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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to this week's Asia in Review issue.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone celebrating Grenada's Independence Day, Japan's National Foundation Day, and the Foundation of Vatican City in this week.

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: Closer to cashless society

(tp) Two private Chinese banks in Liaoning and Beijing have announced that they will no longer provide services involving banknotes or coins, as a part of a nationwide pilot scheme to fully embrace the e-yuan, the country's digital currency. [New York Times]

The move towards digital banking and digital payments comes as Beijing conducts a nationwide pilot scheme for the e-yuan, to which more than 261 million people have downloaded the wallet app named e-CNY. [See Air No. 3, January/2022, 3] [South China Morning Post 1]

At the same time, many Chinese businesses are expanding efforts to accommodate the e-yuan, including WeChat Pay, JD.com, and Meituan. [CNBC]

However, some banks are experiencing regulatory challenges in adopting cross-regional banking services on the internet due to Beijing's crackdown on the internet sector. [South China Morning Post 2]

China: Soon world-leader in AI healthcare technology?

(tp) China has laid out plans to become the world leader in artificial intelligence (AI) healthcare technology by 2030, with the aim of making the industry worth 1 trillion yuan ($147.7 billion). The State Council released its three-step roadmap on Thursday outlining the thinking behind how it expects AI to be developed and deployed in areas from the military to city planning.

This comes as China experiences a rapidly ageing population, where some 44,800 health practitioners are responsible for a population of 1.4bn, and experts warn of the country's insufficient medical infrastructure.

The most recent development in the field comes from Beijing-based medical AI group, Airdoc, who gained regulatory approval to develop retina-scanning software soon to be deployed in Chinese hospitals. This technology will give insights into health conditions including high blood pressure, diabetes, and myopia (near-sightedness). [China News Today]

China: Manufacturing output at its lowest in years

(tp) China's manufacturing sector output has slowed to its weakest in two years as the country maintains its strict 'zero-Covid' approach, sending factories into temporary shutdowns.

The Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) fell to a 23-month low of 49.1 in January, missing the market consensus of 50.4, suggesting that output is contracting rather than expanding. This was down from 50.9 in December. [Trading Economics]

The PMI press release indicated that manufacturing output would increase over the next 12 months as market conditions strengthen and supply chain disruptions ease once the pandemic recedes. [Caixin China General Manufacturing PMI Press Release]

China: Beijing Winter Olympics kicks off with Uyghur athlete lighting the cauldron

(dq/tpl) On Friday, February 4, the Beijing Winter Olympics kicked off. Defying accusations of the human rights violations against the Muslim Uyghur minority in Xinjiang, Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a female Uyghur cross-country skier, was selected – together with a male Han-Chinese Nordic-Combined athlete – to be the final Olympic torchbearer to light the Olympic cauldron at the opening ceremony on Friday night.

This prompted condemnation by critics calling it "shocking and hugely insensitive to use a Uyghur athlete this way, when there is an ongoing genocide," and a "brazen, cynical ploy," of the Chinese government. China, on the other side, declared that a Uyghur torchbearer reflects China as a big family of ethnic groups. [Aljazeera] [The Guardian 1] [Global Times]

In the run up to the Games, many western governments issued a diplomat boycott of the Games, citing human rights violations in the country, in particular in Xinjiang where China is accused of holding more than one million people, mostly Uyghurs, in secretive internment camps. China has been consistently dismissed these accusations.

For a report on cases in which activists, journalists and academics receiving police warnings and facing censorship of their social media platforms ahead of the Games, see [The Guardian 2].

China: US law scholar denied visa to teach in Hong Kong

(tp) American legal scholar specialising in LGBTQ+ rights, Ryan Thoreson, had his visa application rejected by immigration authorities after being hired by the University of Hong Kong to teach human rights law.

This marks a blow to Hong Kong's reputation as a regional academic hub and reflects what the Human Rights Watch (HRW) describe as the "Xi Jinping-ification of academic institutions".

This comes as several academic institutions in Hong Kong embrace Beijing's drive to make teaching more

"patriotic" and stamp out dissent and certain political views. [China Daily]

The scholar previously taught at Yale and works as an LGBTQ+ rights researcher at the HRW, an organisation which China's foreign ministry has repeatedly denounced. [News Week]

In the absence of an official explanation for Thoreson's visa rejection, he said it was difficult to say whether the denial was linked to his HRW background. [France 24]

Hong Kong: Two people jailed on sedition charges

(tp) Property manager Kim Chiang and former vocational school clerk Chloe Cho Suet-sum have been jailed on charges of sedition on Monday, January 31.

Chiang was sentenced to eight months in prison on five counts of conspiring to distribute leaflets advocating Hong Kong independence at a local kindergarten. Cho was sentenced to thirteen months for printing, publishing, distributing, and displaying 101 leaflets and posters that contained seditious materials. A co-defendant of Cho's, Wong Chun-wai, 17, was sentenced nine months in correctional training.

Cho and Wong's posters advocated to establish a "Federal Republic of Hong Kong" and for the army to "regain the dominating power" and "resist Communisation".

This marks Hong Kong's first national security trial and the second and third defendants to be imprisoned under Hong Kong's colonial-era sedition laws since China resumed sovereignty in 1997. [South China Morning Post 1]

China: Grindr removed from app stores sparking fear from LGBTQ+ community

(tp) Popular dating app Grindr has been removed from multiple app stores in China following the cyber authority's announcement on Tuesday, February 1, to crack down on rumours, pornography, and other sensitive web content.

The campaign aims to "create a civilised, healthy, festive and auspicious online atmosphere for public

opinion during the lunar new year", the administration said in a statement.

The removal of the gay dating app has put its LGBTQ+ users under pressure as the community fears worsening intolerance of sexual and gender minorities, especially with gay romance films having been banned and an increasing number of LGBTQ+ rights groups blocked from WeChat. [The Guardian 1]

While homosexuality in China was decriminalised in 1997, same-sex marriage remains illegal and the LGBTQ+ community remains taboo. [The Guardian 2]

China: Analysts warn of worsening economy

(tp) Weak consumption over last week's Lunar New Year holiday period in China owing to border and travel restrictions, has led some analysts to believe that a downward trend could signal a worsening economy.

From January 17-31, more than 70 percent of domestic tourists took short-distance trips, having been deterred by tough border polices and outbreaks of the Omicron variant. This marks a 64.6 percent decline compared with 2019, according to the Ministry of Transport.

Additionally, total box office sales over the period did not meet expectations with a drop of more than 25 percent from 2021 sales. [South China Morning Post 1]

While box office sales and tourism revenues declined, positive trends appeared in winter sports, tourism, and local and digital spending.

Regions such as Shanghai, Chongqing, Hebei, Hunan and Sichuan experienced local retail sales increased from 2021 levels, while the island province of Hainan recorded an increase in sales of 144 percent and number of shoppers by 128 percent compared to last year. [South China Morning Post 2]

Japan: Court declares vote weight gap in lower house election unconstitutional

(dql) On Monday, February 7, the Sapporo High Court ruled Monday that the vote weight disparity Lower House Election last October was "in a state of

unconstitutionality," citing a 2.08-fold gap in the weight of votes between the most and least populated single-seat constituencies. The court, however, did not go as far as to nullify the election results and order a rerun of the election, as requested by the plaintiffs. [Mainichi News]

Last week, two other courts issued similar rulings. [Kyodo News]

Japan: 19th century law on paternity to be scrapped

(dql) Japan is set to scrap a law on paternity from the 19th century that recognizes a woman's ex-husband the legal father of a child born to her within 300 days of their divorce even in the case of remarriage.

On February 1, a subcommittee of the Justice Ministry's Legislative Council approved a proposal outline to revise the law to make the new husband the legal father, regardless of period of time since the end of the previous marriage. [Mainichi News]

Japan: More than 6.7 million foreign workers needed by 2040

(dql) Findings of a study of a group of Tokyo-based think tanks, including the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Development Bank of Japan Group' s Value Management Institute, suggest that Japan will need 6.74 million foreign workers in 2040 if it wants to meet the government's economic growth target. This is about four times more than the 1.72 million foreign workers the country currently has.

The study warned that the government's current arrangements for recruiting foreign workers will lead to a foreign labor shortage of 630,000 people and 420,000 by 2030 and 2040 respectively.

The study is believed to be the country's first ever long-term estimate regarding the question of supply and demand for foreign workers in Japan, the world's third-largest economy, where immigration has long been taboo, as Japanese people value ethnic homogeneity. [The Asahi Shimbun] [Reuters]

Japan: Child abuse cases hit new record in 2021

(dql) Data released by Japan's National Police Agency reveal that the number of suspected child abuse cases which the police reported to child consultation centers in 2021 stood at 108,050, marking the highest since Japan began to record these cases in 2004. It was an increase of more than 1,000 case compared to 2020. However, the growth rate of 1 percent was much lower than the year before with 8.9 percent. This prompted concerns that restrictions on movement due to the coronavirus pandemic have made child abuse less visible. [Mainichi News]

Japan: Rules on procuring overseas software by firms to be tightened

(dql) According to a proposal submitted by an academic panel to the government, Japan's parliament is set to discuss legislation on tightening control over companies in security-sensitive sectors that purchase overseas software as the country is stepping up efforts to combat cyberattacks.

The proposal suggests, among others, to permit the government to order companies to deliver advance information on software updates or the procurement of new equipment. It also suggests to allow the government to vet purchases that could put Japan at risk of cyberattacks.

The proposal is in line with an initiative launched by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida aimed at strengthening the defense of the country's economic security especially against China, including by preventing leaks of sensitive technology and building more resilient supply chains. [Reuters]

Taiwan: Athlete at Winter Olympics causes stir after wearing Chinese uniform

(eb) Taiwanese speed skater Huang Yu-ting caused a stir online after posting on her Facebook page a picture of herself wearing the Chinese Olympic uniform at the eve of the opening ceremony of the China 2022 Winter Olympics. On February 3 it was removed shortly after as many Taiwanese netizens commented angrily, condemning her for wearing the

uniform of a country that was threatening Taiwan with military force.

The athlete, who is part of the small Taiwanese delegation of four athletes and eleven diplomatic representatives, later defended herself saying that sport does not take nationality into account. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Navy frigates to be upgraded

(eb) The Taiwanese Navy has reportedly provisioned a budget of approximately USD$1.37 billion for an upgrade of its six La Fayette/Kang-Ding type frigates.

The upgrade will be carried out in collaboration of the French Directorate General of Armament, the French Government Defence procurement and technology agency responsible for project management, development and purchase of weapon systems for the French Military. French experts will work alongside Taiwanese army officials and experts and will integrate high-tech weaponry on the ships such as the TC-2N surface-to-air missile (SAM) system.

The six frigates were procured in 1990 from France and are based upon the La Fayette model of the French Navy. They can conduct a different array of mission, ranging from anti-naval to anti-submarine to joint surface interception operation. [Naval News]

Taiwan's Defense Ministry launches new reservists' programme

(eb) On February 6, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) launched a new 14-day program to improve the training of the reservists.

50,000 reservists out of the current 120,000 are supposed to take part in the program and will train for ten hours each day under the 206th brigade, including two hours of night time training in order to familiarize with as many different combat scenarios as possible. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: China-linked hackers target Taiwanese financial institutions

(eb) Over the last 18 months, the Chinese state-sponsored advanced persistent threat (APT) hacker group known as Antlion (as well as Pirate Panda or Tropic Trooper) has been persistent in attacking Taiwanese business institutions, stealing data and credentials by inserting backdoors in their networks.

According to Alan Neville, an analyst on Symantec's Threat Hunter Team, although it is difficult to speculate on the goals of the group, it is clear that they managed to infiltrate the networks for several months, acquiring all sorts of potentially sensitive information. [Dark Reading]

Antlion is believed to have conducted espionage activities since 2011. [Symantec]

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

Bangladesh: Sixth and seventh phase of Union Parishad elections held

(sk) Nominees of Bangladesh's ruling Awami League (AL) party secured the majority of chairman posts during the sixth phase of elections to Union Parishads – the smallest rural administrative and local government unit in the country.

The ruling party's candidates won in 117 union councils, that is 54 percent of the chair positions, while independents got 95 seats. A total of 144 candidates

were elected unopposed in the sixth phase of the polls. [Daily Sun] [The Daily Star 1]

Violence during the seventh phase left two civilians, including a thirteen-year-old boy, dead. With the two victims, more than 110 people have been killed in violence surrounding the staggered Union Parishad polls. [The Daily Star 2]

The first three rounds of the staggered polls, which began in June of last year, were dominated by AL candidates. In the fourth round, though, independent candidates clawed their way back before pulling ahead in the fifth round. Results for the seventh phase, held on February 7, were not available at the time of writing. [The Business Standard]

The eighth phase of Union Parishad polls will be held on February 10.

Bangladesh: Main opposition Nationalist Party leader Khaleda Zia discharged from hospital

(sk) After nearly three months in hospital, the chairperson of Bangladesh's main opposition Nationalist Party (BNP), Khaleda Zia, returned home on February 1. [Business Insider] [Prothom Alo]

Zia, an archrival of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's was admitted to a hospital last November, with her doctors saying they fear for her life if she is not allowed to fly abroad for expert treatment. However, the former prime minister has been barred by a court from leaving the country after being convicted and jailed on graft charges in 2018.

Commenting on Zia's discharge, leaders of the ruling Awami League party accused the BNP of playing ill politics in the name of the treatment of its chairperson. According to a high-ranking party official, BNP leaders had claimed that if Khaleda Zia had not been moved abroad, she would have perished and that there was no other way to save her. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Separately, a court has scheduled the hearing in two cases filed against Zia on charges of indictment for February 17. But the former prime minister's council filed a time plea, saying his client could not appear before the court due to her illness. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Earlier this month, hearings in two other graft cases involving Zia and six others had been postponed until

March. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

Bangladesh: Election Commission unable to investigate opposition parties' lobbyist hiring, secretary says

(sk) Bangladesh's Election Commission has said it lacks the legal framework and resources to probe allegations against the country's opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) over the hiring of lobbyists in the United States.

Earlier this month, the government requested the Bangladesh Bank and the Election Commission to scrutinize transfers of funds by the BNP and the now-defunct Jamaat-e-Islami to allegedly employ lobbyists in the United States to advocate against the ruling Awami League-led government. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

According to the Election Commission, the BNP's audit report has no information on any money spent on employing lobbyists in other countries. Furthermore, the constitutional body has no jurisdiction over the Jamaat-e-Islami since a ruling by the country's Supreme Court in 2013 had declared the party's registration illegal. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Jatiya Party, Bangladesh's textile millers urge government not to hike gas prices

(sk) The Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) recently claimed that a gas supply shortage has resulted in several spinning, weaving, dyeing, and printing mills in Dhaka, Gazipur, Savar, Ashulia, and Narsingdi industrial zones not operating at full capacity, claiming $1.75 billion in production losses in the last three months.

The BTMA opposed the state-owned distribution company's plan for a gas price increase, claiming that it would damage the sector's competitiveness. The BTMA president encouraged the government to install Electronic Verification Code meters for bill collection at captive power generation mills as soon as possible and requested that companies have uninterrupted gas supplies by temporarily suspending delivery to fertilizer factories and the transportation sector. He also requested a 5- to 10-year energy program to assist

the sector in planning investment to produce $10 billion in extra raw materials. [Fibre2Fashion]

GM Quader, Chairman of the Jatiya Party, has also urged the government to refrain from raising gas costs in the face of the current Covid-19 pandemic. The country's gas generating businesses recently submitted a proposal to the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission to treble methane gas pricing. Increasing natural gas rates at this time, according to the opposition leader, will be an anti-people choice. [Business Insider]

Bangladesh: Anti-corruption drive to continue, Awami League general secretary says

(sk) While addressing the press on February 3, Bangladesh's Minister of Road Transport and Bridges, Obaidul Quader, reaffirmed that the anti-corruption campaign of Prime Minister Hasina's government would continue, adding that that those implicated in graft would not be spared. [Prothom Alo]

In the latest Corruption Perception Index, Transparency International's annual snapshot of the relative degree of corruption in a country, Bangladesh ranked 147 out of 180 nations worldwide. In South Asia, only Afghanistan scored less.

India: Central government unveils new budget; critics see need for more jobs

(lm) India's central government on February 1 presented its new annual budget in parliament, pledging a 35 percent increase in capital expenditure, mainly on infrastructure related projects. However, critics say the new budget lacks specific proposals to address urgent problems facing the country, most notably rising unemployment, and mounting discontent over economic inequality that the COVID-19 pandemic has made more glaring. [The New York Times, $]

The new budget, which goes into effect on April 1, promises $530 billion in spending, with infrastructure intended as a vehicle for growth: 25,000 kilometers of new highways, 100 cargo terminals, 400 new trains, and additional subsidies for manufacturing solar panels. [BBC]

New Delhi likely wants its commitment to upgraded infrastructure to improve perceptions about the ease of doing business in India. The hope is that these investments will end up creating jobs, increase incomes and spur consumption, growth, and employment in the long term.

This focus on infrastructure seemingly seeks to appeal to international investors that the central government has courted, particularly in the defense and technology industries. The budget's 50 percent increase in information technology and telecommunications spending sends encouraging signals. [The Straits Times]

Still, the central government has come under criticism for not doing enough to address the problem of a "two-speed recovery" – high growth concentrated at the top of the pyramid and elevated levels of stress in the country's vast informal economy. There was also disappointment over the lack of specific proposals to address India's unemployment crisis, which recently sparked riots in the eastern state of Bihar, which has been reporting one of the highest jobless rates in the country [see AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1].

The unrest has implications for state elections taking place between Feb. 10 and March 7. One of them is in Uttar Pradesh and another is in Punjab, home to many farmers who spent much of last year protesting agricultural reform. Modi repealed the farm laws, but his budget cuts for rural development programs could generate fresh grievances.

India: Opposition party slam government, as report claims Modi administration bought Israeli spyware

(lm) India's main opposition National Congress party has accused the central government of committing "treason" following the publication of a media report that claimed Prime Minister Modi had signed off on a purchase of Israeli spyware when made an official visit – the first by a sitting Indian prime minister – to the country in 2017. [The Hindu]

The *New York Times* report published on January 28 said the Pegasus military-grade spyware and a missile system were the "centerpieces" of a roughly $2 billion deal of sophisticated weapons and intelligence tools between Israel and India in 2017. According to the report, a warming of relations after Modi came to

power in 2014 led to the deal in question back in the day. [The New York Times, $]

This is not the first allegation linking the Modi administration to the powerful malware. In July of last year, a global consortium of media outlets alleged that the central government had used Pegasus to snoop on dissidents and journalists via their mobile phones. At the time, forensic analyses confirmed that the phones of at least 10 people in India had been hacked, including five journalists [seeAiR No. 29, July/2021, 3].

Indian officials denied the allegations, but last October, the country's Supreme Court appointed an independent committee to investigate whether and how the government is indeed using Pegasus software to spy illegally on its own citizens [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]. According to Indian media reports last week, two cybersecurity experts told the committee there are "strong indicators" that the allegations are true. [The Indian Express]

The *New York Times* report also alleges that Israel offered Pegasus India, Hungary, Mexico and other countries in order to ensure a shift in their positions at the United Nations. In 2016, New Delhi voted in support of Israel at the UN's Economic and Social Council to deny observer status to a Palestinian human rights organisation, a first for India.

India: Hindu teen's death amid 'forced' Christian conversion sparks uproar in Tamil Nadu state

(lm) The believed suicide of a Hindu girl who suggested that she had been under pressure to convert to Christianity in India's southern state of Tamil Nadu has prompted uproar in a region where far-right Hindu groups routinely accuse Christian-run health care and educational institutions of proselytizing. [South China Morning Post]

On February 3, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – in opposition in Tamil Nadu – released a short video in which the girl is purportedly heard saying the warden of her Christian school asked her parents to convert to Christianity.

In light of this, the Madras High Court ordered the probe to be transferred from the Tamil Nadu police to the nation's Central Bureau of Investigation, upholding a plea from the teenager's parents. The court said the

police should have explored the “conversion angle” but instead the superintendent in charge of the investigation threatened the person who filmed the video.

But the state government later approached the Supreme Court requesting a stay of the high court order, claiming that the girl’s father had only asked for transfer of the case to another department of Tamil Nadu’s state police. [Hindustan Times]

India: Police arrest Kashmir journalist under terror, sedition laws for ‘glorifying terrorism’

(lm) Police in India’s Jammu and Kashmir union territory have arrested a prominent journalist, Fahad Shah, for “glorifying terrorism, spreading fake news and inciting general public”, as a running crackdown against media in the disputed territory continues to escalate.

Police detained Shah under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), an anti-terrorism law which authorities are frequently accused of misusing, and under the archaic sedition law, in connection with his news portal’s report of a gunfight between Indian troops and alleged rebels in late January. The series of reports had included allegations by the family that their 17-year-old – described by police as a “hybrid militant” – was an innocent civilian. [The Guardian] [The New York Times, $]

Under the UAPA, police have the right to detain Shah for up to six months without charges and it is notoriously difficult to get bail under the law. In light of this, The Editors Guild of India called for the “immediate release” of Shah and the Committee to Protect Journalists issued a strongly worded statement. [Committee to Protect Journalists] [The Indian Express]

Shah’s arrest comes in the wake of an aggressive crackdown on independent journalists in Kashmir.

Last month, police arrested Sajad Gul, another Kashmiri journalist, under the Public Safety Act over social media posts that they considered objectionable. Gul was granted bail on January 15, but the police filed another case and continued his detention. Also in January, a few journalists supportive of the Indian government, with assistance from armed police, took control of the Kashmir Valley’s only independent press club. Authorities shut it down the following day,

drawing sharp criticism from media watchdogs. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

Pakistan: Military conducts search for militants after twin attacks

(tj/lm) At least seven soldiers and 20 militants were killed during intense firefights on February 4, following a search for separatists who had attacked two military posts earlier in the week, in the latest violence in the country's volatile Baluchistan province.

The fighting erupted on February 2 when insurgents from a recently formed separatist group – the Baluchistan Nationalist Army – launched twin assaults on bases of Pakistan's paramilitary Frontier Corps, leading to the deaths of at least 12 soldiers and 15 assailants. But information on the situation remained scarce: a curfew has been imposed on the district of Panjgur since February 3, and mobile phone services were suspended. [ABC News]

Last week's attacks came a week after militants linked to another outlawed separatist outfit, known as the Baluchistan Liberation Front, assaulted a military post in Baluchistan's Kech district, an area located near Pakistan's western border with Iran. That attack killed 10 Pakistani soldiers, while one assailant was killed in retaliatory fire. [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1]

Balochistan has been a hotbed of a separatist insurgency for decades. The separatist militants have opposed Chinese investment through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, calling the infrastructure project the colonization and exploitation of the province by Beijing and Islamabad. Significantly, the twin attacks started hours before Prime Minister Imran Khan arrived in China, and one security official said that they were designed to send a message to Beijing and derail Khan's visit. [The Guardian] [see also entry in this edition]

The Pakistani military said on February 3 its intelligence had linked the twin attacks to handlers in India and Afghanistan. [Arab News]

Sri Lanka: Advocacy group calls on Sri Lanka to repeal Prevention of Terrorism Act

(lm) The Sri Lankan government must repeal the country's contentious security act, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) said on February 1, adding that amendments to the law gazetted late last month were "woefully inadequate". [Al Jazeera]

The Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) allows authorities to arrest people without warrants for unspecified "unlawful activities," and to detain suspects for up to 18 months under prolonged pretrial detention without producing them before a court.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's government on January 27 published a bill that seeks to amend the PTA. Clause 2 of the proposed amendments claims to address what rights defenders have called a "legal black hole" by reducing the aggregate period of detention from 18 to 12 months. Clause 10 would provide that a person remanded or detained for 12 months is entitled to seek bail. [Gazette]

However, the ICJ said the proposed amendments to the PTA "do not in any way address the fundamental violation", as they as they still allow for persons to be deprived of liberty for an entire year without judicial oversight. Furthermore, subsection 2 of Clause 10 allows enforcement authorities to obtain an order from the High Court to keep suspects in remand custody until the end of the trial. [International Commission of Jurists]

The move to amend the PTA comes just weeks before Sri Lanka's human rights record will be discussed at the 49th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on March 3 in response to a report of the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, last September called for an "immediate moratorium" on the use of PTA, and that "a clear timeline be set for its comprehensive review or repeal" [see AiR No. 38, September/2021, 3]. [United Nations Human Rights Council]

In the lead-up to the upcoming UNHRC meeting, Human Rights Watch published a report documenting the Rajapaksa administration's alleged misuse of the PTA against the minority Tamil and Muslim communities, and civil society groups. [Human Rights Watch]

Sri Lanka: Court grants bail to rights lawyer detained over Easter Sunday 2019 bombings

(lm) Sri Lanka's Court of Appeal on January 7 granted bail to Hejaaz Hizbullah, a lawyer and prisoner of conscience, arrested over his alleged ties to the 2019 Easter Bombings and held in pre-trial detention for nearly two years on charges rights groups say lacked evidence. [The Hindu]

Hizbullah was arrested in April 2020 on suspicion of being linked to the devastating series of attacks on churches and hotels that left more than 260 people dead and injured more than 500 [see AiR No. 29, July/2020, 3]. His family, however, believed he was targeted for his professional work as a lawyer and his peaceful activism for the human rights of Sri Lanka's embattled Muslim minority [see AiR No. 43, October/2020, 4].

After prosecutors failed to provide evidence of his involvement in the attacks, blamed on a local jihadist group, he was instead charged with inciting "racial hatred" under Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). Under the PTA, any 'suspect' can be placed in detention – without charge and without being produced before a judge. The detention order can be renewed for a further 90 days and continue to be renewed for up to 18 months.

In light of this, the Court of Appeal last week said "draconian elements" of the PTA had been misused to keep Hizbullah detained and called on parliament to reform the act before granting him bail. [South China Morning Post]

The decision comes just weeks before his case was due to be discussed at the 49th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 3, according to diplomats. [United Nations Human Rights Council]

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

Cambodia: United Nations urge to halt internet surveillance law

(bs) United Nations (UN) experts urged Cambodia to immediately stop the implementation of the new data surveillance legislation and re-establish human rights and democratic freedoms in the country.

Cambodia has issued a Sub-decree on the Establishment of the National Internet Gateway to monitor online activity, intercept communications, and gather personal data of users. According to the experts, the decree overpowers the allowed restrictions delineated in Articles 17 and 19 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Cambodia is a party. [AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3] [OHCHR]

The new law is expected to enter into force on February 16, and expected to have disastrous effects on press freedom causing fear among journalists, who might face arrest for publishing censored content. [Radio Free Asia]

Indonesia: Former senior officer of home ministry arrested over bribery accusation

(bs) The former Home Ministry's director-general of regional finance was arrested for suspected bribery in context of the proposal of a regional economic recovery plan in 2021. Two other suspects were arrested on the same occasion.

The senior official was arrested for allegedly receiving bribes of approximately $104,000 and $131,000 for the administration of a loan for a recovery plan proposed by the Regent of East Kolaka, the only landlocked regency of Southeast Sulawesi Island in Indonesia.

The court could charge the former director-general for violating Article 12 (a) or (b) or Article 11 of the Law on Eradication of Criminal Acts of Corruption in conjunction with Article 55 paragraph (1) to 1 of the Indonesia Criminal Code. [VOI]

The Corruption Eradication Commission, said that the case will be led according to the law, and it should serve as a deterrent for future similar cases. [Tempo]

Indonesia: President urged to ratify Optional Protocol on Convention against Torture

(bs) The chief of the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) plans to urge the Indonesian President Joko Widodo to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT). This comes after failed attempts to convince other political leaders of the importance of this instrument. [Antara News]

OPCAT is a key human right treaty which was adopted in 2002 and entered into force in 2006. It aims at encouraging the implementation of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment (CAT) by adding to the convention standards to prevent the use of violence and torture of people in detention and to ensure their humane treatment. The optional protocol imposes the establishment of an independent National Preventative Mechanism to ensure that international standards are met. By ratifying the optional protocol, the United Nations Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture is also allowed to conduct inspections and provide recommendations to the states on a confidential basis. [Australian Human Rights Commission]

Indonesia: Victims of modern slavery up for interrogation

(bs) Indonesian police and the national rights commission will be allowed to interrogate alleged victims of modern slavery and forced labor after being found in cages in the home of a graft suspect who was arrested in mid-January. The authorities currently have the man in custody on corruption charges for demanding payments from private contractors in several infrastructure construction projects.

The police found the cages and the victims in the man's house during the operations leading to his arrest for corruption. The man built two domestic iron-barred prison cells to accommodate between 2,000-3,000 people who were allegedly forced to work at a palm oil plantation while being locked, beaten, rarely fed, and not paid. The authorities immediately began a separate investigation on modern slavery, forced labor, and human trafficking. [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1] [The Jakarta Post]

Malaysia: Political tensions rise as Johor's 16th state poll approaches

(avdv) Several disputes on a national level began immediately after the Sultan of Malaysia ordered to dissolve prematurely the Johor State Legislative Assembly on 22 January. New elections are expected in March. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4] [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1]

All political parties planning to run in the new elections have already started their political campaign with Johor being the first state to implement the new automatic voter registration and the reduction of the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years. [Malay Mail 1]

The Johor assembly is currently the 4th biggest legislative assembly among the 13 Malay states. [Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia: The 'controversial' nature of the Sabah Forest carbon credit agreement

(avdv/bs) Sabah's Deputy Chief Minister saw himself compelled to reiterate that a disputed Nature Conservation Agreement (NCA), a 100-year agreement on forest conservation through carbon credit trading, did not involve any sale or collateral assets of forest land in response to the accusations moved by opposition political leaders.

They claim that, by the agreement 2 million hectares of forest were to be "handed over" to a Singapore-based company. The NCA was signed in October 2021 between Sabah and a Singapore-based shell company, Hoch Standards prompting criticism over its "controversial and secretive" nature [Free Malaysia Today 1]. According to the critics, there has been no proper public consultation, nor have affected indigenous people been taken into consideration.

Moreover, the area covered by the deal is claimed to be not specified, making its revenue calculations unclear. [Al Jazeera] [Malay Mail] [New Straits Times 1]

The criticism is, however, also rejected by Parti Warisan Sabah, or Heritage party, a multiracial political party, whose president ensured that the NCA had been legitimately approved for implementation in the Sabah Legislative Assembly. [New Straits Times 2]

Malaysia: Reinforced border patrolling in Kelantan and Borneo

(avdv) The Internal Security and Public Order Department decided to send a commando team to reinforce security in Sabah's east coast, on the Borneo island, to prevent illegal activities of the Philippine based Abu Sayyaf militant group. [Free Malaysia Today] [Malay Mail 1]

In parallel, the police also decided to reinforce border patrolling in the state of Kelantan, on the Malay-Thai border, due to migrant smuggling and illegal immigration that have been long-term continuous concerns [Malay Mail 2] [Malay Mail 3]. This enhanced border patrolling also follows the potential reopening of the Thailand borders after their closing due to the pandemic. [New Straits Times]

Myanmar: Commemoration of the 2021 coup and international condemnation of the military regime

(bs) On February 1, Myanmar marked one year since the military took power by a coup d'etat and arrested senior members of the elected government. In the country, the population ran the third silent strike since the coup in 2021, while two people were killed by a grenade attack on a pro-military rally against the nationwide silent strikes. [The Jakarta Post]

During the week that preceded the anniversary, authorities warned the population of tougher punishments for those who supported or engaged in strikes or protests, including the risk of a life sentence in prison. The junta also forced the shop owners to keep their business open regardless of potential strikes and arrested at least 70 shop owners for announcing their intention to stay close in support of the silent strike.

While Human Rights Watch defined the military's actions as "crimes against humanity," high representatives of the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the United States (US) expressed their concern and condemned the military regime after over 14 million people sought humanitarian help over the coup's consequences. Rights groups have specifically called the EU to impose sanctions that target the natural gas sector in Myanmar, one of the major sources of income of the military junta. According to the government's estimation for 2021-2022, the regime is expected to earn $1.5 billion from offshore and gas projects. [DW]

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has urged the immediate cessation of violence and return to democracy, comparing ongoing conflict to a civil war and calling on the UN Security Council to take "stronger action" on the junta to restore human rights and democracy. She said that the international response was "ineffectual" as it "lacks a sense of urgency commensurate to the magnitude of the crisis" and shared her concerns over the threats the conflict might pose to the regional stability. [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1] [Radio Free Asia]

Meanwhile, the UN Security Council pushed for diplomatic talks to resolve the situation in Myanmar and for the release of those arbitrarily detained, especially sharing concerns on the continuous imposition of a state of emergency by the junta, which according to political analysts might aim to a full annihilation of the country [Reuters 1]. The Council was also urged to impose an arms embargo by a rights organization operating in Myanmar since 2013. [Aljazeera]

The US, on the same occasion, expressed its intention to continue to impose sanctions on Myanmar's military junta and its supporters, including people and organizations connected with Myanmar's military. [Reuters 2]

Over the past year, authorities killed over 1,500 and arrested over 8,000 mostly during nonviolent anti-junta rallies, according to a Thai association for political prisoners. Moreover, since the 2021 coup, the military junta has arrested about 115 journalists, of whom 44 are still in detention. Three more were recently killed allegedly by the military. One of the victims died during interrogation by the authorities after being arrested in December for filming a protest in Yangon, Myanmar's major city. The military has increasingly repressed media freedoms since the coup and forced journalists

to silence, some of them also fled the country for safety. [The Guardian]

Myanmar: Deadly clashes across the country continue

(bs/ny) After the military carried out airstrikes against a People's Defense Force (PDF) militia's graduation ceremony three days earlier, 11 more victim's bodies were found. The PDF is the armed wing of the major junta-opposition group, the National Unity Government, which claims to be the legitimate government of Myanmar. The January 31 airstrike killed at least 20 civilians. Meanwhile, more airstrikes across the country forced thousands of civilians to flee their homes.

Moreover, on January 31, junta soldiers blazed houses in two villages in Sagaing Region, in central Myanmar, destroying over 400 homes and forcing around 10,000 people to flee. [Radio Free Asia]

During the same week, the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram received around 8,149 refugees fleeing from Myanmar following reported firing and bombing across three villages in Chin state, at the Indian border. There military has allegedly torched 100 buildings over a three-day fight. [Myanmar Now]

While Mizoran's chief minister urged to guarantee asylum to the refugees, officials said that India will not be able to grant them "refugee status" as the country is not a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and its protocol. [The Economic Times] [The Print]

Meanwhile, in Kachin State, Myanmar's northernmost state, the Kachin Independence Army, one of Myanmar's major ethnic armed resistance groups, and local junta-opposition groups attacked over 5 military bases and a police station on the day of the coup's one-year anniversary on February 1. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Myanmar's shadow government to withdraw objections before International Court of Justice

(bs) The National Unity Government (NUG), Myanmar's shadow government, announced the intention to withdraw preliminary objections to the charges of genocide against the Rohingya ethnic minority brought

before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial body of the United Nations (UN) in charge of settling legal disputes submitted by states in accordance with international law. [International Court of Justice]

The NUG also requested to represent Myanmar in place of the military junta in the criminal proceedings before the ICJ. In 2019, Gambia brought before the ICJ charges of genocide and crimes against humanity against Myanmar for persecuting and expelling Rohingya people from the country. While Gambia accused Myanmar of violating the 1948 Genocide Convention, former democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi defended Myanmar's actions claiming that the violations occurred during counter-terrorism operations denying any intentions of committing genocide. [Radio Free Asia]

The Rohingya ethnic minority is the group that represents the largest percentage of Muslims in Myanmar. Due to their cultural differences with the majority of the Myanmar Buddhist community and their history of living at the Bangladesh border, the group has been a victim of abuses and exclusion by Myanmar. Also, the Rohingya are not recognized as an official ethnic group by their country and have been denied citizenship since 1982, causing them to become the largest stateless population in the world. Since then, the group has been forced to flee Myanmar in small waves until 2017, when violence broke out in the Rakhine state, western region, in an attempt to expel the minority from the country leading over 1 million people to flee and seek refuge in Bangladesh and Malaysia. [BBC] [UNHCR]

Myanmar: New trial for former democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi

(ny) Former government head Aung San Suu Kyi will face a new trial, starting on February 14, for allegedly influencing Myanmar's election commission during the 2020 elections, when the National League for Democracy (NLD) party, of which she was the leader, won over the military-based opposition. The court will decide on a potential violation of Section 130-A of the Penal Code for improper influence in an electoral process.

Several other members of the national electoral commission have also been arrested and accused of backing Suu Kyi's alleged fraud. [Mizzima]

Suu Kyi has already been accused of multiple alleged violations that were brought before the court in at least 12 separate trials, for bribery and incitement among others. If convicted in all 12 cases, she might face over 150 years in prison. [Reuters]

Following the accusation of unlawful interference with the 2020 elections, the military junta has promised to hold another poll by mid-2023 if the country will be able to restore "peace and stability," and thus leave its state of emergency. [Aljazeera]

Myanmar: Australia urges immediate release of detained economist

(bs) The Australian government called Myanmar to immediately release and deport a professor and Australian citizen who was incarcerated a few days after the coup in February 2021, for allegedly violating Myanmar's Official Secrets Act by attempting to leave the country with sensitive information on the state's economic situation.

The university associate professor and author of a book on the history of Myanmar's financial development worked with local economists and politicians and also held the position of an economic-policy advisor for the Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy Party. [The Diplomat]

Myanmar: Families disown junta-opponent relatives

(bs) An increased number of families have been posting notices in national newspapers to disown those relatives who have opposed the junta's government. The motives are allegedly connected to related threats coming from the military to confiscate properties and arrest those who protect opponents, especially family members of opposition activists. [South China Morning Post]

Myanmar: Norway-based telecom company provides junta with sensitive data

(bs) The Norway-based telecommunication company Telenor, the leading phone operator in Myanmar, has

allegedly shared sensitive data of customers with the military junta since the coup on February 1, 2021.

Telenor has provided the junta with call histories, phone numbers, and arbitrary termination of contracts with several customers upon request by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, which based its requests on Article 77 of the 2013 Telecommunications Law, according to which the ministry can suspend services, intercept communications, and temporarily control services in "emergency situations". However, the company was concerned that the data requested was based on information obtained through torture during interrogations of political detainees, according to an anonymous source.

The company is currently finalizing negotiations with a military-linked company to sell its Myanmar unit. [Myanmar Now]

The Philippines: Senate to file petition for criminal charges against members of energy body

(bs) The Senate is seeking to file criminal and administrative charges against 12 members of the Department of Energy (DOE), including the Energy Secretary Alfonso Cusi, for the adoption of the arguable approval of the sale of a 45-percent stake in a major gas project to the biggest presidential campaign contributor of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2016. The Senate, while urging the DOE members involved to resign from their official positions, reiterated that the DOE decision threatened the country's energy security and urged the Ombudsman and the Civil Service Commission (CSC) to receive the files on the alleged charges as soon as possible.

According to a senator, Cusi and the other 11 members of the DOE should be charged for "gross neglect of duty and grave misconduct in evaluating and approving the transaction," and for violating the Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act for allowing the transfer of the controlling stake in the gas project. Also, the senator shared concerns over the inconsistent application of a Presidential Decree and a DOE Department Circular, according to which "any transfer of an interest in the government's energy assets requires prior government approval, which should weigh the legal, technical and financial capability of the transferee."

On the other hand, the involved private corporation that allegedly received the sale stated that since the transaction regarded private purchase of shares, the approval of the DOE was not required. The firm also received full support from President Rodrigo Duterte, who reiterated that the national interest was not threatened and that the transaction was of a private nature with no further approval required. [Inquirer] [Reuters]

The Philippines: Marcos's presidential candidacy sparks fear and dissent

(bs) Former political prisoners and civil society groups have assembled in protest of the presidential candidacy of the late dictator's son Ferdinand Marcos Jr., starting a campaign against the return to power of the family that ruled the country from 1965 to 1986. The group fears the return of martial law and the quick spread of human rights violations in the country if Marcos wins the elections. [Rappler]

During the dictatorship under Ferdinand Marcos Sr., thousands of Filipino citizens were imprisoned, tortured, killed, and forcibly disappeared. International and national institutions, including the United States 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in 1995 and the Supreme Court in 2003, also recognized the abuses of the regime. A national law on human rights victims' reparation and recognition also acknowledged gross rights violations under Marcos's regime and established a victim board that would provide compensation for the 11,103 people recognized as victims of human rights violations during the dictatorship.

Vice President and presidential candidate for the country's Stalinist Communist Party Maria Leonor "Leni" Robredo also expressed her opposition to a possible political unification with presidential candidate Marcos Jr. if he does not acknowledge abuses and human rights violations committed during his father's dictatorship. In an interview, she reiterated her zero-tolerance policy for corruption and abuses.

Robredo then mentioned Marcos's conviction for not serving a court order issued in 1995 on a case of unpaid taxes, which could prevent the candidate from becoming a public official under Section 253 of the National Internal Revenue Code. According to the law, "a government official who violates the tax code would be dismissed from the public service and perpetually disqualified from holding any public office, to vote and

to participate in any election" [see AiR No. 2, January/2022, 2].

While the case, among others, is still pending a decision, religious groups called the Commission on Election (Comelec) for an immediate ruling, backing former Comelec commissioner Rowena Guanzon in her accusation of an alleged conspiracy to delay the decision. [Interaksyon]

Guazon, now also a candidate for the position of Deputy Ombudsman for the Visayas island, faced the risk of having her dissenting vote nullified due to it taking place a few days before her retirement day. [PNA GOV.PH] [Inquirer]

Robredo and Marcos have already run against each other for political reasons twice before, including in the vice-presidential race in 2016. On both occasions, Robredo defeated her opponent. [Philstar]

The Philippines: New law to combat online abuse amended

(bs) The Philippines have approved new legislation on social media user registration in an attempt to combat abuse and online misinformation, or so-called 'fake news'. The new regulation, after the final presidential approval, would require social media users to disclose personal data like phone numbers when registering new accounts. The objective is to trace online activities of potential abusers by reducing the number of anonymous or false accounts and punish those who violate the law with jail sentences or high fines. The law also requires registration by the owners of a phone SIM card.

Critics believe that the legislation has strategically come only three months ahead of the presidential election in May that will be likely campaigned also on social media by supporters of each political party as past experiences have shown. In 2016 Rodrigo Duterte won the elections allegedly helped by a strong social media campaign that also included cases of misinformation. [Reuters] [The Diplomat]

The Philippines: Military to displace troops to combat political violence

(bs) The Philippines' army has announced the displacement of troops in the central region of Visayas

to protect the area from further politically-motivated violence by "private armed groups" hired by local politicians in light of the upcoming presidential elections in May.

According to local authorities, about half of the 155 private armed groups (PAGs) that are currently operating across the country threaten and intimidate voters with the use of violence. PAGs are constitutionally-banned organized groups hired by politicians to intimidate political opponents. The long-running firearm culture in the country might be the cause of the existence of PAGs since the early 1960s, according to the authorities.

The Communist New People's Army (NPA) guerrillas, which began its operations in 1969 and counts approximately 5,000 militants in the Philippines, has been leading one of "Asia's longest-running insurgencies." In 2017, President Rodrigo Duterte stopped peace talks with the group after its rebel wing allegedly carried out deadly attacks in violation of the negotiation terms. [Benar News]

The Philippines: Two people killed in clashes with terrorist group

(bs) Two people were killed in armed clashes between the military and members of the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in the Philippines' southern province of Sulu.

The ASG is a militant group associated with the Islamic State terrorist organization that committed a number of terrorist attacks in the Philippines over the past thirty years, the major one being an explosion on a passenger ferry that killed 116 people in 2004. [ANI News]

The Philippines: United Nations increases funds for typhoon victims

(bs) The United Nations (UN) has announced to increase the target of its fundraising to $169 million, from the original $107.2 million, to aid victims of the deadly typhoon that devastated the Philippines in December, causing over 400 deaths and leaving hundreds of thousands of people homeless. The funds aim to assist approximately 840,000 people and humanitarian aid remains a priority to the UN,

according to the UN Resident Coordinator in the Philippines. [Philstar]

The decision came in parallel with the release of an appeal for aid, titled Humanitarian Action for Children, by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which urged the Philippine government to increase its efforts to implement the agency's recommendations and a resilience-building program. The appeal also calls for allocating $39.8 million towards humanitarian aid that would help 492,000 people and 293,000 children. [UNICEF]

Singapore: Singapore meets with UN General Assembly president

(bs) President of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Abdulla Shahid met Singaporean leaders during a two-day visit to Singapore. The parties agreed that multilateral cooperation is essential to tackle global issues including climate change, sustainable development, and economic recovery. Moreover, Singapore's foreign minister renewed his support of Mr. Abdulla's plans during his presidency. He especially mentioned the upcoming 40th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Unclos) as an occasion for international leaders to reaffirm peaceful cooperation and renew their commitments to maintain maritime security. [The Straits Times]

Thailand: Constitutional Court rules on confiscation deadline in anti-corruption law

(bs) The Constitutional Court has ruled the constitutionality of Section 81 of the 1999 Law on the National Counter Corruption Commission (NACC) that allows petitions to request asset seizures to be deposited before the commission within 90 days from the discovery of a suspect.

The case was brought before the court by the director-general of the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) after the NACC filed a lawsuit against him for allegedly violating the anti-graft law. According to the filed accusations, the man was suspiciously wealthy and was allegedly falsifying his asset and liabilities declaration.

The director-general also received a one-year prison sentence by the Supreme Court in 2019 for "unfairly" transferring an official of the Department of Special Investigation. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government 'could fall' over poll bills, deputy prime minister says

(bs) The failure to clear the parliament of the two organic laws on the general elections might lead not only to structural changes in the House of Representatives, which might be dissolved, but also to the prime minister's resignation, according to Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam.

The parliament is expected to decide on two organic laws that would amend the election system in February, namely the Political Parties Act and the Election of Member of the Parliaments (MPs) Act. They rule on an increase in the number of constituency MPs from 350 to 400 and a decrease in the number of list MPs from 150 to 100. The laws also regulate a two-ballot election system for future elections rather than the single ballot used in the 2019 general election. [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1]

However, the approval process of bills encountered resistance in the last two House meetings, which collapsed for lack of quorum. A group of opposition MPs despite being present in the House refused to declare their presence at the moment of the count in an alleged attempt to boycott the session.

Following the recent loss of 21 members in the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), including secretary-general Thamanat Prompow, the parliament's credibility faced several critics from politicians and political analysts. The 21 members were expelled after losing two by-elections and being accused of "serious unethical behavior" [see AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4].

Within this framework, an MP from Pheu Thai, the biggest party represented in the House, that opposed the boycott, also questioned the legitimacy of current Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha. The Prime Minister, however, renewed his intention to maintain his position as long as the law allows [Bangkok Post 1].

In an attempt to re-establish order, a speaker of the House urged MPs to take their responsibility to serve the country in their political and legislative roles seriously by participating in the House meetings. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3] [The Star]

Thailand: Former deputy prime minister might run for Prime Minister

(kc) A new economy-centered political party, Sang Anakhot Thai Party, which translates as Building Thailand's Future Party, called on former Deputy Prime Minister Somkid Jatusripitak to be the party's candidate to run in the next general elections expected to be held by March 2023, when the current government's term expires. To date, the party has not released any official decision yet. It has been waiting for Mr. Somkid's response before announcing its finalized candidate list. [Bangkok Post]

The new party was launched on January 19 by the former finance minister and former leader of the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) Uttama Savanayana together with a former PPRP secretary-general and ex-energy minister [see No. 4, January/2022, 4].

Thailand: Former deputy attorney general applies for anti-corruption body while under disciplinary investigation

(bs) The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) did not receive with favor a new-membership application from former deputy attorney-general Nate Naksuk, who is still awaiting a decision over a hit-and-run incident in 2012 that killed one person. A committee was formed last year to conduct serious disciplinary investigations into Mr. Nate's decision to drop charges against Red Bull scion Vorayuth for involuntary murder caused by reckless driving. An outcome is expected on February 15. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government to establish three centers to tackle 'fake news'

(ay) In a latest effort to tighten government control over the dissemination of false information on social media, the cabinet has approved a draft of a Prime Minister's Office regulation which will establish three centers to tackle the issue.

The centers will be in charge of detecting fake news and alerting the public while informing the Department of Public Relations within one hour from the discovery.

They also would take legal actions against those who spread the detected fake news. [Bangkok Post]

In 2021, the government also attempted to further regulate the government's control over the internet by drafting new regulations under the Computer Crimes Act, that would strengthen state control over social media. The proposals met with critics from rights groups that argued a violation of freedom of expression and privacy rights. [Article 19]

Thailand: Lao activist granted bail

(bs/kc) A Lao human rights activist, who was awaiting deportation while detained in Thailand for overstaying in the country, was released on bail after the United Nations and international rights group urged Thailand to release the man as he was granted "political refugee" status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The Lao activist, Mr. Khoukham Keomanivong, is a member of Free Laos, a rights group in Thailand that promotes human rights and democracy in Laos. He has been supporting groups of Lao students and workers in pro-democracy activities since 2002. [Radio Free Asia]

If deported, Mr. Khounkham, would risk arrest and enforced disappearance by Lao authorities. Laos has a long history of the enforced disappearance of pro-democracy and human rights activists. In 2012 Sombath Sompone, a rural development expert who advocated for human rights in Laos was abducted. In 2016 three Lao workers disappeared during a short visit to Laos to renew their passports. In 2019 a Free Laos activist went missing under "mysterious circumstances" while seeking refugee status in Thailand. [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1] [AiR No. 37, September/2019, 2]

Thailand: Three armed militants killed by soldiers

(ay) On February 3, three separatist militants were killed while breaking through security forces at a Koran learning center in the area of a mosque in Thailand's southern province of Songkhla's Chana district, according to the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC).

Following reports that showed the insurgents were hiding in a house behind the mosque, the authorities surrounded the suspected hideout and sent a negotiating team to persuade the remaining suspects to turn themselves in. [Bangkokbiznews, in Thai] However, three suspected insurgents opened fire, sparking a firefight as they attempted to flee. A fourth man remained hidden in the house and has subsequently agreed to surrender. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste: Human rights examined in Universal Periodic Review

(bs) The United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council's working group on Timor-Leste has released the periodical review document, called the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), of the nation's human rights record.

The United Kingdom, during the UPR session on Timor-Leste, recommended that the country ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to allocate funds to reduce gender-based violence, and provide adequate training to those who work for the protection against human trafficking. [Gov. UK]

Recommendations have been added in the final document along with the country's progress and obstacles in ensuring human rights, such as obstacles that Timor-Leste faced in effectively running the Commission on the Rights of the Child due to lack of human resources, or the progress made by the country in combatting corruption by promulgating new anti-corruption laws. [OHCHR 1]

The UPR is currently approaching the end of its third cycle since 2011. The Universal Periodic Review Working Group holds three sessions per year lasting two weeks each, during which 14 countries are reviewed aiming at reviewing all 193 countries members of the UN by the end of each UPR cycle lasting four to five years.

The latest UPR session terminated on February 4 with the release of reports on 12 countries including Timor-Leste, Togo, Syrian Arab Republic, Iceland, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, Lithuania, Uganda, Moldova, South Sudan, Haiti, and Sudan. [OHCHR 2]

Timor-Leste: Timor-Leste to ratify treaty on prohibition of nuclear weapons

(bs) The government of Timor-Leste has approved the ratification of the country's accession to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the first legally binding international agreement that aims at total elimination of nuclear weapons. The document not only aims to prohibit the use of such weapons but also their production, testing, and storage.

Timorese officials highlighted the importance of the country's accession to the treaty since it is officially an internationally-recognized sovereign country. The document will be forwarded to the parliament for final deliberation. [E-Global, in Portuguese]

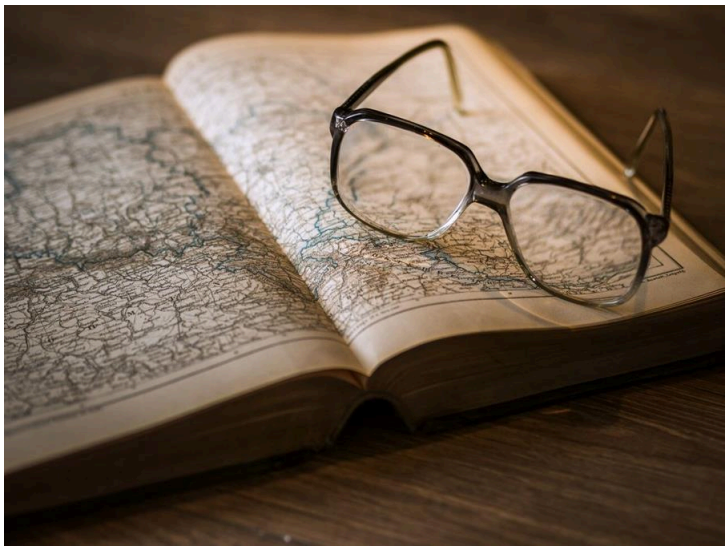
Vietnam: UNFPA approves a new aid program for Vietnam

(kc) The Executive Board of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has endorsed the new $26.5 million fund to Vietnam aiming to support the country to achieve the sustainable development goals by 2030.

The plan also aims at being "for all" by focusing on inclusive social development, governance, and access to justice. It is designed to achieve specific goals in each societal group, including enhancing child participation, youth development, effective disaster response. The final objective is to achieve "zero preventable maternal death, zero unmet need for family planning, and zero gender-based violence and other harmful practices against women and girls." [Vietnam Times]

This is the 10th country program since the UNFPA's first Vietnam engagement in 1977, with a current focus on strengthening health systems to provide universal access to sexual and reproductive health services for youth, ethnic minorities, and survivors of domestic violence. [UNFPA]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



US House of Representatives passes bill to strengthen competition with China

(dql) On Friday, February 4, the US House of Representatives passed majority the America COMPETES Act of 2022, a bill that aims at boosting US economic competitiveness with China. Center piece of the bill is the allocation of more than a quarter of a trillion US to attract semiconductor production in the US, to strengthen supply chains for high-tech products and to boost scientific research and innovation. Furthermore, it also includes motions addressing concerns over alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang, a crackdown on Hong Kong's democracy and tensions over Taiwan. [Lawfare]

China was quick to criticize the move, condemning the bill for being "filled with a Cold War and zero-sum mentality," that "undermines China's development paths and policies, champions the rhetoric of competing against China, and makes indiscreet remarks on Taiwan, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet." [South China Morning Post]

China backs Russia in standoff with in Ukraine

(xh) In a forceful show of unity and closed ranks between China and Russia amid both countries' mounting tensions with the West on multiple fronts, Beijing expressed its support for Moscow in the latter's standoff with Ukraine.

According to a joint statement following a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin met on Friday, February 4,

both countries “oppose further enlargement of NATO,” and urge the alliance “to abandon its ideologized cold war approaches,” with China backing Russia’s demands for “long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe.” [Kremlin, Russia] [Al Jazeera]

Similarly, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi confirmed China’s “understanding and support” for Russia’s position on security vis-à-vis the US and NATO in his meeting with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov a day earlier. [Reuters 1]

It was the first face-to-face meeting of Xi with a world leader in more than two years and came hours before the commencement of the Beijing Winter Olympics on which the US government and other Western governments have placed a diplomatic boycott citing human rights violation in China.

Prior to the meeting, Putin, who was among those heads of state and heads of governments, attending the opening ceremony of the Games, called Sino-Russian ties “of truly unprecedented nature,” and an “example of a dignified relationship.” He also unveiled a series of agreements, including a new gas deal under which China will receive ten billion cubic metres of gas annually, in a latest sign of growing Sino-Russia energy cooperation and Moscow’s diversification of export markets from Europe to Asia. [NDTV] [South China Morning Post]

The gas deal comes as the US and the European Union announced on Monday, February 7, to cooperate to secure gas supplies in times of disruptions in pipeline gas flows, with US Secretary of State referring to “supply shocks” that “could result from further Russian aggression against Ukraine.” Russia is the largest supplier of natural gas to Europe, with Russian gas accounting for some 40 percent of Europe’s natural gas. [Reuters 2]

China-US relations: Washington counter’s Beijing trade restrictions on Lithuania

(xh) During its visit to Lithuania last week, a senior US delegation met Lithuanian ministers to discuss the implementation of a US$600 million agreement aimed at strengthening trade, in a sign of US solidarity with the Baltic state that is has been facing trade restrictions from China ever since it allowed Taiwan last year to open a representative office with “Taiwanese” in its name instead of the usual “Taipei”.

The move comes shortly after the European Commission (EC) late last month formally filled a complaint with the Word Trade Organization against Beijing's trade restrictions imposed on Lithuania. [VOA] [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1].

China issues security alert warning after military takeover in Burkina Faso

(xh) China has issued a security alert warning for Burkina Faso, calling on its citizens to take precautions.

The warning comes after a military group, calling itself Patriotic Movement for Safeguarding and Restoration, announced on January 24 to have taken over power in the West African country, with the government and the national assembly dissolved, the constitution suspended and a curfew put in place shortly after.

In 2020, Kaboré was elected a second time as president. His government has been facing regular protests due to the handling of the ongoing jihadi crisis in the country that since 2015 has seen 2,000 deaths and displacement of 1.5 million people. On 22 January 2022, anti-government protests erupted in the capital over the discontent with the government's failure to stop armed attacks across the country. The government and national assembly were dissolved and the constitution suspended, they said, as they also announced an overnight curfew. [South China Morning Post] [Al Jazeera]

In 2018 the country severed ties with Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

On Friday, February 4, diplomats met with the head of the military group, with Chinese ambassador announcing that China will make its contribution in order to restore peace and security in the country. [Africa News]

China sends food supplies to Afghanistan

(xh) In a latest sign of efforts to secure a deeper foothold in Afghanistan, China has shipped more than a thousand tons of food to the Central Asian country which is facing a huge humanitarian crisis since the takeover of the Taliban.

In August 2021, after the withdrawal of the American troops, the Taliban took over Kabul once again but now is struggling to ensure food to the Afghan population. Most international funding and foreign aid have been suspended since the Taliban came to power. Even though China has not recognized the Taliban government, it has repeatedly offered aid to Afghanistan, including an announcement of a US$31 million donation in aid in September and an agreement on imports of Afghan pine nuts. [South China Morning Post]

China suspends meet imports from Australia

(xh) China has announced that it has suspended beef imports from Teys, an Australian slaughterhouse, apparently due to the high number of Covid cases in Teys's Naracoorte plant in South Australia.

China is trying to maintain a zero-Covid policy and has been concerned that the virus could enter China through imported food. Internationally, so far China has suspended 138 meat processing facilities. Teys is the tenth Australian abattoir that lost its license to trade with China since the start of the pandemic, and the suspension of its beef imports in China adds to strained Sino-Australian trade relations that has been spiraling downward since Australia requested an investigation into the origins of Covid-19 in China in 2020. [South China Morning Post] [ABC News]

Japan's Lower House adopts resolution on human rights situation in China

(dql) On Tuesday, February 1, Japan's Lower House passed a resolution that voices concern over the human rights situation in China's Xinjiang province, Tibet, Hong Kong and Inner Mongolia, and urged the government to constructively engage on right issues in China.

It is believed that the resolution's wording was eventually watered down after discussions, in an attempt to avoid direct accusations of rights abuses against Beijing. [France 24]

Japan too reliant on Chinese imports, survey says

(dql) According to findings of a Japanese government survey on the origin countries of imports for 2019, Japan is excessively reliant on imports from China, making the country vulnerable to supply and transportation disruptions in China.

The survey found out that for more than 2,600 items, Japan received over half from a single country. China was origin country for more than 1,100 of the products, with 99 percent of all laptops and tablet computers shipped to Japan imported from China. Cell phones stood at 86 percent, computer parts at 62 percent. [NHK]

Japan's House of Representatives adopts pro-Ukraine resolution

(dql) Japan's Lower House on Tuesday, February 8, passed a resolution in which it expressed solidarity with Ukraine and urged the countries involved to restore stability in the region through diplomacy as soon as possible, declaring that "any change in the status quo by force is unacceptable." [Japan Times 1]

The resolution came a few days after the US had asked Japan if it could divert some LNG to Europe in case the Ukraine conflict would cause supply disruption. Japan responded that it would consider in which way it would be able to help. [Reuters]

Japan has also been reportedly urged by the US to take into consideration economic sanctions against Moscow in case of a Russian invasion in Ukraine, with Tokyo deferring its response to the request, out of fear of possible ramifications on controversial issues with Russia, including a long-standing territorial dispute over the Kuril Islands. [Japan Times 2]

South Korea protests Japan's application for UNESCO World Heritage List designation of controversial gold mine

(dql) During a phone with his Japanese counterpart on Thursday, February 3, South Korea's Foreign Minister Chung Eui-yong protested against Japan's decision two days earlier to apply for a UNESCO World Heritage List

designation for the gold mine on the island of Sado, which is associated with the wartime abuse of Korean laborers. [Korea Herald] [AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1]

UN panel allows South Korean civic group to ship COVID-19 aid to North Korea

(dql) A committee on North Korea sanctions United Nations Security Council has approved a sanctions exemption for the civic organization Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation Research Center enabling it to send anti-coronavirus equipment to the North Korea for one year, including 20 thermal imaging cameras aimed to help Pyongyang stave off the spread of COVID-19. [Yonhap News Agency]

US lawmakers push for renaming Taiwan representative office

(eb) A bipartisan initiative in the US Senate and House of Representatives, launched on February 3, includes a clause that urged US President Joe Biden to negotiate the change of name of the Taiwanese de-facto embassy in Washington, proposing to change the name from "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office" (TECRO) to "Taiwan Representative Office". [Reuters]

The legislative move is a latest sign of a growing consensus among US lawmakers to deepen US-Taiwanese ties.

Taiwan not approached by US to divert gas to Europe

(eb) According to Taiwan's Economy Ministry, Taiwan was not approached by the US about diverting supplies of its reserve of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to Europe should the military tensions in Ukraine escalate and result in a disruption of the flow to Europe from Russia [Reuters 1]

The United States have asked Qatar [Reuters 2], one of the largest LNG producers, and Japan [Reuters 3] to provide for LNG to Europe.

Taiwan receives LNG from ten different countries, managing to differentiate its sources and aims at

increasing the energy production derived by LNG in the near future.

Taiwanese/German US$5 billion chip deal fails to receive German ministry's clearance

(eb) Germany's Economic Ministry effectively did not allow the US$4.9 billion acquisition of German wafer company Siltronic by Taiwanese firm Global Wafers after it failed to meet the deadline for clearance of the deal. The ministry cited for the failure delayed receipt of the antitrust approval by Chinese authorities. [CNBC]

GlobalWafers specializes in the production of wafers, tiny pieces of silicon required to produce the microchips upon which high-tech manufacturing worldwide is based. In December 2020 it signed an agreement to acquire Siltronic, which also specialized in that field. [Digital Journal]

Meanwhile, Taiwan's latest financial statistics showed that bilateral trade between Germany and Taiwan in 2021 stood at US$ 20.7 billion, marking a record high and an increase of 27.5% compared to 2020. Germany retained the place as most important trading partner of Taiwan in Europe with Taiwan exporting mainly high-tech machineries and components and importing machinery and electrical equipment. [Focus Taiwan]

China warns Slovakian politician of visit to Taiwan

(eb) Karol Galek, Second State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy of Slovakia said during an interview of February 5 that he was warned by China to cancel his visit to Taiwan last December.

The visit by Galek and 43 entrepreneurs to Taiwan resulted in the signing of nine different memorandums of understanding of bilateral trade, education and scientific research. According to Galek, China dissuaded his visit as it believed that there was a hidden agenda detached from economic relations. The Secretary reassured many times Chinese officials that the results of the visit confirms that there was not any other intention. [Taiwan News]

Cross-strait relations: Chinese warplanes enter Taiwanese ADIZ

(eb) On February 5, two military warplanes – a Shaanxi Y-8 reconnaissance plane and one Shaanxi Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft – entered Taiwan's Aerial Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). In response radio warning were given and the air defense missile system was deployed to track the two planes. Since the new year has started, 145 Chinese aircrafts entered Taiwan's ADIZ. [Taiwan News 1]

Meanwhile, after an unidentified drone was seen by local people flying over the Dongyin Island on the same day, Taiwan's military launched an investigation. Suspicions that it was a Chinese UAV, has yet to be confirmed. [Taiwan News 2]

China, Pakistan ink new CPEC framework agreement

(lm) During a four-day visit to China by Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan, the two countries on January 4 signed a new agreement on industrial cooperation under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework, as Islamabad is signaling a progressive shift in its foreign policy away from the United States.

Khan and seven ministers overseeing areas such as foreign policy, finance, and national security had traveled to China the previous day to attend the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics and meet with Chinese leaders. The Pakistani prime minister was the first foreign leader to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping in person since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Voice of America]

Last week's agreement followed Prime Minister Khan's meeting with He Lifeng, Chairman of China's macroeconomic management agency, the National Development and Reform Commission. The industrial cooperation agreement is a key part of what is being called "phase two" of CPEC which centers around the development and industrialization of Special Economic Zones. The first phase primarily involved Chinese investments in Pakistani energy projects as well as road infrastructure. [Dawn] [The Hindu]

Under the agreement, Islamabad also agreed to include the much-delayed Gwadar power plant in its highest priority schemes for clearance of electricity purchase dues, besides provision of enhanced security

to Chinese citizens working in the port city. [The Express Tribune]

Beijing is arguably Islamabad's closest ally, and their all-weather friendship – fueled in great part by their shared rivalry with India – has strengthened in recent weeks as exemplified by the Pakistani acquisition of Chinese fighter jets last December [see AiR No. 1, January/2022, 1].

However, on the economic side, there is some strain. CPEC, which aims to link the Pakistani deep-water port of Gwadar to China's landlocked western Xinjiang border region, has lost momentum.

Beijing, for its part, worries about security risks, as separatists in Pakistan's Baluchistan province wage an insurgency and accuse Beijing of exploiting the region's natural resources at the expense of locals. Islamabad recently agreed to pay $11 million in compensation to the families of 36 Chinese nationals who died or were injured in a terrorist attack last year, removing a major diplomatic bone of contention between the two countries [see AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]. [South China Morning Post]

Faced with a host of economic challenges, including high inflation and diminishing foreign reserves, Pakistan in turn is reluctant to take on new Chinese loans. Beijing has already placed around $11 billion with Islamabad in the shape of commercial loans and foreign exchange reserves support initiatives. [Deutsche Welle] [The Express Tribune]

Pakistan's Prime Minister Khan to visit Russia later this month

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan is set to undertake a crucial visit to Russia later this month, the first by a Pakistani premier in over two decades, *The Express Tribune* reported, quoting diplomatic sources.

Khan's upcoming trip to Moscow assumes added significance, because it is indicative of a progressive shift in Islamabad's foreign policy away from the United States. US President Joe Biden has not held a telephonic discussion with the Pakistani premier since the former assumed office in January 2021.

By contrast, since 2011, contacts between Russia and Pakistan have intensified through a number of high-profile visits from both civilian and military leaders. In 2014, the two countries signed a defence agreement, followed in 2016 by the "Druzhba 2016" (Friendship

2016) joint military exercises, which have been repeated annually since.

Prime Minister Khan and his Russian counterpart, President Vladimir Putin, spoke on the telephone in mid-January – their second conversation in four months – to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. The two leaders also discussed the status of the $2.5 billion PakStream Gas Pipeline project that will secure the delivery of 12.3 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year from import terminals in Karachi and Gwadar to the city of Lahore in Punjab Province. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

Pakistan condemns use of Afghan soil by Taliban militants after cross-border firing kills 5 Pakistan troops

(lm) In a first since the Taliban rulers of neighboring Afghanistan seized power last year, Pakistan's military has issued a strong statement condemning the usage of Afghan soil as a base of operations for terrorists to launch attacks on Pakistan. [Dawn]

Release of the statement on February 6 came hours after militants firing from inside Afghanistan killed at least five Pakistani soldiers at a border post in north-western Kurram district. The Pakistan Taliban, known by their acronym TTP, claimed responsibility for the attack. [Reuters]

Although Pakistan has long been one of the Afghan Taliban's most important advocates, the group's seizure of power in August of last year has unleashed a wave of hardline forces that Prime Minister Khan's government is struggling to control, on and within Pakistan's border.

Most concerning has been a rise in attacks by the TTP, which is ideologically aligned with but separate from the Afghan Taliban. In light of this, Islamabad negotiated a one-month ceasefire with the group in November, hoping to pave the way for substantive peace talks. But the militants refused to extend the agreement, arguing that the government had not honoured conditions such as releasing dozens of prisoners. [AiR No. 50, December/2021, 2]

In the weeks that followed, tensions between the Afghan Taliban and Islamabad started to run high over the installation of a security fence Pakistan had been constructing since 2017 along the Afghan border – known as the Durand Line – to reduce cross-border

militancy and smuggling. In response, in a series of choreographed, well-publicized incidents, Afghan Taliban fighters dismantled poles and barbed wire erected by Pakistan, accompanied by denunciations from their leaders [see AiR No. 1, January/2022, 1].

Against this backdrop, a high-level Pakistani delegation headed by National Security Advisor Moeed Yusuf visited Kabul earlier this month. But the top security official was only able to negotiate a bilateral coordination mechanism to facilitate border crossing movement and trade; the border fence issue remained unaddressed [see AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1].

India joins diplomatic boycott of Beijing Winter Olympics over China's torchbearer

(lm) India on February 3 announced it would join the US-led diplomatic boycott of the Winter Olympics in Beijing after China included a People's Liberation Army (PLA)'s soldier involved in a deadly border clash between the two countries as an Olympic torchbearer in the customary torch relay ahead of the Opening Ceremonies. [The Washington Post]

Qi Fabao, a PLA regiment commander who suffered a head injury when Chinese and Indian troops battled in hand-to-hand combat on the disputed Himalayan frontier in June 2020, acted as one of 1,200 torchbearers in a ceremonial relay last week [see AiR No. 24, June/2020, 3]. New Delhi has acknowledged 20 dead and China has acknowledged four dead in the fighting and later gave the honorary title of Hero of Defending the Border to Qi and to the four Chinese soldiers who died in the skirmish.

India's withdrawal — and China's decision to include the PLA commander — threatens to prolong the two-year dispute between the two neighboring countries that began with a series of confrontations along the high-altitude border and has led to an entrenched military buildup. Military commanders from the two sides have held 14 rounds of talks to defuse border disagreements, with limited progress [see AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3].

The United States, Canada, Australia and Britain are among the countries that have announced diplomatic boycotts to protest alleged Chinese human rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong, making official attendance by heads of state and diplomats very political.

‘Sri Lanka-China ties don’t detract from special relations with India, foreign minister says

(lm) While embarking on a three-day official visit to India, Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister G.L Peiris on January 7 said Colombo’s ties with Beijing would not in any way detract from the “special quality of the relationship” with New Delhi. [The Hindu]

Peiris’s trip to New Delhi, his first since his appointment last August, assumes added significance. For it comes after prominent Tamil legislators from Sri Lanka’s Northern and Eastern Provinces wrote to Indian Prime Minister Modi seeking New Delhi’s help in ensuring that Colombo addresses the island’s long-pending Tamil question with a lasting political solution.

Importantly, that letter coincided with an unprecedented effort by Beijing to extend its influence beyond Sri Lanka’s Sinhalese-speaking majority: China’s ambassador to Sri Lanka spent three days in December visiting the ethnic Tamils in their Jaffna Peninsula heartland, conducting what an Indian political analyst called a “soft-power blitzkrieg”. [South China Morning Post]

Peiris’s trip also follows on Sri Lanka signing a $500 million credit line with India’s Exim Bank to import refined petrol and diesel from Indian suppliers, as Colombo seeks to stave off rolling power cuts amid a foreign exchange crisis that has hampered purchases of diesel for power plants. [Reuters]

Early in December of last year, Sri Lanka’s Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa visited New Delhi, seeking comprehensive assistance from India to help Sri Lanka cope with depleting foreign reserves and shortages of essentials, including food, medicines, and fuel [see AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1]. India expedited assistance to Sri Lanka — by way of swaps, loan deferment and an emergency Line of Credit — after a crucial bilateral deal to jointly develop a strategic oil terminal located near Trincomalee Port was signed [see AiR No. 2, January/2022, 2].

United States does not want to impose wholesale sanctions on Bangladesh, key US congressman says

(ap) The chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks, has spoken highly of the United States' relationship with Bangladesh during a fundraising in New York late last month, and downplayed the significance of sanctions Washington placed on a top Bangladeshi security institution in December 2021. [The Business Standard]

Last December, the US Treasury Department imposed sanctions on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Bangladesh's elite paramilitary force, citing "serious human rights abuses." It also sanctioned the current director of the security force and five former senior RAB officials, including a travel ban on Benazir Ahmed, now Bangladesh's top police chief. [AiR No. 50, December/2021, 2]

In response, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen summoned Washington's envoy to Dhaka to protest the decision. Later the same month, the top diplomat also called his American counterpart Antony Blinken, underlining the RAB's role in curbing terrorism, drug trade and human trafficking. He followed up with a letter to the US official, renewing his request for a review of the sanctions.

Throughout these engagements, the senior US foreign-policy figures have praised the US-Bangladesh partnership, suggesting indeed that the sanctions decision was a one-off move focused on human rights, not a prelude to more confrontation.

IMF approves $1 billion loan for Pakistan, reviving bailout package

(tj/lm) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) on February 2 approved a $1 billion to Pakistan, thereby reviving a bailout package that had been suspended in June last year due to a delay in Islamabad's compliance with structural conditions. [Deutsche Welle]

Islamabad entered the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) with the IMF in 2019. However, after the multilateral lender had released a $500 million tranche in March – the third loan tranche under the 39-month loan program – talks in June to release further funds ended inconclusively [see AiR No. 24, June/2021, 3]. With the latest tranche, Pakistan has been loaned $3 billion from the $6 billion EEF so far.

Earlier this month, Pakistan's upper house of parliament put the seal on a law backed by the IMF to give the central bank independent powers to control price stability and monetary policy, plus guaranteed

tenure for its governor. It also stops the government borrowing from the bank. Under the resumed EFF program, the Khan administration has also committed to draft Personal Income Tax legislation till the end of February. The legislation would come into effect in July, along with the budget for the next fiscal. [Geo News]

However, a subsequent tranche meant to be paid later in the year was held back because of the Imran Khan government's failure to implement an economic reform agenda.

Pakistan's Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin, who negotiated the last leg of the EFF, in an interview with *Bloomberg* said Islamabad wants to end its reliance on the IMF by shrinking deficits and tapping capital markets on its way to sustainable economic growth. [Bloomberg]

Separately, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia last week agreed to put a $1.2 billion Saudi oil facility into operation at the "earliest," allowing Islamabad to defer payments for oil imports that economic experts hope will help stave off a current account crisis. [Arab News]

The $4.2 billion Saudi support package, which included a $1.2 billion oil loan facility, was agreed during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Riyadh in October last year [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]. In December, Pakistan received the $3 billion loan, but the financing agreement for the oil facility, which was signed last November, is yet to be put into use [see AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1].

Ceasefire along Line of Control holding, Indian Army chief says

(lm) The ceasefire understanding between India and Pakistan along the Line of Control (LoC) – the de facto border that divides the disputed Kashmir Valley between the two Asian neighbors – is holding, according to India's Chief of the Army Staff, General MM Naravane.

India and Pakistan in 2003 signed a Ceasefire Understanding, but the truce had been frayed since 2014, with frequent clashes and cross-border shelling by the armies of both countries, which resulted in the deaths of multiple civilians living in villages on both sides of the LoC.

Last February then, India and Pakistan in a rare joint statement reiterated their commitment to hold the ceasefire. Attentive observers believed the joint

statement to be the result of months-long backchannel talks between India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his Pakistani counterpart Moeed Yusuf. [AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1]

Speaking against this backdrop, General Naravane on January 3 argued that the ceasefire along the LoC continues to uphold because India negotiated "from a position of strength." Pakistan's military later termed the comment "misleading". [South Asia Monitor]

The previous day, Pakistan's National Security Advisor Yusuf, in an interview with *The Indian Express*, claimed that New Delhi had agreed to hold the ceasefire understanding because it was facing "pressure from the West" on the Kashmir issue. The top security official blamed the "prevailing ideology" of Indian Prime Minister Modi's government for no progress in bilateral relations. [The Indian Express]

Yusuf's remark came a few weeks after Islamabad, in its first-ever National Security Policy, made no mention of its earlier stance that reversal of New Delhi's 2019 decision to break the state of Kashmir into two union territories is the *sine qua non* to start dialogue. [AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3]

Indian teen tortured by Chinese troops while in captivity, family alleges

(lm) An Indian teenager detained for more than a week by China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) along the disputed Himalayan border was tortured while in captivity, according to his family.

The young man from India's northeastern border state of Arunachal Pradesh was on a hunting trip when he was taken into custody by soldiers from PLA earlier this month, his family said [see AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]. He was repatriated nine days later but his father said he had been kicked and given "electric shocks" while detained. [South China Morning Post]

New Delhi has reportedly raised the claims with China.

European Investment Bank provides $285 million grant to Bangladesh for COVID-19 immunization

(ap) The European Investment Bank (EIB), the world's largest multilateral lender, will provide $285 million to

Bangladesh to support the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines and country-wide immunization. Vaccination efforts will include Rohingya refugees from Myanmar currently hosted in Bangladesh. [Financial Express]

India to improve trade and investment relations with Bangladesh

(ap) Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh, Vikram K Doraiswami said his country wants to improve trade and investment relations with Bangladesh in the areas of logistics, food processing, automobiles and garments. He met with the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industries last week to discuss trade improvements. [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh celebrates 50 years of diplomatic relations with Australia, Germany

(ap) In a message to her Australian counterpart marking the 50th anniversary of diplomatic friendship between Bangladesh and Australia, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Dhaka looks forward to elevating existing economic and security-based relations with Australia. [Daily Star]

The German Foreign Ministry also commemorated 50 years of diplomatic relations with Bangladesh, congratulating Bangladesh on its economic growth, and noting that Bangladesh is a key economic and political partner for Germany. The ministry noted that bilateral cooperation between the two countries focuses on managing climate change and promoting sustainable growth. [New Age]

Indonesia plays down ties with Israel, whilst showcasing its support for Palestine

(bp) Reports of Indonesia becoming the next Muslim country to sign the Abraham Accords have come to light after a visit by the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in December 2021.

The Abraham Accords is a joint statement reached on August 13, 2020, between the United States, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates. Subsequently, this was also

expanded to include Bahrain (on September 11, 2020), Sudan (on October 23, 2020), and the Kingdom of Morocco (on December 10, 2020).

The Abraham Accords aim to establish peace in the Middle East by facilitating relations between Israel and the Arab countries in the region. The Abraham Accords, however, further isolated Palestine and have failed to deliver advancing peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. [Foreign Policy]

Indonesia has consistently shown its support for Palestine. Reports also emerged in January 2022 of Indonesian officials visiting Israel to learn about Israel's response to the Covid-19 crisis, however, the reports were dismissed by the Indonesian foreign and health ministries. Furthermore, on January 21 Indonesia denied reports of growing ties with Israel, and used a news channel to condemn the recent forced eviction of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, continuing its support for the freedom of Palestine through implementing a two-state solution.

A research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in Singapore indicated the constraints that Indonesia faces if it plans to normalize relations with Israel. *The Jerusalem Post* also claimed that the United States International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC) offered to double its investment in Indonesia if it agreed to normalize relations with Israel. [South China Morning Post]

ASEAN takes a hardline stance on junta by admitting only non-political representatives to February talks

(bp) The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s current chair Cambodia has been informed by Myanmar that it will be represented by Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs U Chan Aye, an non-political senior official, at the bloc's Foreign Ministers' Meeting on February 16-17 in Phnom Penh.

The news comes after Cambodia made it clear that it would not invite Myanmar's foreign minister to the ministerial meeting.

This comes after an internal debate within ASEAN on whether a hardline stance or engagement with the junta will cause peace and stability to be restored in Myanmar. Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia have been some of the most vocal critics of the engagement

approach, and have urged the bloc to take a more hardline stance on the junta.

Hen Sen's face-to-face meeting with the junta leader on January 7-8 caused disagreements amongst ASEAN leaders, with Malaysia amongst others noting that the Cambodian leader and ASEAN chair should have consulted the bloc before engaging with the junta. [Al Jazeera]

This disagreement appears have caused a hardline approach to be favored within ASEAN, at least for now. Analysts, however, are skeptical as to whether the hardline stance will help de-escalate tensions in Myanmar.

As the junta is yet to accept an envoy to Myanmar and is yet to deliver on the agreed Five-Point consensus as set out in 2021, the concern is the hardline stance may cause the junta to completely disengage from ASEAN and rely more on China and Russia, which may lead to further instability in Myanmar and the region.

Phnom Penh backed ASEAN's decision of a hardline approach, as the soft approach of engagement with the junta was not resulting in any tangible change in Myanmar to bring about stability in the country. [South China Morning Post] [Thai BPS World] [Khmer Times]

Indonesia continues offshore drilling regardless of warnings from China

(bs) Indonesia has announced that it will continue its drilling operations in the North Natuna Sea, in defiance of China's objections. Soon after the area was deemed to be highly favorable for oil and gas exploration, China urged Indonesia to stop the drilling activities and claimed full ownership over the territory. Both countries claim sovereignty over the area in question, which is officially within Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) but claimed by China on the basis of the 'nine-dash line,' a unilateral sovereignty document drafted by China that governs the geographical borders in the South China Sea, and appoints 90% of the area under Chinese sovereignty. The document has never been recognized internationally, by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or by other claimants of the maritime area at stake. [Energy Voice]

On February 3 Indonesia also established a new maritime security authority, the Indonesian Fleet Command (Koarmada RI), which will be in charge of efficiently handling the challenges in Indonesian

waters, including territorial claims in the South China Sea and offshore operations. Koarmada RI comprises three regional fleet commands that are responsible for different maritime areas within the perimeter of national waters and the maintenance of national warships, aircraft, and naval bases. [Antara News]

Cambodia, Thailand to strengthen military ties

(bs) Cambodian and Thai Royal Armies have signed a Terms of Reference (ToR) to enhance bilateral cooperation in the field of military. The document also includes cooperation in any other sector that falls under the framework of the two countries' armies. Moreover, the parties committed to strengthening cooperation in peace development and regional stability. [Khmer Times]

Laos: Japan funds early warning system

(bs) Japan's government agreed with the Lao Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide a $8.78-million fund to Laos to support the development of early warning systems in six provinces.

The systems aim to provide reliable weather forecast data and improve community response to weather hazards. Storms and flooding have been among the major causes of infrastructure destruction in the country, damaging or destroying 97 bridges, 747 schools, 43 hospitals and health centers, and 462 roads. In 2019, harsh weather conditions affected approximately 760,000 people and 760 houses.

The support comes in the framework of the Laos-Japan socio-economic development plan 2021-2025. [The Star]

Thailand: China offers Thai Navy two used submarines

(kc) On January 6, commanders-in-chief of the Royal Thai Navy said that a Chinese state enterprise made an unofficial offer for two used submarines to the Thai Navy for free. However, the Royal Thai Navy had to pay the overhaul costs to service.

Allegedly, the offer of two secondhand submarines to the Thai Navy came because China encountered issues in purchasing submarine engines from Germany to build the submarine ordered by Thailand in 2017. The Royal Thai Navy, in fact, has received the offer while waiting to acquire the first of three S26T class submarines that it has purchased from China with a $390-million contract. The plan was to build the first submarine in May 2017 with expected delivery in 2024. [Bangkok Post][Defence News]

Thailand, Saudi Arabia plan to sign bilateral cooperation agreements

(bs) The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia will visit Thailand once negotiations for a roadmap on resuming bilateral cooperation between the two countries are completed, according to a response of Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai to an inquiry in parliament on the resumption of working ties between the two Kingdoms, which followed Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's visit to Riyadh on January 25.

The Foreign Minister added that the roadmap would focus on an agreement on cooperation in particular in the fields of energy and labor to be signed during the visit. The parties also planned to sign further agreements on multi-sectorial bilateral cooperation by the end of 2022. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste, European Union unveiled new cooperation program

(bs) On February 3, Timor-Leste and the European Union (EU) revealed a set of priorities to include in a new EU-Timor-Leste cooperation program.

The parties agreed that the EU will provide Timor-Leste with a EUR 55-million fund ($62.9 million) until 2024 to support the country's development and mutual cooperation during the first phase of the EU Multiannual Indicative Programme for Timor-Leste for 2021-27, a new strategic document according to which the EU commits to support Timor-Leste in implementing the two main priorities drafted during negotiation meetings with Timorese representatives. The program aims at recovering and developing green and sustainable economies, and implementing good governance for sustainable development. [Timor-Leste Government]

Malaysia, Egypt agree to consider bilateral relations

(lb) During the Bilateral Political Consultations between Egypt and Malaysia held in Cairo on January 30, both sides expressed hope for the improvement of Cairo-Kuala Lumpur cross-sectoral ties and discussed potential cooperation in education, culture, politics, and economy. [Head Topics]

Singapore vows to enhance bilateral cooperation with the Philippines

(lb) Singapore's Minister for Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan met with his Philippine counterpart Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr., on January 31 to discuss bilateral cooperation, in particular in the sectors of defense, security, and education. Further discussions included views of regional and international developments, including the Myanmar crisis, travel and tourism, and regional ties with members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). [Singapore Business]

Indonesia, Malaysia joins forces against illegal fishing

(lb) Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries released a statement outlining the agreement concluded by Malaysia and Indonesia to tackle the long-time issue of illegal fishing in the North Natuna Sea and the Strait of Malacca, two among the most heavily trafficked shipping lanes.

The agreement involves the implementation of joint advanced monitoring systems that target illegal fishing carried not only by foreign vessels but also vessels from Indonesia or Malaysia. In 2021 Indonesia seized 22 Malaysia-flagged boats and Malaysia has been legally proceeding 14 Indonesian nationals for illegally fishing in Malaysian waters.

It is estimated that illegal fishing causes annual losses of up to $2 billion in Indonesia and $1.4 billion in Malaysia. [Mongabay]

Indonesia, New Zealand in discussion for multisectoral cooperation

(lb) Indonesian coordinating minister for economic affairs met with New Zealand's ambassador to Indonesia to discuss bilateral cooperation in economic recovery efforts in trading, industry, farming, and energy transition. During the meeting, the parties agreed to increase the target of two-way trade to $2.6 billion until 2024.

Moreover, Indonesia has invited New Zealand to cooperate in the country's transition to new renewable energy, among which geothermal energy, in order to comply with the commitments Indonesia has made in the framework of the G20. [Antara News] [DInsights]

Malaysia, Indonesia have not reached labor deal

(bs) The Indonesian government has revealed that Indonesia and Malaysia have failed conclude a deal after five-year negotiations to renew an agreement on Indonesian workers in Malaysia which expired in 2016.

The failure is allegedly because of the repeated abuses Indonesian workers had suffered in Malaysia due to unhealthy and often unlawful labor conditions. Indonesia, in an attempt to protect its workers, passed the Migrant Worker Protection Law in 2017 and pushed for the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on workers' rights with the destination country. The Indonesian representative also demanded Malaysia to abolish a hiring platform that hires migrant workers without appropriate procedure, causing the bypass of the 2017 Migrant Worker Protection Law. [The Jakarta Post]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

9 February 2022 @1:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA

Life and Death in the Donbass, 2014-2021: New Archival and Library Sources at the Hoover Institution

Following the deployment of Russian military forces in Crimea, numerous districts in Eastern Ukraine have become hotspots of conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Experts from the Hoover Institute will present archival sources from the conflict region known as Donbass in this webinar to trace the conflict's history, understand the current situation, and forecast how tensions will develop and potentially affect relations between the U.S., NATO, Russia, and Ukraine.

Find more about the webinar at [Hoover Institute].

9 February 2022 @ 8:00-9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Looking forward: What's Next after the EU-US Energy Council Meeting?

This webinar, hosted by the Atlantic Council Global Energy Center and E3G, will concentrate on the findings and significant insights from the EU-US Energy Council conference.

Visit [Atlantic Council] to learn more about the event.

9 February 2022 @4:30-5:45 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students,

Sandford University, USA

China’s Local Government Debt: The Grand Bargain

This webinar will feature Jean C. Oi, who will present recent findings from her study on the increasing threat of exponentially growing China’s local government debt and examine why this obvious risk, in the international community’s eyes, is still an alarm for China's authorities.

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

9 February 2022 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Office of Communications, USA

Saudi Arabia and Iraq: An Evolving Relationship

Despite the long-complicated relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, both countries have made attempts to enhance their bilateral cooperation in recent years. This online session, hosted by the Brookings Institution, will analyze the two countries’ relationship and its consequences for US interests.

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

9 February 2022 @ 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Parliamentary Perspectives: The Russia-Ukraine Crisis

During this online forum, the Russian-Ukraine situation will be discussed, as well as the role that European countries and institutions could play in addressing the crisis.

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

10 February 2022 @ 12:00 a.m.-1:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Where is Iran’s Economy Headed?

As Iran commemorates the 43rd anniversary of its Islamic Revolution, public dissatisfaction with the country's poor economic performance grows. Iranian officials have worked for decades to diversify their economy away from oil and increase resilience to uncontrollable factors. This session will debate the current performance and future direction of Iran's economy.

For more details of the event, see [Atlantic Council].

10 February 2022 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Russia's Aggression Towards Ukraine – the German View: A Conversation with Minister of State Tobias Lindner

As concerns about a Russian invasion of Ukraine rise, Germany is a key player in Europe's response to the issue. This webinar will feature a conversation with State Minister Tobias Lindner of Germany's Foreign Office about the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and how the U.S. and Germany could work together to avoid another war in Europe.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

10 February 2022 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT+8), Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

In Conversation with Under-Secretary-General Noeleen Heyzer, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar

This webinar will feature a conversation with UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer, whose responsibilities include ensuring sufficient coordination of international and regional approaches to the Myanmar's ongoing political crisis.

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

10 February 2022 @ 10:00-11:45 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

CSIS-DAPA Conference 2021: U.S.-Korea Defense Cooperation in Biden

Administration

This conference will be joined by industry experts, leading thinkers and actors, and officials from the U.S. and Korea to collaboratively look into ways to bolster the US-ROK alliance.

Find more about the webinar at [CSIS].

10 February 2022 @ 12:30-2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), United States Institute of Peace, USA

Conflict and Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

This virtual discussion will address the enduring conflict on the border issue between India and China, which has affected the broader bilateral relations and sparked a ferociously national public debate.

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

11 February 2022 @ 9:00-10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), United States Institute of Peace, USA

Conflict and Violent Extremism in Southeast Asia

The decrease in terrorist activity in Southeast Asia over the last few years has indicated the future of Southeast Asia's violent extremism and conflict. This online session will focus on this rising trend of violent extremism in the region.

Visit [USIP] to learn more about the event.

11 February 2022 @ 9:00-10:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Hindsight Up Front: How to Avert Economic Collapse in Afghanistan

The Afghan economy is on the verge of collapsing. Sanctions on the Taliban regime, as well as a block on Afghan properties overseas, have resulted in a severe cash shortage. This online session will explore what can the US and the rest of the world do to avoid

economic collapse and will make specific policy recommendations that can be implemented.

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

11 February 2022 @9:00-10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

A Liberal Silent Majority in China? A Big Data China Event

This webinar will feature a panel of experts who will discuss and exchange perspectives on Chinese public opinion.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

11 February 2022 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

A Conversation with the US Ambassadors to NATO and the OSCE

This webinar will feature a conversation between Ambassadors Julianne Smith, Michael Carpenter, and Nick Schifrin who will explore what solutions are being considered by the OSCE and NATO to prevent future Russian escalation and what role these organizations will play in the future if the crisis persists or worsens.

Further information about the event is provided at [Atlantic Council].

11 February 2022 @ 12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

China's Online Campaign to Shift the Narrative on Xinjiang

Although there is increasing evidence of brutality against Uyghurs in Xinjian, China continues to undertake an online effort to deflect criticism. Platform manipulation, outbound filtering, and even the use of foreign online influencers are all part of this operation. This webinar will be moderated by Nonresident Senior Fellow Rayhan Asat. It will feature Paul Mozur, a New York Times award-winning journalist, who will uncover

these underground networks and discuss how they operate.

For more information, visit [Atlantic Council].

14-16 February 2022 @ 9:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

The Wilson China Fellowship Conference 2022

The Wilson China Fellowship has supported emerging policy-oriented scholars with expertise in Chinese political, social, economic, security, or historical issues. At this two-day conference, the 2021-22 class of fellows will present their findings from cutting-edge research on a range of important issues that are linked to China's ascent and the future direction of US-China ties.

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

15 February 2022 @7:30-8:45 a.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Should War be Left to the Generals? Civil-Military Relations in India

This webinar will look at the evolution of India's civil-military ties, the issues that the current structure poses, and the reform agenda that the next Chief of Defense Staff will face.

Follow [FSI] to learn more about the event.

15 February 2022 @4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

The Impacts of U.S.-China Tech Decoupling

China’s historic advancement in technology has been globally recognized. This development inevitably affects China’s domestic and foreign affairs, notably its relationship with the U.S. At this webinar, Denis Simon, Senior Adviser to the President for China Affairs at Duke, and Dan Wang, technology analyst for Gavekal Dragonomics, will discuss the current state of

decoupling efforts and their implications for the U.S. and China's technological industries.

For more information, visit [FSI].

15 February 2022 @12:00 a.m.-1.00 p.m. (GMT-5), Observer Research Foundation, India

Fresh Approaches to the Overdose Crisis

The number of overdose deaths has climbed dramatically since President Richard Nixon declared war on drugs, hitting the highest level in 51 years. Lessons learned from the war's failure have led to an agreement in Oregon to decriminalize drug possession and consumption. Still, some scholars advocate for legalization and regulation in addition to decriminalization. This webinar will look at two new approaches to drug policy in the United States that encourage people to think and behave differently.

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

15 February 2022 @4:00-5:15 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Carbon Trading vs. Direct Allocation: Theory and Application to China's Carbon Abatement with Professor Guojun He

At this academic seminary, Professor Guojun He will compare two common methods for achieving a carbon reduction objective: the Emission Trading System (ETS) and the Direct Allocation Scheme (DAS), and argue that a national ETS may be unwelcome for China.

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

15 February 2022 @ 9:00 a.m.-10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Locking in a High-Carbon Future: Chinese Steel, Cement and Coal Investments at Home and Abroad

Many Southeast Asian countries in need of energy and infrastructure welcome the investments, which have so

far primarily been in fossil fuels, road construction, cement, and steel. This panel discussion at the China Environment Forum will focus on Chinese steel and cement investments both within the nation and along the Belt and Road.

For more details, see [Wilson Center].

15 February 2022 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Office of Communications, USA

The Future of American Democracy: A Conversation with U.S. Representative Jamie Raskin

This online forum will present Representative Jamie Raskin's new book, which records the events leading up to and following January 6, 2017. The book discusses the future of democracy in the U.S. and proposes that the protection of democratic institutions in the United States necessitates proactive, forward-thinking measures.

Visit [BROOKINGS] to learn more about the event.

15 February 2022 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT+8), Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The Quest for Local Embeddedness: Recent Chinese Migrants in Thailand

At this webinar, Dr. Aranya Siriphon will argue that recent Chinese migrants in Thailand have established 'parallel community'," a new form of society, where the migrants look for and connect with other migrants to respond to their social needs rather than blending in with the natives. If compared with previous generations of overseas Chinese migrants, the Xin yimin are more transitory.

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

16 February 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (GMT+8), Yusof Ishak Institute, The ASEAN Studies Centre, Singapore

E-Launch and Discussion of "The State of Southeast Asia: 2022" Survey Report

At this e-launch and panel discussion, the State of Southeast Asia: 2022 Survey Report will be discussed by a leading panel of high-level experts.

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

Recent Book Releases

Matthew Crain, ***Profit over Privacy: How Surveillance Advertising Conquered the Internet***, University of Minnesota Press, 216 pages, published on September 21, 2021, reviewed in [LSE].

Jianglin Li, ***When the Iron Bird Flies: China's Secret War in Tibet***, Stanford University Press, 576 pages, published on January 18, 2022, with a review in [New York Times]

Nathan Law, Evan Fowler, ***Freedom: How We Lose It and How We Fight Back***, The Experiment, 240 pages, published on December 7, 2021. For a discussion on the book see [NED].

Allan Lichtman, ***Thirteen Cracks: Repairing American Democracy after Trump***, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 224 pages, published on November 8, 2021. A review is available at [Open Letters Review].

Michael Crick, ***One Party After Another: The Disruptive Life of Nigel Farage***, Simon & Schuster UK, 606 pages, published on February 3, 2022, reviewed in [The New Statesman].

Matt Ridley and **Alina Chan**, ***Viral: The Search for the Origin of COVID-19***, Harper, 416 pages, published on November 16, 2021. For a review see [The Guardian].

B. A. Friedman, ***On Operations: Operational Art and Military Disciplines***, Naval Institute Press, 256 pages, October 15, 2021, with a review in [Wavell Room].

Calls for Papers

The **Institute of Energy Economics, Japan (IEEJ)** invites paper proposals for the ***43rd International Association for Energy Economics (IAEE) Annual Conference***, to be held in Tokyo on July 31 – August 4, 2022. Deadline for submission of proposal is February 25, 2022. For more information, see [IAEE].

The **School of Law of the University of Milano-Bicocca** invites junior scholars in international law and

related disciplines to submit presentation proposal for the ***international conference "The concept of obligation in international law"*** scheduled for May 23-24, 2022, in Milan, Italy. Closing date for submission of proposals is February 15, 2022. If you are interested, you can find further details at [ESIL].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for an ***International Senior Economist*** to be based in Hanoi, Vietnam. Niger. Closing date for applications is February 22, 2022. For more details, see [UNDP].

The **Danish Refugee Council (DRC)** is hiring a ***Protection Monitoring Manager*** with workplace in Cox's Bazar Bangladesh and core responsibilities in overseeing and managing protection monitoring activities in camps and host community locations. Deadline for applications is February 21, 2022. If you are interested, you can find more details at [DRC].

The **World Bank** is recruiting a ***Digital Development Specialist*** to be based in Washington, DC, United States. Closing date for applications is February 28, 2022. For more information, visit [World Bank].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** is looking for an ***Outreach Consultant*** to be based in Osaka, Japan. Deadline for applications is February 14, 2022. Further information are available at [UNEP].

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