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Asia in Review

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Dear Readers,

Please enjoy this week's Asia in Review which comes together with a new format, the Europe in Review´s Europe Monthly, which CPG is producing with support of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Bangkok Office.

The Europe Monthly will be send as a monthly news review on European affairs as one of four information channels of the upcoming Europe in Review platform, which we are fully launching as a pioneering multi-media project early next year. Together with the likewise enhanced Asia in Review, which will also be launched early next year, both media platforms will additionally offer a broad forum for academics and practitioners to add depth and context to current affairs; a professional networking platform; a database of experts, institutions, study & programs, events and career opportunities; and an archive that facilitates in-depth research.

I hope you will enjoy both information tools and provide us your valuable feed-back.

Special greetings are extended to readers celebrating the Independence Day and National Day respectively of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Micronesia, Panama and Tonga.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: Evergrande crisis narrowly avoids default a second time

(tjsj) Evergrande has reportedly made a last-minute interest payment for an offshore bond, reflecting the second time the property developer has narrowly avoided defaulting in a week. Evergrande needed to make a $47.5 million in coupon payments to bondholders by Friday after making a payment of $83.5 million last week.

There were fears that if Evergrande missed this payment it would tip the company into formal default that would trigger cross-default bonds in the amount of $19 billion in international capital markets. The sources to the funds have yet to be determined by commentators. [Reuters] [South China Morning Herald]

Despite these two payments, Evergrande still has other offshore coupon payments due in November and December in the amount of $338 million. [Reuters]

Additionally, fears of the Evergrande crisis being contagious to other property developers in China have been re-enlivened by a report released by S&P. Within the report, S&P estimates that one third of China's property developers will face difficulty in repaying debts across the next 12 months that could lead to insolvency. [The Guardian 1] [See, AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

For example, Modern Land has become the most recent company to default following missing a scheduled payment, following other companies including Fantasia Holdings Group Co Ltd, Sinic Holdings (Group) Co Ltd, and China Properties Group Ltd who have all defaulted on dollar debt obligations this month. [Al Jazeera] [The Guardian 2]

According to analysts at Nomura, the Chinese property sector owes a total of $5 trillion, equivalent to that of one-third of the China entire GDP.

Despite having met its payment for Friday, the S&P analysts believe Evergrande will eventually default on future payments. [The Guardian 1]

Despite this contagion spreading domestically, commentators have further expressed that this contagion could even spread to and influence international property markets [Reuters]

China: Energy crisis

(tjsj) In response to China's growing energy crisis, China's National Development & Reform Commission ('NDRC)', the country's state planner, has set a price target for thermal coal in the amount of 1,200 yuan per tonne in an attempt to temper the market and promote sustainable development after meetings were hosted between the NDRC and coal miners and distributors last week. [Reuters]

China's power crisis has permeated across at least 17 regions that has largely been attributed to coal shortages and exacerbated by heavy flooding in the country's biggest coal producing province, Shanxi. [See, AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

In response to the power shortages, Beijing has ordered the increase to coal-fired electricity production and approval of more than 100 new coal mines, with 230 coal-fired power plants currently under construction. [ABC News] [See, AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

As a result, fossil fuels and power-intensive metals have seen a price renaissance due to China's transition to greener economy, creating an underinvestment in fossil fuels for energy whilst demand for energy surges to record highs. [BBC] [South China Morning Herald 1]

Consequently, there have been multiple reports of diesel rationing amid rising costs and inadequate supply, some reports noting that trucks are only being allowed to fill up 100 litres each, only reflecting about 10% of a trucks fuel storage capacity.

Despite commentators noting that this crisis could be of protracted nature until stabilising, other commentators have cited the recent coal supply improving and prices stabilising as a sign of early recovery. [Reuters 1] [See, AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

Similarly, the high raw material prices have engendered a regress in Chinese factory activity, China's National Bureau of Statistics showing on Sunday that China's factory activity shrunk for a second month in a row. [Reuters 2] Accordingly, there have been concerns that China's domestic energy crisis could disrupt the global supply chain. [Al Jazeera] [BBC] [South China Morning Herald 2]

Despite this increased reliance on fossil fuels, published on the website of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and cementing earlier pledges made by President Xi Jinping, Beijing has

submitted updated nationally determined contributions to fight climate change ahead of COP26.

In a significant move as the world's largest greenhouse gas emitter, the submission documents evinced that Beijing seeks to become carbon neutral before 2060, envisioning its carbon dioxide emissions peaking prior to 2030.

Notably, within this submission, Beijing increased previous pledges pertaining to the share of non-fossil fuels in its primary energy consumption, raising its previous pledge of 20% to 25% by 2030. Beijing further formalised its commitment to raising and increasing wind and solar power capacity to more than 1,200 gigawatts. [Reuters 3] [South China Morning Post 1]

Despite this, experts have expressed that Beijing's submissions fall short of COP26's global heating goals of limits global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, noting that Beijing's renewed pledges are unlikely to make advancement on targets that were made back in 2015. [ABC News 1] [Lowy Institute] [South China Morning Post 2] [The Guardian 2]

However, with China currently 58 per cent reliant on coal, commentators have noted that achieving decarbonisation by 2060 will require significant effort and commitment. [ABC News 2]

Nonetheless, Chinese President Xi Jinping attended COP26 via video link, calling for all countries to promote a greener global development and promoting new technologies that would reduce carbon emissions to developing nations. [Global Times 1]

Mirroring these sentiments, Chinese domestic policy this week reinforced China's insistence on decarbonisation and reduction of air pollution. On Friday, October 29, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment announced that it is aiming to reduce the concentration of air pollution, namely the particles known as PM2.5, by 4 per cent year by year starting this winter. The Ministry insisted it would be looking into more technical practices than merely the closure of factories. [South China Morning Post 3]
Two days later, this was likewise met with an announcement by the National Development and Reform Commissionthat since mid-October, construction had started of major wind power and solar bases in northern, north-west and central Chinese provinces. [Global Times 2]

However, despite auspicious rhetoric, Chinese companies have expressed their concern with manifesting China's pledges into reality in light of the

current power shortages that will leave companies no choice but to return to fossil fuels. [Reuters 4]

China: Hong Kong pro-democracy repression continues

(tjsj) On Thursday, October 28, Hong Kong police have undertaken searches of four premises linked to the now-dissolved Civil Human Rights Front ('CHRF'), including League of Social Democrats, Rainbow of Hong Kong (an LGBT rights group), prompted by the failure of the CHRF to submit information requested. [Hong Kong Free Press]

Additionally, on Wednesday, the Hong Kong legislature has passed a bill amending the Film Censorship Ordinance to censor all films that are contrary to Chinese national security. The amendments prescribes that any person who exhibits an unauthorised film could face up to three years in jail and a HK$1 million fine. Similarly, the amendments grant enhanced powers the Chief Secretary – the second-most powerful figure in the city's administration – to personally revoke film approvals if films are found to "endorse, support, glorify, encourage and incite activities that might endanger national security" whilst further granting censorship authorities the ability to enter film showings without a warrant.

However, for now, the bill does not purport to extend to online streaming platforms. [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

In response, commentators have opined that the amendments will effectively stifle the local film industry and have a dramatic impact on creativity and freedom of expression. [BBC]

The passing of this bill comes amid news of the number of bills passed by Hong Kong's opposition-free legislature more than having doubled after the mass resignation of democratic legislators in November last year in protest of the ousting of their colleagues for being 'unpatriotic'.

During the last session of its sixth term, Hong Kong's Legislative Council has passed 46 government bills and two member bills, reflecting more than double the yearly average of previous sessions, amounting to a total of 128 bills being passed during the legislature's extended five-year term.

President Andrew Leung praised the efficiency of the legislature engendered by the imposition of the

Beijing-imposed national security law. With the majority of Hong Kong's opposition remain in jail, on remand, or have fled abroad, commentators have suggested that Hong Kong' legislature represents a mere rubber stamp for the executive. [Hong Kong Free Press 3]

This has since culminated in commentators questioning whether Hong Kong's economy can survive China's political crackdown, citing that economic freedom without democracy and other freedoms cannot survive. This has similarly fuelled rumours that the Hong Kong dollar will be unpegged from the United States dollar percolate through local brokerages. [Al Jazeera]

China: Construction crackdown

(tjsj) In a joint statement issued on Tuesday, October 26, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural development and the Ministry of Emergency Management have restricted smaller cities in China from constructing 'super high-rise buildings', forming part of a broader narrative of Chinese authorities increased pressure on vanity projects.

Whilst there is already an existing ban on buildings taller than 500 metre, in the joint statement, Chinese authorities announced that cities with populations of less than three million people will be restricted from building skyscrapers taller than 150 metres, whilst cities with populations larger than that will be restricted from buildings taller than 250 metres.

The ministry clarified that exemptions could be sought should a city with a population under three million wish to build a skyscraper taller than 150 meters. [BBC]

China is currently home to some of the world's tallest buildings, including Shanghai Tower, standing at 632 metres tall.

China: Regional leadership updates

(tjsj) Beijing has appointed eight new regional party chiefs ahead of an integral party meeting to be held in early November, marking a change towards 17 of China's 31 provinces that host party chiefs that have served since the 1960's.

The newly elected officials include Wu Zhenlong for

Jiangsu, Li Ganjie for Shandong, Wang Junzheng for Tibet, Liu Ning for Guangxi, Xu Qin for Heilongjiang, Wang Ning for Yunnan, and Yi Lianhong for Jiangxi.

Zhang Qingwei was elected for Hunan as the existing party chief of Zhengzhou, Xu Liyi, was removed from his position due after devastating floods that killed 292 people this summer. [South China Morning Post 1]

Similarly, Yang Fasen, a former People's Liberation Army soldier who had previously captured 30 terrorists and is on an East Turkestan Islamic Movement wanted list, has been appointed as the Urumqi party chief in Xinjiang.

On Monday, Fasen appeared with 14 other members of the new Standing Committee for the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region at the closing of the regional party congress, according to Xinjiang's official broadcaster. [South China Morning Post 2]

Likewise, Gen Quanguo, has been re-elected as the head of China's Xinjiang Party committee, alongside the reelection of four deputy secretaries of the regional Party committee, Erkin Tuniyaz (appointed as acting chairman), Li Yifei, Zhang Chunlin and He Zhongyou. [Global Times]

China: Beijing drafts new rules to prevent data leaving Chinese jurisdiction

(tjsj) Draft regulations were released on Friday by the Chinese Cyberspace Administration of China ('CAC') pertaining to requirement for business wanting to transfer Chinese data abroad.

The draft regulations will require that companies with more than 1 million user in China to undertake a security review prior to sending use-related data overseas, in an effort of ensuring the mitigation data security risks.

The CAC stated that these draft regulations would apply to firms if their data is collected by 'critical information infrastructure' operators or if the data contains 'important' information, echoing last month's draft rules published by China's industry ministry that introduced definitions of what constituted 'core' and 'important' data. [See, AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]

Additionally, the draft guidelines are purported to extend retroactively on companies that have already sent personal information of more than 100,000 users,

or ‘sensitive’ personal information of 10,000 users, whilst similarly extending to companies who intend on sending such information.

The regulations are set to become official after 28 November, marking the finishing of the public feedback period.

Despite the CAC espousing that the draft regulations are to reflect existing standard global practices, commentators expect the draft regulations to have a significant impact on international Chinese companies overseas and multinational corporations’ operations within China. [Global Times] [Reuters] [South China Morning Herald]

China: Chinese officials praise ‘Chinese democracy’ and call for increased supervision

(tj) Li Zhanshu, chairman of China’s highest legislative body, the National People’s Congress Standing Committee, has warned against ‘erosive’ Western political influences such as the impartiality of the judiciary and multi-party elections whilst praising ‘Chinese democracy’ as the superior political system during parliamentary meetings in Beijing. This marks a rhetorical shift and the first time a senior party official has encouraged CCP members to speak about China’s democracy. [South China Morning Post]

This comes amid Guo Shengkun, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and head of the Commission for Political and Legal Affairs of the CPC Central Committee, calling for enhanced supervision and education for political and legal workers on Saturday at a symposium for related work. [Xinhua]

China: Ex-Norinco senior executive charged with corruption over bribery allegations

A previous senior executive, chairman and party secretary, Yin Jiaxu, of Norinco, one of China’s largest weapons manufacturers, has been charged with corruption on allegations of bribery.

The Chinese state prosecutor, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate, confirmed the corruption charges on

Monday, promptly formally arresting Jiaxu for having accepted large amounts of money and gifts during his employment.

This represents the second Norinco senior executive to face corruption charges, following Hu Wenming being charged with similarly bribery accusations back in January this year. [South China Morning Post]

China: Broadcasters warned over 'excessive entertainment'

(tj) This week the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the National Radio and Television Administration summoned four regional broadcasters for an inquiry regarding the airing of 'excessive entertainment programs' and hyping entertainment stars.

Both instances form part of the roader narrative of Beijing's increased paternalism over the media and entertainment industry, having previously introduce regulations against 'sissy' or feminine acting men and celebrity fan culture, whilst promoting nationalist political orthodoxy. [XinHua] [See, AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1; AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2] [See above entry regarding Hong Kong]

China: Action plan against food waste

(tj) After the adoption of the Anti-Food Waste Law in April, Beijing has issued an action plan on saving food this week to bolster food security amid concerns of a potential world food shortage.

Further bolstering the 'clean plate campaign' promoting the reduction of wasting food, the action plan has 28 requirements, including encouraging the catering industry to offer smaller portioned food, the public promotion of a diet consistent of whole grain to replace the past diet trends reliant on processed grains, the selection of better crop species and seeds to increase harvest, and the optimisation of agricultural machines to reduce waste in farming.[Global Times] [Reuters]

Japan: Ruling LDP wins general election

(lnl) Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) succeeded in retaining their majority with junior partner Komeito in the House of Representatives following Sunday's general election on October 31. The LDP (261 seats) and Komeito (32 seats) together won 293 out of 463 seats in the Lower House, securing a stable absolute majority and enabling the LDP to effectively control all standing committees and to steer the legislative process.

The election's voter turnout was estimated to be at 55.33 percent, higher than the 2017 elections of 53.68 percent.

A big win for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida who took office a month ago, the result means that Kishida will be able to solidify his position within the fractious LDP, and this will also give him the mandate to implement his Covid-19, economic and national security agenda. [Kyodo News 1] [The Asahi Shimbun 1] The Asahi Shimbun 2]

The LDP went into the general election holding 276 of the 465 seats. Initial polls and speculations [see Japan Today 1, The Straits Times, Reuters] suggested that the LDP would lose some seats and would need to rely on its coalition partner for a majority, but the party prevailed and defied the expectations and predictions. The LDP did lose 15 seats down to 261 and the ruling coalition parties lost 12 seats from its previous 305.

Five opposition parties, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), the Japanese Communist Party, The Democratic Party for the People, Reiwa Shinsengumi and the Social Democratic Party collaborated for the election with the strategy of unifying candidates in many single-seat constituencies. However, they lost 10 seats.

The biggest winner in the general election, however, was the right-wing Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party), which managed to nearly increase its number of seats four-fold from 11 to 41 and became the third biggest party. The Ishin, which did not join the CDPJ-led opposition alliance, succeeded in attracting swing voters by promoting itself as "third force" and differentiated itself by having different positions from the LDP and the CDPJ. More about the Ishin party see [The Japan News]. [BBC News] [Japan Today 2] [Japan Today 3]

Additionally, the election saw a few well-known lawmakers lose in their districts. Akira Amari, a heavyweight lawmaker and No. 2 of the LDP who was named secretary general last month by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida intends to step down from his post

following his loss in the Kanagawa constituency. He was the biggest name to be defeated and he lost to Hideshi Futori, a newcomer candidate from the CDPJ. Other opposition candidates from CDPJ such as Junya Ogawa defeated former digital minister Takuta Hirai in the Kagawa No. 1 constituency. [Kyodo News 2] [The Mainichi 1] [The Mainichi 2]

See [The Japan Times] for more information of other well-known lawmakers who did not succeed in retaining their seats.

In a latest development, lawyers across the country filed a series of lawsuits on Monday, November 1, seeking to nullify the results of Sunday's House of Representatives election due to vote weight disparities created by Japan's rural-urban population imbalance and demanding a re-run of the election. [The Mainichi 3]

Japan: Japan's prime minister urges government panel to craft proposal for his 'new capitalism'

(lnl) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida instructed a government economic policy panel on Tuesday, October 26 to compile "urgent proposals" for his signature vision of "new capitalism", to be presented in early November. The proposals will include the promotion of economic security issues, and the development of advanced technologies for digitalization and decarbonization. Moreover, Kishida has pledged that the panel will focus on issues such as expanding the middle-class through wage hikes and improving working conditions for non-regular employees and freelancers. [Japan Today]

Japan: Political dynasties die hard in Japan

(lnl) While new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida promised the general public that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has been "reborn", little change has been seen during the election campaign. Familiar names were still found on the ballot and political dynasties continue to dominate Japan's political landscape. 31 percent of the 336 LDP candidates who ran for the election have either taken over their constituencies from family members or have parents or grandparents who were lawmakers. In contrast to the LDP, the corresponding number for the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan is 12.1 percent.

The percentage of lawmakers coming from a political dynasty is high in Japan compared to other democratic countries. The abundance of dynasties in the LDP can be attributed to the fact that younger members of dynasties have three advantages: electoral support base, name recognition and financial support. Criticism has been raised against these structures, as it makes challenging the established political families difficult. More information regarding political dynasties in Japan see [The Japan Times] [The Mainichi].

Japan: Political apathy among younger generation

(lnl) The general election has drawn the attention to the fact Japan is facing the problem of low voter turnout. In Sunday's election, an estimated 55.33 percent of eligible voters cast ballots for the House of Representatives. In the 2017 Lower House election, only half of the population went to cast their ballots. Although in 2016, the legal age for voting was lowered from 20 to 18, there is still low voter turnout among young people in Japan. Only three out of every ten people in the 20-24 age bracket go and vote. Analysts suggest that one of the reasons why young people do not vote is that the candidates available are overwhelmingly male, old and disconnected from the concerns of the younger generation. [Reuters] [The Asahi Shimbun] [The Diplomat] [The Straits Times 1]

In the just-dissolved House of Representatives, only ten percent of the lawmakers are women. Less than 20 percent of the candidates who ran for this Sunday's election were women [see No. 43, October/2021, 4]. The election resulted in only 45 women being elected to the 465-seat House of Representatives, two women down from the previous election in 2017. Out of the 186 female candidates who ran for the election, only 24.2 percent landed a seat. Moreover, the average age of political candidates is 54 and more than a third are aged 60 and above. Additionally, women's rights, gender equality, support for young families, the dire labor shortage and dysfunctional immigration system are barely debated and rarely included on the agenda. This has led to only a third of young voters turning up to the polls in elections over the past decade. This also means that young people's voices will not be reflected in politics, according to activist Momoko Nojo. [The Japan Times] [The Straits Times 2]

Experts, further, say that apathy among the younger generation is deep-seated and reflects the long-term systemic issue of hereditary politics. The ruling Liberal

Democratic Party (LDP) has held on to power for over six decades, and the sentiments are that nothing will change. According to Hiroshi Shiratori, a political science professor at Hosei University, younger people may feel "left out" by Japanese politicians who seem to prioritize policies that appeal to the older generation as they make up an increasingly large part of the Japanese electorate. Adding to the importance of the elderly vote, they have a turnout rate of 60 percent compared to the younger generation with only 30 percent. Young urbanites in Japan do not often participate and vote, and most of the time, they do not know who to vote for. [BBC News] [Japan Today] [The Straits Times 3]

Another possible reason is according to Tomohiro Niwa, a second-year student at the University of Tokyo, the lack of political discourse and discussions in classrooms. Unlike other countries such as the U.S. and the United Kingdom, political debate is rare in Japanese schools. Japanese schools are bound by Article 14 of the Basic Education Act which states that schools should avoid political education or other political activities concerning specific parties. [The Japan Times]

South Korea to develop homegrown naval interception system

(aml) South Korea is going to launch a project to develop a homegrown naval interception system to protect warships from hostile aircraft and missiles. According to the Defence Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), it aims to develop the Close In Weapon System-II (CIWS-II), a ship-based gun capable of countering incoming attacks, by 2027. While currently finial-stage interception systems from the US and the Netherlands are in use, the upcoming project will use domestically developed technologies. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Presidential election updates

(aml) Lee Jae-myung, presidential candidate from the leading Democratic Party (DPK) has recently come under criticism after announcing that he is considering limiting the number of restaurants in the country during a campaign visit to a traditional market in Seoul on Wednesday, October 27arguing that "opening restaurants indiscriminately and going out of business

is not a freedom" and that regulation is needed. Since then, the idea has been strongly criticised by the main opposition People Power Party (PPP) who say that a such a scheme would threaten free market principles and the country's economic system. Lee reacted to the critics stating that he has no particular plans yet but sees the need to review such a system. [The Korea Herald 1] [The Korea Times 1]

Lee, who is currently suspected of being involved in the Seongnam land development corruption scandal in 2015 [AiR, No.39, September/2021, 4], said that if elected, he plans on launching a real estate supervisory service to fight against corruption in the property market. Lee has denied all allegations but stated he needed "to take political and moral responsibility" since he had been responsible for the people who committed the corruption. [The Korea Times 2]

Meanwhile, Ahn Cheol-soo from the minor opposition conservative People's Party declared his presidential bid for the upcoming election. This is getting great public attention since people are speculating whether he will seek a unified candidacy with the main opposition PPP to support them against the ruling DPK. [The Korea Times 3] Ahn aims at transforming South Korea into a science and technology-oriented state through reorganizing the government and creating the position of a deputy prime minister for science and technology and transform as well as enabling technocracy. [The Korea Herald 2]

South Korea: Ex-president Roh Tae-woo dies

(aml) Roh Tae-woo, South Korea's first democratically elected president died on Tuesday, October 26, at the age of 88. Born in Daegu in 1932, Roh graduated from the Korean Military Academy and served in the Korean Army where he met Chun Doo-whan whom he helped overthrow the government in a military coup on December 12, 1979. Chairman of the then ruling Democratic Justice Party, he was elected as Korea's 13th president in 1988, serving till 1993.

Roh is known for his "Northern Policy" that led to the establishment of diplomatic relations with Russia, China, and eastern European nations such as Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria. With the Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, Exchange, and Cooperation with North Korea in 1991, he also improved inter-Korean relations. However, Roh is also

being accused of brutally supressing pro-democracy protesters during the 1980 Guangju Uprising under the Chun administration before becoming president. In 1996, he was sentenced to 17 years in prison by the Supreme Court for bribery, treason, and mutiny for his involvement in the 1979 coup and the 1980 Gwangju massacre. He was later pardoned by President Kim Young-sam. [The Korea Times 1] [The Korea Herald 1]

According to Roh's son, he used his last will to ask for forgiveness for the victims of the 1980 uprising that left more than 200 dead and 1,800 wounded. His son said that because of his medical conditions during the last ten years, Roh hadn't been able wo express the words himself. [The Korea Herald 2]

The perception of Roh's achievements differs throughout the country. While the ruling Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) on the on hand describes Roh as a "criminal of history", but recognizes his diplomatic accomplishments on the other, the opposition People Power Party first and foremost highlighted his political career. This mixed legacy also led to controversy over the government's decision to hold a state funeral. Opposition mainly came from the liberal block and the residents of Gwangju, while the leaders of the DPK and the PPP expressed their respect for the decision. [The Korea Times 2]

South Korea: Constitutional Court rejects first ever impeachment of judge

(aml) On Thursday, October 28, the Korean Constitutional Court rejected the National Assembly's first ever impeachment of a judge, saying there is no point deliberating the case since the judge has retired in the meantime. The decision was made in a 5-3 vote. Lim Seong-geun, former judge at the Busan High Court has been accused of meddling in politically sensitive trials and the National Assembly therefore voted to impeach him in February. [The Korea Times]

Taiwan's opposition party KMT pledges to "defend Taiwan, protect democracy"

(zh) Taiwan's main opposition party Kuomintang (KMT) has passed a new policy platform titled "Defend Taiwan, Protect Democracy, Fight for the Future, Return to Power", which opposes both China's proposal of "one country, two systems" and Taiwan independence. It also rejects military threats or any

unilateral actions across the Strait, vowing to protect democracy and the Republic of China, Taiwan's official name.

While continuing its long-lasting stance of backing the 1992 consensus, which the KMT regards as "one China, different interpretations", the party's view of cross-strait relations has changed from "seeking common ground while allowing differences" to "seeking common ground while respecting differences". In addition to the proposal, KMT chairman Eric Chu said KMT is seeking victory in the upcoming national referendum on 18th December. [Focus Taiwan 1] [Taipei Times]

Regarding the referendum, President Tsai has said called for people to put aside political affiliation and possess a "rational and calm attitude" on the voting issues. Meanwhile, at a campaign held by the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan's Vice President Lai Ching-te has urged people to vote "no" on all the four referendum issues, saying the referendum outcomes could lead to a crisis that hurts the island future instead of a political challenge to President Tsai Ing-wen and Premier Su Tseng-chang.

The four referendum issues are the revival of the construction of the mothballed Fourth Nuclear Power Plant, opposition to a plan for a liquefied natural gas receiving station in Datan Borough, a ban on pork imports containing residue of the leanness drug ractopamine, and holding referendum and national elections on the same day. [Focus Taiwan 2][Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Former president acquitted

(zh) Former KMT President Ma Ying-jeou has been acquitted on charges of breaching trust and irregular transactions in the selling of three media companies possessed by KMT from 2005 to 2006. The three companies are Central Motion Picture Co., China Television Co. and Broadcasting Corp of China. Taipei District Court has found Ma and the other two defendants, former chairman of the KMT Central Investment Company Chang Che-che and former general manager of company Wang Hai-ching, not guilty of special breach of trust and irregular transactions in the sales, saying Ma was not a broad member or manager of the KMT Central Investment Co. and Chang and Wang did not conduct anything illegal during the transaction. The prosecutors said they are likely to appeal the ruling. [Focus Taiwan]

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

Bangladesh: High Court orders judicial probe into communal violence

(lm) Bangladesh's High Court has ordered authorities to conduct judicial inquiries into the series of deadly attacks on Hindu temples and homes earlier this month that left at least seven people dead and several injured.

Anti-Hindu mob violence began on October 15, when hundreds of Muslims protested in the country's southeastern Noakhali district after rumors spread that the Quran had been insulted at a special pavilion set up for the annual Hindu religious festival, Durga Puja. Soon, the violence spread to other parts of Bangladesh. [AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

The high court's order was a response to multiple petitions filed seeking directions to ensure the safety of the Hindu community, rehabilitation and compensation for the victims, in addition to bringing to justice officials who failed to provide security. The petitioners also sought court instructions to remove all social media posts and videos that affect communal harmony. [Eurasia Review]

Local administrations in six districts have four weeks to explain in writing why their "inaction and failure to protect Hindu citizens and their properties" during the annual religious festival should not be "declared

illegal". Further, the court ordered the chief metropolitan magistrates and chief judicial magistrates to submit their reports within 60 days. [Dhaka Tribune] [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government signs agreements with 112 NGOs on eliminating child labor

(lm) Bangladesh's Ministry of Labour and Employment has signed with 112 selected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to work to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. To this end, a monitoring committee will be established to coordinate the enforcement of laws and regulations. [Dhaka Tribune]

Children in Bangladesh are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor in the production of dried fish and bricks, as well as dangerous tasks in garment and leather goods supply chains.

Last year, government extended implementation of its National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Child Labor from 2021 to 2025. However, experts note that gaps exist within the authority and operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder efforts to address child labor, including a lack of capacity to operate effectively.

India: Supreme Court orders probe of government's alleged use of Pegasus spyware

(lm) India's Supreme Court has appointed an independent panel of experts to investigate whether and how Prime Minister Modi's administration had used the Pegasus surveillance software to spy illegally on opposition leaders, activists, tycoons, judges and journalists.

An investigation published first published in July by a global media consortium revealed that hundreds of numbers from India appeared on the global list of more than 50,000 phone numbers, which included some associated with heads of state. Forensic analyses confirmed that the phones of at least 10 people in India were hacked. [AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3]

The court's order was a response to multiple petitions filed in India's top court — some on behalf of those whose phones were found to be infected by the spyware — seeking a court-monitored investigation into the matter. [AiR No. 31, August/2021, 1].

During the weeks-long hearing, the government declined to confirm the use of the spyware, arguing that any software used to combat terrorism cannot be named in public, and instead offered to form its own panel of experts "to dispel wrong narrative". [The Guardian]

In its order, the Supreme Court's bench refused this request, saying the government cannot always get a "free pass" by using the argument of national security. The top court also noted that the possible violation of citizens' right to privacy and free speech compelled it to seek out the truth in the matter, adding that indiscriminate spying cannot be allowed outside the purview of the law. [The Indian Express] [The Washington Post]

The three-member committee will comprise three cybersecurity experts and its mandate will be to determine whether Pegasus spyware was acquired by the federal or state governments or their agencies for use against Indian citizens, among others. It's work will be overseen by a retired Supreme Court judge. [BBC]

The Supreme Court listed another hearing date for after the committee's reporting deadline in eight weeks, indicating it intended to continue pursuing the issue.

India: Students, teacher arrested for celebrating Pakistan cricket win

(lm) Indian police have arrested and detained at least ten people for allegedly celebrating the Pakistan cricket team's victory over India at the Twenty20 World Cup. [The Hindu]

In the Muslim-majority Jammu and Kashmir union territory, police filed two separate complaints under India's anti-terror law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, against various people for allegedly chanting anti-India slogans and cheering for Pakistan. [JURIST]

In the northern state of Punjab, several Kashmiri students were allegedly beaten, and their hostel rooms ransacked, according to reports. [Al Jazeera] [Scroll.in]

Moreover, a teacher was arrested in western India for posting "we won" on her WhatsApp status after Pakistan routed India. The police booked her under §153B of the Indian Penal Code for making assertions that are prejudicial to national integration. She was later released on bail. [India Today]

In the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, meanwhile, police have booked seven people for allegedly raising anti-India slogans following Pakistan's victory. Police have arrested four people out of the seven, including three students originally from Indian-administered Kashmir. [The Indian Express]

The state's chief minister, Yogi Adityanath said in a tweet that the three may be charged with sedition, on top of the charges of cyberterrorism under India's information technology act and "promoting enmity among groups". The sedition law is a colonial era law which gives authorities broad powers to make arrests ahead of filing formal charges if an act or speech by an individual "excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government". [The Straits Times]

Adityanath, a senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) figure, has been pursuing a vigorously anti-Muslim campaign involving arbitrary arrests and intimidation since he came to power in the state in 2017. Last month, he banned the sale of meat in Mathura, a town that Hindus consider to be holy because it is the birthplace of Lord Krishna. [The Guardian]

Nepal: Judges' demand for Chief Justice's resignation throws Supreme Court into crisis

(ns/lm) Nepal's judiciary is currently facing a serious crisis, as the majority of Supreme Court judges is demanding the resignation of Chief Justice Cholenda Shumsher Rana, who is accused of having attempted to gain a share in the Cabinet and designating case benches favorably, as well as failing to introduce reforms in the judiciary branch.

The controversy erupted earlier this month when reports surfaced that the chief justice had demanded a say in the distribution of posts in Prime Minister Deuba's Cabinet, allegedly as payback for the Supreme Court's ousting of the prime minister's predecessor KP Sharma Oli earlier in July [see AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3].

As part of the alleged quid pro quo, Prime Minister Deuba reportedly appointed Gajendra Hamal – a

district-level leader of the ruling Nepali Congress party and Rana's brother-in-law – as the minister for industry, commerce, and supplies. Following severe criticism, Hamal resigned two days after his appointment on October 10 – but the damage was already done.

Rana, who's tenure runs until December next year, has courted controversies previously as well. He was appointed chief justice despite the parliamentary hearing committee having received nine complaints against him over his rulings. His decisions, especially on corruption cases, during his stint as the judge of the Special Court were controversial, and some were later overturned by the Supreme Court. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

On October 26, 14 of Nepal's 20 Supreme Court judges refused to attend a meeting called by Rana, with the Supreme Court Bar Association calling for the chief justice to resign. The Nepal Bar Association, the umbrella body of lawyers across the country, likewise called for Rana's resignation, and threatened to boycott the benches across the country and stage sit-ins. [Setopati]

During a meeting with 15 apex court justices the following day, however, the chief justice refuted all accusations and said he would not step down unless officially impeached by Parliament. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

As per constitutional provisions, one fourth of the lawmakers can file an impeachment motion against a chief justice. But the motion must be endorsed by a two-thirds majority for the chief justice to be impeached. The only party that has enough numbers to file an impeachment motion is KP Sharma Oli' opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), which has 97 members in Parliament's lower chamber. But the former prime minister on October 26 announced his party was not going to get involved in the maneuverings of the judiciary. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Against this backdrop, not a single hearing took place at the apex court's ten benches – including the Constitutional Bench – within the first three days of the week, as 15 justices resorted to a pen-down protest against Chief Justice Rana. The situation was problematic, especially because a large number of cases, some of which have been awaiting hearings for over five years, are currently waiting to be reviewed by the Supreme Court. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Therefore, a writ petition was filed against the 15 Supreme Court judges on October 29 alleging that they had violated human rights by affecting the hearing on cases like habeas corpus and the hearing on the people in detention. [Khabarhub]

Later the same day, cracks started to appear in the Nepal Bar Association, with two lawyers clashing the association's premises while its working committee was discussing a protest plan. Moreover, youth leaders of the ruling Nepali Congress – who had in the past expressed their opposition to Prime Minister Deuba) – in a letter insisted on immediate action by the party leadership. [The Kathmandu Post 5] [The Kathmandu Post 6]

Amid mounting public pressure, the protesting Supreme Court justices resumed hearings of habeas corpus petitions on November 1, after Chief Justice Rana in talks with three representatives on October 31 had hinted that he was willing to make a "graceful exit". The details are however not known. [The Kathmandu Post 7]

Nepal: Ruling Nepali Congress to hold general convention in mid-December

(ns/lm) Nepal's ruling Nepali Congress (NC) has postponed its 14th general convention – originally slated to be held later this month – until mid-December. The decision was made during a meeting of the party's Central Election Committee on October 26, also attended by party office bearers, including party president and prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba. [Online Khabar]

The convention will elect the party's Central Working Committee for the next four years. Incumbent party president Deuba wants to be re-elected again, while around half a dozen leaders have already announced their candidacies for party presidency, most notably former Deputy Prime Minister Bimlendra Nidhi. The four-year term of the Deuba-led committee elected in 2016 had expired in February of last year. However, the party extended the term by one year citing "special circumstances" as allowed by the party statute.

The NC has been deferring the convention dates regularly owing to disputes over the finalisation of the list of active members of the party in various districts. So far, more than 60 of the 77 districts are yet to receive dates for when to organize district and federal electoral constituency level conventions, along with those which have not held the local level conventions

to this date. 4,500 representatives will be elected to the general convention from 165 electoral constituencies. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: House session prorogued until mid-November amid continuing obstruction by opposition

(ns) Acting on recommendation of the government, Nepal's President and ceremonial head of state Bidhya Devi Bhandari has prorogued the current session of parliament's lower house until November 15, amidst the continued obstruction of proceedings by the main opposition party. [MyRepublica]

The Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) had been stalling proceedings in both houses of parliament since the session's commencement on September 8, refusing to endorse the annual budget bill, inter alia, and causing a government shutdown [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]. The reason behind the CPN-UML's obstruction was to insist on the suspension of 14 former party lawmakers, including Madhav Kumar Nepal, whose newly created Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Unified Socialist) in August had joined the ruling coalition government [see AiR No. 34, August/2021, 4].

While the Prime Minister Deuba-led government managed to pass the revised budget later in September, it failed to get any of the 54 other bills currently under consideration through Parliament since then. Some of these bills are crucial, including a bill seeking to amend the Citizenship Act [see AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4]. [The Himalayan Times]

Nepal: After more than 100 days since taking office, ministers are yet to disclose their assets

(ns) Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba as well as four of his ministers, all of which were appointed more than 100 days ago, are yet to submit their property details. [The Kathmandu Post]

According to the Corruption Prevention Act of 2002, every person holding a public position is obligated to disclose their assets no longer than 60 days after becoming a member of the government service. Even with clause 50 (2) of the Act, which provides officials

with extra 30 days to publicize their property details, Deuba's government already missed the marks.

Deuba's office staff has provided affirmations stating that assets have in fact been disclosed and will be available to the citizens in the earliest days. However, the public is now asking why to delay the release of the documents that have been submitted.

The issue is complex for it has increased the corruption talk in Nepal, as transparency has been lacking in the past especially from those assuming leadership roles. Previous Prime Ministers KP Sharma Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal were also guilty of deferring the disclosure of their assets.

Pakistan: After violent standoff, government reaches agreement with banned Islamist group

(tj/lm) Reaching an agreement with Pakistan's hardline Islamist Tehreek-e-Labiak (TLP) group, the federal government averted a political showdown on November 1, putting an end to two-weeks of clashes that left at least seven policemen dead and scores injured on both sides. [The New York Times]

The standoff began on October 21, when thousands of supporters of the TLP departed from the eastern city of Lahore with the goal of reaching the capital, Islamabad. They demanded the release of the proscribed group's leader, Saad Hussain Rizvi, who was arrested in April [see AiR No. 17, April/2021, 4], and the withdrawal of terrorism charges against hundreds of its members. The group also demanded the expulsion of the French ambassador over the publication of cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammad. [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4].

On October 28 then, the supporters began marching north after a series of deadly clashes with police the previous evening that left four officers dead and hundreds wounded, some critically

Later the same day, Pakistan's Interior Minister Sheikh Rasheed said that the government was in talks with TLP, adding that it would agree to most of the group's demands, including freeing Rizvi, but would not agree to formally expelling the French ambassador. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters]

But on the following day, the country's National Security Committee, chaired by Prime Minister Imran

Khan and attended by Pakistan's senior military leaders, decided to uphold the writ of the state at any cost. Days before, the government had already announced it would launch a crackdown against the TLP, saying the banned Islamist group would now be treated "as a militant organization". [South China Morning Post]

In addition, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority ordered all television and radio channels to not report on the protesters. The government has also suspended mobile phone service in areas the marchers are passing through. [Voice of America]

Against this backdrop, the Pakistani government announced October 31 that it had entered into an agreement with the group. As part of the pact, TLP dropped its demand that Islamabad cut off diplomatic ties with France. In exchange, the government agreed to release members of the group who had been imprisoned and not bring new charges against the group's leaders. It also agreed to lift its ban against the group. [France24]

Pakistan: Agreement with IMF to be signed soon, says finance minister

(tj/lm) Pakistan has reached an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) over the revival of the $6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and will sign a formal accord later this week, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said on November 1.

Both sides began the sixth review under the EFF early last month, and Pakistani finance officials traveled to the United States late in October trying to close a deal with the IMF to release the third loan tranche under the loan facility, which was supposed to be disbursed in June [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3]. Since then, both sides have remained tight-lipped over the release of a Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) – a report which outlines Islamabad's commitment to specific time-bound targets [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4].

People familiar with the discissions now claim that the deadlock between Pakistan and the IMF broke after the two sides decided to show some flexibility in their respective stances on the issue of granting autonomy to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). [Dawn]

However, *The Express Tribune* reported that the IMF is withholding the release of the third tranche until the Pakistani government closes commercial bank

accounts held by the defence ministry, the armed forces and public sector entities, and remits $17 billion worth of public funds into a single treasury account. At present, the defence ministry, public entities and some autonomous corporations are still maintaining commercial bank accounts, taking the money outside the federal government's purview. [The Express Tribune]

According to the reports, the Washington-based lender wants a framework to be put in place by December to close all remaining commercial bank accounts that are funded through government money. Pakistan wants one more year to close these accounts, but the IMF is not willing to extend the date. [Asia Times]

Sri Lanka: President Rajapaksa appoints task force to implement 'One Country, One Law' concept

(egm/lm) Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa has appointed a legal reform committee to study the implementation of his "One Country, One Law" concept and to prepare a draft Act for the said purpose, despite concerns with respect to the panel's leadership.

The concept gained the support from the country's majority Sinhala Buddhist population in the aftermath of the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, and featured prominently in the 2020 election manifesto of President Rajapaksa.

Announced in a government notification on October 26, the 13-member "Presidential Task Force for One Country, One Law" has been set up to replace the three customary laws which existed for centuries are still in use in Sri Lanka – Kandyan, Thesavalamai and Muslim law – and bring all communities under one blanket law. The panel was given four months to compile a report. [ColomboPage]

Significantly, the panel will be headed by Galagodaaththe Gnansara, a Buddhist monk known for his anti-Muslim stance who has previously served a sentence in prison under charges of contempt of court and was released in 2019 by presidential pardon. [The Straits Times]

Some observers and rights activists are concerned that the appointment of Gnansara represent a move by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa – who was elected in 2019 with strong backing from the Sinhalese majority

and the powerful Buddhist clergy – to establish Sinhalese legal hegemony within the country. [Al Jazeera]

In a press conference on November 1, Gnansara announced that the issues covered by the task force aligned with the matters addressed by his Bodu Bala Sena (Buddhist Power Force, BBS) – a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist and extreme nationalist organization – including sterilization, religious conversions and cultural invasions. The BBS has been repeatedly accused of inciting violence against Muslims, including the 2014 riots, which killed at least four and injured another 80. [DailyMirror]

Moreover, observers have noted that legal reform committee will comprise four Muslim scholars, but no representatives from the Tamil ethnic minority, the country's largest minority. They argue that the exclusion of the Tamil community could undermine the president's credibility, and thus, create further divisions within the country by siding the law with the Sinhalese majority. [EconomyNext] [The Hindu]

Sri Lanka: Court closes case against senior defense officers in relation to 2019 Easter Sunday attacks

(egm/lm) The cases against former top defense official Hemasiri Fernando and Sri Lankan Police chief Pujith Jayasundara in the Colombo Magistrate's Court on charges of criminal negligence of duty by failing to act on repeated intelligence warnings in the lead-up to the 2019 Easter Sunday have been concluded. [Ada Derana]

The Criminal Investigation Department informed the court that a case had been filed against the suspects before a special three-judge bench of the High Court in October, and thus, requested the court to close the case against them before the Magistrate's Court [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. [ColomboPage]

Sri Lanka: Former governor detained under PTA further remanded

(egm) The former governor of the Western Province, Azath Salley, who has been detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) since his arrest in March, will remain remanded until November 9, the

Colombo Magistrate's Court has decided. [ColomboPage]

In March, Salley had been charged with two counts of violating the PTA and the United Nations Convention on Civil and Political Rights by allegedly inciting religious strife during a press conference.

One month after his arrest, he filed a fundamental rights petition over his detention with the Supreme Court. The petition will be heard on December 15.

In 2013, Salley had been previously arrested under the PTA and later released after he called Muslims to launch an "armed struggle" during an interview.

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

Cambodia: Teenager sentenced to 8 months in jail

(tl) A Cambodian teenager was sentenced to 8 months in prison for spreading messages on social media against ruling party officials.

Sovann Chhay, 16-year-old son of a detained political opposition member and suffering from autism, was sentenced to 8 months in prison, of which he will serve 4 months and 15 days with the remainder of his sentence suspended. The boy, who was due to be released this month, will also have to serve two years of probation in addition to his sentence.

The US and human rights groups condemned the sentence. According to Human Rights Watch, the decision against the boy follows a policy of oppression of dissent inaugurated by the president after winning all parliamentary seats in the 2018 elections. [Reuters]

Cambodia: Energy Minister declares the intention for the country to not renovate coal plants

(tl) Cambodian Energy Minister Suy Sem stated during a summit with the British ambassador the country's intention not to fund new coal-fired power plant projects beyond those already in place in 2019. He added that Cambodia's goal is to reach 25% renewable energy by 2030.

During the meeting, the Minister stressed the country's intention to focus on "low-carbon energy sources such as imported LNG and hydrogen". He also referred to a yet-to-be-released 2040 energy master plan being finalized with the help of the Asian Development Bank. The plan, he said, set the ratio of renewable energy sources at 59% of the total grid and would see a 34% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Critics, while welcoming the signal to move away from coal, pointed out that Cambodia already gets 50% of its energy from renewable sources, mostly from hydropower plants, which effectively renders the target of receiving 25% from renewables by 2030 a step backwards. In addition, experts from the energy sector said that the minister's announcement will not lead to changes in emissions, at least in the medium term.

Cambodia has approved three coal-fired power plants that would add about 1.6 gigawatts of coal-fired power within the next decade, while authorities have also effectively signed up two more coal-fired power plants in neighboring Laos with promises to import energy from them. In its most recent Nationally Determined Contribution, a non-binding climate action plan, Cambodia has promised to reduce its estimated 2030 greenhouse gas emissions to 90.5 metric tons of carbon dioxide compared to 155 metric tons it would emit without government action. [Nikkei Asia]

Cambodia: Ten activists sentenced following a peaceful demonstration

(tl) A Phnom Penh court sentenced ten activists to 20 months in prison, finding them guilty of incitement for taking part in a demonstration in favor of the release of a popular union leader. The ten were arrested in August and September 2020 and are serving pre-trial detention following a demonstration organized to demand that Rong Chun, a trade union leader who is serving a two-year sentence also on incitement charges, be freed and cleared of the charges.

Seven of the convicted youths are members of the Khmer Thavrak youth movement, while the others are activists for the former opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). Domestic human rights group LICADHO reported that during the trial, the activists were mostly asked if they had permission to gather, and if they had been encouraged by someone outside of Cambodia or paid to protest during Rong Chun's trial. They were all fined $500, and their sentences were suspended to 14 or 15 months under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code. All ten activists will be released next month but must remain on probation for two years.

Last month, the World Justice Project, a Washington-based independent group that promotes rule of law, ranked Cambodia next to last – ahead only of Venezuela – in its global Rule of Law Index for 2021. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia requests Google delete most content out of all countries worldwide

(ms) Globally, Indonesia requested Google remove the most items of content during the period January to June 2021, according to Google's recently released "Content Removal Transparency Report". Indonesia requested Google remove more than 500,000 URLs, including websites, blogs, Google Docs, Google Play apps, and YouTube channels. So far, Google has removed more than 20,000 of these URLs and is reviewing the rest. Six other Asian countries also made the top ten list, including Kazakhstan (3nd), Pakistan (4th), South Korea (5th), India (6th), Vietnam (7th), and Turkey (9th). [Tempo]

Spokesman for Indonesia's Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Derdy Permandi, said the requests were made to remove access to content deemed to violate laws and regulations, namely the Electronic Information and Transactions Law (ITE Law). He said the requests followed public complaints, the findings of cyber patrols, or

recommendation from ministries or institutions. [Tempo]

The controversial ITE law has been criticised for limiting free speech and restricting internet access. Enacted in 2008 under President Susilo Bambag Yudyono, it was passed in the context of increasing use of the internet for economic activities as a means to protect consumers in electronic transactions. Updates to the law in 2016 then added regulations on defamation (Article 27) and hoaxes and hate speech (Article 28). Human rights groups have criticized the vague wording of these regulations, which they argue has allowed authorities to criminalize online speech and silence political dissidents. In February, President Joko Widodo announced the government would work with the House of Representatives to revise the law to remove ambiguous articles. This process is still ongoing. [East Asia Forum] [The Conversation] [See also AiR No. 10, March/2021, 2]

Article 40 (2a and 2b) was also added to the ITE Law in 2016, giving the government power to restrict access to internet in Indonesia. This power was used to implement internet throttling and an internet black out during weeks of large protests across multiple cities in Papua and in West Papua in August/September 2019. [See AiR No. 35, August 2019/4] The government justified the use of the powers to restrict the spread of fake news and misinformation during the protests, which in some cases had turned violent. [East Asia Forum]

Indonesia's actions follow a growing trend in recent years of Southeast Asian countries removing internet content and restricting access. Earlier this year, Singapore passed the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, which gives the government significant leverage over social media platforms and users to issue corrections or remove posts it finds to contain falsehoods, [See AiR No. 21, May/2021, 4] Cambodia, meanwhile, is planning a national internet gateway, which could give authorities increased powers to crackdown on online free-speech. [See AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4]. The launch date has not yet been announced but Internet service providers in Cambodia have until February 2022 to reroute their services through the gateway. Myanmar also has repeatedly cut internet access in response to anti-government protests. [See AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4] [See also AiR No. 14, April/2021, 1]

Indonesia provides effective model for expanding girls' education in Muslim nations

(ms) The education of women is flourishing in Indonesia, home to the world's largest network of *madrasas* (Islamic schools). Gender parity has been achieved in overall enrolment at the *madrasas* and there are even more girls than boys at the upper secondary level. Enrolment in remote and underdeveloped communities has particularly improved. [The Diplomat]

Run by the country's Ministry of Religious Affairs and non-state religious organisations, *madrasas* were officially recognized as an Islamic educational institution equivalent to public schools in 1975. They exist alongside secular public and private schools, and also private Islamic schools, but offer a cheaper alternative to the fee-charging private schools. [Fjar Syarif] [The Conversation]

Analysts have argued that increased government investment in schooling since the 1970s has empowered Indonesian girls and women and increased their engagement in social issues and activism. Recently, for example, several women and parents ran a campaign of continuous small protests against the enforced wearing of hijabs in Indonesian schools. As a result, the government banned schools from implementing such requirements. [The Diplomat]

Indonesia's model of government partnership with *madrasas* could be followed in other Muslim countries to expand girls' education. Bangladesh, for example, has already done so, leading to girls outnumbering boys in secondary education. It could also be particularly effective in Afghanistan, where currently girls account for the 60 per cent of the 3.7 million Afghan children who do not attend school. The Taliban, recently returned to power, banned almost all education for girls in their previous rule in 1996-2001. Now they have pledged to allow girls to study, albeit in single-sex schools with female only teachers and in line with Islamic law. [The Diplomat] [Thomas Reuters Foundation]

Indonesia: Constitutional Court sets time limit on emergency COVID-19 spending

(ms) The Indonesian Constitutional Court has ruled that President Joko Widodo's emergency COVID-19 law will expire two years after it was passed or when the president declares the pandemic to be over, depending on what comes first. The legislation was passed by parliament in May 2020 to allow the government to distribute almost US$50 billion of COVID-19 relief funds without parliamentary approval. It also allowed the government to exceed the fiscal deficit cap of three per cent of the country's gross domestic product for three years. Civilians and non-profit organizations brought the case to the Constitutional Court last year, alleging that by bypassing the parliament's rights to review government budgets the law could be in breach of the constitution. A senior lawmaker has said government's 2022 budget and fiscal consolidation plans will not be impacted by the ruling. [Channel News Asia]

Indonesia: Killing of two-year-old boy prompts thousands to flee violence in Papua

(ms) Thousands have fled to church-run shelters fearing more violence following the fatality of a two-year-old boy during a firefight between government troops and independence-seeking rebels in the Intan Jaya district of Papua on October 31. The side responsible for the killing has not been verified. A six-year-old was also hospitalized for bullet wounds from the firefight. Following this skirmish, authorities say the rebels then tried to capture the local airport, but the military has remained in control of all vital public facilities. [France 24]

Papua, Indonesia's easternmost province, has seen decades of sporadic acts of guerrilla warfare in the struggle for independence. A former Dutch colony, Papua declared independence in 1961, but was annexed by Indonesia two years later. In 1969 an UN-backed referendum formally incorporated the region into Indonesia, but the vote was widely considered as rigged due to its low participation rate, sparking decades of violent conflict. Tensions in the region have been on the rise since rebels assassinated Indonesia's top intelligence chief in April, promoting authorities to designate the separatist rebels a terrorist group and intensify their crackdown. [See AiR No. 18, May/2021, 1]

Indonesia: Sovereign wealth fund makes investment deals

(ms) Indonesia's sovereign wealth fund – the Indonesia Investment Authority (INA) – has made investment deals with the telecommunications infrastructure company PT Dayamitra Telekomunikasi and Dubai-based logistics company DP World. INA has pledged $500 to $800 million of investment in PT Dayamitra Telekomunikasi's initial public offering, and it has signed a $7.5 billion deal with DP World to form a long-term consortium to invest in seaports in Indonesia. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

The Indonesian government launched the INA in February to strengthen the country's economy by diversifying into new asset classes. The government initially invested $5 billion in the fund, which has a target of expanding its assets to $24.5 billion to fund infrastructure development. To do this, the INA seeks to attract co-investors. The United Arab Emirates has so far made the largest commitment, announcing in March its plan to invest $10 billion in the fund. [Reuters] Investors are able to place money in sub-funds that then invest in local infrastructure, health care, tourism, technology sectors, and the development of Indonesia's new national capital city on the island of Borneo. [Bloomberg]

Developing the capital city is projected to cost 489 trillion rupiah ($34 billion), with a fifth of the cost intended to come from the state budget and the rest form private funding. President Joko Widodo has cited Jakarta's overcrowding, traffic jams and pollution, as well as the need to spread economic activities outside of Java to the eastern half of Indonesia, as reasons for moving the city. Parliament is expected to pass the bill into law this year, setting a 2024 deadline for the project to proceed. In doing so, Indonesia will become the third Southeast Asian country to locate its capital city, with Malaysia having moved its administrative capital to Putrajaya in 2003 and Myanmar having changed its capital to Naypyidaw in 2006. [BNN Bloomberg] [Nikkei Asia]

Laos: Plantation workers exposed to health hazards quit Chinese company

(bs) A Chinese company saw over 500 workers quitting after the implementation of austere regulation since the beginning of 2020. The banana plantation workers were not allowed to leave the plantation field and buy

their necessities solely from more expensive local Chinese shops, while living in temporary shelters under constant exposure to hazardous chemicals. The monthly salaries, ranging from $100 to $200 USD are often delayed and medical treatment denied.

According to former laborers, the exposure to illegal insecticide and herbicide that the company imported from China caused the death of two workers this year.

The employers claimed the restrictions aimed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, laborers quit due to the drastic decrease in banana export to China.

In fact, banana production for export to China and Thailand is one of the major industries in Laos, with an estimated export volume of $200 million. Chinese general investment in Laos has been increasing over the last decade aiming to develop Lao employment in rural areas. However, several projects had a negative impact on both the environment and the local population. [Radio Free Asia]

Laos: Asia's biggest single drug seizure in the Golden Triangle

(bs) Lao authorities discovered 55 million methamphetamine tablets hidden in beer crates after having stopped other two smuggling operations earlier the same week, sizing a total of over 70 million tablets. Two men were arrested.

The area of the Golden Triangle, in Bokeo, Laos, has been the heart of China-Myanmar-Laos-Thailand drug trafficking for decades. The recent increase in the drug business in the area was supposedly a consequence of the strict Covid restrictions implemented at the China-Myanmar border. [BBC] [Independent]

Malaysia: Bill introduced to amend the Police Commission

(tl) In a recent bill introduced to parliament, the proposed Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) would replace the existing complaints body, the Enforcement Agency Integrity Commission (EAIC). The new Commission would have no powers of search and seizure and would also be precluded from investigating any acts under the Inspector General's standing orders, which generally govern such matters

as the conduct of arrests, the treatment of detainees and the permissible use of weapons.

Under the proposed law, the new commissioners would not be allowed to visit police premises, blocks or places of detention without prior notice to the head of the department. Moreover, even in cases where it finds misconduct or abuse, the commission would not have the power to discipline or prosecute offenders. Instead, its powers would be limited to making recommendations to bodies such as the Police Service Commission, the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission or other relevant authorities.

Human Rights Watch, in a joint statement with Amnesty International, ARTICLE 19 and CIVICUS, said the Malaysian parliament should reject the proposed Police Complaints Bill and create an independent commission that will ensure real accountability for police abuses. According to its legal advisor, 'The proposed Police Complaints Commission will not be able to fully investigate police abuses or ensure that crimes committed by the police are prosecuted fully and fairly'.

Allegations of police corruption and excessive use of force have dogged the Malaysian police for decades, culminating in the establishment of the Royal Commission to Enhance the Operation and Management of the Royal Malaysian Force in 2004. In 2005, the commission recommended creating an independent body to investigate complaints of misconduct against the police and take necessary disciplinary action. The EAIC, created in 2009 without the authority to prosecute or impose disciplinary actions for misconduct, has failed to hold the police accountable. [Human Rights Watch]

Malaysia prepares for Melaka elections by avoiding a new wave of Covid-19 infections

(tl) Malaysia is preparing for elections to be held in Melaka State next month, while criticism is being raised over the undermining of democracy.

The country's aim is to avoid a repeat of what happened on 26 September last year in the Sabah state elections, seen by many as the trigger event for the third wave. In response to the risk of an increase in the number of cases, Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin issued an order, valid until 27 November, prohibiting any gathering or event related to the

elections in Melaka. [South China Morning Post] [The Edge Markets]

Electoral watchdog Bersih 2.0 argue that a total ban on all political gatherings for elections could pose a risk to democracy, denying candidates the opportunity to campaign and denying voters the right to be informed before voting. Furthermore, the prospect of restricting campaigning to remote options further prevents candidates from reaching voters, particularly marginalized and minority groups.

Some legislators have proposed equal media airtime on national television channels for all political parties and candidates instead of physical rallies, as carried out in Singapore. Others, however, pointed out that 95% of the adult population is vaccinated. [South China Morning Post]

On the other hand, health groups such as the Malaysian Medical Association, the country's largest union representing doctors, advocate a total ban on physical campaigns, pointing out that Covid-19 continues to spread even among the fully vaccinated and is now circulating particularly among children under 12.

The Melaka state legislative assembly has 28 seats, with 495,196 people eligible to vote. The Electoral Commission (EC) expects turnout to be around 70%. [CodeBlue] [The Diplomat]

Myanmar: State Counsellor pleads not guilty in first hearing

(nd) Detained State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has pled not guilty to charges of public incitement. The hearing was not made public after her lawyers were forbidden to talk to the media, referring to the information to spread could “destabilize the country.”

According to legal experts, the order to not talk to the media is violating the law if a restraining order is not in place, depriving citizens of their right to information. Since the judge in Aung San Suu Kyi’s case allowed for the lawyers to talk to the press, the junta’s order was interfering with the judiciary and therefore unconstitutional, says a veteran high court lawyer.

The order comes after former President Win Myint testified at court that the military tried to force him to step down, barring his legal team to talk to the press subsequently.

Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained since the February 1 coup for alleged voted fraud in their landslide victory in the general elections of November 2020, for which the junta has yet to provide evidence. Last week, Aung San Suu Kyi has requested the court hearing to only be held bi-weekly instead of weekly for her ill health, which was refused. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: NLD patron sentenced to 20-year prison term

(nd) A National League for Democracy (NLD) patron was found guilty of high treason for a press conference during which he condemned the February 1 coup. The junta-controlled court sentenced U Win Htein to 20 years in prison, which for the 80-year-old will likely mean the rest of his live.

In a press conference following the coup, he called the coup a result of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing's lust for power, who had no intention of returning power, therefore the public shall oppose the coup. His lawyer said it was his "responsibility as a party leader to inform the public".

He added the junta would take the country "back to zero", referring to the turmoil the country is facing today, with at least 1,219 civilians killed and 9,345 arrested.

Between 1989 and 1995, U Win Htein was in prison on charges of providing misinformation to foreign journalists, and released in 2010. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Continuing brutality of junta forces

(nd) Reportedly, the junta has repeatedly used arrested civilians as human shields in their operations against civilian People's Defense Forces (PDF). On October 29, a photo went viral showing over a dozen civilians, tights together blindfolded, forced to walk in front of a military column in Shan State, after suffering heavy casualties from the PDF.

Over the weekend, atrocities against civilians continued, with raiding and burning down villages, bombarding residential areas of towns and arbitrarily killing civilians. [The Irrawaddy 1]

The most recent violence prompted the US to condemn the junta's attack on towns in Chin State, bombing churches, more than 160 houses and killing many civilians, including children, calling for urgent international action to hold the military accountable. US State Department spokesman Ned Price said: "These abhorrent attacks underscore the urgent need for the international community to hold the Burmese [Myanmar] military accountable and take action to prevent gross violations and abuses of human rights, including preventing the transfer of arms to the military." [The Irrawaddy 2]

Meanwhile, the shadow National Unity Government announced it had formed a command structure to coordinate between PDF and allied ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Created as a reaction towards the junta's brutal crackdown on protests following the February 1 coup, there are now hundreds of PDFs across the country engaging in guerrilla warfare and attacking military targets. Earlier, they received combat training from some allied EAOs. Not all of them are under NUG's command. [The Irrawaddy 3]

Myanmar: Junta to amend Bar Council Act to gain control over legal profession

(nd) General Min Aung Hlaing on October 28 introduced two new amendments to the Bar Council Act, effectively putting the Council under the junta's control. The amendments remove the lawyer's right to elect the Council, which instead will be appointed by the Attorney-General and Chief Justice of the Union. The Bar Council is endowed to issue and revoke advocate licenses and to regulate advocates, putting pressure on the profession, which is likely to face tougher restrictions. According to legal experts, without elected members, there are no checks and balances on legal processes and procedures any more.

The Bar Council Act was first passed in 1929 and said that council members were to be elected democratically. When the Bar Council during the 1988 uprising advocated for lawyers to join the protests, the then junta's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) amended the act so that council members could be chosen only by the Chief Justice of the Union. Through an amendment of the act in 2019 by the ousted civilian National League for Democracy (NLD) government, lawyers were given a vote to elect the council.

In a reaction to the protests against the most recent coup, the junta has amended various provisions of the Penal Code to crackdown on protesters and has shunned ousted State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi's legal team from talking to media, which legal experts said it was an effort to interfere with the judiciary and unconstitutional due to the fair trial principle of a trial to be held in an open court. [See article in this edition] [The Irrawaddy]

The Philippines: New leader of the Department of Agrarian Reform appointed

(lt) President Rodrigo Duterte has appointed Bernie Cruz as the new leader of the Department of Agrarian Reform. Malacañang Palace representatives announced this on Saturday, 30 October 2021. The appointment of Cruz comes as John Castriciones, former leader of the Department of Agrarian Reform, resigned to run for senator in the upcoming 2022 national elections. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: Nationwide survey shows son of late dictator Marcos popularity as preferred presidential candidate

(lt) Presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos led a noncommissioned presidential survey, exhibiting his popularity as the topmost preferred presidential candidate in the upcoming 2022 national elections. The results were announced by his camp Partido Federal ng Pilipinas, who stated that the nationwide survey conducted by the Issues and Advocacy Center secured 23.5 percent of the votes.

Former boxer Manny Pacquiao took second place in the survey, receiving 19.75 percent of votes. He was succeeded by Isko Moreno's 18 percent. Current Vice President Leni Robredo garnered 14 percent of voter support. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: News outlet Rappler investigates statements made by presidential candidate regarding education at Oxford

(lt) Online news website Rappler has found that presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos' claim of obtaining a Bachelor of Arts at the prestigious Oxford University has been proven false.

In an investigation dating back to 2015, Rappler emailed the university inquiring about Marcos' education to find that the claimed bachelor's degree was in fact a Special Diploma in Social Studies. This contradicts prior statements made by Marcos; in 2015, the late dictator's son claimed he was awarded a graduate diploma from Oxford University. When his legitimacy was questioned during an interview with ASB-CBN News in 2016, Marcos argued that it was equivalent to a bachelor's degree. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Department of Social Welfare & Development, recipients of 331 reports of online child sex abuse between 2019 to 2021

(lt) 331 reports of online child sex abuse and child exploitation were recorded between 2019 to 2021, the Department of Social Welfare & Development reports. This comes as the COVID-19 pandemic has increased citizens' proximity to technological devices, with the Philippines being one of two countries that have yet to return to face-to-face learning.

Glenda Relova, assistant secretary of the Department of Social Welfare & Development has stressed the illegality of online child sex abuse and child exploitation. Numerous arrests made in partnership with the Philippine National Police have also occurred, with individuals found selling pornographic materials online facing legal action. [ABS-CBN News] [Channel News Asia]

The Philippines: Duterte-Marcos partnership considered a strong contender in upcoming 2022 elections

(lt) Political dynasties Marcos and Duterte are joining forces in an attempt to assist Bongbong Marcos in his bid to succeed current President Rodrigo Duterte. Following a meeting between Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte and presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos, it was announced by the former that the meeting's purpose revolved around helping Marcos' presidential campaign through her Mindanao-based regional party,

Hugpong ng Pagbabago. Sara Duterte also quelled rumors of her alleged presidential candidacy, instead endorsing Bongbong Marcos as her most preferred candidate for the presidency.

The collaboration between two of the Philippines' strongest political dynasties is significant; the Duterte family has historically been subordinate to the Marcoses. In the 1960s, Vicente Duterte, father of current President Rodrigo Duterte, served in the cabinet of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos. [Asia Times]

The Philippines: Generations to face a lifetime of poverty due to lack of face-to-face classes

(lt) The Philippines is due to resume face-to-face classes for a limited 120 schools next month. It is currently one of two countries in the world that have failed in providing face-to-face classes for students due to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning as a whole has suffered greatly; Channel News Asia reports that remote and modular learning has produced worrying outcomes.

These learning inequities have had stark implications for the nation's poorest students, who are unable to afford access to technological devices which facilitate their learning. Some students have dropped out of school and turned to performing hazardous work to earn an income. This has led to families being unable to escape the cycle of poverty, ultimately resulting in a "generational crisis that will affect all segments of the society," as Dr Edilberto De Jesus, a senior research fellow at the Ateneo School of Government states. [Channel News Asia]

The Philippines: Journalist killed in Davao del Sur

(lt) Philippine news reporter Orlando Dinoy has died after being shot multiple times at close range. According to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, Dinoy died immediately after being shot in his home located in Bansalan town, Mindanao island. A reporter for Newsline Philippines and former Philippine Daily Inquirer correspondent, Dinoy is the 21st journalist to have been killed during President Rodrigo Duterte's time in office. [ABS-CBN News] [South China Morning Post]

The Philippines: Protests erupt at US university over racist exhibition concerning American colonization of the Philippines

(lt) Faculty, students and alumni at the University of California, Berkeley are protesting against an exhibit which they allege depicts Filipino history and scholarship from a racist viewpoint. The exhibit in question, located in the university's main library, aims to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies. However, the exhibition's focus on white scholars David Barrows and Bernard Moses – two academics notable for their support of American colonization of the Philippines – has been the subject of criticism.

Critics noted the absence of an academic engagement with the scholars' problematic histories as well as of a discussion on Filipino scholars. The school's student government and other affiliated campus organizations staged a protest in response to the exhibition on Thursday 28 November 2021, just prior to the conclusion of Filipino Heritage Month. [NBC News]

The Philippines: Top communist rebel killed in gun battle with army

(lt) Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos, a senior leader of communist insurgency group the New People's Army, was killed in a gunfight in Bukidnon province on Mindanao island. As a top leader of the communist rebellion in the Philippines, Madlos faced numerous criminal charges, the Philippines News Agency reported. These included robbery with homicide, damage to property as well as several possible murder charges.

His death comes as a blow to the remaining New People's Army forces in the south of the Philippines as noted by Colonel Ramon Zagala. "His death will deter the activities and plans by the NPA for he can no longer direct the communist terrorists' violent actions against our people," Zagala, spokesman for the armed forces of the Philippines, said in a statement. [Deutsche Welle]

Thailand: Ruling party's executive board unchanged amid reshuffle plan to oust secretary general

(kk) Thammanat Prompow remains the secretary-general of the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) despite speculations of a reshuffle of the party's executive board.

Party leader Prawit Wongsuwan said the party can work with the Prime Minister, stressing the PM and Thammanat did not have issues with each other. [Bangkok Post 1] In early October, Thammanat was removed from the Deputy of Agriculture post by Prayuth after he was accused of plotting to oust the PM in the latest censure debate. [See AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2]

The recent speculation about the PPRP's committee reshuffle took off after Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha summoned core members of the ruling party to a meeting at the Government House, including Justice Minister, Industry Minister, Labour Minister, PM's Office Minister, Digital Economy and Society (DES) Minister and Deputy Finance Minister, which were rumored to discuss an internal reshuffle in the party possibly resulting in a re-election of the executive committee to remove Thammanat Prompao. [Bangkok Post 2]

Prior to the party's meeting, DES minister, one of the members participating in the meeting with Prayuth, said that the board reshuffle was related to Thammanat, admitting there was a problem with the secretary-general which "the media and the public already know about". [Thairath, in Thai]

Meanwhile, PPRP deputy leader Wirach Ratanasate denied a report that nine PPRP executive committee members had submitted their resignations. [KomChadLeuk Online, in Thai]

Activist Srisuwan Janya has filed a petition with the Election Commission calling for an investigation into the summon of the ruling party's executive committee by the PM and clarification whether the party violates Section 28 of the law on political parties, which prohibits a third-party to dominate, influence or direct party affairs. In this case, the PM is the third party as Prayuth is not PPRP member. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Former PM eyes young voters for the upcoming election

(kk) Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is reaching out to Thai youth through social media as talks of early election in 2022 has amplified. Thaksin has previously used Clubhouse – the audio-based social media app – as a platform to exchange his ideas with young Thais and showcase his visions since February 2021 According to Thaksin's confidant, the audience ranges from 20-35 years.

Additionally reflecting such ambitions, Paetongtarn Shinawatra, his youngest daughter, was appointed as the Pheu Thai Party (PTP)'s chief adviser on the Inclusion and Innovation Committee.

The ex-PM has a history of having family members being part of his political party including his brother-in-law Somchai Wongsawat and his youngest sister Yingluck Shinawatra, who both served as prime ministers after he was toppled and was forced out of office before completing their terms. Yingluck was ousted by a military coup in 2014 led by then-army chief Prayuth Chan-O-Cha. [South China Morning Post]

Regarding the chance of her being the main opposition's PM candidate, Paetongtarn indicated that it is a "matter of the future" but she might consider the idea if she has the support of party members. For the time being, she would focus on her role as an advisor.

Also, party leader Sompong Amornvivat announced his decision to step down from the position to be succeeded by Cholanan Srikaew. [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World]

Thaksin's political base, mainly in rural area, remained loyal to the party linked to Thaksin in subsequent elections.

In the latest general election in 2019, the newly formed pro-youth Future Forward Party (FFP) signaled the arrival of a sizable number of young voters, securing 81 seats in the parliament – third place after Pheu Thai and the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP). Young voters aged between 18 and 25 years accounted for 7.3 million of overall 51.2 million registered voters. In the next general election, it was estimated that there will be 3 million first voters.

Experts believe that it might not be easy for Thaksin to attract young voters as many of them tended to the defunct FFP and its successor, Move Forward Party (MFP). The MFP's main political goal is to reform

the country's entrenched power structure, including the politically sensitive position of the monarchy. [Nikkei Asia]

Thailand: Authorities escalated crackdown on dissent

(kk) Sitanun Satsaksit – sister of missing activist Wanchalerm Satsaksit – was charged with violating the Emergency Decree after giving a speech at a protest. Sitanun has been demanding justice for her brother and other activists who have went missing after Wanchalerm's disappearance. [The Diplomat]

Last year, Wanchalerm was abducted in his exile in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh and not seen again. Human rights groups believe his kidnapping was part of a pattern of politically motivated disappearances as nine Thai political dissidents who fled to neighboring countries after the military coup in 2014 disappeared, two of whom were found dead later. [See AiR No. 23, June/2020, 2]

Thailand: Controversy over Thai military's solar energy farm plan

(kk) Critics fear the Thai military's solar farm plan will result in the military's rising influence on politics. In January, the Royal Thai Army announced it would conduct a feasibility study for the construction of a 30,000-million-watt solar farm on military land, a capacity which is more than double of Thailand's solar energy target set for 2037.

The study was conducted in partnership with the state-run Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT).

One of the concerns raised was that the military could monopolize the solar sector, gaining a greater political influence. Critics noted that 30 firms recently met with the president of the Royal Thai Army Radio and Television Channel 5 to seek clarity on the rules regarding entry into the sector at Channel 5 headquarters instead of the Energy Ministry.

The status of the land which the solar farm would be built on also added concerns to the issue. The army had said that if the plan was approved, it would transfer the land to the relevant government agencies to operate the solar farm. Kanda Naknoi – a prominent Thai economist – indicated operating a solar farm was

not a part of the military's duties, and added it would be better to transfer the management of the land holdings for the solar projects to the Department of Energy. [South China Morning Post]

Thailand: Young protester shot at Din Daeng protest dies after 2-month coma

(kk) A 15-year-old protester, who was shot on August 16 protest, has died after spending 2 months in the intensive care unit. Following the protest near Din Daeng Police Station, Warit Somnoi was critically injured by a live bullet, which the police denied to have used. [See AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]

A Move Forward Party MP who was a member of the House Committee's working group investigating the two Din Daeng shootings, believes it is unlikely that Warit was shot by another protester, as an alley beside the police station was blocked with a metal fence, making it impossible for protesters to enter the area.

Earlier, police have arrested a suspect of shooting the young protester, however, the suspect denied all charges. [See AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]

Amnesty International issued a statement demanding Thai authorities to conduct an urgent investigation into the case, adding that the use of live ammunition against protestors is "deeply concerning". The organization also urged the police to protect protesters from third-party violence. [Prachatai English]

Thailand: Opposition politician pushes for charter reform to end political crisis

(kk) Prominent politician Sudarat Keyuraphan calls for a constitution reform to avoid political gridlocks amid talks of possible early election.

Amid speculation Prime MInister Prayut Chan-ocha might dissolve the House of Representatives before the end of this year and call for early general elections next year, pro-democracy parties are set to compete with the military-backed ruling party despite rules that are in favor of the latter. According to polls, Sudarat, who was a former premier candidate of Pheu Thai Party, remains the favorite pro-democracy PM candidate, second only to current prime minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha.

Sudarat's appeal for a new constitution is in line with one of the key demands of the youth-led protest movement. In September, the parliament approved a charter amendment on election rules which benefits large parties including the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP). [See AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2]

The current constitution allows 250 senators, appointed by Prayuth's military government, to vote for the prime minister, giving the ruling party an advantage in the next election.

Sudarat indicated that even if the pro-democracy parties win enough votes to form a government, the current charter has mechanisms that can overthrow a pro-democracy government within three to six months. She added that she was trying to form a united front to push for a national referendum to lawfully and peacefully end the political crisis.

Last year, Sudarat left Pheu Thai Partyto found the Thai Sang Thai Party. [See AiR No. 52, December/2020, 5] Sudarat was a co-founder of the now-defunct Thai Rak Thai Party, along with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and served as health and agriculture minister during his administration before the 2006 coup. [Bloomberg]

Thailand: Court rejects temporary injunction request for gathering ban

(kk) The Civil Court dismissed a temporary injunction request to suspend the ban on gathering ahead of a protest against the lese majeste law on October 31. The court ruled that the October 31 protest risks spreading COVID-19 and the ban is necessary for containing the pandemic. [Bangkok Post 1]

Protest leaders including Panusaya "Rung" Sithijirawattanakul had filed a petition against Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and the military commander-in-chief after the government issued further bans on gatherings under the emergency decree in tourism provinces including Bangkok, which has been reopened to foreign tourists on November 1. Panusaya accused the government of using the decree to limit freedom of expression and obstructing pro-democracy protests. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Protesters' rally to demand abolition of royal defamation law,

supported by opposition

(kk) On October 31, Ratsadon group – a prominent pro-democracy group – staged a protest to collect signatories for the abolition of the royal defamation law and demanded freedom for those imprisoned under the law. The constitution allows people to propose a new law or an amendment to an existing law to the parliament if at least 10,000 signatures of eligible voters are gathered. [Bangkok Post]

In the past year, over 150 people have been charged with royal defamation including young students and minors. Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, a student activist, has been charged with 20 cases of lese majeste, which means he could potentially face a total of 300 years in prison if convicted. [See AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2] [See also AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

Meanwhile, Thailand's main opposition party called for a parliamentary review of the government's use of security laws including lese majeste law after a surge in arrests of the government's critics. The statement also included the use of sedition law, the Computer Crime Act and a COVID-19 ban on gatherings against anti-government protesters.

Pheu Thai Party (PTP) announced its position following the rally against the royal defamation law by anti-establishment protesters. The party would propose for reexamination of the ways in which the laws are used, to prevent authorities from abusing the laws as political weapons and free the "prisoners of conscience" in order to restore people's confidence in justice system. [Reuters]

Earlier this year, the parliament rejected a proposal to amend the lese majeste law launched by 44 lawmakers of the opposition Move Forward Party (MFP). [See AiR No. 7, February/2021, 3] Pheu Thai's move was welcomed by the MFP, while facing opposition from Democrat Party leader.

Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Wisanu Krea-ngam said political parties can push for the amendment through the parliamentary process, without having to meet behind closed doors. [Bangkok Post]

UN report urges Vietnam to reduce gender disparity

(bs) The Country Gender Equality Profile Vietnam 2021 (CGEP) has presented evidence on gender equality

issues in the country in various sectors, urging the country to implement stricter regulations to reduce obstacles for women to access businesses and formal employment in order to eliminate gender disparity.

The report highlighted an imbalance in the labor force between men and women, which increased by 0.1% since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The analysis found that women are the most affected by the pandemic, often being employed informally or in the agriculture and domestic sector, and bearing the primary responsibility for children being schooled at home.

In addition, the report shows that gender stereotypes, along with national culture, play a central role in the gender imbalance in the labor market. [Việt Nam News] [United Nations] [Vietnam Plus 1]

Detained Vietnamese journalist receives medical treatment

(bs) Following her lawyer's public pressure, a detained journalist and winner of multiple international awards received medical examination. The medical staff found an internal tumor and provided her with care for other underlying conditions long remained untreated.

She has been in prison since October 2020 for political dissent. [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

This latest attention mobilized over 25 human rights organizations, which in a joint statement her release from jail. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam: Six convicted for online "anti-state content",political dissent

(bs) Five journalists were sentenced for publishing "anti-state content" on the internet. The five journalists on Facebook created a news outlet, which allegedly "carried content that distorted information and defamed the government" [Aljazeera]

The journalists were banned for three years from journalism practice, in addition to the sentence to multiple years in jail, ranging from 2 to 3 years for four of the journalists, to 4 and a half years for the leader of the group.

The court charged the group under Article 331 of the Vietnam Penal Code for "abusing the rights to freedom and democracy to violate the interests of the state [...]" [Việt Nam News] The event caught the attention of the US State Department, which in an official statement appealed to Vietnam to release any detainee for political dissent allowing freedom of expression in the country. The appeal extended to everyone unjustly detained, including a pro-democracy activist arrested in July on the charges of sharing anti-state content on social media. The radio journalist was sentenced to 5.5 years in jail. [France24]

Also, a candidate for the National Assembly was sentenced to 6.5 years in jail for "creating, storing, disseminating and spreading information, materials and items against the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" under Article 117 of Vietnam's Penal Code.

Last March, the authorities arrested the man for criticizing Vietnam's Communist Party in 22 livestream videos on Facebook. The arrest report added that the aspiring member of the National Assembly also advocated for "pluralism and a multi-party regime and separation of powers."

Following the arrest, the government proposed the implementation of stricter control over social media activities by imposing official registration to accounts with over 10,000 followers. [Radio Free Asia]

Detained Vietnamese blogger warns his family of imminent danger to his safety

(bs) The blogger sentenced in October 2017 for "spreading propaganda against the state" under Article 88 of Vietnam's 1999 Penal Code warned his family of the risk of an imminent threat to his safety.

Following the call, the family was not able to contact the detention center. The man said that "if he did not call again within the next 15 days, something bad will have happened to him"

Before the sentence, the blogger "managed several independent online newspapers focusing on politically sensitive issues in Vietnam" and was a member of a US-sponsored program on leadership for Southeast Asian youth.Early 2020, the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (WGAD) accused Vietnam of violating international law by jailing the individual "for exercising his right to peacefully express his opinions" and called for his immediate release. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam: Draft law to encourage families to have a second child

(bs) The government introduced a draft amendment to the Law on Population, which aims to incentivize women to have more children. For that, women shall receive the equivalent of the minimum wage salary for each of the first two children born in a family living in low-birth areas, including free education. [VNExpress 1]

The draft was made public parallel to the release of the 2021 Country Gender Equality Profile for Vietnam, which indicates “declining fertility rates” and high imbalance in the sex ratio of newborns, counting 111.5 boys and 100 girls, surpassing the normal Asian ratio of 105 boys, 100 girls.

The document identifies the “availability of reproductive technologies” among the main causes of the aforementioned imbalance, allowing the population to choose in advance to give birth to either a boy or a girl. [VNExpress 2] [UNFPA Guidance Note on Prenatal Sex Selection]

Vietnam: Online child abuse increase following school closure

(bs) Vietnam has seen an escalation in online child abuse since 2019**.** Covid restrictions enforced school closure imposing the children to attend online classes. The long hours spent on the internet exposes the youths to a higher risk of catfishing, abuse, and online exploitation.

The [WeProtect's Global Threat Assessment] included Vietnam among the countries that reached their highest level of online child sexual abuse and exploitation, particularly affected were the Philippines. The report indicated that the issue principally interested low-income countries, but some regions in Europe, Russia, and the US also experienced a drastic increase in online child abuse. Vietnam saw an increase in child violence by 1.5 times compared to the beginning of 2021. [VNExpress]

Last June, Vietnam launched its first national program on child protection from online abuses that include among others the use of AI to set up child-safe surfing

and education programs on online safety. [OpengovAsia]

In early 2020, the ASEAN community also mobilized its member states towards the implementation of protection measures against child online exploitation and abuse by reiterating their commitment to reach the goals set in the 35th ASEAN Summit.

A recent study argues that inconsistencies in the legislations of ASEAN countries may be one of the causes of the rapid increase in child online abuse in the region since the beginning of the pandemic. The research found that Vietnam, among other ASEAN countries namely Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, and Myanmar, often has not developed or enforced legislation on crucial subjects such as the age of consent, cyberbullying, and child pornography. [Springer]

Vietnam's metro-lines to be completed by 2024

(bs) The metro-line projects in the two biggest Vietnamese cities are expected to be completed by 2024. The constructions saw several delays from the beginning of the projects, facing concomitant financial and quality issues.

Vietnam has received fundings for the metro-line constructions from Japanese, Chinese [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4], and European lenders, but is now encountering complications after the budget doubled due to missed deadlines and land acquisition disputes. [The Diplomat]

The first metro line in Hanoi is ready to begin operating after receiving the final approval of the State Council for Acceptance of Construction Projects. [Việt Nam News] Meanwhile, on October 29, the contractor of the second metro line in Hanoi stopped the constructions announcing the intention to appeal to international arbitration if the Metropolitan Railway Management Board will fail to pay $114.7 million in compensation for the damage caused by the several delays. [VNExpress]

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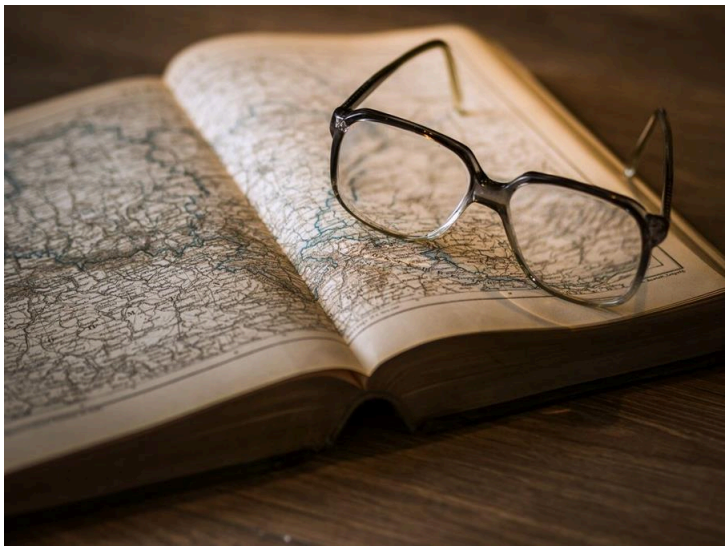

China proposes anti-pandemic action plan, criticizes US for politicization of virus origin issue at G20 summit

(dql) Addressing the G20 summit in Rome on Saturday, October 30, via video speech, Chinese President Xi Jinping called on the international community to deepen solidarity and cooperation in the global fight against the Covid-19 pandemic and proposed the Global Vaccine Cooperation Action Initiative, a six-point action plan, including strengthening vaccine R&D cooperation, increasing delivery of vaccines to developing countries, waiving intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines, ensuring smooth vaccine trade and trade in related materials as well as provide financial support for global vaccine cooperation, especially for developing countries to access vaccines. It also demands treating different vaccines equally and advancing mutual recognition of vaccines, a complain about the West's refusal to recognize Chinese vaccines.

At the same time, Xi warned that "[s]tigmatization of the virus and politicization of origins tracing run counter to the spirit of solidarity against the pandemic," a thinly veiled criticism of the US National Intelligence Council's recent "Updated Assessment of the Covid-19 origins" which accuses China of continuing "to hinder the global investigation, resist sharing information, and blame other countries, including the United States," adding that these "actions reflect, in part, China's government's own uncertainty about where an investigation could lead as well as its frustration the international community is using the issue to exert political pressure on China." [Xinhuanet]

[Office of the Director of National Intelligence] [The Guardian]

In addition to fight against the pandemic, climate change was also high on the agenda at the summit where leaders failed to agree on specific timeframes to phase out the use of coal as an energy source due to Russia's, China's, India's and Australia's opposition and only reached agreement to end international public finance for new coal-power generation abroad by the end of this year. [Reuters]

For a critical account of the outcomes of the summit at which in addition to Xi also Russian President Vladimir Putin was absent, see Hung Tran in [Atlantic Council] who argues that in the light of an intensifying Sino-US strategic competition, "major countries will increasingly use forums such as the G20 to vie for influence rather than exploring compromises for joint solutions to common problems. As a result, it appears likely that the effectiveness of the G20 could become a casualty of this new version of Cold War."

Chinese Foreign Minister meets European leaders, Blinken and Lavrov at G20 summit

(dql) In an attempt to repair strained China-EU relations, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi held talks with European leaders on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit in Rome on Saturday, October 30, including Italian Prime Minister and chair of the summit Mario Draghi, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and French French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian.

In his conversation with Draghi, Wang called on the EU to "stick to strategic autonomy, exclude interference and build consensus on dialogue and cooperation," adding that Rome thereby should "play an active role in the healthy development of China-EU relations." In the following meeting with Rutte, Wang described the Netherlands as "the gateway to cooperation" with Europe and suggested that the two nations should expand "development in bilateral relations ... to give impetus to China-EU relations." [South China Morning Post 1]

Similarly, Wang stressed that cooperation China and France was necessary to push forward "healthy and stable" relations between China and Europe, with Le Drian confirming that France abided by the one-China principle and was ready to continue talks with China

under the UN and G20 mechanisms. [South China Morning Post 2]

Furthermore, Wang met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. During their talk, both traded warnings over Taiwan. While Blinken insisted that Washington opposes any unilateral changes by Beijing to the status quo around Taiwan, Wang accused the US "connivance" and "support" for pro-independence forces in Taiwan that are responsible to the change of the status quo. [Reuters]

Blinken's statement echoes a remark made by US President Joe Biden at the virtual East Asia summit on October 27, which reaffirmed that Washington would stand with Southeast Asian countries in defending freedom of the seas and democracy while describing Beijing's actions towards Taipei "coercive" and a threat to peace and stability in the region, adding that Taiwan can be sure of Washington's "rock-solid commitment" to the island. [France 24]

Lastly, Wang held a talk with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov, during which both Ministers agreed to "uphold multilateralism and oppose 'small circles,' 'false democracy' and 'new Cold War,', reflecting close Sino-Russian ranks to counter the US and its allies. [Ecns]

Prior to attending the G20 summit, Wang visited Greece, Serbia and Albania, seeking to further the Chinese government's effort to promote trade and improve relations with the countries of Eastern and Central Europe. [AP News] [VoA]

China-US trade relations: Biden administration mulls lowering tariffs

(dql) US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has revealed that the US is considering to eventually tariffs on Chinese goods in a reciprocal way, adding that Washington still insists that Beijing fulfills its commitments made under the phase one trade deal. [Reuters]

Yellen's statement follows her video talk with China's Vice Premier Liu He on October 26 during which the latter reiterated Beijing's concerns over US tariffs and discrimination of Chinese companies. [CNBC]

China: Hypersonic missile test draws international concern

(tjsj) In July, China conducted a test of a hypersonic missile, weaponry able to travel at five times the speed of sound, a test that Chinese authorities have brushed off as the mere testing of the re-use of a space vehicle for peaceful purposes. [BBC] [See, AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

Despite other countries working on similar technologies, countries even including the US have not as yet conducted formal testing of what China had achieved, commentators and US General Mark Milley noting the test was 'close to Sputnik moment', referencing the launch of a satellite by the Society Union in 1957 that engendered fears that the US was technologically inferior in the tenuous arms race against the Soviets. [AP News] [The Guardian]

However, perhaps in response, this week the US conducted three hypersonic missile tests at a NASA facility in Virginia, with reports further noting that Washington remains poised to increase its military research spending in this area. [BBC] [South China Morning Post 1]

Concerns have understandably increased against the background of the tenuous relations between China and Taiwan, Taiwanese defence officials having expressed that China-Taiwan tensions are the worst in 40 years, whilst Taiwan's President, Tsai Ing-Wen, expressing that the threat from China is increasing 'every day'. [CNN] [See, AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4] Solidifying these sentiments, on Sunday, 8 Chinese aircrafts, including fighter jets and an anti-submarine aircraft, entered Taiwan's air defence zone representing yet another incursion by China's People's Liberation Army this year after the mass incursion on China's National Day last month. [See, AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4] [Reuters]

Commentators have noted that alongside the testing of nuclear-capable missiles and the multiple incursions to Taiwanese airspace reflects a broader narrative of China remaining resolute in investing in modernising and expanding its military with advanced weaponry and overhauling its existing military command structure. [Al Jazeera 2] [BBC] [See, AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]

China's military expansion and missile testing has similarly spilled into a regional context, India having tested nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic

missiles this week amid increasing tensions with China along its Himalayan border. [Al Jazeera] Tensions between the two nations have flared recently amid China's bolstering of border controls last week, China rejecting criticism from India that the law would interfere with the standing resolution that has resulted in a 17-month standoff. [See, AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4] [AP News]

Despite Chinese President Xi Jinping's a speech marking the 50th anniversary of China's return to the United Nations that China will uphold world peace and international law, further calling for all countries to promote peace, development, justice democracy, this rhetoric stands directly in contrast with reports released from the US Department last month that reported that China had conducted at least 250 ballistic missile tests this year. [ABC News] [Global Times] Likewise, Chinese authorities have raised the number of tests of missiles are required to undergo from eight to fifteen, citing the need to improve reliability. [South China Morning Post 2]

Japanese Prime Minister voices concerns over Indo-Pacific stability

(ec) Speaking online at 16th East Asia Summit on Wednesday, October 27, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida confirmed it his country's desire to strengthen relations with the economic union to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs prior to the LDP's leadership election in September, Kishida was stated as believing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, which aims to promote co-operation other regional bodies in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, was compatible with Japan's own vision of the Indo-Pacific. Kishida was also cited as expressing Japan's shared concerns about, and opposition to, any actions that would challenge the rules-based maritime order in the region. [Japan Today]

These remarks come as the People's Republic of China continues to forcefully assert its historic-rights claim to the nine-dash demarcation line in the South China Sea [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4], a record number of Chinese military incursions into the air defense identification zone of the Taiwan [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4], and contests Japanese control of the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3].

These moves have hardened Tokyo's resolve and led Japan to reaffirm its co-operation with the United

States of America and other partners in the Indo-Pacific. [The Mainichi]

For additional perspective on the defence relationship between Japan, the United States and Taiwan, considering looking into this feature from the Taiwan-U.S. Quarterly Analysis series, in which Yoichi Kato discusses how the growing consensus amongst Japanese leaders on the importance of aiding Taiwan requires further co-operation with the United States. [Brookings]

Meanwhile, in its manifesto for the 49th election for members of the House of Representatives, Kishida's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has pledged to allocate at least 2% of Japan's GDP to military spending; Japanese military spending has not exceeded 1% of its GDP since 1976, when Prime Minister Takeo Miki placed an unofficial cap on the defense budget. Though the promise is expected to fade in the face of popular opposition and an economy recovering from the covid19 pandemic, it indicates Tokyo mounting wariness concerning regional hostilities within the foreseeable future. [Japan Times] [Reuters]

Japan: Ambassador to Afghanistan meets with Taliban foreign minister

(ec) Meeting on Wednesday, October 27, Japanese Ambassador to Afghanistan Takashi Okada has urged Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi to ensure the safety of Japanese nationals in the country and their freedom to leave at earliest notice. The Japanese Foreign Ministry has confirmed that Okada also called on Muttaqi to uphold human rights and ensure the safety of Japanese humanitarian aid to Afghanis. [Japan Today]

Japan: UN Committee adopts nuclear disarmament resolution

(ec) The First Committee of the UN General Assembly has voted in favour of a Japanese draft resolution for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Of the permanent members of UN Security Council, all of which possess nuclear weapons, the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern and Ireland, and the French Republic voted for the resolution, whilst the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation voted against the resolution. [The Japan News] [The Mainichi]

The resolution is adopted amidst ongoing developments in missile weaponry. Both North and South Korea have recently conducted ballistic missile test launches, whilst China is believed to have successfully tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic weapon [See AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1] [See AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3].

US aircraft carrier conducts joint exercise with Japan's aviation, coincides with ASEAN-China meeting

(tl) The US aircraft carrier Carl Vinson and its strike group carried out a joint military exercise with a Japanese destroyer in the South China Sea, as Southeast Asian leaders prepare to discuss a marine Code of Conduct (CoC).

According to the US Navy, the aircraft carrier was conducting operations with the Japanese air force to ensure maritime security, including combined training and maritime attack exercises. The Carl Vinson, which had already sailed in the South China Sea in September, attends the event after participating in a joint maritime exercise with components from India, Australia and Japan along the Indo-Pacific in mid-October. [Stars and Stripes] [Indica news]

South Korean president calls for stronger cooperation fighting the pandemic at ASEAN summit with Japan, China

(aml) On Wednesday, October 27, South Korean President Moon Jae-in called for a stronger regional cooperation between the ASEAN leaders as well as China and Japan to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. At the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Plus Three summit, Moon emphasized the importance of free trade and multilateral agreements to restore pandemic-disrupted global supply chains. [The Korea Times 1] He also vowed that South Korea will make its best effort for a "fair and swift supply of vaccines" and announced that it will provide $5 million to a regional fund to help Southeast Asian national with vaccination. During the summit, he also asked the other leaders to support his efforts for the denuclearization of the peninsula. Furthermore, Moon and the ASEAN leaders issued a joint statement to reaffirm their efforts to strengthen ties under South Korea's "New Southern

Policy" which aims to reduce the country's economic reliance on China. [The Korea Times 2]

South Korean president Moon visits the Pope, attends G20 and UN climate summit

(aml) South Korean president Moon Jae-in left Seoul for a nine-day trip to Europe on which he met Pope Francis, attended a Group of 20 summit in Rome and is attending the UN climate summit in Scotland.

During his visit at the Vatican on Friday October 29, Moon asked Pope Francis to visit North Korea to support the peace efforts on the Korean peninsula. The Pope answered he was willing to go there if North Korea sends a formal letter of invitation, repeating his answer from 2018 when Moon had verbally transmitted an invitation from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un for the first time. Pope Francis would be the first pontiff to visit the country since North Korea has no diplomatic relations with the Vatican. The South Korean Unification Minister has issued a statement on Monday in which he urges North Korea to respond and enable such a visit. [The Korea Times 1] Furthermore, they talked about the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change and other issues. [The Korea Herald 2]

On Saturday, the first day of the G20 meeting in Rome, Moon and the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen agreed to intensify their efforts to ensure Covid-19 vaccine supply in developing nations. In addition, they discussed bilateral trade issues and ways to collaboratively fight climate change. [The Korea Times 1]

On Sunday, Moon pledged that South Korea would step out of coal-fired power generation completely by 2050 to contribute to the achievement of global carbon neutrality. He also vowed to help developing nations to achieve carbon neutrality and their "digital and green transition" by providing key technology and financial aid. However, he recognized that the G20 need to make more contributions since they produce about 80% of total carbon emissions and called for "solidarity and cooperation". [The Korea Times 2]

He also attended a global supply chain summit organized by US president Joe Biden aiming at forming a global supply ecosystem which is less dependent on China. 14 of the G20 countries, including Italy, Germany, Canada, India, and Australia participated in the summit, China was absent. Biden called the other leaders to use the ending of the pandemic as an opportunity to fight supply chain disruptions that

became obvious during the pandemic. Moon held a speech in which he called for solidarity, stating that "supply chain disruptions are holding back recovery while raising inflation concerns" and that the "issue cannot be resolved individually" because the supply chains are globally intertwined. [The Korea Herald 3]

Furthermore, Moon met up with German Chancellor Angela Merkel who will soon leave office after 16 years, to ask her to pay attention to the peace efforts on the Korean peninsula. Merkel thanked him for his efforts on improving bilateral ties between the two countries which have strongly developed over the past 16 years and ensured that she will continue to support inter-Korean peace efforts. [The Korea Herald 4]

Moon left Rome on Sunday evening to attend the UN climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland to discuss ways to achieve the UN goal of limiting global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius which had been set in the 2015 Paris agreement. The so-called COP26 summit is going to bring together more than 100 heads of state and Moon is expected to deliver a key speech on South Korea's goal of achieving carbon neutrality. [The Korea Herald 5]

South Korea, Russia discuss ways to solve North Korea's nuclear problem

(aml) On Wednesday, October 27, South Korean foreign minister Chung Eui-yong and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov met in Moscow and agreed to cooperate in their efforts to resolve North Korea's nuclear problem. Both emphasized the need for a diplomatic solution that covers the whole range of problems on the peninsula. Russia, which is close to the North and a permanent member of the UN Security Council is hoped to have some influence on North Korea's return to nuclear talks as well as on preventing further provocation. Previously, Russia had also been part of the six party talks that included China, Japan, US and the two Koreas to denuclearize the peninsula. The ministers also agreed on efforts to soon enable a visit of Russian president Vladimir Putin to Seoul. The meeting took place on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries in 1991.

US, South Korea holds talks on regional security

(aml) On Thursday, October 28, South Korean defense minister Suh Wook and US Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro met in Seoul to discuss regional security on the Korean peninsula and their bilateral alliance. On his first trip to South Korea after his inauguration, Del Toro expressed his expectation that both countries will continue to work closely together on ensuring peace on the peninsula especially after the North's recent missile launches. Suh thanked Del Toro for the US's help in August to evacuate 400 Afghan co-workers and family members to South Korea. [The Korea Herald]

President Tsai Ing-wen confirms US troops presence in Taiwan amid US affirmation of support

(zh) Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen has confirmed the presence of US troops on the island for training purposes, warning the threat from China is growing "every day". Explaining the number of US military personnel was "not as many as people thought", Tsai said, "we have a wide range of cooperation with the US aiming at increasing our defense capability". She also described Taiwan as a "beacon" of democracy, warning the failure to defend the island would make people "doubt whether these are values that they (should) be fighting for." [CNN]

Last month, the Wall Street Journal had reported a secret deployment of the Special Operations and Marines forces in Taiwan. The Pentagon has not directly made any comment on the report, only stressing the support US for Taiwan remains "strong, principled, and bipartisan". The US military has not been permanently based on the island since the formal bilateral relations ended in 1979 [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2].

Tsai's statement comes after the virtual East Asia Summit (EAS) on 27th October, during which US President Joe Biden has vowed to stand with Asia on freedom and democracy, criticizing China's actions toward Taiwan as "coercive" and a threat to peace and stability. The EAS, attended by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang this year, is a leaders-led regional forum involving members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Japan, the US, China, for dialogue on peace, stability and economic prosperity in East Asia. [NBC]

Meanwhile, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has published a press statement calling on all United

Nations member states to support Taiwan's "robust, meaningful participation" in the UN system and said Taiwan's exclusion "undermines the important work of the UN and its related bodies, all of which stand to benefit greatly from its contributions." [Reuters 1][US Department of State]

China responded that Taiwan has "no right" to join the UN, insisting "the United Nations is an international governmental organization composed of sovereign states [...] and Taiwan is a part of China." Warning the US advocacy would "inevitably pose seismic risks to China-US relations", Beijing criticized Washington's "touting and whitewashing of Taiwan's so-called democracy" was an attempt to "mislead others". [Aljazeera][SupChina]

Earlier this month, Taiwan's foreign minister had issued a statement condemning the UN Secretariat for misinterpreting the UN 2758 Resolution, saying the Resolution only addresses the issue of China's representation in the UN system and does not mean Taiwan is a part of China. [See AiR No.43, October/2021, 4]

Regarding Taiwan's international engagement, US Democratic and Republican senators have introduced legislation seeking Washington's support for Taiwan's admission to the Inter-American Development Bank as a non-borrowing member, a promotion from its current observer status. Previously the Senate had passed a bill directing the State Department to assist Taiwan in obtaining observer status at the World Health Assembly (WHA). [Reuters 2]

In the meanwhile, US Congressmen Scott Perry and Tom Tiffany have sent a letter to G20 Chair Mario Draghi calling for Taiwan's inclusion in the upcoming summit in Rome. Pointing out the crucial role of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) in the global supply chain, Perry and Tiffany argue constructive diplomatic engagement with Taiwan is "a necessity, not an option". [Taiwan News]

On the sidelines of G20, Blinken and his counterpart Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi have bickered over Taiwan, trading warnings against any moves that would worsen the tensions. While Blinken made it "crystal clear" that the US opposes any unilateral changes across the Strait, Wang stressed Beijing's "solemn concern" over the issue and said blamed the heightened tensions for Washington's "connivance" and "support" for pro-independence forces in Taiwan. [Reuters 3]

When asked about the Pentagon's response in the event of China invading Taiwan, Blinken has declined to comment but reiterated Washington's commitment to helping the island defense themselves, referring to the arms sales under the Taiwan Relation Act. [South China Morning Post]

During a virtual interview with Nikkei Asia, former US National Secretary Adviser Robert O'Brien has warned of Chinese military action on Taiwan by the 2024 US presidential election. He predicted that at the present stage China will not do anything that can harm the Beijing Winter Olympics in February, arguing the window between the Olympics and the next presidential election could be "an opportunity to create mischief" since Beijing worries in 2024 former President Donald Trump or China hawks might come into power again. [Nikkei Asia]

A recent poll has shown three-quarters of Taiwanese people hope the US will assist Taiwan's participation in international organizations, while more than half of Americans agree the US comes to Taiwan's defense in the Chinese invasion, the highest rating since 1982 [Formosa, in Chinese].

For detailed coverage of Taiwan's public opinion toward cross-strait relations, see [The New York Times].

Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration receives missile corvette

(zh) Taiwan's Coast Guard Administration (CGA) has received its third Anping-class missile corvette, the Tamsui. The 600-ton offshore patrol vessel equipped with a water cannon, high explosive rockets and a 20mm cannon, will be deployed in northern Taiwan to protect the island nation's maritime rights and local fishermen's interests. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan has been increasing its defense capabilities in preparation for a potential military conflict with China. Earlier, the island' defense minister Chiu Kuo-cheng has said the island must defend itself and not entirely depend on others for help should China attacks. "We are happy to have it," said Chiu, referring to counties and groups that can support the island, "but we cannot completely depend on it". Chiu's comments come on the heels of President Tsai Ing-wen's remarks saying she had faith the US would come to defend Taiwan. [AP][Hong Kong Free Press]

WTO to review Chinese suspensions on Taiwan's fruit imports

(zh) The World Trade Organization (WTO) has confirmed a committee will convene to discuss "specific trade concerns (STC)" over China's imports bans on Taiwan's fruits. This is the first STC filed by Taiwan over China's move to ban fruit imports from Taiwan.

In September, China had suspended imports of wax and sugar apples from Taiwan, citing biosafety concerns. Taiwan's Council of Agriculture chief Chen Chi-chung said China has failed to provide Taiwan with any scientific evidence or official explanation, while China's Taiwan Affairs Office said Beijing had informed Taiwan of the issue in detail and on multiple occasions [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]. [Focus Taiwan 1]

Meanwhile, Taiwan's former President Ma Ying-jeou has called for a swift legislative passage of the Cross-Strat Agreement Supervisory Act, the legislation overseeing cross-strait pacts to facilitate Taiwan's efforts to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Saying Taiwan had enjoyed a great trade surplus with China under the cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA), passed in 2010 when Ma was in power, Ma argued the passage of the act could break the stalemate across the strait for the past six years. [Focus Taiwan 2]

Taiwan's Foreign Minster Joseph Wu visits Brussels

(zh) Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu has paid a secret visit to Brussels and held meetings with European Union (EU) policymakers on Asia-Pacific affairs, despite China's growing pressure. Wu's trip, following the visit to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, and is said to only consist of "informal meetings", is unprecedented and an about-face from last year when the EU signed the EU-China investment deal. Commenting on Wu's trip, Swedish member of European Parliament (MEP) Charlie Weimers said the EU foreign service was "absolutely" right to meet Wu in Brussels. [Politico][VOA]

In response to Wu's visit, China's EU mission reiterates Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and Beijing's opposition to "official interactions of any form or

nature between the Taiwan region and countries having diplomatic ties with China".

Before the visit to Belgium, Wu has warned a potential military conflict across the Taiwan Strait would be "a disaster – not only for Taiwan but also for China and the rest of the world", saying China might "divert domestic attention" from economic slowdown and power shortages by ramping up pressures on Taiwan. Speaking during his visit to Slovakia, Wu has also called for stronger economic ties as part of a "democratic supply chain", referring to the island's potential to help the automotive industry- the backbone of the Slovak economy. [Hong Kong Free Press]

The EU recently has been pushing for closer ties with Taiwan. A delegation from the European Parliament (EP), led by French MEP Raphael Glucksmann who was sanctioned by China in March in a series of tit-for-tat sanctions between the two sides, will visit Taiwan next week. Amid escalating cross-strait tensions, the trip will include high-level meetings with senior Taiwanese government officials. [EU observer][South China Morning Post]

Furthermore, defying China and backing Taiwan, two EU leaders have voiced support for Lithuania's plan for using the name "Taiwanese Representative Office" for its planned de facto embassy in Taipei, rather than the common name "Taipei", which angered China for recalling its ambassador to Vilnius. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel have called China's punitive moves "unjustified" and "disproportionate", vowing to "push back against threats, political pressure and coercive measures" aimed at any member states. [Taipei Times] [Taiwan News]

India deploys US-made weapons along border with China; slams Beijing's new border law

(lm) As part of a new offensive force to bolster its capabilities, India has deployed recently acquired US-made weaponry in areas bordering China's Tibet Autonomous Region, as both countries remain deadlocked over disputed territory in the Himalayas.

The build-up in the Indian northeastern Arunachal Pradesh state is centered on the Tawang Plateau, an area adjoining Bhutan and Tibet. The piece of land is vital to Indian border defense for at least two reasons:

First, it lies northeast to Sakteng, a wildlife sanctuary located mostly in Bhutan's eastern district of Trashigang. In June last year, China expanded its territorial claims beyond the disputed regions in northern and western Bhutan, opposing Thimphu's application to fund a project in wildlife sanctuary, claiming that the location was "disputed" [see AiR No. 28, July/2020, 2].

Moreover, Tawang is also close to the Siliguri corridor, a narrow stretch of land that connects India's conflict-ridden northeastern states with the rest of the country. In 2017, China's attempt to build a road across the adjacent Doklam region – a strategically significant territory cushioned between India, China and Bhutan but claimed by both China and Bhutan –resulted in a 73-day military standoff between India and China.

To counter China in the eastern sector of the LAC, a newly raised Indian Army aviation brigade, based about 300 kilometers south of Tawang, is now equipped with Chinook helicopters, which can ferry US-made light howitzers and troops quickly across mountains, in addition to a domestically-made supersonic cruise missiles and a new-age surveillance system. [The EurAsian Times]

But the preparations go beyond just boots and new equipment. Engineers in India are digging the strategic Sela Tunnel, which runs underneath a critical mountain pass that is visible to the Chinese from the LAC. Construction is ahead of schedule and the structure is set to be operational by next June. [The Times of India]

Moreover, a new road has been constructed close to the disputed border to move troops and supplies. A second one running along the eastern borders of Bhutan connecting the disputed border to the plains below is nearly complete, throwing up more possibilities for military commanders to speed up the overland mobilization of troops to the disputed Sino-Indian border. [South China Morning Post 1]

Adding to the friction is a new Chinese boundary law, which is to take effect on January 1st and calls the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity "sacred and inviolable" [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]. Although it has expressed concern over the new law passed by China's National People's Congress last week, India has said it expects that Beijing will not take action that could "unilaterally" alter the situation in the countries' border areas. [South China Morning Post 2] [Voice of America]

Citing China, United States senators file bill to exempt India from sanctions over Russian missile systems deal

(lm) Three Republican United States senators have filed legislation to exempt India from sanctions for purchasing the Russian S-400 surface-to-air missile system, saying such a move would throw cold water on the important relationship. [Reuters]

India signed a $5.3 billion deal with Russia in 2018 to buy the S-400 missile system amid tensions with Pakistan over the divided Himalayan region of Kashmir. India has since made a down payment and the first set of missile batteries is expected to be begin deployment later this year.

The proposed transfer has caused friction with the US, which passed the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) in 2017 to punish countries for making major arms deals with Moscow, the world's second-largest arms exporter. Washington imposed sanctions on Turkey for buying the same equipment last year [see AiR No. 52, December/2020, 5].

But despite the threats of sanctions, the Modi administration appears to have made the decision with the system. It sees it as critical at a time when it is locked in a stand-off with the China's People's Liberation Army at numerous points along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Himalayan heights of Ladakh. [AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

The bill would create a 10-year exemption for member countries of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue – the multilateral grouping joining the US with Australia, India, and Japan from sanctions imposed under CAATSA.

The legislation added to calls in Congress to waive sanctions for India. Two key senators – who are co-chairs of a Senate India Caucus – in a letter to US President Biden on October 26, called for a waiver on the grounds of national security and broader cooperation. [Defense News]

During a three-day visit to India earlier this month, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that while it was "dangerous" for countries to use the Russian missile system, India's security concerns were "first and foremost" and "front and centre" for the US. [AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

India tests nuclear-capable ballistic missile with range to strike 'nearly all' of China

(lm) India has test-fired a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in what local media called a "stern signal" to China as the two countries remain locked in a border dispute in the Himalayan heights of Ladakh.

The successful launch of the Agni-V ICBM on October 27 was in line with India's stated policy of having a "credible minimum deterrence" that underpins its commitment not to use nuclear weapons first in a conflict, according to a brief statement. [South China Morning Post]

Developed by the Defense Research and Development Organization, the missile can carry nuclear warheads of more than 1 ton and can strike targets up to 5,000 kilometers away with a high degree of accuracy. Agni-V is already inducted into services and is operated by the Strategic Forces Command (SFC), a key tri-services formation that is responsible for the management and administration of the country's tactical and strategic nuclear weapons stockpile.

Observers note that New Delhi has conducted several tests of the ICBM before, but say the latest launch should be read as a warning shot to China, after military talks between the two countries to resolve the 18-month military standoff along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) broke down earlier this month [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. [Nikkei Asia] [The Indian Express] [The Washington Post, $]

Indian Prime Minister Modi, European leaders hold talks on trade, security, Afghanistan

(lm) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held wide-ranging talks with top European leaders last week, marking a high point of New Delhi's efforts to forge closer ties with the 27-member European Union to counterbalance China in the Indo-Pacific.

The Indian prime minister, who arrived in Rome on October 29 to participate in the two-day G20 Summit, began his official engagements with a meeting with President of the European Council Charles Michel and President of the European Commission Ursula von der

Leyen. The wide-ranging discussion centered around deepening bilateral relations, particularly in areas such as political and security relations, and the environment. [The Indian Express] [The Tribune]

An impetus to the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) was also discussed. At the India-EU summit in May this year, the two sides had agreed to resume talks that had been suspended in 2013, and also adopted a Connectivity Partnership document outlining plans to cooperate on digital and infrastructure projects [see AiR No. 19, May/2021, 2]. [The Hindu]

Later the same day, Modi held the first in-person meeting with his Italian counterpart Mario Draghi, which saw both leaders reviewing the 2020-2025 Action Plan of the India-Italy bilateral partnership, besides reiterating the commitment to further expanding trade and investment linkages between their countries. [NDTV]

On October 30 then, Prime Minister Modi met with French President Emanuel on the sidelines of the Group of 20 summit. During the meeting, which was also attended by India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, both sides agreed to open a "strategic dialogue" this week in Paris to set a common agenda. The in-person meeting between the two leaders followed a phone conversation on September 21 during which they agreed to "act jointly in an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific area" [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4].

Modi also met with Pope Francis, asking the leader of the world's 1.3 billion Catholics to visit India – a significant turnaround after negotiations for a papal visit to the Hindu-majority country had collapsed in 2017. [BBC] [France24]

Bangladesh, France to sign deal on defense cooperation

(lm) France and Bangladesh are working to sign a deal for setting a framework on defense cooperation during a five-state state visit by Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to Paris later this month, suggesting that Dhaka wants to diversify its arms procurements. According to officials familiar with the discussions, the French proposal includes the delivery of the Dassault Rafale multirole fighter aircraft and unmanned combat air vehicles, among other military hardware. [New Age]

Hasina, who is currently attending the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, is scheduled to arrive in France on November 9. During her visit, she will hold bilateral meetings with French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Jean Castex. [Dhaka Tribune]

The Bangladeshi prime minister – who also supervises the defense portfolio – will also meet with French Defence Minister Florence Parly, whose visit to Dhaka in March of last year was followed by reports suggesting that France was considering selling Bangladesh the Dassault Rafale fighter aircraft and unspecified combat drones.

At present, China is Bangladesh's largest supplier of military hardware, accounting for more than 70 percent of the latter's total arms purchases between 2016 and 2020, according to a 2020 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. In recent months, however, Bangladesh has been stepping up defense exchanges with other countries, most notably with Turkey, with Dhaka becoming the fourth-largest arms buyer from Ankara. [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5].

India, United Kingdom forge stronger security, defense ties; hold joint tri-service exercise Konkan Shakti

(lm) Personnel from all three military services from the United Kingdom and India have exercised in a tri-service exercise, Konkan Shakti, the most ambitious conducted by the two countries to date. The UK was only the third country with which India was conducting a tri-service exercise. [GOV.UK]

During the exercise, which concluded on October 27, air, surface, and subsurface assets from both defence forces worked through a series of multi-service combat drills across all domains of maritime operations. The maritime phase of the exercise was conducted between October 21 and 27 in two stages: a harbour phase, held in Mumbai between within the first three days, and a sea phase, which was conducted off the Indian west coast from during the remaining four. [Naval News]

The Royal Navy was represented by the UK's Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 21, led by the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth, which is currently making its 28-weeks-long maiden visit to the Indo-Pacific. Participating Indian Navy assets included three Kolkata

(Project 15A)-class guided-missile destroyers, two Talwar (Project 1135.6)-class frigates, the tanker Aditya and one of its new Scorpene-class submarines, INS Karanj. [JANES]

The exercise followed the CSG's two-day engagement with the Indian Navy in July [see AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4], followed by exercise Konkan along the UK's coast in August and exercise Ajeya Warrior between the two armies earlier this month.

Coinciding with the maritime exercise was a two-day working visit by British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss to New Delhi and Mumbai. While in the Indian capital, Truss met with Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav. [The Hindu]

China blacklists Sri Lankan bank over fertilizer row

(egm/lm) In an ongoing diplomatic spat over a fertilizer shipment, China has blacklisted a state-owned commercial bank in Sri Lanka.

Colombo earlier this month refused a Chinese vessel carrying organic fertilizer that experts had found to be tainted with harmful bacteria entry to Sri Lanka. Additionally, the Sri Lankan Commercial High Court banned the $4.9 million payment to Qingdao Seawin Biotech Group, China's leading maker of seaweed-based organic fertilizer, for the shipment. [Worldakkam]

The company protested the decision, with strong support from the Chinese embassy in Colombo, which blacklisted the People's Bank of Sri Lanka over failure to make a payment under a Letter of Credit opened in favor of the Chinese company. [The Hindu]

On October 27 then, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa told China's Ambassador in Sri Lanka that his government could not accept the "tainted" fertilizer stock but was willing to purchase fertilizers that meet the island nation's "expected standards". [DailyMirror]

China's blacklisting of the Sri Lankan bank, and the public clash between officials on both sides, come as concerns over a looming agriculture crisis in Sri Lanka continue to grow.

In May, the government in a surprise move banned the imports of chemical fertilizers – widely used in the tea

and rice industries – ostensibly to become the first country in the world to go 100 percent organic. The decision was believed to be a means to reduce the outflow of dwindling foreign reserves, which had taken a hit in light of the pandemic.Following widespread farmer protests warning that the abandoning of agrochemicals would critically hit yields, however, the government later in August lifted the import ban on most chemical fertilizers. Colombo has since imported 30,000 tons of potassium chloride as fertilizer and about 3 million liters of nitrogen-based plant nutrients from India.

Bangladesh, European Union hold fourth Diplomatic Consultations

(lm) Bangladesh and the European Union (EU) held their fourth Diplomatic Consultations on October 26 in Brussels. Discussions covered a wide range of topics, including climate action, post-COVID recovery, the situation of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, as well as connectivity and security. [Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh]

In recognition of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy – a landmark document that was published in September and foresees a stronger strategic presence by Brussel in the region [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3] – representatives from both sides agreed to initiate a regular political dialogue for providing strategic guidance and intensifying foreign and security policy cooperation. In this context, the political and security situation in the region, including in Myanmar and Afghanistan, were also being discussed.

Moreover, the EU expressed concerns over the Digital Security Act (DSA), noting that some of its provisions risk going beyond the stated purpose of fighting digital crime. Brussels further encouraged Dhaka to implement the recommendations made during the third and last Universal Periodic Review cycle, which was published in 2018.

Speaking two days after the consultations with the EU, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen brushed aside Brussel's concern on the DSA, saying his country would continue "doing what is good for our people". [The Financial Express]

Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia sign Memorandum of Understanding

(lm) With a view to enhancing investment, Bangladesh has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on public-private partnerships with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The MoU was signed on the sidelines of the fifth edition of the Future Investment Initiative, which concluded on October 28 in the Saudi Arabian capital of Riyadh.

Last year, a Saudi delegation visited Dhaka to take attend a two-day Joint Economic Council meeting, during which some of Riyadh's top companies expressed interest in investing around $30 billion in different economic sectors in Bangladesh. Red Sea Gateway Terminal, a leading port developer of the Kingdom, for example, indicated that it would want to invest in Bangladesh's Port of Chittagong, which handles ninety percent of the country's export-import trade and is the core port of countries dependent on the Bay of Bengal. [Arab News]

Rating agency downgrades Sri Lanka's debt rating; Colombo says action ill-timed

(egm/lm) Ratings agency Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) announced last week it had downgraded Sri Lanka's debt rating to 'Caa2' from 'Caa1', citing Colombo's failure to come up with a comprehensive debt repayment plan, and the risk of default due to falling foreign exchange reserves. [Reuters]

Earlier in July, the ratings agency announced it had placed Sri Lanka under review for a downgrade [see AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4]. Justifying its latest decision, Moody's said its assessment reflects the weakness of the country's institutions when it comes to addressing and mitigating urgent risks to the balance of payments.

Sri Lanka's official foreign exchange reserves had dropped to $2.5 billion by the end of September, which Moody's says is insufficient to cover the country's annual foreign debt servicing of $4 to $5 billion.

Responding to the downgrade, Sri Lanka's central bank called the decision ill-timed, coming as it did just days prior to the announcement of the government's budget plans for the next fiscal year. The central bank also argued the assessment would overlook the medium and long-term funding arrangements currently made to bring inflows. [EconomyNext]

Bangladesh, United States hold annual disaster response exercise

(lm) Personnel of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and the United States Army Pacific have held a disaster response exercise on search and rescue operations. The exercise was conducted under the framework of the Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange (DREE), an annual exercise on earthquake management jointly organized by Washington and Dhaka. Under the theme "Resilience through Preparedness", this year's iteration brought together more than 300 participants from 147 institutions of 23 countries. [Dhaka Tribune] [DREE]

Training squadron of Indian Navy concludes Sri Lanka visit

(lm) The Indian Navy's 1st Training Squadron – comprising of six ships – last week concluded a four-day visit to Sri Lanka. During the visit, personnel from the navies of both countries conducted joint drills near the coast of the Sri Lankan port city of Trincomalee. [Mint]

Sri Lankan President Rajapaksa, delegation of India's Adani Group discuss future investment possibilities

(egm/lm) A delegation led by the chairman of Indian multinational conglomerate Adani Group met with Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa last weeks, weeks after his company inked a deal to develop and run the strategic Colombo Port's Western Container Terminal (CWICT). [The Economic Times]

During the meeting, the 11-member delegation reportedly inquired about the possibility of investing in Sri Lanka's energy and wind sector, a senior official from the state-owned Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) said on October 26. Sri Lanka's Board of Investment has already established that Phase II of the Mannar Wind Energy Park project is now open for potential investors. [Board of Investment of Sri Lanka] [The Hindu]

The visit — and possible further investment — come after the Adani Group signed a $700 million Build Operate Transfer agreement with Sri Lanka's largest

listed company and the country's state-owned Ports Authority to jointly develop the CWICT, a move considered by officials a countermeasure by New Delhi against China's rising influence in India's backyard. [AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]

Japan to grant $7 million to Bhutan to help digitally mapping country's landscape

(lm) Japan will provide a grant of approx. $7 million to produce a digital topographic map that will provide updated and reliable geospatial information, helping the Himalayan kingdom to better manage plans in fields like agriculture, land management, and disaster prevention. The envoy's of both countries posted in India exchanged the notes for the project in a ceremony held on October 22 in New Delhi. [Kuensel]

Laos, United States: Business digitalization the key to post-COVID economic recovery

(bs) The US and Lao PDR are partnering to develop a sustainable digitalized system to support the full recovery of businesses most affected by COVID-19.

On October 29 the US Ambassador and the president of the Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry met in a Lao-focused conference held alongside the fourth Indo-Pacific Business Forum (IPBF). On that occasion, business representatives from Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and the US shared concerns and insights on the effects of the pandemic on local businesses identifying business digitalization as an effective method to overcome the economic crisis.

On the fifth anniversary of the US-Lao Comprehensive Partnership, 2021, the United States renewed its commitment to assist Laos with its post-COVID economic recovery and to continue providing sustainable support to the economy of the country in the following years. [US Embassy in Laos]

The IPBF marked another occasion for the countries in the region and the US to promote mutual economic cooperation by developing effective partnerships in business recovery, digital innovation, open trade, investment, and renewable energy. [Indo-Pacific Business Forum]

Indonesia: Leaders attend COP26 in Glasgow

(ms) President Joko Widodo and several cabinet members have arrived in Glasgow to attend the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26). For the summit, Indonesia has announced its target of net zero emissions by 2060 and updated its Nationally Determined Contributions with the aim to reduce its carbon emissions by 29 percent independently and by 41 percent with international assistance by 2030.

In the leadup to the summit, British diplomats hyped Indonesia's abundant renewably energy sources as holding the potential to turn the country into a climate superpower. [Jakarta Globe] Renewable energy potential is at least six times the current total energy demand, and the opportunity exists to export the energy to renewable countries. [The Jakarta Post] Singapore, in particular, recently announced it was targeting 4 gigawatts worth of low-carbon electricity imports by 2035. Indonesia has in turn agreed for Singaporean companies to develop solar power systems on its Riau islands to provide electricity for the city-state. [Retuers]

Indonesia, Southeast Asia's most populous country, is the largest emitter of green-house gas emitter in the region and the 8th largest globally, accounting for 2% of the word's total. The Southeast Asia region itself recorded the world's most growth in carbon dioxide emissions between 1990 and 2010 and is currently one of fastest growing regions in terms of electricity demand. [CGTN] [Benar News]

Other efforts are being made to lower Indonesia's emissions though. Ahead of the summit, the government prepared a domestic carbon trading regulation and agreed to introduce a carbon tax on coal-fired power stations from April 2022. [See AiR no. 41, October/2021, 2] [see also AiR no. 43, October/2021, 3] Plus, a three-year moratorium of new palm oil plantations led to the lowest rate of deforestation in 20 years last year. However, 114,459 hectares were still deforested, and the moratorium has now been lifted. [Benar News]

Indonesia: President Joko Widodo urges regional and international cooperation for post-pandemic recovery

(ms) President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) urged international cooperation to achieve equitable post-pandemic economic growth at multiple summits this week. At the virtual ASEAN Business and Investment Summit on October 25, Jokowi urged a strengthened regional health architecture, speeding up and levelling the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, a regional travel corridor, and an accelerated digital economy as main areas to be prioritized in the recovery of ASEAN member economies. [Independent] At the G20 summit in Rome on 30-31 October, at which Indonesia officially assumed the 2022 presidency, he pushed for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines to aide economic recovery and called on G20 countries to finance the health sector in an effort to prevent future pandemics. [The Jakarta Post]

On the health front, Southeast Asia has so far seen an unequal distribution of vaccinations: Singapore, Malaysia, and Cambodia, for example, have the highest rates with over 70% of their population vaccinated, while Myanmar is trailing far behind with less than 10% vaccinated. [Independent] Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Indonesian Finance Minister Mulyani Indrawati recently called on the G20 group to create a forum to prepare for future pandemics and develop an international response system. [See AiR. No. 43 October/2021, 4] In regard to travel, ASEAN members have agreed to the ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework initiated by Indonesia last year. So far, however, member countries have only set up bilateral deals for travel with nations around the world, and the level of restrictions in Southeast Asia remains the highest in the world at 82 per cent. [Business Times] With respect to the digital economy, Southeast Asia is home to the fastest growth in internet use in the world, having expanded by $US100 billion in 2020 and with the opportunity to add an estimated $1 trillion to regional GDP over the next ten years. [Kearney]

With Jokowi also attending the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow this week, his participation at three successive summits seems to indicate a shift towards international diplomacy. Since assuming the presidency in October 2014, Jokowi has preferred to focus on domestic issues, leaving international affairs mainly to his foreign minister. Analysts argue Indonesia now stands to benefit from cooperation in regard to its economy, recovery from the pandemic, and climate change mitigation. [The Jakarta Post 2]

Indonesia's aims to strengthen international cooperation comes amidst weakening multilateralism in recent years due to the pandemic, with several

international organisations with mandates to deal with international crises criticized for their ineffectiveness. [G20 Insights] The capacity for effective economic cooperation amongst G20 members will now depend on the willingness of richer countries to provide some sort of debt forgiveness for the developing countries that are struggling, as well as the ability of the group's two largest economics - China and the US - to navigate their growing rivalry. [East Asia Forum]

Indonesia, ASEAN urge stronger bilateral ties with Australia

(ms/tl) President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) urged Australia continue to strengthen ties with ASEAN members to ensure regional peace and stability, while addressing the first ASEAN-Australian Summit virtually on October 27. Jokowi implored that the region avoids developing an arms race and turning into an arena for power projection. Rather, he called for all parties to continue to respect the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, the peace treaty to which all ASEAN members as well as sixteen countries outside the bloc have acceded. Australia has in turn agreed to establish a comprehensive strategic partnership with ASEAN amid its growing concerns about China's activities and influence in the Asia-Pacific. [Indonesia Tribune]

Following that, in a statement released by ASEAN chair Brunei, the bloc agreed to stipulate a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (CSP) with Australia to improve security in the Indo-Pacific and to bring benefits to their economies. During the Summit, the Australian President Scott Morrison declared that Canberra would provide US$93 million to found jointly projects with ASEAN that will include Covid-19 recovery, terrorism, transnational crime, energy security, and the transition to lower emissions technology. Also, he added that Australia its aware of its commitment on nuclear non-proliferation and believe in ASEAN centrality in Southeast Asia. [Prime Minister of Australia] [Radio Free Asia]

The Summit follows critics released by some of the ASEAN's members about the AUKUS pact. [AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]Indonesia recently joined its ASEAN ally Malaysia, however, in raising public concerns over the so-called AUKUS pact, in which the United Kingdom and United States agreed to provide Australia with the technology to build eight nuclear-powered submarines. They believe it could lead to a regional arms race and draw other powers into the South China Sea dispute. Not all ASEAN members are unified in

their response. Singapore and the Philippines have expressed less concern over the pact, hoping it might restore a regional imbalance and contribute to regional stability, while others have remained silent on the matter. Australia has downplayed any concerns, reassuring ASEAN leaders that it does not plan to acquire nuclear weapons either under the pact or elsewise. [ABC] [East Asia Forum][The Jakarta Post] [See also AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

Stability has been threatened in Southeast Asia in recent years. The region has become a strategic location in the US-China rivalry, with the US and its allies increasing patrols to challenge China's vast maritime presence in the South China Sea, over which it stakes massive territorial claims. Accordingly, several countries in the region are involved in disputes over territory with China in the South China Sea.

China, ASEAN towards a closer relationship

(tl) ASEAN chair Brunei announced that ASEAN is ready to elevate its relationship with China top a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (CSP), just one day after entering into a similar agreement with Australia.

The plan to expand mutual relations could come to life as early as November during a special meeting between Xi and the bloc's leaders to commemorate the 30th anniversary of bilateral relations. As proposed by Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang, China and ASEAN should deepen their strategic partnership as soon as possible, focusing on a joint response to climate change, new technology challenges and innovation.

Asked about the possibility of permanently excluding Myanmar from the Association of Southeast Asia given the exclusion of the country from the last meetings, the Sultan of Brunei, this year's ASEAN's chair, said that "Myanmar is an integral part of the ASEAN family and their membership has not been questioned,". Observers have judged the content of this statement as an attempt to cater to Beijing, which has always been close to the military junta in Myanmar. [Nikkei Asia] [South China Morning Post] [Limes, in Italian] [AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4]

China's attempt to boost its relationship with ASEAN follows Beijing's willingness to participate in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific (CPTPP), a treaty designed to regulate trade and investment among partner countries with the goal of

supporting sustainable economic growth globally. To date, 11 countries have signed the agreement, including four ASEAN members Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei. [Australian Government]

Beijing had already signaled its intention to join the project in 2020, provoking adverse reactions from some members such as Australia and Japan, who were concerned that China had so far failed to comply with the main free trade fundamentals of the agreement.

Some of these countries, in particular Vietnam, are at the center of disputes with Beijing in the South China Sea area. During the meeting, the Chinese Prime Minister avoided directly touching the subject, declaring that "peace in the South China Sea serves the common interest of China and ASEAN countries" and that the two should work as soon as possible to establish a common Maritime Code of Conduct (CoC) on safety and free navigation.

To approach ASEAN members, China has entered into agreements on the delivery of free doses to Malaysia and Vietnam. Meanwhile, trade relations between China and ASEAN increased significantly during the pandemic, with ASEAN becoming the largest trading partner with $301 billion in imports, double the amount of the previous decade. [Chinese Government] [Nikkei Asia]

Recent Chinese openings to ASEAN have rung alarm bells at the White House, raising considerable fears from US President Joe Biden aware of the loss of authority suffered by the United States' ignorance of the region by the Trump administration. Participating in a virtual summit Tuesday with the bloc's leaders, an event skipped for three consecutive years by his predecessor, Biden announced $102 million in interventions to support members' recovery from the pandemic to underscore his claim of Southeast Asia being a top priority for his administration. [South China Morning Post]

ASEAN, China discuss CoC

(tl) The aircraft carrier comes at the occasion of ASEAN-China meeting. China joined a meeting of ASEAN leaders on 26 October to discuss shared navigation rules, urging member countries to speed up negotiations to approve the CoC. During the meeting, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang said that China can be satisfied with the progress of good relations with ASEAN in terms of maritime security.

The year 2022 will mark the 20th anniversary of the approval of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) between ASEAN and China, a document that was supposed to pave the way for the CoC but was never finalized following disputes between some ASEAN members and Beijing.

China has continued to press its broad claims in recent years, despite a 2016 award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in a case brought by the Philippines. The award, declared null and void by China, had found that China's claims to "historic rights" over the South China Sea had no basis under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). At the summit, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte again said that ASEAN should pursue CoC negotiations in accordance with international law, including the 2016 arbitration award.

According to a well-known Vietnamese analyst, ASEAN member countries would be organizing themselves to try to curb Beijing's claims, saying "Some ASEAN countries want to strengthen cooperation with external powers to counterbalance China's growing assertiveness and may find China's approach unacceptable." [BenarNews]

With Cambodia taking over the bloc's presidency next years, some of the ASEAN members are concerned that Phnom Penh's proximity to Beijing may compromise ASEAN's stance on the South China Sea. In 2012, Cambodia was accused of siding with China and preventing ASEAN from reaching an agreement on CoC. China accounts for about 90 percent of foreign direct investment in Cambodia and Phnom Penh has become even more dependent on Beijing after the U.S. and E.U. imposed various sanctions on the Southeast Asian state. [Radio Free Asia] [Radio Free Asia] [AiR No. 32, August/2021, 2]

Indonesia: Officials yet to explain cautious stance in face of Chinese incursion in Indonesian waters

(ms) Indonesian officials have not yet explained their seemingly cautious approach taken towards the presence of a large Chinese survey vessel in Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the North Natuna Sea. The vessel, the Hauyand Dizhi 10, originally entered Indonesia's waters near an important oil and gas field on August 31. After leaving for a few days to re-supply in late September, it returned to the location in early October, before

leaving again on October 22. Analysts have said the Chinese vessel's movement in a grid pattern shows that it was clearly carrying out unlawful research activity surveying the seafloor. However, at no point during or after the incursion has Indonesia publicly protested. Officials have instead preferred to downplay the presence of the Chinese ship, stating it has committed no violations and, like all foreign ships, is allowed to navigate freely in the Natuna sea. [Asia Times] [See also AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1] [See also AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

Indonesia does not consider itself as part of the South China Sea dispute, which involves contested islands and maritime claims amongst China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. Nevertheless, Beijing does claim historic fishing rights to overlapping areas in Indonesia's EEZ. In 2019, Indonesia summoned the Chinese ambassador in Jakarta and filed a formal complaint over the presence of a Chinese coast guard vessel in its territorial waters around the Natuna islands. It also expanded sea and aerial patrols of islands, deploying navy, army, and air force personnel to the area, including eight war ships. [see AiR No.1, January/2020, 1]

Analysts have put forward several possible explanations as to why Indonesia has taken a more cautious approach this time around. Some have noted that Indonesia's position may be due to its priority in maintaining regional stability, given the existing tensions in the South China Sea. It may also have to do with Indonesia's growing dependency on China for investment and COVID-19 vaccines. China invested $4.8 billion in Indonesia in 2020, making it Indonesia's second biggest foreign investor, with Chinese companies helping significantly to draw Indonesia into the global supply chain. Plus, China's pharmaceutical companies have dispatched 215 million vaccine doses to Indonesia during the pandemic. Indonesia may also be looking to downplay the external quarrel so as not to increase anti-Chinese sentiment in the country. Or it could be that President Joko Widodo, his coordinating minister for maritime affairs, and the Armed Forces have not yet agreed on a unified policy regarding the matter. [Asia Times] [South China Morning Post]

Other countries in the region have responded more vocally to China's assertiveness in their waters. Recently, for example, Malaysia publicly protested against the operation of a Chinese vessel in its EZZ and went as far as to summon the Chinese ambassador. [See AiR No. 20, May/2020, 3] The country has also deployed naval vessels to protect its operations drilling in the South China Sea and made various UN Convention on the Law of the Seas filings against

China's presence. The situation is different for Indonesia though, as it is not currently drilling in contentious areas. Analysts therefore suggest the country may be more willing to observe China's actions for the time being. [South China Morning Post]

Indonesia and France seek to strengthen ties in light of AUKUS

(ms) Indonesian President Joko Widodo and French President Emmanuel Macron have decided to work on a strategic partnership in the Indo-Pacific. Meeting on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Rome, the two leaders agreed to strengthen their partnership by working on the transition to a green economy, support for employment and growth in Indonesia, and the economic recovery from COVID-19. They also reviewed coordination at ASEAN, in which Indonesia's position is significant. [Le Courrier Australien]

France has turned to strengthen ties with leading Asian nations, including Indonesia and India, as a way to reboot its Indo-Pacific strategy after tensions around the so-called AUKUS defence pact between the US, UK, and Australia. Australia joined the alliance as a means to better counter China, snubbing a major submarine deal with France in the process, in turn damaging the two nations' relations. France is ambitious to yield a greater presence and influence in the region as ninety-three per cent of its exclusive economic zone is in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, holding territories there such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia. As such, it is the only member of the European Union to maintain a military presence in the Indian Ocean. [Le Courrier Australien] [The Strategist]

France and Indonesia established diplomatic relations in 1951, before forming a strategic partnership in 2011. In March 2017, French President François Hollande and President Joko Widodo then forged further bilateral cooperation between the two countries, agreeing to collaborate in various areas, including the economy, education, maritime, development of sustainable cities, energy, infrastructure projects, and defense. In defense, the bilateral cooperation is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Indonesian Ministry of Defense and the French Ministry of Defense in 1996 on Cooperation in Equipment, Logistics and Defense industries. This cooperation allows Indonesia to not only pursue its policy of nonalignment, but also its shared strategic interests with France in the Indo-Pacific. [Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia Paris France] [The Strategist]

The Philippines: President Duterte expresses concerns over tensions between big powers at East Asia Summit

(lt/tl) Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has voiced his concerns over the "brewing rivalry" occurring between the world's largest powers in a message at the 16th East Asia Summit. Noting that "Peace and stability are preconditions for growth and prosperity," Duterte hinted at the need for the United States, Russia and China to enhance engagement and collaboration in areas such as the Asia-Pacific. [Manila Bulletin]

He was joined by Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob expressing his concerns about the AUKUS military agreement signed by the US, UK and US, which he said could lead to an arms race in the Indo-Pacific. Ismail Sabri stressed the importance for Malaysia to preserve the Southeast Asian region as a nuclear weapon-free zone, inviting the parties concerned to make compromises in the name of stability. [The Sun Daily]

AUKUS aims to keep the Indo-Pacific area free and open for trade and requires the signatory nations to jointly make improvements in areas such as security and defense. To guarantee these aims, the US has decided to provide Australia with a fleet of British-made nuclear-powered submarines to defend its interests in the event of an attack. According to Beijing, which is worried that the real intention of the agreement is to limit its own space for action among the maritime trade routes, this will inevitably damage its relations with the United States. [Notizie in Italian]

Philippines' complaints about China map results in removal of spy drama episodes

(lt) Episodes from the spy drama "Pine Gap" have been removed by Netflix Inc. from its Philippine-based streaming site. This has occurred due to complaints over the drama's inclusion of scenes asserting China's claims in the South China Sea.

Following a review by the Philippines' movie classification board, the drama was deemed "unfit for public exhibition," as stated by the Department for Foreign Affairs. Episodes two and three of the Australian series have subsequently been removed

due to the Philippines' protests that the show's depiction of the South China Sea violated its sovereignty as a nation. [Reuters]

Malaysia: PM suggested to improve cooperation with Japan in the health sector

(tl) During the 24th ASEAN-Japan Summit, Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob suggested to deepen cooperation in the health sector between Japan and the regional bloc, hoping to consolidate a commune research activity at the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases.

During his speech, Ismail Sabri stressed the importance of Japan's contributions in the supplying vaccines and the fight against the pandemic, highlighting the importance of shared vaccine productions. Also, he added that ASEAN and Japan should improve their collaboration on cybersecurity, working together through the ASEAN-Japan Cyber Security Capacity Building Centre.

The establishment of Japan's formal relationship with ASEAN dates back to 1977. The 24th ASEAN-Japan Summit was held on the sidelines of the three-day ASEAN Summit, which began Tuesday under the chairmanship of Brunei. [Malay Mail]

Taiwan pleads for Interpol inclusion following fugitive arrest in the Philippines

(lt) Taiwan's representative office in Manila has called for the nation's inclusion in Interpol following the arrest of a Taiwanese fugitive suspected of drug trafficking in the Philippines. The 45-year-old fugitive was arrested in a joint operation between Taipei and Manila police and will be deported to Taiwan.

Taiwan's justification of its inclusion in Interpol is also due to its inability to share information on criminals who have fled to other countries through Interpol's I-24/7 global secure communications system. [Focus Taiwan]

Vietnam, Cambodia discuss mutual cooperation in their non-demarcated territory

(bs) Vietnam and Cambodia met to renew peaceful cooperation in handling the non-demarcated areas between the two countries.

In the meeting, the country representatives encouraged the border provinces to enhance close cooperation and mutual support while continuing the negotiations on potential solutions. In compliance with the recommendations, the two countries have recently inaugurated a new border checkpoint in the area facilitating international trade and cross-border land transport. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Vietnam and Cambodia are yet to demarcate 16 percent of their border territories.

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

3 November 2021 @ 6:00-7:00 p.m. (GMT+11), Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), Australia

Ethiopia's Tigray War

At this online talk, William Davison, International Crisis Group's Senior Analyst for Ethiopia, will offer insights into the latest developments of the ongoing conflict in the Ethiopia's Tigray region between the dissident leaders of the regional administration and country's

federal government, led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

Learn more about the event at [AIIA].

3 November 2021 @ 4:00-5.30 p.m. (GMT+2), Institute for Security Studies Africa, South Africa

Governing in the shadows: Angola's securitised state

This online discussion of the book "Governing in the shadows: Angola's securitised state" will offer insights into the inner workings of the intelligence services, the army and presidential guard, providing an explanation of the journey of a survivalist and fearful regime that presides over scarcity and injustice for the people of Angola. Holding far more power than government institutions, the 'shadows' weakened the administration and widened the gap between the state and civilians.

More information is available at [IIS Africa].

3 November 2021 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-7), World Affairs, USA

The art of Middle East peace negotiations

This online conversation will discuss what lessons that can be drawn from history for future efforts at peacemaking, drawing on the example of the Middle East. What were the greatest strengths and missed opportunities in the history of American diplomacy in the Middle East? As the world witnessed in Gaza and Israel this year some of the worst violence since 2014, what approach should the Biden Administration adopt for future negotiations?

Learn more about the event at [World Affairs].

3 November 2021 @ 7:00-8:00 p.m. (GMT-7), World Affairs, USA

Iraq before and after 9/11

This webinar will explore political life in Iraq before and after 9/11 which unleashed political changes of transformative nature for people around the world,

including in countries targeted as part of the “War on Terror.”

[Event details are accessible via [World Affairs].

3 November 2021 @ 8:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

How to build independent media in Ukraine

This webinar will explore the status of media freedom in Ukraine in the light of the paradox that while the country sees independent media continuing to grow, news the majority of Ukrainians receive do not come from these sources.

If you are interested, find more about the event at [Atlantic Council].

3 November 2021 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Global Development, USA

Taking Stock of G20 Outcomes for Pandemic Response and Risks

High on the agenda of the G20 summit in Rome on 30-31 October 2021 will be response to both the current pandemic and future health shocks. The webinar will discuss and evaluate the outcomes of the summit regarding this issue.

If you want to know more about the event, see [CGDEV].

4 November 2021 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Digital Trade in the European Union

This webinar will discuss EU regulatory proposals on businesses in Europe and the United States as well as their expected impact on the transatlantic relations in trade and technology, as well as on the business models of successful U.S. technology companies engaged in Europe.

For more information, visit [CSIS].

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

Economic security screening: A discussion on geopolitics, markets and compliance

This online discussion will explore investment screening regimes, addressing especially their interaction with geopolitics and defense, as well as with international markets and compliance.

Event details are accessible via [Atlantic Council].

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

Elections under Daniel Ortega: Implications for Nicaragua, Central America, and beyond

Nicaragua, ruled since 2007 by Daniel Ortega, will hold on 7 November 2021 general elections to elect the President, the National Assembly and members of the Central American Parliament. Effectively unopposed after more than 150 political prisoners had been arrested – among them seven contenders for the presidential office, Ortega is expected to win a fifth term in office. Against this backdrop, this webinar will examine the implications of the election process for the country as well as Central America, and the United States, taking into account also the growing risks the Ortega administration will be facing in 2022 and beyond.

4 November 2021 @ 1:00-1:45 p.m. (GMT-5), The Chicago Council on Global Affairs

China and the Digital Yuan: What's at Stake?

This online seminar will address economic and security implications of the digital yuan for China and the global economy.

For more event details, visit [Chicago Council].

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

Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order

This book discussion will introduce "Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order" by Kathryn Stoner, Stanford University Professor and Mosbacher Director of the Center on Democracy, Development, and the Rule of Law at the Spogli Institute for International Studies.

Learn more about the event at [Wilson Center]. See also entry below under "Recent book releases".

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

Taking Control: The United States & Canada Respond to China's Supply Chain Challenge

This webinar will explore the increasing challenges China's evolving outlook – both domestic and international – poses to policy makers and business leaders on United States and Canadian supply chains and discuss also China's role in North America and on the world stage at large.

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

4 November 2021 @ 830 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. (GMT+2), The South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), South Africa

FOCAC and the Future of Africa-China Cooperation

This webinar will discuss ways to advance cooperation between Africa and China in the wake of global crises and new frontiers of bilateral Sino-African trade ties opened by the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

If you are interested in the event, visit [SAIIA] to find more information.

4 November 2021, 11:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Open Society Foundations, USA

Investigating the Police in Latin America: The Role of Civil Society

This online conversation will discuss efforts in three Latin-American countries – Brazil, Jamaica, and Mexico – and explore role civil society is playing in establishing new mechanisms and advances to ensure developments towards more police accountability.

Visit [Open Society Foundations] to find more about the event.

5 November 2021 @ 12:00-1:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Cato Institute, USA

The Origins of Human Progress

This livestreamed policy forum will address crucial historical questions related to the period of modernity including: What explains the explosion in growth and prosperity that humanity has experienced in the past couple centuries? Why did that process take root more readily in some places than in others, and how can its spread be encouraged?

Visit [Cato Institute] for further information.

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

Medium-Term Economic Planning in Thailand and Malaysia – A Comparative Analysis

The online seminar will offer an evaluation of the effectiveness of Thailand' s and Malaysia's five-year development plan formulation and implementation.

More event details are available at [ISEAS].

5 November 2021 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Brookings, USA

State, society, and markets in North Korea

At this online event, "State, society, and markets in North Korea," the latest book of Andrew Yeo, Professor of Politics and Director of Asian Studies at The Catholic

University of America in Washington, D.C., will be discussed.

If you are interested in joining the event, you can register at [Brookings].

8 November 2021 @ 4:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate

This online book talk will introduce Mary Elise Sarotte's "Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate." Mary Elise Sarotte is Kravis Professor at Johns Hopkins University and a researcher at Harvard's Center for European Studies.

Visit [Wilson Center] for more information.

8 November 2021, 10:00 a.m.-11:00 q.m. (GMT-4), Open Society Foundations, USA

Human Rights Challenges a Year After the 44-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh

Against the backdrop of the current stand-off in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, an ethnic and territorial conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, this webinar will offer insights into the treatment of Armenian prisoners of war in Azerbaijan and present human rights violations committed by Azerbaijani military against Armenian communities. It will also shed light on state policies and rhetoric that have contributed to a critical atmosphere following the end of the two-month war in November last year.

For more event details, see [Open Society Foundations].

9 November 2021 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies (FSI), USA

How could states use nuclear weapons? Four models after the bomb

This online talk will discuss the argument that if the compellent state is able to bolster the credibility of its nuclear threat through standard techniques, compellence might succeed. It will also take into account the problem of greater military capabilities bolstering coercion by increasing the risk of disaster, with capabilities of a first-strike being particularly destabilizing.

See [FSI] for more information.

9 November 2021 @ 2:00-3:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Central Asia at 30 Years of Independence

Against the background of the declaration of Independence in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in August and September 1991, this webinar will discuss the social and political transformation and the security situation in Central Asia after three decades of independence and provide on outlook for the regions' future.

See [Wilson Center] for further event details.

9 November 2021 @ 6:00-7:00 p.m. (GMT+11), Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), Australia

Australia and the shifts in the Indo-Pacific

This webinar will concentrate on the shifting currents in the broader Indo-Pacific region, both strategic and economic, exploring especially the following questions: Where are US-China relations heading and what are the drivers of their Indo-Pacific policy? Is it possible to avoid a new Cold War? What do the shifts in China's economic and strategic settings signal? Where does the Quad, AUKUS and South East Asia fit in and what does it all mean for Australian policy?

For more information, visit [AIIA].

9 November 2021 @ 10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Brookings, USA

Mozambique's al-Shabab insurgency, and local and international responses

Against the backdrop of the intensification of the al-Shabab insurgency in the Cabo Delgado region in Mozambique, this webinar will discuss the conflict drivers – both internal and international –, the threat for the region the conflict poses as well as the policies adopted for conflict resolution. It will also analyze the role external actors are playing.

Visit [Brookings] to learn more about the event.

9 November 2021 @ 10:00-11:35 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Managing and Mismanaging the Pandemic in Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam: Approaches and Consequences

This webinar will discuss the different anti-pandemic approaches in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam as well as their respective health and economic outcomes.

See [ISEAS] for more information.

Recent Book Releases

Philip Hamburger, ***Purchasing Submission: Conditions, Power, and Freedom***, Harvard University Press, 336 pages, published September 7, 2021, and recommended by Legal Theory Bookworm in [Legal Theory Blog]. If you are interested, join the online discussion of the book, hosted by Cato Institute on November 4, 2021. For more information, see [Cato Institute].

Kathryn E. Stoner, ***Russia Resurrected: Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order***, Oxford University Press, 344 pages, published on February 1, 2021, reviewed in [Diplomatic Courier]. See also the book discussion on November 4, 2021, at [Wilson Center].

Andrew Yeo, ***State, Society and Markets in North Korea***, Cambridge University Press, published online September 21, 2021. The book will be discussed online on November 4, 2021, at [Brookings].

Elbridge A. Colby, ***The Strategy of Denial: American Defense in an Age of Great Power Conflict***, Yale University Press, 384 pages, published on September 14, 2021, and reviewed in [The Wall Street Journal, $]. See also a book discussion on [youtube], hosted by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Katerina Clark, ***Eurasia without Borders: The Dream of a Leftist Literary Commons, 1919-1943***, Belknap Press, 464 pages, published on November 2, 2021, and review in [Asian Review of Books].

Calls for Papers

The **Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies, Liverpool Hope University** invites paper proposals for its ***international online conference "Communication, Conflict and Peace,"*** to be held on June 27, 2022. Closing date for submissions is April 1, 2022. For more information, visit [Tutu].

The **London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research** will host a hybrid ***international conference on the theme "Somewhere in Between: Borders and Borderlands"*** from April 2-3, 2022 and welcomes paper proposals. Deadline for submission is December 15, 202. In you are interested, learn more about the call for paper at [LCIR].

The **European Commission (EC)** has opened a call for proposals for ***EU actions grants*** under Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value Programme (CERV) with a budget volume of 2 million Euro. Closing date for applications is February 24, 2022. For more information, visit [EC].

Jobs and Positions

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is hiring a ***Risk Management Specialist***. Closing date for applications is November 9, 2021. For further details, see [UNDP].

UNICEF is recruiting an ***Education Specialist (Digital and Distance Learning)*** in Senegal. Deadline for applications is November 15, 2021. Learn more about the vacancy at [UNICEF].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is offering the position of a ***Head of Program*** to be based in Kabul, Afghanistan. Applications can be submitted until November 17, 2021. Visit [NRC] for more information.

The **Asian Development Bank (ABD)** is hiring a Project Coordinator with the Philippines as country of assignment. Closing date for applications is November 5, 2021. For more details see [ADB].

The **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)** is recruiting a ***Child Protection Team Leader*** to be based in Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh). Deadline for application is November 8, 2021. Visit [DRC] to learn more about the vacancy.

Europol is offering the position of a ***Head of Unit – European Migrant Smuggling Centre***. Applications can be submitted until November 15, 2021. Find more information at [Europol].

The **European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL)** is seeking a ***Head of Unit***, responsible for the overall planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of the operational activities of the Agency. Closing date for applications is November 21, 2021. More details are provided at [CEPOL].

The **European Commission's Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs** is hiring a ***Principal Adviser***. Deadline for application is November 9, 2021. For further information, visit [EC].

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