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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

I hope you have enjoyed last week´s *Asia in Review (AiR)* that came together with the new *Europe in Review*`s Europe Monthly whose next issue will be published on December 1.

Thank you very much for your kind feedback and please enjoy this week's AiR.

Special greetings this week go to everyone celebrating the Independence Day of Angola, Cambodia and Poland.

Have a great day and an informative read!

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: Communist Party´s governing body expected to reaffirm a third five-year term for President Xi Jinping

(tj) Accompanied by state-media pronouncing President Xi Jinping as selfless and inspiring leader, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China is convening its sixth plenary session, the last major meeting in China's five-year political cycle where some 400 members have gathered in Beijing on Monday for four days and are expected to secure Xi a third five-year term as President.

They are also expected to ratifying a 'historical resolution', the anticipated 'Resolution of the CCP Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experiences of the Party's Centennial Struggle', is expected to affirm Xi's role as leader, his authorities, and his policies, setting the tone ahead of the 2022 party congress.

There have only ever been two previous 'historical resolutions' in the CCP's history. One was passed in 1945 under Mao Zedong that cemented his leadership over the Party four years before it assumed full power over mainland China. The other was adopted in 1981 by Deng Xiaoping to justify economic reforms and recognize the "mistakes" of Mao's ways. [Hong Kong Free Press] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2]

This year´s plenum's agenda is strictly confidential, resolutions only released after Thursday. [Global Times] [The Guardian]

China: Tech companies continue to leave China

(tj) ByteDance's founder, Zhang Yiming, has stepped down as the company´s chairman, interpreted by commentators as another victim of Beijing's increased pressure on wealthy tech executives under President Xi Jinping's 'common prosperity' initiative, a campaign to decrease wealth disparity. [Al Jazeera] [The Guardian 1]

Similarly, Yahoo has formally announced it would be withdrawing from China, citing sentiments of 'increasingly challenging business and legal environment', interpreted as a symbolic withdrawal as the company's services were already blocked by Chinese censorship. Commentators noted that the withdrawal coincided with the implementation of China's novel data protection law, The Personal Information Protection Law ('PIP') which came into effect on 1 November, that mandates the limitation on companies' ability to gather personal information and how this data is used, whilst further mandating companies to provide data to the authorities on request. Likewise, the PIP prescribes the imposing of sanctions of up to 5% of a company's annual turnover for a company's non-compliance. [See, AiRNo. 44, November/2021, 1]

Yahoo has had a tenuous history operating in China, in 2007 having provided Chinese authorities data of

political dissidents that culminated in their incarceration, and as regulations on the technology sector began to increase, Yahoo closing its Beijing office.

Those wishing to access Yahoo in China will now be greeted with a message stating that Yahoo's sites are no longer accessible. Yahoo is only the latest example of the exodus of tech giants, Google and Facebook blocked and only accessible via VPN. [BBC] [The Guardian 2]

This follows the withdrawal of Linkedin last month, LinkedIn similarly expressing a 'more challenging operating environment and greater compliance requirements in China' as reasoning for the departure of its formal website, only to be replaced by a jobs board. [ABC News] [AP News] [See, AiR No.42, October/2021, 3]

Similarly, Chinese authorities have sought to crack down on phone apps. Last week, China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology has ordered 38 apps, including Tencent Holdings, to resolve excessive data collection and publishing misleading information. [South China Morning Post 1]

Likewise, the Tianjin Binhai People's Court has ruled that multiple apps on Apples' App Store published unlicensed content, order to pay a Tianjin subsidiary of publisher, COL Publishing Group, US$1.9 million for failure to conduct due diligence to prevent copyright infringement of third-party apps.

Reflecting over a decade of legal stalemate, the Court ruled that several unnamed apps on Apple's App Store can only be published by the plaintiff Chinese publisher. [South China Morning Post 2]

In a similar move, Epic Games, owner of popular game Fortnite, has announced that Fortress Night, the Chinese version of Fortnite is to be removed later this month, providing no reason to close the game. The follows last month's decision by Chinese authorities to impose strict limits on the time children can spend playing online games. [BBC 2] [See, AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2]

China: Energy crisis continues as coal production records new annual high

(tj) Amidst a national energy shortage, China's daily coal output reached an annual high, hitting 11.2 million

tonnes this week, having risen almost 1 million tonnes since early October, according to China's National Development and Reform Commission. [Reuters 1]

In anticipation for winter, some coal mining companies are running at full capacity to ensure adequate supply. [South China Morning Post 1]

As reported last week, China's energy crunch is having a drastic impact on China's fossil fuel industry, crude oil imports marking a 3-year low, whilst similarly extending into fuel shortage concerns. [Reuters 2] [See, AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

For example, a series of Chinese airlines announced that from Friday, November 5, passengers on domestic flights will be charged a fuel surcharge, citing rising cost of fuel, China Eastern Airlines announcing it would be charging 10 yuan per passenger on routes less than 800 kilometres, and 20 yuan for routes longer than 800 kilometres. Air China, China Southern Airlines, and other smaller airlines have since announced similar surcharges. [Reuters 3]

China's energy crunch and heavier reliance on fossil fuels comes as a report by Global Carbon Project described how China's carbon emissions were set to pas pre-pandemic levels, estimated to rise by 4 per cent, as China emerges from COVID-19 recovery. [Global Carbon Project] [South China Morning Post 2]

Despite announcements by China's State Grid Corporation that electricity supplies have stabilised, China's energy crisis has further been exacerbated by a cold snap that has swept 90 percent of regions in China with temperatures forecasted to fall by up to 16 degrees in some provinces. This has since been met by the issuing of winter's first snowstorm orange alert, the second highest level, by China's weather agency, the China Meteorological Administration ('CMA'), raising concerns about the spike of anticipated domestic energy consumption to keep warm. [Global Times] [Reuters 4] [South China Morning Post 3] [South China Morning Post 4] [Sydney Morning Herald] [Xinhua]

The CMA warned that the cold weather and associated snowfall could have a 'negative impact' on the China's energy supply, fuelling fears that the China's energy crisis could be prolonged. [South China Morning Post 3]

Additionally, China's energy crisis has added another layer of concern for experts and commentators who noted that China's pledges entering into COP26 in Glasgow amounted to nothing more than mere bloviation, perhaps a prescient observation as China

refused to pledge to phase out use of coal-fire power and stop building plants at COP26 on Thursday. [Reuters 5] [See, AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

China: Evergrande contagion spreads

(tj) Kaisa Group Holdings Ltd, a Shenzhen-based developer, missed a payment on a wealth management project this week. Kaisa is currently the most indebted company of any Chinese developer, facing a multitude of offshore debt deadlines over the coming year, among the myriad of other Chinese developers facing similar problems. [Reuters 1] [See, AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Kaisa has since halted trading of its shares in Hong Kong due to concerns held over issues regarding the company's cash flow, planning to sell its assets to raise capital for liabilities. [Al Jazeera 1] [South China Morning Post]

This comes over concerns of Evergrande, China's largest property developer, facing $300 billion in debt, having narrowly missed a second payment deadline last week, and concerns that the Evergrande crisis could spread globally to 'megaprojects' in international major cities. [Al Jazeera 2] [See, AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1] In fact, a third 30-day grace period from non-payment could have been triggered after holders of offshore bonds issued by Evergrande reportedly did not receive interests payment due on November 6. [Reuters 2]

In order to mitigate the cascading crisis, on Thursday, November 4, Beijing released draft guidelines that prescribed that developers will be unable to claim their money back if their projects are not delivered on time, have quality problems, or violate laws, whilst Beijing raising the possibility it may increase management of home purchase payments to ensure finance is utilised for property projects only. [Reuters 3]

However, commentators have remained sceptical as to whether President Xi can produce initiatives that will be able to alleviate the Evergrande crisis. For example, Xi has launched a trial property tax in cities such as Shenzhen and Hangzhou in an attempt to reform the property sector, despite local government relying on sales of property for at least 40% of their revenue. [The Guardian] Likewise, the Guangdong government has proposed new rules to mandate Guangzhou and Shenzhen, two of China's largest cities, to allocate at least 10% of their land towards rental housing in order to meeting increased demand for homes. [Reuters 4]

Regardless of commentators' concern of contagion, on Friday, Hong Kong's markets watchdog, the Hong Kong Securities and Futures Commission, has proclaimed that there is no systemic risk to the city from the Evergrande crisis. [Reuters 5]

China: Slowing economy

(tj) China's premier, Li Keqiang, indicated China is facing 'downward pressures', a term often used by Chinese officials generally interpreted as meaning the slowing of the economy. Li expressed concerns for the Chinese economy, citing the need of 'cross-cyclical adjustments', whilst similarly noting that Beijing must reduce taxes and fees to resolve issues associated with small and medium-sized companies.

Recently, commentators have expressed concern over China's economic trajectory and that it is running against the clock before economic growth stops. However, both the Evergrande crisis and China's energy crunch both exemplify financial strains that are fuelling hesitation regarding China's economic progress and exacerbate political pressure faced by Chinese President Xi Jinping due to these concurrent crises. [Al Jazeera] [Foreign Affairs] Despite this, China recorded exports that exceed initial forecasts, offering a buffer to concerns of China's slowing economy, yet similarly citing the Evergrande and energy crises, commentators have still expressed concerns regarding China's impact on the international supply chain in anticipation for Christmas. [Reuters] [The Guardian]

China: Governmental food stability notice prompts mass panic buying

(tj) On Monday, November 1, China's Commerce Ministry posted a notice regarding a plan to ensure the supply and stability of foodstuffs, including a relatively innocuous line encouraging families in China to store necessities for emergencies that prompted widespread panic-buying and hoarding inferring that China was signalling it planned to go to war with Taiwan. [AP News]

In reality, the Ministry of Commerce cited it was merely conducting regular governmental efforts to aid its population adequately prepare for potential emergencies, a germane reminder given the ongoing COVID-19 lockdowns, concerns of food supply after

severe floods had damaged crops in Shangdong, China's largest vegetable producing province, and increasing cold weather.

The damaging of such a significant amount of crops has led to a dramatic increase in vegetable prices, some prices on particular vegetables having doubled from early October, a concern against the backdrop of a typical prompting of government to increase supply of food to prepare for upcoming Lunar New Year that for 2022 will fall in early February. [ABC News] [BBC] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2] [South China Morning Post 3]

China: Former Vice Premier accused by tennis star of sexual assault

(tj) Peng Shuai, a former number one ranked tennis doubles player, has announced via a post on her Sina Weibo account, that former Vice Premier, Zheng Gaoli, forced her to have sexual relations with him, representing the first time such an allegation has been made against one of China's most senior politicians. Zhang served as China's Vice Premier between 2013 and 2018.

While Shuai's post was quickly removed from China's internet, it is surprising that the post escaped censorship. For the Communist Party, the incident reflects of painful exposure of the fundamental fiction of a society and a governance system supposed to be based on meritocracy.

Shuai's post is the latest example in a series of high profile #MeToo cases in China, a movement that has been largely stifled by the CCP's increasing paternalism on civil society. [ABC News] [AP News] [BBC] [Sydney Morning Herald]

China: Journalist jailed for reporting on COVID-19

(tj) A citizen journalist, Zhang Zhan, who was jailed for her coverage of Chinese authorities' initial response to Covid in Wuhan in February last year, is currently close to death after going on hunger strike. Zhan was sentenced in December to four years in jail for 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble', a charge widely seen as used by Chinese authorities to quash political dissent.

Zhan's physical state has caused renewed calls by human rights organizations for her release. [Hong Kong Free Press] [The Guardian]

This comes amid a survey conducted by the Hong Kong Foreign Correspondents' Club and revealing that almost half of journalists considered leaving Hong Kong due to the rapid decline in press freedom. Similarly, 56 percent in the survey admitted to self-censoring in fear of government reprisals, whilst 84 per cent believed their working conditions in the city had deteriorated. [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

China: LGBT group disbands under increasing political pressure

(tj) An influential LGBT advocacy group, LGBT Rights Advocacy China, announced it would be ceasing all activities and closing all social media accounts indefinitely on Thursday, citing Beijing's growing restrictions on social activism and tightening control of social controls.

The Group was behind a series of the legal cases calling for better rights of LGBT people and raising awareness about the community. [AP News] [South China Morning Post]

LGBT groups have been subject to increasing pressure by Beijing in recent months that have extended to the banning of 'sissy boys' in media, banning LGBT social media accounts, collecting 'lists' of LGBT

China: warplane innovation; fake US aircraft carriers to practice missile targeting

(tj) China has reportedly conducted the first flight of the two-seater variation of the J-20, a stealth aircraft.

Chinese commentators hailed this is a significant development for China's military expansion due to the new warplane uses innovations that could potentially change modern warfare and could elevate China to be the lead innovator of novel stealth aircraft technology. [Global Times]

Meanwhile, the US Naval Institute have released satellite images showing that China's military, the People's Liberation Army, is using fake US aircraft

carriers to practice missile targeting in Xinjiang, raising further concerns about China's advanced missile technology. [AP News] [South China Morning Post]

China: Hong Kong Court ruling rejects government's push to expand national security law despite further pro-democracy demonstrators charged

(tj) On Thursday, November 4, Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal, the city's top court, unanimously rejected the attempts by the government to expand prosecution of people who riot or take part in illegal assembly, despite the absence of the individuals being present at such events. Herein, the government sought to render even supporters of movements criminal liable under the common law doctrine of 'joint enterprise', a doctrine that can render a secondary offender liable of the same charge as a primary defendant.

The court held that 'taking part' was an essential element under sections 18 and 19 of the Public Order Ordinancethat the joint enterprise doctrine could not override, commentators describing it as a 'landmark' decision for reasons that it would impact future prosecutions by requiring prosecutors to prove that individuals were physically present to be held criminally liable. In this regard, commentators have noted that this ruling could potentially serve at preventing the Hong Kong authorities passing sweeping and hastened charges on pro-democracy protestors that had been conducted in the past.

However, the court still ruled that supporters may still be held liable for 'secondary and inchoate offences.'

The appeal, in part, was brought by Tong Wai-hung, acquitted in July 2019 for rioting during pro-democracy demonstrations. [Hong Kong Free Press] [Reuters 1]

This perhaps sits in direct contradiction to China's Taiwan Affairs Office announcement this week that people who support Taiwanese independence will be prohibited from entering Hong Kong, Macau and the mainland, the Office stating that those that support Taiwan's independence will be criminally liable for life. [ABC News]

Despite the ruling, on Monday, November 1, eight pro-democracy activists, including Lee Cheuk-yan, the former chairman of the now disbanded Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements

of China, and Jimmy Lai, founder of the regime-critical newspaper Apple Daily, were charged under the national security law for organizing, participating, and inciting others to joinan unauthorised candlelight vigil that commemorated the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations. Five of the eight plead guilty. [The Guardian 1]

The vigil was banned last year for the first time by Chinese authorities who cited public health risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic as justification. 26 activists were arrested and charged over their involvement with the vigil. [AP News]

In a similar vein, a Hong Kong activist and a creator of Studentlocalism, a since disbanded civil society organisation for students, who previously tried to seek asylum at US consulate, has been found guilty of secession and money laundering by a Hong Kong court after entering a plea bargain.
[The Guardian 2]

Students have consistently been targeted by the Beijing-imposed national security law, having implemented a compulsory course on said law last month. Reports have since emerged that the course describes the dangers of breaking the law, including instances of messages in a chat could constitute a serious breach of the law that could result in life in prison, whilst noting that CCTV cameras were installed in lecture halls to monitor students throughout the duration of the course. [Reuters 2]

Additionally, Stand News editor-in-chief, Chung Pui-kuen, has stepped down which state media has described as signalling 'the end of anti-government media', serving as another example of Beijing's increasing paternalism over the Hong Kong press. [Global Times] [See, AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]

Japan: Election recap

(lnl) Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has succeeded in retaining its overall majority in the Diet following the House of Representatives election on Sunday, October 31. The LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito won a total of 293 seats out of 465, which will give them a stable majority and let the LDP dominate each Lower House standing committee.

After the victory at the general election for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced on Monday, November 1 to prioritize and accelerate his pandemic-relief stimulus package and

address defense policies aimed at deterring an increasingly assertive China.

Kishida pledged to work towards an extra budget aimed at ensuring the recovery from the pandemic by the end of the year. The government is planning on spending more than 30 trillion yen on a set of measures to kick-start the economy. It will also look into restarting a travel subsidy program in order to revive domestic tourism and will compile a “large-scale” stimulus package around mid-November. Moreover, the Prime Minister also signaled to emphasize the country’s defense, including pushing for an unprecedented doubling of defense spending to two percent of the GDP, - a move widely seen as an attempt to satisfy more hawkish LDP members who supported him in his run for party leader.

The main opposition party, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), had joined a coalition with five other parties to field joint candidates in nearly 220 out of 284 electoral districts, in the hope to win additional seats. However, the CDPJ fell short of their goal and went from holding 110 seats before the election to 96. The Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party), whose seats quadrupled from 11 to 41, was the biggest winner of the election and won over some of the LDP’s traditional voter groups. The Nippon Ishin is now the third largest political party in the Diet. [Japan Today 1] [The Diplomat 1] [The Japan Times]

In the election, women accounted for only 17.7 percent of all candidates. Female representation in the House of Representatives now accounts for less than ten percent of politicians, which is lower than before. In a bid for diversity, the government has set a target of increasing that number and aiming to have women account for 35 percent of candidates running in the elections of the House of Representatives and House of Chancellors by 2025. Additionally, a study by the Asahi Shimbun shows that male incumbents had more than an 80 percent chance of being elected, with the corresponding number being 20.8 percent for male newcomers. The chance for female newcomers to win seats however was only 7.6 percent. This shows the massive odds faced by female new entrants. Lastly, the average age of all lawmakers in the Lower House is 55.5. [The Asahi Shimbun]

A Kyodo News survey from Tuesday, November 2 showed that around 33 percent of the electorate viewed economic policies as the defining factor in the general election. Moreover, the public support rate for the Kishida cabinet increased from 55.7 percent to 58.1 percent. [Japan Today 2]

More information regarding the election results can be read at [The Diplomat 2] and [No. 44, November/2021, 1]. For an interesting read of how the results of the election is another proof of Japan's "one-party democracy" see [Asia Times].

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will however have plenty of trials awaiting him as he begins a new term; how he will revive the pandemic-stricken economy, manage the Covid-19 and navigate the geopolitical threats from an increasingly assertive China and North Korea. More information regarding the challenges Kishida is facing see [Japan Today 3] [Reuters].

Japan: Third biggest party faces hurdles to further electoral success

(lnl) The Osaka-based Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party) that became the third-largest party in the parliament after the general election on Sunday, October 31, might face challenges in how to exercise its increased power in the Diet. Experts believe that the party's desire to brand itself as an independent non-establishment party makes it more likely that Nippon Ishin will remain political outsiders but align with the policies of the Liberal Democratic Party and the Komeito, particularly on national security and defense issues, while opposing measures that the party do not believe are in their interests.

The election has produced unprecedented national results, and experts say that the reason why Nippon Ishin managed to win 41 seats can be attributed to the fact that many voters were not satisfied with either the ruling coalition or the opposition and wanted an alternative. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi appointed as LDP's no.2

(lnl) Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi resigned from his post and was appointed as secretary-general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on Thursday, November 4. The party's general council approved the change the same day. Prime Minister Kishida informed senior LDP members on Friday, November 5 that he intends to appoint Yoshimasa Hayashi as foreign minister. Kishida has himself doubled as foreign minister since Thursday, November 4. The official appointment of Hayashi, a former education, culture, sports, science and technology minister, will be on the

relaunch of his cabinet after the parliament convenes a special session on November 10. [The Japan News] [Japan Today 1] [Japan Today 2]

The choice of Motegi as LDP's no. 2 may underscore the prime minister's desire to stabilize his powerbase within the LDP. Motegi is known for being well-versed in policy matters and has an amicable relationship with party elders and influential leaders within the LDP's top two factions, such as former prime minister Shinzo Abe and the party's Vice President Taro Aso. He is seen to be the one most likely to be able to help Kishida maintain his grip on power within the LDP.

Akira Amari, who held the post of LDP's secretary-general only a month ago, offered to resign following his defeat in a single-seat district in the general election [see No. 44, November/2021, 1]. [The Japan Times 1] [The Japan Times 2] [Reuters]

Japan: Former Defense Minister to be Japan's adviser on human rights

(lnl) Former Defense Minister Gen Nakatani is to be named by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as his special adviser on human rights issues. Kishida introduced the post as a response to China's treatment of Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang region and pro-democracy advocates in Hong Kong.

Nakatani's appointment is expected to be confirmed on November 10, when the prime minister relaunches his cabinet in a special Diet session. Nakatani supported Kishida in the LDP leadership race and is co-head of a cross-party group with the aim to promote legislation which will enable Japan to impose sanctions on countries over human rights abuses. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Main opposition party leader Edano to resign over election setback

(lnl) The leader of the main opposition party the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), Yukio Edano, expressed his intention to resign as the party head after the CDPJ's poor results in the House of Representatives election. Edano will officially resign on the last day of a special Diet session which will take place on November 10. The CDPJ's internal rules require that a leadership election is to be held within 60 days after a leader resigns, and the party will

coordinate the date of its party leader election. [The Asahi Shimbun 1] [The Japan News 1]

The CDPJ's leadership election will likely focus on whether the party should continue cooperating with other opposition parties in future elections, particularly the collaboration with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). However, the JCP has expressed its intention to continue to cooperate with the CDPJ even after the resignation of Edano. Many other opposition party leaders have also expressed the will to continue cooperation with CDPJ, such as the party heads of Reiwa Shinsengumi, Taro Yamamoto, and the Social Democratic Party, Mizuho Fukushima. [The Asahi Shimbun 2] [The Japan News 2]

Japan: More than two-thirds of general election winners in favor of amending Japan's constitution

(lnl) Four Japanese political parties, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and its coalition partner Komeito, the Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party) and the Democratic Party for the People (DPP), are positive on constitutional reforms. A Mainichi Shimbun survey found that some 77 percent of candidates elected to the House of Representatives in the election on October 31, are in favor of revising Japan's constitution. This is well over the two-thirds majority necessary to initiate constitutional amendment in the Lower House. The LDP, Komeito, Nippon Ishin and the DPP together have 345 seats out of the 465 seats in the chamber.

Among the election winners, 98 percent of both LDP and Nippon Ishin members were in favor of reforming the constitution. The corresponding figure stood at 61 percent among members of Komeito. Of those elected who are in favor of constitutional amendment, 73 percent wanted the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to have a clear constitutional right of existence by revising war-renouncing Article 9. Four percent of those in favor said that the SDF should be transformed into a regular national defense force just like in other countries. [The Japan Times] [The Mainichi]

Japan: Death row inmates sue over same-day executions

(lnl) Prisoners on death row in Japan are only notified hours before they are to be executed. This practice has

huge impacts on the mental health of the prisoners and has long been criticized by rights groups. Two death row inmates are now taking legal action against same-day executions and filed a lawsuit in district court in the city of Osaka on Thursday, November 4. According to the inmates, the short notice does not give prisoners enough time to file an objection.

The lawyer for the two death row inmates, Yutaka Ueda, said that the short notice is inhumane and "death row prisoners live in fear every morning that that day will be their last". The prisoners have asked for 22 million yen in compensation. In Japan, there are more than 100 people on death row, however, none have been executed for the past two years. [BBC News]

South Korea: Opposition's new elected presidential hopeful faces charges of surveillance of judges

(dql) Days after Yoon Seok-you, South Korea's former prosecutor-general in the Moon Jae-in administration, was elected the presidential candidate of the opposition People Power Party (PPP) on Friday, November 5, he is facing fresh charges under which he is accused of being responsible for the documenting of judges' traits in the past by the prosecution based on illegal surveillance. Yoon is also accused of prevented investigations into suspicions surrounding the document during his time as prosecutor-general. [Korea Times] [Korea Herald]

Yoon is currently leading in polls of the presidential election scheduled for March 9, 2022. [Hankyoreh]

South Korea: Bill allowing full adoptions by singles on the way

(dql) South Korea's Ministry of Justice announced that it will propose amendment bill to make singles 25 and older who are capable of supporting the well-being of an adoptee eligible for full adoptions. Under the current law, such adoptions are allowed only for married couples.

The Ministry, furthermore, revealed that it plans to strengthen the court review process of whether to allow full adoptions by adding new review criteria, including how much child rearing time the potential parents would have and the post-adoption child care environments.

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

Bangladesh: Crimes against journalists rarely tried, advocacy group says

(lm) At least 23 journalists have been killed in Bangladesh since 1992, and only in 3 cases have the criminals been tried, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, an independent, nonprofit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide. What is more, victims' families had to wait for sixteen to twenty-five years to get justice, and at least three cases were thrown out, for various reasons, relating to those who were killed between 2001 and 2002. [Dhaka Tribune]

The findings were shared in a virtual panel discussion held on November 2 on the occasion of the United Nations' International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

Bangladesh: Official of ruling Awami League threatens voters with gun use

(lm) While addressing an electoral rally in Bangladesh's Kishoreganj district, a local party official of the ruling Awami League (AL) threatened voters, saying he would use an assault rifle if they do not vote for the party's

candidate in an upcoming union election. [Prothom Alo]

Bangladesh: Leader of armed group believed to be behind murder of Rohingya leader found dead

(lm) The leader of the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), an armed Islamist group present in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district was found dead on November 2, believed to have beaten to death. [The Daily Observer]

The ARSA is suspected to be involved in the assassination of Mohib Ullah, a high-profile figurehead for the more than 800,000-strong Muslim minority Rohingya. Ullah was killed by unidentified gunmen as he spoke to other community leaders outside his office on September 29. [AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]

India: Supreme Court lawyers booked under anti-terrorism law after reporting on anti-Muslim violence

(rs) Police in India's northeastern Tripura state have registered a case against four Supreme Court lawyers under the country's stringent anti-terrorism law and various sections of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly promoting communal disharmony with their social media posts about recent anti-Muslim violence in the state.

On October 26, hundreds of followers of a right-wing Hindu nationalist group protested against the police refusing them permission to hold a rally against a recent series of deadly attacks on Hindu temples and homes in neighboring Bangladesh that left at least seven people dead and several injured [see AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]. This protest turned violent, and numerous homes, shops, mosques belonging to people of Islamic faith were vandalized and set on fire. Moreover, more than 10 incidents of religious violence were reported from the district in the four days thereafter.

Days later, an independent fact-finding team of Supreme Court lawyers visited Tripura, a remote state encircled on three sides by Bangladesh and dominated by Bengali-speaking Hindus. Two members of the group in a report later noted that the state

government and Tripura police forces did not take proper action to curb the violence. This, they alleged, was "tantamount to sponsoring the violence". [Hindustan Times]

Following the publication of the report, four of the lawyers were served notices under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for allegedly "provocative" posts on social media. They were also asked to appear before police by November 10 for questioning. [The Indian Express 1]

The move came hours after the police registered five criminal cases against 71 people who they claim shared misleading images on social media after the incident to whip up further violence. [The Hindu]

Three days later then, police in Tripura invoked the UAPA against 102 social media handles which allegedly had "malicious propaganda" in them and "potential to create hatred", and served notices to US-based social media companies seeking detailed information on the owners of these accounts. [The Indian Express 2] [The Straits Times]

India: Manual on transgender inclusion in schools removed from website

(sr) India's National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), has removed a teachers' training manual on integration of transgender or gender non-conforming students in schools from its website days after a statutory body under the aegis of Ministry of Women and Child Development sought rectification of "anomalies" in the document. [Hindustan Times]

The NCERT is an autonomous organization set up by the Government of India to assist central and state governments in improving the quality of education in the country. Last month, it released a training manual to sensitize teachers about gender identities, elaborating on strategies to make schools more inclusive such as gender-neutral toilets and uniforms.

Earlier this month, however, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) issued a notice to the NCERT, following a complaint filed by a former propagator of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological fountainhead of India's Hindu supremacist groups which seeks to convert the country into an ethnic Hindu state.

The main point of the manual that was contested pertained to the recommendations for gender neutral

toilets and an effort to remove gender binaries in the school environment. It was contended that such moves would psychologically traumatize the children as their treatment would be contradictory at home and at school. Another point of strife was the manual's recommendation that teachers discuss the "availability of puberty blockers or hormone treatments for adolescents experiencing gender dysphoria". [The Hindu]

In a letter dated November 2, the NCPCR instructed the NCERT to take necessary steps and remedy the points of contention in the manual. The NCERT was also directed to update the NCPCR about follow-up actions they had taken within seven days, and to verify the background of the members of the expert panel that had worked on the manual. [The Indian Express]

India: Government cuts fuel taxes for first time in three years, as prices hit record highs

(rs) In a relief to consumers, the Modi administration has cut the taxes paid by consumers on petrol and diesel after the surging cost of crude oil pushed fuel prices to record highs. Amid record-high fuel prices, this is the first cut in India's excise duty on petrol in over three years. [Press Information Bureau] [The Indian Express]

The announcements came on the eve of the festival of Diwali, which sees the start of a busy festive season in India, typically marked by increased consumer spending. [BBC]

Following the central government's announcement on November 3, 15 states ruled by Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or its allies said they would go further and cut local fuel taxes by as much as another 7 rupees (approx. $0.013) a liter. Overall, 23 states and union territories have undertaken a commensurate reduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) on petrol and diesel to give relief to consumers. [India Today]

Global oil prices have jumped this year, which has hit India – the world's third-biggest oil consumer and importer – hard. In December of last year, New Delhi's crude oil imports had soared to the highest levels in nearly three years to more than 5 million barrels per day (bpd) as its refiners cranked up output to meet a rebound in fuel demand, boosting prices and an

accelerating de-stocking of floating storage globally [see AiR No. 4, January/2021, 4].

India: Prime Minister Modi visits troops along Line of Control during Diwali festival

(lm) India must enhance its military capabilities in tune with changes in the world and the modes of war, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on November 4 while addressing soldiers near the Line of Control (LoC) in the Jammu and Kashmir union territory. [The Indian Express]

Continuing with his annual tradition, the Indian premier had travelled to the union territory to celebrate Diwali – one of the most popular festivals of Hinduism – with the troops. Last year, Modi had celebrated the festival with soldiers and Border Security Force in India's northern state of Rajasthan.

Preceding the prime minister's visit, Indian Army chief General M.M. Naravane arrived on a two-day visit to Jammu to review the security situation and operational preparedness. [The Dispatch]

Both visits to the union territory came against the larger backdrop of a recent wave of targeted killings. Since early October, suspected militants have killed 12 civilians, including five migrant workers, as well as minority Hindus and Sikhs, in Kashmir – despite a widespread security crackdown in the heavily militarized region. [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

Nepal: Stalemate persists in Supreme Court as judges sense chief justice not serious about resigning

(ns/sd) The Nepal Bar Association (NBA) has affirmed the further continuation of its staged sit-in program in front of the Supreme Court. It also urged lawyers across the country to join protests pressuring Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana to resign from his post. The organisation, which represents the country's lawyers, said it will not stand down until its demands are met and the judiciary branch is cleared of corruption. [My Republica]

The chief justice's alleged pressure on Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to make his brother-in-law a

minister earlier this month, and other purported misdemeanours, halted proceedings in the Supreme Court as judges and lawyers went on the warpath. AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1

For the past week justices and lawyers have been boycotting full court meetings called by Chief Justice Rana. Cases in the apex court and other national courts have also been boycott, bringing the judicial process to a standstill. As it is, the protesting Supreme Court justices only hear habeas corpus petitions.

This has started to create a division in the Nepal Bar Association as two of its main constituents, the Democratic Lawyers Association (DLA) – affiliated with the ruling Nepali Congress party – and the Professional Lawyers Association (PPLA) – connected with the opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) – disagree with the stance Supreme Court justices have taken. [The Kathmandu Post]

Lawyers from both associations called on the Supreme Court justices to resume court hearings because they are worried about the long-term effects this could have on the judiciary branch, and the public overall.

Moreover, the UML's position in the current judiciary crisis is that the chief justice should not resign, with party Chairman KP Sharma Oli previously announcing his party would not get involved in the manoeuvrings of the judiciary. However, there are also talks that the UML might file an impeachment motion against four other justices who were members of the Constitutional Bench that ordered Deuba's appointment as prime minister [see AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3]

Pakistan: Government lifts ban on radical Islamist TLP party

(tj) Pakistan ended the proscribed status of the hardline Islamist Tehreek-e-Labiak (TLP) on November 7, following an agreement reached between the radical Islamist group and Prime Minister Imran Khan's government that TLP would call off its proposed march to the capital, Islamabad. [Deutsche Welle]

The TLP was declared as a proscribed organization in April this year, in the wake of violent protests by the group calling for the expulsion of France's ambassador over the publication of cartoons depicting Islam's Prophet Mohammad. Authorities also blocked travel documents and bank accounts of over two hundred key leaders of the TLP. [AiR No. 16, April/2021, 3]

The group once again took to the streets last month with the goal of reaching Islamabad. They demanded the release of the proscribed group's leader, Saad Hussain Rizvi, who was arrested in April and the withdrawal of terrorism charges against hundreds of its members.

After two weeks of clashes that left at least seven policemen dead and scores injured, the Khan administration announced October 31 that it had entered into an agreement with the TLP – just days after Pakistan's Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Fawad Chaudhry, had said that the government had decided to consider the already-banned group a "militant organization" [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1].

Justifying the government's agreement signed with the TLP, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that it was the only way the government could defuse the situation and avoid further violence. He also said that he never supported the idea of using force to resolve such issues, adding that the manner had to be resolved amicably considering the intensity of the deadlock. [The Friday Times]

In line with the agreement, more than 1,000 workers of the TLP who were arrested after clashes with policemen had been released. But many supporters planned to maintain a sit-in until the government follows through on its promise to release Rizvi. [Al Jazeera]

Pakistan: Government, local Taliban militants agree on one-month 'complete ceasefire'

(lm) The Khan administration on November 3 announced it had reached a cease-fire agreement with the country's leading Taliban group, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a month after the militants had rejected the government's amnesty offer and vowed to continue its violent struggle. [Bloomberg]

Attacks in Pakistan have surged since the Afghan Taliban released around 2,300 leaders of the TTP – including the group's former Deputy Chief Faqir Mohammad – just days after seizing control of Kabul on August 15. Between July and mid-September, TTP militants have claimed responsibility for at least 55 attacks against military and civilian targets [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3].

Against this backdrop, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and President Arif Alvi in mid-September said Islamabad would pardon the TTP if its members laid down their arms, abandoned their militant ideology and respected the constitution [see also AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]. In October then, Prime Minister Imran Khan in a televised interview said that his government was in talks with parts of the TTP as part of a "reconciliation process".

Since then, both sides are said of have had two rounds of preliminary talks, facilitated by Sirajuddin Haqqani, the current Afghan Minister of Interior. Haqqani is also member of the Haqqani network, an Afghan Sunni Islamist militant organization that is functionally part of the Taliban and which the United States designated as a foreign terrorist organization in 2012.

The group committed to the truce as peace talks between the sides continue, according to Pakistan's Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry. How long the cease-fire lasts will depend on progress in the talks, Chaudhry said, without giving details. The TTP, which sources said had been demanding the release of a number of prisoners as a condition for full ceasefire negotiations, said it was "ready for a dialogue that will lead to lasting peace in the country". [Reuters]

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

Cambodia: Civil society organizations urge the government to protect journalists

(tl) Nine Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), including the International Federation of Journalists and the Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association (CamboJA), voiced concerns about the continued repression of journalistic freedoms by Hun Sen's government. The statement criticized a lack of justice for those who commit crimes against journalists, calling for the creation of independent investigative bodies.

The groups released their statement to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, which the United Nations created to draw attention to the risks journalists face around the globe. According to UN figures, at least 17 journalists have been killed in Cambodia in the course of their work since 1994.

Since Hun Sen and his CPP took absolute control of parliament following the 2018 elections, the government cracked down on journalists, activists, civil society organizations, NGOs and independent bloggers. In light of the Covid-19 restrictions, the government assumed an even closer grip, banning independent news outlets and radio stations, while journalists at some news outlets were purged.

More than 80 journalists have been targeted in the last 10 months: 31 were arrested, 20 were physically assaulted, and 16 were threatened, according to Cambodian Journalists Alliance Association. Eight other journalists faced judicial harassment, five others were detained for questioning, and one female journalist experienced sexual harassment.

Paris-based media watchdog Reporters Without Borders ranked Cambodia 144 out of 180 countries in its 2021 World Press Freedom Index. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia: General nominated as sole candidate for military commander

(ms) President Joko Widodo has nominated Indonesian Army Chief of Staff General Andika Perkasa to become the next commander of the Indonesian Military (TNI), as the sole candidate to replace Air Chief Marshal Hadi Tjahjanto, who has reached the mandatory retirement age. The House of Representatives, controlled by a majority of the government coalition, is expected to approve the nomination. [Jakarta Globe]

A coalition of civil society organizations has criticized the nomination as ignoring the rotational policy for the position of military commander set out in the 2004 TNI

law, which mandates that the position be rotated among representatives of the Army, Navy, and Air Force branches, and there is an unwritten agreement that each branch takes consecutive turns. If Andika is appointed, however, the Navy will be skipped in way for the army. This has already happened before. During Jokowi's first and second terms, two out of three of his military commanders have been from the Army. This has led to speculation that Andika's nomination may be due to the influence of the Army or individual active or retired generals seeking to serve their political interests. Civil society groups have also pointed towards allegations that Andika was involved in human rights violations, including the killing of a Papuan activist, while serving in Papua in 2001. [Jakarta Post, $]

The 2004 TNI law was initiated as part of reforms made to the military following the decades long military dictatorship under President Suharto from 1968 to 1998. The reforms were intended to dismantle active political roles of the military. Nevertheless, the military has been criticized for still holding an active role in Indonesia's democracy. [International Institute for Asian Studies]

Indonesia: Government takes over land controlled by Tommy Suharto

(dw) On November 5, the government seized land assets linked to Tommy Suharto, the son of late president Suharto. The move was part of broader efforts to recoup $7.7 billion of unpaid loans given as bank bailouts during the 1997-1998 financial crisis. According to a statement, Tommy controlled PT Timor Putra Nasional. This carmaker company has an outstanding debt to the state amounting to 2.6 trillion rupiahs ($180.87 million) after defaulting on loans to state banks during the crisis. The government had issued letters to seize the assets used as collateral but had not physically taken them over due to "obstacles on the ground." Critics said the late President Suharto, who died in January 2008, had amassed as much as $45 billion in kickbacks during his presidency, which he and his family denied. [Reuters]

Indonesia: The long-postponed Nahdlaltul Ulama's Muktamar will be held on December

(dw) The national congress of Nahdlaltul Ulama (NU), Muktamar, will be held from 23 to 25 December 2021. NU is Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, with an estimated 40-45 million members across the country. It has publicly committed itself as a supporter of freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and pluralism. According to observers, this upcoming Muktamar should reflect NU as a leading moderate Islamic organization in Indonesia. [East Asia Forum 1] [Antara News, in Indonesian]

The Muktamar is the organization's most important meeting. It is usually held once every five years but was postponed due to COVID-19. The main agenda of the Muktamar is to elect a new general chairperson who will lead the organization for the next five years. Leading contenders for the chairmanship race are the incumbent Chairman Siradj and the incumbent General Secretary Yahya Cholil Staquf. Both come from the organization's moderate wing and are similar in their ideological and political viewpoints. There are some other candidates, for example, Yahya Cholil Staquf, who is the son of one of NU's founders [Republika, in Indonesian] [Detik News, in Indonesian] [Antara News, in Indonesian]

Muktamar is facing several challenges. First, the inconsistencies within the organization with respect to its effort to promote moderate norms in Indonesia. Religious authority within NU is organized along personal networks rather than formal hierarchies, leading to different directions regionally. Some of the local NU clerics have led persecutions against the Shiites and Ahmadiyas in some regions. The East Java NU has officially supported banning Shia in the region. Other than that, NU also remains silent following the late 2008 anti-Ahmadiyah decree. [Human Rights Watch]

Second, NU's political alignment with President Jokowi's administration has raised the organization's political influence and increased the number of NU officials appointed as key ministries. NU's alliance with the Widodo administration is rooted in their shared desire to neutralize threats from a resurging Islamist opposition movement. This leaves NU vulnerable to criticisms for aligning itself with a government. [East Asia Forum 1] [East Asia Forum 2]

Gold mine contaminates river in the south of Laos

(bs) A Chinese gold-mining company released waste and chemical substances in a local river exposing the community to the risk of life hazards. The mining work has been polluting the village's only water source making the water undrinkable and killing the fish. Villagers use the water from the river for drinking, cooking, and bathing. The villagers have requested the authorities to enforce the regulation against water pollution in the area and the restoration of the river's cleanness since the beginning of the gold-mining project in 2020.

Despite such efforts, the pipe system built by the company delivers an inadequate amount of water and has not yet been repaired after being heavily damaged during the monsoon season.

The project has been under local authorities' supervision and operated on a 15-year concession. [Radio Free Asia]

Malaysia: Rising concerns on electoral process under COVID-19 restrictions in Sarawak

(my) Sarawak's 12th State Election will be held immediately, after the Proclamation of Emergency was lifted by Sultan Abdullah Ri'ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah, and the state assembly dissolved. Its current mandate had ended in June. The implementation of the upcoming election is challenged by Covid-19 restrictions. [Channel News Asia]

The chairman of the NGO The Rise of Social Efforts (Rose), Ann Teo, urged the Election Commission to prepare Standards of Procedure (SOP) ahead of time.

Teo also referred to the complexities of social conditions in Sarawak. With half of its 1,2 million voters residing in rural areas with minimal road and internet access, equal voting chances for the elderly and those affected by Covid-19, including those living under the Enhanced Movement Control Order (EMCO) locations, are in question. In order to avoid an even lower voter turnout than Sarawak usually sees, Teo suggested to have alternative campaigns through televisions and radio airtimes, and enable postal voting. [New Straits Times]

Myanmar: Bail application by jailed American journalist refused

(tl) A court rejected the request for bail of Danny Fenster, an American journalist who has been in prison for five months. Fenster is charged with spreading false information, which carries a sentence of up to three years, and for alleged links with groups opposing the military regime, which could lead to a further three years in prison. [AiR No. 22, June/2021, 1] [AiR No. 29, July/2021, 3]

He has just been charged with the added offense of violating the Immigration Act on visa requirements, punishable by imprisonment of between six months and five years.

The court's decision comes after a visit by Bill Richardson, a former US ambassador to the United Nations who came to the country to discuss humanitarian aid for Myanmar's emergency. The former ambassador's visit had raised hopes for Fenster's release, given his past efforts to secure the release of Americans imprisoned in countries with which the US has strained ties.

Myanmar has been mired in violence and civil unrest since the military seized power in February, ousting the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Protesters against the takeover who faced beatings, shootings and arrests have increasingly turned to armed resistance against the military government, and armed fighters are active in many parts of the country.[Al Jazeera]

Myanmar: Army clashes with resistance forces, displacing 300 people in the South

(tl) The latest clash between the army and People's Defense Force (PDF) left four resistance force fighters injured and five soldiers dead in Shan State on November 2. Following the clash, junta troops occupied the village, displacing about 4000 people and burning down some of the abandoned houses.

Junta atrocities have increased, including raids, arrests, the arbitrary killing of civilians, bombardment and burning down houses, especially in Magwe and Sagaing regions and Chin, Shan and Kayah states. According to the residents, the militaries recently burned down more than 160 houses in Thantlang, Chin State. In Sagaing Region, some 30 soldiers died in a mine attack by the PDF in the wee hours of November 3, according to Tigyaing resistance forces. In retaliation for that, the junta is continuously facing fierce attacks from PDF and ethnic armed forces across the country.

Since the February 1 coup, junta forces killed 1,229 civilians and detained 9,626 people according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, an advocacy group that records deaths and arrests. [Myanmar NOW] [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Civilian exile government announced to sell bonds for funding

(tl) Myanmar's civilian National Unity Government (NUG) will start to sell bonds to fund the revolutionary movement against the military junta.

The NUG, who was formed by the National League for Democracy, representatives of ethnic minorities and anti-regime protest groups in April, said the bond sales will offer no interest. The movement is hoping to raise at least US$800 million (1.4 trillion kyats) for social and humanitarian support, including health care, education, social care and funding for military personnel and police officers who defect.

Anti-regime movements have been largely supported by donations since the February coup, although the NUG officially introduced voluntary taxation in August. The NUG invited taxpayers, including businesses at home and abroad, to voluntarily pay tax online through a self-assessment process, after the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Union Parliament) approved the Union Taxation Law in September. During that time, the NUG said it collected more than $150,000 in taxes. Also in August, the NUG introduced a pilot project selling "Spring Lottery" tickets online to support civil servants in the civil disobedience movement (CDM). More than 200,000 ticket orders were made but many of the payments were cancelled and the actual sales only managed to support around 5,800 striking staff.

According to the movement, almost 410,000 civil servants have joined the anti-regime movement, refusing to work under the junta and increasing numbers of military personnel and police are joining the CDM with some 800 military personnel and police defecting in September and October. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta amends telecommunication's law

(tl) Junta Chef Gen. Min Aung Hlaing amended the Law on Television and Broadcasting to include lengthy prison sentences for violators instead of merely fines, in an attempt to suppress journalist and muzzle the media.

The new amendment brings news broadcast on the internet under the same regulations as those broadcasts on television and radio, and punishes offenders with penalties of up to 5 years. Since the coup of Feb.1, the chief of the military junta has amended or added new provisions to 63 laws.

Since the seizure of power in the country the military authorities have charged journalists under the Defamation Act and the Unlawful Association Act for expressing views critical of the regime. They have also revoked the licenses of private media outlets deemed insufficiently supportive of the new government. Journalists in Myanmar say the military has targeted the media for shining a light on human rights abuses by documenting state-directed crackdowns and killings of anti-junta activists.

The junta has arrested 103 journalists, including US and Japanese nationals, in the nine months since the coup and 32 remain behind bars. Paris-based Reporters Without Borders ranked Myanmar 140th out of 180 countries and regions in its 2021 World Press Freedom Index, down from 139th a year earlier. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Dozen National League for Democracy offices targeted since the coup

(tl) Dozens of offices of the National League for Democracy (NLD), the party of the Myanmar's deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi, have been destroyed since the February 1 coup.

According to a member of the NLD, "there have been 44 such incidents since the coup" at party offices throughout the country. October marked the month with the largest series of attacks at NLD's offices, with at least a dozen bouts in Mon state, as well as Tanintharyi, Mandalay and Irrawaddy regions.

Following the coup on February 1, security forces arrested several top leaders of the NLD, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Initially, multiple NLD offices were raided and the NLD headquarters in Yangon was bombed. For analysts, the junta's attack on NLD follows the intention to dissolve the party and prosecute the

leaders for treason, to prevent the party from running in the next elections.

The junta is still seeking the arrest of several top NLD officials across the country and detained at least 458 NLD members in the eight months from February to September. The junta claimed that NLD had engineered a landslide victory in Myanmar's November 2020 election through widespread voter fraud. It has yet to present evidence of its claims. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: The junta and allied parties meet to change the electoral system

(tl) The junta's election commission and military's proxy parties began on Friday a three-day conference to discuss changing Myanmar's electoral system to one of Proportional Representation (PR), which would make it easier for less popular junta-aligned parties to win seats.

Myanmar's elections currently operate under a First Past the Post system, meaning the candidate who wins the most votes in each constituency become MP, without considering the results of other candidates. With the new electoral system, the number of seats awarded to each party is determined by the overall share of the vote that it wins across the country. That means parties whose candidates fail to secure a majority of votes in any constituency can still have seats in parliament.

Among those attending is the National Democratic Force (NDF) party, which first submitted a proposal in parliament to switch to PR in 2014 but was defeated after a constitutional challenge from the National League for Democracy (NLD). The current system was introduced by the military as part of the 2008 constitution. Both elections under this constitution were won by the NLD in a landslide, the most recent one triggering the junta's allegation of voter fraud, which they cite as reason for their February 1 coup.

The junta has repeatedly said it intends to hold new elections, while large sections of the population are in open revolt against them following the February 1 coup. [Myanmar NOW]

The Philippines: Withdrawal of President Rodrigo Duterte's daughter from mayor race

(lt) Sara Duterte-Carpio, daughter of incumbent President Rodrigo Duterte has withdrawn from running for the position of Davao City mayor just days from the closing of electoral deadlines. Duterte-Carpio has declined to provide reasons for her withdrawal, but has stated that further announcements would be made regarding the issue.

A member of the prominent Duterte political dynasty, Duterte-Carpio has enjoyed much support as a political leader in the south of the Philippines. Though she has repeatedly stated that she would not be running for president in the upcoming 2022 elections, Duterte-Carpio has led many opinion polls as the most preferred presidential candidate. [Reuters]

The Philippines: Government pushes plan withholding cash subsidies from those unvaccinated against COVID-19 virus

(lt) The government of the Philippines is aiming to implement a plan which withholds cash subsidies from those who refuse to receive vaccinations against COVID-19. A policy deemed controversial by many, human rights groups have argued that this violates fundamental rights for individuals to choose their medical treatment.

According to Presidential spokesman Harry Roque, the plan in question would quell fears of the vaccine's legitimacy and safety. By establishing vaccinations against COVID-19 as a "condition" to receiving cash subsidies under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, this would ensure that all sectors of Philippine society would be able to receive their government benefits. The plan continues to be backed by leaders such as the Interior Secretary Eduardo Año, who insists that while the government respects the individual rights of its citizens, the policy is detrimental to achieving herd immunity. "The virus does not know those rights," Año has stated, in an attempt to illustrate the virus' inability to discriminate in infecting members of the public.

However, the policy's approval has faced stark criticism. Karapatan, a Manila-based human rights group has argued against the plan due to its militaristic approach in "forcing" people to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Cristina Palabay, secretary-general of Karapatan, went on further to deem the policy "anti-poor" due to its dangling of incentives against the poverty-stricken populations of the Philippines.

The Philippines is one of the hardest-hit nations in Southeast Asia affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with over 2.8 million active cases. The government aims to inoculate 70% of the population with their first COVID-19 vaccination shot by the end of November. [Benar News]

The Philippines: Arrest made in connection to 2020 killing of Los Baños mayor

(lt) The Criminal Investigation and Detective Group, the primary investigation branch of the Philippine National Police, has arrested a former Los Baños councillor involved in the killing of Los Baños, Laguna mayor Caesar Perez. Former councilor Norvin Tamisin was arrested by authorities due to murder charges filed against him, as well as his connections to the death of Perez, who was shot in the town's municipal hall in 2020.

Perez is noted to have been accused of involvement in illegal drugs by President Rodrigo Duterte in 2017. In an ABS-CBN interview, the former mayor denied the "politically-motivated" accusations made against him. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Petition filed against presidential candidate due to status as convicted criminal

(lt) Civic leaders have filed a petition with the Philippine Commission on Elections against presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos, son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos in an attempt to cancel his certificate of candidacy.

The petitioners have used Marcos' 1997 conviction for failing to pay income tax returns between 1982 to 1984, a two-year period in which he served as vice-governor and later governor of Ilocos Norte. Stating that this criminal conviction disqualifies him from presidential candidacy, petitioners also noted his refusal to pay this income tax as a "repeated evasion of his positive duty to... society." [Rappler]

The Philippines: President Rodrigo Duterte defends political dynasties of the

Philippines

(lt) Incumbent leader President Rodrigo Duterte has come to the defense of political dynasties in the Philippines, saying that they are not "bad" and justifying their alleged legality under the Philippine Constitution. Using his experiences as former Mayor of Davao City, Duterte explained that after he stepped down barangay leaders "unanimously" chose his daughter, Sara Duterte, as his successor. He drew upon his prior tenure as mayor to illustrate how civilians prefer political leaders coming from one family.

The President noted that this cannot be changed unless amendments were made to the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines. However, Article II, Section 26 of the Constitution specifies a prohibition on political dynasties in the Philippines, contradicting Duterte's statements. Although this is the case, the ban is largely ignored as evidenced in the many political dynasties that continue to wield their power over the nation's political affairs. [CNN Philippines]

The Philippines: President Rodrigo Duterte explains motives behind anti-drug campaign

(lt) President Rodrigo Duterte has clarified the reasons behind his infamous war on drugs policy, explaining that he wanted to protect the citizens of the Philippines. The statement was made following the International Criminal Court's decision to investigate what many have called a bloody and ruthless campaign against Philippine civilians. In a speech at Siargao on 6 November 2021, the President stressed that should he face legal charges due to his drug war, that he would only be tried under the Philippine legal system. [Manila Bulletin]

The Philippines: Communist rebels surrender in Sultan Kudarat, military to step up offensive

(lt) Eight members of the communist New People's Army surrendered in the Sultan Kudarat province on Thursday. The former members of the Far South Mindanao Regional Committee handed over their firearms to authorities upon their surrender. [Manila Times]

Meanwhile, the Philippine military has announced the launching of a fresh military offensive against the remaining New People's Army forces in Bukidnon province. This includes the launching of air strikes and bombs in the region, with the military also blocking civilians from entering a hinterland village on Tuesday. These provisions follow after the killing of leader Jorge "Ka Oris" Madlos, who was shot during a shootout with military forces last week. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Philippine Commission on Human Rights points out excessive use of force by police

(lt) In an ongoing investigation into police shootouts occurring during President Duterte's ongoing war on drugs, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights has indicated that police may be liable for excessive use of force. This comes as only 11 individuals were found to survive shootouts during anti-drug operations in Central Luzon, Calabarzon, and the National Capital Region.

The Commission examined a total of 451 police operations which investigated 705 persons of interest. In these, at least 538 were killed, with a remaining 167 reported to have survived or suffered unknown ailments. [Rappler]

Thailand: Debate over lèse-majesté law heats up as parties declared stance

(kk) The debate over a reform of royal defamation law is gearing up as political parties announce position on the issue. [Swissinfo.ch]

Pheu Thai Party's (PTP) leader Chonlanan Srikaew clarified that the main opposition will not play the leading role in pushing for the amendment of Section 112, but it will act as a middleman bringing the protesters' message into the parliament for further discussion. [Bangkok Post 1]

The PTP's announcement came after an online post published by former PM Thaksin Shinawatra stating the law itself was "never a problem", but rather the enforcement of the law, which was politically weaponized by the government. [Bangkok Post 2]

Earlier, the PTP issued a statement saying it would propose for a reexamination of the ways in which the security laws — including the lèse-majesté law and sedition law — are used, to prevent authorities from abusing the laws, and to free any person imprisoned of the basis of these laws. [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

The statement was interpreted by many as Pheu Thai endorsing the anti-establishment campaign calling for an overhaul or abolition of lèse-majesté. Protesters have been collecting signatures to propose for the abolition of the royal defamation law.

The opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) announced its intention to amend the royal defamation law, warning the alternative would be to repeal it. The MFP asked the House Speaker to expedite the process for an amendment bill of the lèse-majesté law proposed by the MFP, which has been stalled since February this year. [Thairath, in Thai]

MFP's stance faced criticism from Piyabutr Saengkanokkul - former secretary-general of the former Future Forward Party which later transformed into the MFP, implying that the party should propose a more progressive agenda.

Meanwhile, the coalition parties insisted they are against the amendment or abolition of the royal defamation law. [Bangkok Post 3]

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha assured that his government would not amend the lèse-majesté law, stating the country's long-respected institution should not be destroyed as every country has their own traditions. [Thai PBS World]

As of November 6, over 120,000 people signed up to submit a bill proposing the repeal of lèse-majesté. The draft bill noted the law represses freedom of expression and the penalty – three to fifteen years in prison – is disproportionate to the crime. [Bangkok Post 4] On the other hand, representatives of the People's Army Protecting the Monarchy have filed a petition against the amendment of lèse-majesté and the sedition law. [Bangkok Post 5]

Thailand: Student activists sentenced to jail

(kk) A Criminal Court rendered prison sentences for student activists Benja Apan and Nutchanon Pairoj on contempt of court charges with respect to a protest in

April. According to Thai Lawyers for Human Rights – a Thai NGO – at least 26 people have been charged with contempt of court since July 2020. [Prachatai English]

Thailand: Government whip to name new chief over corruption suspension

(kk) Nirote Sunthornlekha will likely be appointed chief of government whip after former whip Wirach Ratanasate has been suspended from parliamentary duty pending the court's hearing on a corruption case involving the construction of futsal fields during his time as a Pheu Thai Party MP under former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra's administration. He was accused of using the Education Ministry's budget for its construction. [Bangkok Post 1]

Thailand: Political activists allegedly tortured by police

(kk) Two protesters were allegedly tortured by police during interrogation. Police arrested two people after dispersing a memorial for Warit Somnoi, a 15-year-old demonstrator who died after being shot at a protest. The activists accused the officers of beating, choking and threatening to kill them pressuring them confess their involvement in the shooting of a policeman.

The Asia director at Human Rights Watch (HMW) said the mistreatment by Thai police showed the government's pledges to end torture in police custody have failed.

In August, a viral video showing a drug suspect tortured to death by police during custody has prompted calls for police reform and anti-torture legislation.

Although the Thai parliament has approved the bill against torture and enforced disappearance backed by the government in the first reading, HMW said the bill does not meet international standards as it lacks definitions for important terms, including cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

HMW also urged the Thai government to "establish a credible and independent prosecutorial body to receive complaints of police abuse, conduct investigations, and bring cases for prosecution" [Human Rights Watch]

Thailand: Migrant rights groups urge to release detained migrant advocates

(kk) A hundred civil society organizations and migrant rights groups demanded that the Thai government releases seven Cambodian migrant advocates who were detained by police and immigrant officers while visiting the Ministry of Labor to submit a petition calling for better protection of migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos. They requested more accessible healthcare for migrant workers during the pandemic as well as more convenient bureaucratic procedures. [UCA News 1]

In an open letter to Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-O-Cha, the signatories said the Thai authorities' actions contradicted the Cabinet's previous decision on September 28, 2021, enabling undocumented migrant workers to continue to stay in Thailand to allow more time for employers to apply for official permits.

Thai authorities have escalated the crackdown on migrant workers crossing the borders illegally to find jobs in Thailand. Since the military coup in February, thousands of Myanmar migrants have attempted to flee to Thailand, many of whom were forced to return to Myanmar. [See AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2] A spokesperson for the Aid Alliance Committee for Myanmar Workers said the violation of Myanmar workers' rights has worsened as Thai companies face financial problems caused by the pandemic. [UCA News 2]

Thailand: Daily terror attacks in the deep South

(kk) Separatist Islamist insurgents carried out several attacks against security forces in Thailand's restive deep South as part of an uprising against Thai authorities.

On November 2, six suspect insurgents ambushed two policemen who were on a patrol in Narathiwat province, and set fire to the patrol truck. The day before, two rangers on a patrol were injured from a bomb attack in the same province. Meanwhile, six insurgents were killed in Narathiwat within a week in October.

Narathiwat is one of the three border provinces in the deep South in which a separatist insurgency has been simmering since 2014. Over 7,000 people have died due to the insurgency and operations led by security forces. Rights advocates have accused the Thai military of extrajudicial killings and torturing suspects in the area, turning more local Muslims against authorities.

For years, Thailand failed to pacify the region of Muslim-majority with ethnic Malay background. Governmental promises of border patrol divisions teaching Thai to Malay children, starting in 2023, are unlikely for be successful for insurgents have long-time attacked government-run schools. [UCA News]

Vietnam: A detainee's wife risks arrest if husband does not confess

(bs) A Vietnamese land-activist told his lawyer that the police threatened to arrest his wife if he does not confess.

The activist, Trinh Ba Phuong, was arrested in June 2020 after sharing on social media a dispute between the police and some protesters at a construction site in the Hanoi's outskirt that ended in violence and in the death of a village elder. He has been exercising his right to remain silent until the trial. Meanwhile, in the absence of a confession, the police imposed a mental health assessment on Mr. Phuong.

The authorities threatened to use the evidence they collected of Mr. Phuong's wife activities on social media as a ground for her arrest. According to his lawyer, threatening the arrest of a family member can be seen as an indirect violation of the law against extorting a confession. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam: Former intelligence deputy chief sentenced to 14 years for corruption

(bs) Nguyen Duy Linh, ex-deputy chief of the Ministry of Public Security's General Department of Intelligence, and his subordinate, were sentenced to 14 years and 7.5 years respectively in jail for corruption.

In 2017, the deputy chief received $220,865 in bribes from his assistant to help him eluding criminal investigations against him. Vu was sentenced in March 2019 for bribery and revealing state secrets. [The Star]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

US National Security Adviser on strategic competition with China

(dql) US National Security Adviser Jack Sullivan in an interview presented a strong record on achievements of US China-policy in the first ten months under Joe Biden's presidency arguing that the Biden administration has been able to "set the terms of an effective competition where the United States is in a position to defend its values and advance its interests not just in the Indo-Pacific but around the world," and citing successful alignment with partners in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. While saying that the goal of the US China policy was not a new Cold War or China's containment, Sullivan emphasized that it is still competition in which the US seek to achieve "a favorable disposition of how the United States and its allies and partners can shape the international rules of the road on the sorts of issues that are fundamentally going to matter for the people in our country and the people everywhere." [CNN]

Sullivan's remark comes on the heels of the release of the US Defense Department's 2021 Congressional report "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China." According to the report, "Beijing views the United States as increasingly determined to contain the PRC, creating potential obstacles to its strategy," which under the banner of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation by 2049

aims “to match or surpass U.S. global influence and power, displace U.S. alliances and security partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, and revise the international order to be more advantageous to Beijing’s authoritarian system and national interests.”

The report acknowledges that in trying to achieve this goal, China has made a lot of progress in 2020 in a wide range of areas, highlighting – among others – the integration of Russian-built S-300 and S-400 surface-to-air missiles into China’s defense systems, with the air forces shifting from strictly air defense to “offensive and defensive operations,” and toward building a “strategic” air force capable of projecting power at long range. It also asserts that the country’s nuclear stockpile will quadruple from the current total in the low 200s to 1,000 weapons by 2030. [Department of Defense, USA] [The National Interest] [Times of India] [Air Force Magazine]

Meanwhile, the US Naval Institute concluded that satellite images suggest that China’s military is using mock-ups of a US aircraft carrier and other warships for missile target practice in Xinjing. [South China Morning Post]

China, US trade blame over Xi Jinping’s absence at COP 26 UN climate summit

(dql) The US and China attacked each other at the ongoing Cop26 UN climate summit in Glasgow. US President Joe Biden sharply criticized his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping for not attending in person the, calling his absence “a big mistake” and accusing him of failing to demonstrate leadership on the climate crisis before over 120 world leaders attending the summit and discussing ways to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C. China’s head of delegation, meanwhile, a day earlier accused the US and other developed countries of failing to cut emissions fast enough and to provide the developing world with the promised $100bn a year in climate finance to support poor countries cut emissions and cope with the impacts of extreme weather. [The Guardian]

China’s Foreign Ministry hit back against Biden’s criticism of Xi’s summit absence, arguing that what was needed in fighting climate change “is concrete action rather than empty words,” adding that “China’s actions in response to climate change are real.” [France 24]

Biden promised sharp cutbacks in US carbon emissions by 50%-52% below 2005 levels by 2030,

adding that the US will seek to become a "net-zero emissions economy" by no later than 2050. [NPR]

China, the world's biggest emitter, delivered a plan for emissions reductions on the eve of the conference on October 31, under which Beijing would cause emissions to peak by 2030 and reach net zero by 2060. The targets, already announced more than a year ago, disappointed climate experts who fear that if the targets would not improve, it will make it difficult for the world to stay within 1.5C the threshold beyond which scientists warn some of the impacts of climate breakdown will become irreversible. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1].

Meanwhile, more than 100 countries signed an initiative, led by the US and the European Union, that commits them to reduce their methane emissions by 30% between 2020 and 2030. China, India, Australia and Russia are not among the signatories. [Climate Change News]

Methane is a greenhouse gas 80 times more potent than carbon dioxide in the short term.

China-US relations: Washington steps up operations in South China Sea, Chinese researchers say

(dql) According to findings of Beijing-based South China Sea Probing Initiative, the US has increased its military operations in the disputed South China Sea this year. Over 500 reconnaissance flight over the South China Sea were made this year. If operations over the Yellow and East China Seas are added, the total surpasses 2000, compared with less than 1,000 flights in 2020. [South China Morning Post]

The revelation of the findings comes shortly after ASEAN and China recently agreed to elevate their relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1].

US State Department wants to talk with China about nuclear pact

(dql) The US State Department announced on Thursday, November 4, that the US seeks to begin talks with China about its nuclear arms program and called on Beijing to engage in dialogue on nuclear arms control.

The announcement came on the heels of a report of the Pentagon which warns of Beijing's being capable of increasing its stockpile of deliverable nuclear warheads to 1,000 by 2030, which would be five-fold the amount the Chinese military was believed to possess last year. The State Department furthermore remarked that the report's finding indicated that China's has abandoned its nuclear doctrine of limited deterrence".

China rejected report, reassuring its commitment to keeping its nuclear force at the "minimal level required for national security". [South China Morning Post]

Beijing has so far consistently declined any calls to join either a bilateral dialogue with Washington or a trilateral pact with the US and Russia arguing that US would need to first reduce its own stockpile.

NATO chief's statement at Nordic Council angers China

(dql) Addressing the Nordic Council – the official body for formal inter-parliamentary Nordic cooperation among the Nordic countries – in Copenhagen on Wednesday, November 3, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, while underscoring that China was not considered an "adversary," nevertheless forcefully warned of China's rise as another challenge next to Russia, which continues its pattern of aggressive behaviour on several fronts." Citing Beijing's presence and power in the Arctic, Africa and in cyberspace as well as heavy investments in in new, long-range nuclear weapons, Stoltenberg described the country as a "growing superpower," that "does not share our values, [....] oppresses, monitors and controls its own people, [s]uppresses democracy and human rights, [a]nd persecutes ethnic and religious minorities." Furthermore, he accused China of 'openly threatening Taiwan, and hampering freedom of navigation, as [...] seen in the South China Sea," urging all NATO members to demonstrate solidarity in the face of challenges from Russia, China and terrorism. [NATO]

In response, Beijing condemned the statement and accused Stoltenberg of Cold war mentality and ideological prejudice. [South China Morning Post]

Echoing Stoltenberg, his predecessor and former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen in an interview called China's and Russia's increasingly tight strategic partnership called "a real concern," referring in particular to the further integration of the nuclear-armed militaries of the two nations. [Newsweek]

Sino-Russian joint UN Security Council resolution on lifting sanctions against North Korea

(dql/pm) China and Russia have joint hands in support of Iran, with a draft resolution circulated among the members of the UN Security Council calling on the agency to lift a host of sanctions against North Korea, citing the "the difficult situation of economy and livelihood of the DPRK in recent years," and "the necessity to respect the legitimate security concerns of the DPRK, and ensure the welfare, inherent dignity, and rights of people in the DPRK." [Reuters]

Reflecting growing alignment between Beijing and Moscow, Russia expressed support for China's concerns over Aukus, the recently trilateral security partnership between the US, the UK and Australia, at the meetings of the UN General Assembly's First Committee, one of six main committees dealing with disarmament and international security matters. [TASS] [Global Times]

In response to the creation of Aukus, China and Russia conducted two joint naval exercises, one from October 14 to 17 in the Sea of Japan and one from October 17 to 23, the first Sino-Russian patrol in waters in the West Pacific. [Global Times] [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

China's growing footprint in Central Asia: Resuming trade with Afghanistan, funding a base in Tajikistan

(dql) Signaling the start of the resumption of trade between China and Afghanistan after a lengthy disruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the escalating conflict between the Taliban and Afghan government forces, 45 tonnes of Afghan pine nuts arrived last week at Shanghai's international airport on Monday. The shipment comes at a time when Beijing is deepening its engagement with the Taliban government without formally recognizing it. [South China Morning Post 1]

Meanwhile, late last month Tajikistan's government announced that it has approved a US$8.5 million offer of China for the construction of a base close to the country's border with Afghanistan, adding that no

Chinese troops will be stationed there. In a separate development, the Tajik government has reportedly offered Beijing full control of a preexisting Chinese military base in the country and a waiver of any future rent in exchange for military aid from China. These moves are widely seen as attempts on Beijing's side to satisfy its security needs in Xinjiang, where the Chinese government has been carrying out campaigns to crackdown on terrorism and extremism for over a decade. [South China Morning Post 2] [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty]

China-New Zealand relations: Trade not to outweigh rights concerns, Prime Minister Ardern says

(dql) In an attempt to dismiss accusations of New Zealand being too lenient with China's human rights record, Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern made it clear that her country will not shy away from criticism of China's in this matter to safe its lucrative trade relationship with Beijing, citing "maturity" in relations between the two countries that allows for raising "issues that we're concerned about, be it human rights issues, be it labour issues, be it environmental issues." [Reuters]

Ardern made this statement ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) 2021 Leaders' Week which New Zealand, member of the Five Eyes security alliance along with the US, the UK, Canada, and Australia, is currently hosting online. The summit kicked off on Monday and runs until Friday.

China's treatment of Lithuania as warning for Europe

(dql/zh) Speaking at last week's Aspen Security Forum in Washington, Lithuania's Deputy Foreign Minister Arnoldas Pranckevičius underscored that China's treatment of his country was an attempt to 'kill a chicken to scare the monkey,' urging the European Union to be united vis-a-vis Beijing.

In August, China demanded the withdrawal of the Lithuanian ambassador in Beijing after Taiwan announced that its office in Vilnius would be called the Taiwanese Representative Office in Lithuania. Earlier this year, Lithuania dropped out of the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries, the China-led initiative to promote business

and investment ties between China, and now 16 Central and Eastern Europe countries. The diplomatic tensions have led to China suspending freight train services connecting Vilnius under China's Belt and Road Initiative and new licenses that Lithuanian food exporters had applied for, posing a threat to economic growth in Lithuania. [Reuters]

Lithuania President Gitanas Nauseda, meanwhile, has said that, during an informal conversation with US President Joe Biden at the COP 26, President Biden vowed to support the mutual establishment of representative offices in Taipei and Vilnius. In July, the Baltic country had announced the plan for Taiwan to open a de facto embassy with the name "Taiwan" instead of the common use "Taipei", which angered China to withdraw its ambassador to Lithuania. [Taiwan News]

In a related development, Republican Senator Jim Risch, member of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, as well as Democrat Senator Jeanne Shaheen, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation, have introduced a resolution to support Lithuania's efforts to boosting ties with Taiwan amid increased pressures from China. The resolution, which only serves as an expression of opinion and is not binding on the executive administration, commends Vilnius bold steps to engage with Taiwan and encourage other countries to support the Baltic state and confront malign Chinese influence. [Taipei Times]

Japanese Prime Minister Debuts at Climate Summit

(ec) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has made his international debut in-office at the UN climate summit in Glasgow on Tuesday, November 2, having been previously occupied with Japan's 49th election for the House of Representatives. Kishida was previously the Minister for Foreign Affairs under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. [The Japan Times] [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

At the summit, Kishida promised $10 billion US dollars to promote carbon neutrality in Asia over a five-year period, contributing to UN commitments for the mobilization of $100 billion US dollars every year for climate financing from developed countries. Kishida also reaffirmed Japan's determination in achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 and cutting greenhouse gas emissions by the end of 2030. The former is in keeping

with an election pledge made by the Liberal Democratic Party. [Kyodo News 1]

Kishida also had a brief first meeting with US President Joseph Biden at the UN climate summit, in which both informally agreed to further enhance co-operation between the two countries to ensure the freedom and openness of the Indo-Pacific superregion. Kishida engaged in similar talks with British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, all of whom share Japan's concerns over the People's Republic of China's continued moves in the superregion [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]. Kishida and Pham also agreed to promote further dialogue for Japanese defense exports to Vietnam. [Kyodo News 2] [See AiR No. 37, September/2021, 2]

At a press conference on Friday, November 5, Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihiko Isozaki stated that the government was looking to arrange a summit meeting between Kishida and Biden before the end of the year. [The Mainichi]

For additional perspective on Japanese fossil fuel imports and power, consider looking into this feature from the Diplomat, in which Thisanka Siripala highlights the contrast between Kishida's pledges with his commitment to extend the life of Japan's thermal stations with prototype technologies thought to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. [The Diplomat]

Japan: Trade Minister Requests US Lift Tariffs on Steel and Aluminium

(ec) In a digital meeting with United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai, Japanese trade minister Koichi Hagiuda requested the United States abolish the tariffs on Japanese steel and aluminium, as defined under Section 232 of the US Trade Expansion Act. His request is made in light of the United States' agreement to resume duty free steel and aluminium imports from the European Union as before the Trump Administration. There are concerns from the Japanese steel industry that their US exports will become uncompetitive. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Both Ms Tai and United States Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo are due to visit Japan on November 15, in the hope of reaffirming US–Japan ties in the face of Chinese economic power. The tariffs are expected to be a prominent topic during their stay. [Nippon Today]

Japan: German Frigate First European Military Vessel Makes Port Call in Twenty Years

(ec) On Friday, November 5, Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi inspected the German Navy frigate *Bayern*, which has been conducting joint exercises with Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force in the Pacific Ocean since Thursday, November 4. Kishi, the younger brother of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and a Constitutional Revisionist, also held talks with Inspector General of the Bundeswehr Eberhard Zorn. The frigate will also visit South Korea and sail through the South China Sea. [Japan Today]

The visit is representative of growing concerns from the European Union and its constituent states on the disruptive effects of US–China rivalry on the stability of the Indo-Pacific area. The German Air Force is looking to include Japan as a site for its Indo-Pacific deployment of aircraft next year, September 2022, whilst Inspector of the Navy Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schonbach has expressed a desire to dispatch vessels every two years in order to maintain peace in the superregion. France is also seeking to promote ties with Japan and Indonesia as part of President Emmanuel Macron's Indo-Pacific Strategy. The European Union as a whole is looking to obtain greater strategic autonomy as a result of the uncertainties of the Trump administration, the formation of AUKUS, and China's ongoing actions concerning the South China Sea and Taiwan. [Kyodo News] [Defence News 1] [Defence News 2]

For more information on European commitments in the Indo-Pacific, consider reading Germany's *Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific* and France's *Indo-Pacific Strategy*, wherein both countries set out their policy aims and methods. [Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific] [Indo-Pacific Strategy]

Japan Becomes First Foreign Operator of KC-46A Tanker

(ec) On Tuesday, November 2, Boeing completed the first of four deliveries of the KC46A Tanker for Japan Air Self-Defense Force, making the country the first operator of the aircraft outside of the United States. The new tankers will improve the Air Self-Defense Force's aerial refuelling capabilities. [Defense News]

The delivery has been made amidst growing concerns that Japan could be caught unprepared should regional tensions escalate. Though Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is widely considered pacifistic, his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has long sought to revise Japan's exclusively defensive orientation. The LDP's election manifesto included a target for spending at least 2% of Japan's GDP on the military marks a substantial shift away from the traditional 1% threshold. [Kyodo News] [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Japan reluctant to accept Korean War Peace

(ec) Takehiro Funakoshi, the head of Japanese Foreign Ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, has expressed the Japanese government's hesitation to accept South Korean proposals for a formal end to the Korean War as a method of appealing to North Korea to cease its nuclear program. Funakoshi cited North Korea's ongoing ballistic missile tests as evidence that the proposal is unlikely to succeed. Tokyo is also concerned that Korean conciliation could complicate Japan's position on the past abductions of citizens by North Korea. [The Mainichi]

In a speech to the UN in September, South Korean President Moon Jae In declared his intention to seek a formal end to the Korean War, naming China and United States as potential partners in peace dialogues, but not Japan. North Korea has stated that it will reject any South Korean proposal to formally end the Korean War whilst South Korea and the United States continue with military developments, which Pyeongyang considers to be hypocritical. [Kyodo News] [See AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]

South Korea to deepen investment cooperation with Visegrad countries

(dql) Returning from his last week's meeting in Budapest with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis, and Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger, President Moon Jae-in gave instruction to his aides to step up efforts to strengthen exchanges with the Visegrad Group states, arguing that their economies are growing dynamically compared with Western European nations that where in the "doldrums or slumps."

During the meeting, the five leaders discussed in particular a potential rail investment as the "largest common enterprise of the V4 countries." [Yonhap] [AP News]

Moon also attended the V4-Korea Business Forum during which he called for an advanced cooperation system in electric vehicle batteries, aimed at contributing to carbon neutrality as well as gaining ground in the global supply chain. [Korea Herald]

Following a separate meeting with Hungarian President Janos Ader, Moon announced that relations between the two countries will be elevated to a strategic partner status. He also announced an expansion of South Korean investments into the manufacturing of electric vehicles and batteries in Hungary. [ABC News]

Meanwhile, Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) and LOTN, a Slovak state-owned aeronautical maintenance company, concluded a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on industrial cooperation in the framework of an offer of a sale of FA-50 combat aircraft to the Slovak Air Force. [Aviaci Online]

South Korea-UK relations: Foreign ministers discuss ways to complete denuclearization of the peninsula

(dql) On the sidelines of the UN climate summit COP26South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong held talks with his British counterpart Elizabeth Truss on Monday, November 1, discussing ways to establish peace on the Korean Peninsula.

While Chung called for London's support toward the complete denuclearization of the peninsula and establishing peace in the region, Truss assured the support toward peace establishment efforts. Both Ministers also shared views on how to globally tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. [KBS]

Taiwan to seek backers at APEC for CPTPP bid

(zh) Taiwan is hoping to take advantage of this year's Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) leaders' meeting, which is slated for November 12, to seek support for its bid in joining the Comprehensive and

Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Despite being an APEC member, Taiwan's President has been prohibited from attending the leader's summit due to China's opposition. Instead, Morris Chang, who founded the world's largest contract chipmaker Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and helped build Taiwan's key strategic semiconductor industry, will serve as the island's envoy to the APEC forum in New Zealand. He was requested by President Tsai to seek backing for the country's CPTPP bid. [Taipei Times]

In September, both Taiwan and China had filed applications to join the trade pact, and Taiwan is worrying it may face obstructions from Beijing if China joins the bloc first [see AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]. Last month, the island had also tried to seek support from Australia [see AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3].

China to force Taiwan into unification negotiations by 2027, says Pentagon

(zh) China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) has set a goal of developing its military capacities, with an aim to force Taiwan into unification negotiations by 2027 through an integrated development of mechanization, informatization, and intelligentization of the PRC's armed forces," according to the Pentagon's latest report to Congress, titled "Military and Security Development Involving the People's Republic of China". [Department of Defense, USA] [Focus Taiwan]

Meanwhile, at a parliamentary meeting, Taiwan's National Security Bureau Director-General Chen Ming-tong told lawmakers that China had internally debated whether to attack Pratas Islands but will not do before 2024, when President Tsai Ing-wen's tenure ends. The Pratas Islands, located more than 400 km away from Southern Taiwan, are considered vulnerable to Chinese attacks in the eyes of some security experts. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, speaking at the Aspen Security Forum, an annual security and foreign policy conference involving leaders and key players in the defense community, the chairman of the US House Intelligence Committee Adam Schiff has urged Washington to be less ambiguous with respect to its commitment to come to Taiwan's defense in the event of China's attack on Taiwan. [Taiwan News 2]

Also at the Aspen Security Forum, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley reassured that the US army "absolutely could defend Taiwan from a potential

Chinese attack, predicting China would not invade the island in the next 24 months. He also added that Beijing is "clearly and unambiguously building the capability to provide those options [of attacking Taiwan] to the national leadership if they so choose at some point in the future.". [The Hill]

In response, China's state-backed tabloid Global Times has hit back against Milliey's remarks, saying it is just a brag of "the US ability, not determination". It warns that whether China will resort to force against Taiwan is not determined by Washington's pledges but by "whether Taiwan authorities cross the redline and close the possibility of peaceful reunification". [Global Times]

For a discussion on conditions enabling the US to shift to strategic clarity on Taiwan, see Simon Cutton in [The Strategist]. For a discussion of Washington's China and Taiwan strategies, see James Stavridis in [Time] calling on Washington to come up with a coherent whole-of-society approach toward dealing with Taiwan issue.

US lawmakers introduce bill to support Taiwan's defense

(zh) US legislators are continuing to push for support for Taiwan in developing its defense capability. Republican lawmakers have introduced legislation seeking to authorize US$2 billion each year for Taiwan through 2032 in Foreign Military Financing, covering US grants and loans that allow the island to purchase US-made weapons and defense equipment. The funding would be attached with conditions, including Taiwan committing to match US spending and whether two sides agree to conduct joint long-range planning for capacity development. [Reuters]

Furthermore, Senator Josh Hawley has proposed a legislation titled "Arm Taiwan Act of 2021" to strengthen Taiwan's defense against a potential Chinese invasion through training, equipment, and other means of support. Citing that the threat of a Chinese invasion is "expected to reach especially dangerous levels by the latter half of the 2020s", the bill calls on the US to authorize US$3 billion annually from 2023 through 2027 to provide assistance to Taiwan's government and calls also on US allies to "sell, lease, or otherwise provide appropriate asymmetric defense capabilities to Taiwan". [Focus Taiwan]

In addition, the Iowa state legislature has established the Taiwan Friendship Caucus, the fourth state in the US setting up a pro-Taiwan group after Illinois,

Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The Caucus is a bipartisan effort to enhance the state engagement with Taiwan. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan's Defense Minister confirms Taiwan-US joint military training

(zh) Taiwan's Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng has confirmed that a group of Marine Corps was sent to undergo one-month US-Taiwan joint training in Guam, saying it is part of a "long-standing" bilateral exchange program between Taiwan and the US. Chiu's remarks follow on the heels of President Tsai Ing-wen's confirmation of a secretive deployment of a US special force unit on the island aimed to increase Taiwan's defense capabilities [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]. [Focus Taiwan 1]

Meanwhile, according to a bi-annual report issued by the island's defense ministry, China has posed a "grave" military threat as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is capable of blockading Taiwan's key harbors and airports. The report described China's military tactics as "gray zone" warfare, citing 554 Chinese warplane "intrusions into the island's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) between September last year and the end of August. [Reuters]

Eyeing China, Taiwan has been boosting its military capability in preparation for a potential military conflict. The island's first F-16V combat squadron is to be commissioned later this month. At least 42 of F-16Vs are upgraded from former F-16A/Bs and equipped with more advanced avionics, including APG-83 Scalable Agile Beam Radar, a Helmet Mounted Cueing System, and other flight management and electronic warfare systems. [Focus Taiwan 2]

European Union legislators make its first-ever official visit to Taiwan

(zh) A delegation of the European Parliament (EP) last week made its first-ever visit to Taiwan, in a move aimed at signaling China that the European Union is reaching out to Taiwan. During the three-day visit, the delegation, consisting of members of EP's Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation (INGE), called for bolder actions to strengthen bilateral ties between the two sides, with Raphaël Glucksmann, French MEP and head of the

delegation, describing the flourishing of Taiwan's democracy as "formidable". Regarding the aim of the visit, he said that as Europe is facing "interference from authoritarian regimes", the delegation has come to learn the island's experience in dealing with disinformation from China. [Aljazeera][Focus Taiwan 1][Focus Taiwan 2][Reuters][Taipei Times]

In response to the historic visit, China has lashed out at the European Union (EU), calling on the bloc to immediately correct its "mistake" otherwise would face deterioration in Sino-EU ties. [Politico]

China blacklists three Taiwan high-level officials for supporting independence

(zh) China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) has announced to punish those "diehard" supporters of Taiwanese independence with criminal responsibility for life, with the island's Premier Su Tseng-chang, Legislative Yuan President Yu Shyi-kun, and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu being put on the blacklist on the ground of "vigorously inciting cross-strait confrontation and malicious attacks against the mainland". According to the statement by TAO, those on the blacklist will be prohibited from entering China, Hong Kong, and Macau. Nor are they allowed to cooperate with mainland organizations and individuals. [South China Morning Post]

In response, Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) said possible legal countermeasures against Chinese officials are being considered, blaming Beijing for jeopardizing cross-strait relations, and vowed that Taiwan as a democratic society would not tolerate coercion from any authoritarian regime. [Taipei Times]

At COP26 climate summit, India pledges carbon neutrality by 2070

(rs) At COP26, the United Nations climate summit currently held in Scotland, Indian Prime Minister Modi surprised domestic observers by announcing plans to cut emissions to net zero by 2070, just days after the country's Environment Ministry had rejected calls to announce a net zero carbon emissions target.

The Indian prime minister presented five commitments from his country. They include a promise for India to get half its energy from renewable sources by 2030, and by the same year reduce its total projected carbon

emissions by one billion tons. Prime Minister Modi also pledged to reach net-zero emissions by 2070, two decades beyond what scientists say is needed to avert catastrophic climate impacts. [The Hindu]

Modi defended his country, however, as having stuck to its climate pledges "in spirit and letter". He noted that India had 17 percent of the world's population but was responsible for only 5 percent of the global emissions. Furthermore, he underscored that in order to help with efforts for climate justice, rich developed nations should provide financial assistance of at least $1 trillion to help developing countries accelerate their struggle. [BBC]

The ambitious pledges at first glance disappointed activists and experts in Glasgow. While other leaders vowed to end deforestation and cut global methane gas emissions by the end of the decade, India did not sign on to either plan, because of its concerns over the impact on trade, on the country's vast farm sector, and the role of livestock in the rural economy. Agriculture accounts for over 15 percent of India's $2.7 trillion economy and employs almost half of the country's more than 1.3 billion people. [Reuters]

But it marks the first time New Delhi has put an end date on its contribution to climate change. Only one week prior to COP26, New Delhi had rejected calls to announce a net zero carbon emissions target, saying it was more important for the world to lay out credible pathways to reduce emissions.

Rapid population growth and an expanding economy have turned India into the world's third-largest energy consumer that relies heavily on coal, which makes up about 70 percent of New Delhi's total energy mix [see also AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2].

Prime Minister Modi's targets will require a massive investment in a new green electric for India, which the United Kingdom will partner with New Delhi to build. This was part of a plan announced by London and New Delhi on November 2 aimed at improving connections between the world's electric grids, called the "Green Grids Initiative – One Sun One World One Grid." [Deutsche Welle]

Amidst negotiations on counterterror use of airspace, Pakistan appoints new ambassador to United States

(tj) Pakistan has appointed Masood Khan as its new Ambassador to the United States, official sources have confirmed, as both sides are reportedly working out a deal for the use of Pakistan's airspace by Washington to launch counterterrorism military missions in neighboring Afghanistan.

Masood will replace Pakistan's current envoy to Washington D.C., Asad Majeed, who is likely to be appointed as the new Foreign Secretary.

Khan is a career diplomat who served the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in different capacities since 1980, holding diplomatic positions at the Pakistan missions in Beijing, The Hague, and Washington D.C. After his retirement, he became the AJK President and has been advancing Pakistan's case for the longstanding Kashmir dispute with India. He has vast experience in multilateral diplomacy and has been a frequent negotiator for Pakistan.

He is being tasked with the new assignment at a time when relations between Pakistan and the US are facing an uncertain future.

Although Pakistan has been seeking broad-based ties with the U.S. covering all aspects, the U.S. has so far given little indication if it is ready to enhance the scope of ties beyond security and Afghanistan.

For this purpose, Washington has been trying to work out an arrangement to enable the American military to conduct timely counterterrorism operations against the regional branch of the Islamic State group and militants linked to other terrorist groups in Afghanistan since US and NATO troops withdrew from the country in August.

Late last month, the Biden administration told US lawmakers that it was nearing a formalized agreement with Pakistan for use of its airspace to conduct military and intelligence operations in Afghanistan. In exchange, Islamabad has reportedly requested in exchange for assistance with its own counterterrorism efforts and help in managing the relationship with India.

The US military currently uses Pakistan's airspace to reach Afghanistan as part of ongoing intelligence-gathering efforts, but with no formal agreement in place, Washington runs the risk of Islamabad refusing entry to US military aircraft and drones en route to Afghanistan.

But the negotiations are ongoing, according to sources familiar with the discussion, and the terms of the

agreement, which has not been finalized, could still change.

Days after the media reports, Pakistan confirmed it has longstanding security and counterterrorism cooperation with the US but asserted that no formalization of an agreement on the use of its airspace for counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan had taken place.

India, France hold annual strategic dialogue; vow to expand defense, security partnership

(lm) During the latest iteration of their annual strategic dialogue, India and France have agreed to step up their bilateral defense and security partnership by improving intelligence and information sharing, conducting more joint military exercises, and pushing for new initiatives in the maritime, space, and cyber domains. [The Defense Post]

The meeting, held on November 6 in Paris, was co-chaired by India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Emmanuel Bonne, Foreign Policy Adviser to French President Emanuel Macron. During his visit to the French capital, the Indian top official also met with the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, and Florence Parly, France's Minister of Armed Forces. [The Indian Express]

The series of meetings came after Indian Prime Minister Modi and his French counterpart Macron in a phone conversation in September had agreed to "act jointly in an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific area". Prior to the phone conversation, both countries had agreed to launch a bilateral space security dialogue. [AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4]

Ajit Doval's engagement with the French government officials marked the first formal engagement between India and France since the diplomatic blow-up over US President Biden's announcement of the trilateral security partnership with the United Kingdom and Australia, known by the acronym AUKUS [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]. [The Hindu]

Nepal, Indian prime minister meet on sidelines of climate summit

(ns/sd) During the COP26 Climate Conference in Glasgow, the first meeting in four years between the Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took place. The country leaders discussed bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as the possibility of granting three new air routes over Indian airspace. [My Republica] [The Kathmandu Post]

Prime Minister Modi reacted "positively" to the formal request. The talks included the topic of the soon-to-be resumed supply of chemical fertilizers to Nepal which, based on the negotiations in June, should take the form of a 5-year contract in the near future.

The overall importance of the meeting lays in its potential for future "high-level visits", according to multiple sources from both parties. There is a tradition of Nepali prime ministers making their first overseas trip to India after assuming office – and Deuba is yet to visit New Delhi. [The Hindu]

While his administration has actively sought New Delhi's support since assuming office in July, ahead of his party's 14th general convention – which is set to be held next month – Deuba is seeking India's favor as he is fighting for another term as Nepali Congress President, according to observers. [The Diplomat]

Need for 'new cooperative architecture' for Indian Ocean Region, India's national security advisor says

(lm) Citing a set of maritime challenges including increased militarization and terrorist activities, India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla called for a "new cooperative architecture" for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) while addressing the Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) last week. [The Free Press Journal]

Organized by India's Naval War College, the GMC is the Indian Navy's outreach initiative providing a multinational platform for maritime security leaders and the academia. This year's three-day iteration – the third of its kind – was attended by India's Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar and Naval Chiefs and other representatives from Bangladesh, Comoros, Indonesia, Madagascar, Maldives, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. [The Tribune]

In his remarks, Shringla said non-traditional threats and new technologies have combined to form a whole

new spectrum of sub-conventional security threats and problems. He said that terrorists, which are supported and encouraged by the resources of governments, threaten offshore and coastal assets using oceans to move and infiltrate.

The Indian top diplomat also said the approach to maritime security articulated by Indian Prime Minister Modi, the vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) – New Delhi's doctrine of maritime cooperation in the IOR, and the central ideas underlying India's bilateral and plurilateral initiatives, would constitute a complementary set of principles.

Armies of India, China conduct multiple drills near disputed Himalayan border

(lm) Against the larger backdrop of the ongoing border dispute with China in the Himalayan heights, the India Army on November 3 concluded a three-day airborne insertion exercise in eastern Ladakh. Involving hundreds of pre-acclimated troops and heavy weapon systems, the drills were meant to convey yet another "clear message" to China to "desist from any misadventures along the northern borders", the *Times of India* reported, citing sources. [The Indian Express] [The Times of India]

The three-day exercise came a week after India test-fired its nuclear-capable Agni intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in what local media called a "stern signal" to China, after military talks between the two countries to resolve the 18-month military standoff along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) had broken down earlier last month. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

In response to the Indian Army's show of strength, the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) later revealed it had conducted multiple drills in its western plateau over the past week. [Global Times]

Deep in the heart of Zangnan in the southern part of Southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region (Tibet), a combined arms brigade affiliated with the PLA Xizang Military Command conducted an assault training in mountainous areas. Separately, an artillery regiment affiliated with the same PLA command conducted a comprehensive, cross-day-and-night exercise in a high-altitude region.

In another military drill, the PLA Xinjiang Military Command organized a joint fire strike confrontation drill. JH-7 fighter bombers affiliated with the PLA

Western Theater Command Air Force also joined the exercise, which trained joint aerial combat, electronic countermeasures, and land-based air defense.

China not to attend India's Afghanistan security dialogue

(dql) China announced on Tuesday, November 9, that is will not participate in security dialogue on Afghanistan convened by India, citing "scheduling reasons".

The announcement refers to the meeting of national security advisors that India will host this Wednesday and that will be attended by representatives from seven other countries including Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Pakistan will also not join the forum. [India Today]

Pakistan dispatches more humanitarian aid to Afghanistan

(tj) Pakistan on November 2 dispatched another 21 trucks, carrying 28 tons of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan as part of its efforts to avert humanitarian crisis in the war-torn country.

After concluding a one-day visit to Kabul late last month, Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi announced on October 22 that Islamabad was going to provide would provide more than $28m in immediate humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and ease travel and trade restrictions at its land borders. The first 16 truckloads of relief goods arrived in Afghanistan shortly thereafter.

The latest consignment was sent under the auspices of Pak-Afghan Cooperation Forum (PACF) and Kashmir Orphan Relief Trust (KORT) via the Kharlachi border crossing in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Kurram district. [The Express Tribune]

Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Taliban government is pressing for the release of billions of dollars of central bank reserves as the drought-stricken nation faces a cash crunch, mass starvation and a new migration crisis. Afghanistan parked billions of dollars in assets overseas with the US Federal Reserve and other central banks in Europe, but that money has been

frozen since the Taliban ousted the Western-backed government in August.

Addressing those concerns, Foreign Minister Qureshi back in October also said Pakistan had dropped duties on the import of Afghan fresh fruits and vegetables, and that a working group had been formed to examine where duties could be reduced or removed on other commodities.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Hasina commences five-day visit to France

(lm) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on November 9 arrived in the French capital Paris for a five-day state visit, which is expected to focus on increasing both economic and cultural relations between the two countries. During her visit, Sheikh Hasina will meet with French President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Jean Castex. [Foreign Brief]

The Bangladeshi prime minister, who attended the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow last week, will also meet with France's Defence Minister Florence Parly. A visit by the French minister 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. [United News of Bangladesh]

In the run-up to Hasina's trip to Paris, news outlets reported that France and Bangladesh would be working to sign a deal for setting a framework on defense cooperation. 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. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Bangladesh to acquire five naval ships from United Kingdom

(lm) Bangladesh will be purchasing five naval ships from the United Kingdom as part of its "Forces Goal 2030" military modernization program. Three of the vessels will be imported from the UK, while the remaining two will be built in Bangladesh's main seaport, Chattogram. [The Defense Post]

The decision was reached during a bilateral meeting last week between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on the sidelines of COP26, the United Nations climate summit currently held in Scotland.

According to Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, the South Asian nation wants to acquire additional sea assets to improve monitoring and protection of its maritime territory. But Momen did not disclose specific details about the type of ships his country would be purchasing. The British premier also proposed selling other defense equipment, including aircraft, according to the Bangladeshi top diplomat. [The Daily Star]

Launched in 2009 and revised in 2017, Forces Goal 2030 is a military modernization program aimed at improving the capabilities of the three services of the Bangladesh Armed Forces. To this end, it focuses on the reformation of the military organization, force expansion, and the acquisition of modern, high-powered military weapons and equipment. Since procurement started in 2009, the navy has acquired two submarines, eight frigates, six corvettes, eleven patrol vessels, and a significant number of other surface combatants.

Afghan interim Foreign Minister to visit Pakistan, with resetting bilateral ties high on agenda

(lm) A high-level Afghan delegation led by interim Foreign Minister Amir Khan Mutaqqi will visit Pakistan this week as part of efforts by both sides to reset their ties in the wake of the Taliban's takeover of Kabul earlier in August. [The Hindu]

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited the Afghan capital Kabul on in late October, following weeks of tension over transport links between the neighboring countries. Qureshi's delegation included Faiz Hameed, the then-head of the ISI intelligence service, who had also visited Kabul in the immediate aftermath of the Taliban victory in August [see AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1].

Pakistan has not recognized the Taliban government, but Taliban officials have reportedly been allowed to take control of the Afghan embassy in Islamabad as well as consulates in Peshawar, Karachi and Quetta. [Dawn]

Fertilizer row escalates as Chinese firm seeks $8 million in compensation from Sri Lanka

(lm) A Chinese company is seeking $8 million as compensation from a Sri Lankan government agency for losses and damages to its reputation, *Bloomberg News* reported, as weeks-long tensions over a fertilizer shipment continue to simmer and are increasingly testing bilateral relations between Colombo and Beijing. [Bloomberg]

Sri Lanka earlier this month denied a Chinese vessel carrying organic fertilizer that experts had found to be tainted with pathogens entry to Sri Lanka. Additionally, the Sri Lankan Commercial High Court banned the $4.9 million payment to the Chinese company, Qingdao Seawin Biotech Group, for the shipment. It was not clear if the contract's terms allowed for the buyer to stop payment.

While the Rajapaksa administration has since requested Quingdao Seawin to send a new consignment for testing, China's embassy in Colombo waded into the dispute earlier this month by announcing that the People's Bank of Sri Lanka was now backlisted over failure to make a payment for the shipment. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Chinese diplomats were scheduled to meet with Sri Lankan authorities on November 8, but the results of the discussions have not been made public. [The Hindu]

India delivers 100 tons of nano fertilizer to Sri Lanka

(rs) Two Indian Air Force planes last week delivered 100 tons of liquid fertilizers to Sri Lanka, the first consignment of 3.1 million liters of nitrogen liquid fertilizer set to help the island nation's Eastern province in the cultivation of maize and paddy. [Hindustan Times] [The Hindu]

In May, the Sri Lankan 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 from India.

Late last month, China blacklisted Sri Lanka's second-largest commercial bank after Colombo had previously refused a Chinese vessel carrying organic fertilizer that experts had found to be tainted with harmful bacteria entry to the island nation. 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. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

In line with its "Neighborhood First" and "First Responder" policies, New Delhi regularly reaches out to Colombo, reflecting its expanding sphere of influence in the region. Earlier on August, for example, India delivered 140 tons of medical oxygen to Sri Lanka following Colombo's request for international assistance amidst the rising COVID-19 cases [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5].

Nepal to sell surplus electricity in India's energy exchange market

(ns/sd) India has allowed its neighbor Nepal to participate in daily auctions at the Indian power exchange market to sell of its surplus electricity at a competitive rate. The move, announced on November 2, follows a decision in April that enabled India to sell surplus electricity to Nepal from the same market.

Since it became an energy-surplus country in August after launching a large hydropower project, Nepal has lobbied to sell its electricity to the Indian market. [The Hindu]

So far, Nepal has developed less than 1.2 GW of hydropower, which is a tiny fraction of the total economic potential. Even with the ongoing hydropower developments, about 88 percent of the economic potential of hydropower is available for further development, according to a report by the Asian Development Bank published last year.

Because it is lacking a foreign destination to trade its excess in electricity to, the Nepalese government

would also be interested in an arrangement where India would subscribe to electricity supply on regular basis. Other options discussed included Energy Banking between Nepal and India, which would supply energy into one country during its shortage, and export the equal amount back in case of a surplus. So far, this mechanism remains in the talks, short of execution. [The Kathmandu Post]

Bangladesh, which is facing growing energy demand and it is energy-deficient, in July announced it would import around 700 MW of hydropower from Nepal via transmission lines over neighboring India [see also AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]

Nepal Army Chief on four-day visit to India

(lm) Nepal's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Prabhu Ram Sharma on November 9 commenced a four-day visit to New Delhi, where he will meet with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi discuss the improvement of bilateral relations as well as joint training of security forces.

During his visit, General Sharma will also meet with his Indian counterpart General M.M. Naravane and other service chiefs, as well as National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.[India Today]

Furthermore, Sharma will receive the honorary rank of General in the Indian Army, in reciprocation of the honor given to General Naravane during his visit to Nepal in November last year [see AiR No. 44, November/2020, 1]. [The Himalayan Times]

Nepal's President and ceremonial head of state Bidhya Devi Bhandari in September had approved the Cabinet's recommendation to appoint Sharma as COAS see [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. His trip is considered part of Nepali Prime Minister Sher Bahad Deuba's efforts to strengthen ties with New Delhi. [Foreign Brief]

China provides 300,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses to Nepal, revives railway project

(lm) China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) on November 8 gifted health materials, including 300,000 COVID-19 vaccines to the Nepali Army. The vaccines

arrived only days after Beijing supplied another 1.6 million doses of its Sinopharm to Nepal under grant assistance.

In related developments equally aimed at wooing Nepal, China also revived a rail project supposed to be linking the remote Tibetan capital of Lhasa with Nepals capital, Kathmandu. The $300 million infrastructure project, however, has not gained much pace since it was first planned in 2008. Completion is now intended for 2025. [The Times of India]

India requests Pakistan to let Srinagar-Sharjah flight use its airspace

(rs) India has asked Pakistan to grant overflight clearance for a recently launched Srinagar-Sharjah flight in the interest of people who have booked tickets for the route.

Direct flights between Srinagar, the main city in Indian-administered Kashmir, and Sharjah, the third-most populous city in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), were resumed from October 23, after the service was inaugurated by India's Union Home Minister Amit Shah during his visit to Kashmir last month [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]. [The Hindu]

Pakistani authorities had granted overflight clearance to flights to operate the Srinagar-Sharjah sector on four days in October but had subsequently put the clearance for the same flight on hold since October 31. [Hindustan Times]

It is the first air connection between the Kashmir Valley and the UAE since 2009, when an Air India Express service between Srinagar and Dubai was shut within months due to poor demand. That flight was also subject to restrictions from Pakistan on using its airspace. [The Indian Express]

Indonesia: Jokowi, Biden discuss strategic partnership, Myanmar concerns on sidelines of COP26

(ms) President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo and US President Joe Biden met on the sidelines of the United Nations Climate Summit (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, on October 1 to discuss their strategic partnership and concerns about the post-coup crisis in Myanmar. The two agreed to enhance their nation's strategic

partnership, in order to cooperate economically, address the climate crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, and uphold freedom of the seas. Jokowi also invited the US to invest in environmentally sustainable sectors in Indonesia. Regarding Myanmar, they called on the junta to immediate cease violence, release all political prisoners, and swiftly reinstate democracy. [Benar News] [Jakarta Globe]

The agreement to enhance ties comes amid a simmering US-China rivalry for economic influence in Southeast Asia. The Biden administration has made a concerted effort to engage more extensively with nations in the region, considering their relationship with Indonesia — as the largest economy in ASEAN — particularly vital to counter the growing influence of Beijing. Indonesia is currently China's largest trading partner, with Chinese investments having doubled to almost $4.8 billion in 2020 from $2.4 billion in 2017. The US has also stepped up its freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific, especially to counter China's vast maritime presence in the South China Sea, over which China stakes massive territorial claims. Indonesia, meanwhile, has made repeated calls to maintain peace and stability in the disputed waters, in respect to international law. [Benar News] [The Jakarta Post, $]

Indonesia has also recently strengthened ties with another foreign power, France, following tensions around the so-called AUKUS defense pact between the US, UK, and Australia, in which France lost a major contract to sell submarines to Australia. Indonesia has raised public concerns over the pact, believing it could lead to a regional arms race and draw other powers into the South China Sea dispute. [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Indonesia: UAE announces $32.7 billion investment in Indonesia

(ms) The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced its commitment to invest $32.7 billion (RP460 trillion) in Indonesia, following President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's two-day visit to the country on 3-4 November. During his visit, Jokowi met with the Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, and the ruler of the Emirate of Dubai, Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, as well as a number of business leaders, to bolster partnerships in trade and investment. UAE businesses have agreed to invest through the Indonesia Investment Authority (INA) in several sectors, such as health, new and

renewable energy, port infrastructure, and food. [Antar News] [Jakarta Globe]

The Indonesian government launched the INA earlier this year in February to strengthen the country's economy by diversifying into new asset classes. It seeks to attract co-investors, which 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. Before this announcement, in March, the UAE had already committed to invest $10 billion in the fund. More recently, the Dubai-based logistics company DP World signed a $7.5 billion deal with the fund to form a long-term consortium to invest in seaports in Indonesia. [Reuters] [See also AiR No. 44, November 2021/1)

Political, economic, and cultural ties between the two nations are strong. Diplomatic relations began in 1976. The Indonesian embassy then opened in Abu Dhabi in 1978, while the UAE embassy opened in Jakarta in 1991. Last year, UAE's non-oil trade with Indonesia was valued at $2 billion and has totaled over $11 billion in the last five years. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia at odds with interpretation of COP26 global deforestation pledge

(ms) Indonesian ministers have expressed concern over the interpretation of a global plan to end deforestation by 2030 signed by 133 nations, including Indonesia, at COP26. The environment minister Siti Nurbaya Baker has labelled the pledge unfair for Indonesia, which is home to the world's third largest rainforest, and in conflict with its development plans. Instead, she claimed it more appropriate that Indonesia follow its own goals for the forestry sector to absorb more greenhouse gases than it releases by 2030 by minimizing deforestation and rehabilitating forests. The country's vice foreign minister Mahendra Siregar, meanwhile, has denied that Indonesia promised to halt deforestation completely, interpreting the pledge to mean countries will ensure no net loss of forested land by 2030. The UK has in turn announced a £350 million (US$470 million) climate investment to support Indonesia's goal of reaching net carbon sink in the forestry and land use sector by 2030. [Al Jazeera] [Jakarta Globe] [The Guardian]

The deforestation pledge, signed on Monday November 1, is among dozens of side deals countries have agreed to at COP26. Across Southeast Asia,

Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand did not sign the pledge despite the region being home to 15 percent of the world's tropical forests and a major hotspot for deforestation. The goal will now depend largely on the actions of Indonesia, Brazil, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with 85 percent of the world's forests located in these three countries. [Benar News]

Indonesia is highly dependent upon deforestation for its development. Projects approved by the Indonesian government will likely see 145.9m acres of forest cut down by 2040 to build new roads, for the cultivation of crops, to expand its nickel and electric vehicle industries, and to harvest palm oil. The country is currently the largest exporter of palm oil in the world. A three-year moratorium of new palm oil plantations did lead 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. Between 2001 and 2020, Indonesia's 93.8 million hectares area of primary forest decreased by about 10 percent. Nevertheless, Indonesia is targeting to halve its deforestation rate over the next three decades and reforest 26.2m acres of land by 2050. [Al Jazeera] [Benar News] [The Guardian]

Other efforts are also being made to lower Indonesia's emissions. Ahead of the COP26 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] It is also making move towards using more renewable energy. On-grid renewable energy so far accounts for only a small fraction of overall electricity generation, but the country has an official policy to source 23 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2025. As part of this, the construction of the Cirata solar farm in West Java, expected to be complete in 2022, will be the largest solar power plant in Southeast Asia. [Antara News] [The Diplomat]

Indonesia joins other developing countries in coal transition program

(ms) Indonesia will join India, the Philippines, and South Africa in a pilot program to receive around US$2.5 billion from the Climate Investment Funds to accelerate their transition from coal power to clean energy. The Accelerating Coal Transition program, supported by contributions from the US, UK, Germany,

and Denmark, is the first to target emerging economies with financial assistance to shift away from the use of coal. Working with six multilateral development banks, it will invest in programs designed to enhance the countries' capacities to manage the energy transition, repurpose or decommission coal assets, and create economic opportunities for coal-dependent communities. [Reuters]

Indonesia, meanwhile, signed up to the COP26 Coal to Clean Power Transition statement on November 4. However, it excluded a clause to end the approval and construction of unabated coal-fired power generation projects. Still, officials have said Indonesia will consider phasing out coal earlier, by the 2040s, if it can secure additional international financial and technical assistance. [The Jakarta Post, $]

Indonesia is currently highly reliant on fossil fuels, with coal being its biggest export product. This reliance on fossil fuels is a common trend across the Asia-Pacific region, more so than any other. About 76 percent of global coal reserves are in the region, with 60 percent in South and Southeast Asia, where there is a high dependency on income from coal exports. China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and India have historically relied on coal and continue to be large coal importers with strong financial support for coal expansion in the region. Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Vietnam reap the most benefits financially from this support. [Climate Analytics]

The Philippines: Government to purchase more assets for Philippine Coast Guard

(lt) President Rodrigo Duterte has ordered the Department of Transportation to purchase more air assets for the Philippine Coast Guard to increase the capability of the country's maritime security and search and rescue operations. The President has stressed the importance of the nation's maritime security, particularly in the West Philippine Sea amid the ongoing tensions in the South China Sea. [Manila Times]

Vietnam, US, Iran disputes over Vietnamese-flagged oil tanker sized by Iran

(bs) Vietnam started diplomatic talks with Iranian authorities on a Vietnamese-flagged seized oil tanker

and the arrested crew members.

On October 24, the vessel was seized and its crew arrested by Iran. After a first request for humane and fair treatment to the Vietnamese citizens on the ship, the captain announced that all 26 crew members are all safe and in good health.

Iranian state TV depicted the incident as an act of American aggression against Iran in the Gulf of Oman, claiming the US Navy attempted to detain a tanker carrying Iranian oil. The US denied any involvement in the seizure stating that "the American naval forces were just monitoring the situation."

The tanker, sailing in the Gulf of Oman, was long suspected to be smuggling Iranian unrefined petroleum to Asia by United Against a Nuclear Iran, a New York-based advocacy group. In October already, the NGO showed satellite data as prove of ship-to-ship transfer of oil, in order to conceal the Iranian origin and circumvent sanctions. However, the US asserted that the action "constituted a blatant violation of international law that undermines freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce." [VN Express] [Reuters]

Constructions on Vietnam-controlled island in the South China Sea

(bs) Satellite images show the presence of new constructions and land-filling areas on a Vietnamese-administered island in the South China Sea.

Unofficial sources confirmed that the country is likely to be building a ship dock, while experts affirmed that Vietnam has been merely acting in protection of erosion and landslides without any expansion goal.

The island, Namyit, is contended between Vietnam, China, the Philippines, and Taiwan. Although Vietnam has been administrating the area since 1975, it has no right to modify its borders nor its natural structure. The island is the largest and one of the most developed among those controlled by Vietnam in the South China Sea. [Radio Free Asia]

Pearson Reef marks a similar case of alleged expansion of a Vietnamese-administered island. Following the satellite images showing an expansion of the island, Vietnam admitted its land amplification activities in several areas in the South China Sea. [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

Vietnam, however, claims China has violated the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982, and the Declaration on Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) by occupying the area surrounded by the Union Banks atoll in the South China Sea. Vietnam demanded immediate removal of the over 150 Chinese vessels currently present in the waters of the atoll.

The vessels were seen first in March this year and, after a temporary withdrawal, in August reappeared on the radar regularly increasing in number over the time. [VNExpress] [Hanoi Times]

Vietnamese agricultural exports endure delays and restrictions at Chinese borders

(bs) China imposed strict COVID-19 control over agricultural products imported from Vietnam, causing delays.

While only 30 percent of Thai products are inspected for COVID-19 at the Chinese borders, 100 percent of products from Vietnam undergo a Covid checkup, causing long delays in delivering perishable goods.

China responded to the appeal from Vietnam for an urgent need to accelerate the process by drafting a new protocol establishing that only 30 percent of each lot will undergo the inspections.

The agricultural trade market between China and Vietnam has seen extensive growth from 2015 to 2020 making China one of Vietnam's major commercial partners covering 19.3 percent of the country's agricultural exports. [VNExpress]

Vietnam, France to develop stronger cooperation

(bs) On the occasion of Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's visit to France on November 3, France and Vietnam agreed to strengthening ties between the two countries in every field, including business, trade, education, health, defense and security, and technology.

The prime ministers, on November 3, agreed on holding the 12th Vietnam-France decentralized cooperation conference in Hanoi next year. The event would mark an occasion to develop advanced plans in

strategic partnership to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Vietnam-France diplomatic relations in 2023.

Furthermore, the diplomats promoted the implementation of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA) and urged the ratification of the EU-Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement (EVIPA). They also agreed to conduct the second Vietnam-France defense strategic and cooperation dialogue. [Nhân Dân]

Lao PDR, Norway 30 years of diplomatic relations

(bs) Norway and Laos met on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the beginning of their diplomatic relations to discuss further cooperation between the two countries. Norway has supported Laos in several sectors, including hydropower, water supply, education, Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) clearance, and environment.

Earlier this year, Laos received part of the $14.5 million USD fund that Norway donated to the United Nations Covid-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund. [Vientiane Times]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

9-10 November 2021, Observer Research Foundation, India

Strategic High Tide in the Indo-Pacific: Economics, Ecology and Security

This two-day online conference will discuss key issues in economics, ecology and security on the Indo-Pacific.

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

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

Will Climate Change Derail Africa's Economic Recovery?

Despite being the lowest contributor to global emissions, sub-Saharan Africa will be the region hit hardest by climate change. Against this backdrop, this webinar will discuss the impact of climate change on Africa's economic outlook, and explore how the crisis can be an opportunity for economic transformation and job creation.

For more details of the event, see [CGDEV].

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

In Search of the Next Political Order for Malaysia

Malaysia’s political context has been in flux for some time. This webinar will revisit the sets of political, economic, and social ideas that have sustained previous eras, which I term ‘political orders’, and explore what is to come.

Further information about the event is provided at [ISEAS].

10 November 2021 @ 3:00-4:15 p.m. (GMT), Royal United Services Institute, UK

Ukraine Defence Cooperation with the UK and US

This webinar will offer insights into the state of security cooperation between the UK and Ukraine and between the US and Ukraine, addressing also London and Washington’s security assistance to Ukraine.

For more information, visit [RUSI].

10 November 2021 @ 11:00 a.m. (GMT+1), Egmont Institute, Belgium

Beyond Brexit: What Outlook for EU-UK Relations?

At this online panel, experts will address crucial issues and questions of EU-UK relations, including: Is the endgame of Brexit now already coming into view? What can be learned fromvthe transition period following the UK's departure from the EU? And what can we expect from the future relationship, with a new post-Merkel German coalition government coming into office and France taking over the Council Presidency?

If you interested in the answers to these questions, register at [Egmont Institute].

10 November 2021, Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada

Digital Economy Report 2021

This online event will present and discuss the main findings of the Digital Economy Report 2021 of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

Learn more about the event at [CIOGI].

10 November 2021 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT), International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

Conflict in Syria: protracted stalemate, regional security and catastrophic impact

This online seminar will discuss the dynamics of the conflict in Syria, including the current state of the conflict, the foundations of the country's political economy, the lasting humanitarian impact and the regional security concerns.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [IISS].

11 November 2021 @ 8:30-9:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Next Steps in U.S.-Japan Economic Relations

This online seminar will discuss the U.S.-Japan trade relationship in a bilateral and multilateral context, including economic competition and pressure from China.

Find more about the webinar at [CSIS].

11 November 2021 @ 5.30 p.m. (GMT-5), Krasno Global Affairs & Business Council, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, USA

Energy Security Today: Nord Stream II, Turkstream, and Hybrid Warfare

Energy Security, climate change, pipeline diplomacy and hybrid warfare are among some of the most pressing issues. This webinar will address crucial questions related to these issues.

More information is available at [Krasno].

11 November 2021 @ 3:00-4:30 p.m. (GMT+1) Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), Sweden

The protracted conflicts in Eastern Europe

This online panel will analyze so-called protracted conflicts currently ongoing in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan, focusing on the questions: What are these conflicts really about? Who are the conflict parties? What role does Russia play? What are potentials and challenges of conflict resolution?

Find more at [UI].

11 November 2021 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Barcelona Centre for International Affairs, Spain

The future of the digital global order: Algorithmic governance and artificial intelligence

Against the rapid technological transformation of the world, the webinar will explore crucial issues and questions of the governance of digitalization and AI,

including: If the digitalization process leads to the delegation of certain decisions to AI, can such decisions be trusted? Can AI be governed so as to correct the biases algorithms generate? How can neutrality be assured? Can global agreements be reached to achieve ethical AI development? What role are great powers playing in the global governance of artificial intelligence?

Visit [CIDOB] to learn more about the event.

11 November 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. (GMT+11), Lowy Institute, Australia

2021 Lowy Lecture — Jake Sullivan, US National Security Adviser

This year's Lowy Lecture will be held by US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan who will offer insight into foreign and security policies of the Biden administration in times of pandemics, growing climate risk and competition with China and Russia.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [Lowy].

11 November 2021 @ 3:30-5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), East Asia Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore

The Productivity Consequences of Pollution-Induced Migration in China

This webinar will present latest research findings of migration response to pollution in Chinese cities, and its impacts on productivity and welfare.

More information is available at [EAI].

12 November 2021 @ 10:30-11:00 a.m. (GMT), Overseas Development Institute, UK

Managing climate-related risks in India's financial sector: lessons from other countries

At this online event, senior leaders from both domestic and international central banks will offer insights into opportunities for India to strengthen climate-related

risk management and expand green investment and lending.

More information is available at [ODI].

12 November 2021 @ 9:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), United States Institute of Peace, USA

Beyond AUKUS and the Quad: What's Next for the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

At this online event features a conversation with National Security Council Coordinator for the Indo-Pacific Kurt Campbell on U.S. leadership and cooperation in defense, public health, education, infrastructure, investment, high technology and more amid an intensifying geopolitical competition with China.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [USIP].

15 November 2021 @ 5:15-6:30 p.m. (GMT+8), Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore

Securing Peace in the Indo-Pacific in an Age of Geopolitical Shifts

Against the backdrop of an intensifying strategic Sino-US rivalry and the related shifts in the geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific, this webinar will explore the question how to secure peace in this region.

For more details, see [LKYSPP].

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

ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum 2021: The Road Ahead after the Biden-Moon Summit

At this 6th annual ROK-U.S. Strategic Forum, officials, policymakers and experts will discuss critical issues and question of US-South Korea relations, including what Sino-US competition means for the alliance, whether there is a way forward for denuclearization and peace on the Korean Peninsula, and the future of trilateralism and the alliance in the Indo-Pacific region.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [CSIS].

15 November 2021 @ 1:00-2:00 a.m. (GMT),
International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

The global conflict landscape, current and emerging hotspots and areas of fragility

This webinar will address developments and emerging political risks in three regions: the Balkans, Sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan. It will particularly focus on the question of possible future migration crises impacting Europe.

To find more about the event, click on [IISS].

15 November 2021 @ 2:00-3:30 p.m. (GMT+1),
Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Ways out of the energy crisis?

This webinar will explore the cross-pressure between the geopolitics of the fossil era that put oil and gas producing countries at the top of the regional hierarchy and the promise of the new energy technologies that might soon render the old regional power dynamic obsolete.

Follow [DIIS] to learn more about the event.

15 November 2021 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+1),
Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

EaP: Regional geopolitical challenges and the way forward

Ahead of the next European Eastern Partnership summit on December 15th in Brussels, this webinar will discuss the political dynamics in the EU's eastern neighborhood which over the past year saw protests after contested presidential elections in Belarus, contested parliamentary elections in Georgia, a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia, power transition in Moldova, massive military mobilization of Russian troops on Ukraine's border as well as limitations of freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. The event will also explore related regional security challenges.

For more information, see [IAI].

15-16 November 2021, Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada

Project for Peaceful Competition: Global Cooperation on Digital Governance and the Geoeconomics of New Technologies in a Multi-polar World

This two-day online conference will discuss major issues of how to govern a digital, data-driven economy and society, with a focus laid on how international cooperation is affecting national policies.

Visit [CIGI] for more information.

16 November 2021 @ 3:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Crisis Group, Belgium

Global Warning: How Climate Change Drives Risks of Conflict

This webinar will offer insights into the complex relationship between climate change and deadly conflict and explore particularly how policymakers can mitigate conflict risks.

Visit [Crisis Group] to find more details of the event.

16 November 2021 @ 6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Italian Institute for International Political Studies and Bocconi University, Italy

Europe and Africa: Searching for Common Ground and a New Partnership

This webinar will focus on the latest developments in the relations between the European Union and Africa and explore their future prospects.

For further event details, see [ISPI].

16 November 2021 @ 11:00-11:45 a.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

A Conversation with British Historian Andrew Roberts

At this online conversation historian and professor Andrew Roberts will share his assessment of the present state of the US/UK Special Relationship, the outlook for American leadership on the world stage, the future of the British Monarchy, and the prospects for Great Britain in the Brexit era.

For more event details, visit [The Heritage Foundation].

16 November 2021 @ 8:00-10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

Gender Mainstreaming in South Asia: Country Perspectives

At this online panel discussion, regional analysts from India, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Sri Lanka will discuss the benefits and challenges of gender mainstreaming and elevating underrepresented voices in their respective countries in the fields of security, politics, and economics.

Further information is accessible via [Stimson Center].

16 November 2021 @ 9:00-10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), United States Institute of Peace, USA

Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE): Global Trends and Dynamics

This webinar will discuss manifestations of racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE) movements and ideologies in Australia and India. It will put a particular focus on similarities and differences between the two countries, transnational links, narratives, and overall implications for efforts to address threats posed by their activities.

Visit [USIP] to find more event details.

Recent Book Releases

Rajshree Chandra, ***Competing Nationalisms: The Sacred and Political Life of Jagat Narain Lal***, Penguin Viking, 256 pages, published on October 18, 2021. To learn more about the book, join the online discussion on the book on November 12, 2021, hosted by [CPR India].

Cengiz Çandar, ***Turkey's Neo-Ottomanist Moment: A Eurasianist Odyssey***, Transnational Press London, 198 pages, published on August 25, 2021, discussed in [Ahval]. See also the online book discussion on November 10, 2021, hosted by [Eliamep].

Zoltan Barany, ***Armies of Arabia: Military Politics and Effectiveness in the Gulf***, Oxford University Press, 368 pages, published on October 1, 2021. If you are interested in knowing more about the book, join the online book talk on November 12, 2021, organized by [CSIS].

Ryan Shaffer, ***African Intelligence Services: Early Postcolonial and Contemporary Challenges***, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 302 pages, published on September 27, 2021, reviewed in [LSE].

Andrew Cockburn, ***The Spoils of War: Power, Profit and the American War Machine***, Verso, 288 pages, published on September 21, 2021. A review in available at [Open Democracy].

Max Chafkin, ***The Contrarian: Peter Thiel and Silicon Valley's Pursuit of Power***, Penguin Press, 400 pages, published on September 21, 2021, reviewed in [The New Statesman].

Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, ***The Daughters of Kobani: A Story of Rebellion, Courage, and Justice***, Penguin Press, 288 pages, published on February 16, 2021, with a review in [Wavell Room].

Kati Marton, ***The Chancellor: The Remarkable Odyssey of Angela Merkel***, Simon & Schuster, 329 pages, published on October 26, 2021, reviewed in [The New York Times].

Calls for Papers

The **Department of Social Science at Hang Seng University of Hong Kong** invites paper proposals for its ***international online conference on "Populism in Asia: The Same or Different Story?"*** to be held on February 25-26, 2022. Closing date for submissions is January 31, 2022. For more information, visit [HSU].

Texas Tech University (TTU) will host its ***Annual Conference 2022 on "Anti-Racism"*** from April 22-23, 2022 and welcomes paper proposals for this event. Deadline for submission is December 31, 2021. In you are interested, learn more about the call for paper at [TTU].

Jobs and Positions

United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is hiring a ***Programme Analyst*** (Governance and Women's Political Participation) to be based in Harare, Zimbabwe. Closing date for applications is November 16, 2021. For further details, see [UNDP].

The **Asian Development Bank (ABD)** is hiring a ***Competition Policy Expert***. Deadline for applications is November 22, 2021. For more details see [ADB].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is recruiting a ***Protection Coordination Specialist Switzerland*** to be based in Geneva. Applications will be accepted until November 29, 2021. Find more information about the vacancy at [NRC].

The **Danish Refugee Council** is offering the position of ***Project Manager*** to be based in Adjumani Uganda. Closing date for applications is November 29, 2011. For more details, visit [DRC].

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