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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

The AiR team is pleased to present this week's Asia in Review issue.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone celebrating Burkina Faso's, Finland's, Kenya's and Tanzania's National Day and Independence Day respectively.

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: Party leaders directly linked to the crackdown on Uyghur Muslims, leaked documents say

(tp/dql) Newly leaked documents titled the "Xinjiang Papers" reveal how leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang, made speeches on policies which directly affected Uyghurs and other Muslims. The documents include policies on mass sterilisation, forced assimilation, forced internments, "re-education", and coercion of detained Uyghurs to labor in factories.

Despite international pressure over allegations of human rights violations occurring in Xinjiang, the Chinese government has consistently denied these allegations, insisting that the crackdown is necessary to prevent terrorism and root out Islamic extremism. [BBC]

China is facing a real estate dilemma

(tp) China's government is facing a difficult situation in its bid to control the debt-ridden property market by reducing excessive real estate construction without squeezing the sector too hard and causing developers to go under.

This comes amid China's "housing are for living, not for speculation" campaign, reflecting an attempt by authorities to reduce China's economic dependence on the real estate sector, which accounts for more than a quarter of the economy.

Authorities began restricting borrowing in August 2020 with the "three red lines" policy scheme which assesses developers' financial situation against three key criteria; a liability-to-asset ratio of less than 70-percent, a net gearing ratio of less than 100-percent, and a cash-to-short-term debt ratio of more than 1x.

According to managing director of China Beige Book International, Shehzad Qazi, "there is the realisation that the former growth model-which involved high levels of debt, high levels of investment, and high levels of growth- doesn't work anymore" and that "Beijing realises that it needs to shift to a more sustainable model, which means a slower pace of growth".

The "three red lines" policy scheme has contributed to a decline in construction, house sales and house prices in 2021, however, authorities are cautious of squeezing the sector too hard so as to avoid market collapse amid a liquidity crisis that brought China Evergrande Group close to bankruptcy. [See, AiR No.44, November/2021,1]

Analyst at Trivium China in Beijing, Janz Chiang, told reporters that "Beijing wants to ensure that there's sufficient liquidity to maintain construction in the property sector…but it also doesn't' want a sudden flow of easy credit- the very practice it has been trying to stamp out for years. So, their challenge is to find out where that magic point between sufficient liquidity and preventing a reinflation of the property sector will be." [Al Jazeera]

In a latest development in the ongoing crisis of property developer Evergrande, the government of Guangdong, the province where the company is based, revealed that it has sent officials from several state-backed institutions to join a risk committee to provide support in restructuring the company, a move

signalling the government's determination to rein in to prevent a collapse of Evergrande. The move came after the developer conceded that it may no longer be able to meet its financial obligations and requested help from its provincial government. [The New York Times]

China: Population crisis worsens as birth-rate hits record low

(tp) Data released from China's National Bureau of Statistics in 2020 reveal there were only 8.5 births per 1,000 people in China, a record low with no signs of the trend reversing. The national census, recorded only once-a-decade, reveal that just 12 million babies were born in 2020- down 18-percent from 14.65 million in 2019.

Experts suggest China may be entering an era of population decline, sparking concerns of a worsening population crisis as the population of 1.4 billion continues to age.

Declining birth rates is a problem experienced by many countries, including neighbours Japan and South Korea, however the decline has been particularly noticeable in China due to the decades-long one-child policy.

To improve birth rates, the government approved legislature in 2015 to allow married couples to have two children. In addition to the 2015 legislature, China's government has increasingly introduced incentives such as cash handouts, real estate subsidies and extension of maternity leave to encourage couples to have more children. However, these policies have failed to convince women, who are concerned they're careers will be jeopardized if they take longer maternity leave.

China's population growth is expected to enter negative growth in 2021. [CNN]

China: Former deputy commander of Xinjiang paramilitary body investigated for corruption

(tp) State media reported on Thursday the "grave violations of party discipline and law" committed by former deputy commander of Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), Yang Fulin.

The XPCC is a paramilitary body regulated by the central government responsible for overseeing Xinjiang's economic development and security. The XPCC was sanctioned by the United States last year for alleged human rights abuses.

Yang allegedly "interfered in judicial processes and helped others seek illegal gains in project contracting, job promotion and case handling in exchange for huge amounts of money and gifts" according to a statement issued by anti-corruption investigators.

This case is not an outlier amongst security and law enforcement officials in Xinjiang, last week former secretary of the political and legal committee of Hami city, Miao Yi, and deputy secretary in Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Dai Guanghui, were both put under investigation for corruption.

Yang's case has been transferred to state prosecutors and will soon undergo trial. [South China Morning Post]

China: Face-scanning traffic-light surveillance system used to detect journalists

(tp) Documents found by surveillance analyst firm IPVM describe a face-scanning surveillance system used in the Chinese province of Henan that classifies journalists and other "people of concern", including migrant women and foreign students, into a "traffic-light" system- green, amber and red. "People of concern" would be placed into "thematic libraries" connected to China's national database about people in the province and used to gather further information about the subject. Anyone placed into the "red" category would be "dealt with accordingly" the documents outline.

The documents, released in late July, were part of a tendering process that encouraged Chinese companies to offer contracts to implement the new surveillance system, won by software engineering services company NeuSoft in September.

The documents encourage information to be taken from cell phones, social media, travel details, photos, property ownership and vehicle details.

IPVM Government Director, Conor Healy, said "these documents shed light on what China's public-security officials want from mass surveillance" and that

"building custom surveillance technology to streamline state suppression of journalists is new". [BBC News]

China: State-owned app Lanxin to prevent government classified information leaks

(tp) State-owned enterprise (SOE) China Electronics Corp (CEC) released a collaborative office platform app called Lanxin on Wednesday in the aim to prevent classified information leaks for government agencies and SOEs using the app for remote work.

The app prohibits users from copying, screenshotting, or transferring internal information to external sources. Users are given a watermark bearing the person's name making any leaked screenshots traceable and password and fingerprint verification is required every time the platform is entered. All of the platform data is held with the China State Shipbuilding Corp (CSSC) and encrypted.

Lanxin conforms to China's policy to establish a hierarchical data classification management and protection system, which is included in a draft regulation on data security released by China's cyberspace regulators, and it's also beneficial for the country to accelerate the modernization of cyber governance.

The instant messaging app has so far been used by 8000 government agencies and SOEs for remote working, including China State Shipbuilding Corp, China Huadian Corp, Steel Group Corp, and the Ministry of Water Resources. [Global Times]

China: Manufacturing sector is losing its competitive advantage

(tp) According to lead engineer and adviser to the Chinese government, Chen Xuedong, China's manufacturing industry is at risk of falling behind international competition as restrictions over access to foreign technology mount.

This comes after China's vow to invest in its manufacturing industry amid trade and diplomatic tensions with the United States, which has led to restrictions on technology exports to Chinese companies. [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3].

Meanwhile, the coronavirus pandemic has generated greater demand for reshoring parts of the manufacturing process, presenting an additional challenge for China in seeking to control its own supply chain.

“We have been following and imitating scientific and technological innovation for a long time… There have not been many original breakthroughs” Chen said.

Chen suggests that in order to uphold a competitive manufacturing industry, the government should set up a vocational education system to train talent for advanced manufacturing. [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Government panel to compile report on imperial succession soon

(la) A government panel announced that it plans to publish a final report on the reform of the imperial succession as early as this year-end. The announcement was made at a news conference on Tuesday, November 30, after the panel’s first meeting since Fumio Kishida took office in October. [The Japan Times]

The panel had agreed to focus on two plans earlier in June: allowing female members to retain their imperial family status after marriage with a commoner, and enabling the use of adoption to restore the imperial status of male descendants in the paternal line who have earlier left the family.

Especially the first issue has been topic of debate after Princess Mako lost her royal status after marrying a commoner. [The Diplomat]

Japan: Foreign Ministry to introduce new post monitoring human rights violations

(la) On Friday, December 3, Japan’s Foreign Ministry announced its plan to create a post for a senior human rights officer. Amidst growing human rights awareness across the world, and rising concerns about China’s alleged oppression of Uyghur minorities in Xinjiang and the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, Japan aims to strengthen and promote its human rights diplomacy and keep in step with the U.S. and Europe, which have already imposed sanctions on China for its alleged violations – something Japan is not yet capable of under its current laws. The

introduction of this new post comes two months after Prime Minister Kishida named Gen Nakatani, a former Defense Minister, as his special adviser on international human rights issues.

During Friday's press conference, Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi explained the new post would be created in the existing Human Rights and Humanitarian Division. Aside from monitoring the human rights situation in China, the new human rights officer is expected to be involved in policymaking concerning the Afghan humanitarian crisis following the Taliban's takeover in August. Hayashi added that the Japanese government also needs to shed light on human rights issues occurring in the private sector. [Mainichi]

Japan: Supreme Court rules law prohibiting gender alteration for parents of underage children constitutional

(la) On November 30, the Japanese Supreme Court ruled that Japan's gender alteration ban for parents of underage children is constitutional, fourteen years after the law had passed constitutional review earlier in 2007. The Gender Identity Disorder Special Cases Act came first came into effect in 2004. It initially stipulated that legal gender alteration would be prohibited for individuals with children of all ages, not just minors. After the Supreme Court ruled the stipulation constitutional in 2007, a revision was made to the law in 2008, which relaxed requirements for individuals without underage children.

The review was petitioned by a 54-year-old transgender from Hyogo Prefecture, who argued that the ban violates the principles of Article 13 of the Japanese Constitution, which states: "All of the people shall be respected as individuals." The Court ruled that, in line with the legal precedent of 2007, the law does not violate the Constitution, with only one of the five judges concluding that the stipulation is unconstitutional. While the results were disappointing for the petitioner's side, it expressed content with the dissenting opinion, which was found groundbreaking and "a ray of light". [Mainichi]

Mongolia: Lawmakers urged to revise laws impacting the right to freedom of peaceful assembly

(dql) Globe International Center, an NGO established in 1999 and engaged in sustaining Mongolian democracy and civil society, has called on the Mongolian lawmakers to launch a review of the laws and policies impacting the right to freedom of peaceful assembly in the country. The organization refers in particular to new laws and amendments of existing laws during the time of the pandemic in which it reports more than 50 cases of violations of the right to peaceful assembly and association since November 2020. [IFEX]

North Korea's food situation tense, South Korea says

(dql) According to assessment of the South Korean government North Korea's food situation appears to be tense, with Pyongyang suffering "chronic food shortages with around 1 million tons of foods falling short every year." In the light of the prolonged pandemic-driven border lockdown, Seoul suggests that the North "is likely to be having difficulties in securing necessary foods from abroad." [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: DPK candidate's election aid resigns over hostility for having extramarital children

(aml) The ruling Democratic Party (DPK) has accepted the resignation of Prof. Cho Dong-youn of the Seokyeong University's Department of Military Studies, only three days after she was appointed to become standing co-chairwoman of the DPK's election committee.

Shortly after her appointment was announced, allegations occurred that Cho had two children outside her marriage with her ex-husband prompting the main opposition People Power Party (PPP) to claim that Cho had a "morality issue" which made her unable to "shoulder the hefty responsibility of serving the public."

Cho served in the military for 17 years, obtained a master's degree in public administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, was 2018 World Fellow at Yale University, and is considered an aerospace and military specialist.

The incident sparked a debate about sexism as well as about whether the private lives of politicians should be

dragged out to the public if they are unrelated to their professional abilities. [The Korea Herald] [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Assembly passes record 607.7 trillion won budget for 2022

(aml) On Friday, December 3, the National Assembly has passed a record budget of 607.7 trillion won ($516.3 billion) with a day of delay due to last-minute negotiations between the ruling Democratic Party (DPK) and the main opposition People Power Party (PPP). The Assembly decided on a 3.3 trillion won increase compared to the government proposal which included the defense ministry's 7.2 billion won request for the development of a light aircraft carrier that had been denied by the parliamentary defense committee [AiR, No.47, November/2021, 4] [The Korea Herald].

According to the budget proposal, the government will set aside 216.7 trillion won for health, welfare, and labor sectors, up 8.5% from last year, as well as 30.4 trillion won for small and mid-sized companies, up 6% compared to last year. 11.9 trillion won are supposed to go into the environmental sector, which is an increase of 12.5% in order to achieve the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Seongnam mayor indicted on corruption, abuse of power charges

(aml) On Tuesday, November 30, prosecutors have indicted Eun Soo-mi (Democratic Party of Korea), mayor of Seongnam, on charges of corruption and abuse of power, following an investigation into allegations that Eun gave 450 million won ($379,000) to an unidentified company at the request of a police officer in exchange for information. The officer had at the time been in charge with an investigation into an alleged violation of the Political Funds Act because Eun had received free transportation services from a local business. The charges furthermore include receiving cash and wine worth 4.67 million from a close aid between 2018 and 2019. Eun has denied all allegations. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Marine Corps launch aircraft group

(aml) On Wednesday, December 1, South Korea's Marine Corps launched an aircraft group in order to step up the defense of border islands and wartime capabilities for landing operations. The Marine Corps had already received two units of the MUH-1 Marineone helicopter in 2017 and plans to extend it to 28 units by 2023.

The launch is part of the armed service's plan to establish a separate air unit after earlier units which had been formed after the Korean War, were incorporated into the Navy in 1973. In addition, the Marine Corps and the US have signed an agreement to promote exchanges between their aviation units and to share technologies to improve interoperability between their militaries. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Launch of first national administrative legislation committee

(aml) South Korea has launched its National Administrative Legislation Committee, an advisory body on the administrative legal system at the national level that belongs to the Ministry of Government Legislation. The 38-member committee is going to be jointly chaired by Minster Lee Kang-seop and private chairperson Hong Jung-sun, former professor at Yonsei University. The committee's operation plan was shared on Friday, December 3, and includes the legislative impact analysis which is going to be conducted from next year on. In the future, three subcommittees are planned for each field to discuss matters related to the revision of the General Act on Public Administration. [The Korea Herald]

Taiwan to work on migrant fishermen rights

(zh) Chen Chu, the President of the Control Yuan – Taiwan's investigatory and auditory branch of the government – confirmed that the rights of migrant fishermen is the most urgent issue for the island's fisheries industry. She made the statement in her capacity as Head of the National Human Rights Commission, referring to results and suggestions of an investigation of the Commission's task force

established in February. Among the core recommendations are changes to existing regulations on the employment of migrant fishermen on distant-water fishing (DWF) vessels bringing them more in line with those in the Labor Standards Act and Work in Fishing Convention C188 to provide with more rights and better written terms and conditions of employment. Currently, migrant fishermen are not covered by these legal instruments. [Focus Taiwan]

Migrant fishermen are described as the backbone of Taiwan's DWF fleet, with currently around 20,000, mostly from Indonesia and the Philippines, employed. Last year, the US Department of Labor added fish caught by Taiwan-flagged vessels to its 2020 "List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor" [see AiR No. 19, May/2021, 2].

Taiwan's new anti-stalking bill signed into law

(zh) The newly-passed Stalking and Harassment Prevention Act was signed into law by Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen on December 1 and will take effect in six months. Passed with bipartisan support, the Act stipulates eight types of stalking and harassing behaviors, and individuals who are found guilty of these actions face up to one-year imprisonment and a maximum of NT$100,000. [Focus Taiwan]

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

Bangladesh: Authorities allow Rohingya refugees relocated to flood-prone island to visit families

(ap) Authorities in Bangladesh have allowed 68 Rohingya refugees to leave a remote, flood-prone island in the Bay of Bengal to visit their relatives on the mainland for the first time since their relocation began two years ago. [Radio France Internationale]

Since December of last year, 20,000 refugees have been relocated to Bhasan Char. The government plans to move 100,000 refugees to take pressure off Cox's Bazar where more than one million members of the largely Muslim minority group have taken shelter.

The United Nations refugee agency had criticized the relocation on the grounds of safety and Bhasan Char's livability until October, when it signed an agreement with the Bangladeshi government to start operations on the island [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]. Rights groups such as Human Rights Watch continue to oppose the project, questioning whether the resettlement has been voluntary [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5].

Bangladeshi authorities said they are planning to regularize Rohingya family reunions, allowing at least two trips per month. [Arab News]

Bangladesh: Student protests in capital continue

(ap) Thousands of students in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, have continued road safety protests which began earlier this month after a student was killed by a garbage truck [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5].

The demonstrations intensified on November 29 after a bus ran over another student, killing him on the spot. Local people rushed to the spot and set fire to several buses after the incident. Police saved the driver, who was severely beaten up by a mob, and kept him under their custody. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

The Dhaka Police has sued 300 protesters, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated that those responsible would be punished. She also urged students to end their demonstrations and return to their educational institutions. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, in turn, claimed that the bus torching was not carried out by students but by "a vested quarter" trying to destabilize the country by taking advantage of the student movement. [Dhaka Tribune 3]

Students have expanded their demands, which now include drug testing for bus drivers, safety measures for women on public transport and compensation to injured passengers. Last week, the government cut student bus fares by 50 percent in Dhaka, but protesters demanded the cut be extended to the whole country. [Dhaka Tribune 4]

In 2018, similar protests after the deaths of two students in a traffic accident grew into a nationwide movement that disrupted traffic around the country for a week, leading to a government crackdown. The protest also prompted the government to enact a new road transportation law that increased the punishment for death due to negligent driving to five years.

Bangladesh: Main opposition party in dire straits as leader's health deteriorates

(ap) The secretary general of Bangladesh's main opposition Nationalist Party (BNP), Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, has alleged that the ruling Awami League party seeks to establish a one-party government, as authorities are yet to allow the critically ill BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia to receive treatment abroad. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Zia, Bangladesh's first female prime minister and archrival of current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was admitted to the critical care unit of a hospital last month, with doctors treating her saying they fear for her life if she is not allowed to fly abroad for medical care [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

However, the leader of the BNP has been barred by a court from leaving the country after being convicted and jailed on graft charges in 2018. In March of last year, the government allowed Zia to be released from prison as her health began to worsen [see AiR No. 10, March/2021, 2].

As her condition has worsened, BNP activists and supporters have been staging protests across the country since November 21, demanding she be allowed to travel for treatment. Protests continued last week, and Alamgir claimed the government is under foreign pressure to allow the BNP chairperson to go abroad. He also claimed that the government is lying

about legal hurdles preventing Zia from leaving the country, while also hinting at the possibility of an upcoming youth movement if the party's demands are not met. [Dhaka Tribune 2] [Dhaka Tribune 3]

In related developments, 23 notable citizens, including professors and activists, have also petitioned for Zia to be allowed treatment abroad. [Dhaka Tribune 4]

Bangladesh: Major arrested for refusing mural of nation's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

(ap) A Bangladeshi mayor was arrested after he refused to permit a mural depicting the nation's founder and father of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, on religious grounds. [Al Jazeera]

The case follows last month's sacking by Hasina of the mayor of the industrial city of Gazipur after he allegedly defamed Rahman. Both mayors were members of Hasina's ruling Awami League party. [Dhaka Tribune]

Since Sheikh Hasina took power in 2009, more than a thousand murals and monuments have been erected to venerate her father.

In light of this, the Hefazat-e-Islam Bangladesh (HIB), a hardline Islamist group based in Chittagong, started an agitation last December against the construction of a sculpture of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Dhaka. Islamist groups deem such statues to be anti-Islamic, often associating them with idol worship – a strictly forbidden practice in Islam. [AiR No. 48, December/2020, 1]

The HIB's protest, which included vandalism of Rahman's statue, reflected the government's difficulties in containing radical Islamist groups, that it has in the past. This growing radicalism is especially problematic to Bangladesh's minorities, as the HIB is reportedly collaborating with other radical groups, including the Jamaat-e-Islami, an anti-Hindu, anti-India groups, backed by Pakistan, and accused to collaborating with the Pakistan army in the Liberation War of 1971.

Bangladesh: Digital Security Act necessary for all people, information minister says

(ap) Bangladesh's contentious Digital Security Act (DSA) is necessary to ensure digital security for all people in the country in an increasingly digitized world, according to Information Minister Hasan Mahmud, who was attending an online seminar "Fact and Impact of Digital Security Act". [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Mahmud – who is also serving as joint general secretary of Prime Minister Hasina's ruling Awami League party – noted that several other countries have similar laws, citing India's Information Technology Act 2000 and Pakistan's Prevention of Crime Act 2016, among others.

In related developments, two former leaders of the ruling Awami League party's student wing filed cases under the DSA seeking action against individuals for allegedly spreading false information against Mahmud. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: Faculty strike, university closed after professor's death following confinement by students

(ap) Authorities in Bangladesh shut down a university after a professor died of cardiac arrest last week, following alleged confinement by a group of students at his office. The students in question were from the campus unit of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling Awami League party. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: United Nations to support on Rohingya crisis, outgoing resident coordinator says

(ap) The United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh has assured Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that the UN will continue to support Bangladesh on the Rohingya issue. The prime minister, for her part, underlined that Bangladesh has given shelter to the forcibly displaced Rohingya on humanitarian grounds, adding that "they should return to their country" as their continued residence in Bangladesh will create social problems. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Town elects country's first transgender mayor

(ap) Voters in a town in Bangladesh have elected the nation's first openly transgender major after the independent candidate beat her ruling Awami League party rival in a landslide. [Al Jazeera]

The Muslim-majority South Asian nation of 161 million is estimated to have around 1.5 million transgender people, who often face discrimination and violence, though recent laws mark growing tolerance. In 2013, transgender people were officially identified as a separate gender and, in 2018, they were allowed to use "third gender" when registering to vote.

Bangladesh: Activists call for indigenous justice in Chittagong Hill Tracts

(ap) Activists, political leaders and a church official have criticized the Bangladesh government for failing to implement an accord for peace, justice and development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), a group of districts within the Chittagong Division in southeastern Bangladesh.

The CHT, which holds strategic importance because it shares borders with Myanmar on the south and southeast, and with India on the north and northeast, is home to dozens of indigenous Buddhist, Christian and animist communities.

In the 1960s and 1970s, thousands were forced off their lands to make way for reservoirs and hydroelectric schemes, a displacement made worse by massacres against the Jumma people (the collective name for all indigenous peoples in the region). Moreover, the Bangladesh government settled hundreds of thousands of Bengali people in the Chittagong Hills, and they now make up the majority of the population in the region.

This led to an insurgency of the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samiti (United People's Party of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, PCJSS) and its armed wing, the Shanti Bahini, against government forces in 1977. The insurgency ended in 1997 when a peace accord, the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, recognized the rights of the Jumma people over their lands.

However, this accord remains largely unimplemented and the Jumma people are not even acknowledged in

the Bangladesh constitution.

Against this backdrop, at an event observing the 24th anniversary of the signing of the accord on December 2, the PCJSS chairman accused the Bangladeshi government of being insincere in claiming to implement the accord. He also said the main agreements for regional autonomy, land dispute resolution and withdrawal of military camps have not been initiated, leaving the CHT the most highly militarized region in Bangladesh where indigenous groups are gradually becoming a minority in their own land. [UCA News]

He also accused the government of backing an opposition political party in the CHT, the United People's Democratic Front, after the peace accord was signed.

Bangladesh: Banned terrorist group active in Chittagong Hill Tracts

(ap) The Bangladeshi Border Security Force has stated that the banned terrorist group National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) is active in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The NLFT is a nationalist militant organization based in Tripura, India, seeking independence from India. [News 18]

Bangladesh: Prime Minister urges armed forces to implement economic development plan for 2041

(ap) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked the Bangladesh Armed Forces to work as "frontline soldiers" to implement the Perspective Plan 2041 to make Bangladesh a developed country. [Dhaka Tribune]

The Perspective Plan 2041 is a national strategic plan issued by the prime minister and the National Economic Council for socio-economic development. Four 5-year plans between 2022 and 2041 aim to achieve high income status through industrialization, an expansion of manufacturing capacity and investment in human capital to increase exports.

India: Fresh blow for opposition Congress party in Meghalaya state

(lm/rs) In the latest blow to India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress (INC), some 600 members of the party's student wing in the northeastern Meghalaya state have quit from the organization, including the president. [NDTV] [The Hindu]

In addition, the INC lost two senior leaders in the working president and the general secretary of the MPCC, both of which attributed their move to the "business-like approach" of the recently appointed president of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC). [India Today]

These developments assume added significance, coming they do just days after 12 out of 17 of INC lawmakers in Meghalaya's state assembly, including former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma, defected to the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) party.

At the time, people familiar with the developments said that the INC's high command had failed to address concerns raised by Sangama, who was upset over not being consulted before the appointment of the new MPCC chief in September this year, among other things.

In related developments, a grand plan for the entry of election strategist Prashant Kishor into the INC has collapsed into bitterness between the two sides after months of negotiations at several levels. According to a senior party functionary, Kishor – who advises AITC leader and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee –wanted a formal position in the party, among other demands, which was judged to be unworkable. [India Today] [The Hindu]

India: Protesting farmers form committee to hold further discussions with central government

(sr) The umbrella body of unions leading the year-long farmers' protests against free-market agricultural laws in India, Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Joint Farmers Front, SKM), in a crucial meeting on December 4 formed a committee to discuss its remaining demands with the central government. [The Hindu]

Earlier this month, India's Parliament passed a bill to repeal three agriculture laws that had prompted more than a year of protests, after Prime Minister Modi had unexpectedly announced his government would roll back the contentious legislation.[AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]

However, with the prime minister on the back foot, 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. They also want the government to drop fines and other penalties for stubble burning after harvesting their crops.

Against this backdrop, the SKM met with the government of Haryana state on December 3 to discuss the demands of the farmers. However, no consensus was reached in the four-hour meeting, and the SKM later alleged that the state government was not sensitive to the demands of the farmers and the issues being faced by them. [India Today]

India: Opposition protests introduction of bill seeking to alter Preamble to the Indian Constitution

(sr/lm) The introduction of a private member's bill seeking to replace the word "socialist" with "equitable" in the Preamble to the Indian Constitution, among other changes, led to protests by opposition lawmakers during a session of Parliament's upper house on December 3.

The bill was introduced by a member of Prime Minister Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). While the deputy chairman of Parliament's upper house initially allowed the introduction, a lawmaker from the opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal party opposed the move and other MPs joined the protest.

The opposing MP stated that amending the Preamble was an attack to the very structure of the Indian Constitution and the bill did not have the prior assent of the President. However, the deputy chairman rebutted that the bill did not require the consent of the President to be introduced in the Upper House and the decision on the introduction of the Bill was reserved. [Moneycontrol]

The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2021, seeks to replace the word "socialist" with "equitable" in the Preamble to the Constitution, among other changes. It also suggests changing the words "equality of status and of opportunity" in the Preamble to "equality of status and of opportunity to be born, to be fed, to be educated, to get a job and to be treated with dignity". It has proposed to add "access to information technology" in the objectives of the Preamble. [The Hindu]

In light of these developments, observers believe that Prime Minister Modi's decision to backtrack on his agricultural legislation has emboldened farmers and invigorated other critics, including labor unions, who sense a rare opportunity to join hands and stymie the privatization agenda of a leader who has not often encountered setbacks through seven years in power. [The Washington Post, $]

In fact, in the same week when India's Parliament formally repealed the farm laws, news outlets reported that the Modi administration plans to defer the implementation of contentious labor reforms that would make it easier to fire and hire workers until after pivotal state elections next year. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

India: Parliamentary committee asks ministry to properly define 'anti-national attitude'

(rs) A parliamentary committee headed by veteran opposition lawmaker Shashi Tharoor, in its 27th report on "Ethical Standards in Media Coverage" has observed that the Information and Broadcasting Ministry should properly define the term "anti-national attitude" used in the Cable Network CTN Rules to remove any ambiguity in its interpretation. [The Hindu]

In the report, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology noted that though Rule 6(1)(e) of the CTN Rules, 2014 states that no program should be carried in cable service which is likely to promote "anti-national attitude", the term has not been separately defined in the program code enumerated in the CTN Rules, 1994. Consequently, the term has caused unnecessary harassment of the private channels, the committee noted.

The ministry, however, had justified that "anti-national" is commonly understood as opposed to national

interests or nationalism.

India: Supreme Court orders states, union territories to provide dry ration to sex workers

(sr) India's Supreme Court has reiterated its direction to states and union territories to supply dry rations to sex workers identified by the National AIDS Control Organisation and district legal authorities, noting that it would be difficult for sex workers to produce a proof of identity. [Bar and Bench]

The judges observed that Right to Food was a fundamental right of all Indian citizens under Article 21 and it was the obligation of local governments to ensure that all citizens, including sex workers, received basic amenities. [Live Law]

The court ordered the states and union territories to file status before December 10, and listed the case for hearing on December 14. [The Hindu]

India: Scolded by Supreme Court, air quality commission takes further actions

(sr/lm) India's central government on December 3 told the Supreme Court that it is constituting an enforcement task force and flying squads to implement pollution control measures, among others, a day after the top court again scolded authorities for their inability to control the worsening air pollution. [Live Law 1]

The Indian capital, New Delhi, has been engulfed in a shroud of smog for the past few weeks, and reached hazardous levels this year in early November. This was exacerbated by a spike in the burning of crop waste in surrounding farmlands. In light of this, a public interest petition was filed at India's Supreme Court seeking protection for the "right to breathe" [see AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3].

Against this backdrop, the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) informed the top court that it had constituted a five-member task force to supervise inspection teams that are supposed to sites and report serious violations to take actions against those not following guidelines. The Delhi government further announced that all school and colleges would remain shut till further notice. [News Laundry] [Times of India]

Satisfied with the steps taken by the CAQM, the Supreme Court allowed the State government to proceed with building hospitals in the city, keeping in mind the on-going pandemic. The judges also urged the State and Central governments to follow the guidelines as set out by the CAQM. [Times of India]

On December 6 then, the top court turned down a plea made on behalf of a builders group for urgent listing of its plea to lift the blanket ban imposed on construction activities. [Live Mint] [Live Law 2]

India: Parliament passes Assisted Reproductive Technology Bill

(sr) The lower house of the Indian parliament has passed the Assisted Reproductive Technology (Regulation) Bill, 2020 to regulate and oversee assisted reproductive technology and IVF clinics in the country. [Scroll.in]

The Bill proposes to create a national registry and registration authority of all clinics and medica professionals engaging in the field. The Bill also has provisions to hand out strict punishment for those found engaging in sex selection and sale of human embryos. [The Hindu]

However, it was vehemently noticed by parliamentarians of the Opposition that single parents and people of the LGBTQI+ community were excluded from the bill and opined that the Bill violated Article 14 of the Indian Constitution and was patriarchal in nature. [Scroll.in]

India: Troops ‘mistakenly’ kill 14 civilians in weekend incidents in Nagaland state

(sr/lm) A botched security operation and subsequent violence in India’s remote northeastern Nagaland state has left 14 civilians dead, sparking unrest and calls for the repeal of a special law that grants the armed forces immunity from prosecution in several states in the northeastern border region as well as in Kashmir.

On December 4, a unit of the Assam Rifles, India’s oldest paramilitary force, mistook a group of laborers for militants and opened fire. The soldiers had laid an ambush for a week following intelligence that insurgents were planning to attack soldiers in the area,

according to a police report. Six men were killed and two critically injured in the shooting. [The Washington Post, $]

In light of this, violence erupted later the same day after a big crowd of people marched to the local security forces camp and started damaging and burning buildings. At least seven more civilians died. According to the police report, eyewitnesses confirmed that the security forces opened fire “indiscriminately.”

Violence erupted again on December 5, when a crowd of mourners vandalized and set fire to some buildings belonging to a different unit of the Indian Army. The personnel resorted to firing blanks, which agitated the nearly 700 protesters armed with sticks, pipes and machetes. One person died, and six others were wounded by gunfire.

Expressing regret over the incident, India’s Home Minister Amit Shah promised swift justice and said an investigation conducted by the state government will be completed in a month. [South China Morning Post]

India’s northeast is home to a complex web of tribal groups, many of which have launched insurgencies, accusing the central government of plundering resources and doing little to improve their lives. People in Nagaland have frequently accused security forces of wrongly targeting innocent locals in their counter-insurgency operations against rebel groups, which cross into Myanmar after attacking Indian government forces in the remote area. [Al Jazeera]

The killings have renewed calls from local residents and politicians for the revocation of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), a law that grants special powers to the Indian Armed Forces to maintain public order in "disturbed areas”, including the right to search, seize, and even shoot suspects on sight without fear of prosecution unless the government makes an exception, which rarely occurs. [The Diplomat] [The Times of India]

India: Government rejects United Nations’ concerns about Kashmiri rights activist’s arrest

(rs) After the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said it was “deeply concerned” at the arrest of a prominent human rights activist from the Jammu and Kashmir union territory, India on December 2 lashed out, saying the United Nations

body should develop a better understanding of the negative impact of terrorism on human rights. [Al Jazeera] [Hindustan Times]

Khurram Parvez was arrested late on November 22 by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's counter-terrorism agency. He 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. [AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5].

In a statement released on December 1, the OHCHR reiterated its demand to amend the law to bring it in line with the international human rights law and standards. The UN agency also said that it was "increasingly alarmed by the rise in killings of civilians, including members of religious minorities, by armed groups in Indian-administered Kashmir this year".

Responding to the statements by the human rights body, New Delhi dismissed the agency's statement as biased, criticizing the Geneva-based body for a lack of understanding of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. [The Independent] [The Wire]

India: Prime accused in lynching case killed by police vehicle in 'escape bid'

(sr) The prime suspect in the killing of a student leader in a mob attack died in an alleged road accident while he was trying to flee from custody, with his relatives alleging that his death is a pre-planned murder authorized by the state. [The Wire]

The accused was supposed to be produced in court on December 1. However, the police stated that he had informed them about a hidden drug assignment, and they were ushering him to the site where he claimed the drug consignment was stashed. The police claim that on the way to the site, the man jumped out of the car and the police escort vehicle behind him, accidentally ran over him. [The Indian Express]

India: Admiral R Hari Kumar takes over charge as new chief of Indian Navy

(rs) Admiral R. Hari Kumar has assumed charge as the 25th Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS), succeeding on Chief Admiral Karambir Singh, who retired after 41 years of military service.

Admiral Kumar takes over at a time when the Indian Navy is in the process of revising its 15-year Maritime Capability Perspective Plan – expected to be ready by the first quarter of next year – to align it with the 10-year Integrated Capability Development Plan being formulated by the Department of Military Affairs. [The Hindu 1]

The last two CNSs were outspoken critics of the Indian Navy's declining budget, and the reduction in planned warships from 200 vessels in 2027 to 170. After the Chief of Defence Staff, General Bipin Rawat, placed a public question mark over plans for a second indigenous aircraft carrier, outgoing CNS Singh spoke out strongly about the need for the carrier. [Business Standard]

The new navy chief used a press conference last week to voice is support for the theaterisation process, calling it "the most important higher defence organisational reform that has happened in our country since Independence". The initial target for the rollout of the theatre concept was 2022. But the process, which is being led by General Rawat, has expectantly not been a smooth one, with the Indian Air Force opposing the formation of unified theatre commands, citing limitation of resources [see AiR No. 39, September/2021, 4].

Maldives: Former President Yameen walks free after corruption conviction overturned

(lm) The former president of the Maldives, Abdulla Yameen, was freed from house arrest on December 2 after the country's Supreme Court overturned a money-laundering and embezzlement conviction, allowing him to potentially make a return to politics. [South China Morning Post]

Widely seen as pro-China and accused of crushing dissent in the archipelago, Yameen served as the Maldives' President from 2013 until his surprise defeat in the 2018 general election. In 2019, he was sentenced to five years in prison by the Criminal Court after being found guilty of embezzling $1 million in state funds, allegedly acquired through the lease of resort development rights, and laundering the proceeds. Apart from the jail term, he was also given a fine totaling $5 million, to be settled within six months of the verdict.

The High Court upheld the lower court's decision in January this year, prompting the defense to file an appeal with the Supreme Court. In October, the top court refused to grant bail to Yameen [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2].

But a three-member Supreme Court bench ruled last week there was insufficient evidence in the original case, observing that the evidence given at the initial trial had discrepancies and did not conclusively prove that the former president had laundered $1 million in state money for personal gain. [The Edition]

The overturning of the verdict is a key moment in the Maldives' often-turbulent politics, as Yameen is now free to conduct political activities and even contest the next presidential election.

However, Yameen has also been facing a corruption trial over the lease of an island for resort development. Further, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), the Presidential Inquiry Commission on Asset Recovery as well as the Maldives Police Service are currently conducting probes against the ex-president, regarding the Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC) grand corruption case.

Nepal: Supreme Court resumes work with reduced power of chief justice

(lm) Nepal's Supreme Court has resumed hearings of all kinds of cases on December 1, more than a month after justices started boycotting benches in protest against Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana. Lawyers, who had also been boycotting the benches and other court proceedings, have also returned to taken part in pleading and other court proceedings. [The Kathmandu Post]

The embattled top judge stands accused of maneuvering to get loyalists appointed to key constitutional bodies and to the cabinet, as well as failing to introduce reforms in the judiciary branch. Rana's critics also accused him of steering certain cases toward judges inclined to make rulings in line with his own preferences. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Members of Nepal's bar association boycotted the court, and after pressure from frustrated members of Nepal's ruling coalition, the chief justice agreed to support a lottery system to assign judges to cases [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. The new system, effective from December 1, reduces the administrative power of Rana. [The Himalayan Times]

Court watchers in Nepal said there was a good chance that Rana would not return to the bench. For just as he faces growing pressure to resign, the top judge has been hospitalized to treat a COVID-19 infection. [The New York Times, $]

Nepal: K.P. Oli returns to helm opposition Communist Party, vows to come back as prime minister

(lm) Nepal's main opposition party, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), has re-elected former Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli as its chairman for the next five years.

Last week, the party's 10th General Convention saw Oli elected with a thumping majority. Out of 2,153 convention representatives, 2,096 participated in the voting process. Out of them, the former prime minister secured 1,837 votes, while is rival Bhim Bahadur Rawal – a vocal critic of Oli – got only 223 votes. [Business Standard] [The Wire]

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. [AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]

Nepal: Rajendra Lingden elected as new president of Rastriya Prajatantra Party

(lm) Nepal's Hindu-nationalist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) has elected Prasad Lingden as its new chairman after the incumbent president, Kamal Thapa, was defeated at the party's general convention on December 5. [The Kathmandu Post] [The New Indian Express]

Nepal: President promulgate six new ordinances

(ns) New pieces of legislation were set forth by the Nepali President, Bidya Devi Bhandari. Overall, six new ordinances were presented. [My República]

The ordinances concerned were 'Ordinance on Amendment of Some Acts against Sexual Violence, 2078, Ordinance to Amend Some Acts Related to Criminal Offenses and Criminal Procedure, 2078, Nepal Police and Provincial Police (Operation, Supervision and Coordination) (First Amendment) Ordinance, 2078, Acid and Other Hazardous Chemicals (Regulation) Ordinance-2078, Social Security (First Amendment) Ordinance-2078 and Railway Ordinance-2078 BS.'

Nepal: President summons Parliament for December 14

(ns) Nepal's ceremonial head of state, President Bidya Devi Bhandari, has summoned the next session for Parliament for December 14. It was planned subsequently to the 14 general convention of the Nepali Congress, the governing Nepali party, which will take place on December 10. [Khabarhub] [Setopati]

Pakistan: Sri Lankan factory manager lynched and set on fire

(lm) A mob of hundreds of enraged factory employees in eastern Pakistan on December 3 tortured and burned a Sri Lankan manager who they accused of desecrating posters bearing the name of Islam's Prophet Muhammad, in a "horrific" attack that Prime Minister Imran Khan said brought shame on the country. [South China Morning Post] [The Washington Post, $]

Few issues are as galvanizing in Pakistan as blasphemy, and mere allegations of an insult to Islam can invite mob attacks. Rights groups say accusations of blasphemy can often be wielded to settle personal vendettas, with minorities largely the target. Islamabad has long been under pressure to change the country's blasphemy laws – which carry the death penalty for anyone found guilty of the offense – a move Islamists strongly resist.

The attack came less than a week after another Muslim mob on November 28 burned a police station and four police posts in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province after officers refused to hand over a mentally unstable detainee accused of insulting Islam. [Voice of America]

In the port city of Karachi, civil society members held a protest on December 4 against the lynching of the Sri

Lankan national. The protesters said they condemned the killing and demanded that the government take measures to stop the misuse of the blasphemy law. [Al Jazeera]

Further, an adviser to the Sri Lankan government has drawn a link between the lynching of the Sri Lankan national to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, saying that it had emboldened terrorist outlets and religious radical groups across South Asia. [The Hindu]

Pakistan: Protests in Gwadar enter third week

(lm) Thousands of people, including women and children, continued their protest in Gwadar, a coastal town in Pakistan's Balochistan province, against a severe shortage of water and electricity and threats to livelihoods. [Pakistan Today]

The protests are being led by Maulana Hidayatur Rehman, a local leader of Jamaat-i-Islami, an Islamic political party which seeks to transform Pakistan into an Islamic state. The protesters have put forth 19 demands, most notably an end to illegal fishing by trawlers and the lifting of trade restrictions with Iran. The Balochistan provincial government has so far held three rounds of talks with the protest leader, terming the demands "legitimate and pro-public". [Dawn]

The protests are part of a growing discontent with China's presence in Gwadar, whose deep-water port is an integral part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project (CPEC), the signature undertaking of Beijing's international infrastructure strategy known as the Belt and Road Initiative. Under the CPEC, Islamabad surrendered Gwadar port to a Chinese-backed multinational corporation for a lease of 40 years.

Locals claim they had been promised that China's investment in Gwadar would mean development for the area, including the establishment of a coal-fired power station to provide much-needed electricity. Yet, in the years since Beijing was granted a lease on Gwadar port, no work has begun on any such projects and instead locals say that China's presence is undermining their livelihoods and creating local food shortages by allowing Chinese fishing boats to illegally fish in Pakistan's waters around the port. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Pakistan: Anti-corruption watchdog launches investigation into Prime Minister Khan's pet project

(lm) Pakistan's anti-graft watchdog, the National Accountability Bureau, has announced that it is investigating the federal government's much-touted tree-planting program, Ten Billion Tree Tsunami. The ambitious project – which is supported by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – sets out to plant ten billion trees by 2023. [Dawn]

It originated in 2015, when Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan — then a provincial politician in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa — backed a program dubbed a "Billion Tree Tsunami." The initiative reached its provincewide target in 2018 and was so successful that federal officials expanded the drive nationally in 2019 with a new goal of 10 billion trees.

Sri Lanka: In a U-turn, government says it will retain personal laws for different communities

(lm) In a move that contradicts the government's stated policy of enacting a unified personal code, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister G L Peiris has said Colombo will continue to retain personal laws for different communities, after meeting with the envoys from Islamic countries.

Earlier in October, Sri Lanka's President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed a 13-member legal reform committee tasked with studying the implementation of his "One Country, One Law" concept and to prepare a draft Act for the said purpose. The goal is to replace the three customary laws which existed for centuries and are still in use in the country – Kandyan, Thesavalamai and Muslim law – and bring all communities under one blanket set of laws. The panel was given until February 28 to compile a report. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

On November 30 then, Sri Lanka hosted a working dinner for the Heads of Mission of Islamic States in Colombo. It was also attended by Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and Foreign Minister GL Peiris. Significantly, In a statement released afterwards, Peiris said that the country's democratic tradition was also "reflected in the rich and varied legal tradition of Sri Lanka which included personal laws specific to

Muslim, Kandyan and Tamil communities, which Sri Lanka will continue to retain." [The Island]

Sri Lanka: Cooking gas cylinder sales suspended over mystery explosions

(lm) The Sri Lankan government last week suspended distribution of all gas cylinders following an alarming rise in unexplained cooking gas explosions and fires that have injured many people across the island nation in recent weeks.

On December 1, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed an eight-member committee to investigate the incidents and provide a report within two weeks following police and media reports of at least 14 explosions in a single day. [The Straits Times]

Opposition lawmakers have blamed increased concentrations of propane in the mix of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) cylinders used for cooking, relative to the more expensive butane. State-run Litro gas, which provides more than 80 percent of Sri Lanka's LPG gas cylinders for domestic and commercial use, rejects the claims.

The island is in the grip of an economic crisis with serious shortages of fossil fuels and other essential goods due to dwindling foreign exchange reserves. In September, Parliament approved an economic emergency previously declared by President Rajapaksa [see AiR No. 36, September/2021, 1]. Earlier this month, Colombo temporarily shut its only oil refinery because it could not source dollars to import crude.

Ratings agency Moody's Investors Service (Moody's) announced last month it had downgraded Sri Lanka's debt rating to 'Caa2' from 'Caa1', citing Colombo's failure to come up with a comprehensive debt repayment plan, and the risk of default due to falling foreign exchange reserves. [AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

In light of this, Sri Lanka is also attempting to negotiate a $500 million credit line with India to buy fuel and boost reserves, which dropped to $2.27 billion at the end of October, down from $7.5 billion in November 2019 when the government of President Rajapaksa took office promising robust growth. [see entry in this edition]

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

Brunei: Sultan visits British Prime Minister on visit to the UK

The Sultan of Brunei met the UK Prime Minister at Downing Street, London, on December 3.

The two discussed the relationship between their countries, as laid out in the UK-Brunei Garrison Agreement and the UK Carrier Strike Group's trip to Brunei in October. There will also be a UK-Brunei Strategic Dialogue taking place next week. [GOV UK]

The Sultan has been the monarch of Brunei since 1967. He has also been the Prime Minister of the country since its independence from the UK in 1984.

Prime Minister Johnson thanked the Sultan for his support for the UK in becoming a Dialogue Partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as he is the Chairman of the group. Johnson said the new partnership, alongside the UK's application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and the recent Carrier Strike Group deployment, were part of the UK's agenda to increase commitment in the Indo-Pacific, viewing it as "a region of vital importance".

Brunei's monarch visited the UK to attend the graduation ceremony of his son, Prince 'Abdul Mateen, from the All Arms Commando Course (AACC) of the British Royal Marines. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia: Prime Minister mitigates statements pointing to his son as successor

(tl) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said he would support his son Hun Manet as his successor as next Prime Minister but later softened his statements, saying the contest is still open.

Analysts believe the prime minister changed his tone to avoid tension within his ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). "I can say that Hun Manet will be one of the candidates," adding, "this does not mean that he'll be the only candidate." In a 2018 interview, Hun Sen has yet referred to his son as a "possible future leader" of Cambodia. [Voacambodia]

Now, speaking at the opening of a new national road, Hun Sen also encouraged the sons of Defense Minister Tea Banh, Interior Minister Sar Kheng, and National Assembly's first vice-president Cheam Yeap to compete for the position.

However, after this statement Sar Kheng's son Sar Sokha, secretary of state for Cambodia's Ministry of Education, declared his endorsement of Hun Manet for the role. [Radio Free Asia]

Hun Sen, 69, is currently one of the world's longest-serving leaders, having been in power for 36 years. Currently, his political party, the CPP, holds all 125 seats in parliament, following the banning of the former Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) opposition party by the supreme court in 2018. Since then, a general crackdown has begun within the country on journalists, activists, opponents and NGOs. [Al Jazeera]

Hun Manet, 44, is the deputy commander of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces and joint chief of staff. He is also the deputy commander of Hun Sen's personal bodyguard unit, and head of the country's counterterrorism force.

Despite the slightly softened endorsement of his son, Hun Sen reiterated his desire to serve as Prime Minister at least until the 2028 elections. This limits the ambitions of other government representatives, including especially those of Sar Kheng, to stand in his place in the next elections in 2023. Indeed, as the Prime Minister added, if the popular outcome of the next elections were to allow him to remain in office, his son would be a suitable successor for the country,

while “Kheng and his colleagues would be too old to start their term”. [The Diplomat]

Cambodian activist in pre-trial detention for online state criticism

(bs) A member of the banned Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) and activist, who was recently deported back from Thailand, is now in detention waiting to appear in court for the trial.

The man was arrested in Thailand as a suspect of conspiracy and was deported back to Cambodia right after the arrest.

The activist was a migrant worker in Thailand and a supporter of the CNRP. He advocated the “end of impunity in Cambodia” and the eradication of social injustice. He was also known for his critics against Cambodian governments on social media.

Concerns came from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who mentioned the controversial decision of Thailand to deport people for expressing political opinions. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia: President Joko Widodo reassures business after court ruling on jobs law

(ms) President Joko Widodo reassured the business world that investments would not be impacted by the recent Constitutional Court ruling on a divisive Job Creation Law. [The Jakarta Post, $]

The Indonesian Parliament passed the legislation, also known as the Omnibus Law, last year to revise and combine more than 70 labor, tax and environmental laws with the aim 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, $]

The Constitutional Court, however, ruled on November 25 that the process of devising the Job Creation Law was unconstitutional and gave the government two years to amend relevant parts of the legislation or else it would be scrapped. [See AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5] In its ruling, the court cited insufficient public

consultation and transparency in the drafting process as well as the changes made after parliamentary approval. The law will remain in force in the meantime, and investments made under it will remain protected. Coordinating Legal, Political and Security Affairs Minister said the government is working fast to complete the revisions before the two-year deadline. Investment Minister Bahil Lahadalia said he does not expect the court ruling to disrupt Indonesia's fourth quarter investment realization. [Benar News] [Channel News Asia] [The Jakarta Post, $]

Indonesia: Papuan students charged with treason following demonstration

(ms) Police detained and charged eight Papuan students on December 1 for raising the banned "Morning Star" flag, a symbol of Papuan independence. Authorities arrested the students in West Papua's capital Jayapura during a demonstration marking the anniversary of what many people in the region consider their own day of independence. They charged the students with treason, alleging they organized and attended an outlawed event and produced materials promoting Papuan independence. The students could face life in prison if found guilty. [The Jakarta Post]

An addition, 26 people were arrested in Papuan Independence Day protests across Indonesia. Twenty-four have since been released, while two remain in custody. Nineteen protestors were meanwhile injured in demonstrations, and protests in two cities were forcibly dispersed. [Amnesty International]

Human rights groups have criticized authorities for using accusations of treason to stifle Papuan dissent. More than 50 Papuan activists have faced the charge in recent years. [The Jakarta Post] Seven of which were sentenced to 11 months prison in June 2020 for their involvement in anti-racism rallies in West Papua. [Reuters] [See No. 25, June/2020, 4]

The Independence Day rallies on December 1 marked the anniversary of the 1961 end of Dutch colonial occupation in Papua. The newfound independence was short-lived however, with the Indonesian government taking control of the region two years later. In 1969 a UN-backed referendum formally incorporated the region into Indonesia. The vote, however, was widely considered as rigged due to its low participation rate, sparking the decades-long pro-independence movement that continues today.

Lao PDR: Prime Minister issue decree on National dress code in formal ceremonies

(bs) A new government resolution dictates that men and women affiliated with Laos are required to wear the Lao National set of clothing in both National and International events.

The decree, while aiming at preserving national traditions and made-in-Lao PDR products, also intends to prevent the degradation of national culture by forbidding anyone to wear a traditional dress while engaging in illegal activities. [The Laotian Times]

Lao: Child labor in the tourism industry

(bs) The Head of the Tourism Management Department, under the Lao Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism, has shared concerns over child labor in the tourism industry.

After receiving several reports of minors working in bars, restaurants, and nightclubs, the department addressed local authorities to encourage stricter implementation of the National child labor protection regulation. [The Laotian Times]

Earlier this year, the International Labor Organization supported campaigns to spread awareness in the business service and tourism sectors in the four child-labor most affected provinces. [Lao National Radio, in Lao]

The amended Labor Law, 2006, prohibits employment of children under 14 years and bans the involvement of children under 18 years in sectors that are dangerous to their health. According to the law, 14- to 18-year-old children are also prohibited to work at night and for over eight hours per day. [Labour Law (amended)]

However, despite the National Labor Law in the protection of child labor, the Save the Children's 2021 Global Childhood Reportshowed that Laos remains among the 45 countries with negative performance in child health, education, labor, marriage, childbirth, and violence ranking 143 out of 186.

Malaysia: Former 'East Malaysia' states will now be the 'Borneo States'

(sd) Sarawak and Sabah will be known as the 'Borneo States' if proposed amendments to the constitution are accepted, according to the Prime Minister's Department.

The proposed amendments would be to Article 1 of the Federal Constitution. The Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister said the amendment was long overdue and, if approved, would finally give the two states separation from the others comprising Malaysia.

In the Malaysia Agreement of 1963 Sabah and Sarawak were referred to as the 'Borneo States', and Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Penang, Perak, Perlis, Selangor and Terengganu were the states of Malaya. However, over time all of the states were identified within one category.[The Borneo Post]

The proposed constitutional amendment was first introduced in early November. Other proposed changes included amending Article 160 to make September 16 Malaysia Day, and to amend Article 161A to give the status of native to the children of a native in Sarawak married to a foreign national. [AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5] [The Star]

Malaysia: Sarawak 18-year-olds cannot vote in December election

(sd) People in Sarawak – the largest of Malaysia´s 13 states - will not be able to vote in the upcoming state election if they are age 18 as the Constitutional Amendment Act 2019 which lowers the voting age from 21 to 18 will only be implemented next year, despite the amendment coming into effect from December 15. Automatic voter registration will also come into effect on December 15.

The country´s de facto law minister, Datuk Seri Wan Junaidi, said he hoped the issue "won't be politicized", as there was no pressure from any group but it was just a consequence of the legal process and decisions made by the state of Sarawak´s Kuching High Court.

The Election Commission (EC) also released a statement saying the amendments to the Registration of Voters and the Conduct of Elections Regulations were gazetted in November and will take effect on

December 15 following getting the consent of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (Malaysia's monarch).

The Kuching High Court ordered the Undi18 to be implemented by the end of December. [Malay Mail] [The Star]

The automatic registration of voters, and voting for 18 to 21-year olds, was delayed in April due to the pandemic. The original decision to lower the voting age was made in 2019. The delays were protested by the Young Voters Association group, known as Undi18. [Benar News] [AiR No. 14, April/2021, 1]

Malaysia: British technology company 's forced labour allegations influencing foreign investors?

(sd) Following the decision of British technology company Dyson to cut ties with its Malaysian supplier ATA IMS, other foreign partners seem to lose confidence in the country as well.

Dyson accounted for around 80% of ATA's revenue. After the split shares in the Malaysian manufacturer fell by 60%. 8,000 people are employed by ATA officially, but a former executive and four workers estimated the employee count to be closer to 17,000 including people without work permits. [Channel News Asia, 2]

Dyson ended its relationship with ATA after an audit of its labour practices and allegations made by a whistleblower. [Channel News Asia] [AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]

In response to the developments, Human Resources Minister called on employers and industries to be diligent in their practice of workers' rights and welfare so Malaysia can distance itself from forced labour. The Minister also said that ATA will be charged after complaints were received from the labour department.

Malaysia: Vegetable prices increase dramatically due to weather, COVID-19 and lack of workers

(sd) The cost of vegetables in Malaysia has seen an increase of 30%-40% recently, due to a severe monsoon season, a labor shortage caused by COVID-

19 and an increase in production costs, according to people in the agricultural industry.

Farmers also faced labor shortages this year and last year due to many foreign workers returning to their home countries because of the pandemic. Cameron Highlands Vegetable Growers Association said farms in the area rely heavily on these workers to help with planting and harvesting.

The government also decided to freeze foreign labor hiring in June 2020, so no new foreign workers can be hired by farmers. [Channel News Asia] [The Straits Times]

Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi's charged and sentenced

(tl) (nm) On December 6 the junta reduced the original four-year sentence, for incitement and breach of COVID-19 restrictions, to two years in jail for the democratically elected leader, Aung San Suu Kyi. She is allowed to serve the two-year sentence under house arrest in the capital of Naypyidaw. On the same occasion, former president Win Myint and former mayor of Naypyitawk were sentenced respectively to four and two years in jail for incitement.

Following the latest charge of corruption against Aung San Suu Kyi on November 30, the woman is now facing a total of 12 charges, half of which relate to abuses of power during her presidential term and the other half to corruption cases connected to the government. [Myanmar NOW] If found guilty on all the remaining 11 charges, there is a possibility that Aung San Suu Kyi will spend the remainder of her life held by the junta, even though the charges have been widely condemned as "unjust".

The verdict is still being met with heavy criticisms from international institutions and representatives, including Amnesty International, the chair of the group ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, who described the verdict as "a travesty of justice," and the United Nations. [Channel News Asia]

Since February, more than 10,600 people have been arrested and at least 1,303 have been killed by the junta. [The Guardian] [BBC]

Myanmar: Taliban and junta will not be allowed into the UN yet

(sd) The UN General Assembly said on December 6 it would postpone a decision to choose between Afghanistan's Taliban and the Myanmar junta, and their ousted government counterparts.

Ambassadors from the former governments of Afghanistan and Myanmar made claims to the countries' UN seats, while the two new powers also laid claim to them.

The nine-member UN credentials committee agreed, without a vote, to defer the decision for both countries, which leaves the current ambassadors in the seats. The decision is not likely to be considered again until the end of 2022, denying the recognition both military powers want for another year.

Myanmar's ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun was originally appointed by Aung San Suu Kyi's government and has asked to renew his UN accreditation despite plots against him due to his opposition to the coup. [The Straits Times]

Myanmar: five people killed in anti-junta protest

(bs) During a demonstration in the Yangon area, a military vehicle, allegedly used by Myanmar´s armed forces, hit a group of anti-junta protesters, killing five people.

Following the event, the United Nations in Myanmar condemned the episode, including the arrest of eleven demonstrators. [CNN]

Myanmar: Villagers fled to China's border seeking refuge

(nm) In Myanmar's northern Shan state, 1,500 villagers have fled to seek refuge in camps near China's border due to the intensified fighting between the military and the ethnic Kokang forces. Reportedly fighting started on 3 August but progressively got worse forcing the community to escape. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Helicopter attacks in Sagaing region

(nm) Thousands of civilians have escaped helicopter attacks in Myanmar's Sagaing region where 15 villages were targeted, the same area were 70 supporters of Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party were killed by a military-backed group in 2003.

Saigang was one of the first regions to arm themselves in opposition to the military government and has since been home to clashes, military-led massacres and assassinations. Displaced residents have been seeking shelter in nearby forests and other villages.

A joint statement released by Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States has urged the international community to "suspend all operational support to the military" and that weapons stockpiling, airstrikes, heave weapons use and troop deployment was concerning. [Aljazeera]

Myanmar: Following defections in the junta

(tl) 2,000 military and 6,000 police left the junta to join the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) following the 1 February coup. The number is set to rise in the coming months according to People's Embrace, a group set up to help defectors.

According to Captain Lin Htet Aung, military defector and founder of the group, parts of the military are losing confidence in the junta due to its continued failure to gain international recognition. People's Embrace is trying to put defectors in touch with the civil parallel government of the National Unity Government (NUG) in order to offer them accommodation and security.

According to CDM sources, some of the soldiers who leave the army become members of the resistance groups in the country soon after, providing useful information and organize attacks against the junta.

No member of the junta has yet commented on the defections. [Myanmar NOW]

The Philippines: Civic leaders, political parties file new petitions for disqualification of presidential candidate

(lt) Civil leaders and political leaders filed a new petition against presidential candidate Ferdinand Marcos Jr, son of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and commonly referred to by his nickname Bongbong Marcos. Groups such as Akbayan, a political party in the Philippines, have participated in filing petitions against the politician, who was previously convicted of failing to file income tax returns.

Disqualification petitions submitted to the Commission on Elections by Akbayan discussed Marcos' previous criminal convictions and their violation of Presidential Decree No. 1994, section 1985. The latter is an amendment to the National Internal Revenue Code of 1977 which states that Filipino citizens can be dismissed from public office should they fail to file their income tax return. As Marcos failed to do so in 1985 before the 1986 deadline, petitioners arguing against his presidential campaign are asserting his violation of the amendment in question. Akbayan, along with civic leaders, has also argued that Marcos' actions are evidence of immoral conduct and thus, calls for disqualification under the Omnibus Election Code. [Rappler 1]

The petition filed by Akbayan is one of many throughout this week; the Partido Federal Party has also filed a petition calling for Marcos' disqualification. However, the Partido Federal Party has also requested that Marcos not only be disqualified due to his past criminal convictions but also because his certification of nomination and acceptance was issued without their consent. [Rappler 2]

However, the presidential aspirant has rebuffed petitions calling for his disqualification after he was accused of being unfit for public office due to his tax evasion, which occurred between 1982 to 1985. A receipt issued by the Land Bank of the Philippines dated 27 December 2001 shows that Marcos paid his income tax returns in full, settling his previous convictions. This calls into question the validity of the petitions filed against him. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: Senator to withdraw from presidential race

(lt) Senator Christopher Lawrence ("Bong") Go has withdrawn from the presidential race, citing his family's concerns regarding his participation. The announcement leaves his former party PDP-Laban without a presidential candidate. Go still has yet to formalize his withdrawal, and is expected to do so with the Commission on Elections in the next few weeks. [Manila Times]

The Philippines: Department of Justice recommends murder charges against 17 policemen for deaths of political activists

(lt) The Philippines Department of Justice has recommended that at least seventeen policemen involved in the deaths of nine political activists be charged with murder. The inter-agency body is currently investigating counter-insurgency operations and extrajudicial killings under President Rodrigo Duterte, namely the deaths of leftist activists. The Department issued these recommendations after focusing upon the killing of a leader of the leftist group Bagong Alyansang Makabayan. The man was killed in a police raid committed against a worker's union group in Cavite on 7 March, 2021.

Human rights groups and activists have claimed that the police are targeting civilian groups thought to pose a communist threat in the context of President Duterte's ongoing war against communist insurgency in the south of the Philippines. [Benar News]

The Philippines: Philippine Nobel laureate permitted to receive prize in Norway after being deemed flight risk

(lt) Nobel laureate Maria Ressa, one of the co-founders of the news website Rappler, has been granted permission to fly to Norway and receive the Nobel Prize. The Court of Appeals has enabled this in its handling of a cyber-libel case against the famed journalist and cited a previous instance where Ressa had travelled abroad without any security concerns arising. This contradicts claims made by Philippine Solicitor General Jose Calida, who had earlier claimed Ressa was a flight risk. He argued that Ressa's continuous critiques of the Philippine legal system would lead to her evasion of domestic law, insisting that she need not attend the ceremony in person. However, the Court of Appeals disagreed with Calida's

arguments, believing that Ressa's travel reasons were "necessary and urgent."

Ressa's news site Rappler has been subject to government scrutiny due to its focus and criticism on President Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs which has left many citizens dead. In June 2020, Ressa and a former colleague were subject to cyber libel convictions; they face sentences of six-years' imprisonment and are currently on bail pending an appeal. [Benar News]

The Philippines: group of journalists face libel charges for reporting alleged illegal acts in government project

(bs) The national Energy Secretary and a campaign donor of the Philippine president have filed libel and cyberlibel charges against 21 journalists and media managers, after they filed reports before the Office of the Ombudsman on alleged favoritism regarding the economic involvement of the president's campaign donor in the Malampaya deep water to gas project.

The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) while advocating for the legalization of libel, showed its support to the journalists and media operators involved claiming that the reports "were meant to intimidate."

Libel remains a felony according to the Republic Act (RA) 10175 and the 2012 Cybercrime Prevention Act despite the two-decade long decriminalization campaigns. Also, in 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Committee defined the Philippines' Libel Law "excessive" and urged the country to amend it. [IFEX]

The Philippines: Lawyer to face disbarment complaint over defamation of former president

(lt) Controversial lawyer and public figure with political ambitions Larry Gadon faces yet another disbarment complaint to the Supreme Court. The complaint follows his remarks that former President Noynoy Aquino died due to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Complainants are HIV-infected persons who allege Gadon of "gross misconduct," and a violation of several provisions of the Code of Professional Responsibility which lawyers are bound to. Aquino's

family has clarified that the former president died of renal disease, not HIV.

Petitioners noted that Gadon's failure to adhere to proper standards of conduct is not new citing his statements as violation the prohibition to disclose a person's testing, exposure, or HIV or AIDS illness without consent.

Gadon faced four disbarment cases filed against him in 2018 for cursing and obscenities displayed in protests in Baguio City. Later, the High Court suspended Gadon in 2019 due to offensive language used against a doctor. These actions were contradictory to the Code of Professional Responsibility, hence his suspension. [CNN Philippines] [Rappler]

The Philippines: Members of Islamic State-linked insurgency group killed by Philippine troops

(lt) On December 2, Philippines' troops killed five members and a top-ranking leader of an Islamic State-linked separatist group.

Daulah Islamiyah, the insurgency group in question, is one of the many Islamic insurgency groups operating in the Mindanao region of the Philippines. Though a peace deal between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front – a group consisting of the indigenous Moro people, who seek autonomy from the Philippine government – has been established under President Rodrigo Duterte, Daulah Islamiyah has opted to continue its offensive. Its ideology is primarily militant, and is one of the many "hardline" groups seeking independence from the government. [Benar News]

The Philippines: Terrorist groups, private armed groups monitored by police

(lt) The Philippine National Police have announced their ongoing police watch of six armed groups and terrorist groups. The police Chief General has deemed these groups a threat to the upcoming 2022 elections, citing their aims to spread fear and harass community members as reasons for their surveillance. The Chief has promised to search for loose firearms and gather intelligence specific to the terrorist and private armed groups in question.

Elections in the Philippines are characterized by political acts of violence and corruption. Politicians in the region are known to influence votes by providing monetary or material bribes to citizens, going as far as to kill opponents deemed threatening to their campaigns. Just last month, Roland Sherwin Uy, son of Cagayan de Oro lawmaker Rolando Uy, was shot dead in an act of election poll-related violence. Rolando Uy's role as the frontrunner in the mayoral race at the time is thought to have contributed to what authorities believe to be the first act of political violence relating to the 2022 elections. [Benar News] [Manila Times]

The Philippines: Australian man jailed due to involvement in Philippine child sex trafficking ring

(lt) A multinational police operation investigating a child abuse ring that spanned over multiple countries resulted in the rescue of seven children from the Philippines, who were victims of abuse, as well as the imprisonment of an Australian man. The man was found to have committed multiple child abuse offenses, many of which occurred across international borders. More specifically, the Australian national sent money to countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand and the Philippines to facilitate instances of child sex trafficking.

The multinational operation involved collaboration between the Australian Federal Police and the Philippine Internet Crimes Against Children Center. The investigators also discovered the involvement of a Filipino women and a British national in the child abuse ring, who have both been arrested by authorities. [The Guardian]

Singapore: Workers' Party yet to respond regarding leader's culpability involving former MP Raeesah Khan

(nm) The Workers' Party (WP) has recently been under scrutiny over a member of the parliament's lie involving former Sengkang Group Representation Constituency, MP Raeesah Khan, and three senior WP members of the parliament (MP).

On 1 November, Khan had admitted to lying in Parliament about accompanying a sexual assault victim to the police station and claimed the case had been

mishandled by the police. She apologized to the police station, retracted her statement and announced that it was “untrue”. She was then referred to the Committee of Privileges for breach of parliamentary privilege. [Channel News Asia]

Following her resignation from the party and as an MP on 30 November the WP confirmed that there would not be a by-election for Sengkang GRC, as there were still three remaining constituent MPs that could continue for the remainder of the term. [Channel News Asia]

The Committee of Privileges heard this week that WP chief, Pritam Singh, party chairman Sylvia Lim and vice-chairman Faisal Manap had told Khan in a meeting on August 8 to stick to the lie she originally made. [The Straits Times]

After these revelations made at the parliament committee, the question of culpability has been made to WP leaders regarding the members that asked Khan to continue with the lie. So far, the special report has been released, however the release of nine hours’ worth of committee video recordings are still up for debate. The WP has remained silent on the matter, except for a quick SMS blasted to members that assured the party would be responding to allegations in due course. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Terrorist group continue to pose threat to the region after 20 years

(nm) In an interview with Senior Minister and Coordinating Minister for National security Teo Chee Hean, he stated that Islamist terrorism and particularly, Jemaah Islamiah (JI) remains a primary concern to Singapore and the region.

The first wave of JI arrests was 20 years ago and the network is still alive in Indonesia. The group has continuously adapted to hostile security environments through evading detection, enlistment of recruits and rebuilding its military capabilities. The use of legality and non-violent means are the modern approach of the JI, but their ultimate goal remains and that is to establish a Daulah Islamiah (Islamic state) in Southeast Asia, confirmed by Hean. [The Straits Times]

The Internal Security Department (ISD) recently released in a report JI’s terror plans for 80 Singaporean sites, including Changi Aiport. JI aimed to attack Singapore’s economy by targeting Changi Airport and the radar station on Biggin Hill, currently acting as

Changi Airport's Air Traffic Control Centre. [South China Morning Post]

Vietnam: Amendments to Law on the Execution of Criminal Judgements and the Statistic Law

(bs) The President of Vietnam disposed of the promulgation of amendments of the Law on the Execution of Criminal Judgements and one of Statistic Law after the National Assembly's approval.

The amendments of the Law on the Execution of Criminal Judgements aim to align national legislation with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership by conducting thorough criminal investigations. When the law comes into effect it will also allow "temporary suspension" of the crime reporting system due to unavoidable events such as epidemics or natural disasters.

The additional articles to the Statistics Law aim to create a regulatory framework "for the collection and calculation of statistical indicators," including Gross Domestic Product (GDP), GRDP (Gross Regional Domestic Product), and GDP scale. Every five years the government should also receive a review of GDP before it is submitted and approved by the National Assembly. [Việt Nam News]

Vietnam approves ASEAN transport agreement

(bs) Vietnam has approved the ASEAN Framework Agreement on the Facilitation of Cross-border Transport of Passengers by Road Vehicles (CBTP).

The document, signed by Vietnam in 2017, includes mechanisms for transport harmonization, custom procedures, and regulations for the transport of passengers among ASEAN member states in compliance with the ASEAN Mutual Recognition Agreement on Type Approval for Automotive Products (APMRA).

The CBTP will enter into force in Vietnam on January 15, 2022. [Vietnam Plus]

Vietnamese province to use coal mining waste in constructions

(bs) The authorities of Quang Ninh Province, Vietnam, urged the implementation of the 2021-2025 provincial plan to use coal mining waste as ground filling material for construction.

Quang Ninh is the Vietnamese province most concerned by the negative environmental effects of coal production, and aims to be environmentally sustainable by reducing the area occupied by waste dumps and re-purposing coal mines by using their waste for construction purposes. However, since the discharged material may have polluting effects on water, the authorities have requested to ensure that the constructions will be at a distance from main water sources.

Although provincial representatives proposed the project in early 2021, it has not been implemented yet due to the poor conditions and inefficiency of the roads connecting the waste discharge and the construction projects. In addition, the plan requires not only amendments to both the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and the Plan for Environmental Rehabilitation and Restoration of Coal Mining projects, but also official permission by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for the use of coal mining waste as "accompanying mineral," which caused prolonged delays for its implementation. [VNExpress]

Thailand: Myanmar nationals risk deportation after illegally crossing the border

(sd) 30 Myanmar nationals were arrested in Thailand after crossing the border into the Sangkhla Buri and Sai Yok districts of Thailand illegally.

The nationals were arrested in two groups. According to police, the illegal migrants payed between 17,000 and 25,000 baht to brokers for jobs in Bangkok.

The job seekers were handed over to local police, pending deportation. [Bangkok Times]

Thailand: Refugee monk seeking asylum in a new country after being released from detention in Thailand

(kc) Ven. Bor Bet, a Cambodian activist monk, was arrested at a temple in Samut Prakan province on 1 December before being transferred to a Bangkok Immigration Detention Center and was then released after two days in custody.

The Thai Parliamentary Committee on Torture and Enforced Disappearance said the monk has been released on bail and seeking a third country for asylum while many countries have already offered him refuge. Before his arrest in Thailand, Ven. Bor Bet escaped arrest by Cambodian authorities after participating in protests against Prime Minister Hun Sen. He was then granted official refugee status from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Thailand. [Radio Free Asia]

Many Human Rights organizations condemned the capture and demanded the Thai government to respect international law. [VODenglish]

The Human Rights situation in Thailand has been questioned under the current government. In November, Thai officials arrested and deported three Cambodian refugees, who were jailed in Cambodia, linked to the dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP). [See also AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Thailand: Protest leader gets bail for University exam

(kc) Thai criminal court granted Panusaya “Rung” Sithijirawattanakul, a prominent protest leader, bail on two lese majeste trials in relation to protests on 21 August and 20 December to attend her examination at Thammasat University until 12 January with strict requirements. Panusya is barred from participating in rallies or engaging in activities that offend the monarchy, ordered to stay at home for 24-hours and to wearing an electronic monitoring bracelet.

In addition to the two cases on bail, Rung has been charged with two other lese majeste cases related to her speeches on 19 September and 2 December, and she is required to return to prison on 13 January after her bail expires. [Bangkok Post]

After her release, Rung gave a brief interview mentioning her friends, Benja "Benja" Apan and Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak, protest leaders who were jailed for more than 50 and 100 days. She also said that it was clear that they are political prisoners regarding the court's bail conditions. [Thairath, in Thai]

Thailand: Bill to disarm a dissolved military junta has been delayed

(kc) The first reading in the House of Representatives of a bill proposed by iLaw, a Thai human rights NGO, has been postponed. iLaw aims to revoke 35 announcements and orders of the now-dissolved military junta National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO).

The NCPO disarmament bill proposal comes from a compilation of 13,409 signatures collected since January 2018. It was then submitted to the House of Representatives on 24 June 2019. It took approximately two years and five months for the bill to be put on the agenda for consideration in the parliament. [Bangkok Post]

Rangsiman Rome, a member of the oppositional Move Forward Party, called the parliament to expedite the review of this bill, claiming it will benefit the country. Another bill trying to repeal the NCPO order proposed has also not been considered.

According to Section 279 of the 2017 Constitution, all the announcements and orders that NCPO has issued will remain in effect until they are repealed. Although some of the declarations were canceled by the NCPO itself and the Constitutional Court later repealed some more, 17 laws remain in effect today. [Prachatai, in Thai]

Thailand: Royalist politician and street leader Suthep gets bail for corruption

(kc) Former Thai Deputy Prime Minister Suthep Thaugsuban who led the prolonged anti-government protest during 2013-14, has been granted bail by the Supreme Court Criminal Division for Persons Holding Political Positions in a corruption case. The first testimony of witnesses is scheduled for 17 February 2022.

Last month, the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) filed a court request to investigate and punish Suthep for the potential corruption and price collusion in a $173 million government project building over 400 new police stations and dorms in 2009, some of which were left unfinished. [See also, AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5] [ThaiPBS, in Thai]. As protest leader Suthep had blamed his political adversaries inter alia especially for their alleged corruption.

Thailand: Royal pardon reduces prisoner's sentences, some freed

(nm) The King of Thailand, Rama X, has issued a royal pardon to prisoners on his birthday on Sunday, the Royal Gazette reported. Eligible inmates will see their prison sentences reduced and some will be freed completely.

Among the 32,000 inmates affected, 22,000 are about to be immediately released, while the other 9,100 prison sentences are reduced to where parole can be considered. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste to facilitate international trade

(bs) Timor-Leste has reduced the bureaucratic process for international trade and facilitated the harmonization of international trade operations by improving the performances of the National Single Window System to declare imports and exports.

The country adopted the National Single Window System in 2017 as a part of the cooperation agreement between Timor-Leste and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), aiming at developing an efficient and unified custom clearance system. The platform ensures that the "Customs Authority, all relevant ministries, government agencies, and trading operators can share and exchange information in a standardized manner." [Timor-Leste government]

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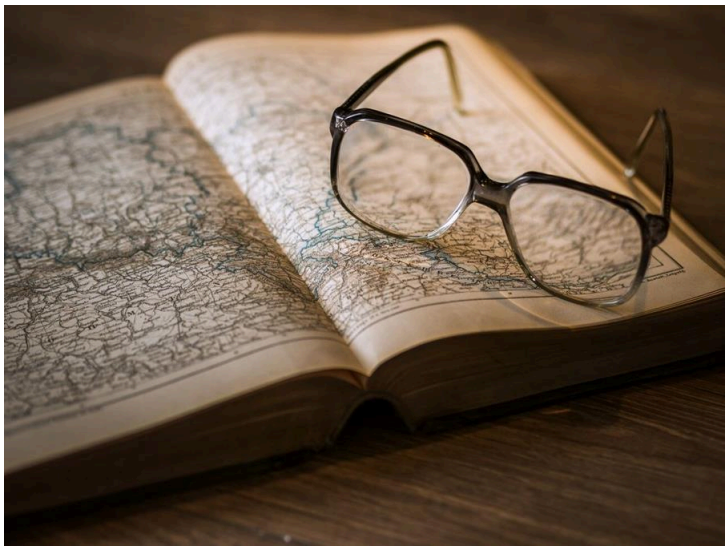

China-US relations: Biden administration announces diplomatic boycott of 2022 Olympics in Beijing

(pm) Amid strained Sino-US relations, the White House announced on December 6 that US officials will not attend 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, citing “ongoing genocide and crimes against humanity in Xinjiang and other human rights abuses” as reason for the boycott. [White House]

China was quick to criticize the boycott calling it a “self-directed political farce,” and “a blatant political provocation and a serious affront to the 1.4 billion Chinese people,” which “will only make the Chinese people and the world see clearly U.S. politicians’ anti-China nature and hypocrisy." Prior to the announcement, China’s Foreign Ministry announce to “take resolute countermeasures” in the event of a boycott. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post].

US accuses China of attacks on US satellites and economic warfare against Australia

(pm) General David Thompson, the US Space Force’s First Vice Chief of Space Operations has accused both China and Russia of regular attacks on US satellites with non-kinetic means, such as lasers, radio frequency jammers and cyber-attacks, adding that “the threats are really growing and expanding every single day,” and that a point has been reached “where

there's a whole host of ways that our space systems can be threatened." [Independent].

White House coordinator for the Indo-Pacific Kurt Campbell, meanwhile, accused China of a "really dramatic economic warfare – directed against Australia," hitting Canberra with an array of sanctions on Australian goods in a fierce political dispute that has stalled ministerial contacts and plunged Sino-Australian ties into the most serious crisis since Tiananmen. Speaking at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, he also revealed that "Canberra's and London's economic ties with a rapidly growing China had put the alliance in doubt," but that AUKUS now "would bind the three allies for generations," adding the AUKUS was not a closed architecture, but remains open to Pacific allies to join. [France 24]

Australia to impose sanctions on Chinese authorities over Xinjiang

(qdl/pm) Australia's Parliament passed on December 2 the Autonomous Sanctions Amendment Act 2021 which will make it easier for the government to impose sanctions on human rights abusers, cyber attackers and corrupt officials including travel restrictions, seizing their assets and restricting investments within Australia's financial institutions. Prior to the new Act, the government could only place sanctions on states, not individuals. [SBS News]

Against this backdrop, the Australian parliament is now believed to face pressure from lawmakers calling for sanctions against Chinese authorities over human rights violations in Xinjiang Beijing is accused of, and the military regime in Myanmar. [The Guardian].

Australia, meanwhile, was among those 20 countries which refused to sign the Olympic Truce for the Beijing Winter Olympic Games to be held in February (see report above). [The Sydney Morning Herald]

China-UK relations: MI6 chief accuses Beijing of large-scale espionage

(pm) In his first speech since assuming the post of Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) on October 1, Richard Moore last week accused China of running "large-scale espionage operations" against the UK and its allies, adding that the MI6 considers China as the biggest among four "big threats" (China, Russia,

Iran and international terrorism), as "tectonic plates are shifting as China's power, and its willingness to assert it, grows." He made clear that "[a]dapting to a world affected by the rise of China is the single greatest priority for MI6." [Sky News][CNBC]

EU's global investment plan as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative

(dql/pm) Calling it a "true alternative" to China's Belt and Road initiative, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen revealed on December 1 details of the European Union's "Global Gateway" scheme, an investment plan under which the European Commission, along with the EU's 27 member states and the European Investment Bank, seeks to generate public and private funds amounting to €300 billion by 2027 to support projects in transport infrastructure, digitalization, clean energy, health as well as research and education. Von der Leyen stressed the need for such an investment plan as "[c]countries [had] their experience with the Chinese investments and they need better and different offers," adding that it is aligned with the "Build Back Better" initiative, announced by US President Joe Biden in June and aimed at "meeting the tremendous infrastructure needs of low- and middle-income countries." [European Commission] [The White House, USA] [BBC]

State-run media outlet Global Times was quick to present China as open the EU's investment scheme saying that "competition between the two sides [...] can completely avoid the competition from turning into confrontation," but also making clear that "if the EU really aims to rival the BRI with its new infrastructure plan, it is doomed to fail." [Global Times]

For a discussion of the EU's "Global Gateway" as part of a wider transatlantic pushback against China, see Stuart Lau, Paola Tamma and Joshua Posaner in [Politico] who point to the financial inferiority compared with estimated 1.2-1.3 trillion USD of the BRI by 2027 as well as to EU-internal divisions citing Cyprus' affirmation of its commitment to the BRI (see report below).

A day earlier, Chinese Vice Premier and member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, called in his keynote speech at the "Hamburg Summit: China meets Europe" on November 30 on China and the European Union to strengthen economic and trade cooperation in the post-epidemic

era, while announcing that China's annual economic growth is expected to exceed its targets in this year. [Xinhua]

The "Hamburg Summit: China meets Europe" is a biennial high-level conference on Sino-European economic relations held in Hamburg. It was inaugurated in 2004 with the aim to establish a dialogue platform for open exchange between Europe and China and to improve economic relations.

China-Cyprus relations elevated

(dql/pm) During a phone call – held on November 30 as part of events marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Cyprus – Chinese President Xi Jinping and Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades agreed to upgrade their countries' relations to a strategic partnership to deepen cooperation in the frame of the Belt and Road initiative, to expand bilateral trade, and "to maintain the right direction of the development of China-European Union (EU) relations," with Nicosia called on to push Brussels to get strained relations between China and the EU back on track. [Xinhua] [Financial Mirror]

For a discussion of the current geopolitical feud between Greece, Cyprus and Turkey and its complex entanglement with NATO, the EU, Russia and China, see Jamie Shea in [Friends of Europe].

European legislators anger China with resolutions and motions in support of Taiwan

(dql/pm/zh) Last week saw lawmakers of several European countries passing resolutions in support of Taiwan.

The French Parliament on November 29, passed a non-binding resolution calling on the French government to support Taiwan's participation in international organizations. [Radio Taiwan International]

A day later, the Dutsch House of Representatives adopted two motions supporting Taiwan, urging the government to object any unilateral change of the cross-strait status quo as well as to push the bloc to support Lithuania, who faces pressure and retaliation from China for allowing Taipei to open representative

office which bears “Taiwan” in its official name [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. [Focus Taiwan 1]

Lastly, on December 2, the Irish Senate passed a motion urging the Irish government to protest “ongoing and sustained breaches of human rights in the People's Republic of China,” and to support “the freedom and liberties of the people of Taiwan,” while rejecting any use of force for the unification of China with Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan 2]

In a related development, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and European External Action Service Secretary General Stefano Sannino shared “strong concern over China’s problematic and unilateral actions” in the South and East China Seas, the Taiwan Strait” and its “bullying” against Lithuania during the the US-EU Dialogue on China. [South China Morning Post]

China-Russia relations: Agreement on mutual notifications of ballistic missile and carrier rocket takes effect

(dql/pm) On Wednesday, December 1, a protocol to extend for a period of ten years the 2009 Sino-Russian agreement to notify each other of ballistic missile and carrier rocket launches entered into force, in another sign of increasingly close relations between Beijing and Moscow. The protocol was signed by Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe and his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu in December 2020. [CGTN]

Meanwhile, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin agreed to deepen economic and trade cooperation and improve the trade structure as they chaired the 26th Regular Exchange between the Heads of Government of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation. They also agreed to strengthen cooperation between the Belt and Road initiative with the Eurasian Economic Union, with Mishustin stressing – in a thinly veiled reference to the US and European powers – that it was the best response to the fact that “[r]regrettably, some of our foreign partners continue to take unfriendly actions towards us,” including “illegal sanctions and political and economic pressure.” [Global Times] [Newsweek]

Established in 2014 by Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia, members of Eurasian Economic Union currently also include Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

Belarus signs directive advancing bilateral relations with China

(pm) On December 3, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko signed a directive to advance the country's strategic partnership with China in a wide range of areas for the years 2021-2025, including "political cooperation, maintaining and promoting the values of friendship and mutual support, cooperation in economy, trade, finance, and investment, and implementing the Belt and Road initiative." The directive continues a similar one for the period 2015-2021. [Xinhua]

China-Africa relations: Beijing to cut investments at FOCAC

(dql) China is set to reduce its financial engagements in Africa. In his opening speech to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) meetings, held in Dakar on November 29-30, President Xi Jinping announced that China will provide African countries with $40 billion in investment, credit lines, trade finance as well as special drawing rights. At the last two FOCAC meetings in 2015 and 2018 China had provided $60 billion respectively. Next to this financial pledge, Xi promised to deliver 1bn Covid-19 vaccine doses and to strengthen co-operation on solar, wind and other renewable investments and to reduce red tape to facilitate an increase of agricultural imports from African states.

The cut in investments is seen by observers as reflecting China's confidence of having achieved a foothold on the continent strong enough to allow it to lower its financial commitment. [Financial Times]

China-Ethiopia relations: Chinese Foreign Minister visits Ethiopia to support its president

(pm) Amid the ongoing violent conflict between Ethiopian government forces and Tigray Regional government, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Addis Ababa to reaffirm Beijing's support for the government. He also expressed opposition to Western interference in the conflict, as Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed believes that Western partners such the US and the EU have placed sanctions on Ethiopia as well

as visa restrictions on the Ethiopian civil and military leadership.

China is the biggest bilateral lender to Ethiopia and has financed large state infrastructure projects including factories and a railway from the capital to the seaport of Djibouti where China is operating a military base at the Port of Doraleh. It is also supplying weapons to the Ethiopian army, including armed, medium-altitude, long-endurance Wing Loong drones. [Bloomberg] [The Reporter] [Asia Times]

Japan: Former PM Abe warns China of economic suicide in the event of an attack on Taiwan

(la/ec) In a latest sign of Japan's hardening stance towards China over Taiwan, Japan's ex-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has warned China of a dire situation should Beijing take military action against Taipei during a video speech to a Taiwanese audience on Wednesday, December 1. Following China's fresh dispatch of warplanes to Taiwan on Sunday, Abe expressed his concerns about Chinese aggression, which, according to him, is blurring the line between war and peace. He sharply warned that a military adventure would drive China to "economic suicide" and arouse military involvement from Japan and the U.S., as a "Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency, and therefore an emergency for the Japan-U.S. alliance. People in Beijing, President Xi Jinping in particular, should never have a misunderstanding in recognising this." He also called on democratic leaders to continually remind the Chinese Communist Party to steer clear from taking the wrong path. [Reuters]

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, meanwhile, stated that the Taiwan Strait could be the next major diplomatic quandary that Japan faces, adding the importance of seeking cooperation with Taiwan and other cultures that share Japan's values of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. [The Japan Times]

Abe's remarks caused rage amongst Chinese authorities, which claim that he is grossly interfered with China's internal affairs, violating the basic norms of international relations. China's Foreign Ministry urged Tokyo to not underestimate China's power to defend its national sovereignty. China also summoned Japanese Ambassador Hideo Tarumi on Wednesday, December 1, over Abe's comments made by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over the perception that any moves made by China against

Taiwan would constitute a threat to Japan. [DW] [The Diplomat] [The Mainichi]

During a press conference on Thursday, December 2, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno added that it was not the role of the Japanese government to explain the former Prime Minister's beliefs or intentions, as Abe is no longer a member of said government. [Reuters 1]

This is the latest in a series of events that have hardened Japan's stance on Chinese moves in the Indo-Pacific area, and comes just days after the joint military drill between Japan, the United States of America, Canada, Australia, and Germany. US Seventh Fleet commander Vice Admiral Karl Thomas stated during an onboard briefing that the exercise was intended to deter aggression in the region, though he did not specify that it was aimed at China. [Reuters 2] [See AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Japan requests US ground fighters after fuel dumping

(ec) The Japanese Defense Ministry has made a request to the United States Forces Japan (USFJ) to ground its F-16 jet fighters after one such aircraft dumped two fuel tanks in Aomori Prefecture prior to making an emergency landing on Tuesday, November 30, with one of the fuel tanks landing in residential area but causing no injuries. The Japanese government has conveyed its distress over the incident, with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida instructing Defense Ministry personnel to cooperate with US forces in minimizing similar accidents in future, whilst USFJ Colonel Timothy Murphy expressed regret both over the event and for a USFJ statement declaring that the pilot had jettisoned the fuel tanks in an unpopulated area. [Kyodo News]

Vice Defense Minister Makoto Oniki is expected to bring Aomori Prefecture officials up to date on the incident after Governor Shingo Mimura informed reporters on Wednesday, December 1, that the Prefecture intends to remonstrate over the issue. This follows shortly after Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki stated his intention to reject Tokyo'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 central government, which considers the USFJ a vital deterrent to foreign aggression, is likely to take Tamaki's opposition to court. [Japan Today]
[See AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]

Russia to deploy missiles to contest islands

(ec) The Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed on Thursday, December 2, the deployment of Bastion coastal missile system crews to the disputed Kuril Islands. The deployment of the anti-ship missiles is the latest development in the territorial dispute between Russia and Japan, with Russian President Vladimir Putin having previously stated his belief that the dispute can be resolved whilst Russia remains firm in its position on the sovereignty over the Kurils.

This is also not the first missile deployment to the Kurils, with Russia having previously deployed the Bal and the Bastion coastal defense missile systems in 2016. [The Canberra Times] [RepublicWorld.com] [See AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]

Japan and Maylasia vow to boost bilateral ties

(la) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his Malaysian counterpart Ismail Sabri Yaakob pledged to boost their nation's ties in order to contain China's maritime assertiveness in the South-China Sea. During phone call, Kishida shared his intention to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific region through cooperation, ahead of the 65th anniversary of Japan and Malaysia's diplomatic relations. He specifically mentioned the "ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific", an initiative that was introduced to maintain freedom, peace and prosperity in the region.

Ismail Sabri, in turn, expressed his intention to strengthen bilateral ties with Japan in honor of the 40th anniversary of Malaysia's "Look East" policy, which is aimed at emulating the Japanese work ethic in Malaysia.

Both Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur have been involved in territorial disputes with Beijing in the East and South China seas respectively. Apart from cooperation to balance China's growing military power, Kishida and Ismail Sabri also discussed the coronavirus crisis and the political situation in Myanmar. In relation to this, Kishida vowed to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' mediation efforts. [The Japan Times]

South Korea, US discuss North Korea, OPCON transfer

(aml) At the annual Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in Seoul, South Korean Defence Minister Suh Wook and his US counterpart Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin agreed to update their military plans in response to North Korea's growing nuclear and missile weapon programs. The joint statement stressed their commitment to a "diplomatic approach" and "dialogue" but also clarified that they would prepare to "defend against the full range of threats". The operational war plan (OPLAN 5015) had lastly been changed in 2010 and is mainly focused on handling conventional attacks. The update is supposed to react to North Korea's advanced missiles.

The SCM, established in 1968, annually discusses security matters between the US and South Korea and created among other projects the South Korea-US Combined Forces Command. [The Korea Herald 1]

Moreover, they decided to start the second part of the three-phase assessment on whether South Korea is ready to regain the wartime operational control (OPCON), in the fall of 2022. The verification process includes the testing of the initial operational capability (IOC) which was carried out in 2019, full operational capability (FOC) and full mission capability (FMC). Due to the pandemic, the testing of the FOC didn't take place this year. This would mean that President Moon Jae-in won't be able to meet his promised deadline to regain OPCON before the end of his term in May 2022. [The Korea Times 1]

However, on Friday, December 3, an official at the Defence Ministry reported that Moon and Austin agreed in a call on Tuesday to consider shift the assessment of the FOC to an earlier date. [The Korea Herald 2]

The wartime operational control had been handed over to the US during the 1950-53 Korean war, and while South Korea retook the peacetime operational control in 1994, the wartime control remains within the US.

In addition, the joint agreement restored the clause of the US's commitment to maintain the current level of 28,500 US Forces in Korea. The clause had been removed last year under the Trump administration. The alliance is meant to promote stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Furthermore, the statement also referred to the "importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait", however, did not further

touch on China-related sensitive issues. [The Korea Herald 3]

South Korea, five central Asian countries discuss post-pandemic recovery

(aml) On Tuesday, November 30, diplomats of South Korea, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan met at the 14th Korea-Central Asia Forum in Dushanbe, capital of Tajikistan, to discuss measures for a post-pandemic economic recovery.

South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong called for more cooperation between the countries and explained that they were the key partners in South Korea's New Northern Policy, aimed at peace and prosperity promotion between the Korean peninsula and Eurasia.

During the forum, further topics discussed include cooperation in forest, energy, digital technology, and health care sectors. Additionally, Chung held separate talks with the other countries on how to increase investments, trade, and cultural exchanges between the nations. [The Korea Herald]

China supports South Korea's push for end-of-war declaration

(aml) According to the South Korea embassy, Chinese Communist Party Politburo member Yang Jiechi has expressed China's support of pushing forward an end-of-war declaration between North and South Korea, during a meeting with Suh Hoon, national security director at Cheong Wa Dae. The declaration has however not yet been confirmed by the Chinese government. [NHK World - Japan] [The Korea Herald 1]

Although the 1950-53 Korean war effectively ended with an armistice, an official peace treaty has never been signed. The end-of-war declaration is one of South Korean president Moon Jae-in's key projects in fostering peace on the Korean peninsula. South Korea and the US have been working on a draft declaration and it was anticipated that China would demand to be included into the process as a major interested party. [The Korea Times]

Suh visited China to discuss bilateral relations, denuclearization on the peninsula and other regional

issues, as well as US-China relations. China's foreign ministry reported that Suh also expressed South Korea's active support of China's hosting of the Beijing Winter Olympics, this statement however wasn't included in the statement released by the South Korean government. [The Korea Herald 2]

Furthermore, the diplomates discussed a possible meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and South Korean President Moon. Moon had visited China on 2017 and 2019 but Xi's visit had been postponed due to the pandemic. Now, Suh and Yang agreed to enable a virtual summit in case Xi is not able to travel because of quarantine restrictions. [KBS World]

Taiwan tells China: Get democratic yourself

(zh) In a rebuke to China's opposition to Taiwan's participation in the US Summit for Democracy, Taiwan's Minister Without Portfolio Audrey Tang has suggested countries that were not invited to "double down on realizing democracy so that maybe by the next round we will be sharing the same stage". [Reuters]

The US had invited Taiwan, the only invitee that Washington does not officially recognize as a sovereign country, to the "Summit for Democracy" hosted by President Joe Biden on December 9 and 10 [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. The virtual summit will be attended by Tang and Taipei's de facto ambassador to Washington Hsiao Bi-khim.

While Taiwan saw the rare participation as a golden opportunity to interact with other countries on equal footing and brand its democratic image, China, who was neither invited nor listed on the agenda, was furious about Washington's decision. The Chinese Embassy in Washington criticized Taiwan's invitation as "bolstering and emboldening" pro-independence forces in Taiwan. [Politico]

Taiwan's Premier calls China "overbearing", lawmakers demand boycott of Beijing Olympics

(zh) Amid highly strained cross-strait relations, Taiwan's Premier Su Tseng-chang has accused China of being "overbearing", criticizing Beijing for putting political pressure on Taiwanese companies.

Su's remarks came after Chinese law enforcement agencies fined Far Eastern Group (FEG), one of Tawian's biggest conglomerates and a main sponsor of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), US$13.89 million – officially on grounds of multiple violations of business regulations. But the fine is widely seen as politically motivated "to warn Taiwan companies with similar backgrounds and behaviors," of support for Taiwan independence [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. [Focus Taiwan 1]

In a related development, opposition lawmakers from the New Power Party (NPP) and human rights activists have urged the Cabinet to consider boycotting the 2022 Winter Olympics in China, citing Beijing's human rights violations and military intimidation to the island. [Focus Taiwan 2]

Cross-strait relation: Over 660 Taiwanese extradited to China

(zh) Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) has confirmed that countries across the globe have extradited 666 Taiwanese nationals to China, accused of telecom fraud and other vcrimes that involved Chinese victims. The Council, however, did not disclose the time frame.

The confirmation comes on the heels of the report "China's Hunt for Taiwanese Overseas" of human rights NGO Safeguard Defenders which suggests that over 600 Taiwanese accused of crimes abroad were extradited to China between 2016 and 2019, accusing Beijing of abusing "extradition treaties, mutual law enforcement agreements, and other multilateral institutions" to achieve its political goals vis-à-vis Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan] [Safeguard Defenders]

US affirms commitment to defending Taiwan

(zh) During a trip to Southeast Asia, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink has reiterated the US's rock solid commitment to Taiwan, saying China's threat and coercion toward the island increased the need for Washington to help Taiwan maintain self-defense capability. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, in a letter to the Head of the Legislative Yuan You Si-kun ahead of the 2021 Open Parliament Forum hosted by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, US Congress said Washington is committed to defending the freedom, security, and human rights of the people of Taiwan, affirming the promotion of pro-democracy parliaments were "essential as we strive to advance our shared values and interests". [Focus Taiwan 1]

In related news, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has described any move by China to invade Taiwan as "a potentially disastrous decision", warning of "terrible consequences" of the military contingency. While reiterating Washington's adherence to the one-China policy, Blinken said the US is "resolutely committed" to Taiwan's self-defense capability. [Focus Taiwan 2]

On Taiwan's self-defense capability, US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall has doubted whether antiquated aircraft such as MQ-9 Reapers and the A-10 Warthog can pose enough threat to China's army, suggesting replacement with new platforms that surpass PLA's capabilities and can intimate China. [Taiwan News]

The US has doubled its unofficial military deployment in Taiwan over the past year, with an increase from 20 personnel to 39, including 29 Marines, two service members from the Army, three from the Navy, and five from the Air Force. Although Washington has not officially recognized the troops' presence, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen had made a rare confirmation in October [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]. [VOA]

Chinese warplanes sent to Taiwan's ADIZ

(zh) An oil tanker aircraft, the Y-20 aerial refueling aircraft, has participated in patrol of China's air force in Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) for the first time, joining another 26 military planes incluing 18 fighter jets, five nuclear-capable H-6 bombers, two KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft and one a Y-9 transport aircraft. [South China Morning Post 1]

Meanwhile, satellite imagery of the European Space Agency's Sentinel, showed a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine heading north from the People's Liberation Army base in Yulin, on the southern coast of Hainan in the South China Sea. While the return to the base in Yulin is a routine transit, the surfacing of the submarine in the Taiwan Strait is an unusual move. Obervers suggest that it could be a signal to

Washington amid heightened cross-Strait tensions. [South China Morning Post 2]

Commenting on China's increased air operations near Taiwan in recent months, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said Chinese military operations near Taiwan resembled "rehearsals" as "it looks like them exploring what their true capabilities [are]". [FOX]

Blaming Taiwan for protest, Solomon pro-Beijing PM survives no-confidence vote

(zh) Pro-Beijing Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare has survived a no-confidence vote, successfully crashing criticism of broken promises of more inclusive politics, but also defending his decision to switch diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China in 2019. In the run up to the vote, opposition leader Matthew Wale, who initiated the vote, had accused him of serving a "foreign power", referring to China. Sogavare, however, described China as an "economic powerhouse," whose support allows the nation totackle its development needs and challenges. He also insisted that the "national government does not need to bow to the interest of Taiwan and its agents on this matter." [The Guardian]

The no-confidence vote came on the heels of last month's deadly social unrest in the Chinatown area of its capital city, Honiara. While there are many factors behind the violent protest, Sogavare attributed it to the "only issue" – US-China geopolitics – and contended the violence was "influenced and encouraged by other powers." On the other side, Daniel Suidani, Premier of Malaita, said that not foreign interference but a series of longstanding domestic issues led to the protest. Malaita is the country's most populous but poorest province. Accused by the Prime Minister of being "Taiwan's agent," the province had opposed the central government's diplomatic switch and continued maintaining ties with Taiwan and accepting aids from Washington. [SupChina] [Taipei Times]

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry condemned Sogavare's accusation as "irresponsible", urging the country's central government to listen to its people instead of copying the Chinese authoritarian rule to govern the country. Meanwhile, China's Foreign Ministry commented on the protest that "all attempts to disrupt the normal developments of relations between China and the Solomon Islands are just futile". [Focus Taiwan]

Three allies voice support for Taiwan's participation in WHA

(zh) Three diplomatic allies of Taiwan have voiced support for the island to join the World Health Assembly (WHA) at a special session which was held from 29 Novermber to December 1 and during which agreement was achieved "to kickstart a global process to draft and negotiate a convention, agreement or other international instrument under the Constitution of the World Health Organization to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response."

Nauruan President Lionel Rouwen Aingimea first spoke up for Taiwan, saying the island's exclusion would create gaps in the global public health emergency response framework. Following Aingimea's remarks, Belizean Minister of Health and Wellness Michel Chebat said Taiwan's exclusion is out of "political reasons" and would jeopardize global health cooperation. Haitian Minister of Health Alex Larsen also said it was regretful that Taiwan could not attend the meeting, underscoring that "no one is safe until everyone is safe". [Focus Taiwan 1] [World Health Organization]

Meanwhile, two members of the Belize parliament made a five-day visit to Taiwan for in the 2021 Open Parliament Forum. During the trip, Belize's House Speaker Valerie Woods and Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly Clarita Pech met with President Tsai Ing-wen and Head of the Legislature You Si-kun to express Belize's solidarity with Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan 2]

Baltic lawmakers visit Taiwan for 2021 Open Parliament Forum

(zh) The 2021 Open Parliament Forum, co-organized by Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Legislative Yuan, and the National Democratic Institute, was attended by two Belizean government officials (see report above) and ten lawmakers from Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. Lawmakers and activists from the US, UK, Japan, France, Australia, the Czech Republic, Spain, and Siri Lanka also virtually participated in the forum. The two-day event culminated in a joint statement by representatives from participating democracies that pledges to pursue "transparency, civic space, open response to, and recovery from COVID-19 crisis". [Focus Taiwan 1][Taiwan News]

The first-ever joint visit by lawmakers from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia to Taiwan signals the attempt by Baltic countries to move closer toward Taipei and distance from Beijing. [Focus Taiwan 2]

For reasons behind the overtures by Baltic countries toward Taiwan, see an analysis in [The Economist] which attributes the moves to historic and economic concerns.

Incoming Honduras president not to sever ties with Taiwan

(zh) The administration of incoming Honduran president Xiomara Castro of the party Liberty and Refoundation announced that it will not establish formal diplomatic ties with China and that "relations continue with Taiwan," in a complete about-face in its pre-election stance. [Reuters]

In a landslide victory of a 20-point lead over her nearest rival, Nasry Asfura of the ruling National Party, Castro was elected as the country's first female president. Before the election, she had vowed to switch diplomatic ties from Taiwan to China if victorious. [The Guardian]

Castro's u-turn comes on the heel of a last-minute visit by the US delegation days before the election [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. Honduras has become a new front in the US-China tug of war over Taiwan. The Central American country that hosts the US Joint Task Force Bravo airbase is one of 15 diplomatic allies of Taiwan, and Beijing has been trying to sway the country's diplomatic relations with the island with its growing economic importance in the region. [Finanacial Times]

India, Russia expand defense, trade ties during President Putin's visit to New Delhi

(sr/lm) India and Russia signed a flurry of trade and arms deals during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi for an annual summit with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on December 6, including one that will see India produce more than 600,000 assault rifles. [South China Morning Post]

President Putin was making his first foreign trip in nearly six months as India takes delivery of the first regiment of Russia's S-400 surface-to-air missile

defense-system that is part of a $5.3 billion weapons deal [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. The missile deal has already been complicated by looming United States sanctions on India under the US legislation meant to punish countries dealing substantively in the defense realm with Moscow, the world's second-largest arms exporter. [The New York Times, $]

Visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in New Delhi that Washington tried to undermine the S-400 deal, which he assigned "a very important practical meaning for the Indian defense capability". Lavrov also mentioned that the talks of production of Sputnik Light in India were also near completion and both the countries would soon release a joint statement. [Nikkei Asia] [Times of India]

In addition to the S-400 missile defense system, India and Russia signed a $681 million deal to locally manufacture around 670,000 AK-203 assault rifles through a joint venture set up in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. India's Ministry of Defence called it a "landmark" deal that would replace a locally made rifle with a modern weapon, ending the "long quest" for its army's needs. [Al Jazeera]

The two sides signed a total of 28 investment pacts, including deals on steel, shipbuilding, coal and energy. They also reinforced their ties with a military and technical cooperation pact until 2031 and a pledge to triple bilateral trade to $30 billion by 2025. [Reuters] [Times of India]

Prior to the meeting between the two leaders, the two countries' foreign and defense ministers held talks under the inaugural 2+2 dialogue. Before, India only had arrangements for this top-level ministerial dialogue only with member states of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a multilateral grouping joining India with Japan, Australia, and the United States [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

Considering that President Putin's trip to India came as a buildup of Russian troops near Ukraine has Western officials warning that the Kremlin could be planning a large-scale invasion, observers believe that New Delhi will need to watch Russia's actions carefully, as this could complicate its ties with Washington if it decides to stay silent. [The Interpreter]

Pakistan receives $3 billion loan from Saudi Arabia

(tj/lm) Pakistan on December 4 received a $3 billion loan from Saudi Arabia, a week after the cabinet of Prime Minister Imran Khan had approved the corresponding agreement, alongside another deal on a $1.2 billion oil loan facility. The agreements constitute a support package which was signed during Prime Minister Khan's visit to Riyadh last month [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]. [Reuters] [The Express Tribune]

According to the terms agreed between both countries, Islamabad will pay 4 percent interest on the cash deposit and 3.8 percent on the oil on deferred payment facility. Unlike in the past, this time there is no option for rollover, and Pakistan will have to return the cash deposit at once after one year. Moreover, in case of a sovereign default by Pakistan, the country would be asked to pay back the loan in 72 hours of a written request by Saudi Arabia.

Approval of the agreements comes a week after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed to revive a $6 billion funding program following more than a month of discussions, providing a major relief to the country's struggling economy, though the Khan administration will need to push through with key reforms. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Separately, Saudi Education Minister Hamad Al-Sheikh on December 4 met his Pakistani counterpart, Federal Minister for Education Shafqat Mahmood, during his two-day visit to the Kingdom and agreed to enhance cooperation in the educational sector. [The Express Tribune]

India, Sri Lanka finalize four-point package for economic cooperation

(lm) India and Sri Lanka have agreed on a four-pillar cooperation package comprising urgent food and health security, energy security, currency swap and Indian investments to help Colombo combat a strain produced by the coronavirus pandemic on its economy. [The Indian Express]

The plan was finalized during Sri Lanka Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa's visit to India last week. While in New Delhi – Rajapaksa's first overseas visit since he assumed office in July – the minister met his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, among others. [Hindustan Times]

Sri Lanka's request for a $1 billion bilateral currency swap, first made in 2020, did not figure in the latest

discussions, according to people familiar with the discussions [see AiR No. 42, October/2020, 3]. The currency swap offered to Sri Lanka is expected to be made under the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) facility and would be worth $400 million.

Sri Lanka's foreign debt crisis follows the severe economic struggles generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which decreased the nation's exports, tourism earnings and foreign remittances. Earlier in August, the island nation signed a $308 million loan agreement with China as part of the $1.2 billion bailout [see AiR No. 34, August/2021, 4].

Pakistan to host OIC-led foreign ministers' meet on Afghanistan later this month

(lm) Pakistan on December 4 said it will host a conference of foreign ministers from the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) later this month, in a bid to avert a looming humanitarian and economic crisis in Afghanistan. [Voice of America]

The United States, Russia, China, France and Britain along with the European Union (EU), the World Bank and representatives of relevant United Nations relief agencies will also be invited to attend the session, which is being organized at the request of the OIC's current chair, Saudi Arabia. [Dawn]

The OIC-led conference will be the biggest international gathering on Afghanistan since the Taliban took over the country in mid-August on the heels of a US-led foreign troop exit. Since then, Afghanistan – already struggling with drought and severe poverty after decades of war — has seen its economy all but collapse, raising the spectre of a humanitarian crisis this winter. [Arab News]

Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi is expected to meet the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, and EU parliamentarians in Brussels on December 7 to apprise them on Afghanistan's situation.

China suspends Sri Lankan solar plants after India protest

(lm) China has shelved plans to set up hybrid wind and solar energy projects on three Sri Lankan islands only 45 kilometers off the coast of Indian southern Tamil Nadu state, months after India was reported to have protested the awarding of the tender to a Chinese firm. [The Times of India]

The Cabinet of Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa in mid-January selected a Chinese company to develop the projects – just weeks before Colombo also pulled out of three-party agreement with India and Japan for operating the strategic Colombo Port's Eastern Container Terminal (ECT). [AiR No. 6, February/2021, 2]

In an effort to undo the presence of a Chinese company in its immediate backyard, New Delhi lodged a strong protest with the Sri Lankan government, citing the project site's proximity to the Indian coastline, and later offered Sri Lanka $12 million in grants to execute the project. [AiR No. 8, February/2021, 4]

Chinese firm inks deal with Maldives on installation of solar project

A Chinese renewable energy firm has signed an agreement with the Maldives to provide a solar photovoltaic power in all the inhabited islands in the Thaa Atoll. [The Hindu]

The development assumes added significance, coming as it did just days after the company, Sino Soar Hybrid Technology, had shelved plans to set up hybrid wind and solar energy projects on three Sri Lankan islands following concerns raised by India over the project's proximity to its Tamil Nadu state. [see entry in this edition]

India deepens ties with Mongolia; commits to timely completion of oil refinery

(rs) Indian President Ram Nath Kovind on December 1 met a Mongolian parliamentary delegation led by Gombojav Zandanshatar, Chairman of the unicameral parliament of Mongolia.

Conversations centered around development projects undertaken by India in Mongolia, most notably construction of a $1.2 billion oil refinery project. Engineers India Ltd is providing engineering

consultancy for the project, which will meet 75 percent of Mongolia's requirement of oil. Construction is expected to be completed by 2022. [Asia News International] [South Asia Monitor]

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Mongolia in May 2015 during which the partnership between the two countries was raised to the level of Strategic Partnership.

Pakistan, Russia pledge to avert humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan

(tj/lm) Leading a six-member delegation, Pakistan's National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf met with his Russian counterpart Nikolai Patrushev on December 1 in Moscow. The meeting focused on matters related to bilateral relations between both countries, as well as international relations and the region's emerging situation in light of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan earlier this year. [Daily Times] [The Express Tribune]

India hosts Pakistan delegation for SCO meeting on cybersecurity

(lm) While bilateral ties remain in a freeze, India and Pakistan continue to engage within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

A delegation arrived in New Delhi to participate in a cybersecurity conference of SCO member states that India will host on December 7. This follows a visit to Pakistan by an Indian delegation in October for an anti-terror SCO exercise that sought to promote cooperation between the member states. [The Times of India]

The cybersecurity conference is being organized India's National Security Council Secretariat that also recently hosted the Third Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan. Expect for China and Pakistan, all full SCO members, including Russia, attended the conference. [AiR No. 46, November/2021, 3]

India, Maldives launch 11th edition of joint Exercise EKUVERIN

(lm) Personnel from the Indian and Maldives armies on December 6 kicked off a 14-day joint military exercise, EKUVERIN, at Kadhdhoo Island. The aim of the exercise is to enhance synergy and interoperability between the Armed Forces of both countries in terms of understanding transnational terrorism both on land and at sea, conducting Counter Terrorism and Counter Insurgency Operations and sharing best military practices and experiences. [The Statesman]

The exercise follows on the heels of a six-day official visit to India by Maldivian Defense Minister Didi last month. She was the chief guest at the passing-out parade of officer cadets at the Indian Naval Academy in southern India. With this, she became the first foreign defense minister to witness a passing-out parade at an Indian naval institution.

Maldives seeks loan from Bangladesh following flurry of high-level visits

(ap/lm) The Maldives has requested a long-term loan from Bangladesh, as the two South Asian countries try to enhance bilateral ties ahead of the upcoming visit by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina later this month. Dhaka, which had extended a $250 million Line of Credit to Male earlier this year to help sustain the nation's foreign reserves and improve its exchange rate said it was "positively considering" the request. [Daily Star]

Last week, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen visited the Maldives and held discussions with senior officials. He also announced that Prime Minister Hasina would visit the archipelago later this month. That trip was preceded by a visit to Bangladesh by Maldivian Vice-President Faisal Naseem last month. During his trip, Naseem had met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, President Abdul Hamid, and Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen. [South Asia Monitor]

United States, Bangladesh kick off bilateral Exercise CARAT Bangladesh

(ap) The navies of the United States and Bangladesh on December 1 launched this year's iteration of their annual "Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training" (CARAT) maritime exercise, aimed to improve Washington's and Dhaka's ability to work together in matters of Indo-Pacific security. To mitigate COVID-19

risks, many of the engagements took place virtually. [America's Navy] [Business Standard]

CARAT is a series of annual bilateral military exercises conducted by the United States Pacific Fleet with a hosting Indo-Pacific country.

Increased security cooperation between Washington and Dhaka can, writers at Foreign Policy argue, holds strategic advantage for the US in counterbalancing Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific region, especially if Bangladesh joins the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), an alliance between the US, Australia and Indian to counter Chinese economic and military power. Earlier this year, the Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh warned that China-Bangladesh relations would suffer if Dhaka joins the QSD. [Foreign Policy]

Indo-Bangladesh dialogue on bilateral trade, continued partnership held

(ap) Foreign policy analysts and academics from India and Bangladesh attending a bilateral dialogue in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, have identified mutual respect, trust and equality as the three pillars of the relationship between the two countries. They also noted the need to resolve any discord, including water issues, border management and non-tariff barriers in trade, to tackle emerging challenges in geopolitics and climate change. [Financial Express]

Indo-Bangladesh cooperation has been flourishing this year, with India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh noting earlier this month that relations between the countries were in a "golden phase" [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. In a similar vein, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last week said relations between the two countries had reached new heights. [Daily Star]

Diplomatic relations between the two countries will continue, as Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla is due to visit Dhaka on December 7 in preparation for the Indian President Ram Nath Kovind's first visit to Bangladesh on December 16 to celebrate Bangladesh's golden jubilee of its independence and the birth centenary of Bangladesh's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh hosts 'World Peace Conference-2021' for global think tanks,

activists, artists

(ap) Bangladesh President Md Abdul Hamid has called on world leaders to unite for peace, as he spoke at the "World Peace Conference-2021" held in the capital, Dhaka, this week. He stated that Bangladesh has an "untiring quest" to build a peaceful, inclusive and just nation, and noted the importance for world leaders to corporate to create peace amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, global conflicts and climate change. [New Age]

The conference was organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to celebrate fifty years of Bangladesh's independence, and the birth centenary of the nation's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Civil society representatives from fifty countries were in attendance both virtually and in person, including members from think tanks, writers, poets, singers, and political personalities. Notable attendees including Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nation and Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

In a video message at the conference, Ban called on all to prioritize peace, sustainability, and inclusion, as climate change and regional conflicts increase. He called the COVID-19 pandemic the greatest test for global peace, noting that the pandemic amplifies inequalities. He emphasized the need for equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and warned that the spread of the new Omicron variant of COVID-19 indicates the urgency of a global vaccination drive. [Dhaka Tribune]

Japan to finance factories in Bangladesh; expects Prime Minister Hasina to visit Tokyo next year

(ap) Japan expects Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to visit Japan in 2022 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries to further bilateral relations, according to Tokyo's ambassador to Dhaka. [Dhaka Tribune]

This invitation comes after Japan agreed to cooperate on the development of a fertilizer factory and an automobile factory in Bangladesh. It also comes after Tokyo earlier this month agreed to finance a railway network and power plant in Bangladesh [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. [The Independent]

Bangladesh seeks extension of duty-free market in Thailand

(ap) Bangladesh will seek further extension of preferential tariff treatment for its products in the Thai market under Bangkok's duty-free and quote-free (DFQF) scheme at the Joint Trade Committee meeting between the two countries, which is likely to be held in January next year. [The Financial Express]

However, Thai officials have indicated that the extension may take time and suggested signing a bilateral free trade agreement for a quick solution.

Chinese firms to fund sustainable energy in Bangladesh

(ap) A Chinese firm has signed agreements to invest $300 million in a waste-to-energy power plant in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, while another Chinese developer has indicated its willingness to invest $50 million in solar and wind projects provided that the government frees up 200 acres of land and water. [Business Standard] [pv magazine]

Spain keen to invest in Bangladesh railway

(ap) The Spanish government has expressed interest in investing in Bangladesh Railway, the state-owned rail transport agency of Bangladesh, and proposed that a memorandum of understanding be signed on this matter. Raquel Sanchez Jimenez, Spain's Transport Minister, made the proposal during a meeting with a Bangladeshi delegation, led by Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan, in Madrid on November 30. [Daily Star]

Bangladesh desires strong trade ties with Pakistan, high commissioner says

(ap) Bangladesh's High Commissioner in Pakistan in a meeting at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry has stated that the visa issuance procedure for Pakistani businessmen will be eased. He also recommended the exchange of trade delegations and

single country exhibitions to expand bilateral trade. [The Nation]

Bangladesh receives COVID-19 aid from South Korea, France

(ap) South Korea has donated ambulances and oxygen generators to Bangladesh, which the South Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh called a symbol of South Korea and Bangladesh's friendship. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

In related developments, France donated 2.06 million AstraZeneca vaccine doses in a similar gesture of solidarity. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Lao-China Railway officially inaugurated

(bs) Laos has officially inaugurated the $5.9 billion Laos-China railway connecting the Lao capital Vientiane, to Boten, a Chinese border town.

The inauguration of the railway also encouraged Thailand to speed up the construction of a rail track that connects directly to the Lao-China railway to enhance economic cooperation with both Laos and China. [Bangkok Post]

Although the railway started its national commercial operations on December 4, the authorities have yet to announce when the train will be allowed to enter China in accordance with the Covid-19 restrictions.

The two countries agreed upon the project in 2015 in order to connect the landlocked country directly with China. The constructions, 60% of which were funded by the Export-Import Bank (Eximbank) of China, began in 2016. The Lao government agreed with China's Eximbank on a $480 million loan that would contribute to covering two-thirds of Lao equity stake, together with the $250 million from the Lao national budget.

The loan goes to increase the Lao debt to China to "around two-thirds of its annual economic output."

The Lao government expects that the Lao-China railway would increase the national income from both the export and tourism industries, enhancing the economy and contributing to reducing the amount of national debt. [The Diplomat] [Asia Nikkei]

Others criticize the project for allegedly exploiting workers, displacing over 4000 villagers, and delaying providing compensations. [Radio Free Asia]

The train runs 417 kilometers in just over three hours, compared to the two-day road journey.

Lao PDR, Cambodia to strengthen cooperation

Lao and Cambodian ministers have agreed to strengthen cooperation in both the energy sector and border security.

Following the agreement to "create a joint border-taskforce" to improve cooperation in border security, the countries committed to increasing their mutual effort to combat cross-border crimes and international drug trafficking.

Furthermore, the Cambodian and Lao Mines Ministers have agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

The parties aimed at bolstering energy trade between Laos and Cambodia by fulfilling the commitments made in a 2019 agreement, which stated that the Kingdom would import 2,400 mW a year of power from Lao hydropower dams from 2024 to 2027 to expand renewable energy production.

Furthermore, the Cambodian representative renewed the country's obligations to encourage and develop clean energy projects by prohibiting any environmentally unfriendly activities, "including coal-fired power plants." [Khmer Times 1] [Khmer Times 2]

High-speed rail project between Malaysia and Singapore may be revived

(sd) The planed high-speed rail link between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore which was terminated on January 1, when the two countries announced they had failed to reach an agreement on changes proposed by Malaysia before the end of the year, might be revived according to a joint statement from the prime ministers of the two countries.

[The Straits Times] [New Straits Times]

UN postpones decision on future Myanmar representative

(tl) The UN has decided to postpone its decision on who should represent Myanmar in the world body, leaving the country's shadow National Unity Government (NUG) representative in place despite attempts by the military junta to gain international recognition.

At its 1 December meeting in New York, the NUG Credentials Committee announced its intention to postpone indefinitely the decision on the country's future representative, leaving the incumbent ambassador in charge until at least 31 December. According to analysts, the move marks a serious blow to the regime on the world stage.

The Swedish Ambassador, also the current president of the U.N. Credentials Committee, reasoned that the decision was due to "the current development of the situation in Myanmar", declining to comment on how long the current delegation could serve as representative.

According to a junta spokesman, the UN's postponement of the decision violates the organization’s principles as well as international law, urging the committee to the junta´s military attaché at the Myanmar Embassy in Washington, as Myanmar's effective representative.

The U.N. Credentials Committee is composed of the U.S., Russia, The Bahamas, Bhutan, Chile, Sierra Leone, Namibia, and Sweden. The decision to postpone will be submitted to the U.N. General Assembly for approval next year. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam, Russia discuss cross-sector cooperation

(bs) The Vietnamese and Russian presidents have met in Moscow to discuss Vietnam-Russia’s comprehensive strategic partnership in politics, trade, defense, technological cooperation, and humanitarian contact in a 2021-2030 plan.

The leaders reiterated the mutual commitment to cooperate in the oil and gas sector adhering to international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Russia will continue its operations in the South China Sea on

Vietnamese territories, while Vietnam agreed to facilitate oil exports to Russia. [VNExpress]

They also agreed to strengthen bilateral trade and investments and "effectively implement the Free Trade Agreement between Vietnam and the Eurasian Economic Union." The meeting also included plans for cooperation in education, maritime security, and sustainable development. [Nhân Dân]

Moreover, the countries committed to accelerating the development of a new Nuclear Science and Technology Research Center in Vietnam, which would include the use of advanced technologies in nuclear research, laboratories for nuclear medicine, and research projects in materials science. Following the first project draft in 2011, Russia and Vietnam signed two Memorandums of Understanding on the construction of the Centre and its implementation. [Raos Rosatom]

Also, on December 1, the two leaders signed the Vietnamese-Russian inter-governmental agreement on military-technical cooperation according to which the countries commit to partner on military trade and technologies. [Janes]

Australia to ask Vietnam to meet human rights requirements

(sd) Human Rights Watch said that the Australian government should call on Vietnam to reach human rights standards at their virtual human rights dialogue on December 8.

The 17th Australia-Vietnam dialogue will be held virtually and the Australian director of Human Rights Watch, Elaine Pearson, has said it is an opportunity to encourage Vietnam to "reverse its abysmal human rights record."

Pearson called on the Australian government to tackle Vietnam on its suppression of fundamental civil and political rights. Rights, she said, "that Australians often take for granted."

The international NGO found at least 146 people in Vietnam, including activists and bloggers, were imprisoned for exercising basic rights. [Human Rights Watch]

Asian countries sign recovery roadmap at East Asian Seas Congress

(bs) Eleven Asian member states of the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) discussed ocean governance at the 7th Ministerial Forum of the East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2021 and signed a climate-change recovery plan for 2030.

After discussing the progress and the objectives of EAS countries in sustainable and green management of areas in the East Asian Seas, the participants committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) and launched the PEMSEA Roadmap to 2030 by signing the Preah Sihanouk Ministerial Declaration.

The PEMSEA is an intergovernmental organization created to develop mechanisms and promote green solutions for efficient water management in the East Asian Seas. It comprises South and North Korea, the Philippines, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Singapore, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. [Manila Bulletin] [Vietnam Plus] [EAS Congress 2021]

Cambodia, Myanmar: Cambodia aims to improve relationship with Myanmar through ASEAN membership

(bs) Myanmar receives Cambodia's support in the country's presence at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations's (ASEAN) meetings.

On December 7, Myanmar's military-appointed foreign minister met the Cambodian Prime Minister to discuss effective mechanisms to develop multilateral partnerships in the ASEAN context. The Burmese representative also invited the Cambodian Prime Minister to an official visit in Myanmar on January 7-8. By accepting the invitation, the Cambodian leader will be the first government representative to visit Myanmar after the coup in February, when national security forces allegedly killed over 1300 people.

In October, the Myanmar junta refused a meeting between the currently detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi, and appointed a military chief as the official representative of the country in international visits. Unlike the other ASEAN leaders, who condemn the decision of Myanmar's government, the Cambodian Prime Minister affirmed his eagerness to include

Myanmar's military-appointed leader in the 2022 ASEAN meetings, when Cambodia will assume the Association's chairmanship taking over from Brunei. [The Jakarta Post] [The Straits Times]

Indonesia: First-ever ASEAN-Russia joint naval exercise held in Indonesian waters

(ms) Russia and seven ASEAN member states held their first ever joint naval exercise in Indonesia's territorial waters off Sumatra on December 1-3. Russia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar, and Brunei each sent one warship to participate in the 2021 ARNEX joint exercise. The intention of the drills was to strengthen cooperation between the navies of ASEAN member states and Russia in order to provide maritime security for economic activity and civil navigation. The drills included a sea surveillance exercise, a search-and-rescue exercise, and several non-combat maneuvers. [Benar News] [Radio Free Asia]

At the Russia-ASEAN summit on October 28 this year, 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 2].

Analysts claim this is not a new development, with Russia having placed an emphasis on Asia in its foreign policy and focused on developing ties with Southeast Asian countries for some time. Much of this cooperation is in arms sales, Russia being the biggest supplier in Southeast Asia. Between 2000 and 2019 the country sold defense equipment totaling $10.7 billion. In this context, joint naval drills can be a way for Russia to promote further sales to the region. This is important for Southeast Asian countries, which continue to militarize in the context of simmering China-US tensions and unresolved disputes over the South China Sea. [Benar News]

Analysts say ASEAN member countries are also looking to avoid taking sides in the China-US rivalry. It is in their interests to have the presence of a third stabilizing power in the region to hedge against the threats of the two rival superpowers. This strategy can be seen in some of the member's foreign policies. Vietnam, for example, has long performed a cautious balancing act in its relations and has long been a

traditional ally and comprehensive strategic partner of Russia. [Benar News]

Indonesia: China demanded stop of oil and natural gas drilling in contested waters

(ms) During a months-long stand-off in the South China Sea, a letter from Chinese diplomats to Indonesia's foreign ministry told Indonesia to cease drilling for oil and gas at a temporary offshore rig they claimed to be within China's so-called nine-dash line. Indonesia rejected the demand, claiming they were within their exclusive economic zone (EEZ) as per the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The communication between the two countries occurred in September this year, but an Indonesian lawmaker only revealed it to the public on December 1. In a separate diplomatic note, China also expressed objections to a joint Indonesia-United States military exercise involving 4,500 troops held in August. This is the first time China has protested against this regular event, held since 2009. [Benar News] [Reuters]

Indonesia does not consider itself as part of the South China Sea dispute, which involves contested islands and maritime claims amongst China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan. Nevertheless, Beijing does claim historic rights to overlapping areas in Indonesia's EEZ in the southern end of the South China Sea, which Indonesia renamed the North Natuna Sea in 2017. China insists this waterway is within its nine-dash line, which demarcates its claims to most of the South China Sea. Its claims are not recognized under UNCLOS, however. [Benar News] [Reuters]

UNCLOS requires governments to seek permission in advance for marine scientific research in another state's EEZ. On August 31, however, a large Chinese survey vessel, the Hauyand Dizhi 10, entered Indonesia's EEZ in the North Natuna Sea near a $500 billion-worth oil and gas field without permission. After leaving for a few days to re-supply in late September, it returned to the location in early October, before leaving again on October 22. [See AiR No. 40, October/2021, 1] [See also AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2] [See also AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4] Analysts have said the Chinese vessel's movement in a grid pattern shows that it was clearly carrying out unlawful research activity surveying the seafloor. Chinese survey vessels have also loitered in the EEZs of Vietnam in late

2019 and Malaysia in early 2020, where oil and gas exploration was underway. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia prefers to maintain friendly relations and take a peaceful diplomatic approach. Officials preferred to downplay the presence of the Chinese ship, stating it has committed no violations and, like all foreign ships, is allowed to navigate freely in the Natuna sea. Analysts have suggested Indonesia kept quiet about the manner to avoid conflict with China, its biggest trade partner upon which it is economically dependent. [See AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]

Indonesia assumes G20 Presidency

(ms) Indonesia officially assumed its year-long presidency of the Group of Twenty (G20) on December 1. President Joko Widodo announced that during its presidency Indonesia will strive for a more just world order that accommodates the aspirations and interests of developing countries. As such, it will prioritize the areas of inclusive health care, digital-based transformation, and the transition toward sustainable energy. As part of this, Indonesia will work to close the gap of coronavirus vaccinations between developed and developing nations. Plus, it will seek greater global solidarity in addressing climate change and sustainable development, with larger commitments of developed countries to assist developing countries. [The Jakara Post, $]

Senior US diplomat visits Southeast Asia to boost engagement with ASEAN

(ms) A top US diplomat for East Asia visited Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand on November 29 – December 4 as part of the Biden administration's commitment to deepen ties with ASEAN states and counter China in the region. During his visit, Daniel Kritenbrink, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific, discussed maritime security, human rights challenges, the Myanmar crisis, and cooperation on climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic. The four Southeast Asian countries on Krittenbrink's tour were chosen as they were missed on earlier US diplomatic tours of the region in May, August, and September this year. [Benar News] [The Diplomat]

The Biden administration is making a concerted effort to engage more extensively with ASEAN nations, as

part of its commitment to ensure peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region. On October 26 US President Joe Biden joined ASEAN leaders for a virtual summit, during which he pledged to stand with them in defending freedom of the seas. He also committed $102 million for the bloc's COVID-19 recovery, to address climate change, and foster economic growth. [The Hill]

The US also agreed on October 1 to enhance their strategic relationship with Indonesia to cooperate on these same issues. Indonesia was an important stop on Kritenbrink's tour, as the country serves as the official liaison between the US and ASEAN, with headquarters in Jakarta, and it is the largest economy in ASEAN. [See AiR No. 45, November/2021, 2] [Benar News]

The US is especially concerned with countering the growing influence of China in the region. As part of this, it has stepped up its freedom of navigation operations in the Indo-Pacific to counter China's vast maritime presence in the South China Sea. China stakes territorial claims to almost 90% of the South China Sea, conflicting with the claims of several ASEAN members. Despite US intentions to counter China's influence in Southeast Asia, it has claimed it will not force countries to pick sides in the US-China rivalry. [Benar News] [Benar News 2]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

7 December 2021 @ 8.30 – 9.00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategies & International Studies, USA

Beyond COP26: The Global Methane Pledge

At COP26, several major issues were addressed, including global methane emissions. This webinar will discuss the Global Methane Pledge that was launched by the U.S. and the EU, along with other partners at the conference, and its significance to global action on climate change.

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

7 December 2021 @ 11.00 – 12.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategies & International Studies, USA

Going Green While Building Peace: How Can Technology Drive Climate, Conservation, and Peacebuilding Goals?

This virtual session will feature experts who will offer insights on the role of technology towards climate change goals as well as peacebuilding. Several case studies about the pros and cons of a range of digital technologies implemented in African, Asian, and Latin American forests will be discussed.

Further information is accessible via [CSIS].

7 December 2021 @ 7:00-8:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

Kim Jong Un at 10 Years: Evaluating the Regime and Future Prospects

This webinar will feature a panel of experts who will take a look back at ten years of the Kim Jong Un presidency in North Korea, examine key factors that have formed the regime, and project the country's future domestic and international strategy.

Further information is accessible via [Stimson Center].

8 December 2021 @ 2:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Communism's Dark Tyranny: The 30th Anniversary of the Collapse of the Soviet Union

At this online conversation, experts will discuss the atrocities of the Soviet Union, its collapse, and the legacies that the institution left to today's world. Then, the forum will focus on how the world can share lessons learned from the Soviet Union with the young.

Further information is accessible via [The Heritage Foundation].

8 December 2021 @ 10:30 - 11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Movements amid Rising Authoritarianism

Technology is used as a new tool for authoritarian regimes to further political authority and oppression. This webinar will feature a panel of activists from all over the world who will share their new ways to resist techno-authoritarianism and promote democracy by using and avoiding technology.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [Atlantic Council]

8 December 2021 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Office of Communications, USA

Is the NATO-EU Divide an Obstacle to a European Foreign Policy?

This webinar will step back to explore the history of collaboration between Nato and the Eu and address challenges between the institutions and implications of the strengthen NATO-EU for tension between the United States, the European Union, and other key geopolitical powers.

Find more about the webinar at [BROOKINGS].

8 December 2021 @ 2:00-4:30 p.m. (GMT-5), The United States Institute of Peace, USA

The Shocking Rise in Coups - Day 2: Guinea-Conakry and Myanmar

Despite the Biden administration's aim to stabilize global democracy, coups and authoritarian power have been shockingly rising. This second day of the Shocking Rise in Coups webinar will continue discussing the resurgence of authoritarianism trend around the world

and will focus on coups in Guinea-Conakry and Myanmar and the two countries' future directions.

Find more about the webinar at [USIP].

8-9 December 2021 @ 3:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. (GMT+2), The Institute for National Security Studies, Israel

Thirty Years of Russian-Israeli Relations: Past, Present, and Future

On this occasion of the 30th anniversary of relations between Israel and Russia, renowned experts from both countries will share insights on the current position of this bilateral partnership, assess various aspects of the relationship, and provide suggestions for the collaboration's future.

Follow [INSS] to learn more about the event.

8-10 December 2021, ADB Institute, Japan

Virtual Conference on Environmental Challenges and Agricultural Sustainability in Asia: Interlinkages and Future Implications

This three-day conference will present findings from new research that identify new threats to agricultural sustainability in Asia, their interconnections, and consequences for the region's economic growth.

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

9 December 2021 @ 10:00-7:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Word Affairs, USA

Burma on the Blink

After the military coup in Myanmar, the future direction of the country is still obscure. In this webinar, Professor Penny Edwards, an expert in Southeast Asian studies, will offer insights into the military and the history of its role in Burmese politics.

Further information is accessible via [World Affairs].

9 December 2021 @ 2:00 - 3:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Is there a 'Plan B' for Iran?

This webinar will debrief the Vienna Talks on November 29, which discussed the prospect of reinstating the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Experts from the Atlantic Council's Future of Iran Initiative will explore alternatives to diplomatic solutions that would ease tension between Iran and the U.S. and reestablish multilateral cooperation with restrictions on nuclear weapon development.

If you wish you attend this event, register at [Atlantic Council]

9 December 2021 @ 3:00-6:10 p.m. (GMT+9), ADB Institute, Japan

Virtual Conference on Asian Economic Integration in the Post-Pandemic World

The world has been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in several dimensions. This virtual conference will explore the consequences of the pandemic on the Asian economy and suggest measures to alleviate the situation and restore the strength of the regional economy.

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

9 December 2021 @ 10:30 -11:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Middle East Institute, USA

Permission to Narrate: The Shifting Discourse on Israel/Palestine in the U.S.

In this panel discussion, experts will unpack the U.S. discourse on Palestine-Israel, investigate the potential shifts in the narrative on Palestine, and address the implications of the new developments with regard to U.S. diplomatic policies.

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

8 December 2021 @ 12:00- 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Hudson Institute, US

Saudi Arabia and the New Middle East

The change in power dynamics in the Middle East brings significant challenges to Saudi Arabia as a regional alliance with the U.S. This webinar will focus on new strategies that Saudi Arabia should adopt to benefit from the shift in the region and how Saudi Arabia and the U.S. could further their respective interests while also promoting regional stability.

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

9 December 2021 @ 12:00- 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Hudson Institute, US

Pushing Back Against Authoritarianism

This webinar will discuss threats to the democratic world from the rise of authoritarian regimes in Russia and China, which attempt to promote totalitarian systems in vulnerable countries. The speakers will examine what the U.S. and its democratic alliances should do to combat the trend and enhance democratic stability.

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

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

How to Ensure Mental Health and Well-Being for Researchers

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. This workshop will be led by Dr. Brian CAHILL, a research scientist at the Leibniz Information Center for Science and Technology (TIB), who will speak on the general concept of mental health and will focus on how researchers can maintain their mental health and well-being.

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

9 December 2021 @ 3:00 -4:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Fraught with Tensions

China's relations with the Nordic-Baltic countries have been strained, and tensions between the two sides have grown as a result of politically sensitive conflicts. This webinar will feature scholars who will discuss the current relationship between China and the Nordic-Baltic countries and how new developments will affect this bilateral collaboration.

Follow [DIIS] to learn more about the event.

10 December 2021 @ 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), The United States Institute of Peace, USA

From Stabilization to Prevention: Changing the U.S. Strategy on Violent Conflict

After lessons learned from the situations in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is crucial for the U.S. to reevaluate its global policies, especially towards violent conflicts abroad. This webinar will go over new policies that the US government has put in place to focus on preventing global conflicts and maintaining global stability.

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

10 December 2021, @ 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. (GMT+8), Institute of Policy Studies and IPS Social Lab, USA and Singapore

IPS-Nathan Lectures by Dr Noeleen Heyzer — Lecture III: "Securing Our Future: A Renewed Multilateralism"

The present world has faced various vital and unprecedented challenges, and the current framework of multilateralism that is used to secure the world may not meet the needs of the era. This online session will feature Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, who will discuss the importance of multilateral governance and how it should be fortified and renewed.

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

10 December 2021 @ 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), EURAXESS ASEAN

Research Funding Acquisition

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. The focus of this online workshop will be on how to secure research funding.

For more details of the event, see [EURAXESS ASEAN]

10 December 2021 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, USA

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

In this webinar, Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications at the United Nations, will address the challenges of her role in the United Nations amid the turbulence of momentous events happening around the world and discuss the UN's new communications strategies as well as threats from misinformation.

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

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

North Korea During Covid-19: Implications on Security, Human Rights, and Foreign Policy

This virtual seminar will feature a conversation between Dr. Jieun Baek and two prominent North Korea escapees who will explore the COVID-19 situation in North Korea, its consequences, and the implications of the pandemic for the country.

For more details, see [Belfer Center].

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

Russia and the Green New Deal: Light at the End of the Tunnel?

Russia is considered one of the biggest carbon polluters in the world. Even so, the Russian government aims to reduce emissions and become carbon neutral by 2060. Three Russian experts who are on the frontlines of the country's climate and environmental crisis will present a report regarding the Green New Deal for Russia, a solution to the climate change issue and carbon offset, which has been published and launched its actions across the country by Russian environmentalists.

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

13 December 2021 @10:30 -11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Twenty Years of Stabilization and Reconstruction: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan

Despite twenty years of support from its ally, the United States, the Afghan government eventually collapsed. This webinar will present findings from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) that show lessons that the U.S. government should learn and reform in order to better efficiently stabilize crisis-effected settings around the world.

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

13 December 2021 @ 4:00 - 7:30 p.m. (GMT+8), EURAXESS ASEAN

Making an Impact: How to Communicate Your Science Effectively

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. This workshop will give participants a better understanding of how to target audiences for their study and ways to reach out and collaborate with the study's audience to create a greater effect.

Visit [EURAXESS ASEAN] to find more details of the event.

14 December 2021 @ 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. (GMT+00), Royal United Services Institute, UK

The Long War: The Inside Story of America and Afghanistan Since 9/11

In this webinar, David Loyn will introduce his latest book, The Long War: The Inside Story of America and Afghanistan Since 9/11, which investigates the root causes of this prolonged conflict. The author will also explore the ramifications of the US and NATO withdrawals from Afghanistan and how the events affect both regional and global security.

For more details, see [RUSI].

14 December 2021 @ 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

NATO and Transatlantic Relations

NATO has faced challenges and dilemmas in its alliance during Trump's policies, which have had substantial ramifications for transatlantic relations. This webinar will explore changes in NATO after Biden's administration, the European NATO member positions, and how new policies will guide the institution towards 2030.

Follow [DIIS] to learn more about the event.

14 December 2021 @ 4:00 - 7:00 p.m. (GMT+8), EURAXESS ASEAN

Entrepreneurship for Researchers

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. In this webinar, Dr. Macro Masia, executive coordinator at the Initiative for Science in Europe, will explore the entrepreneur side of research.

If you interested in the answers to these questions, register at [EURAXESS ASEAN]

Recent Book Releases

John T. Sidel, ***Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia***, Cornell University Press, 324 pages, published on May 15, 2021, reviewed in [LSE].

Claude A. Clegg III, ***The Black President: Hope and Fury in the Age of Obama***, Johns Hopkins University Press, 672 pages, published on October 12, 2021, with a review in [The New York Times].

Bernard-Henri Levy, ***The Will to See: Dispatches from a World of Misery and Hope***, Yale University Press, 208 pages, published in October 26, 2021. A review is available at [The Atlantic].

Eyal Press, ***Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America***, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 320 pages, published on August 17, 2021, reviewed in [The New York Times].

Calls for Papers

The **American University of Moldova** invites abstracts for a ***special issue of Revista de Studii Interdisciplinare (The Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies)*** on the theme of "Negotiating transnational connections in a global pandemic: Case studies from Eastern Europe". Closing date for submission is December 23, 2021. Visit [CFP] for more information.

The **Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA)** invites proposals for participation in its ***2022 annual conference "Political Science and Politics in Transformative Years"*** to be held from May 30 to June 3, 2022. Deadline for submission is January 31, 2022. For more details, see [CPSA].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** is hiring a ***Policy and Programme Associate*** ton be based in Beijing, China. Closing date for applications is December 21, 2021. See [UNDP] for more details.

Solidarités International is looking for a ***Country Director*** for Afghanistan. Deadline for application is December 22, 2021. Find more about the job offer at [UN Channel].

People in Need (PIN) is recruiting a ***Head of Programmes Nepal***, with Kathmandu as duty station

and responsibilities in overseeing, managing, mentoring and further expanding long-term development as well as emergency programs of PIN Nepal. Interviews will be conducted on a rolling basis and the vacancy will be closed when filled. If you are interested in the position, you can find more details at [People in Need].

The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** is hiring a ***Director of Partnerships Division*** to be based in Paris, France, with core responsibilities lying in leading and setting strategic directions to improve and expand UNESCO's partnership as well as structuring appropriate solicitation strategies that ensure critical resources for advancing the Organization's work. Closing date for applications is January 5, 2022. Visit [UN Jobs] for further information.

The **Department of Political Science at Case Western Reserve University** is seeking applications for the ***Alexander P. Lamis Memorial Endowed Chair in U.S. Politics***. Review of applications will begin on January 1, 2022 and continue until the position is filled. Find more about the vacancy at [Case Western Reserve University].

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