval maneuvers, the statement added. [Press TV]

In a latest development, both countries conducted on Monday, October 18, a joint anti-submarine drill and a first joint passage through Tsugaru Strait in the Japanese archipelago, in a demonstration of closed ranks and strong signal of warning towards Japan. [South China Morning Post]

Japan and South Korea to make more effort to improve ties, Kishida sends offering to Yasukuni Shrine

(lnl) Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida urged South Korea on Wednesday, October 13, to make more effort at improving and mending bilateral ties damaged by wartime issues. The leaders of Japan and South Korea then spoke by phone on Friday, October 15 to look to deepen ties in face of regional security threats. Kishida however, sent a ritual offering to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine on Sunday, October 17.

Kishida's urge in an upper house plenary session is related to court rulings in South Korea that ordained the seizure of assets of Japanese companies as compensation for labor by Korean nationals during the colonial era [see No. 40, October/2021, 1]. Kishida "strongly urge[s] the South Korean side to present an acceptable solution at an early date to bring Japan and South Korea back to healthy relations". The urge from Kishida is also connected to the increased instability in the region and the recent threat posed by North Korea's ballistic missile test launches, and nuclear and missile programs [see No. 40, October/2021, 1]. Kishida points out the cruciality of Tokyo's cooperation with Seoul and their trilateral partnership with the U.S. [Japan Today]

Fumio Kishida and South Korean President Moon Jae-In said in a phone talk on Friday, October 15, that the

two countries would try deepening their commitment to security cooperation in the region despite strained bilateral relations. Although Seoul and Tokyo are both military allies of the U.S. and share common concerns over China and North Korea, the relationship between the countries have suffered over the legacy of Japan's military aggression during WWII and disagreement over monetary compensation for wartime Korean laborers. [AP News]

However, ahead of the Yasukuni Shrine's autumn festival, Kishida sent a ritual offering to the shrine that honors war dead on Sunday, October 17. This has prompted South Korea to express "deep disappointment and regret" over Japanese leaders "once again sending offerings to and repeating their visits to" the shrine that "glorifies Japan's war aggression and enshrines war criminals". Kishida was following the example of previous Japanese leaders who have refrained from visiting in person during the festivals or on the anniversary of Japan's WWII surrender to avoid angering China and South Korea.

The Yasukuni Shrine is seen by China and South Korea as a symbol of Japan's past military aggression due to the fact that it honors 14 Japanese wartime leaders convicted as war criminals. The majority of the 2.5 million people enshrined at Yasukuni were military servicemen and civilian employees of the Japanese military. [Kyodo News] [Reuters]

Japan attends Quad's joint naval drill

(lnl) In the face of China's maritime assertiveness, the naval forces of the U.S., Japan, Australia and India, conducted the second phase of the Malabar exercise in the Bay of Bengal from Tuesday, October 12, to Thursday, October 14, involving two Japanese escort vessels, the U.S. Navy's nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Carl Vinson, an Australian frigate and an Indian destroyer. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Fumio Kishida's first phone talk with Boris Johnson

(lnl) During a first phone talk between Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and the United Kingdom's Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Wednesday, October 13, the leaders welcomed a strengthening in Japan-Britain relations. They also discussed security

cooperation between the countries to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

London and Tokyo also agreed to sign an agreement to boost interoperability and collaboration between Japan's Self-Defense Forces and the British Armed Forces. The countries are stepping up coordination to counter China's military buildup and assertive territorial claims in the Indo-Pacific. This also includes countermeasures against North Korea and its resumed ballistic missile tests.

The prime ministers also discussed the United Kingdom's bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) free trade agreement, which includes the countries of Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam. [Kyodo News]

South Korea, UAE push for free trade deal

(aml) South Korean Trade Minister Yeo Han-koo and his UAE counterpart Thani Ahmed Al Zeyoudi have issued a joint statement aiming at pushing forward a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). South Korea and the UAE have closely cooperated in energy fields and the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and their trade volume had been at $9.4 billion in 2020. The CEPA is expected to increase investments and transactions in bio, aerospace, hydrogen, and renewable energy, among other fields. [The Korea Times]

The meeting of the trade ministers took place shortly after the countries' foreign ministers had met in Dubai to discuss how their countries relationship can be strengthened. [AiR, No.41, October/2021, 2]

South Korea helps Colombia develop ship industry

(aml) The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and Colombia's Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism have signed a record of discussion, in which South Korea wants to help the South American country to establish a foundation for policies for its shipbuilding industry.

Colombia has chosen the shipbuilding sector as one of its core national industries under its social agreement

for economic growth at job creation from 2018 to 2022. However, the industry had issues to adapt to the international market since it focuses on ship repair and glass-reinforced plastic. KOICA will therefore support the implementation of mid-to long-term development plan for the industry including training in policy, design, and production. [The Korea Times]

South Korea, Japan remain apart over historical issues

(aml) After the election of the new Japanese Prime Minster Fumio Kishida, South Korean president Moon Jae-in and Kishida have held their first phone talk on Friday, October 15th. President Moon called for the two countries to work out their wartime disputes before it is too late, Kishida demanded that South Korea to suggest ways to solve the disagreement but did not further elaborate what he considered appropriate. [The Korea Herald 1] [The Korea Times 1]

After Kishida held phone talks with US, Australia, India, China, and Russia over the course of last week, Japanese media had interpreted the late talks with South Korea as demonstration of Kishida's priorities. It had been reported that Kishida's office and the Foreign Ministry have decided to not prioritize talks with South Korea, on the grounds that Japan's general elections take place on October 31th and Kishida therefore wants to reiterate the hardline stance on South Korea of his predecessors. [The Korea Herald 2] [The Korea Times 2] [Nikkei Asia]

The relation between the two countries have been at an all-time low due to disagreements over how to handle actions for compensation for the forced labor and sexual slavery stemming from Japan's colonial rule over South Korea from 1910-1945. Japan insists that everything has been settled under agreements in 1965 and 2015 but Moon's administration demands further consolation. [AiR, No.41, October/2021, 2]

While the phone talk did not help to relax the tension between the two countries, Kishida's offerings to the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo on Sunday has sparked harsh critique from South Korea. The Shrine honors 2.5 million Japanese war dead, including 14 class-A criminals from World War 2 and is constantly criticized from neighboring countries for glorifying Japan's mast militarism. [The Korea Times 3] [The Korea Herald 3]

South Korea donates AstraZeneca vaccine to Vietnam, Thailand

(aml) South Korea is donating 1.1 million doses of AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine to Vietnam and 470,000 doses to Thailand. It is the first time that South Korea is directly donating Covid-19 vaccines to other countries since the support through the COVAX program had been only financial aid. South Korean president Moon Jae-in had promised to his Vietnamese counterpart to donate at least 1 million doses of vaccines, as they met in New York last month. According to the foreign ministry, the donations aim at protecting Korean nationals living in Vietnam and Thailand as well as local residents. [The Korea Times]

US, South Korea discuss follow-up measures on summit agreement

(aml) South Korea and the US held talks to discuss the implementation of their latest summit agreement during the third Bilateral Policy Dialogue (BPD) on Thursday. Alongside the discussion of pending diplomatic and security issues, Ko Yun-ju, Ministry's director general for North American affairs and Mark Lambert, US deputy assistant secretary for Japan and South Korea, reaffirmed their commitment to joint efforts regarding the denuclearization of the peninsula, climate change, global health, and emerging technologies. [The Korea Herald]

South Korean assembly speaker visits Egypt to strengthen partnership

(aml) National assembly speaker Park Byeong-seug has visited Egypt to ask for help in engaging with North Korea and for efforts to officially end the 1950-53 Korean War.

In the meeting with the president of the Senate Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Razeq and the speaker of the House of Representatives Hanafy Ali El Gebali, he sked Egypt to help North Korea to talk openly for peace as Egypt is North Korea's traditional ally and Gebali responded that Egyptian President Sissi "supports all mechanisms for maintaining peace and stability" and that Egypt "will always support efforts to solve difficult problems through dialogue".

The talks with President Abd al-Fattah as-Sisi focused on economic cooperation and international security, especially Park's request to support Korean companies in large projects led by Egypt which would help Korean companies to expand their export into Asia, European and African markets. [The Korea Herald]

Pentagon reaffirms "rock solid" commitment to Taiwan

(zh) The United States Department of Defense has reaffirmed its pledge to help Taiwan defend itself against China's potential military coercion, saying its commitment to the island is "rock solid". Pentagon's comment came after the island's Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng described current cross-strait relations as "the worst in 40 years" and warned of a full-scale Chinese invasion by 2025 [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. [Focus Taiwan 1]

Earlier before, the Biden administration had discussed with the island's officials the possibility of expediting the delivery of American-made F-16s to Taiwan in light of China's recent mounting military incursion in the island's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]. The fighter jets sales were approved in 2019, and it usually can take up to 10 years for delivery. [CNN]

In another development, Chiu has confirmed that the island's Army General Hsu Yen-pu had visited Washington and attended the Association of the United States Army's Annual Meeting (AUSA), the largest land-power exposition and professional development forum in North America. According to the defense minister, the visit is part of an annual exchange program between the two sides' militaries. [Focus Taiwan 2]

In a report to parliament, Chiu has commented on China's increased warplane incursion near Taiwan, warning "the closer that are to the island, the stronger the countermeasures". China's Taiwan Affairs Office, meanwhile, defended the sorties saying that they were necessary to "fundamentally safeguard the overall interests of the Chinese nation and the vital interests of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait." Earlier this month, Taiwan had reported record Chinese warplane sorties in the island's air defense identification zone (ADIZ). Around 150 Chinese jets had entered the ADIZ in four consecutive days between October 1 and 4 [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. [Reuters][Taipei Times]

In related news, it is reported that, according to satellite images, China is upgrading and reinforcing its airbases closest to Taiwan in Fujian province, the southeastern coast of its territory, signaling Beijing is stepping up its preparation for a potential military conflict with the island. The construction at Longtian Airbase, Huian Airbase, and Zhangzhou airbase are expected to enhance China's air combat ability and help defend potential strikes to the country. [South China Morning Post]

Regarding potential military conflicts across the Taiwan Strait, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said Beijing "does not need to use force" to achieve its unification goal and he did not see any threat of military confrontation. Echoing Chinese President Xi Jinping's remarks of "peaceful reunification", Putting argues that China as a powerful economy has the capability to implement its national objectives "by increasing their economic potential". [CNBC]

In another blow to strained Sino-US relations, Harvard University has announced the plan to relocate its intensive summer Chinese program from Beijing Language and Culture University in Beijing to National Taiwan University in Taipei. Citing operational and logistical considerations, the program director said the move is due to "a perceived lack of friendliness from the hose institution". [AP][The Crimson]

Despite rising Cross-Strait tension, analysis by [CNN] has argued the possibility of a potential Chinese invasion to Taiwan is low, pointing out the current deteriorating relations between two sides are mainly due to an increasingly confident Taiwan, warming US-Taiwan relations, and consideration of Chinese domestic politics. For possible US policy on cross-strait relations, see the article in [Council on Foreign Relations].

Taiwan chipmaker TSMC to build plant in Japan

(zh) Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), the world's biggest contract chipmaker, has announced plans to build an advanced chip-making plant in Japan in 2022 and start operations in 2024. The factory is expected to be jointly run with Sony Group Corp. and produce 22-nanometer and 28-nanometer chips. [The Japan Times][Taipei Times]

Meanwhile, the European Union (EU) has made a pitch for TSMC to invest in the bloc, saying the EU and Taiwan are democracies with shared values and are

natural partners when it comes to semiconductors. Describing technology as "a question of security", Sabine Weyand, director general of the European Commission's trade section, hopes "the EU's digital agenda to be shaped together with our like-minded partners and according to our common values." [Reuters]

With the world's growing demands for chips and just a few players in the industry, semiconductors have become a strategic commodity amid the Sino-US geopolitical competition. TSMC has played a key role in the competition, and its plan to build new plants may have a strong impact on the situation, see analysis in [Small Wars Journal]. For the research of how the tech heavyweight island defends itself against a potential Chinese takeover, see [Focus Taiwan]. To know more about China's attempt to achieve semiconductor self-reliance, see the coverage by [Observer Research Foundation].

Taiwan's legislative committee approved bill on tariff-free treatment for allies

(zh) Taiwan legislature's Finance Committee has approved a draft that would allow tariff-free treatment for 234 products from three of its diplomatic allies: Belize, Honduras, and Paraguay. The proposed amendment to the Customs Import Tariff Act, which provides the import duty-free of 199 items from Belize, 25 from Honduras, and 10 from Paraguay, is now pending review and vote by the full legislative floor.

Taiwan and Belize had signed an Economic Cooperation Agreement in September 2020, but it has yet been ratified by the legislature. If passed, the amendment would make Taiwan's tariff rules in line with the agreement with Belize. [Focus Taiwan][Taipei Times]

Taiwan to seek Australia's support for CPTPP

(zh) Taiwan's de facto ambassador to Australia, Elliott Charng, has asked Australia to support its bid to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), saying the support for the island would "send a strong message" to Australian businesses affected by China's recent economic sanctions on Australian products. [Reuters 1]

Last month, Taiwan filed its application for joining CPTPP days after China announced its application, worrying to face political problems and obstruction from China if it joins first [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]. China submitted its own application only days earlier than Taiwan.

In a separate development, China had lodged stern representations to Australia over "inappropriate" remarks by former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott during his personal visit to Taiwan. When met with the island's President Tsai Ing-wen, Abbott had called Taiwan a "country" and voice his support for Taiwan's bid to join CPTPP. At a security forum, he also said that China "could lash out disastrously very soon" at a security forum [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. [Reuters 2]

Taiwan's cabinet approves budget for patrol vessels purchase

(zh) Taiwan's cabinet has approved a budget of more than NT$12.93 billion for the purchase of six 3,000-ton patrol vessels by the Coast Guard Administration, aiming to increase the island's capability to protect its maritime borders. The six vessels will participate in Taiwan-U Coast Guard joint exercises. Taiwan and the US had held the first Patrol Working Group online conference in August after the two sides had signed an agreement on bilateral coast guard cooperation on 25th March. [Taiwan News]

Meanwhile, the island's Air Force has begun its annual Tien Lung drills from 18 to 29 October. The maneuvers contain the bulk of the drill's exercises conducted in Jiadong, Pingtung County, for the sake of defending Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the wake of China's recent mounting incursion into ADIZ. Air Force F-1Vs, Mirage-200s, and Indigenous Defense Fighters (IDFs) will take part in the annual drills. Competitive testing of the air-to-ground, air-to-sea, air-to-air, and land-based combat skills will also be included. [Focus Taiwan]

France confirms naval vessel presence in Taiwan Strait

(zh) France's Defense Minister Florence Parly has confirmed the country's intelligence vessel Dupuy-de-Lôme was present in the Taiwan Strait before, without telling the sailing date. When asked how France would

respond to maintain the Cross-Strait stability during a senate hearing, Parly cited the sailing of Dupuy-de-Lôme as evidence of demonstrating freedom of navigation and warned of dramatic consequences in the scenario of escalating tensions. [Focus Taiwan]

In another development, China has lashed out at the United States and Canada for each sending warships through Taiwan Strait, condemning that such moves were jeopardizing peace and stability in the region. China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) said it is monitoring the transit and "stood guard" throughout their passage. On Thursday and Friday, the US Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer USS Dewey and Canadian frigate HMCS Winnipeg had sailed through the Taiwan Strait respectively, saying the passage is to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. [Reuters]

Lithuania to send "strong delegation" for first visit to Taiwan

(zh) Matas Maldeikis, the leader of a Taiwan friendship group in the Lithuanian parliament, has said he plans to organize a "strong delegation" consisting of ruling and opposition lawmakers to visit Taiwan, in the hope to cooperate and create "win-win" scenarios for both countries. The upcoming visit came after an invitation from the island's ruling Democratic Progressive Party lawmaker Chiu Chih-wei. Meanwhile, Taiwan's foreign ministry had announced the plan to send a delegation to Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Lithuania this month, eyeing stronger trade and investment ties between the two sides [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 4]. [Taipei Times][Focus Taiwan]

Recently, the Baltic state has been distancing itself from China and deepening its ties with Taiwan. Last month, the Lithuanian parliament had passed a law to open a representative office on the island despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4].

Taiwan denounces Chinese report on bribing Somaliland

(zh) Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has denounced China's state-backed tabloid Global Times for spreading disinformation about the island, saying the report is fabricated and aims to smear Taiwan. A while earlier, [Global Times] reported Taiwan's current ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has been bribing

Somaliland politicians, claiming the DPP promotes Taiwanese independence campaign through dollar diplomacy.

Last year, Taiwan and Somaliland established representative offices in each other's capitals despite not having formal diplomatic relations. Since then, the two sides have been cooperating on agriculture, ICT, education, and medicine to improve the lives of people in the East African country. [Taipei Times]

India-US hold joint training exercise in Alaska

(dql) India and the US kicked off a 14-day military exercise 'Yudh Abhyaas' at Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson in Alaska on Saturday, October 16, including counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations and involving 300 US Army soldiers belonging to First Squadron (Airborne) of the 40th Cavalry Regiment and 350 soldiers of 7 Madras Infantry Battalion Group of the Indian Army.

At the same time, Admiral Michael Gilday, Chief of US Naval Operations, and a high-level US delegation visited the Western Naval Command headquarters in Mumbai where he met with Vice Admiral R Hari Kumar, Western Naval Commander, to discuss issues pertaining to strengthening navy cooperation between the two countries, coping with maritime challenges and enhancing collaboration. [The Tribune]

The joint drills come on the heels of the completion of the second phase of the Malabar exercise in which naval forces of the United States, Japan, Australia participated from October 12-15. [Mint]

India-Israel expanding cooperation

(dql) Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on Monday, October 18, in Jerusalem. Themes included the creation of a free trade zone between the two countries which could be concluded mid-2022, an agreement on mutual recognition of coronavirus vaccination certificates and expanding cooperations in the fields of water and agriculture. [The Jerusalem Post]

The meeting with Lapid kicks off Jaishankar's five-day with talks with Israel's top leadership, focusing on

exploring new areas of bilateral collaboration and preparing a roadmap for further advancing the strategic relations between the countries. [NDTV]

Also on Monday, Jaishankar participated in a 4-way Zoom call with Lapid, United Arab Emirates' Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, hosted by the latter. During this call – the first-ever meeting between the foreign ministers of these four countries – the diplomats discussed ways to expand "economic and political cooperation in the Middle East and Asia, including through trade, combating climate change, energy cooperation, and increasing maritime security," as well as scientific cooperation and joint efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. [The Times of Jerusalem]

For an interpretation of India's efforts to boost relations with Israel as "India's new foreign policy pragmatism," based on "the feasibility of a non-ideological engagement with the Middle East," see [The Indian Express].

India invites Russia to its National Security Advisors' conference on Afghanistan

(dql) Reflecting its interest in playing a significant role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, India has proposed to host a multi-national conference on Afghanistan in Delhi and to invite National Security Advisors (NSAs) to attend, with the dates believed to be around November 10-11. Russia and Pakistan have already been invited for the meet. Further invitees include China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. [Hindustan Times]

India, itself, accepted earlier last week an invitation of Russia, to take part in the Moscow Format on Afghanistan in Moscow on October 20. The meeting is expected to gather Indian officials and the Taliban who have also been invited. [The Indian Express]

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, meanwhile, announced on Monday, October 18, that Russia is set to halt its diplomatic engagement with the Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), with diplomatic credentials from emissaries of the alliance working in Moscow to be withdrawn by early November. [The New York Times]

The immediate impetus for Moscow's move is NATOS's expulsion of eight members of Russia's mission in early October accusing them of secretly working as spies.

Subsequently, NATO also cut the size of Moscow's team allowed to work at its headquarters. [France 24]

Indian-Russian coal agreement

(dql) At the Russian Energy Week Forum, held from October 13-15 in Moscow, the Russian Energy Ministry and the Indian Steel Industry Ministry concluded an agreement that will annually raise Russia's coking coal supply to India to 40 million tons. Russia, currently, provides India with around eight million tons of all kinds of coal.

The deal also aims to encourage companies in the two countries to invest in the development of coal deposits, the development of coal logistics and infrastructure, the promotion of R&D in production, and education and training for the coal sector.

The agreement come at a time when India is facing major coal crisis [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. The country is the world's third-largest coal importer, with coal accounting for some 70 per cent of the nation's electricity generation. [The Tribune] [The Guardian]

Indian draft resolution in UN for observer status in International Solar Alliance

(dql) India introduced a draft resolution in the UN General Assembly for receiving observer status for the International Solar Alliance (ISA). The draft was co-sponsored by Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Denmark, Egypt, Fiji, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Maldives, Mauritius, Myanmar, New Zealand, Oman, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates and United Kingdom. [NDTV]

The ISA is treaty-based inter-governmental organization, initiated by India in 2015 and currently covering 124 countries. Headquartered in Gurugram, India, the alliance purpose is to work for efficient consumption of solar energy to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

In a separate development, India was re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council for the 2022-24 term after receiving 184 out of 193 votes in the General Assembly. [India Today]

Along with India, Argentina, Benin, Cameroon, Eritrea, Finland, The Gambia, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Montenegro, Paraguay, Qatar, Somalia, United Arab Emirates and the United States of America were elected. [Relief Web]

Pakistan, Iran to cooperate on navy industry

(mm) The chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri, visited the Pakistani Navy's shipyards in the port city of Karachi as another step towards improving Iran-Pakistan relations [Xinhuanet]. Both sides plan to enhance cooperation in manufacturing military vessels, in submarine maintenance and in fighting drug trafficking and terrorism in the maritime field.

Baqeri have also held a meeting with Chief of Naval Staff of Pakistan Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi in Islamabad discussing among other issues the status of relations between Iran and Pakistan, regional cooperation and security, which was previously discussed during 11th iteration of their Bilateral Political Consultations (BPC). [Tasnim News Agency] [AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

Pakistan: China demands compensation for dead workers on Dasu Dam

(mm) China has demanded that Pakistan pay USD 38 million in compensation for the death of the nine Chinese engineers at the Dasu Dam hydropower project in Kohistan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, before resuming the work. [Business Standard News]

The incident happened in July 14, when thirteen people, who were part of the team working on the project, including the Chinese engineers, two locals and two personnel of frontier constabulary, died on the bus, which fell into a ravine after it was hit by a car laden with explosive. [tfipost]

Since then, the civil work in the project has been stalled with the Pakistani side hoping to solve the problems in a couple of weeks and to resume the works on the project.

However, the issues of compensation, in particular the volume of the money demanded by China, has become

a matter of national interest and it has reached top level policy in China. China is threatening to not restart the project until the compensation is paid to their workers. [Business Standard News]

Bangladesh: Nuclear power plants spark South Korean interest, Russia still engaged

(nd) Following announcements of a second nuclear power plant in Bangladesh, the South Korean ambassador to Bangladesh indicated that many Korean companies will be interested in cooperating. [New Age Bangladesh]

Meanwhile, the Bangladeshi government sought support from Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation of Russia, who is in the process of building the country´s first nuclear power plant whose completion is expected in 2023. Rosatom has already expressed its willingness to continue to work with the Bangladeshi power sector. [The Daily Observer]

Bangladesh-China relations and the Rohingyas

(nd) Ever since the beginning of bilateral relations in 1975, ties between Bangladesh and China were strong, most notably with Bangladeshi support for China's most sensitive issues of Tibet and Taiwan. First being a delivery source for the armed forces, China has become Bangladesh's largest trade and development partner, being at the base of the majority of large-scale infrastructure projects, all this, however, amid alleged corruption and interest rates at commercial level.

Still, two more challenging issues recently surfaced between the countries. The first one being the last-minute cancellation of the Chinese-backed deep-sea port at Sonadia, the second China's support for the military junta in Myanmar. The latter is problematic for Bangladesh, shouldering the bulk of the Rohingya refugees.

Given the mounting paramount pressure on the junta, they are more than ever dependent on China for their survival. Arguably, in these circumstances China could apply pressure for Rohingyas to be able to return to their homes, which would play a part in creating stability in Rakhine, which in turn would mean safety for Chinese investment. [Prothom Alo]

Bhutan, China to sign MoU

(nd) Bhutan and China signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on a "three-step roadmap for expediting the Bhutan-China boundary negotiations" that will "provide a fresh impetus to the boundary talks".

For India, which wields traditionally great influence over Bhutan with both countries using to closely coordinate their foreign policy, this development comes at a point where Delhi faces increasing tensions with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between both countries in a disputed border area in Ladakh.

Since 1984, Bhutan and China have held 24 rounds of talks, with discussions being limited to three areas of dispute in the western and central sections of the boundary. Talks have been frozen since 2017, following the months-long border stand-off between China and India in Doklam, a territory claimed by both Beijing and Bhutan. [See AiR 29. December 2017] The last bilateral talks occurred in April 2021. [See AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3] In July 2020, Beijing for the first time publicly put on record that is has a border dispute with Bhutan over the country`s eastern sector, and – in a tangential reference to India – said that "a third party should not point fingers" in the Sino-Bhutan border dispute. [See AiR No. 28, July/2020, 2] [Hindustan Times]

Indian Army Commander visits Sri Lanka to strengthen bilateral relations

(egm) Indian Army Commander General Manoj Mukund Naravane met President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa during his five-day visit in Sri Lanka to strengthen bilateral relations between both countries amidst growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka. [Economy Next]

General Naravane visit, accompanied by senior ruling party politician Subramanian Swamy, follows the official three-day visit from Indian foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2].

India's push for stronger ties with the island nation follows its concerns about China's potential use of Sri

Lanka as a military base that could jeopardize India's security in the Indian Ocean region. China has repeatedly dismissed allegations over its military presence in Sri Lanka.

India's fears, however, were further heightened in February this year after Sri Lanka unilaterally canceled its $500 million East Container Terminal (ECT) cooperation pact with India and Japan, creating tension with New Delhi [see AiR No. 6, February/2021, 2]. The deal would have given the nations access to operate the ECT located near the Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT) controlled by China and the $1.4 billion Chinese built Port City.

In a counter move on September 30, India's private firm Aldani Group signed a $700 million deal with the Sri Lanka Ports Authority and the John Keells Holdings conglomerate [see AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]. The agreement granting the West Container Terminal (WCT) to the Indian firm is recognized as a strategy to neutralize China's foothold in the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, as part of India's strategy of strengthening bilateral ties — particularly in the field of military cooperation with the island nation — both countries began a 12-day joint military exercise on October 4. The training exercise was especially designed to enhance neighborly ties between the nations and their armies' understanding of transnational terrorism, counter-terror cooperation and inter-operability skills. [The Hindu]

As explained by the Sri Lanka Army, this annual training program, which takes place alternately in either of both countries, allows the military personnel to share their best practices and experiences and has been a large contributing factor to strengthening relations between India and Sri Lanka.

Tensions between India and Sri Lanka continue over alleged poaching in Sri Lankan waters

(egm) During a protest on October 17, Sri Lankan fishermen demanded stronger measures from the government to protect the nation's waters and its natural resources from Indian poachers. [Al Jazeera]

The protesters, which included opposition legislators, launched a flotilla of boats with black flags that traveled 60 miles from the northeastern fishing town of Mullaittivu to the northern tip of Point Pedro.

As explained by a legislator from the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), their protests are directed towards the government's insufficient response against the illegal fishing practice described as 'bottom trawling'. This practice, which was banned from Sri Lanka in 2017, uses dragonfly heavy nets across the ocean floor to gather large volumes of fish, thus causing considerable damage to the marine ecosystem.

Earlier, the Sri Lanka Navy seized two Indian fishing vessels along with the 23 Indian fishermen aboard them for allegedly poaching on October 13. The men are currently in custody at the Kankesanthurai Naval Camp in Sri Lanka. [DailyMirror] [India Today] In March 2021, Sri Lanka released 54 fishermen who were apprehended for the same charges. They were released after India deemed their arrest as a hostile move in accordance with the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution passed on March 23 noting the lack of progress in the island nation with regards to human rights issues [see AiR No. 13, March/2021, 5].

The Sri Lanka Navy vowed to better protect fishermen by stepping up regular patrols. Since the decades-long Tamil separatist war ended in May 2009, there have been increasing tensions between India and Sri Lanka over poaching. Furthermore, arrests in the Palk Bay between the Southeast coast of India and Sri Lanka have been continuously carried out over a decade following Sri Lanka's claims that the Indian fishermen have allegedly trespassed into its territorial waters.

Indonesia: President Widodo confirmed to attend COP26 in Scotland next month

(ms) Indonesian officials have confirmed that President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) will personally attend the 26th United Nations climate change conference (COP26) in Scotland next month. Jokowi will use the opportunity to further bolster Indonesia's global credentials as it takes on a defining G20 presidency. He is scheduled to attend COP26 in Glasgow on November 1-2, immediately following the G20 Summit hosted by Italy in Rome on October 30-31. [The Jakarta Post]

Jokowi intends to show Indonesia's strong commitment to mitigating the impacts of climate change. Indonesia will renew its Nationally Determined Contributions – its five-year plan to reduce gas emissions - and reveal its Long-Term Strategy for Low Carbon Development and Climate Resilience 2050. In addition, the country will announce its target of net zero emissions by 2060. The

country will also present the opportunity to use blue carbon as a solution for reducing emissions and encourage the role of developing archipelagic and small island countries through the Archipelagic and Island States Forum. Currently, as the days countdown to COP26, diplomats in Jakarta are pushing for the completion of international rules to govern emissions trading, an issue that is expected to be in the spotlight at the conference. [Katadata] [The Jakarta Post]

Last week, as part of the country's tax reforms, the Indonesian government agreed to introduce a carbon tax on coal-fired power stations from April 2022 on [see AiR no. 41, October/2021, 2]. The measure will eventually reach all sectors of the economy to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia's measures come amidst news that Southeast Asia is one of the planet's most vulnerable regions to climate change. In August, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change released the first part of its Sixth Assessment Report, predicting that the region will experience particularly stark consequences of the worsening global climate, including rising sea levels, heat waves, drought, and more intense and frequent bouts of rain. [World Economic Forum]

Indonesia: President Widodo approves government funding for Belt and Road Initiative railway

(ms) President Joko Widodo has authorized the use of state budget to help fund the Jakarta-Bandung high-speed rail project, part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. Funding will be provided either through a state capital injection or loan guarantees to the Indonesian state-owned companies that are part of the consortium led by China Railway International Co. [Bloomberg]

This decree overrides a previous regulation passed in 2015 prohibiting the use of any state funds for the project. The regulatory change, however, is now needed for the project to be completed on schedule as the budget has swelled to U.S. $7.9 billion from an estimated $6 billion. The State-Owned Enterprises Ministry has acknowledged the overrun budget was due to land acquisition problems, overoptimistic planning, and poor project management, with state companies unable to bear the additional costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Benar News] [Jakarta Post]

The Jakarta-Bandung rail line is the leading project in Indonesia to be part of China's estimated U.S. $1 trillion-plus Belt and Road Initiative. It is Indonesia's first venture into constructing a high-speed rail line, which has been touted as an important maker of being a modern country. [VOI]

Experts and lawmakers have warned, however, that contributing financially to the railway project could deplete state coffers and lead Indonesia into a debt-trap. Indonesia's state budget is already burdened due to the pandemic, with this year's budget deficit projected to reach 5.82 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The government has set a target for the deficit to return to normal, around 3 percent of GDP, in 2023. [Benar News 2]

Indonesia also owes US$17.28 billion (Rp247.10 trillion) in "hidden debt" to China, according to a recent study conducted by the international development research lab AidData. This is equal to 1.6 percent of the country's GDP and more than four times its $3.90 billion in reported sovereign debt. Nearly 70 percent of China's overseas lending is now directed to state-owned companies and private-sector institutions, with the resulting "hidden debt" not appearing on government balance sheets. [Benar News 3] [Tempo]

Indonesia: Economic dialogue with Australia excludes non-state actors

(ms) There has been meagre participation of non-state actors in Indonesia and Australia's economic-financial dialogues that have been held to bolster cooperation in recent years. Other than academics, many non-government economic actors that could enhance bilateral relations between the two countries have not been included in several forums maintained between the two nations, including the High-Level Policy Dialogue (in existence since 2007), the Economic Policy Dialogue (in existence since 2013), and the Economic, Trade and Investment Ministers' Meeting (inaugurated on 6 July 2021). Rather the focus has been on building cooperation between ministers and senior policy makers.

These forums are an important means to increase dialogue on economic and financial matters, build trust by providing opportunities for frank communication, and stimulate policy learning and innovation. They also provide a medium to coordinate policy between relevant Australian and Indonesia authorities to

overcome collective problems, such as global economic challenges like COVID-19.

Including non-state actors at consultive forums between the two nations would allow for a broader perspective to be expressed. It would allow for the input of diverse economic players who are familiar with the problems on the ground, understand market expectations, and can provide fresh ideas and recommendations. Ultimately, this would lead to a more comprehensive set of considerations for policymakers. This would not mean omitting the role of the state in bilateral processes but would work to complement the existing participation of state actors. [East Asia Forum]

Myanmar Junta faces increasing international exclusion

(ds) Mounting forces are combining to place pressure upon Myanmar's ruling junta, which came to power following a coup in February. Multinational companies are leaving the crisis-stricken nation as international sanctions are making business more and more complicated, coupled with a growing international boycott of state-run enterprises. This week, British American Tobacco (BAT), a UK-based cigarette firm, announced the termination of its operations in the country. A connected insider lamented the effect this may have on the 'severely affected poorer and middle-class' Burmese citizens who are already in the throes of the country's economic decline. [The Irrawaddy 1]

In an evolving story, the junta maintains its repudiation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) requests aimed at facilitating peace talks and ending the violence in Myanmar. The regime has been reluctant to implement the Association's five-point consensus, despite promising to do so at April's summit. [AiR October 12 2021] Continuing appeals by ASEAN for access to imprisoned leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi have been rejected, leading in turn to any progress on arranging a visit for ASEAN's special envoy, Erywan Yusof, to remain at an impasse. [The Irrawaddy 2]

The international community is resisting lending any legitimacy to the regime after the reports of indiscriminate violence and harsh crackdowns by the military against the Burmese people. The European Parliament, the main legislative body of the European Union, last week passed a resolution in support of Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG) and

simultaneously condemned the country's ruling junta. The Parliament called upon EU member states to implement "targeted and robust sanctions" against senior members of the regime and state-run Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, which form the junta's largest income streams. [The Diplomat] The motion was met with a harsh rebuttal from Myanmar's junta-led Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who have been lobbying foreign powers for legitimate recognition. [The Irrawaddy 1] Furthermore, last week UN chief Antonio Guterres pushed back a videoconference with ASEAN leaders out of fear that the presence of junta envoys would be interpreted as tacit support of the regime. [Al Jazeera]

Bowing to pressure in a rare show of political partisanship, ASEAN this week announced the exclusion of regime head, Min Aung Hlaing, from the regional talks, opting instead to invite a "non-political representative from Myanmar". Singapore's foreign minister made a statement on the unprecedented decision, noting that it was "difficult, but necessary [in order] to uphold ASEAN's credibility". [Reuters] ASEAN has often been criticized for its staunch stance on non-interference into its members' internal affairs.

Noted observer, Bertil Linter, underlines that ASEAN has much to gain from changing tracks to ostracizing the junta. In particular, the mixture of sanctions preventing business relations, destruction over co-owned infrastructure in the conflict, and the mass displacement of Burmese civilians, has begun to affect neighboring ASEAN members. It was these factors, writes Linter, that ultimately combined with the regime's foolhardy rebuttal of diplomatic pressure that swayed the Association's position on the junta. [Asia Times]

Meanwhile, the junta succumbed partly to the pressure by releasing some 5,600 prisoners arrested or wanted over their roles in anti-coup protests in an amnesty on humanitarian grounds. While some activists decried the move as an attempt to regain international reputation following ASEAN's exclusion of the junta chief from the upcoming summit, U.N. Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews commented it was "outrageous" that they were detained in the first place. It has been several times since the coup that the junta has released prisoners. [Reuters]

The Philippines urges for greater cooperation on disarmament issues

(lt) The Philippines has urged the international community to cooperate in addressing issues of nuclear disarmament. Permanent Representative of the Philippines to the United Nations Ambassador Enrique A. Manalo expressed his concerns about developed nations continuing their development of nuclear arsenals amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which many underdeveloped states are grappling with.

Manalo reaffirmed the Philippines' stance on the need for nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation, stressing the nation's commitment to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. [Manila Bulletin]

United States, Philippines to return to joint military exercises; Australia, United Kingdom as observers

(lt) The United States and the Philippines have announced their intent to return to full-scale joint military exercises in 2022 after two years, inviting Australia and the United Kingdom as observers. Offsetting China's growing aggression in the Indo-Pacific, the military drills were postponed by President Rodrigo Duterte in 2020 in an attempt to cultivate deeper ties with China.

There is also a likelihood of Japan joining Australia and the United Kingdom as observers of the military exercises, military chief Jose Faustino has stated. [South China Morning Post]

Cambodia: U.S. accuses government of non-transparency with respect to Ream naval base

(tl) The United States accused Cambodia of lacking transparency about China's activities in the Ream naval base. The charges are based on a report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which published the satellite images from August and September 2021 showing the construction of three new buildings and a road. [CSIS]

While the US embassy said that any foreign military presence in Ream will undermine the regional security, Cambodia's government denied the charge of allowing China to build a facility in the base, but said that the

construction was part of Chinese development assistance. [Reuters]

The Ream Naval Base could be a potential stopover point for China to protect and control its shipping lanes in the Malacca Strait. U.S. concerns about the issue have arisen since Cambodia decided to raze U.S. facilities just north of Ream last year. At the time, Cambodia said it had razed the building to allow for further expansion and would relocate the demolished facility, denying reports of Chinese involvement. [See AiR No. 45, November/2020, 2] After agreeing to a visit by U.S. officials last June 11, the defense attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Cambodia said he was barred from having full access inside the base during the visit. [See AiR No. 24, June/2021,3]

Cambodia: Cambodia will host the next 13th ASEM Summit

(tl) Cambodia will host the upcoming 13th Asia-Europe Summit (ASEM), which will be held via video conference on 25-26 November. The meeting will be chaired by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and is expected to be attended by all members of the ASEM states.

ASEM is a cross-regional forum comprising the leader of the European Commission, representatives of 53 partners, including 21 Asian countries, 30 European countries, the ASEAN Secretariat, and the European Union.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the name “Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth”, this year's edition will address the common post-Covid 19 recovery and the issue of trade integration among participating countries. [Phnom Penh Post]

Singapore: 50th anniversary celebration of Five Power Defense Arrangements

(tl) Member states of the Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) commemorated 50 years of the defense pact with an aerial and naval display at Marina South.

The Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) is a series of bilateral defense relationships established by a series of multi-lateral agreements between the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and

Singapore signed in 1971, whereby the five powers are to consult each other in the event or threat of an armed attack on Malaysia or Singapore for the purpose of deciding what measures should be taken. Under the agreement, there is not a specific military commitment in the case of an attack.

Under FPDA, member states participate in annual military exercises to strengthen cooperation and build professional relationships, in an attempt to maintain the stability within Southeast Asia. [Channel News Asia]

Thailand: AUKUS as new justification for Thai navy's submarines purchase

(kk) The Australia-United Kingdom-United States AUKUS security partnership could bolster Thai Navy's halting submarine plans. The Royal Thai Navy (RTN)'s procurement of three submarines from China has been constantly delayed due to public backlash and criticism. Thailand has approved the purchase of the first submarine in 2017, while the other two were postponed as Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha ordered the RTN to halt its acquisition plans again in July this year after a first postponement in 2020. [See AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3, AiR No. 35, September/2020, 1]

The new partnership allows the US to share its nuclear technology with its allies. The AUKUS deal would equip Australia with a nuclear-powered submarine fleet, which is seen as a move to deter China's maritime expansion. However, AUKUS could result in China further strengthening its military capabilities due to the security dilemma caused by the lack of diplomatic engagement between US and China.

The military competition between the two powerhouses would pressure Southeast Asian countries to fortify their naval forces. The Philippines declared that it would continue its plans to purchase submarines and modernizing its navy forces, similarly to Australia's path. Indonesia and Malaysia have voiced strong opposition against AUKUS, arguing the deal would eventually lead to Australia's development of nuclear weapons, which could pose a threat to the region.

Although Thailand has remained silent on the topic, it is likely that the Thai navy would cite the growing uncertainty from AUKUS to legitimize its purchase of submarines in the next budget allocation in 2022.

The RTN would however still encounter many obstacles in order to fulfill the plans. Apart from economic viability and the lack of public trust in the government, many Thais believe that diplomacy is the most suitable approach to maintain a balanced stance for a small state like Thailand. Also, Thai people are generally more worried about domestic issues including political instability, economic recession, and the widening inequalities. They prefer the government to allocate the budget to solving these problems rather than boosting military strength.

As a result, the procurement of the remaining submarines still has a long way ahead despite the AUKUS partnership giving the RTN a reasonable justification for its purchasing plans. [The Diplomat]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

20 October 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. (GMT+11), Australian Institute of International Affairs

The Great Game Reignited: Power Dynamics in Central Asia

With the recent withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, Central Asia could now become an arena of increased Great Power competition. Against this backdrop, this webinar will explore how the Great Powers will navigate relations with the historically volatile Central Asian region and what spill-over effects will the rise of the Taliban have on its regional neighbors?

Visit [AIIA] to learn more about the event.

20 October 2021 @ 12:00-1:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Politics and civil society in Belarus a year after mass protests

This webinar will discuss the unique challenges of the ongoing crackdown on civil society in Belarus one year after the controversial election. It will also explore what a transfer of power may look like, and how these events have continued to affect Belarus's foreign policy.

Visit [Wilson Center] for more information.

20 October 2021 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Cato Institute, USA

COVID and the Constitution: Jacobson, Lochner, Mandates, and Lockdowns

With state police power imposing unprecedented limits on individuals' ability to provide for themselves, this webinar will discuss important decisions of the US Supreme Court dealing with the tension between state authority and the potential danger to liberty implicated.

For more information, see [Cato Institute].

21 October 2021 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Cato Institute, USA

Why, as a Muslim, I Defend Liberty

This online book discussion will introduce "Why, as a Muslim, I Defend Liberty" by Cato Institute senior fellow Mustafa Akyol who explores strong grounds in Islam to defend freedom of speech and religion and to harmonize Islam with liberal democracy, the market economy, and a peaceful world order.

Learn more about the event at [Cato Institute].

21 October 2021 @ 4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-7), World Affairs, USA

Afghanistan and the Aftermath of America's Defeat

What are the strategic implications of the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan related to the international system, the region, and most particularly for the United States? Will Afghanistan once again become a base for terrorists threatening both its neighbors and the West? Find answers to these and other questions pertaining to the repercussions of the Taliban's power seizure in Afghanistan at this webinar.

For more information, visit [World Affairs].

21 October 2021 @ 12:00-1:15 p.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, USA

China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy

This online book discussion will introduce Peter Martin's "China's Civilian Army: The Making of Wolf Warrior Diplomacy," which traces the roots of China's approach to diplomacy back to the communist revolution of 1949 and describes how it evolved through social upheaval, famine, capitalist reforms and China's rise to superpower status.

See [FSI] for more information.

22 October 2021 @ 2:00-2:45 p.m. (GMT-5), The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Bridging the Political Divide on Climate

Against the backdrop of climate change being subject to persistent ideological divisions, with a lack of consensus around the causes, scale, or existence of the threat, this webinar will explain how science, faith, and human psychology fit into the narrative around climate change and why it is still possible to mobilize collective action despite our differences.

For more information, see [The Chicago Council].

22 October 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Women, Peace, and Security 2030: Integrating lessons learned from Afghanistan

This virtual seminar will explore lessons learned from Afghanistan and its implications for the future of the women, peace, and security.

Learn more about the event at [Atlantic Council].

25 October 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT+2), Institute for Security Studies Africa, South Africa

Africa and global cyberdiplomacy: priorities for action

This webinar will explore how to grow continental champions and articulate common positions on security, surveillance, data sovereignty and access to Africa. It will also discuss the role of regional organizations in communicating common positions.

Further event details are available at [ISS Africa].

25 October 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, USA

Europe After America

This webinar will discuss the latest tensions between Europe and America in the wake of the Afghanistan pullout and the Australian submarine deal reflect, exploring the question whether they could signal the dissipation of the Atlantic alliance three decades after the end of the Cold War and nearly eight decades after its birth.

If you are interested in joining, you can register at [FSI].

25 October 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World

This online event will offer insights into North Korea's unique position as both a postcolonial nation and a Soviet client state, with one foot in the socialist Second World and the other in the anticolonial Third World.

If you wish to join this event, you can register at [Wilson Center].

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

Remodelling Indonesia's Maritime Governance: Comparative Lessons from the Region

This webinar will discuss arious policy options that Indonesia could pursue to transform its maritime governance system into a "dual authority" model backed by the Indonesian Navy and Indonesian Coast Guard (BAKAMLA).

For more information, visit [ISEAS].

26 October 2021 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, USA

Pandemic Politics and the End of the Old International Order

This virtual book talk will introduce "Pandemic Politics and the End of the Old International Order," by Thomas Wright is the Director for the Center on the United States and Europe and a senior fellow at the Strobe Talbott Center for Strategy, Security, and Technology at the Brookings Institution.

Visit [FSI] for more information.

26 October 2021 @ 4:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, USA

China Tackles Climate Change

This online lecture will offer an overview of climate governance under President Xi Jinping. It will also discuss local implementation of air pollution policies in China to draw potential lessons for its ongoing efforts to curb carbon emissions.

Further event details are accessible via [FSI].

26 October 2021 @ 9:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

China's Painful Transition to a Clean Energy Future

This webinar will discuss the challenges and opportunities facing China's departure from coal both at home and in its investments along the Belt and Road abroad.

For more information, see [Wilson Center].

26 October 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. (GMT+11), Australian Institute of International Affairs

The Strategic Benefits of the AUKUS Deal

This online talk will discuss the recent AUKUS defence agreement concluded between Australia, the UK and the US, focusing on the following questions on Australia's benefit: What capability gap could the Australian submarines help meet? What does AUKUS mean for the importance of integrating more closely with allies? What is the strategic impact for the UK in a region where it has limited hard power to call on?

Further information is provided at [AIIA].

Recent Book Releases

Jacob Helberg, ***The Wires of War: Technology and the Global Struggle for Power***, Avid Reader Press/Simon & Schuster, 384 pages, October 12, 2021, discussed in [Axios].

Sheera Frenkel, ***An Ugly Truth: Inside Facebook's Battle for Domination***, Harper, 352 pages, July 13, 2021, reviewed in [The Hindu].

Richard Lapper, ***Beef, Bible and Bullets: Brazil in the Age of Bolsonaro***, Manchester University Press, 272 pages, August 5, 2021. A review is available at [LSE].

Syed Irfan Ashraf, ***The Dark Side of News Fixing: The Culture and Political Economy of Global Media in Pakistan***, Anthem Press, 250 pages, September 7, 2021, reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Calls for Papers

The **London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research (LCIR)** invites paper proposal for its ***international conference "Faces of War"*** to be held on March 19-20, 2022. Closing date for submissions is December 15, 2021. For more information, see [LCIR].

The **Bamberg Graduate School of Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies** and the **Chair for English Literature Studies at the University of Bamberg** welcome abstract submissions for its ***interdisciplinary conference on "Displacement, Emplacement, and Migration"*** scheduled for June 24-26, 2022. Deadline for submission is December 31, 2021. Visit [Uni Bamberg] for further details.

Jobs and Positions

The **Asian Development Bank (ABD)** is hiring a ***National Climate Change Specialist*** with Mongolia as country of assignment. Closing date for applications is October 25, 2021. For more details see [ADB].

World Vision is recruiting a ***Regional Digital Programme Manager***. Deadline for application is November 5, 2021. Visit [World Vision] to learn more about the vacancy.

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is offering the position of ***Country Director Afghanistan Kabul*** to lead NRC's Afghanistan country operations. Applications can be submitted until October 25, 2021. Further details are provided at [NRC].

The **Niehaus Center for Globalization and Governance (NCGG) at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs** invites applications for the ***Visiting Fellowship*** Program in regional political economy for the 2022-2023 academic year. Closing date for applications is December 6, 2021. Further information are provided at [Princeton University].

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