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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the *Asia in Review´*s first December issue which comes with another issue of the Europe in Review's *Europe Monthly* to inform you about what is going on in Asia and Europe these days.

Wishing you an informative read, I would like to take the opportunity to also extend special greetings to everyone celebrating the National Day or Independence Day of Barbados, the Central African Republic, Scotland, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

Your feedback and comments are highly welcome and will be forwarded to the team.

We hope you enjoy reading and stay happy.

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: Pro-democracy activist youngest person to be sentenced under Hong Kong's national security law

(tp) Former convenor of pro-independence group Studentlocalism, Tony Chung, 20, has been sentenced to 43 months imprisonment on charges of secession and money laundering.

Chung is the youngest political figure of three to be sentenced under the Beijing-imposed national security law, which was implemented on June 30, 2020, amid widespread independence protests in Hong Kong (HK).

The security law criminalises terrorism, subversion, collusion, and secession with foreign forces, including disturbances to transport and infrastructure. Significantly, the law reflects elements of China's socialist system introduced in HK's common law system and is controversial as security forces from China are openly able to operate in HK for the first time.

Chung pleaded guilty in court, stating there was "no shame in my heart". [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Tech giant Tencent Apps suspended from launching or updating new apps

(tp) The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) in China has implemented an order against Tencent apps following allegations that its apps violate consumer interests. The order has suspended Tencent from updating existing apps or launching new apps while the company undergoes further investigation.

The $500 billion company runs over 70 apps including social media giant WeChat (1.2 billion users) and the online game Honor of Kings (over 100 million daily players).

This ban comes amid the Ministry's strengthening of legislative efforts to regulate data and prevent personal information abuse and algorithm abuse in the tech sector. China enacted the Cybersecurity Law in 2017, and the Data Security law in September this year, and the Personal Information Protection Law in November this year. [AiR no. 34, August/2021, 4]

The MIIT has also implemented orders against other apps for over-collecting user data, including dating app Tantan and social media platform Xiaohongshu.

It is currently unknown how long this ban will take place for. [South China Morning Post]

China: Global supply chains and shipping industries impacted by China's zero-Covid policies

(tp) The Chinese Government has imposed a seven-week mandatory quarantine for returning Chinese seafarers as part of its increasing zero-Covid policy posture. This is in addition to prohibitions on crew changes for foreign crew, causing ship managers and owners worldwide to divert shipments. Vessels with changed crew will now have to wait two weeks before being allowed to port in China.

As the world's largest exporter, China's zero-Covid regulations further exacerbate the global supply chain crisis by delaying shipments and increasing travel costs by as much as six-fold for 40-foot containers. This has challenged even the largest operators, including Cargill and Anglo-Eastern.

Subsequently, the burden of these restrictions has been passed to onboard workers, many of whom, according to Anglo-Eastern, are overdue for relief (800 workers) and have not been home in almost a year (more than 100).

China is now the last country to remove its zero-Covid policy posture, rather increasing its restrictive measures [South China Morning Post]

China: Government calls to activate the 'silver economy' to address ageing population

(tp) China's State Council released new guidelines on Thursday, November 25, that seek to address population ageing by "actively cultivating the silver economy" and improving industries and services that accommodate the elderly. The State Council's new guidelines emphasise improvements in infrastructure, elderly education, elderly finance, health care, internet, and other services to meet the demands of the growing silver-haired population.

Beijing-based consulting firm, Intelligence Research Group, valued the silver economy in China at 5.4 trillion yuan in 2020, an increase of 25.6 percent from 2019. This number is estimated to rise to 5.9 trillion by the end of 2021, making it the largest market in the world for the elderly.

Despite more than one in five people aged above 60 in China, the existing industries and infrastructure that cater to the elderly are deemed as unbalanced and inadequate, according to the National Health Commission's Department of Ageing and Health. [South China Morning Post] [The State Council of The People's Republic of China]

China: Government targets coal, petroleum, and waste sectors to reduce methane emissions

According to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment's deputy director for climate change, Lu Xinming, the Government will set reduction measures on methane-emitting sectors such as mining, sewage, petroleum, coal, solid waste, and natural gas, in an effort to combat methane gas emissions.

This comes after China's joint statement with the United States at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow that commits both nations to taking cooperative action on climate change, including reductions in methane gas emissions. This also takes place after the recent announcement of China's 14th five-year economic and social development plan, which outlines goals for the reduction of greenhouse gases like methane by 2025.

Measures will include an intensification in data collection on methane emissions, the development of technologies to recycle the gas for utilisation, and the strengthening of international exchanges and cooperation of the management of methane.

"Formulating the methane action plan is an important element in controlling non-carbon dioxide emissions... and is important work in China's national strategy to actively respond to climate change," said Lu. [South China Morning Post]

Japan to restore ban on foreign nationals over Omicron variant

(ec) Speaking to reporters on Monday, November 29, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that the Japanese government will restore its blanket ban on foreign nationals from Tuesday, November 30, as a precaution against the Omicron variant of COVID19. Kishida revealed that an arrival from Namibia has tested positive to COVID19, though which variant

remains unknown at this time. The Health Ministry followed this by declaring the man to have arrived at Narita airport on Sunday. [The Mainichi]

Japan eased entry conditions on November 8, allowing students, interns, and businesspeople into the country under their host's vigilance, as part of efforts the government's efforts to restart economic activities that were restricted by the pandemic. [Japan Today]
[See AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Japan: Family murder case raises debate about domestic violence measures

(la) Experts in Japan are urging the government to strengthen measures against domestic violence perpetrators. The call comes after a family murder in Miyazaki prefecture in late October, with the police investigating under the suspicion that the 45-year-old husband committed suicide after killing his in-laws.

Among the most pressing issues, experts point to the need for a nationally unified support scheme that ensures that victims can receive help regardless of where they are as standards for offering protective temporary evacuations in special facilities to those fleeing domestic abuse vary greatly per prefecture, which effectively means in some cases victims are excluded from receiving support. Experts also stress the need to amend the criminal system to hold perpetrators accountable, as they currently tend to stay without punishment as the victims flee.

Domestic violence cases have been rising since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, with consultations in Japan reaching a record high of around 190,000 cases in 2020, prompting a petition submitted to the government by All Japan Women's Shelter Network, a group of private shelters, in March 2020. The government responded with measures in various fields, including the opening public domestic violence counseling offices, the launch of counseling services for non-Japanese residents, alliances with private shelters and individual receipts of $926 special cash payment. [Nippon][The Asahi Shimbun, in Japanese] [The Japan Times].

Japan: Motegi new leader of LDP's third intraparty faction

(la) Toshimitsu Motegi, secretary-general of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), has been appointed as the leader of the party's third-biggest faction at a general meeting of the intraparty bloc on November 25. Wataru Takeshita, the former leader of the faction, left the leadership post vacant after passing away in September. Motegi faces challenges in maintaining his faction's unity, as some members of the upper chamber of parliament expressed their dissatisfaction with his appointment. Speaking to reporters immediately after the announcement of his appointment, Motegi declared his goal to develop the faction into an amiable and powerful group with a culture of openness and the ability to act in unity.

At the same meeting, the faction appointed Yoshitaka Shindo, former internal affairs minister, as its secretary-general and former Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato as deputy leader. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Cabinet passes additional economic stimulus package of 36.0 trillion yen

(la) On Friday, Japan's cabinet has approved a supplementary budget of 36.0 trillion yen to the government's stimulus package of 2021, which objective is to restore the corona-stricken economy to pre-pandemic levels. With this economic stimulus, prime minister Kishida, who took office in October this year, also aims to achieve wealth redistribution by increasing support for vulnerable households and firms.

From the extra budget, the government intends to use 18.6 trillion yen for measures to contain the spread of the virus and mitigate its economic impact, of which 2.0 trillion yen will be used to increase the capacity of medical institutions; 1.3 trillion yen to boost Japan's national vaccination program; 1.7 trillion yen to expand the government's unemployment insurance system and provide allowances for furloughed workers.

In an attempt to boost the domestic tourism sector, 268.5 billion yen will be allocated to restart the "Go To Travel" campaign, a domestic tourism subsidy program that was discontinued in December 2020 after it supposedly caused a high spike in corona-cases.

This economic stimulus package, which will be financed by debt, adds another blow to Japan's fiscal health, which new debt issuance for this fiscal year through March 2022 amounts to an estimate of 65,7

trillion yen. While this figure is smaller than the 108.6 trillion yen used by the government last year to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, it fuels fear of Japan's further decline into the country's major national debts, which is one of the highest amongst developed nations. [The Mainichi]

South Korea: Victims of Gwangju massacre file damage suit against government

(aml) 900 victims of the Gwangju massacre have filed a damage suit against the government on Friday, November 26. The 1980 massacre had been former President Chun Doo-hwan's brutal response to a pro-democratic student uprising that left more than 200 dead and 1,800 wounded. Chun died earlier this week, without ever apologizing for his actions. [AiR, No.47, November/2021, 4]

The plaintiffs demand the government to pay 94.3 billion won ($79 million) for their psychological suffering, after the Supreme Court had ruled in May, that past compensation failed to address the victim's psychological pains. [The Korea Herald]

Earlier this week, another group of 70 victims had also launched a damage suit. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: More rights to foreign undocumented children

(aml) On Wednesday, November 24, the South Korean government announced a new policy under which undocumented children whose parents aren't South Korean citizens will be guaranteed more rights in education, healthcare, and other welfare programs.

Already in April this year, the justice ministry had announced a new policy that gave these children legal status as well as allowed temporary residency. However, the requirements were strict, calling for the child to be born in South Korea, having lived there for 15 years, and having completed elementary school before 2021. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) claimed that the policy would only benefit a small percentage of the children and asked the ministry to improve it.

According to the justice ministry, there are about 3,400 undocumented children living in South Korea, but the

NHRCK estimates that the number comes closer to 20,000. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Supreme court rules repeated drunk driving law unconstitutional

(aml) The South Korean Supreme Court has decided that a part of the Road Traffic Act, allowing aggravated punishment for drunk driving repeatedly, is unconstitutional. The clause had allowed for penalties up to five years in prison or a 20 million won fine, even if the offences happened decades apart from each other. Seven out of the nine judges deemed that the punishment in these cases would be unreasonably high, compared to the offender's responsibility. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Senior DPK officials offer to resign to revive Lee's campaign

(aml) About 100 days before the presidential election, senior officials of the ruling Democratic Party (DPK) have offered their resignation in order to revive the election campaign. DPK secretary general

Rep. Youn Kwan-suk, chief policymaker Park Wan-joo, deputy chief policymaker You Dong-soo, chief spokesperson Koh Young-jin, and chief strategist Song Kap-seok have stated to "put the party before self" and to respond to calls for the party to be reborn through reforms. The offer comes during a time where the DPK candidate Lee Jae-myung continues to stay behind his opponent Yoon Seok-youl from the People Power Party (PPP) in opinion polls. [The Korea Herald 1]

Lee has been under criticism due to a possible involvement in the Seongnam land development scandal [AiR, No.42, October/2021, 3], which he has denied. On Saturday, November 27, prosecutors have questioned former Supreme Court justice Kwon Soon-il over allegations that he helped Lee to clear an election law violation in return for a post-retirement job. Shortly before his retirement last year, Kwon delivered a not-guilty-opinion which helped Lee to be freed of the charges. After his retirement, Kwon got a high-paying position at Hwacheon Daeyu, the asset management company at the center of the scandal. [The Korea Times 1]

South Korea agrees in joint release of oil reserves

(aml) Regarding US president Joe Biden's call for the world's largest oil consuming nations to release some of their reserves to stimulate economic recovery as well as lowering prices, South Kora has agreed to join. While the US will release 50 million barrels of crude in December, the amount and timing of Korea's release has yet to be decided on. [Reuters]

The country has only recently expanded its oil storage facilities to boost energy security. The current petroleum stockpile of 97 million barrels lasts Korea approximately 106 days, according to the industry ministry. The private sector, however, holds another 103 million barrels, granting South Korea around 106 days without oil imports in case of an emergency. Some estimate that the country will be able to release about 4%, which are about 3.8 million barrels of its reserves, as it has also done in the 2011 Libyan crisis. [S&P Global]

Taiwan: Cabinet approves special arms budget to boost sea and air combat capabilities

(dql) Taiwan's Cabinet on November 24 approved a proposed special budget of NT$237.3 billion (US$8.53 billion) for the procurement of arms to strengthen the country's sea and air combat capabilities. The major share of the funding is earmarked for shore-based anti-ship missiles. [Focus Taiwan]

A day earlier, the Taiwan's legislature passed a bill under which the government is authorized to draft a special budget of up to NT$240 billion (US$8.63 billion) for arms procurements over the next five years, with a focus on the acquisition of mostly indigenous defense arms, aimed at upgrading the island's anti-air and anti-surface capabilities [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights

and National Security in South Asia

Bangladesh: Authorities resume moving Rohingya refugees to flood-prone island

(ap) Bangladesh has resumed moving Rohingya refugees to a remote and flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal, transferring another 2,000 people last week, despite criticism from humanitarian groups who claim are being relocated against their will. [France 24]

Since December of last year, Bangladesh has moved nearly 20,000 Rohingya to Bhasan Char to ease chronic overcrowding in the sprawling refugee camps of Cox's Bazar, where more than one million members of the largely Muslim minority group have taken shelter. Authorities plan to eventually relocate a total of 100,000 refugees. [Al Jazeera]

The United Nations and the Bangladeshi government signed an agreement in October for cooperation on services for the island's residents [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. The movement of refugees continues after monsoon storms that batter the Bay of Bengal each year ended earlier last month.

A senior Red Cross official who had visited the island on November 23 warned that health services were insufficient for a large population, and that refugees lacked freedom of movement to and from the mainland. Further, international rights watchdog Human Rights Watch, in a statement, said that authorities were forcing refugees to relocate to the island by confiscating their identity documents. [Reuters]

Bangladesh: Former opposition lawmaker sentenced to death for war crimes during Liberation War

(ap) Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal has sentenced a former lawmaker of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party to death for crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the country's 1971 war of independence against then West Pakistan.

Abdul Momin Talukder was convicted of collaboration with the Pakistani occupation army in attacks on Hindu communities and freedom fighters. Three charges of crimes against humanity were brought against him. The charges included murder and genocide of 19 persons and arson attacks on 19 houses after looting. [bdnews24.com]

The International Crimes Tribunal is a domestic war crimes tribunal established in 2009 to investigate suspects for the genocide the Pakistan army and its local collaborators committed in 1971. Although the tribunal initially received UN support, human rights groups have since criticized its court proceedings.

Bangladesh: Amnesty International urges release of Hindu teenager arrested over Facebook post

(ap) International rights group Amnesty International has called for the immediate release of a Hindu teenager who is being held in detention since being arrested in October last year for a Facebook post that allegedly hurt religious sentiment. [bdnews24.com]

Although the accused was granted bail in May 2021, the government appealed to overrule the bail order. If convicted, the girl could face up to seven years in jail after police booked her under the country's Digital Security Act on charges of "hurting religious sentiment" and "advancing to deteriorate law and order."

The rights organizations also urged Bangladesh authorities to ensure the security of the girl, her family, and other members of minority groups in the country from communal or politically motivated attacks.

Mob violence is not uncommon in Muslim-majority Bangladesh over actions allegedly causing hurt to religious sentiments. At least six people lost their lives in violence when mobs ransacked over 100 Hindu

temples in October after rumors spread that the Quran had been insulted at a special pavilion set up for the annual Hindu religious festival, Durga Puja [see AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3].

Bangladesh: Students protest in Dhaka after student death

(ap) Thousands of uniformed students blockaded key roads in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, on November 25 to protest the death of a high school student in a road accident. Protesters demanded justice, reduced bus fares and safer roads. [bdnews24.com] [The Straits Times]

In 2018, similar street protests triggered by the deaths of two students in a traffic accident developed into a nationwide movement that stopped traffic around the country for a week, prompting a government crackdown.

Bangladesh: Garment workers in capital protest for higher wages

(ap) Hundreds of workers in several garment factories blockaded roads in Dhaka's Mirpur this week, demanding a ten percent increase in wages to match rising cost of living. [bdnews24.com]

On Wednesday, workers' organizations also gathered to commemorate the ninth anniversary of the Tazreen Fashions garment factory fire in Ashulia, Dhaka, which killed 112 workers in 2012. Demonstrators stated that the government has failed to rehabilitate the families of killed and injured workers. The Bangladesh Trade Union Center demanded that the factory be renovated and used to rehabilitate workers. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Violence in Rohingya camps can spread beyond borders, prime minister warns

(ap) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cautioned that growing violence in Rohingya camps in Bangladesh can soon spread beyond Bangladesh's borders. She urged the international community to find a lasting solution for Myanmar's Rohingya crisis. [Business Post]

This week, two refugees were killed in a shootout with the Rapid Action Battalion, an anti-crime and anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladeshi police, in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar. [bdnews24]

Bangladesh: Pirates in Bay of Bengal

(ap) Incidents of piracy, including the murder and abduction of fishers, have increased along the coast of the Pirojpur and Barguna districts in the Bay of Bengal. The rise in piracy comes at a time when Bangladeshi fishers are facing poor catches over the past two years because of consecutive fishing bans. [Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Largest solar power plant to come online next month

(ap) A 100 MW solar power plant will begin supplying electricity to the grid next month, boosting Bangladesh's renewable energy portfolio. At the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow earlier this month, Bangladesh committed to achieving 4.1 GW of clean power capacity this decade. [pv magazine]

India: Parliament passes bill to repeal contentious farm laws

(sr/lm) India's Parliament has passed a bill to repeal three agriculture laws that had prompted more than a year of protests, after Prime Minister Modi earlier last month had unexpectedly announced his government would roll back the contentious legislation. [Al Jazeera 1] [Reuters]

The move represented a rare retreat for the prime minister, who has stood firm in the face of fierce criticism of his government's policies in the past. The decision came ahead of elections early next year in key states such as Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, which are significant agricultural producers and where Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is eager to retain power. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

But a week after Modi's announcement, tens of thousands of farmers on held demonstrations across the country on November 26 to mark a year of their protest against the three farm laws, declining Prime

Minister Modi's appeal to them to return to their homes. [Al Jazeera 2]

As parliament reconvened for its winter session on November 29, both the lower and upper houses passed the Farm Laws Repeal Bill, 2021 without any debate. The Opposition MPs in both houses rushed to protest at the Well, raising slogans in support of the farmers and demanding a resolution be passed condoning the death of the farmers in the protests throughout the past year. [Indian Express]

However, farmers say they will continue to protest until the central government meets several other demands, including raising the minimum price of their produce, withdrawing legal action against some farmers, and paying compensation to the families of hundreds of farmers who have died during the yearlong protest. [CNN]

They also want the government to drop fines and other penalties for stubble burning after harvesting their crops. The smoke has become a major source of hazardous air pollution in the capital, New Delhi, and nearby cities bordering the crop-growing northern states. [AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3] The farmers have given the government until November 30 to reply to their demands. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) has decided to hold an emergency meeting on December 1 to determine future action. [The Hindu]

Separately, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri, has welcomed the Modi administration's decision to repeal the three contentious farm laws. He also urged the central government to ensure accountability for the casualties. [UN News]

India: Global Rights group condemn arrest of activist

(sr/tj/lm) International rights groups, alongside the United Nations, have criticized the arrest of a prominent activist in Indian-administered Kashmir on various charges, including "conspiracy" and "terror-funding", calling it an attempt to "silence and punish human rights defenders". [BBC] [The Hindu]

Khurram Parvez was arrested late on November 22 by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's counter-terrorism agency. His residence and office in Kashmir's main city, Srinagar, were searched and a mobile phone, laptop and books seized. Parvez is being held under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention)

Act, India's anti-terrorism law, that allows for detention of up to six months without trial. [Times of India]

Parvez has long been a vocal critic of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government. His Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS), a group of rights organizations working in the region, has published several scathing reports on human rights violations and excesses committed by security forces in the Valley. He is also the chairperson of the "Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (Afad), an international rights organization which looks into the forced disappearances in Kashmir and elsewhere in Asia. [CNN]

India: Prime Minister Modi's BJP registers landslide win in local body polls in Tripura state

(sr/lm) Elections to civic bodies in Indian northeastern Tripura state concluded on November 25, with opposition parties raising allegations of widespread political violence. Prime Minister Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) registered a landslide win, securing 217 out of 222 seats, after the party had already won 112 seats uncontested. [The Hindu]

The municipal elections formed a three-way battle between the BJP, the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), which earlier in May had won a two-third majority in the West Bengal the state election [see AiR No. 18, May/2021, 1], and the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which the BJP had dethroned from power in Tripura in 2018.

In the run-up to the polls, the Supreme Court on November 23 had declined a plea of the AITC that sought contempt action against the Tripura state government and other officials for failing to curtail violent incidents against opposition parties in the lead-up to the polls. The SC, however, did not accede to delaying the elections citing that postponing the election process was an extreme step in a democracy and they were averse to such a measure. [Asian News International] [The New Indian Express]

The judges directed the Director General Police of Tripura and Inspector General (Law and Order) to meet with the State Election Commission on the 24th of November,2021 in order to assess the number of CRPF personnel required in order to conduct the elections in a peaceful manner. The apex court also ordered India's

Home Ministry to deploy additional central forces to ensure free and fair polling. [The Telegraph]

While the State Election Commission and police claimed that no major incidents were reported during the polling hours, opposition parties accused the BJP of sheltering "goons" who forcefully captured polling booths and also allegedly threatened the voters. However, deputy chief minister Jishnu Dev Varma denied all the allegations made by the opposition parties and told The Wire that some 'stray incidents' were reported but no major incidents occurred. [The Wire, $]

A day after the polls, the AITC approached the Supreme Court of urging to postpone the counting of votes – scheduled for November 28 – alleging that the apex court's orders for free and fair municipal elections were violated and people were not allowed to vote. Further, complainant the TMC seeks a probe by the court-monitored panel into the allegation levelled by them. [NDTV]

India: Joint Parliamentary Committee adopts report on Personal Data Protection Bill

(sr) A joint committee of India's Parliament (JPC) charged with reviewing the Personal Information Protection Bill has submitted its report on the proposed law, two years after the piece of legislation was introduced in Parliament in 2019. The bill is expected to be passed in Parliament's winter session, thus giving India its first data protection law. [The Quint]

The committee has made several recommendations for modifying the draft. But it also defended one of the most widely debated provisions of the draft bill, Section 35, which empowers the central government to exempt any government agency from the obligation of complying with the law, leading to dissent notes from panel members from the Opposition.

The members have suggested that partial exemption should be granted to certain agencies instead of a blanket immunity. The final report, however, did not accept these suggestions "arguing that there is a need to balance the concerns regarding national security, liberty and privacy of an individual."[The Hindu]

India: Government to review trade ties with China through security prism, foreign secretary says

(rs/lm) Against the larger backdrop of the protracted border standoff with China along the disputed border in the Himalayan heights, New Delhi is carefully weighing its options to ensure its trade and investment ties with Beijing do not leave the country exposed, according to India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla. [The Times of India]

Addressing the Indian Chamber of Commerce on November 24, Shringla said that China maintained an aggressive posture and attempted multiple transgressions along the Line of Actual Control, which was not conducive to peace and security. However, the diplomat also said that despite all of this, trade, import and export continued, with Beijing remaining an important economic partner. [Hindustan Times] [WION]

The annual trade volume between the two countries earlier in October had exceeded the $100 billion mark for the first time, according to data released by China's General Administration of Customs earlier this month. This was a goal jointly proposed by the two countries 11 years ago.

Moreover, Shringla highlighted that the Indian economy had returned to the high growth path. He also noted that this had caused a shift of the economic center of gravity towards Asia, adding that this shift had turned the Ind-Pacific Region into "a major focus of global attention". [NDTV]

India: Three suspected militants shot dead in Kashmir Valley; doubts over police's 'encounter' claim

(rs/lm) A shootout in Srinagar, the main city in India's Jammu and Kashmir union territory, has come under high scrutiny, with regional parties and eyewitnesses questioning the official version of events that led to the killing of three suspected militants, including a top commander of a local rebel group.

Local police on November 24 announced to have killed three alleged members of The Resistance Front (TRF) – a militant group associated with one of the main Islamic groups operating in Kashmir, Pakistan-based

Lashkar-e-Taiba. While police said the three were killed in a "gunfight", witnesses said they were dragged out of a car and shot. [The Indian Express]

The killings sparked protests in parts of downtown Srinagar, with hundreds of men taking out a procession, while authorities responded by suspending internet in downtown areas. [The Wire, $]

The encounter comes after authorities earlier this month ordered a probe into another security operation that killed four people, and later exhumed two bodies and returned them to families who alleged that police used innocent civilians as a "human shield". [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

India: West Bengal chief minister calls on Prime Minister Modi, demands repeal of BSF jurisdiction extension

(sr/lm) The chief minister of India's West Bengal state, Mamata Banerjee, on November 24 met with Prime Minister Modi and demanded that the decision to extend the Border Security Force (BSF)'s territorial jurisdiction in the state be withdrawn. [Hindustan Times]

The BSF, which only had powers to take action up to 15 kilometers along the international border in the states of Punjab, West Bengal and Assam, in October had been authorized to extend its jurisdiction up to 50 kilometers without any hurdle or permission either from central or state governments.

In light of this, the West Bengal Legislative Assembly last month passed a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the notification by the Ministry of Home Affairs, calling the decision an attack on the federal structure and an attempt to curtail the rights of the state police.

India: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam state governments hold talks on border issue

(sr) The governments of Indian Arunachal Pradesh and Assam states have started holding discussions to settle the long-pending boundary dispute between the two northeastern neighbors, according to the home minister of Arunachal Pradesh. The discussions started after the forest department of Assam served an

eviction notice to people of three villages living on the disputed border territory earlier this month.

It is Arunachal Pradesh's grievance that when the states were being divided, many tracts containing forests in the plains, that had historically belonged to hill tribal chiefs and communities were unilaterally transferred to Assam. Once Arunachal had received Statehood, a committee was appointed that gave the recommendation that certain territories be transferred from Assam back to Arunachal. This was contested by Assam and the matter is currently pending in the Supreme Court. [The Hindu]

Separately, the Arunachal Pradesh state government has ordered an enquiry into the exchange of fire between forest officers of Assam and illegal tree fellers near the inter-state boundary on November 23. [The Times of India]

India: At least five journalists injured amid clashes over local elections in Tripura state

(sr) In the run-up to municipal elections in Indian northeastern Tripura state, groups of people belonging to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and opposition All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) clashed in the streets of the state capital, Agartala, on November 21, injuring at least 19 people, including five journalists. [Committee to Protect Journalists]

India: High Court admits petition against Prime Minister Modi's picture on vaccine certificate

(sr) A high court in Indian Kerala state has admitted a petition challenging the inclusion of Prime Minister Modi's photograph on COVID-19 vaccination certificates, and issued notice to the central and state government to file a counter affidavit in response to the plea. [Bar and Bench]

The petitioner had previously approached the court stating that the picture of the prime minister on his vaccine certificate was a violation of his fundamental rights as it was a private health document which contained personal data, and he had paid for the certificate from his own pocket. [Telegraph India]

Hearing the plea, the bench observed that the petition could have serious implications. [New Indian Express]

The central government has previously defended the decision to include Prime Minister Modi's photo claiming that the "PM's image along with his words help create general awareness and Covid-appropriate behaviour." [Hindustan Times]

Nepal: Main opposition CPN-UML holds 10th National General Convention

(ns/lm) Nepal's main opposition party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), is currently holding its 10th National General Convention, about four months after incumbent party chairman KP Sharma Oli was ousted by the Supreme Court as prime minister following months of political turmoil.

In the run-up to the convention, a meeting of the party's incumbent Central Committee on November 26 decided to expand its size to 303, up from 225, as well as to increase the number of the party's office bearers to 19, from originally 15, in a bid to ensure that the party's leadership is elected through consensus. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

On November 27 then, delegates during the closed-door convention authorized Oli to select office bearers and Central Committee members. However, the decision was met with severe criticism from various party officials, including Oli's current deputy Bhim Bahadur Rawal, who announced that he would contest the election for a new party chairman. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

So far, around 50 percent of the party's office bearers and Central Committee members have been elected unanimously, including senior vice-chairman, general secretary, as well as deputy general secretaries. [The Himalayan Times]

The convention's inaugural session on November 26 was by several country high-ranking officials as well as at least fifteen foreign dignitaries, including former Indian minister Harsh Vardhan, and the national secretary of India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Harish Dwivedi. The Bangladeshi Communist Party sent three of its members, as did Cambodia with a four-person delegation. A representative from Sri Lanka's Marxist-Leninist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna party was also among the guests. [Asian News International]

The CPN-UML's convention will be followed by the 14th general convention of the ruling Nepali Congress party, is scheduled to commence on December 13, after being rescheduled seven times.

Nepal: Election Commission to make public disclosure of party finance mandatory

(ns/lm) Nepal's Election Commission (EC) is planning to make it mandatory for the country's political parties to disclose their sources of income. Due to the previous dismissal of restrictions implemented by the commission on elections campaigns' spending, a disregard of the new resolution will lead to financial repercussions for parties. [The Kathmandu Post]

In Nepal, political parties gather funds by collecting fees from their members as well as receiving contributions from private sources. Usually, these donations are not publicized.

In light of this, the EC has developed an "accounting template" in which political parties will have to provide details about the source of income along with what they intend to use the money for, as a way of preventing any ambiguities. Simultaneously, if the party was to omit submitting the file, there would be monetary fines.

The template was introduced due to the previous disregard of parties for spending limits endorsed by the commission. During the election term in 2017, the cap was fixed at 2.5 million rupees, yet most parties spent at least six times more. The obstacle in taking action against these violations lays in the fact that parties enclose their expenditure to be within the limit, therefore are fully protected.

Nepal: Maoist party holds local-level conventions to select new leadership

(lm) The third-largest party in Nepal's lower house of parliament, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) (CPN(M)), has conducted local level conventions across the country for the selection of new leadership. [The Himalayan Times]

Meanwhile, the party's chairman, Pushpa Kamal Dahal's, has announced that his CPN(M) would hold its national convention from December 26 to 28.

Nepal: Urgent concrete actions are required to prevent custodial deaths, Amnesty International says

(ns/lm) International rights watchdog Amnesty International has urged Nepal's government to take urgent and concerted actions to prevent custodial deaths, including appropriate legal accountability measure, 10 months after four United Nations special rapporteurs had expressed serious concerns on the matter. [Amnesty International]

Within the past three months, at least six custodial deaths have occurred in Nepal. The issue is further problematic as Nepali authorities are not required to keep track of this category of deaths and therefore there is very little empirical evidence to put forward. Further, official investigations are rarely conducted in order to determine and bring justice to individuals accountable as most deaths concluded as suicide or as a result of health-related issues.

In 2017, parliament passed the first-ever law under which torture is a criminal act, yet dire conditions for detainees in local prisons have not improved. The National Penal (Code) Act, 2074 (2017) subjects each and every individual "found guilty of inflicting torture" to the penalty of $400 and/or to five years in prison. Although currently in effect for over four years, no one has been charged with this law as of yet.

Nepal: Four police personnel among several injured during Nepali Congress ward convention

(lm) Several people including four police officers were injured in a clash between security personnel and cadres of the country's ruling Nepali Congress party on November 29. The clash erupted after two factions of the party were unable to agree on a venue for a local ward election. The party cadres pelted stones at the police while the latter fired several shells of teargas to disperse the unruly crowd. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Humla district dependent on China faces severe food shortages

(ns) Residents in Nepal's northwestern Humla district are facing severe food shortages, as they mostly rely on supplies from China, which has not opened its border since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020. [South Asia Monitor]

Fortunately, the opening of a hospital facility by the officials, a couple of months ago lessened the overall effect of the circumstances on the district. The capital city is also currently trying to relieve the situation with the help of the Nepali Army, delivering supplies through the air since the recent snowfall made the area inaccessible via ground. The same attempts were made by three privately-owned organizations on November 26. [The Kathmandu Post]

In October, a Nepalese study panel formed to investigate alleged encroachment by China on territory along the Himalayan border between the two nations in a report claimed that Beijing had violated border rules by putting up fences and wires in Humla district. [AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]

Nepal: Former high-ranking security officials express worries over growing terrorism threat

(ns) Several former high-ranking Nepalese security officials have spoken on the recent concerns of terrorist activities in the region during a debate on November 26. [Khabarhub]

The concerns stem mainly from the recent seizing of power by the Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. According to one of the officials, the movement is mainly problematic due to its religious base which advances across borders faster than political ones. The security specialists further worry that terror groups might take advantage of Nepalese territories as a way to reach India and other surrounding countries.

The government was advised to be prepared and strengthen its security agencies responsible for patrolling 'terrorist activities' in the country. The discussants recommended the border control to be heightened as well as given necessary assets.

Due to the recent spike of terrorist organizations in South Asia, participants of the debate warned Nepal to monitor closely its domestic affairs, even though there are no records of terrorist groups as of yet.

However, reports state that since drug trade along with similar criminal activities is not unusual in the region, the manifestation of terrorists is possible.

The situation along the Indian border seemed to attract the most attention by the security experts as extremist Islamist groups have allegedly been participating in suspicious activities as are the Indian Mujahedeen. The concern of rising extremist activities among Hindus and Muslims was also addressed.

The main agencies in charge of monitoring these activities are the Nepal Army, Nepal Police, Armed Police Force, and the Central Investigation Bureau but Nepal Army Brigadier General stated that their resources and techniques are not sufficient to fight or monitor terrorism.

Other experts emphasized the urgency in the process of increasing security in the country as they stated that even countries with much higher-level surveillance have in the past been targeted by terrorists.

Pakistan: Government releases over 100 Taliban prisoners as 'goodwill gesture' amidst peace negotiations

(tj/lm) Pakistan's government has released more than 1000 members of the country's banned Taliban group from prison, as a "goodwill gesture" to reciprocate the ceasefire announced by the militants earlier this month, as both sides continue to negotiate a peace deal, with the Afghan Taliban mediating the talks. [The Express Tribune]

Islamabad announced on November 9 a one-month ceasefire was agreed with the armed militant group, known as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), while negotiations got underway to end years of bloodshed [see AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2]. The TTP comprises about two dozen banned militant groups and has been waging deadly terrorist attacks against security forces as well as civilians in Pakistan for many years.

It was reported that the TTP made three demands during the exploratory talks, including permission to open a political office in a third country, and restoration of the traditional semiautonomous status of the region that once served as strongholds for local and foreign militants. TTP has also called for implementing an Islamic system in Pakistan in

accordance with the group's own interpretation of Islamic law.

The government, however, has long rejected these demands as unacceptable, ruling out any discussion on the constitution, the status of the troops or the border districts. Further, the Khan administration maintains that hardcore TTP members who are involved in serious crimes against the state will have to face legal proceedings, but "foot soldiers" of the group could be offered an amnesty in the event of a deal to encourage them to undergo de-radicalization and rehabilitation. [Voice of America]

Pakistan: Women in Gwadar protest for rights, end to 'illegal trawler fishing'

(lm) Hundreds of women took to the street in Pakistan's port city of Gwadar demanding an end to illegal fishing by trawlers and the lifting of trade restrictions with Iran. [Pakistan Today]

Thousands of people have been staging a protest for the past several days. Among their demands is the removal of unnecessary checkposts, the complete removal of fishing trawlers and the opening of the Pakistan-Iran border. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Sri Lanka: Troops break up Tamil remembrance of civil war dead

(lm) Grieving members of Sri Lanka's minority Tamil community were forced out of cemeteries by armed troops on the weekend as they attempted to commemorate relatives who died in the island's decades-long civil war, residents and media organizations said on November 29.

In a statement, the Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions said Tamil journalists covering a memorial in Mullaittivu, a north-eastern fishing town where the war's final battle was fought, were assaulted by troops. It added that reporters in the Northern and Eastern provinces, which house 70 percent of Sri Lankan Tamils, have been subject to "constant harassment" by security authorities. [The Straits Times]

From 1989, November 27 was observed as " Great Heroes' Day" by Sri Lankan Tamils to remember members of the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) group who died in the conflict. Since the

end of the civil war in 2009, however, the Sri Lankan government and its security forces have clamped down on any attempt at commemorating the remembrance day and destroyed the remaining LTTE cemeteries.

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

Largest bank in Brunei to have its first ever female CEO

(sd) Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (BIBD) announced on Monday that Ms. Hjh Noraini Hj Sulaiman will replace Mubashar Khokhar as CEO and managing director from the beginning of December.

Hjh Noraini will be the first woman to assume the role since the bank began in 2005 and will be moving from her current role as BIBD's deputy managing director. Her predecessor Khokhar was temporarily transferred from Fajr Capital, a private equity firm based in Dubai, in 2015.

Fajr had had a 29% stake in BIBD since 2010 but sold it in January last year to the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA). This made the bank effectively wholly owned by Bruneians.

The majority shareholder in the bank is the Brunei government, through stakes owned by the BIA and the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Foundation and around 6,000 individual Bruneian investors also have shares.

BIBD's total assets in 2020 were approximately $9.71 billion. [The Scoop]

Brunei among the hardest-hit by unemployment and lack of tourism during COVID-19

(sd) Brunei was one of the countries that suffered the most from unemployment due to the pandemic, a report published this month showed.[AlJazeera]

The International Labour Organisation's (ILO) report on COVID-19 and employment in the tourism sector in the Asia-Pacific region was released on November 18, 2021. The report, which focused on Brunei, Mongolia, Thailand, Vietnam and Philippines, showed that job losses in tourism-related sectors were four times greater in 2020 than in non-tourism sectors.

Two in five (40.5%) of tourism industry employees lost their jobs during the pandemic, which, before COVID-19, employed 27.7 thousand women and men in Brunei. Compared to losses in the country's other sectors, tourism suffered losses 22 times larger.

More men lost their jobs than women, a similar situation to in Mongolia and Thailand. In the Philippines and Vietnam, however, more women lost their jobs.

The largest losses were in the food and drink sector of tourism for Brunei, while the other Asia-Pacific countries made significant losses in other areas including travel agencies, cultural activities and sports or recreational activities. Brunei also had major losses in railway and road transport.

Fewer tourism-sector employees in Brunei were working zero hours at their job than in the other countries. During 2020 15% of employees were working zero hours, while in Thailand 76% of tourism workers reported working no hours in the reference week.

ILO estimates show employment shrank by 62 million between 2019 and 2020, but the reduction in hours caused by COVID-19 was equivalent to the working-time of 145 million full-time workers.

The ILO member states adopted the Global Call to Action for a Human-centered Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis that is Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient, at the International Labor conference in June

2021. This publication details the “principles of a human-centered recovery to the tourism sector,” and will implement international labor standards to safeguard safe work within the industry in the future. [ILO Brief]

Cambodia: Growing number of activists repatriated from Thailand

(tl) A Cambodian activist living in Thailand was arrested, along with two other activists, by Thai police under pressure from the Cambodian government.

The individual was deported to Cambodia after being held in a Bangkok detention center for “political issues” and is now detained on charges of inciting and co-conspiring against the government. The other two activists arrested with him had already been repatriated to Cambodia.

The activist was a member of the banned opposition group the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and was already known to the Cambodian government for publicly criticizing the handling of the pandemic and human rights issues within the country on social media.

On November 24, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said in a statement that the activist was worried about Thailand’s forced return of other native Cambodians in recent weeks. UNHCR’s Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, said: “We are extremely alarmed by this trend of forcibly returning refugees to Cambodia, where they face a serious risk of persecution.”

In November alone Thailand arrested and deported three activists to Cambodia, known to the authoritarian government of Hun Sen, and justified the decisions as inherent to Thai foreign policy. However, according to Human Rights Watch, Thailand has a duty to protect political refugees from surrounding countries.

In an official statement, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, vowed to remain in office to “destroy extremists” and preserve “peace in the country” for the benefit of future generations.

The Supreme Court dissolved CNRP in 2017 two months after the arrest of its president Kem Shoka for an alleged plot to overthrow the government. The event was followed by a broader crackdown on civil

society which enabled Hun Sen to win all seats in the 2018 elections. [Euronews] [Radio Free Asia]

Cambodia: Rift revealed between former opposition allies

(sd) The former president of the banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and his long-time partner have cut ties after claims he used the politician's image and name without consent.

Kem Sokha accused fellow opposition politician Sam Rainsy of using his name and image to promote Rainsy's own political activities, including the recent revival of the Candlelight Party.

Rainsy, Sokha's predecessor in the CNRP Party, claimed on November 29 that the message was not issued freely, and said it was a result of political pressure put on Sokha by Prime Minister Hun Sen. The Prime Minister previously ordered the dissolution of the CNRP in November 27, and Rainsy claimed he was now "holding Kem Sokha hostage". The Cambodian government and the CNRP own party both denied the allegations.

Two months before the dissolution of the CNRP in 2017, Sokha was arrested on charges of treason, and continued to be under "court supervision" after his release from the CC3 maximum security prison in 2018. His trial is still pending.

Rainsy has been in exile since 2015 after the Cambodian government activated a dormant arrest warrant while he was away in South Korea. [Khmer Times] [The Diplomat]

Indonesia: Top officials visit outer islands to strengthen border regions

(ms) The chief security minister and home minister conducted a two-day tour of Indonesia's outermost islands neighboring the South China Sea to reaffirm the state's plan to develop and safeguard its border regions. Mahfud Mahmodin Damanik, the coordinating minister for political, legal and security affairs, and Home Minister Tito Karnavian visited the Natuna island chain, as well as the Laut and Sekatung Islands.

Tito announced the intention for the state to strengthen its border regions by providing a constant

military presence and assistance to strengthen local economies. He also said the government is constructing new border outposts at Sealasan Island, which are already 60 per cent complete. Mahfud claimed the visit is intended to develop Indonesia's borders generally, not in reaction to China or any one specific country. [The Jakarta Post, $]

The Natuna Regency, an archipelago of 272 islands located in the Natuna Sea, is a strategic border area for Indonesia. Both Indonesia and Vietnam claim the location is in their economic zones (EEZs), while China also claims historic fishing rights to areas within Indonesia's EEZ. [The Jakarta Post, $] Despite 13 rounds of negotiations between Indonesia and Vietnam to establish their EEZs in the region, no agreement has been reached. As such, Indonesia continues to detain Vietnamese fishing boats for alleged poaching in its waters. [Radio Free Asia] [See also Air No. 47, November/2021, 4] China, meanwhile, continues to send fishing boats into Indonesia's waters. One Chinese vessel spent several weeks there in September and October this year, which analysts believe was carrying out unlawful research activity surveying the seafloor. [See AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1] [See also AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2] [See also AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Indonesia: Government drafts revisions to controversial cyber law

(ms) The government plans to send a finalized draft revision of the controversial Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law to the House of Representatives for deliberation this week. The government seeks to partially revise the law by introducing stricter definitions for what constitutes defamation, hate speech, and obscenity on the web. The revision was drafted by a government taskforce with input from various stakeholders, including victims of ITE cases, activists, journalists, politicians, and academics. [The Jakarta Post, $]

The proposed revisions of the law follow public outcry over the ambiguous interpretations of key articles. Although meant to regulate online activity including defamation and hate speech, and protect against cybercrime, the law's vague wording has frequently been used by those in power to silence criticism and dissent. In one example Saiful Madi, a lecturer from Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh, was sentenced to three months jail for allegedly slandering the university, after he criticized a hiring process for

lecturers in a private WhatsApp messenger group. President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo agreed to his pardoning halfway through the lecturer's sentence following an outcry from human rights groups. [See AiR No. 41, October 2021/2] Cases involving the law have increased over the years, from 97 cases in 2017, to 211 cases in 2018, 437 cases in 2019, and 509 cases in 2020. [The Jakarta Post, $]

Jokowi announced his intention to revise the law in February this year, with the government forming a taskforce to ensure that the law be applied more judiciously. [See AiR No. 10, March/2021, 2] The taskforce found that the law was still needed to maintain order in cyberspace, but agreed revisions would be necessary to prevent multiple interpretations of articles that could threaten free speech. [The Jakarta Post, $]

In recent years, there has been a trend across the Southeast Asia region of increased government control over the internet [Global Risk Insights]. Earlier this year, Singapore passed the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act, which gives the government significant leverage over social media platforms and users to issue corrections or remove posts it finds to contain falsehoods [see AiR No. 21, May/2021, 4]. Cambodia, meanwhile, is planning a national internet gateway which could give authorities increased powers to crackdown on online free speech [see AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4]. Myanmar also has repeatedly cut internet access in response to anti-government protests [see AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4] [see also AiR No. 14, April/2021, 1].

Indonesia: Constitutional Court orders revision of controversial labor law

(ms) Indonesia's Constitutional Court ordered the government to revise its controversial Omnibus Law on November 25, citing insufficient public consultation and transparency in the drafting process, and said the changes made after parliamentary approval were unconstitutional. The court gave the government two years to amend relevant parts of the legislation. It also forbade the government from issuing new policies and regulations derived from the legislation. The government agreed to make the required changes, however the law will remain in place. [Channel News Asia] [The Australian, $]

President Widodo said on November 29 that his government would ensure investments that have been

made would remain safe and secure, and assured investors that the law would remain in effect pending the changes. [Jakarta Post]

The Job Creation Law, passed into legislation last year and revised more than 70 labor, tax and environmental laws. The government claimed the law was designed to remove bureaucratic hurdles in order to attract investment and create jobs. By reducing costs for businesses seeking to set up operations in Indonesia, the government claimed the law would create an additional one million jobs a year. [Channel News Asia] [The Australian, $]

Critics, however, argued that revisions to the law were finalized without sufficient public consultation and rushed through parliament to avoid large scale protests planned for Jakarta and other cities. Labor unions, students, environmentalists, Islamic organizations and other critics also alleged the law would worsen labor and environmental protection in favor of investors. They objected to rules being changed around severance pay, leave, contract workers and outsourcing, and a stipulation that environmental studies only be required for high-risk investments. Tens of thousands of people protested across the country following the passing of the law. Some rallies turned violent, with police detaining around 1,000 protesters in Jakarta and more than 100 in other cities. [Channel News Asia] [The Australian, $] [See also AiR No. 41, October/2020, 2]

Indonesia: Consensus needed to pass sexual violence eradication bill

(ms) Indonesian political parties in the House of Representatives were unable to reach a consensus needed to push through the sexual violence eradication bill. The House of Representatives' Legislative Body (Baleg) postponed a meeting on November 25 to determine the fate of the bill, while lawmakers continue to lobby for the majority support they need. The date for the meeting has not been set, but lawmakers are aiming for before the next recess starting in mid-December. The bill focuses on the prevention of all forms sexual violence and increasing rights for victims. It identifies 20 forms of sexual violence, extending the notion to include verbal, non-physical, and digital actions. [The Jakarta Post] [Jakarta Globe]

Strong criticism of the proposed bill comes from Islamic-based political parties: the Justice and

Prosperity Party, the United Development Party, and the National Mandate Party**.** These parties seek to widen the bill beyond sexual violence to include further regulations of sexual relations, including "sexual perversion" and "extramarital sex". Women's rights groups have said that extending the bill in this way could thwart its initial intent and purpose, and even criminalize victims of sexual violence as perpetrators of adultery if they fail to prove their case. [The Jakarta Post]

Multiple conservative groups such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) and the Muslim organization Muhammadiyah also oppose the bill. They argue that defining sex without consent as sexual violence will, in turn, encourage consensual sex. [Asia Times]

Indonesia: Police arrest 24 people for financing terrorist group

(ms) Indonesian national police's counter terrorism squad, Densus 88, arrested 24 people suspected of raising funds for the al Qaeda-linked regional terror network Jemaah Islamiyah (JI). The suspects are accused of collecting funds, believed to be approximately $2 million, via two Islamic charitable foundations. Among the 24 detained include Ahmad Zain-An-Najah, a member of a top Islamic council in Indonesia. [Channel News Asia] [See AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

With cells in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines, JI seeks to establish an Islamic state extending across Southeast Asia. The group was responsible for a string of high-profile attacks through the 1990s and early 2000s, including the 2002 Bali bombings, which killed over 200 people in the tourist district of Kuta. It is considered a state opponent in Indonesia and has been designated a terrorist group by other countries and the United Nations. The group has not staged a major attack in Indonesia since 2011. [Stanford Centre for International Security and Cooperation]

Laos: Lao authorities investigate the culprit of mass deforestation in Sekhong province

(bs) Villagers from Sekhong province in Lao PDR defended themselves after being held responsible for local deforestation.

The provincial officials identified the cutting activities of the villagers as the cause of a 36% reduction of 100 hectares of forest over a five-year period.

In their defense, the residents claimed that their current use of the forest is limited to agricultural purposes and basic living necessities such as building houses and house-heating in winter. Meanwhile, the residents reported the activities of a group of Vietnamese companies to local authorities for the mass production of cassava, rubber, and coffee.

While collecting information on foreign investors in the area, local authorities announced the immediate implementation of a reforestation plan including environmental education training for the local population.

At present, 25,900 hectares out of 70,000 are from a nature conservation area. In 2020, the provincial administration planted 380 hectares of replacement forest and rehabilitated 1,500 hectares of the damaged area. [Radio Free Asia, in Lao]

Malaysia: Government commits to ending forced labor while malpractice investigations are ongoing

(sd) Malaysia has agreed to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Protocol 29, which aims to abolish all forms of forced labor.

The agreement to ratify the protocol to the 2014 Forced Labour Convention was made on November 26, alongside the launch of the National Action Plan on Forced Labour (NAPFL) 2021-2025. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia's Human Resources Minister Seri M. Saravanan said four key goals were established to eradicate forced labor in Malaysia: awareness, enforcement, labor migration, and access to remedy and support services. Saravanan said the NAPFL 2021-2025 was put in place to ensure those initiatives are carried out in a structured manner.

The Asia Pacific region held the highest prevalence for forced labor according to the ILO's 2017 Global Estimates, with four out of every 1,000 people being classed as victims of forced labor.

Malaysia was also placed in Tier 3 of the USA's 2021 Trafficking in Persons report. The tier was classed as

countries that don't meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act's (TVPA) minimum standards and are not making significant attempts to do so. The report did mention, however, the Malaysian government's prosecution and conviction of some traffickers, and the adoption of victim identification standard operating procedures (SOPs). [2021 Trafficking in Persons Report]

Saravanan objected to the Bangladeshi government's request to increase the number of agencies about to send workers to Malaysia from 10 to 2,000 and expressed concern that Malaysia would become a "dumping ground" if more foreign agencies had permission to send workers there. Foreign workers currently constitute more than 30% of the Malaysian workforce.

Furthermore, following the allegations filed in three complaints by 185 migrant workers from Nepal, India, and Myanmar, the U.S. government has investigated Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co's Malaysian factory for the past year. The workers alleged unpaid wages, wrongful deductions, and threats to migrant workers. In June 2020 the Malaysian industrial court ordered Goodyear to pay back the wages and has since committed to a settlement with the workers. [Reuters]

British technology company Dyson also recently decided to sever ties with the Malaysian manufacturing company ATA IMS following an audit of its labor practices and allegations by a whistleblower. The manufacturing company said it was taking the forced labor allegations seriously, along with claims of physical abuse from a former employee.

One of the initiatives underway in Malaysia to address forced labor is the "Working for Workers" mobile application. The app allows workers to file complaints without having to be physically present at the Department of Labour offices.

Saravanan said at a press conference that new pre-conditions had been put in place to monitor the entry of foreign workers into the country. He also said any agencies bringing in foreign workers would have to provide evidence of suitable accommodation for the workers, and e-wages would be introduced to ensure workers receive their salaries on time. [Channel News Asia]

Malaysia: Sarawak state election set for December after being suspended over two emergency periods

(nm) The Sarawak state election in Malaysia's east has been confirmed to take place in mid-December, with nomination day and early voting on Dec 6 and Dec 14 respectively. There are some concerns over the new COVID-19 wave that followed the Melaka polls, however the Election Commission (EC) is mirroring the physical campaigning bans of the Melaka polls and applying them to the Sarawak state election as a precaution. The voter turnout is expected to be around 70% and is significant as a proposed constitutional amendment was introduced to recognize the status of Sarawak and Sabah as part of the Malaysian federation earlier this month. The demand for these states to be elevated has been a long-awaited demand by local Borneo politicians to increase state autonomy. [Channel News Asia] [The Straits Times]

Myanmar: Junta detained a seven-year-old girl for questioning

(tl) Military of the junta detained and interrogated the seven-year-old daughter of a journalist for two days before releasing her. The news editor of the Thingangyun Post, who the regime accused of possessing explosives, was arrested in September with a reporter of the Wai Lin Yu journal. Both are now being held at Insein Prison.

According to police, the two were found in possession of explosives at the time of their arrest. As reported by sources close to the family, the girl was repeatedly asked during the interrogation whether she had seen her mother buying weapons. The two journalists are facing charges under Section 5 of the Explosive Substances Act, according to the source, which carries a sentence of between 10 years and life in prison.

Since the coup of 1 February, more than a hundred journalists have been arrested for subversive activities against the military regime. To date, half of them are still in custody, awaiting trial and facing precarious conditions inside the prisons. [Myanmar NOW]

Myanmar: Families disown children for fear of being targeted by junta

(tl) Families are cutting ties with their children who are members of movements opposing the military regime, for fear of repercussions from the junta or the confiscation and sale of their property.

According to local sources, at least 15 families have disowned some of their relatives through posts on social media in the past week. These numbers also include actors, journalists and radio announcers who were popular before the coup on February 1.

Many families have suffered repercussions following the arrest of a family member, according to local sources. In one testimony, parents of children opposing the regime were arrested for questioning in relation to their children's activities, and then held in prison under false charges while awaiting trial.

According to Khin Maung Myint, a veteran high court lawyer in Myanmar's commercial center and former capital Yangon, families disowning their children as members of the opposition will not quell the wave of arrests involving them, as “the country's military rulers are simply arresting whomever they want”.

Since Myanmar’s military overthrew the country’s democratically elected government, led by Aung San Suu Kyi, on February 1, the junta has violently suppressed nationwide demonstrations that call for a return to civilian rule. 1,291 people have been killed and 7,530 arrested during that time, according to the Bangkok-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP-Burma). [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Junta excluded from Asia-Europe Meeting

(tl) The Myanmar junta was excluded from the two-day virtual Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) on 25-26 November. This is the third time the military regime has been excluded from meetings, composed of members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN).

In a statement issued after the meeting, hosted by the 2022 ASEAN chair Cambodia, leaders from some 50 Asian and European countries expressed their concerns about the situation in Myanmar, calling for a prompt return to democracy and the release of political prisoners. Moreover, the countries reportedly called on Myanmar to allow an ASEAN-led delegation to enter the country and install a peaceful dialogue with the junta, and to obtain a meeting with the deposed democratically elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

Allegedly, the reason why Myanmar was excluded from the ASEM meeting, as well as the ASEAN-China special summit last week and the ten-member bloc’s leaders’

meeting in Brunei last month, was because the regime did not comply with the five-point agreement reached with the ASEAN in April. Key points of the agreement included an immediate cessation of violence in the country, and the installation of a dialogue between the junta and all the parties involved in the 1 February coup. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4] [ASEAN]

As reported by the Thailand-based Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, there have been about 1,300 civilian deaths since the beginning of the violence in the country, while more than 7,000 people are still in prison. As a result of clashes between the army and the resistance forces organized throughout the country, hundreds of thousands of civilians have been displaced while the country is facing against precarious food conditions and the damages caused by the pandemic. [Irrawaddy] [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: 21 anti-regime activists sentenced to death by the junta

(tl) 21 anti-regime activists were sentenced to death on 25 November, while 29 others received life sentences for crimes against the junta.

Some of those sentenced to death were accused of killing two members of the army between July and August, while other charges included high treason, sedition and boycotting the junta's activities. Among those sentenced to life imprisonment, the most frequent charges were making donations to the revolutionary activities of the People's Defense Forces (PDF) and illegally financing the junta's parallel civilian government, the National Unity Government (NUG).

Up until the end of October, the junta had sentenced 65 people to death including two people under the age of 18, according to rights group the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners which also reported that there have been about 1,300 civilian deaths since the beginning of the violence in the country, while more than 7,000 people are still detained. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta raid a Catholic clinic arresting the staff

(tl) Military and police raided a Catholic Church clinic in the east of the country, arresting four doctors and 14 nurses, accusing them of collaborating with and helping resistance forces opposed to the junta. The

facility's authorities denied them any contact with friends or relatives.

Following the operation at the Mercy Clinic the military forced 60 patients, including 40 pregnant women, to move to a hospital under military control.

According to the director of Kayah state's Karenni Human Rights Group, the military violated international law by attacking the clinic and arresting its employees. The ethnic Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) and the Health Ministry of Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government (NUG) also both condemned the military's raid at clinic. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Shadow government reached $6.3 million on launch of sell bonds

(tl) The shadow civilian government of Myanmar said it reached $6.3 million during the inauguration day of its bond sell campaign. The funds raised will be used to finance humanitarian aid within the country as well as the revolutionary activity of the resistance forces opposed to the military junta.

The National Unity Government (NUG), an alliance of pro-democracy groups, ethnic minority armies and remnants of the ousted civilian government had already made it known that the bonds sold would be interest-free, with the aim of raising at least $800 million for humanitarian aid, health, education and military spending. [AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2]

The military junta labelled the shadow government formed in April a 'terrorist-like movement'. Despite this, the NUG has been largely financed by private donations since its formation. According to internal sources, at least 410,000 civilians have joined movements opposed to the junta, to be added with military personnel and police opposed to working for the regime whose job it is to provide useful information to revolutionary movements scattered throughout the country. [Reuters]

Myanmar: Junta accused of starving population

(tl) According to a report by the Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, the military junta is accused of starving the population, destroying food stocks, killing

livestock, and cutting links to roads through which food and medicine have passed since the February 1 coup.

In a statement released by the Council, the international community should recognize and work with the parallel government of the National Unity Government (NUG) to provide effective support inside the country. According to a former UN member, humanitarian organizations working in Myanmar need to be from the international community through direct aid to the parallel government, which is better organized and quicker in handling funds.

The NUG was formed by the National League for Democracy and representatives of ethnic minorities and anti-regime protest groups in April.

According to a UN report, at least 605,000 people have been displaced since the start of violence in the country following the coup. In the last few weeks, following the increase in clashes between the army and revolutionary movements, the number has risen further, making it difficult to calculate exactly how many civilians have been left homeless following the junta's burning of entire villages. [UNHCR] [AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3] [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

According to the report, at least 3 million people in Myanmar need life-saving aid. [UN News] [The Guardian]

The Philippines: Businessman files petition with Supreme Court, requests Senate arrests orders against him void

(lt) Chinese businessman and former economic adviser to President Rodrigo Duterte Michael Yang has filed a petition to the Philippines Supreme Court, asking to void all Senate arrest orders and subpoenas against him. The Senate ordered his arrest using the upper chamber's contempt power. This was done in an attempt to compel Yang to attend ongoing investigations into Pharmally Pharmaceutical Corporation, one of the Duterte administration's main pandemic procurements. Yang was found to be the organisation's guarantor, at times financier, of the newly-established and undercapitalized company. The Senate's investigation into Pharmally Pharmaceutical Corporation revolves around Yang, Pharmally officials and former budget secretary Lloyd Christopher Lao's failure to file proper income tax returns. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Commission on Elections warns of possible foreign influence in upcoming May 2022 national elections

(lt) The Philippine Commission on Elections has warned against underestimating the practice of electronic vote-buying by foreign nationals. This would influence the outcomes of the election and corrupt democratic processes, Commissioner Rowena Guanzon has stated. Guanzon went on to reference the 2016 federal elections in the United States, in which many have accused Russia of "meddling" in.

Vote-buying is a practice prevalent during election time in the Philippines, with politicians bribing citizens with food, money and other material goods in exchange for their votes. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen a rise in the use of online platforms, many of which facilitate financial transactions. The Commission on Elections, as well as Gen. Guillermo Eleazar – chief of the Philippine National Police – have warned that politicians may take advantage of such platforms to buy votes, thus affecting the electoral process. [ABS-CBN News] [Rappler]

The Philippines: Children of political dynasties to form alliance in 2022 elections

(lt) Davao City Mayor Sara Duterte-Carpio has finalized her plans for her vice-presidential campaign in preparation for the upcoming 2022 May elections, announcing her alliance with presidential candidate Bongbong Marcos. In a media release, Duterte-Carpio's party Lakas-CMD announced its formal "adoption" of Marcos, son of the former leader Ferdinand Marcos, as its presidential bet.

Both leaders are members of notable political dynasties – Duterte-Carpio hailing from the Duterte clan, whilst Marcos is descended from the Marcos family. Each holds considerable political power in Davao City and Ilocos Norte respectively, where both families have governed for a significant amount of time. Most notably, Duterte-Carpio and Marcos are children of whom many consider to be the Philippines' most notorious dictators, descended from current Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte and former President Ferdinand Marcos respectively. [Rappler]

The Philippines: National electoral candidates undergo drug tests following accusations of drug usage

(lt) Candidates Sara Duterte-Carpio, current mayor of Davao City, and Bongbong Marcos, son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, have undergone drug tests just months before the upcoming May 2022 national elections. This follows claims made by President Rodrigo Duterte, who openly accused Marcos of weak leadership and cocaine usage just last week. Both candidates, who are running for the positions of vice president and president respectively, returned negative drug tests. [Rappler] [Rappler]

The Philippines: Overseas Filipino workers issue ten-point demand directed towards presidential candidates

(lt) Overseas Filipino workers – commonly referred to as "OFWs" in the Philippines – have issued a ten-point demand, urging for presidential candidates running in the 2022 elections to include them in their electoral agendas. Groups led by Migrante International have asserted that while overseas Filipino workers are recognized as economic heroes in the Philippines, they remain disadvantaged while away from their home country. This "distress" faced by overseas Filipino workers has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many stranded or displaced as a consequence of the Philippine government's inability to act, Migrante International discussed in a statement.

The ten-point demand issued by Migrante International specifically focused on providing safe networks, healthcare, and increased government services for overseas Filipino workers. Other demands include the release of Filipinos on death row, specifically naming Mary Jane Veloso, a Filipino woman detained on death row in Indonesia for smuggling heroin. The migrant association also called on all sectors of the Philippine government to develop a concrete plan and increased funding to alleviate the plight of overseas Filipino workers. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Pharmaceutical company makes undisclosed financial transactions

to unknown entities

(lt) Pharmally Pharmaceutical Company, a company deemed undercapitalized due to its insufficient capital, has reportedly made transactions totalling P3 billion for undisclosed supplies and services. Taking place in 2020, the company engaged in these transactions with two similarly undercapitalized entities, both of which were newly registered companies.

Pharmally is a company notorious for its "murky" transactions. A document titled "Summary List of Pharmally Pharmaceutical Corporation for CY 2020" exhibited officers of the company purchasing luxury cars using company money. This included a Porsche, purchased for P6.85 million from Porsche Motors Inc. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Learning poverty rates in the Philippines at 90%

(lt) A World Bank report has found that learning poverty rates in the Philippines have risen significantly, currently sitting at 90%. This contrasts from data taken in 2019, which estimated learning poverty rates to sit just below 70%.

Learning poverty is defined by one's inability to read and comprehend stories by the age of ten. Its rise can be a consequence of the impacts of COVID-19 on face-to-face learning and the ineffectiveness of remote learning for poverty-stricken families in the Philippines, who are often unable to afford technology necessary for home learning. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: Philippine Nobel laureate denounces possibility of exile

(lt) Maria Ressa, co-founder of the news website Rappler and the first Philippine Nobel laureate, has ruled out possibilities of exile in response to criminal charges she faces. In a streamed news conference, Ressa told audiences that "Exile is not an option" for her; she added that President Rodrigo Duterte's regime of fear and violence was slowly easing due to the upcoming 2022 national elections.

Ressa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize alongside fellow journalist Dmitry Muratov, who hails from Russia. Rappler, Ressa's news website, had its license suspended due to its criticisms of the Duterte regime,

namely the war on drugs. She now consequently faces numerous legal challenges, five of which are related to tax evasion. [Channel News Asia]

The Philippines: Communist rebels surrender in Davao del Norte

(lt) On November 22, 19 communist rebels surrendered to authorities in Davao del Norte on Monday. They collectively also surrendered their arms, consisting of M-16 rifles and a M-14 rifle, to military forces. The former rebels confessed that military operations conducted by the Eastern Mindanao Command had progressively weakened the morale of the communist New People's Army, hence their surrender. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: Islamic insurgent captured in Zamboanga city

(lt) Security forces have captured an Abu Sayyaf bomber in Zamboanga city. The insurgent, named Kalmi Mustala, is also wanted for a series of ransom kidnappings in the south of the Philippines. The 42-year-old was captured in a security operation conducted by police and military forces, found in the coastal village of Recodo.

The terrorist has allegedly participated to a twin suicide attack claimed by the Islamic State in a cathedral in Sulu's capital town of Jolo on Jan. 27, 2019, where over ten people were killed or wounded. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: President's top choice for a successor withdraws from the presidential race

(bs) Senator Christopher Go, the Philippine President's first choice for a successor, officially resigned from the 2022 presidential election race.

The politician offered his support to other candidates who will "serve, continue and protect the Duterte legacy." [Bangkok Post]

Singapore's leading climate change plan

(nm) Singapore's Prime Minister has renewed the country's commitment to fight climate change issues describing it as "life and death matters".

Due to its dense population and flat geographical features, Singapore is at risk from rising sea levels and faces challenges of effective water drainage and sustainable water supply. The nation has adopted an approach that centers long-term planning and implementation in its water system management. This is in preparation for the end of their right to draw water from neighbouring country, Malaysia, in 2061 to which Singapore is currently drawing 50% of its water from.

Over the last two decades, Singapore's National Water Agency (PUB) has made significant progress in achieving its goals for long-term water sustainability. PUB adds large-scale nationwide rainwater harvesting, used water collection and seawater desalination to its list of conventional water sources. Following the United Nations' COP26 conference, Singapore's model has been recognized as a successful case study on how countries can adapt and tackle climate change challenges. [The Conversation]

Singapore, Malaysia: Malaysian man fate lies with Singapore's top court

(nm) Negaennthran K. Dharmalingam is currently on death row for the attempted smuggling of less than 43 grams of heroin into Singapore under their strict anti-drug laws. The case has garnered international attention as Negaennthran has been confirmed by UK-based rights group, Reprieve, to have an intellectual disability and had fallen victim to trafficking. Reprieve's director, Maya Foa, has argued for his protection from the death penalty as a result of his condition.

Legal experts from the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network and Amnesty International have spoken against Singapore's ruling that his execution would be "inhumane and a violation of international law". Singapore maintains its zero tolerance against illicit substances and has made its consequences clear at its borders. [AP News]

Thailand: Former deputy prime minister and protest leader accused of corruption

(bs) Former Thai deputy prime minister Suthep Thaugsuban who led the anti-government protest in 2010 may face charges for alleged illegal activities concerning a $173-million project to build over 300 new police stations.

On November 24, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) has filed a request to the Supreme Court to investigate and punish the former politician for corruption and price collusion in a government's project.

The NACC claimed that an executive member of the contractor company “tendered contract bids that were unusually low”, and that the unusual prices were not spotted by the verification committee. These quotations were used to pitch for PCC Development and Construction Co. to be awarded the contract, and the company later failed to complete construction. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Apple warn Thai activists that state-sponsored attackers target them.

(kc) At least 17 activists including researchers, university professors, and protest leaders who criticized and opposed the Thai government, claimed they received alert messages from Apple Inc. on November 24 notifying them that their iPhones were being targeted by state-sponsored attackers. Through this, hackers might have remote access to sensitive data as well as the camera and microphone, but there was no indication of which state the text referred to. Thai Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan said authorities were investigating the case. [The Guardian] [Khaosod, in Thai]

On the same day, Apple Inc. released a statement that they filed a lawsuit against Israeli spyware firm NSO Group and its parent company to curb the abuse of state-sponsored spyware. Apple has said it has new evidence of how the latest NSO spyware products could break into victims' devices. [Apple]

Thailand: Youths demand for marriage equality

(kc) Pro-democracy, feminist, and LGBTQ networks gathered on November 28 at the Ratchaprasong intersection in Bangkok to promote a petition calling for legal amendments to Section 1448 of the Thai Civil and Commercial Code to make the marriage legal for all regardless of sexual orientations and gender identities.

The Thai Constitutional Court recently ruled that the current Thai marriage law which does not recognize same-sex marriage does not violate the Constitution and suggests lawmakers enact laws that ensure equal marriage rights for all people. [See also AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4] [Thairath, in Thai]

Thailand: Probe launched into Amnesty International's compliance with Thai law

(sd) Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha ordered Royal Thai Police (RTP) and the Interior Ministry on November 26 to conduct a probe into whether Amnesty International Thailand has broken national law after receiving complaints about the organization from royalist groups which called for the human rights group to be expelled for supporting activists calling for reforms of the monarchy, deemed as attempts to undermine national security and the royal institution. The organization's finances will also be investigated. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post, 2]

The royalist campaign was fueled by Amnesty International's support of activists Anon Nampa, Panupong Jadnok and Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul after the Constitutional Court ruled that the three were guilty of attempting to overthrow the monarchy, after they gave speeches during a political protest at Thammasat University on August 10, 2020. [The Thaiger]

The Prime Minister Office's vice minister also launched a campaign to collect one million signatures in support of expelling the group. Also, a draft law was recently submitted to parliament which asks for greater transparency from NGOs. This would include the organizations clarifying where their funding comes from and submitting annual reports with auditing details.

Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for Research said the court ruling on the three activists was "a dangerous warning to hundreds of thousands of Thais who want to express their opinions or

legitimate criticisms of public figures or institutions." [Amnesty International]

In a separate statement the organization said it has been in Thailand for several decades and will continue to work on holding states and corporations accountable for human rights abuses. [Reuters]

Thailand: Bill for the elimination of discrimination submitted for parliament's deliberation

(bs) A bill on the elimination of discrimination has been submitted to the Thai parliament for further deliberation after it bill garnered over 12,000 supportive signatories. To introduce a bill in Thailand, 10.000 signatures are required.

The lead representative of the proponent parliamentary group shared the hope that the bill will mark a further step towards the national promotion of equal treatment to all. He also affirmed that the spread of discriminatory behaviors in Thailand has its roots in the education system, proposing effective political actions in tackling the issue with new legislation. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Media outlets told to stop ournalists to stop covering pro-democracy speech

(sd) The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NTBC) of Thailand told media outlets to cease reporting on activists who call for a reform of the monarchy.

The warning follows a Constitutional Court decision earlier this which considered demands for a reform of the monarchy made by three protesters as amounting to attempt to overthrow the royal institution.

The regulatory body said journalists in Thailand were free to report on pro-democracy protests but warned that coverage of protesters' calls for reform of the monarchy could be viewed as repeating the above mentioned offense and may result in the prosecution of journalists and media outlets.

One pro-democracy activist said it was "the dawn of a new dark age in Thailand," and that having the wrong

political opinion made you “an enemy of the state”.

Foreign residents in Thailand are also not exempt from legal action. French entrepreneur Yan Marchal was refused entry into Thailand and deported after the Thai Immigration Department issued an expulsion order. The department said he posed a “danger to society” due to his political views. [Bangkokpost]

Marchal, who had lived in Thailand for 18 years and has children there, posted videos on YouTube and TikTok which made jokes about the country’s monarchy and government. [UCA News]

Thailand: Fishing industry urged to eliminate illegal labor practices

(bs) Recent investigations of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) revealed that child labor and forced labor are still widely practiced in Thai fishing-related industries.

Following the allegations made in the Human Rights Watch's World Report 2021, the NHRC conducted further inspections on the labor conditions of both Thai and migrant workers in the fishing industry, finding that children, younger than 15, are still employed in fisheries, and teenagers between 15 and 18 often work eight-hour night shifts. The NHRC also found that migrant workers are victims of forced labor and human trafficking.

Although the Thai Labor Protection Act, 1998, regulates child labor, illegal workplace practices, and forced labor, the NHRC urged the country to strictly enforce it in combination with the national laws on child exploitation and forced labor.

The NHRC also stressed the importance of holding the authorities accountable through constant monitoring by civil organizations. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Constitutional amendments introduces two-ballot electoral system

(nm) Following the promulgation of the constitutional amendment that re-introduced the two-ballot electoral system, the coalition government is expected to submit draft amendment bills to the two organic laws on the election of MPs and political parties. Other parties including the Democrat Party, the

Chartthaipattana Party and the Palang Pracharath Party announced that they have already prepared theirs.

In the 2019 general election a single-ballot method was used. Voters cast a single, fused ballot for a candidate. The vote counted as both a vote for the candidate, and simultaneously a vote for that candidate's party for purposes of the party list seats. Under the new system voters will use two ballots, one for their constituency MP and the other for a party-list MP. Additionally, the number of constituency MPs will increase from 350 to 400, while the number for list MPs will drop from 150 to 100. [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Proposed bill seeks to repeal announcements and orders made under the 2014 coup

(nm) A new civic group-sponsored bill has been submitted to parliament which aims to repeal 35 announcements and orders that were established during the 2014 coup. It is scheduled to enter its first reading in the House of Representatives this Wednesday. Internet Law Reform Dialogue (iLaw) has confirmed that the draft is up for deliberation. The bill will be presented by the group, and more than 13,000 eligible signatures have been collected in support.

Both iLaw and civil groups will address the House to argue for the abolition of the coup's orders that suppressed civil rights and liberties. These orders range from fishing regulations to education reforms and the lack of public involvement in political due process. [Bangkok Post]

The draft follows the previous amendment bill, proposed, and campaigned by activist group Re-solution. This bill was supported by 135,000 eligible voters; however, it was dismissed by Parliament during its first reading. [See AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Thailand: Miss Universe Thailand contestant sparks controversy over accused abuse of the Thailand flag

(nm) Miss Universe Thailand Anchilee Scott-Kemmis has been accused of flag abuse after a promotional campaign featured the contestant standing on what looks like the Thai flag. The pageant organizer's

website was where it was initially promoted. Sonthiya Sawasdee, a former advisor to the House committee on law, justice and human rights, accused Anchilee of breaching the 1979 Flag Act and the PM's announcement which bans the use of the Thai flag for commercial purposes.

The maximum punishment for flag abuse could include a combination of a two-year prison sentence and a 40,000 baht fine. Head of Thanai Klai Took lawyers' network, Decha Kittiwitthayanan, recognized that it is unlikely Anchilee will be held criminally accountable as there are no clear motives or ill intentions. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste: Discharged Portuguese judge may return to Timor-Leste's high courts

(bs) A former Portuguese judge, who was relieved from their position in Timor-Leste for declaring the 2008 budget amendments unconstitutional, may obtain a new position in the Timorese judicial system.

The magistrate has applied to be the new international advisor on criminal law in district courts and judge of the Superior Council for the Judiciary, claiming that the Council's decision to discharge the Portuguese judge was unjustified, confirming that he had acted within the scope of a magistrate's duties.

The decision on the positions will be released between the end of December 2021 and the beginning of 2022. [Observador, in Portuguese]

Timor-Leste: Fundings received for national digitalization

(bs) The Timorese government received a $5 million USD grant for peace-building education and national digitalization.

The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) financed the grant to support Timor-Leste to maintain the country's commitment to respect human rights and maintain political peace. The primary objectives of the program include building a digital archiving system at Centro Nacional Chega (CNC), peace education projects, and enhancing national capacity in conflict management and reconciliation.

The CNC is a public institution established to promote human rights education, the implementation of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (CAVR)'s recommendations, and provide support to those affected by human rights violations. [Timor-Leste government]

Vietnam: Five Vietnamese nationals rescued from slavery

(bs) After two years of investigations, UK authorities rescued five Vietnamese citizens who were victims of modern slavery.

The group of Vietnamese men, who were forced to cultivate and guard the production of illegal drugs, were found living in precarious conditions in Essex, the same region where 39 Vietnamese people died in a lorry attempting to enter the UK illegally in 2019.

After the arrest of five people allegedly responsible for the crime, the court sentenced four of the offenders to three to five years in jail, and one to a suspended sentence and a hundred hours of unpaid work. [Việt Nam News]

According to the 2017 report by Independent Anti-Slavery Commissioner "the most common sectors within which Vietnamese nationals experienced modern slavery in the UK are labor exploitation, including cannabis cultivation, and nail bars, followed by sexual exploitation." Also, the organization Anti-Slavery has identified Vietnam "as one of the top three countries of origin for victims of trafficking in the UK." [Anti-Slavery]

Vietnam: Vietnam plays a central role in illegal wildlife trafficking; report calls for international help

(bs) According to the latest report on the role of Vietnam on wildlife trafficking, Vietnam has been one of the primary actors in the illegal export of wildlife products from Africa expediting the deterioration of African biodiversity.

Despite the Vietnamese Government's efforts to eradicate the illegal wildlife trade, groups of Vietnamese criminals have continued exploiting, trafficking, and poaching African elephants, pangolins, and rhinos since early 2000.

International investigative authorities believe that the number of animal victims of illegal activities currently known include 18,000 elephants, 111,000 pangolins, and 976 rhinos. This represents only a minor percentage of the Vietnamese wildlife trafficking activity, supporting the claim that most illegal operations remain "undetected." Moreover, only 14 percent of those crimes resulted in convictions in the past ten years.

The authorities reported illegal operations on wildlife by Vietnamese groups in Angola, Cameroon, DR Congo, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, and Uganda.

Among the reasons behind the high involvement of Vietnam in the wildlife illegal trade is Vietnam's long history of using rhino horns as a natural medicine and profitable export market with China.

Vietnam has increased the number of seizures of illegal wildlife trade to 40 percent over the past three years and introduced new preventative legislation in the 2018 Penal Code. [Radio Free Asia] [Environmental Investigation Agency] [Mongabay]

Vietnam: World Intellectual Property Organization Copyright Treaty signed

(bs) Vietnam has acceded to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)'s Copyright Treaty (WCT) following last week's hand-over of the country's instrument of accession to the WIPO.

Speaking at the hand-over ceremony, Le Thi Tuyet Mai, Permanent Representative of Vietnam to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva shared Vietnam's plan to develop its digital presence, improve the National software industry, and implement effective legislation in the protection of copyright. Moreover, she reassured that the country is committed to adhering to the treaty's guidelines as a statutory foundation of the National legal framework on digital copyright. [Vietnam Plus]

Vietnam: Political prisoners strike against cell confinement

(bs) A group of Vietnamese political prisoners held in their cells for over five months held a strike for their

rights to be allowed to exercise outdoors by refusing prison food. According to the wife of one detainee, the detention center has started denying the group food and medicine donations from their families.

A former political prisoner reported the detrimental effects of long-term confinement on both the mental and physical health of the inmates. He also claimed that, although it is not clear if criminal prisoners endure the same treatment, authorities often make political prisoners undergo physical and psychological pressure to receive a "confession" of the allegedly committed crime.

According to Vietnam's 2015 Penal Code, all prisoners should enjoy the "right to physical exercise, to practice religious beliefs and to perform cultural and artistic activities." [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

ASEM13: Asia, Europe discuss multilateralism

(bs) Asian and European leaders discussed three "pillars" of multilateral partnership at the 13th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM13) on "Strengthening Multilateralism for Shared Growth."

The objective of the event, held in Cambodia on 25-26 November 2021, was to review legal and political approaches on three main areas of interest, "the three

pillars," namely politics and security, economy and finance, and culture and society.

The 51 participatory countries and the two regional organizations, European Union and ASEAN, concluded the meeting with the adoption of three documents: ASEM13 Chair's Statement, Phnom Penh Statement on the Post-COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery, and The Way Forward on ASEM Connectivity.

In her speech, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, primarily focused on effective cooperation on restoring global economies affirming that "openness, multilateralism and a rules-based trading system will be crucial to a lasting economic recovery." She also mentioned the crucial role of the upcoming European Global Gateway (EGG) in multilateral investment and sustainable infrastructure development. [European Commission]

The EGG aims to be an alternative to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand European trade and investments in the Global South. [INAA group]

During the two-day meeting, the leaders shared concerns on the threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction and committed to promoting global disarmament. Moreover, they agreed on working towards the global elimination of gender-based discrimination and violence, protection of human rights, promotion of the Rule of Law, and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The diplomats also urged Myanmar to immediately release those arbitrary incarcerated, and rapid deployment of humanitarian assistance to the country. Furthermore, they recommended Bangladesh provide safe shelter to those affected by the conflict in Rakhine State implementing the Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State between Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Furthermore, European and Asian leaders stressed the importance of strengthening the digital economy and connectivity to fight cyber-crime on both a national and a global scale. They recognized the key role of digital transformation to ensure "a global, open, secure, stable, accessible, and peaceful ICT environment."

Among other topics, the participants discussed measures against climate change, environment preservation, and emphasized the importance of complying with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). [ASEAN]

Summit for Democracy: Invitees' list out, China and Russia amongst those excluded

(dql) The US Department of State last week released the invitees' list for the virtual Democracy Summit on December 9-10, hosted by US President Joe Biden and aimed at "solicit[ing] bold, practicable ideas" revolving around three core issues including "defending against authoritarianism," "addressing and fighting corruption," and "promoting respect for human rights." The list contains 110 countries. Among them are twelve countries from South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia, including India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Taiwan and Timor-Leste. [Department of State, USA]

The December gathering is the first of two summits with which Biden fulfills his presidential campaign pledge to advance the cause of global democracy against the global rise of autocratic governments.

China and Russia, both excluded, strongly rejected the summit. Chinese and Russian Ambassadors to the US Qin Gang and Anatoly Antonov in a rare joint opinion article – published in The National Interest (TNI), an American bimonthly conservative international relations magazine, – called it an "evident product of its Cold-War mentality," which "will stoke up ideological confrontation and a rift in the world, creating new 'dividing lines'." They urged all countries to "stop using 'value-based diplomacy' to provoke division and confrontation [...] to work for harmonious coexistence between countries with different social systems, ideologies, histories, cultures, and development levels." [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

China, US clash over elections results in Venezuela

(dql/pm) China's Foreign Ministry called on the international community to respect the results of the regional and municipal elections in Venezuela, held on Sunday, November 21, warning against "gross interference by external forces." [Xinhua].

The Statement comes shortly after the US State Department called the elections "grossly skewed," accusing President Nicolas Maduro of resorting to authoritarian tactics to ensure "that the elections

would not reflect the will of the Venezuelan people." [Department of State, USA]

According to first announcements of the National Electoral Council, government candidates led in 20 of 23 states, prompting President Maduro's party, the United Socialist Party of Venezuela, to declare victory. Over the past years, opposition forces – backed by US sanctions against the Maduro regime – unsuccessfully attempted to oust the Maduro government which, for its part, was supported by Russia. [Reuters]

Under the presidencies of Hugo Chavez (2002-2013) and Nicolas Maduro China has become Venezuela's biggest lender with some $60 billion, and Beijing's ensuing growing influence has turned the South-American into a spot of the US-China geopolitical competition. In its recently released 2021 Report to Congress

the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, warns that "through trade, loans, and political backing, China has provided an economic lifeline to authoritarians like the Maduro regime in Venezuela while supporting democratic backsliding elsewhere in the region," highlighting that "China's expanding control over entire supply chains in the region may also harm U.S. competitiveness and threaten U.S. access to critical inputs for emerging technologies." [US Institute of Peace] [Congress, USA]

China-US relations: Sanctions on 12 additional Chinese companies

(pm) Citing national security concerns, Washington has added a dozen firms to its export blacklist in the latest move, which observers say could lead to a technology decoupling. They include quantum computing and semiconductor companies and businesses that are believed to have contributed to "Pakistan's unsafeguarded nuclear activities," and to advancing military modernization of the People Liberation Army. [South China Morning Post].

The move indicates that Washington is piling up pressure on Chinese companies, continuing a hard, uncompromising stance and strategy in the Sino-US tech and trade dispute.

In a related development, US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo on November 29 called on the House of Representatives to immediately pass Innovation and Competition Act, or USICA, to prevent future supply interruptions and to reduce reliance on parts from

China. Tucked into this bill is the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors for America Act, or CHIPS Act, that authorizes $52 billion for the domestic production of semiconductor production and incentives for investments in new semiconductor manufacturing facilities in the country. It also provides for the establishment of a National Semiconductor Technology Center.

The USICA was passed by the Seante in June, but has been stalled in the House of Representatives. [CNN]

China-US relations: Pentagon's plans to expand bases in Guam and Australia and PLA's conditions for developing relations with US military

(dql/pm) The US Defense Department announce that based on its 2021 Global Posture Review (GPR) the US military it will upgrade and expand military facilities in Guam and Australia reflecting targeting China as a the US's major military. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific is confirmed in the review as prority region in which the US seeks "additional cooperation with allies and partners across the region to advance initiatives that contribute to regional stability and deter potential military aggression from China and threats from North Korea."

The GPR is one of several defense-policy reports to be released in the next months that will influence US President Joe Biden's decicion where to place US military assets and forces worldwide. [9 News]

For a critical account of the US's "missed opportunities" in the Sino-US competition for influence in Oceania, see Grant Newsham in [Asia Times] who draws on the example of the Solomon Islands and argues that the US is wantonly negligent in ceding the strategically important islands to Beijing. In 2019, the Solomon Islands under Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare shifted its diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China.

Furthermore, concerns among US lawmakers are rising over the Marshall Islands loyalty toward the US as the stalwart American allyis in a dispute with Washington over the terms of its "Compact of Free Association" agreement, with expiration approaching. Washington is refusing to engage the Marshallese on claims for environmental and health damage caused US nuclear tests conducted in the 1940s and '50s, promting fears as China appears to be ready to step in

with infrastructure and climate resiliency investment needed by the Marshall Islands.

Located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, the Marshall Islands is a highly important strategic outpost for the US military with developed military, intelligence and aerospace facilities. [Military.com]

China's Ministry of Defense, meanwhile, has spelled out conditions for military talks with Washington, which would be the first such exchange since the virtual summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden earlier this month. While confirming that communication between the two militaries was important to stabilize bilateral ties, the Ministry made it clear that talks should be conducted on the understanding that China's sovereignty should not be infringed upon. It cited as acts of interference US spying and provocations on Taiwan and the South China Sea. [South China Morning Post]

US points finger to China in praise for South African scientists' transparency on Omicron variant

(pm/dql) During his talks with South African International Relations and Cooperation Minister Naledi Pandor on bilateral cooperation on Covid-19 vaccination in Africa, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken praised South Africa's scientists the "quick identification of the Omicron variant and South Africa's government for its transparency in sharing this information," calling it a "model for the world," to emulate. The statement is a thinly veiled reference to China.

The pandemic is one front of tensions between the US and China where Washington has repeatedly criticized Beijing for being not transparent enough on its tracing the origins of the coronavirus and obstructing global Covid-19 research. In October, the US National Intelligence Council accused China of continuing "to hinder the global investigation [on the origin of the coronavirus], resist sharing information, and blame other countries, including the United States." [South China Morning Post] [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

China: Expanding foothold in Africa

(dql) Eritrea and Guinea-Bissau have joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), after signing MoUs on November 25 and 22 respective. The access of the two African countries to China's global infrastructure project reflects its expanding foothold in the continent. In particular, Eritrea's cooperation is believed to solidify China's strategic position in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, where Beijing has vast interests, operating a military base in neighboring Djibouti and running other large infrastructure projects including as ports and railways. Meanwhile, with Guinea-Bissau joining, Beijing is expected to expand its maritime interests along the West African coastline. [South China Morning Post]

The MoUs came ahead of the Forum for China-Africa Cooperation (FORAC) held in Senegal on November 29. In his opening speech, Chinese President Xi Jinping vowed – among otthers – to encourage investments in Africa by Chinese busineess worth at least 10 billion USD over the next and to provide African financial institutions with a credit line of the same amount. [CCTV]

Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Kenya, Nigeria and Senegal. During his first trip to Africa as State Secretary he reassured US readiness to make the "U.S.-China competition on the continent to be a race to the top," and announced that Washington will host a summit of African leaders aimed at deepening ties with the continent, without giving details on date and place. [NPR] [VoA]

For a discussion of Blinken's Africa trip, see David E Kiwuwa in [The Conversation] who suggest that the US Africa policy under Biden reflects an attempt to "set a new tone and underscore the Biden administration's belief that Africa matters to the US as a strategic partner," after years of indifference towards Africa under Donald Trump and in the face of China's "irreversible inroads into Africa."

China-Russia relations: Roadmap for expansion of military cooperation signed

(dql/pm) In a latest sign of closer ties between China and Russia, Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and his Russian counterpart Sergei signed a roadmap to deepening military ties, including strategic military drills and joint patrols, during a video call on Tuesday, November 23. Both ministers condemned US military moves near their respective borders, calling them US

attempts to disrupt and sabotage regional peace and stability.

On the same day, the USS Milius, a Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, transited through the Taiwan Strait, marking the tenth time an American warship transited through the narrow waterway separating Taiwan and China since US President Joe Biden took office [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. Shoigu, meanwhile, cited some 30 sorties – involving strategic bombers – made to Russia's borders of the Russian Federation in October, 2.5 times more than in the corresponding period last year. [Newsweek] [Express]

Meanwhile, the 7th China-Russia Committee for Parliamentary Cooperation was held virtually also on the same day, with Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee Li Zhanshu confirming that Sino-Russian relations have been progressing "at a high level with fruitful outcomes in various fields of cooperation." Issues discussed at the meeting included maintaining political security in the two countries, establishing a legal framework to enhance synergies between the Belt and Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union, and legislative exchanges in COVID-19 prevention and control, public health and other sectors. [Xinhua]

China, Russia reiterate opposition to AUKUS

(pm) China and Russia reiterated their strong rejection of the AUKUS nuclear submarine pact between the US, Australia and the UK, calling it a threat to the "international non-proliferation mechanism and global strategic balance and stability, as well as the post-war international security order."

The Sino-Russian joint statement was made during the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors meeting held on November 26 in Vienna, which for the first time discussed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the context of AUKUS. [Xinhua].

For a discussions on how to break the "nuclear silence" between China and the US and to bring Beijing to the negotiating table in the face of the latter's accelerated nuclear weapons expansion, see Rose Gottemoeller in [Politico] and David E. Sanger and William J. Broad in [The New York Times]

China-Palestine phone talk on two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

(pm) Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi discussed with Palestinian Deputy Prime Minister Ziad Aby Amr the current status of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, with the latter condemning Israel's "apartheid practices, including daily settler aggression" as threats to the existence of the Palestinian people in their homeland. In response, Wang Yi expressed his country's intentions to step up its involvement in mediating efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict, adding that China believes the international community should uphold the "land for peace" principle and realise that the "two-state solution" is the only realistic path to resolving the Palestinian question. [Middle East Monitor] [Xinhua]

On Wednesday, November 17, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Israeli counterpart Isaac Herzog held a telephone conversation, the first ever presidential phone talk between the two countries during which Iran's nuclear program, the Abraham Accords and the bilateral ties between both countries were discussed. Both leaders agreed to work for greater Israeli-Chinese collaboration in the future, stressing especially the areas of culture, economy, and tourism, and reaffirming their commitment to the China-Israel comprehensive innovation partnership, established in 2017 between Xi and then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to boost innovation cooperation between the two countries [see AiR NO.47, November/2021/4].

China-Iran relations: Foreign Ministers close ranks against US

(dql/pm) During a virtual meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confirmed that China was willing to deepen cooperation in the framework of the countries' comprehensive strategic partnership. He furthermore, reassured in a thinly veiled reference to the US that China will support Iran in its resistance to unilateralism and "bullying acts," vowing to support Iran's "reasonable demands" in nuclear negotiations. He also sharply condemned the US for hosting a democracy summit in December, to which 110 countries – including Taiwan and Iraq – are invited, but not China and Iran, calling the event an attempt to "create divisions through ideological confrontation," and "to change other sovereign nations in American style to serve the US' own strategic needs."

Amir, for his part, expressed satisfaction with the progress in the relations between the two countries made in recent months, while strongly decrying US interference in China's internal affairs and accusing Washington of politicizing sports for geopolitical gains, citing threats to boycott the Beijing Winter Olympics. [South China Morning Post] [Mehr News Agency]

The meeting reflects an increasing alignment between the two countries whose relations with the US are highly strained.

China-EU relations: Beijing to face renewal of sanctions

(dql/pm) A legislative motion on the renewal of EU sanctions against China over human rights violations and forced labor in Xinjiang was approved on November 24 by the bloc's powerful Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper) II body which is composed of member states' ambassadors to the EU. The approval of the renewal by the member states' ministers for employment, social policy, health and consumer affairs is expected for early December. [South China Morning Post 1].

In March, the EU had imposed sanctions including travel bans and asset freezes on four Chinese officials and the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps Public Security Bureau for human rights abuses in Xinjiang. It is the first time in more than three decades that the EU was placing sanctions on Beijing following the EU arms embargo in 1989 in the wake of the Tiananmen Square crackdown [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]. While the sanctions are mainly symbolic, they signal a substantial hardening in the EU's policy towards China.

Meanwhile, the EU has called on China to provide "independent and verifiable proof" of the "well-being and whereabouts" of tennis star Peng Shuai, defying Chinese state media efforts to present her in videos and on images as safe and active, widely seen as having provided under duress. Peng had not seen and heard publicly following her post on social media earlier this month in which she accused former Vice Premier Zheng Gaoli of forcing her to have sexual relations with him. It was the first time such an allegation has been made against one of China's most senior politicians. [South China Morning Post 2] [AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2]

UK: MI6 needs cooperation with tech industry to cope with China's and Russia's cyber threats

(dql) MI6 new chief Richard Moore has urged his agency to become "more open to stay secret" and cooperate with tech companies to counter threats posed by China and Russia, making clear that that means abandoning MI6's longstanding tradition of relying "primarily on our own capabilities to develop the world-class technologies we need to stay secret and deliver against our mission."

In his first speech since assuming the post of the foreign spy agency's head on November 23, Moore stressed that MI6 is not capable to develop the tools needed in-house to counter hybrid physical and virtual threats, pointing to "adversaries" massively investing artificial intelligence, quantum computing and synthetic biology, "because they know that mastering these technologies will give them leverage." [The Guardian]

Moore's statement comes after MI6, MI5 and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) reportedly concluded an agreement with Amazon to host their cloud computing this year. [Financial Times]

For a discussion of the motives behind China's and Russia's "digital authoritarianism", including establishing cyber sovereignty as a global norm and spreading digital censorship systems across the globe, see David Calhoun Olivia Enos in [The National Interest].

China-Germany relations: China urges Berlin to continue its pragmatic China policy

(pm) Beijing warned Germany's new coalition government not to interfere over Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang, and urged it to stick to previous friendly policies. The warning came after the leaders of the three parties which will form the new government – the Social Democratic Party, the Alliance 90/The Greens, and the Free Democratic Party – presented the coalition agreement after weeks of negotiations. The 177-page document contains more than a dozen references to China, and for the first time mentions human rights abuses in Xinjiang, the erosion of rights in Hong Kong, and the Taiwan issue. Furthermore,

Annalena Baerbock of the Greens is expected to become Foreign Minister in the new Cabinet. During her election campaign the repeatedly announced to pursue a tougher stance towards China. [South China Morning Post] [The Local]

China-Denmark relations: Foreign Ministers meet to discuss elevation of ties

(pm) On November 26, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met his Danish counterpart Jeppe Kofod. It was the first visit of a Danish Foreign Minister to China in three years. During the meeting Wang reassured that China wa ready to elevate Sino-Danish relations and to strengthen "political guidance and strategic alignment." Kofod, for his part, confirmed that investments of Chinese business are welcome in Denmark which would not discriminate any company. [Xinhua]

China-Switzerland relations: FTA talks to start soon

(pm) During their video call on November 27, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis agreed on launching negotiations on an upgrade on the 2013 free trade agreement as soon as possible. China has been Switzerland's biggest trading partner in Asia for more than a decade, and its third largest globally after the European Union and the United States.

Both ministers also agreed on opposing "malicious politicisation" of sports as China faces calls for a boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics scheduled for February 2022. [CGTN] [South China Morning Post].

China wins seat at Interpol

(pm) Hu Binchen, deputy director general of the Chinese public security ministry's international coordination department, was elected to Interpol's 13-member executive committee, despite opposition from an alliance of lawmakers from 20 countries. Hu won one of two seats representing Asia, next to Praveen Sinha, special director of India's Central Bureau of Investigation, the country's premier investigative agency.

Meanwhile, Maj. Gen. Ahmed Naser al-Raisi, inspector general at the United Arab Emirates' interior ministry, was elected the committee's president was also elected during Interpol's general assembly this week, with United Arab Emirates' Ahmed Nasser al-Raisi winning the role, the global agency said. [South China Morning Post].

China: Advancing space technology

(dql) China is reportedly developing a powerful nuclear reactor for its Moon and Mars missions, expected to be capable of producing one megawatt of electric power which would be 100 times more powerful than a similar device that the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) wants to put on the surface of the moon by 2030. [South China Morning Post]

The report comes as China continued its record-breaking year of launches, with two satellites launched on separate rockets and from different space centers on Monday, November 22. The two launches marked China's 44th and 45th in the year, extending a national record for orbital launches in a calendar year. The US has launched 44 times so far in 2021. [Space.com]

For account of big ambitions of China's emerging commercial space sector, see Andrew Jones in [Space News] reporting about last week's China Commercial Aerospace Forum (CCAF) in Wuhan.

Japan: Ambassador to Australia calls for unity over Taiwan

(ec) In interviews with newspapers *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Japanese ambassador Shingo Yamagami has called for unity amongst Japan's democratic allies over Chinese moves against Taiwan and the South China Sea. Shingo's statements are the latest Japanese effort to rally international support for the status-quo in the Indo-Pacific area. Both Japan and Australia are members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), with the former hosting the group's next summit in 2022. QUAD, which was formed in 2007 but lapsed until 2017, is widely viewed as a counter to China's growing military and economic power. [Nippon.com] [The Sydney Morning Herald]

For more perspective on Japan's shifting consensus on Taiwan, consider reading this article by Ryan Ashley,

wherein he discusses how and why Japanese strategic policy concerning Taiwan has shifted from lukewarm acknowledgement to open support. [War on the Rocks]

Japan: Foreign Minister concerned over Russian military activity

(ec) In a phone call on November 25, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov agreed to resume stalled peace treaty negotiations, with the former expressing concerns over the recent surge in Russian and Chinese military activity proximate to Japan. Other issues discussed included tensions in Eastern Europe and North Korea's ballistic missile tests. [The Mainichi]

The disputed status of the southernmost Kuril Islands, called the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan, means that Russia and Japan have been *de jure* in a state of conflict since the Second World War. Tokyo claims that the Northern Territories were not covered in the Yalta Agreement, and considers their return a matter of national pride. Russia passed a constitutional amendment last year that prevents it from ceding territory to a foreign power and is unwilling to forsake their strategic value in the Pacific. Russian President Putin, however, has declared his belief that peace talks can continue regardless of the constitutional constraint. [Aljazeera] [The Diplomat 1] [See AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

Hayashi's phone call came two days after Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu signed a roadmap for the development of stronger military ties with China. Shoigu cited recent US strategic bomber exercises along the Russian border as necessitating further Sino-Russian military co-operation. Moscow and Beijing conducted joint naval drills in the Sea of Japan in October, whilst two Russian and two Chinese strategic bombers flew over the East China Sea in a joint patrol on Friday, November 19. [Japan Today] [See AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

For additional perspective on Sino-Russian ties see Yuan Jiang in [The Diplomat 2] who weighs the advantages both gain from co-operation against their growing clashes of interests.

Japan: Okinawa Governor to reject US base plan

(ec) At a prefectural assembly meeting on Thursday, November 25, Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki stated his intention to reject the central government's plan for the relocation of a US military base on the island, under which the functions of the Futenma airfield would be transferred to a new site next to the Marines' Camp Schwab. The plan conforms with a bilateral accord from 1996 for the return of the land the air base occupies, with the central government looking to start land reclamation in the area. [Kyodo News]

In addition to many Okinawans expressing opposition to the base remaining in the prefecture, a patch of weak seabed discovered within the designated reclamation area in 2016, but only revealed to the public in 2018, has given the local government a means to oppose Tokyo, which Tanaki claims has not been responding to his calls for dialogue over the plan. The central government, which considers the airbase a deterrent against regional aggressors, is likely to take the matter to court. If the plan is approved, the move is expected to take 12 years before operations can start at the new base, coming to a total cost of around 930 billion yen. [The Asahi]

For additional perspective on the opposition of Okinawans to the presence of US forces, see Jon Mitchell in [The Diplomat] who sheds light on numerous disasters that have occurred since the creation of the base.

Japan and Vietnam discuss co-operation over South China Sea

(bs) (ec) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met with Vietnamese counterpart Pham Minh Chinh, who is the first foreign leader to be hosted by Kishida since the latter took office in October, in Tokyo on Wednesday, November 24. Foremost amongst their discussions were shared concerns over "unilateral attempts to change the status quo and increase tensions" in regional waters, a thinly veiled reference to China as both Japan and Vietnam contest Chinese claims to islands in the East China Sea and South China Sea, respectively. Both leaders declared their commitment to International Maritime Law and improving maritime sustainable development by effectively utilize available resources whilst preserving the ecosystem.

Meetings between Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi and Vietnamese counterpart Phan Van Giang on Tuesday, November 23, and Foreign Minister

Yoshimasa Hayashi and Vietnamese counterpart Bui Thanh Son on Thursday, November 25, were also dominated by the topic of Chinese moves disrupting the established order in the Indo-Pacific. Japan has been looking to bolster its security in the region by reinforcing its ties with countries and nations opposed to Beijing's actions.

Other topics included the promotion of Japanese defense exports to Vietnam, improving conditions for Vietnamese students studying in Japan, and resolving Japanese industrial supply chain issues. Kishida vowed to deliver more than 1 million additional COVID19 vaccine doses to Vietnam, increasing total dose contribution to approximately 5.6 million, as well as indicating his intention to expand the "Medium to Long-Term Vision for Japan-Vietnam Agricultural Cooperation." Chinh sought to use the visit to expand Japan's public and private investment in Vietnam, as the country looks abroad to stimulate industrial development and digital transformation domestically.

Both parties also released a signed joint statement promoting Vietnam-Japan cooperation in the fields of economy and investment, education, agriculture, and health, as well as foreign policy, security, and climate change. [Kyodo News 1] [Kyodo News 2] [The Mainichi] [Vietnam News] [Vietnam Plus 1] [Vietnam Plus 2] [Vietnam Times] [See AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2]

Japan: Foreign Minister remains apprehensive about China visit

(la) Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi stated to not yet have made a decision on whether to accept the invitation of an official visit to China from his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi as Sino-Japanese ties have been further strained over sensitive issues such as the Taiwan strait, the disputed Senkaku islands, and human rights violations Tokyo is accusing China of more openly than ever before [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

Although Japan and China will mark their 50th anniversary of diplomatic normalization next year, the invitation is understood to come at a sensitive time, as the U.S. government is considering a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics as a protest to the alleged human rights violations taking place in China's Xinjiang region. Masahisa Sato, head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Foreign Affairs Division, explained that accepting Wang Yi's invitation could send off the wrong message abroad.

While Hayashi has currently not accepted China's invitation, he stressed the importance of promoting dialogue and cooperation with China, stating Japan would be resolute in asserting the necessary when it comes to freedom, fundamental human rights and the rule of law [The Japan Times].

South Korea, Costa Rica to strengthen cooperation in digital, green sectors

(aml) South Korea president Moon Jae-in and his Costa Rican counterpart Carlos Alvarado Quesada met on Tuesday, November 23, in Seoul, to elaborate ways to strengthen their countries' cooperation in digital and green sectors while enhancing post-pandemic recovery. Furthermore, they agreed to upgrade their relation to an "action-oriented comprehensive partnership", as their 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties will be in 2022.

Moon asked Alvarado to help South Korean companies to join eco-friendly infrastructure projects in Costa Rica and Alvarado in return expressed his hopes for Korean investments as well as offering support in Moon's peace efforts with North Korea. [The Korea Times]

Alvarado stated he hoped for a recognition as a strategic partner, as they aim to deepen cooperation in South Korea's leading sectors such as science and technology innovation, tourism, aerospace industry and electric mobility.

Since the free trade agreement came into force in 2019, the countries have expanded their trade and investments. Specific plans are a cooperation in digitizing their governments, expanding digital and eco-friendly infrastructure, disposing of waste, and supplying low-pollution cars. [The Korea Herald]

EU criticizes South Korea's 'discriminatory' vaccine pass system

(aml) The European Union ambassador to South Korea, Maria Castillo Fernandez, has criticized the "vaccine pass" system for discriminating against foreigners living in South Korea who have been vaccinated overseas.

Under the country's "living with COVID-19" policy, access to some public places is only allowed with a proof of vaccination of a negative test. The used App

by the Korea Disease Control and Preventions Agency, however, can't be used by non-South Koreans who have been vaccinated overseas, contrary to South Korean citizens who have been vaccinated abroad.

According to Castillo Fernandez, this differentiation makes the lives of foreigners living and working in South Korea unnecessarily difficult as well as hindering them from getting a booster shot.

The Korean government is currently in talks with the EU on a mutual recognition of vaccine certificates to facilitate travel. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea's presidential candidates present opinions on Korea-Japan relations

(aml) At the KOR-AISA Forum 2021, the presidential candidate of South Korea's ruling Democratic Party (DPK) Lee Jae-myung, and his opponent of the main opposition People Power Party (PPP) Yoon Seok-youl presented their opinions and plans on recent and future Korea-Japan relations. [The Korea Times 1]

Lee emphasized the importance of "pragmatism" and welcomed a two-track approach, calling for a firm handling of historical and territorial issues, since they concern "each country's sovereignty", but at the same time clarifying his plans to expand social and economic exchanges and cooperation. Furthermore, Lee referred to Japan's opposition to South Korean president Moon Jae-in's plan to officially end the Korean War in order to push peace and denuclearization on the peninsula. He stated that even tough opposing the plan might "serve Japan's interests", South Korea should remain focused and "make sure of this stance to Japan". [The Korea Herald 1]

PPP candidate Yoon on the other hand blamed the current administration for the worsening of the countries' bilateral relations as they "did not prioritize the national interest and used diplomacy for domestic politics" as well as focusing "on the past rather than the future". He vowed that if elected as president, he would promote open communication between the countries to "find common ground and build trust" to overcome any issue. [The Korea Times 2]

South Korea asks Russia, Oman, Bahrain, other countries for help in urea shortage

(aml South Korea is currently facing an urea shortage, which was caused by an export ban from China in October to ensure its own domestic supply. Although the first shipment of a 18,700-ton deal which has been negotiated with China has already arrived, the country is still experiencing a serious shortage which led 17% of South Korean gas stations to have run out of their inventories.

Therefore, South Korea has now asked several countries for help, such as Russia [The Korea Times 1], Oman, Bahrain, Indonesia, Nepal, Switzerland and Georgia. At the 143rd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in Madrid, National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug urged the countries broaden their export portfolios to Korea. The representative of Oman responded positively and expressed his hope for further cooperation with South Korea in renewable energy, tourism, logistics, and other fields. [The Korea Times 2]. Park also received a positive answer from Bahrain's representative. [The Korea Herald]

Taiwan invited to US Summit for Democracy

(zh) Taiwan is invited to attend the "Summit for Democracy" hosted by US President Joe Biden on December 9 and 10, a rare inclusion that infuriated China. Among 110 invitees to the virtual summit, Taiwan is the only participant that is not officially recognized by Washington as a sovereign state, while China is not on the invitation list. The summit will revolve around three key topics: defending against authoritarianism, addressing and fighting corruption, and promoting respect for human rights.

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the summit would be attended by Minister Without Portfolio Audrey Tang and Representative to the US Hsiao Bi-khim, adding the invitation is "an affirmation of Taiwan's efforts to promote values of democracy and human rights". On the other side, Beijing "firmly opposed" the inclusion, criticizing the summit as "just a cove and tool for it to advance its geopolitical objectives, oppress other countries, divide the world and serve its own interests ". China's Taiwan Affairs Office also called the invitation as a "mistake". [Aljazeera][Global Times][Taipei Times]

In related news, US Senator John Cornyn has warned Taiwan, instead being Beijing's ultimate goal, would be the "first domino in a [China's] quest to reach regional and global dominance", saying "Taiwan isn't just a

Taiwan problem, it's a China problem". He urged the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which would authorize $768 billion in national security programs at the Defense and Energy department. [Focus Taiwan]

US urges Honduras not to break ties with Taiwan

(zh) A visiting US delegation to Honduras has said Washington wants the country to maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan ahead of its upcoming presidential election, warning Central American nations of "some of the risks associated with Chinas' approach to the region". [Taipei Times]

Honduras is one of Taiwan's 15 diplomatic allies. The upcoming presidential election is deemed as a critical point in bilateral relations as one of the candidates, Xiomara Castro of the party Liberty and Refoundation, has vowed to switch diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China if victorious [see AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3]. "There is not a definitive decision," said the Castro aide shortly after the unusually-timed visit by the US. [Reuters 1][Reuters 2]

US lawmakers visit Taiwan second time this month

(zh) A US bipartisan congressional delegation arrived in Taiwan on November 25 for a two-day trip, marking the second congressional visit to the island this month. Led by House Committee on Veterans' Affairs chair Mark Takano, the delegation consists of three Democrats Elissa Slotkin, Colin Allred, Sara Jacobs, and a Republican Nancy Mace.

According to American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), the US de-facto embassy on the island, the delegation has discussed US-Taiwan relations, regional security, and other significant issues of mutual interests with Taiwanese officials. President Tsai Ing-wen is expected to be among those. [Focus Taiwan] [Reuters 1]

Upon arrival in Taiwan, Mace in Twitter referred to Taiwan, whose official name is the Republic of China, as "the Republic of Taiwan". In an interview with CNN, Mace contended the use of "Republic of Taiwan" as a "subtle but strong nod to the Taiwanese people". [Taiwan News 1]

Earlier this month, six members of US lawmakers had made an unannounced visit to Taiwan. It was reported the delegation had met with President Tsai and visited the headquarters of the Ministry of National Defense and that of the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), the world's largest contract chipmaker [see AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3].

After the US congressional visit, China sent the largest warplane sorties to Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) in the past seven weeks. The incursion included 27 aircraft, eight of which are J-16 fighter jets. Commenting on the incursion, Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng said China's non-stop air force actions near the island has made the cross-Strait relations extremely tense, pointing out Beijing's intention is to "slowly exhaust, to let you know that we have this power." [Reuters 2][Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan, US discuss chip shortages and Chinese economic "coercion"

(zh) Taiwan has discussed chip shortages, supply chain collaboration, and response to China's economic "coercion" with the US during the second session of US-Taiwan Economic Prosperity Partnership Dialogue (EPPD), an annual dialogue launched last year. The meeting was attended by Taiwan's Economic Minister Wang Mei-hua and US Secretary of State for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment Jose Fernandez.

Regarding China's economic "coercion", the discussion centered on Lithuania, which faced pressure from Beijing for allowing Taiwan to open a de facto embassy with the name "Taiwan Representative Office" [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. [Reuters 1]

Regarding the semiconductor supply chain, the head of Taiwan's National Development Council Kung Ming-hsin has said the island is looking at three Eastern European countries Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania and will set up working groups to work on the cooperation. [Reuters 2]

Meanwhile, Italian Representative to Taiwan Davide Giglio has called Taiwan a "silent giant" in the global supply chain, expressing hope for Italy, a leader in the automotive industry, to cooperate with the island on semiconductors closely. [Taipei Times]

Ten Baltic lawmakers visit Taiwan

(zh) A 10-member parliamentary delegation of three Baltic countries – Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia – visited Taiwan on November 29 to attend the 2021 Open Parliament Forum held by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the trip, the delegation also met with President Tsai Ing-wen, Premier Su Tseng-chang, President of the Legislative Yuan You Si-kun, and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu.

President Tsai has said Taiwan and Europe must defend democracy together. Echoing Tsai, Matas Maldeikis, head of the Lithuania parliament's Taiwan Friendship Group, expressed the country's "solidarity" and said the government's policy toward Taiwan received wide support in the society. [Focus Taiwan] [VOA]

It was the first-ever joint visit to the island by the three countries, none of which established formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. Lithuania has been distancing itself with Beijing and deepening ties with Taipei. Earlier this month, the Taiwanese de facto embassy named "Taiwan Representative Office" was opened in Vilnius. The term "Taiwan", deviating from the common use of "Taipei", has angered Beijing, prompting China to downgrade its relations with Lithuania and withdraw its ambassador [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

China fines Taiwanese pro-DPP company Far Eastern Group

(zh) Taiwanese conglomerate Far Eastern Group (FEG), the main investor of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was fined RMB $36.5 million by the Chinese government due to multiple violations of business regulations ranging from tax to fire safety for the fine. Observers, however, believe that reason behind appears to be political.

When asked if the move is related to the government's punishment to "stubbornly pro-Taiwan independence", China's Taiwan Affairs Office (TAO) did not draw a direct link but added that those supporting Taiwan independence and their connected companies and financiers "must be punished in accordance with the law". [Reuters][SupChina]

The state-backed tabloid Global Times, meanwhile, later published an article reporting Beijing punishes "pro-secessionist Taiwan companies for better cross-Straits economic ties". The article investigates the connection between FEG and DPP in detail, listing out previous FEG's donation to the DPP and concluding the

fine on EFG was to "warn Taiwan companies with similar backgrounds and behaviors" [Global Times]

In a related statement, the TAO announced that more names of Taiwanese secessionists would be put on their blacklist. Earlier this month, China had released a blacklist of entities deemed "stubbornly pro-Taiwan independence", which included Premier Su Tseng-chang, Foreign Minister Joseph Wu and the parliamentary speaker, Yu Shyi-Kun. Those on the list are prohibited from entering China and cooperating with mainland organizations and individuals [see AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2]. [South China Morning Post]

Taiwan to established telecom infrastructure for Pacific allies

(zh) Speaking to lawmakers during a budget review meeting, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu confirmed plans to help its diplomatic allies in the Pacific to set up telecom infrastructure to prevent China's Huawei Technologies from getting a foothold in the region. The plans come at a time when Beijing is increasingly using its economic power to poach allies away from the island. [Taiwan News]

Mongolia-Russia relations: Strengthening military-technical cooperation

(dql) During their meeting on November 30 in Ulan Bator, Mongolian Defense Minister Gursediin Saikhanbayar and Russian General Staff head Valery Gerasimov discussed military-technical cooperation between the two countries, including expanding contacts between their armed forces. [TASS]

India, Pakistan, Nepal invited to United States' Summit for Democracy; Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka excluded

(ap) India, Pakistan and Nepal are amongst the 110 countries invited to United States' President Joe Biden's Summit for Democracy. Amongst South Asian democracies, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka were not invited. The virtual summit, scheduled for December 9 and 10, will bring together government, civil society, and private sector leaders to defend

democracy and human rights. Analysts say that Biden's initiative can potentially have far-reaching implications for global governance, trade, and diplomacy. [Daily Star] [Dhaka Tribune]

Washington is facing criticism for its invitation to Pakistan, though Steven Feldstein at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace states the country may have been invited because it is one of the world's largest democracies. [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace]

South Asia Monitor notes that Sri Lanka's failure to hold provincial elections to empower marginalized ethnic minorities, and its declining human rights protection, may have motivated President Biden's decision to exclude Colombo. [South Asia Monitor]

In the same vein, Bangladesh may have been excluded because of the targeted arrests of political opponents of the ruling Awami League, and the use of the Digital Security Act to jail critics. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen postulated that the US claimed countries with weak democracies to its summit, and stated that Bangladesh has a "very stable and transparent" democracy. [Dhaka Tribune]

Sri Lanka to sign new container port deal with China

(lm) Sri Lanka will tap a state-run Chinese firm to build the second phase of Colombo Port's East Container Terminal (ECT), which was earlier to be developed jointly by Sri Lanka, India and Japan, until Colombo scuttled a trilateral agreement, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's administration announced on November 24.

In 2019, state-owned Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA) signed a preliminary agreement to develop the new ECT with 51 percent ownership by Sri Lanka's government and the remaining 49 percent as an investment by Indian multinational conglomerate Adani Group and other stakeholders, including Japan. But Colombo scrapped the deal in February, deciding that the ECT would be exclusively operated by the SLPA [see AiR No. 6, February/2021, 2].

Last week then, the Cabinet agreed to award the project to prominent Sri Lankan firm Access Engineering and China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC). It did not say how much the deal was worth, but official sources had earlier estimated another $500

million to develop the partially built terminal. [The Straits Times]

CHEC, a subsidiary of state-owned China Communications Construction Company, is already involved in strategic infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka, including the Colombo Port City, a $1.4 billion joint venture project between a Chinese state-owned enterprise and the Sri Lankan government, and a highway connecting Colombo's suburbs, with a near-$1-billion investment. [The Hindu]

Last week's decision comes two months after Sri Lanka awarded Adani Group, India's largest private port operator, another site to build a new container terminal – the Colombo West International Container Terminal (CWICT) – with Sri Lanka's largest listed company and the SLPA [see AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1]. That project is next to the Chinese-run Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT, in operation since 2013.

Pakistan pledges $28million in Afghanistan humanitarian support, allows Indian aid transit

(tj/lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan has announced more than $28 million in medical, food and other humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan, while also granting permission to India to use the country's land route to ship wheat aid to its war-torn neighbor where millions of people face hunger as a harsh winter sets in. [Reuters]

The decisions were taken at the first meeting of the apex committee of the newly established Afghanistan Inter-Ministerial Coordination Cell on November 22. Prime Minister Khan chaired the meeting, which was attended by top government officials, including the foreign minister, finance minister and national security adviser, and the country's army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. [Al Jazeera]

Responding to an appeal for assistance by the World Food Program, India earlier this year prepared a 50,000-tons wheat donation and, on October 7, sought Pakistan's permission to dispatch the consignment using the land route via the Wagah-Attari border near Amritsar in Punjab. But New Delhi earlier this month said it had been facing obstacles in accessing Afghanistan. [AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3]

Now, Islamabad has allowed the shipment to go through Pakistan, but linked its decision to the condition that the relief materials be moved by Pakistani trucks. [Hindustan Times]

Further, matching the level sent by New Delhi, Islamabad will also send 50,000 metric tons of wheat, in addition to emergency medical supplies, winter shelters and other supplies. A delegation of health officials from Afghanistan will visit Islamabad later this week to work out modalities for Pakistan's support to Afghanistan's health sector. [Dawn]

Sri Lanka agrees to pay $ 6.7 million to Chinese company that supplied contaminated organic fertilizer

(lm) Sri Lanka has reportedly agreed to pay 70 percent of the claim made by a Chinese company for an organic fertilizer shipment that Colombo had rejected as it was found to be contaminated, preliminarily ending a diplomatic tussle between two close allies.

Early last month, Colombo denied a Chinese vessel carrying organic fertilizer that experts had found to be tainted with pathogens entry to Sri Lanka. Additionally, a court ordered the state-owned People's Bank to stop the $4.9 million payment to the Chinese company, Qingdao Seawin Biotech Group, for the cargo [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1].

As the controversy escalated, the Chinese embassy in Colombo responded by blacklisting the bank for not honoring the payment to the company. The company, for its part, demanded $8 million compensation from a Sri Lankan government agency for the loss of reputation it has suffered following the controversy [see AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2].

Following subsequent talks aimed at resolving the dispute, Colombo has now agreed to pay $ 6.7 million to Qingdao Seawin for the shipment, the equivalent of 70 percent of the agreed price in the original tender agreement and additional freight charges. In addition, Sri Lanka has agreed to buy fresh stocks from the company.

"We cannot afford to damage diplomatic relations over this issue,", Sri Lanka's Agriculture Minister Mahindananda Aluthgamage said explaining the government's volte face. Only a month ago, the minister had stated that the organic fertilizer shipment

would not be accepted, nor would Colombo make any payment towards this shipment. [The Diplomat]

Germany to give more than €1.2 billion for green projects to India

(rs) Germany has announced new commitments worth more than €1.2 billion to India to battle climate change and help the country in green energy transition. The announcement on November 24 came amidst the visit of a delegation from the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development to New Delhi. [The Indian Express 1]

Germany has allotted €713 million for energy, €409 million for urban development and €90 million for agroecology and natural resources. These projects will include supporting India's targets to expand solar power generation. Berlin is already collaborating with New Delhi in the focal areas of energy, sustainable urban development, management of natural resources and agriculture and other activities, particularly vocational training, health and social protection.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced at 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) held in Glasgow in early November this year that India would aim for net-zero carbon emissions by 2070 [see AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2]. New Delhi was later being portrayed as the villain behind the version of the Glasgow pact that used the watered-down commitment to a "phase down" of coal-fired power generation rather than a "phase out".

Indian Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav last week said that New was only speaking on behalf of the developing countries, emphasizing that the amendment was approved by consensus. [The Indian Express 2]

Germany's incoming coalition government under its next chancellor Olaf Scholz presented an agreement on Wednesday which includes plans to ideally bring forward Germany's coal exit to 2030, from a previous target of 2038 at the latest. [Reuters]

Earlier this year, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in its report that both India and Germany together account for nearly 9 percent of global greenhouse gas.

China, Russia, India foreign ministers hold video conference, focus on Afghanistan

(rs/lm) The foreign minister of Russia, India and China (RIC) on November 26 met virtually for the 18th edition of their tri-nation summit, during which they expressed concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan and the spread of drug trafficking in the war-torn country. [Reuters] [Global Times]

In a joint communique released after the talks, the three top diplomats called on the Afghan Taliban to ensure that the country will not once again become a base of operations for modern Islamist terrorist organizations. They also urged the formation of an "inclusive" government and discussed the importance of immediate and unhindered humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. [La Prensa Latina]

India-Bangladesh ties pass through 'golden phase', Indian defense minister says

(ap/rs/lm) Breaking with protocol, India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on November 22 visited the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi on the occasion of the Armed Forces Day of Bangladesh, and in a speech noted that relations between the two South Asian countries are currently passing through a "golden phase". [Hindustan Times]

The Indian minister was accompanied by Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat, Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane, Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari and Navy Chief Admiral Karambir Singh. [Prothom Alo 1] [WION]

In related developments, the India-Bangladesh CEO Forum will meet soon for the first time, India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on November 28. This came after India's high commissioner to Bangladesh in October said that New Delhi was ready to commence negotiations on the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Bangladesh as early as January 2022. [The Hindu 1]

Between the two events last week, while addressing an event organized to celebrate 50 years of India-Bangladesh ties, India's Chief of the Army Staff, General MM Naravane, said his country was conscious of Bangladesh's efforts to deny space to terror groups

that were carrying out subversive activities against India.

India at SCO meeting: 'Serious connectivity initiatives must be transparent'

(rs) India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar virtually attended the 20th meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Council of Heads of Government on November 25 under Kazakhstan's chairmanship.

China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Mongolia, Iran, Turkmenistan were also represented in the meeting, which took place at the level of prime ministers, vice presidents, foreign officers and other high ranking officers.

During the meeting, the Indian top diplomat noted that "serious connectivity initiative must be consultative, transparent and participatory." His statement seemed to be pointing towards the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) flagship project – which traverses through parts of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. [The Tribune]

He also said that to provide secure and commercially viable access to the sea for Central Asian countries, India had been taking steps to operationalize the Chabahar Port in Iran, the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. [The Hindu]

India clears assault rifle deal with Russia in the run-up to annual bilateral summit

(lm) India's Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has green-lighted a $687.7 million deal to manufacture around 670,000 AK-203 assault rifles in India, in partnership with Russia. [Firstpost]

Timing and context of the deal – which has been pending since formal negotiations began in 2018 – assume added significance. For it comes just days ahead of an impending visit to India by Russian President Vladimir Putin on December 6 to for the 21st edition of the India-Russia Annual Summit. The first edition of bilateral two-plus-two talks is likely to be held on the sidelines of the summit. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

A formal contract for the manufacture of the rifle, which is expected to be signed during President Putin's visit, envisages production of the rifles by Indo-Russia Rifles (IRPL), a joint ventured that resulted from both countries signing an Inter-Governmental Agreement in 2019. India's Ordnance Factory Board holds a 50.5 percent stake in the company, while the Kalashnikov Concern, and Rosoboronexport, Russia's state agency for military exports, own the remaining stakes [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. [Frontline]

Last month, Russia started delivering the first regiment of its S-400 surface-to-air missile to India. Notwithstanding the threats of United States sanctions, the Modi administration sees the air defense system as critical at a time when it is locked in a stand-off with the China's People's Liberation Army at numerous points along the disputed Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Himalayan heights of Ladakh. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

UN General Assembly affirms graduation of Bangladesh, Nepal, Laos to developing country grouping

(ap) The United Nations General Assembly on 24 November adopted a resolution affirming the graduation of Bangladesh, Laos, and Nepal from the Least Developed Country (LDC) category. The three countries will graduate after an exceptionally extended preparatory period of five years – the standard period is of three years – to enable them to prepare for graduation while planning for a post-COVID-19 recovery. [United Nations General Assembly]

Sri Lanka, India, Maldives navies conduct maiden maritime exercise

(lm) The navies of India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka on November 28 concluded a two-day maiden exercise held near the Exclusive Economic Zones of the three countries in Southern Arabian Sea. [Naval Technology]

The drills assume added significance, coming as they did three months after the three countries emphasized "four pillars" of cooperation –maritime security, counterterrorism, human trafficking and cybersecurity – during the latest meeting of their Colombo Security Conclave (CSC) on August 4 [see AiR No. 33, August/2021, 3]. The multilateral grouping was formed in 2011 and revived in November last year after a six-

year hiatus. It is now poised to expand its full-time membership to Bangladesh, Seychelles and Mauritius, which currently hold observer status. [The Hindu]

Last week's "CSC Focused Operation" also came on the heels of another maritime drill: The 15th edition of the biennial coast guard exercise "Dosti" concluded on November 25. For many years after it was first launched in 1991, the maritime drill was bilateral, involving the Indian and the Maldives Coast Guards. In 2012, however, Sri Lanka joined for the first time. It has been a trilateral exercise since then. [The Indian Express]

United States delegation visits Pakistan to discuss Afghanistan, bilateral ties

(lm) A six-member delegation led by two senior United States congressmen on November 23 arrived in Pakistan to hold wide-ranging discussions with Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, and other senior officials. [Al Jazeera] [Gulf News]

Bangladesh-United Kingdom Defence Dialogue soon, Bangladesh High Commissioner says

(ap) Bangladesh High Commissioner to the United Kingdom has said that a defense dialogue between the two countries will be held soon to strengthen multi-dimensional cooperation in defense including implementation of the Forces Goal 2030. [Daily Star]

The Forces Goal 2030 is a Bangladeshi military modernization program, established in 2009 and revised in 2017, to expand and modernize the Bangladesh Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Turkey seeks long-term trade, defense partnership with Bangladesh

(ap) The Turkish ambassador to Bangladesh has stated that Ankara is interested in a long-term trade and defense partnership with Dhaka, noting that the Turkish naval chief is likely to visit Bangladesh to boost defense cooperation. [New Age]

The statement signals increased defense cooperation between the two countries. Earlier this year, the Bangladeshi Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed visited Ankara to meet senior Turkish defense officials, including Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and the Chief of the General Staff, Yaşar Güler [see AiR No. 34, August/2021, 4].

Bangladesh seeks political dialogue with European Union in 2022

(ap) In a meeting with the European Union's Ambassador to Bangladesh, Dhaka's state minister for foreign affairs has indicated that Bangladesh looks forward to commencing a "political dialogue" with Brussels next year. [Dhaka Tribune]

Japan to finance $2,665 billion railway network, power plant in Bangladesh

(ap) Bangladesh signed a deal with Japan for $2,665 billion credit for an underground railway network in Dhaka and a power plant at Matabari in Cox's Bazar. [bdnews24.com]

The parliamentary vice minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, HONDA Taro said that Japan would continue its cooperation in Bangladesh's growth. He commended the Bangladeshi government for its socioeconomic development, and noted that Japanese private investment in Bangladesh has tripled in the last decade [Dhaka Tribune].

Iraq to repay $34 million to Bangladesh after three decades

(ap) Iraqi authorities have agreed to form a delegation to return money owed to the Bangladesh Bank and the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC). Iraq imported jute products from the BJMC in 1997-98 but failed to pay for them. [Business Standard]

United States donate 1.8 million COVID-19 Pfizer vaccines to Bangladesh

(ap) The US has donated another 1.8 million Pfizer vaccines to Bangladesh this week, contributing a total of 16.8 million vaccines and $121 million in aid to Bangladesh [Times of India]

Indonesia and France extend strategic partnership

(ms) France and Indonesia signed a continuation of their strategic partnership, extending it until 2027, during the French Foreign Minister Jean-Yve Le Drian's two-day visit to Jakarta on November 23 and 24. The countries agreed to heighten communications, particularly around maritime affairs in the Indo-Pacific, and bolster their defense cooperation. France also announced a commitment to invest 500 million euros (US$562.10 million) to assist Indonesia's energy transition projects. [The Jakarta Post, $]

France has sought to cement ties with Asian nations, including Indonesia, India, Japan and Vietnam, as a way to reboot its Indo-Pacific strategy after being left out of the so-called AUKUS defense pact between the US, UK, and Australia. Australia joined the alliance as a means to better counter China, snubbing a major submarine deal with France in the process which in turn damaged the two nations' relations. 93% of France's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is in the Indian and Pacific Oceans, including territories such as New Caledonia and French Polynesia. As such, it is the only member of the European Union to maintain a military presence in the Indian Ocean. [Le Courrier Australien] [The Strategist]

Le Drian announced that Indonesia is at "the heart" of France's strategy in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries formed a strategic partnership in 2011 and cooperate in various areas including the economy, energy, infrastructure projects, and defense. In June this year they signed a defense cooperation agreement, covering cooperation in areas such as training and education, defense industry development, intelligence cooperation and counterterrorism. Indonesia is seeking the possible purchase of submarines, warplanes, and warships from France, with negotiations for the purchase of 36 Rafale fighter jets still in progress after several months. This cooperation allows Indonesia to not only pursue its policy of nonalignment, but also its shared strategic interests with France in the Indo-Pacific. [Reuters] [The Jakarta Post, $] [The Strategist]

Indonesia: Navy, Russian embassy announce first-ever ASEAN-Russia joint naval exercise

(ms) The Indonesian navy and Russian embassy announced that Russia and several ASEAN member states will conduct their first-ever joint naval exercise from December 1 to 3 in Indonesia's territorial waters in the Malacca Strait. All ASEAN member states were invited to the exercise, seven of which have agreed to send their warships. The intention of the exercise is to strengthen cooperation between the navies of ASEAN member states and Russia in order to provide maritime security for economic activity and civil navigation. [Benar News]

The Russia-ASEAN dialogue has been in place since 1996, and Russia has held naval exercises bilaterally with several of the association's members in the past, including Indonesia and Vietnam. This includes a joint naval exercise in the Java Sea in December 2020 of three Indonesian Navy ships and three Russian vessels. Last month, at a Russia-ASEAN summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that one of Russia's foreign policy priorities is to enhance ties with the bloc. In doing so, Russia hopes to strengthen stability and security, safeguard the post-pandemic economic recovery, boost trade, and expand humanitarian ties. [Benar News]

According to analysts, Russia's increasing focus on Southeast Asia has come in response to two US-led pacts: the AUKUS defense pact with the UK, and Australia; and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, with Australia, India, and Japan. Southeast Asian countries, meanwhile, are looking to avoid taking sides in the simmering rivalry between China and the US. Indonesia also stands to benefit from the exercise, as the largest part of the Malacca Strait is in Indonesian territory. As one of the world's busing shipping lanes, it is vital for Indonesia that the strait stays secure. [Benar News]

Indonesia and Denmark sign green cooperation agreement

(ms) Indonesia and Denmark signed an extensive cooperation agreement towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals earlier this month. The agreement was signed in Jakarta on November 22 during the visit of Denmark's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jeppe Kofod, to Indonesia. It contains 86

concrete plans to follow from 2021 to 2024, particularly in the areas of energy transition and energy efficiency, as well as in waste management, the circular economy, and food security. It also includes a new ongoing climate dialogue between both countries. [Channel News Asia] [ScandAsia]

In the leadup to the recent COP26, Indonesia announced its target of new zero emissions by 2060 [see AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]. At the international summit it signed up to the COP26 Coal to Clean Power Transition statement, yet excluded a clause to end the approval and construction of unabated coal-fired power generation projects. However, officials have said Indonesia will consider phasing out coal and transitioning to clean energy earlier, by the 2040s, if it can secure more international financial and technical assistance. Earlier this month, it joined India, the Philippines, and South Africa in a pilot program to receive around $2.5 billion from the Climate Investment Funds to accelerate their transition. [See AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2] Denmark is one of the major funders of this program, and has committed to donate 100 million kroner ((US$15.6 million). [The Jakarta Post, $]

Indonesia is currently highly reliant on fossil fuels, with coal being the country's biggest export product. It ranks as both one of the world's largest coal exporters and in the top 10 of the world's largest coal consuming countries. Nevertheless, the country has enormous potential to develop its renewable energy resources, with 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. [The Diplomat] [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia considers banning tin exports from 2024

(ms) President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo announced Indonesia is considering halting tin exports from 2024, while speaking at the central bank's annual gathering with financial holders on November 24. Jokowi claimed that the ban on exports would attract investment in the resource processing industry and improve Indonesia's trade and account balances. He argued that the selling of raw commodities deprives Indonesia of bigger export earnings and jobs in the manufacturing industry. [Reuters]

Last year Indonesia banned nickel exports to spur the development of the downstream nickel industry in Indonesia and create jobs. This triggered an influx of foreign investment into nickel processing, particularly from China. The country also plans to ban bauxite exports from 2022 and raw copper exports from 2023 for the same reason. [The Jakarta Post, $]

The EU has filed a lawsuit with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against Indonesia's nickel ore export ban, claiming the ban is a violation of the commitment of WO members to grant access to international trade and unfair on the bloc's stainless-steel producers. Jokowi has vowed to use every available way to fight the lawsuit, arguing Indonesia's reason for banning exports of nickel is not in violation of WTO rules. [The Jakarta Post, $] [See also AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Laos: Lao PDR and Cambodia strengthen cooperation in public security

(bs) Laos and Cambodia agreed to further develop bilateral cooperation in national and cross-border security by signing a Memorandum of Understanding for 2022.

The Cambodian Ministry of Interior and the Lao Ministry of Public Security signed the agreement after positively evaluating past collaborations between the two countries not only in the field of security and defense, but also in bilateral trade, tourism, and combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

The document aims to bolster mutual effort in adopting measures to prevent cross-border smuggling, national and international crimes, deforestation, and strengthening collaboration against drug trafficking. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Laos: Lao-China railway to boost bilateral economic cooperation

(bs) Lao PDR and China agreed to jointly oversee effective collaboration in strengthening bilateral trade and investment along the Lao-China railway.

The train will officially start operating from December 2, on the 46th National Day of the Lao PDR. In view of the event, Lao and Chinese diplomatic representatives have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on

economic cooperation drafting 32 projects on Lao-China investment, economic production, infrastructure, and tourism. The parties also updated previous agreements, including China's Belt and Road Initiative and the agreement on Laos-China economic corridor development (2019-2030). [The Phnom Penh Post]

Philippine defence chief rejects Chinese demand to remove ship from Ayungin shoal

(lt) Philippine defense chief Delfin Lorenzana has rejected China's request to remove the BRP Sierra Madre, a Philippine Navy vessel that has been grounded at the Ayungin shoal. The vessel serves as a makeshift post for the Philippines in the South China Sea, and has done so since 1999.

This follows from China's earlier hostilities just last week, where water cannons were launched at Philippine vessels at Ayungin Shoal, alternatively referred to as Second Thomas Shoal by Western nations. During this, Chinese vessels fired water cannons in an attempt to prevent Philippine nationals from resupplying a South China Sea outpost. Philippine officials have decried the aggression, and has led to President Rodrigo Duterte's participation in the ASEAN-China Special Summit as a result.

The United States, a longtime ally of the Philippines, has warned China to end its aggression in the South China Sea. In response to the water cannons China fired at Philippine vessels at Ayungin shoal, American representatives warned that further "dangerous, provocative and unjustified" attacks against the Philippines would invoke American mutual defense commitments under the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between both nations. State Department spokesman Ned Price elaborated on this further in a statement on the matter, asserting American commitment to upholding the international maritime order. [ABS-CBN News] [Bloomberg] [Channel News Asia] [Manila Bulletin]

Singapore: Assistant secretary of state for East Asia visits four ASEAN countries to increase engagement

(nm) Assistant secretary of state for East Asia, Daniel Kritenbrink, is set to visit Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand in December after U.S President Joe Biden announced plans to increase engagement and strengthen economic ties in Southeast Asia in the battle for regional influence over China. Kritenbrink aims to show U.S support and commitment to combat global and regional challenges as well as advocate for a "rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific" directly responding to China's growing assertiveness in Southeast Asia.

The key question for ASEAN remains whether the U.S will have a feasible economic strategy for the region. Among those announcements for Kritenbrink to visit four ASEAN countries, it was also confirmed that the diplomat will not be visiting Cambodia as the country now has close relations with China. [Reuters]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

2-10 December 2021 @ 10:00 a.m.-7:00 p.m. (GMT+7), CPG, Thailand

CPG Academy on Human Rights

This immersive, one-week academic course will provide a thorough overview of human rights laws, agencies, activism, and scholarship, as well as an in-depth analysis of them. Featuring international renown experts, this program aims to offer a rigorous human rights course where the participants are able to gain both theoretical understanding and hands-on experience.

Further information is accessible via [CPG].

3 December 2021 @ 2:00-4:15 p.m. (GMT+7), CPG, Thailand

Europe in Review (EiR) Webinar Series on Europe-Asia relations "Disunited on Basic Values: Challenges to European Constitutional Identity"

The European Union (EU) has faced several unprecedented threats that pose challenges to the union in various dimensions, including its internal cohesiveness, unity, and core shared values. This panel discussion will feature experts and scholars who will discuss these problems and recommend actions for the EU to effectively respond to them.

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

1 December 2021 @ 9:00 a.m.-10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

The Climate Footprint of Plastics: Search for Solutions in Asia, Europe, and the United States

Plastic waste is one of the world's major environmental challenges and is predicted to take up more than 13 percent of the world's carbon budget by 2050 if the production and consumption of single-us plastics are not seriously addressed and brought down. This webinar will illustrate how every sector, including market changes, policies, lawsuits, and technologies, could contribute to the goal of a drastic reduction in plastic waste.

For more details of the event, see [Wilson Center].

1 December 2021 @10:30 – 11:45 a.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Turkey-US Relations: Can the Vicious Cycle be Broken?

This webinar will look into the root causes of political conflicts between Turkey and the US, which lately have

increased tensions. Then, the speakers will suggest policies that may relieve the anxiety.

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

1 December 2021 @ 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Lonely at the Barricades: How to Strengthen the Global Defense of Democracy

This online session will be organized prior to the White House's Summit for Democracy, an event on December 19 that will focus on the global regression of democracy and the rise of various forms of authoritarianism. An overview of the conference, its objectives, and the results of what will be discussed will be provided in this webinar.

Follow [Wilson Center] to learn more about the event.

1 December 2021 @ 12:00 a.m. - 1:15 p.m. (GMT-8), Cato Institute, USA

The Politics Industry: How Political Innovation Can Break Partisan Gridlock and Save Our Democracy

Katherine Gehl and Michael Porter, trailblazing innovators and renowned business strategic experts, will use business analytical tools to demonstrate the similarities between the political industry and other competitive markets and address negative outcomes that have resulted from the industry's polarization in this online book forum.

For more event details, visit [CATO].

1 December 2021 @ 11:00 a.m.-11:45 a.m. (GMT-5), The Heritage Foundation, USA

The Iran Nuclear Negotiations: Why the Humpty Dumpty JCPOA Should Not Be Renewed

This virtual event will feature a panel of experts who will offer insights on the JCPOA and suggest why the

U.S. should not let the potentially dangerous return of the JCPOA occur.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [The Heritage Foundation].

1 December 2021 @ 9.00 – 10.00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategies & International Studies, USA

Modi Government's Midterm Reform Assessment

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has come half way through their service, in this online session, experts will offer their insights and thoughts about the government's performance on economic reform and provide suggestions that the government can adopt during the next two and a half years.

Follow [CSIS] to learn more about the event.

1 December 2021 @ 9.30 – 10.15 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategies & International Studies, USA

China's Power: Up for Debate 2021 - Keynote Remarks by Secretary Christine Wormuth

This online event has invited Secretary of the U.S. Army Christine Wormuth to deliver a speech on the rise of China's power, the challenges caused by such powerful growth, and the U.S. Army's views toward the development.

Follow [CSIS] to learn more about the event.

1 December 2021 @ 2:00-3:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, USA

Destined for Decline? Examining the Role of Nuclear in the Ongoing Energy Transition

Competed by wind, solar power, energy-storage technologies, and other renewable energy, nuclear energy is projected to decrease its role to the world. This online event will feature a conversation between Jochen Markard and Alejandro Nuñez-Jimenez, international researchers, about this energy transition.

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

1 December 2021, @ 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (GMT-8), Institute of Policy Studies, USA

COP26 in Context

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) recently organized in Glasgow has been considered an impactful event that put the world on the right track toward the fight against climate change. However, in this interactive talk, Basav Sen, Climate Policy Director of the Institute for Policy Studies, will discuss the politics, methods, and results of the conference, with an emphasis on the role between the U.S. bargaining stances at COP26 and the country's domestic and international climate policies.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [IPS-DC].

2 December 2021 @ 4:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT+9), The Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, Japan

The Accelerating Global Shift to EVs: What Fleet-owning Businesses Need to Do Now?

One of the major issues at COP26 is the transition to ZEVs (Zero Emission Vehicles). With ambitious ZEV targets set by countries and automakers, the transition to the decarbonization of road transport is growing globally. This virtual conference will discuss new regulations for Japanese fleet-owning businesses and address the opportunities and threats of this energy transition.

For more details, see [IGES].

1-2 December 2021, Lowy Institute, Australia

The Indo-Pacific Operating System: Power, Order and Rules for the 21st Century

As the Indo-Pacific region is currently at the center of a growing rivalry between great powers, the U.S. and China, the region has faced unprecedented challenges. This two-day conference will discuss these timely geopolitical issues that prompt countries in the region

to consider what new strategic directions the Indo-Pacific should take to ensure peace and security.

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

2 December 2021 @ 1:00-2:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), Sweden

Youth Identity, Politics and Change in Contemporary Kurdistan

This online panel will feature a conversation between contributors of the book *Youth Identity, Politics and Change in Contemporary Kurdistan* who will look at the opportunities and threats in terms of social, economic, and political issues that Kurdish youth, the new generation that have no firsthand memories of centuries of oppression and have grown up during the substantial transformations of the region, may face.

Find more at [UI].

2 December 2021 @ 4:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, USA

Understanding the Past, Present, and Future of North Korean Cyber Operations

This webinar will discuss the global cybersecurity threats posed by North Korea's cyber operations, which have been growing, the future of the operations, and how international agencies can collaborate to ease the cybersecurity risks.

For more details of the event, see [Belfer Center].

2 December 2021 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+1), GLOBSEC, Slovakia

What actually works? Measures to Fight against Information Manipulation in the Online Information Space

The world has been bombarded with a huge amount of data along with unfavorable consequences from information manipulation. Although there are no ideal methods that could fully navigate and prevent risks from such manipulation, the implementation of some measurements might be able to respond to this global

threat. This webinar will discuss what might be efficient measures that have a higher chance of success for democracies.

More information is available at [GLOBSEC].

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

Public Diplomacy and the Communication of Foreign Policy: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy

This webinar will feature Isabelle Karlsson, a Ph.D. candidate from Lund University, whose research analyzes Sweden's strategic communication in public diplomacy and opportunities and threats of its feminist foreign policy.

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

2 December 2021 @ 8:30-9:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Office of Communications, USA

North Korea in a new era of US-South Korea partnership

This panel discussion will feature experts from the U.S. and Korea who will explore the new extended cooperation between the U.S. and Korea, the two countries' diplomatic schemes, the future roles of this partnership, and its impacts on the Korean Peninsula.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [BROOKINGS]

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

Trends and Trajectories of Online Information Warfare in Three Southeast Asian Countries

In this webinar, three experts from Thailand, Vietnam, and Malaysia will present cases of online information warfare in their own countries that occur in specific directions and will demonstrate the necessity of

contextualizing analysis and responses to cyber troop operations in each country.

Find more at [ISEAS].

2 December 2021 @9:00 -10:00 a.m. (GMT-8), Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA

Xi Jinping Makes History: Perspectives on the CCP's 6th Plenum

This webinar will feature Asia studies experts who will examine the underlying motivations behind the 6th Plenum (2021) of the Chinese Communist Party's 19th Congress and what may be the future direction of Xi Jinping and China.

Find more about the webinar at [Hoover Institute].

2 December 2021 @ 9:00-10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), The United States Institute of Peace, USA

Learning from U.S.-Vietnam Cooperation on Wartime Remains Recovery

This online session will focus on cooperation between the U.S. and Vietnam in accounting for Americans and Vietnamese missing personnel after the Vietnam War, which is considered the first stepping stone of the U.S.-Vietnam alliance partnership.

Visit [USIP] to learn more about the event.

3 December 2021 @ 9:00 a.m. -3:00 p.m. (GMT+8), East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore, Singapore

International Conference on Assessing Seoul's New Southern Policy Plus: Perspectives from ASEAN, Korea and India

This webinar will explore Korea's recent bold diplomatic policy, New Southern Policy Plus (NSPP), which is an outreach diplomacy aiming towards strengthening partnerships with Southeast Asia and India.

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

3 December 2021 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT-5), The United States Institute of Peace, USA

Averting a Fiscal and Humanitarian Disaster in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has faced economic and humanitarian catastrophes since the Taliban returned to power, and the situation is projected to get worse. The Taliban's track record shows that the Taliban government does not prepare for such immense crises. In this webinar, international experts and humanitarian actors will jointly discuss the current economic and humanitarian threats in Afghanistan and how the U.S. and international agencies can aid the country at this crucial time.

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

3 December 2021 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+00), Overseas Development Institute, UK

Humanitarian Action in 2021: Tensions, Trade-Offs and Dilemmas

In 2021, various major crises happened across the world, including conflict in Ethiopia, food shortages in the Tigray region, the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, a military coup in Myanmar, and so on. In response to these emergencies, humanitarian action has also faced obstacles, trade-offs, and dilemmas in protecting human rights. This webinar will revisit and question the politics, principles, and practicality of humanitarian action in the context of the contemporary world.

Find more about the webinar at [ODI].

6 December 2021 @ 12:00 - 1:00 a.m. (GMT-8), Cato Institute, USA

Congress and War: Reclaiming Article I Powers

Congress' ambition to prevent presidential overreach and constrain military activities from executing one-sided wars and selling weapons through the War Powers Resolution of 1973 and the Arms Export Control Act of 1976. However, in practice, there are still gaps in the laws that give presidents the authority to

directly execute military moves in a number of countries and allow the military to sell weapons to countries with nightmare human rights conditions and international security. This webinar will discuss how members of the House and Senate can use Article I mandate in Congress's constitutional right to reduce such gaps and stop presidential outreach.

For more details, see [CATO].

6 December 2021 @ 4:30 - 5:30 p.m. (GMT+8), EURAXESS ASEAN

How to Get Published

This session is part of the career development training workshops at the EU Research & Innovation Days in ASEAN 2021, an annual conference hosted by EURAXESS ASEAN and its partners. During the session, Victoria Babbit, director of researcher development and outreach at Taylor & Francis Group, will disseminate a broad concept of academic publishing and share insights on the process of publication and what should be considered and prepared.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [EURAXESS ASEAN]

7 December 2021 @ 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. (GMT+8), EURAXESS ASEAN

Design-Thinking your Research Career

This session is part of the career development training workshops at the EU Research & Innovation Days in ASEAN 2021, an annual conference hosted by EURAXESS ASEAN and its partners. Led by Nina Terol, chief marketing officer and entrepreneur-in-residence at Talino Venture Labs, U.S., the workshop aims to use design thinking, an efficient approach to problem-solving and innovation, to explore research careers.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [EURAXESS ASEAN]

7 December 2021 @10:00 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT-8), Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA

Mafia-Like Business Systems in China: Xi's Crackdown in Context

This webinar will question the world's great powers, China, its political economy development, and the management of authoritarians like the Chinese Communist Party towards the country's economic systems.

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

7 December 2021 @1:00 – 2:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Media Reporting on International Affairs

After going through around forty million news articles published from 2010 to 2020, three speakers will present findings from their joint research on U.S. news media and international affairs reports. The research will illustrate similarities and differences between the news media's reports on global issues and examine how the reports might be impacted by their biases.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

7 December 2021 @ 12:00-12:00 p.m. (GMT+9), ADB Institute, Japan

Tokyo Fiscal Forum Seminar: Towards Post-COVID-19 Fiscal Policy and Digitalization in Asia

This seminar will explore the development of financial policies following COVID-19, the digitalization of fiscal management, and the future of financial sustainability in Asia.

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

7 December 2021, @ 9.30-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada

China and the Global Economy

This virtual event will feature a conversation between His Excellency Cong Peiwu, China's Ambassador to Canada, and Rohinton P. Medhora, CIGI President, who will exchange views and visions on China's positions and involvement in several global prompting issues,

including technology, cyber and data governance, economics, and climate change.

Visit [CIGI] to find more details of the event.

Recent Book Releases

Sandy Gall, ***Afghan Napoleon: The Life of Ahmad Shah Massoud***, Haus Publishing, 368 pages, published on September 7, 2021, reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Salvador Santino Fulo Regilme Jr., ***Aid Imperium: United States Foreign Policy and Human Rights in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia***, University of Michigan Press, 308 pages, published on November 3, 2021, with a review in [LSE].

Paolo Gerbaudo, ***The Great Recoil: Politics after Populism and Pandemic***, Verso, 288 pages, published on August 31, 2021. A review is available at [Chicago Review of Books].

Mircea Raianu, ***Tata: The Global Corporation That Built Indian Capitalism***, Harvard University Press, 304 pages, published on July 6, 2021, reviewed in [The Hindu].

Calls for Papers

The **European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)** invites paper proposals for its ***European Conference on Politics and Gender*** (ECPG) to be held on July 6-8, 2022, University of Ljubljana. Closing date for submissions is December 8, 2021. For more information, see [ECPR].

The **Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu** welcomes manuscripts for book chapters on the topic of ***"The Armed Conflict on the Dniester: Political and Social Implications for the Republic of Moldova"***. Deadline for submissions is December 6, 2021. More details are provided at [Balkan History].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** is hiring a ***Senior Policy Specialist*** for the UN Capital Development Fund. Closing date for

applications is December 14, 2021. See [UNDP] for more information.

Plan International is recruiting a ***Project Officer*** to be based in Maiduguri, Nigeria, with core responsibility in implementing the implementing AECID/SPNO funded Education project. Learn more about the position at [Plan International].

The **University of Kansas** is seeking a ***Research Scientist/Associate or Full Professor*** for the Institute for Policy & Social Research. Review of applications will begin on December 15, 2021 and will continue until the position is filled. Visit [Sjobs] for further information.

The **Department of History and Political Thought at Concordia University, Irvine, CA**, invites applications for the position of a ***Professor of History and Political Thought***. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is funded and filled. For further details, see [CUI].

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