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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

The AiR team is pleased to present you this week's Asia in Review issue whose international relations sector is dominated by the Russo-Ukrainian war.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Bosnia and Herzegovina's, Ghana's and South Korea's Independence Day and Bulgaria's Liberation Day in this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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Main Sections

- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in East Asia
- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in South Asia
- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in Southeast Asia
- International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia
- Announcements

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

China: Investigation confirms chained woman trafficked and sold for marriage

(dql) An investigation into the plight of a Chinese woman found chained by her neck in a shack in a village in Jiangsu province [see AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4] has revealed that she was trafficked and sold for marriage, the first time at the of 20 in 1998.

Over the case, seventeen officials from the province's health and propaganda departments, police and women's federation have been removed from their posts, punished or are put under investigation. [NPR] [South China Morning Post]

China: High-profile banker corruption case

(dql) On Tuesday, February 22, Sun Deshun, former president of China CITIC Bank Corporation Limited – one of China's largest commercial banks majority-owned and controlled by state-owned investment firm CITIC Group – pleaded guilty to allegations of taking bribes totaling nearly 1 billion yuan (USD 155 million) in return for providing favorable loans and credit to businesses between 2003 and 2019.

Sun was arrested in March 2020 and expulsed from the Chinese Communist Party shortly afterwards. His case is the second biggest bribery case so far in the anti-corruption drive targeting China's financial sector. In 2021, a former chairman of Huarong, one of the four asset management companies established by the Chinese government in 1999 in response to the 1997 Asian financial crisis, was executed after being found guilty of accepting 1.8 billion yuan in bribes. [South China Morning Post]

In October last year the government has launched a new round of anti-graft crackdown in the finance sector, with more than 20 officials in the financial institution and regulatory bodies arrested since then. Shortly before Sun's trial, former vice chairman at the China Banking Regulatory Commission (CBRC) Cai Esheng was arrested on charges of bribery. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

China: Fishing ban on Yellow River

(dql) China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs announced on Wednesday, February 23, that it will ban fishing on the upper reaches of the Yellow River from April 1 until the end of 2025. The ban comes along with an extension of a seasonal ban on fishing in the mainstream, 13 tributaries and three major lakes by one month from April 1 until July 31.

The measures aim at slowing down the decline of fish species in the country's second longest river. Over the past 15 years, the number of species has dropped by roughly 50 percent, according to state news agency Xinhua. [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Revised law on age of majority to enter into force

(cm) The age of majority in Japan is set to be lowered from 20 to 18 from April 1, when the revised Civil Code of 2018 will come into effect, marking the first change in 146 years after adulthood was set at 20 years in 1876 under a proclamation issued by the great council of state in the Meiji period (1868-1912).

The revision was triggered by discussions which followed the 2014 enactment of the revised national referendum law for constitutional revisions that set the age for people eligible to vote in such referendums at 18 in order to encourage social engagement among young people.

The revised Civil Code also raised the legal age for women to marry from 16 to 18, aligning with the regulation for men. Nonetheless, the legal age for drinking, smoking and public gambling remains at 20. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Prime Minister Kishida faces criticism from own party

(cm) Less than half a year into office, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is facing declining approval rates of the public as well as criticism from the public and within his own Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

He has been gradually losing public support, as shown by a poll last week: Kishida's support rate stood at 43.4 percent, down 8.3 percentage points compared to the rate in January.

From within the ruling LDP, Kishida has been attacked by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other leaders of the LDP for his decision to lock down Japan's borders in December, with a limit of 3500 entrants a day, causing the Party to fear a setback in the global economy. He was also confronted with party-internal opposition for his intention postpone the UNESCO world heritage nomination of the Sado gold and silver mines, concerned that the move would upset South Korea due to the historical links of the mines to South Korean victims of forced labor during Japanese rule over the Korean peninsula from 1909 to 1945.

In both case Kishida bowed to the pressure with the LDP and revised his policies, prompting observers to conclude that not Kishida, but the LDP as a whole is

leading the policymaking or political decisions. [Japan Today] [The Japan Times]

Japan not to host nuclear weapons, Prime Minister Kishida declares

(cm) In a parliamentary session on February 24, Prime Minister Kishida made clear that for him hosting US nuclear weapons in Japan to increase deterrence is out of question. He cited the three non-nuclear principles of Japan's national policy including not possessing, not producing and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons for his position.

Kishida made the statement in response to former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's suggestion to discuss nuclear sharing in Japan, under which a nuclear state allows allies that does not possess such weapons to share them and take part in the decision-making process when they are used. [Nippon.com] [The Mainichi]

North Korea: Ballistic missile text continues

(mpk) South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff confirmed that North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward the East Sea on Sunday, February 27. It was Pyongyang's eighth round of missile test in this year, following seven rounds in January and comes less than two weeks before the presidential election in South Korea.

While South Korea observers said that the missile was a Pukguksong-2 missile, a road-mobile solid-fuel medium-range ballistic missile and ground-based variant of its submarine-launched ballistic missile, the Pukguksong-1, North Korea claimed Monday that it was an "important test" for developing a "reconnaissance satellite." [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2]

The latest launch comes also after Chinese President Xi Jinping reportedly sent a message to North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, in which he affirmed his readiness to "develop the China-DPRK relations of friendship and cooperation" under a "new situation." [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Overseas voting in presidential election completed

(mpk) On February 28, overseas South Koreans completed voting for the presidential election at 219 polling stations in 155 countries. Voting could not be taken at the South Korean Embassy in Ukraine due to the security crisis. The nationwide election will take a place in the country on March 9. However, citizens who wish to vote early can participate in advance voting on March 4-5, too. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

According to Gallup Korea's survey, Lee Jae-myung's, the candidate of the ruling Democrat Party, and Yoon Suk-yeol's, the candidate of main opposition People Power Party, voting rates are very close to each other. Yoon gathered 39 percent support; Lee gathered 38.3 percent. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

South Korea: The government stays alert towards economic reflections of Russian occupation

(mpk) The South Korean government created a Russia desk to provide consultancy services to 120 South Korean companies in Russia aimed to control the impact of the economic sanctions to be applied against Russia. Through this, supply chain issues will be observed and supplies of energy and other key materials will be stabilized.

The government does not expect any negative effects in the short term, but they are worried that the South Korean economy may be adversely affected in the long term. It is stated that South Korea currently has 106 days of crude oil stocks. Moreover, Ukraine is South Korea's largely grain exporter. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2] [Yonhap News Agency 3]

South Korea: L-SAM missile interceptor was tested successfully

(mpk) South Korea successfully tested a long-range surface-to-air missile (L-SAM) against North Korea's missile threats. The test was organized to see whether the L-SAM interceptor can fly on a targeted trajectory and fall accurately on a preset spot.

The South Korean military is working on deploying the L-SAM for the country's multilayered and low-tier missile defense program until 2026. Thus, L-SAM will be a crucial part of South Korea's anti-missile program. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan: Taiwan maintains the status of "free" in the annual "freedom in the world" report

(eb) According to the "Freedom in the world" report issued every year by Freedom House, Taiwan placed 17th out of 210 countries in the index that ranks freedom and respect of human rights. Taiwan scored 38 points out of a maximum 40 for political rights, and 56 out of a maximum of 60 for civil liberties. In the top of the ranking Norway, Finland and Sweden occupied the first places while China placed 185th with only 9 points.

According to the report, human rights and the status of democracy in China gained traction in the agenda of numerous governments and over 60 countries saw the status of human rights decline, while only 25 saw an improvement. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Groups march to remember victims of repression

(eb) Hundreds of people belonging to over fifty groups marched on February 28 to remember the victims of the repression enacted by the Nationalist military during a crackdown on anti-government uprising, which happened on February 28, 1947, 16 months after the end of Japanese colonial rule on the island and that led to the imposition of a martial law that lasted for forty years.

The associations ask for further investigation upon unsolved crimes of that era as well as the demolition of monuments that remind of that era such as the Cihu Mausoleum in Taoyuan, where former Republic of China President Chiang Kai-shek is buried. [Focus Taiwan 1]

President Tsai Ing-wen visited a facility in New Taipei's Xindian District, where prisoners of the so-called "white terror" were held captive. She said that facilities like the aforementioned detention center, should be kept as a reminder of dictatorship and that Taiwan will

strive to remain an open and democratic country. [Focus Taiwan 2]

Taiwan: Army undergoing changes in military equipment

(eb) Taiwan's army reportedly decided to dismiss the "Walker Bulldog" M41A3 tank after 60 years of service. The first M41A3 arrived in Taiwan in 1958 and since reached the 700 units. Although upgraded versions of the Bulldog have been operating in the country, the Army relies on M60A3, the CM-11, and the CM-12, which now makes up for the majority of the tanks in the Taiwanese army. [Taiwan News 1]

On the other hand, the purchase of 12 MH-60R anti-submarine Seahawk helicopters for a total price of NT$34 billion (NT$947.46 billion) was postponed as the Biden administration has been prioritizing the sales of weapons that can improve Taiwan's capabilities in an asymmetric warfare situation against China, according to analysts. The MH-60R is considered unfit for asymmetric warfare and for this reason its purchase has been delayed. [Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan is currently developing a lighter version of the Hsiung Feng III anti-ship missile. The Hsiung Feng missiles is usually mounted on ships but a lighter version (which should weigh less than a metric ton) should be fitted on Indigenous Defense Force's Jet but at the cost of a reduction of the effective range of the missile. If tests are successful, it will be fully implemented by the end of 2022. [Taiwan News 3]

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

Bangladesh: President appoints new chief election commissioner, four commissioners

(lm) The new chief of Bangladesh's Election Commission (EC) and four commissioners took their oath on February 27, a day after they had been appointed by President Md Abdul Hamid. The five-year tenure of the previous EC expired last month; the current commission will be tasked with arranging Bangladesh's next parliamentary election, which is set to be held between November 2023 and January 2024.

Early last month, Bangladesh's Parliament passed a law on the formation of the new EC through a search committee, thereby formalizing procedures used by the current and previous administrations. Shortly thereafter, President Hamid established such panel, despite criticism from opposition political parties and rights organizations [see AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1]. The committee on February 24 submitted a list of 10 names for the five-member EC to the president, who later picked the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and four commissioners. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

The new CEC, Kazi Habibul Awal, previously worked in the law ministry where he was eventually appointed secretary in 2007. But the High Court, following a writ petition, in 2008 declared his appointment illegal; the Supreme Court upheld the verdict a year later. Awal later held posts as secretary in the religious affairs ministry, and in the defense ministry. All of this happened while the now-ruling Awami League party was in power. [bdnews24.com]

In light of this, leaders of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) alleged that the new CEC is a staunch supporter of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's, alleging that Awal had only been serving as secretary in various ministries due to his close ties with the government. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: Local chapter of ruling Awami League party inducts prime minister, sister

(lm) A local chapter of Bangladesh's ruling Awami League party has included Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana. Prime Minister Hasina has been the first member of the unit's 73-member executive committee, while Rehana was made the third member of the advisory council. [Dhaka Tribune]

The unit is located at the town of Tungipara, the birthplace of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh's independence hero and father of Prime Minister Hasina and Sheikh Rehana.

Bangladesh: Construction of South Asia's first underwater tunnel nears completion

(lm) The *Dhaka Tribune* reported this week that the Karnaphuli Tunnel, which will stretch nearly 9.5 kilometers and link the Bangladeshi coastal cities of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, is nearly 80 percent finished and will open to traffic by the end of the year. The USD 1.1 billion project – which is largely funded and fully constructed by China – constitutes one of the biggest new infrastructure projects in South Asia outside Pakistan. [Dhaka Tribune]

Ever since Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Chinese President Xi Jinping inaugurated the construction site of the tunnel in October 2017, early commentary focused on its advantages, from easing traffic to creating thousands of jobs. However, as the construction continued apace, new concerns cropped up. Congestion could be heavy near the entrance to the tunnel, where multiple roads will converge, and the maintenance costs are likely to be surpass USD 4.5 million a year.

These challenges notwithstanding, the tunnel – named after Bangladesh's Founding Father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman – is poised to become a national symbol of the country's economic and development clout.

Bhutan: Almost half of top civil servants, executives unfit for their current roles, assessment exercise finds

(lm) Almost half of Bhutan's top civil servants may face demotion, change in jobs, or forced retirement, after a recently concluded performance assessment exercise found them unfit for their current jobs and roles.

The exercise, conducted by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), found that 50 percent of the total 62 civil servant working at the executive level – secretaries and director generals – failed to meet to required expectations, *Kuensel* reported earlier this month. The commission is now in the process of "managing them" out, or moving them out of their current positions.

Article 26, Section I of Bhutan's constitution states that the RCSC shall promote and ensure an independent and apolitical civil service that will discharge its public duties in an efficient, transparent, and accountable manner.

India: State elections update

(lm/kd) A high-stakes election season that experts say will likely determine the political direction of the country, and the fortunes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), is proceeding in India, including in its most populous state and political nerve center, Uttar Pradesh.

February 27 marked the fifth phase of voting in Uttar Pradesh, with two more rounds before voting ends on March 7. This week also saw election day in the northeastern state of Manipur, with a second phase of voting on March 5; all votes will be counted, and results declared, on March 10. Other states that have completed voting but are due for Mach 10 counting include Goa, Punjab, and Uttarakhand [see AIR No. 8, February/2022, 4]. [India Today]

In Uttar Pradesh, reports estimate that turnout has remained high, including indications of record-level turnout on February 23 in Lucknow, the state capital. The ruling BJP is expected to triumph in Uttar Pradesh, but opposition parties still hope to capitalize on high unemployment and the state's poor handling of the pandemic.

Manipur, for its part, is currently led by a BJP-led coalition, and incumbent Chief Minister N Biren Singh contested the election in the first phase from the Heingang constituency. However, it is uncertain whether Singh will continue to occupy the state's top post – notwithstanding a BJP victory – because the party has not formally announced a chief ministerial candidate.

Meanwhile, the opposition Indian National Congress (INC) has campaigned heavily in the state. INC leader Rahul Gandhi met with party leaders in Imphal, the state capital, on February 21. Given Gandhi's personal role in the campaign, a bad result for party in Manipur would reflect poorly on him and his party. [Moneycontrol]

Maldives: Ruling party puts bill criminalizing 'India out' campaign on hold amid intraparty differences

(lm/kd) The Maldives coalition government has put on hold a bill that seeks to criminalize activities deemed harmful to the country's foreign relations amid "concerns" within the ruling alliance. Protests calling for the expulsion of Indian military personnel from the island nation over the last year has raised discord in the parliament not only from the opposition, but within the ruling Maldives Democratic Party(MDP) itself.

The bill, which was expected to be tabled in the current session of parliament, includes punitive language aimed at political movements that threaten foreign relations in the strategically located nation. Violations are punishable with imprisonment or house arrest of 6-12 months, and even a fine of nearly USD 1,300. [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]

The bill was widely considered as the latest effort by the government to stifle a diplomatic storm caused by former President Abdulla Yameen, who has become the public face of anti-India rallies since his release from house arrest last November. [AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1]

Passage of the bill seemed a foregone conclusion, given that the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih controls 64 lawmakers in the 87-member lower house of Parliament. But according to a leading member of the MDP, parliamentarians close to President Solih harbored "concerns" regarding the bill, which was

called for by a faction of lawmakers led by the incumbent Speaker of Parliament, Mohamed Nasheed. [The Edition]

Tension between President Solih and Speaker Nasheed, who served as the first democratically elected president of the archipelago until 2012, have been growing in recent months, over the government's policies, mainly on corruption and religious extremism. Last July Nasheed confirmed his intention to run in the primary of the MDP for the 2023 presidential election, while also claiming he was planning to conduct a national referendum next year to decide if the country would prefer a parliamentary system in lieu of the current presidential system [see AiR No. 27, July/2021, 1].

Pakistan: High court puts controversial amendment to cybercrime law on hold

(tj/lm/kd) In what is considered a setback to Pakistan's government, a high court has ordered authorities not to implement a key section of the country's contentious cybercrime law that was recently toughened ostensibly to curb online disinformation.

On February 20, President Arif Alvi signed an ordinance, approved by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Imran Khan, to amend Section 20 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). Under the amendment, online defamation and the dissemination of so-called "fake news" are made nonbailable, cognizable offenses. Furthermore, the jail term for defamation will be increased from three years to five years [see AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]. The legislation, however, needs to be passed by the country's parliament within 90 days.

Against this backdrop, several media bodies, superior bar councils, as well as opposition Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz had filed petitions with the Islamabad High Court, challenging the amendment.

On February 23 then, the court ruled that the government cannot implement Section 20 of the PECA without ensuring guarantees under Article 19 of the Constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech barring certain restrictions. Terming the amendment "draconian", the court further warned that the ordinance would pressure journalists and members of the public into self-censorship and potentially stifle the free flow of information. The judges also warned that officials would be held accountable if the Federal

Investigation Agency violated its standard operating procedures. [Human Rights Watch] [The Print]

In 2021, Pakistan dropped to 145 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, an annual ranking published by Reporters Without Borders, a France-based international nongovernmental organization dedicated to safeguarding the right to freedom of information.

Pakistan: Opposition Peoples Party launches 10-day march to capital in Karachi

(lm) Pakistan's second-largest opposition party, the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), on February 28 kicked off a 10-day march from the southern city of Karachi towards the capital Islamabad, as part of a series of rallies aimed at dislodging Prime Minister Imran Khan from power. The protest will travel through 34 cities before reaching Islamabad on March 8, according to a plan shared by the party.

Before beginning its long march, the PPP released a 38-point charter of demands, seeking a social development program, electoral reforms, effective justice system, sustainable economic policy, and a strong foreign policy aimed at connecting Pakistan with rest of the world. [Dawn]

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), an alliance of nine opposition parties established in 2020, has announced its support for the PPP's so-called Awami March ever since the opposition parties decided early last month to join forces in order to overthrow Prime Minister Khan's government through a vote of no-confidence in parliament's lower house [see AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]. The PDM too is planning to march on the capital on March 23, Pakistan Day, unless opposition parties introduce the planned no-confidence motion in parliament earlier.

In a tit-for-tat response to the PPP's protest march, Prime Minister Khan's ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and its allies on February 26 launched a march against the Sindh provincial government from Ghotki to Karachi. The PPP has been ruling Sindh – the party's home province and center of power – since 2008; the next assembly election is due in 2023. [Asian News International]

Pakistan: Radical Islamist party to organize protests in major cities against inflation

(lm) Pakistan's hardline Islamist Tehreek-e-Labiak (TLP) party has reportedly announced protests in major cities across the country against a rising inflation under Prime Minister Imran Khan's government. The demonstrations are expected to commence on March 23, Pakistan Day, in the southern city of Karachi. [The Print]

In November of last year, Pakistan's government reached an agreement with the TLP to end violent protests and defuse a crisis that had left the country reeling for weeks. Under the deal, the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan agreed to free over 2,000 detained members of the TLP movement, lifted a ban on the group and agreed to let it contest elections [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1]. The government also freed Saad Hussain Rizvi, the leader of the hardline Islamist group, and removed his name from a terrorism watch list [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

The standoff began in October, when thousands of supporters of the TLP began marching from the eastern city of Lahore with the goal of reaching the capital, Islamabad. They demanded the release of Rizvi, who had been arrested in April [see AiR No. 17, April/2021, 4], and the withdrawal of terrorism charges against hundreds of its members.

The group also demanded the expulsion of the French ambassador over the publication of cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammad [see AiR No. 43, October/2021, 4]. Prime Minister Khan's government had agreed to put the question of expulsion to a parliamentary vote earlier that year but did not follow through.

Pakistan: Protesting fishermen end blockade of Karachi port after talks with government

(lm) Fishermen in Pakistan's southeastern Sindh province protesting their lack of access to waters off neighboring Balochistan province ended a 34-hour-long blockade of the Port of Karachi on February 23 after talks with Prime Minister Imran Khan's government. [Reuters]

Located at the northern shore of the Arabian Sea, the Karachi port is one of South Asia's largest and busiest deep-water seaports, and the most important port Pakistan for movement of commodities and vehicles. Therefore, the disruption prompted the city's business community to raise its concern that some vessels would seek to avoid a port backed up with vessels waiting to be handled.

Preceding the blockade of Karachi port were mass protests in Gwadar, a coastal town in neighboring Balochistan province, in December of last year, to press demands for authorities to take action against illegal trawling by Chinese commercial fishing trawlers, and vessels from Sindh [see AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1]. They were also protesting over a lack of basic facilities like power and water, and the restrictions on their movement and access to the sea resulting from the high level of security for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that runs through the province [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. To end the month-long protest, the provincial government agreed to most of the demands.

Since then, the fisheries department, coast guard and Maritime Security Agency are carrying out joint patrols to stop trawlers from Sindh coming into Balochistan waters.

Pakistan: Pakistan-American man sentenced to death for beheading a diplomat's daughter

(lm/kd) A Pakistani court has sentenced the scion of a wealthy industrialist family to death for the murder, rape and beheading of the daughter of a distinguished diplomat, in a case that had triggered nationwide outrage and a debate on the government's perceived failure to protect domestic violence victims.

An Islamabad judge on February 24 sentenced Zahir Jaffer to death for killing Noor Mukadam, the daughter of Pakistan's former ambassador to South Korea and Kazakhstan, last July at Jaffer's family home in Islamabad [see AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4]. The court also sentenced two members of Jaffer's household staff to 10 years in prison each for abetting the murder and confining Mukadam. [Al Jazeera] [CNN] [South China Morning Post]

Back then the brutal murder was the latest in a spate of women killings in Pakistan [see AiR No. 30, July/2021, 4]. The series of events triggered nationwide

outrage and a debate on the state's failure to protect women, the culture of impunity, and the reasons behind society's tendency to curtail women's independence and inflict pain on them. It also renewed calls for police and politicians to prioritize pursuing justice for victims, notably by strengthening the country's limited domestic violence laws, the first of which was passed in 2013.

But legislation to tighten protections for women against violence has frequently faced pushback from religious and community leaders.

The Pakistan Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill, proposed in 2020, was passed by Parliament's upper house last June and progressed to the next step, presidential assent, for final approval. However, in early July, the adviser to the prime minister on parliamentary affairs wrote a letter to the speaker of Parliament, seeking a review of the bill by the Council of Islamic Ideology – a constitutional body responsible for giving advice on whether or not a certain law is repugnant to Islam [see AiR No. 31, August/2021, 1].

Furthermore, President Arif Alvi in December 2020 issued an ordinance to set up special courts for speedy trials of the rape cases and to issue verdicts within four months [see AiR No. 51, December/2020, 4]. The ordinance was passed into law by Parliament in November of last. But the Council of Islamic Ideology at the last minute objected to the punishment of chemical castration for rapists for being an "un-Islamic" practice [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

Pakistan: Government resumes talks with Pakistan Taliban, news reports suggest

(lm/kd) Pakistan's military has reportedly reached out to the Pakistani Taliban, known by their acronym TTP, in the latest of a series of attempts to reign in and accommodate the group politically in order to defuse its potential for violence. But the talks between the two adversaries remained once again inconclusive due to seemingly incompatible demands.

Over the past few months, TTP militants have significantly increased attacks on Pakistani security forces, particularly since early December when a ceasefire between the group and the government in Islamabad collapsed. At that time, Afghanistan's ruling Taliban brokered the truce in an attempt to pave the way for substantive peace talks between the two warring parties. However, the TTP refused to extend

the agreement, citing a lack of progress in the negotiations. [AiR No. 50, December/2021, 2]

During talks in January of this year, Islamabad's four-member delegation was reportedly adamant about excluding the Afghan Taliban as mediators, a demand that was categorically rebuffed by the TTP. It was further reported that the militants reiterated three demands during the talks, including permission to open a political office in a third country, and restoration of the traditional semiautonomous status of the region that once served as strongholds for local and foreign militants. The militants also underlined their called for implementing an Islamic system in Pakistan in accordance with their own interpretation of Islamic law. [Sunday Guardian]

Crucially, the talks were reportedly initiated by Lieutenant General General Faiz Hameed, the former head of Pakistan's powerful intelligence agency, ISI. After a surprise military reshuffle in October last year, General Hammed has been serving as Commander of the Peshawar Corps, which is stationed in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province bordering Afghanistan [see AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2].

Lending further credence to reports of outreach efforts by Pakistan's military are separate accounts claiming that Pakistan's government recently released nearly 50 members of the TTP from prison. In November last year, Islamabad had released more than 1000 TTP militants from prison, as a "goodwill gesture" to reciprocate the ceasefire announced by the militants earlier that month [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]. [Asian News International]

Pakistan: Military kills 10 insurgents in Balochistan province

(tj/lm) A dozen believed militants were killed in two separate operations by Pakistani security forces in remote Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces on February 24, as domestic militant threats continue to put pressure on Chinese investment through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). [WION]

On January 20, a previously unknown group called the Baloch Nationalist Army (BNA) claimed responsibility for a blast that ripped through a market in Lahore, the country's second largest city, killing at least three people and wounding dozens [see AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]. A week later, at least ten members of Pakistan's military were killed during an attack on a

security post located near Pakistan's western border with Iran [see No. 5, February/2022, 1].

But most alarming for Pakistani officials were complex, simultaneous attacks by BNA militants on two Pakistani paramilitary camps in the remote districts of Panjgur and Naushki. The assault on the paramilitary headquarters in Panjgur lasted three days, and the one in Nushki a day, and coincided with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Beijing for the Olympics opening ceremony and talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping. [AiR No. 6, February/2022, 2]

In light of this, many political analysts argue that not only the Pakistani Taliban feel emboldened and even enabled by the return of the Afghan Taliban to power in Kabul. While Balochistan has been a hotbed of an insurgency for decades, especially the twin attacks had added to concerns that the separatist movement is jeopardizing the completion of the CPEC. [Deutsche Welle]

Sri Lanka: Finance minister to hold talks with IMF, World Bank in April, local report says

(lm) Sri Lanka's finance minister, Basil Rajapaksa, is scheduled to hold discussions with officials of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in Washington this April to initiate talks on potential financial support to ride over the island nation's current economic crisis, the *Sunday Times* reported. [The Sunday Times]

Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves have plummeted to less than USD 2.36 billion, down from USD7.5 billion in 2019, hitting imports of essential goods, including fuel. The island nation also faces debt repayment obligations of about USD 4 billion this year. [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]

In light of this, opposition leaders and economists are pushing President Rajapaksa's government to seek assistance from multilateral lenders such as the IMF – a move that is likely to force Colombo to undertake painful austerity measures and fiscal reforms. Some opposition members have also urged the government to table in parliament an upcoming IMF assessment of the economic and financial situation, conducted as part of its regular Article IV consultations.

But observers say the decision for Sri Lanka to approach multilateral lenders for financial support will

to an extend depend on political considerations, not least because the finance minister is the younger brother of the president and of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa. Moreover, the presence of a wide range of creditors — particularly the heavy borrowing from China — could complicate attempts to restructure the debt.

Sri Lanka has previously entered 16 programs with the IMF, but about half of those were not completed.

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

Cambodia: Supreme court denies bail in incitement case

(bs) The Cambodian Supreme Court has denied bail to an activist and former member of the Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), a now-defunct major opposition party, who was allegedly involved in activities to overthrow Prime Minister Hun Sen. In 2021, the activist was sentenced to 18 months in prison and charged with "incitement [...] causing harm to social order" under articles 494 and 495 of the Criminal Code. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Contemporarily, the Supreme Court has also upheld the provincial court conviction of one year in prison for a high school teacher for anti-state incitement. The teacher had written a post on social media regarding the government's plan to build a Cambodian-Vietnam Friendship Monument in Pailin at the Cambodia-Thai border. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Civil society groups urge authorities to end violence against Naga casino strikers

(bs) 51 civil society groups submitted a joint statement urging Cambodian authorities to end the violence and harassment against striking workers at NagaWorld casino, who have been carrying out peaceful protests since December 18 asking for better work conditions and the reinstatement of over 300 employees who were laid off. According to the statement, the violations include sexual violence and threats against the strikers, who are mostly women.

The groups also reported that female strikers have been "disproportionately" targeted by the police during the peaceful strikes. They have allegedly been denied access to bathrooms and prevented from returning home until late at night several times. Moreover, the workers are reportedly held in precarious conditions with no access to clean water.

Since the beginning of the strikes, Cambodian authorities have arrested more than 35 union leaders and activists for incitement and forced hundreds of workers into quarantine regardless of their negative COVID test results. On February 21 and 22, other 100 people were taken into custody for allegedly breaking COVID restrictions. Rights groups have condemned the enforcement of 'special' restrictive measures for the casino workers speculating a government's attempt to "thwart the rights to freedom of association, expression, and assembly." [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4] [Radio Free Asia]

Those arrested are currently in pre-trial detention. If convicted, they could face up to two years in jail under Cambodia's Criminal Code. [Ifex]

Indonesia: Human rights commission demand participation of locals in talks on dam project

(bs) The Indonesian National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) urged to hold talks to define long-term solutions for residents of Wadas, Central Java, who are believed to be affected by the construction of a major dam. Over the past weeks, 64 residents have been arrested for opposing new land surveys aimed at building a dam in the area. According

to the villagers, the mining operations would have negative effects on the local environment. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

The Komnas HAM commissioner urged President Joko Widodo to ensure that the project and eventual future constructions would respect human rights. The current issue rose after the villagers claimed that they were not invited to participate in any decisions regarding the project and were thus not allowed to comment nor express their concerns. [Tempo]

Laos: New labor protection regulation issued to tackle human rights violations in Chinese owned zone

(bs) Local authorities in the northern Lao province of Bokeo have issued new labor protection regulations to tackle forced labor and human trafficking in the Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone (SEZ), an area at the border with Thailand and Myanmar that is 80 percent owned by Chinese companies. The Golden Triangle SEZ has been the center of drug production and forced prostitution for over three decades.

According to the new regulation, both employer and employees must sign the employment contract in their local language to facilitate eventual disputes before the court. In case of violation, the employer will be held liable. Moreover, the employers are required to hire only officially registered laborers and submit the necessary documentation to legally employ their workers. [The Laotian Times]

A high number of women, after moving to the SEZ to work as chat girls, have been coerced into staying in the Chinese-owned area and forced into prostitution for not meeting high sales targets set by the company. The company also confiscates the passports and identity documents of the women. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

Malaysia: Former prime minister to sue a party's information chief for defamation over bribery case

(gl) Former Malaysian prime minister Najib Razak has announced his plans to sue People's Justice Party's information chief, Shamsul Iskandar Mohd Akin, for defamation. Shamsul claimed that Najib had stolen

USD 3.5 billion from the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) fund for personal uses. [Free Malaysia Today]

The United States justice department, 1MDB, and the Malay government filed lawsuits against Najib for bribery. The company seeks to receive US$8 billion for the damages. Najib denied all the claims, arguing that since he returned the money to the donor four months after it was credited to him, he couldn't have used it to buy "rings and handbags" as the opposition had claimed. [The Star]

The former Pekan Prime Minister was found guilty of seven charges of money laundering, abuse of power, and criminal breach of trust connected to the 1MDB scandal in July 2020. [AiR No. 30, July/2020, 4]

Along with Najib, Shamsul's accusation included former Goldman Sachs banker Tim Leissner, who was also involved in the scandal. Leissner is currently a key witness in the 1MBD related bribery trial of Roger Ng, his former colleague, who has yet to plead guilty for his role in the fraud after revealing that he stole at least USD80 million from his accomplices. Throughout the trial, he has admitted to lying to compliance officials, arranging millions in bribes, receiving USD 60 million in kickbacks for facilitating 1MDB's bond deals and being paid by Goldman a total of USD 12 million as a result. [Bloomberg] [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Deputy chief minister claims carbon deal agreement signed upon consultation with indigenous communities

(avdv) Public and political discontent have been expressed about the controversial Sabah Nature Conservation Agreement (NCA), which has been officially declared "legally impotent" by Sabah's attorney general for the lack of involvement of the indigenous communities affected by the agreement. However, the deputy chief minister claims that indigenous communities were consulted before the agreement was finalized. [Al Jazeera]

The NCA was signed for the Sabah forest by several Sabah government officials and a Singapore-based shell company, Hoch Standard, in October 2021. The NCA was allegedly signed in the absence of public and indigenous consultation, the latter of which is a requirement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, officially adopted by

Malaysia. [AiR, No. 6, February/2022, 2] [United Nations]

The NCA is being investigated by a coalition of nine Non-Governmental Organizations, which also confirm the agreement's lack of transparency and scientific inaccuracy. The NCA allegedly inflates the compensation and deflates the number of restored trees it would need to plant. The company with which the carbon trade deal was signed also has no past experience in that area. [AiR, No. 7, February/2022, 3]

Myanmar: Junta arrests teenagers for anti-government protests

(bs/ny) Over 50 teenage students were arrested and allegedly tortured by the military authorities for organizing and participating in anti-junta rallies on February 22, which was a palindrome (22/02/2022), a supposedly a lucky date. [Mizzima 1] [Myanmar Now]

On the same day, other 27 people were arrested for their alleged involvement in demonstrations for the so-called Six Twos Revolution. [Mizzima 2]

The Myanmar military junta has been cracking down on protests and demonstrations through violence, arrests, and killings since the February 2021 coup when it took power by overthrowing the democratically-elected government. In just over a year, the junta killed around 1,570 people and arrested another 12,300, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a Thai human rights organization. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Resistance forces receive financial support while deadly clashes continue

(bs/ny) Within a week, more than 60 people were killed in attacks between the military junta and resistance forces across Myanmar. In Karenni State, in the eastern part of the country, three civilians were killed and five were injured in an attack by the junta in two villages. The military has also bombed another area with three airstrikes in the Karenni State. The 8-day-long fight has also killed approximately 61 junta soldiers and 20 resistance fighters [Myanmar Now 1]

The junta's attacks have also continued in Sagaing Region, in North-West Myanmar, where the junta

forces killed at least three civilians and burned down over 500 homes. The attack forced more than 3,000 people to flee. According to a local organization that keeps track of the impact of the ongoing conflict in the country, the junta has torched over 5,000 homes since the February 2021 coup. [Radio Free Asia 1]

Meanwhile, in south-eastern Shan and Kayah states, the intensified fighting between the Myanmar military and local resistance groups has killed 10 civilians, 80 junta soldiers, and 20 People's Defense Force militants. According to the director of the Karenni Human Rights Group, the junta is intentionally targeting civilians by cutting off health and food supplies and spreading fear. More than 30,000 people have been forced to flee since the beginning of the intense fighting in Shan state on February 16. [Radio Free Asia 2]

While the junta attacked villages across the country, the People's Defense Force, the armed wing of the National Unity Government (NUG) which is the democratically-elected shadow government, fired a long-range grenade at the Kayan Township Education Office in Yangon Southern District killing five members of the Military Council. They also attacked a police station in Magway Region killing five people, including a head police officer. [Mizzima] [Myanmar Now 2]

Resistance forces nationwide have received funds from Burmese ethnic minority communities based in the United States (US) since the February 2021 coup. The financial support comes not only from the US but also from other ethnic minority groups in the United Kingdom, Malaysia, South Korea, and other foreign countries, and the funding is primarily sent to Chin State, in western Myanmar, to buy weapons, food, and refugee support. [VOA News]

Among the purchases by resistance forces, there are low-cost drones, which have allegedly been modified to be used as bomb release tools. This technique has been proved daily effective in Sagaing Region, where resistance militants have been using drones to fight the military junta for over five months now. [The Diplomat]

Myanmar: Junta temporarily prohibits Telenor senior employees to leave the country

(bs) The Norwegian government urged the Myanmar military junta to release executives of Telenor, a Norway-based telecommunication company, as they

are prohibited from leaving the country until the completion of the sale process of the company's subsidiary to a military-linked company. [Myanmar Now 1]

On February 24, the Myanmar military junta approved the sale of Telenor's subsidiary in the country to the Lebanese M1 group. The announcement was originally released in July 2021, but the sale transfer was then halted due to the escalating violence in Myanmar. [Myanmar Now 2]

Early February, Telenor was condemned by rights groups for providing the junta with call histories, phone numbers, and other sensitive data of its customers. The military government would find the legal basis of its requests in Article 77 of the 2013 Telecommunications Law, according to which the ministry can suspend services, intercept communications, and temporarily control services in "emergency situations." Following the sale announcement, a network of Norwegian civil society groups called for an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity by Telenor for providing the military junta with sensitive data of its customers facilitating the junta's perpetrations against pro-democracy activists and opponents. According to the civil society groups, the sale could violate Chapter 16 of the Norwegian Penal Code on genocide and crimes against humanity. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

The Philippines: Presidential candidate Leni Robredo popular at end-of-dictatorship anniversary march

(dvr) Thousands of people gathered on February 25 marking the 36th anniversary of the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA) Peoples Power Revolution ending Ferdinand Marco's 21-year Dictatorship and 14 years of martial law in the Philippines, which sent him to exile. Among the ranks of the march were placards voicing fears of a further loss of democratic values and the return to a dictatorship if Marcos's son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr, will win the elections. [Rappler 1]

Marcos's dictatorship was defined by corruption, torture, killings, media oppression, and disappearances. Approximately 70,000 were imprisoned, 34,000 tortured and 3,240 killed in just over two decades.

In light of the citizens' concerns over Marcos Jr's candidacy, several petitions were filed to the National

Election Committee (Comelec) to disqualify Marcos' candidacy as he had been convicted for tax law violations. However, on February 8, the Comelec dismissed all bids related to Marcos Jr. The debate over Marcos Jr's eligibility to be a presidential candidate has created controversy since late 2021. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

Meanwhile, current Vice President, and competing presidential candidate, Leni Robredo showed unity with the marchers on keeping the EDSA spirit alive in the Philippines. Over 150 law Deans and Professors have signed a statement endorsing Robredo alongside a strong rejection of Marcos Jr. [Rappler2]

Robredo and running mate Senator Francis Pangilinan also enjoying support among the 1987 constitutional framers, surviving members of the 1986 constitutional commission who were responsible for the creation of the 1987 constitution one year after the EDSA revolution. They reiterated their commitments to upholding constitutional law, human rights, and co-equal branches of government. [CNN Philippines]

The Philippines: Cyber attack during presidential candidates' debate

(dvr) On February 27, nine presidential candidates and seven vice-presidential candidates attended the first Presidential debate. Ferdinand Marcos Jr., son of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, and running mate Sara Duterte did not attend referencing their busy schedules touring Pangasinan.

The debate lasted three hours covering many issues, with a majority of candidates promising to investigate and probe government agencies such as the Bureau of Customs for corruption, while Manny Pacquiao, politician and former professional boxer, plans to probe the Department of Health.

During the debate, Vice President and presidential candidate Leni Robredo, supported by, vice presidential candidate Senator Panfilo Lacson, reiterated her support for same-sex civil unions believing everyone should be treated equally. On the other hand, Pacquiao voiced his disapproval, mentioning his respect for same-sex marriage but he is prevented from supporting them as it would contradict his beliefs. [CNN Philippines 1] [CNN Philippines 2]

During the debate, hosted by CNN Philippines, the website was down for two hours due to a network attack where hackers send large amounts of traffic to a

website or server to overload it. No one has claimed responsibility. However, recently, major media sites and human rights group Karapatan and the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) have been repeatedly attacked by a group called Pinoy Vendetta. The group is allegedly working in the name of free media but it is believed that they have also attacked many of President Duterte's political opposition and have gained the endorsement of the National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict, a government organization responsible for attacks on the CPP. [Inquirer] Rappler]

The Philippines: Prominent detained senator and former election commissioner fears unfair elections

(dvr) On February 26 a local court rejected Senator Leila de Lima's request to participate in the Commission on Elections' (Comelec) e-rally for candidates through videoconferencing reasoning that Lima's detention status would prohibit her to receive the same treatment as other candidates.

According to Lima, a human rights activist, law professor, and former chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights who was arrested in 2017 under drug trafficking charges which are believed to be a cover for the political motivation of the arrest, her request was based on the rights for a candidate to be free from harassment and discrimination and to have equal opportunities. [Manila Bulletin 1][The Diplomat]

Human Rights Watch urged the Philippine government to drop all charges against Senator de Lima claiming that she has been arbitrarily detained on politically motivated charges for strongly criticizing President Rodrigo Duterte's "war on drugs" and other grave human rights violations under his rule. [Human Rights Watch]

The claims of unfair election became louder after the European Union (EU) condemned the human rights situation in the Philippines, specifically, President Duterte's "war on drugs" and the increase in "red-tagging" arrests, primarily directed towards activists and political oppositions labeling them as communists and making them vulnerable to persecution. The EU also mentioned the repression of press freedom, freedom of expression, and human rights activism as a threat to fair elections. [AIR No. 8,Feburary/2022, 4]

Moreover, the Commission of Human Rights in the Philippines called the current situation a “reminiscent of tyranny” in the wake of killings violence and attacks on journalists, adding that Filipinos need to use the 36th anniversary of the Epifanio de Los Santos Avenue (EDSA) Peoples Power Revolution on February 25th to strengthen advocacy for the right to truth and ensure the end of violations and abuses. [Manila Bulletin 2]

Luie Guia, a lawyer and former commissioner at the Comelec, also expressed concerns over unfairness of the upcoming presidential elections talking about persistent human rights violations in election-related activities. He called the proliferation of fake news a human rights violation. [Philstar]

A week earlier the National Police and Comelec participated in taking down election campaign materials from private properties due to violations of guidelines of size and location set by Comelec. [AIR No. 8,Feburary/2022, 4]

The Philippines: Five people killed in armed clashes

(bs) On February 24, the Philippine forces had an armed encounter with suspected rebels from the New People’s Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party, killing five people.

According to a commander of the national Brigade, the troops were conducting security operations when they spotted the militants and the attack began. [Manila Bulletin]

Save Our Schools Network (SOS Network), a child-focus non-governmental organization, believes that the military mistakenly identified the militants as being members of NPA killing instead of only civilians. [Philstar]

The Philippines: Government declares 16 groups as terrorist organizations

(dvr/bs) The Philippine government has designated 16 groups affiliated to the left political side as “terrorist” organizations for allegedly funneling money to the communist militia, according to the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC).

Arrests will not be immediate but the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) issued sanctions on the 16 groups and their members, and freeze orders are to take effect immediately on property or funds. [Philstar]

The groups are allegedly sub-organizations of the outlawed Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP).

According to the ATC, the decision is based on reliable and verified sources, including the report submitted by CPP founder Jose Maria Sison, who identified the 16 groups as allies of the National Democratic Front (NDF), the armed wing of the communist party and branded as a terrorist group in 2021.

National Security Adviser Hermogenes Esperon Jr and vice-chairman of ATC claims that designation is an effective means in the battle against terrorism preventing financing, recruitment, and supplying of weapons.

In response, the CPP Chief Information officer Marco Valbuena stated that these 16 organizations targeted are "patriotic and democratic" and "have long been fighting for the rights and interests of their represented sectors," further stating that in order to avoid state suppression groups had to remain underground. CPP anticipates that this resolution will be used by ATC to clamp down on social activists violating constitutional rights and legal processes. [BenarNews]

Singapore: Harsher sentences for sex offenders

(avdv) On March 1, the new Criminal Law Act, passed by the parliament in September 2021, entered into force. The Act introduces an increase of the maximum penalties for sexual offenders from two to three years in jail. Such penalty is now equal to that of a sexual offense involving minors.

The new law sparked dissent among the citizens who asked for harsher punishment for the crime.

Over the past three years, Singapore has seen a drastic increase in reported cases of molestation and voyeurism. [The Star]

Thailand: Opposition party proposed amending constitution on Prime Minister

qualifications

(ay) On February 23, the leader of the opposition Pheu Thai Party proposed amending the constitution by adding three new bills, including an amendment of the conditions for becoming Prime Minister.

The first bill would amend articles 159 and 170 of the constitution to establish that the prime minister, in order to be elected, must be a member of parliament.

The second and third bills would amend articles 29 and 29/1 of the constitution to make bailing rights in criminal cases more equitable by allowing those convicted to be detained only if the provisional release petition is denied by the court for reasonable safety reasons.

The third bill also would amend article 43, which states that individuals and communities have the right to conserve, restore, and promote their local wisdom, as well as receive state protection and promotion on health and environmental issues. [Thai PBS, in Thai] [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Groups of protesters demand update on farmer emergency budget approval from to Prime Minister

(ay) On February 22, three protester groups marched to the Government House to present petitions to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha demanding an update on the approval of the USD 61.6-million emergency budget to support the Office of Farmer's Reconstruction and Development Fund. They also demanded to revoke the emergency decree and the prosecution process against one of their group leaders for participating in protests between January 20 and February 3. Moreover, one of the groups urged the government to provide financial assistance to employees affected by the COVID-19 pandemic by using the federal budget. [Thai Post, in Thai]

Thailand: Civic groups call for probe against PM over alleged connection to past human trafficking case

(gl) Five civic organizations have called for an investigation into Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and eight other officials on their alleged involvement in

a 2015 Rohingya Trafficking case. The original case saw numerous police officers and officials sentenced for corruption and trafficking after more than 30 bodies of trafficked Rohingya were discovered on the southern border. [Bangkok Post 1] [The Nation Thailand]

The Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority is not recognized in Myanmar and is seeking refuge in neighboring states. Military attacks against the Rohingya escalated in 2017 and Myanmar was brought before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on genocide allegations for persecuting the Rohingya community. [AiR No. 35, August/2021]

The organizations, which include the Campaign for Democracy, a non-governmental organization (NGO) on democracy and human rights, submitted a petition to the House committee on corruption and misconduct suppression and prevention on February 23. The petition involves Pol Maj Gen Paween Pongsirin, former deputy commissioner of Provincial Police Region 8 who headed the investigation that saw dozens arrested for their links to a Rohingya trafficking network in the South of the country. Seven officials were named for their involvement as well. [Bangkok Post 2]

Secretary-general of Campaign for Democracy Metha Maskhao said that Pol Maj Gen. Paween quit the force and ended up seeking asylum in Australia. The organizations have also requested that Gen. Prayut be questioned in his capacity as the chief of police, in regards to the handling of the Rohingya human trafficking problem.

Additionally, a senior army adviser, died in 2021 while serving 82 years for his role in trafficking Rohingya from Myanmar. The civic groups have urged the committee to launch another investigation into his death to determine if he was killed by authorities to silence him so he would not implicate other Thai officials. [Bangkok Post 1]

Thailand: Long-delayed torture bill gets green light in Parliament

(gl) On February 23, Thailand's House of Representatives passed a bill to criminalize torture and enforced disappearances with an overwhelming 359 votes in favor. [Thai PBS World]

The government-sponsored "Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Bill" outlaws acts of torture committed by state officials

and offers compensation for injuries from the crime but has been long-stalled. It was approved by the Cabinet in June 2020. At the time, four bills on torture and enforced disappearance were waiting to be tabled for parliamentary consideration. This is the only one of the four to move forward. [AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]

As of September 2021, there has been an estimated 82 enforced disappearances since 1980 in Thailand, with some experts saying that figure is much higher. Perpetrators are rarely convicted and many human rights activists accuse authorities of involvement. [AiR No. 25, June/2021, 4] This is despite Thailand ratifying the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhumane and Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 2007 and signing the United Nations International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance in 2012. [Amnesty International]

After a decade of stalling and public pressure, the draft bill passed with perpetrators now facing 15 to 30 years in jail for political disappearances or torture cases involving death. The bill still has to be approved by the Senate, which is expected to be in May. Once approved, the legal changes would apply for all future and current cases of people that have gone missing. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Thai pro-democracy student leader freed on bail for 2020 protests

(gl) The Bangkok South Criminal Court granted bail to Thai pro-democracy student leader Parit 'Penguin' Chiwarak after Thammasat University sent a certificate detailing his student status and requirement to attend final examinations. [Thai PBS World]

Parit faces 23 charges for his alleged involvement in the 2020 student protests that called for Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha's resignation and reform to the Thai monarchy. The student allegedly violated the highly debated lèse-majesté law which punishes with a jail term between 3 and 15 years anyone who "defames, insults or threatens the king, the queen, the heir-apparent or the regent." [South China Morning Post]

The bail was set at 200,000 baht and lasts until May 24. Under the strict bail conditions, Parit must stay at home from 6 pm to 6 am curfew, wear an electronic ankle bracelet, abstain from political activities, and not leave the country. [Bangkok Post]

Parit had been previously hospitalized after a 46-day hunger strike in May 2021 which he stated he would end when he and the other co-leaders were granted bail. He was granted bail in May 2021 but allegedly led a student protest two months later, which would violate the conditions of his bail. He was denied bail in August of the same year, along with other student protest leaders. [AiR No. 11 March/2021] [AiR No. 34 August/2021)

Timor-Leste: European Union deployed election observation mission to Timor-Leste

(bs) The European Union (EU) has deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to Timor-Leste in light of the upcoming presidential elections scheduled for March 19.

The decision followed an open invitation from the Timorese Ministry of Foreign Affairs requesting the EU's support to consolidate the country's democratic values. The ministry aims at ensuring that Timor-Leste's elections are inclusive, transparent, and fair.

Europe had previously deployed EOMs for each of the Timorese elections since the country's declaration of independence in 2002. The EOM is composed of several groups of experts who would observe the election period from a few weeks before the election date until the completion of the election process when the commission will publish a final report with its observations and a set of recommendations. [Relief Web]

Vietnam: Government plans to intensify fight against cybercrime

(bs) The Vietnamese Minister of Information and Communications has issued a new plan to increase the country's capacity to combat cybercrimes and law violations of internet security. The move is part of the national strategy on crime prevention and control for 2016-2025, which aims at eradicating online abuse and crimes by 2030. [Vietnam Plus]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Sino-Russian unity in Ukraine conflict at test amidst widening anti-Moscow sanctions

(xh/dql) Two of China's largest state-owned banks – Industrial & Commercial Bank of China and Bank of China – have reportedly started to restrict funding purchases of Russian commodities. This comes amidst widening sanctions against Russia imposed by the US and its Western allies in reaction to Moscow's invasion of the Ukraine, including the European Commission's latest decision on Sunday, February 27, to shut down the EU airspace for any Russian plane and to exclude selected Russian banks from the SWIFT system, in addition to banning transactions of Russia's central bank and freezing all its assets. US President Joe Biden also announced a ban on exporting semiconductors to Russia.

Although China has so far refrained from calling Moscow's military operation an invasion and lifted a ban on imports of Russian wheat, the Chinese banks' move is indicative of China's problem to uphold pledges of unity and solidarity with Russia under the pressure of economic sanctions against Moscow. [Bloomberg Quint] [Al Jazeera] [European Commission] [BBC] [Wired] [South China Morning Post]

Chinese President Xi Jinping also expressed a cautious diplomatic line in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday, February 25, in which he

affirmed China's support for Russia's efforts for a resolution of Ukraine crisis through diplomacy, while stressing "respecting the legitimate security concerns of various countries and forming a balanced, effective and sustainable European security mechanism through negotiation." [Xinhua]

Reflecting a diplomatic tightrope walk was also China's abstention on the same day from a vote on a UN Security Council resolution drafted by the US and calling on Russia to stop the attacks of the Ukraine and withdraw all troops immediately. Russia vetoed the draft resolution. India and the United Arab Emirates also abstained from the vote. The remaining eleven members, including voted in favor of the draft resolution. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, a New York times report last week claims that Chinese officials, including the Chinese ambassador to the US and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, were informed on a regular basis since late December by US intelligence about Moscow's invasion plans. But the Chinese side dismissed the information as an attempt to sow discord between China and Russia. [The New York Times]

Japan, South Korea join international sanctions against Russia

(cm/mpk) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that Japan is joining the United States, the EU, the UK and Canada in banning Russian access to its SWIFT, or Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication services, as well as adding sanctions on Russian officials, including President Putin, and sending USD 100 million to Ukraine as emergency humanitarian aid funding. SWIFT is a global platform for banks to communicate on financial matters such as trades, transfers and transactions, connecting more than 11,000 financial services companies across 200. [Insider]

In an earlier move, Japan announced on Wednesday, February 23, to impose a set of economic sanctions on both Russia and the two separatist regions Donetsk and Luhansk. The sanctions include suspending visa issuance for officials from Donetsk and Luhansk and freezing their assets, as well as a ban on imports from and exports to the two regions, and on the issuance and trading of new Russian sovereign bonds in Japan, as well as export controls on high-tech products such as semiconductors. [The Japan News]

Furthermore, Japan is in talks with the European Union about coordinating further diversion of parts of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports to Europe, with Tokyo likely to provide additional LNG supplies from April as long as it can ensure sufficient energy supplies for its domestic market. [The Mainichi]

Japan's latest measures are likely to set the country and Russia further apart in solving the long-standing territorial dispute over the four islands northeast of Hokkaido, the southernmost Kuril Islands, that were annexed by Russia at the end of World War II but are claimed by Japan. [The Japan Times]

South Korea's Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, announced on Monday, February 28, to ban exports of strategic materials to Russia, including supplies of electronics, semiconductors, computers, information and communications, sensors and lasers, navigation and avionics, and marine and aerospace equipment.

South Korea also decided to join the US, Britain, Canada and other countries to exclude important Russian banks from the SWIFT system. The measures are part of the country's efforts to join global sanctions against Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

The Ministry added that Seoul will also promote additional release of strategic oil reserves to stabilize the international energy market, as well as further look into additional measures including the resale of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe. [Yonhap News Agency] [Reuters]

Counting both United States, Russia as partners, India faces major diplomatic challenge in Ukraine crisis

(lm) The Russian invasion of the Ukraine leaves India in quandary as New Delhi juggles ties with its old partner Russia its growing relationship with the United States at a time when tensions with neighboring China on its northern Himalayan border are running high.

India's public statements on the current crisis have so far pleased Russian officials. So far, New Delhi has abstained from two votes taken in the United Nations (UN) Security Council – one deploring Russia's aggression against Ukraine and another procedural vote calling for an emergency session of the UN General Assembly, along with China and the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, New Delhi's ambassador to the UN declined to explicitly criticize Moscow's

moves, instead calling on all sides to exercise the "utmost restraint." [Reuters]

While US Secretary of State Antony Blinken had pressed his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar on the need for a "strong collective response" before the UN Security Council vote on the resolution deploring Russia's aggression, the Russian embassy in New Delhi welcomed India's "independent and balanced position," after it abstained. [South Asia Monitor] [The Wire]

With India-China relations in recent years trending once more toward cordial antagonism, India maintains historically close ties with Moscow, particularly in defense procurement. Just last December, the two countries signed a flurry of investment and arms deals during Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to New Delhi for an annual summit with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi [see AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1].

In light of this, and its traditional approach of keeping a low profile, India has avoided criticizing Russian aggression in the past, including the 2014 annexation of Crimea. At the time, India's National Security Advisor spoke of the "legitimate security concerns" of all sides. Using a similar language, in a February 24 phone conversation with President Putin, Indian Prime Minister Modi called for dialogue and a ceasefire – but stopped short of criticizing Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. [The Straits Times]

Instead, New Delhi has stayed in touch with both Moscow and Kyiv as it prioritized evacuation operations for citizens from India and neighboring countries, besides providing humanitarian assistance to the Ukraine. [The Hindu]

But political analysts argue that Russian aggression in Ukraine poses major threats to Indian interests, from driving Russia into China's arms to distracting the United States from countering China's regional influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Furthermore, because India's relations with the United States have strengthened since 2014, staying quiet on Russia's moves has become a bigger gamble. Bilateral relations between the two countries have already been complicated for New Delhi's acquisition of the S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Moscow last year. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

Washington will likely waive sanctions on India for the purchase, but experts believe that the real challenge for the US is figuring out how to avoid having to deal with this repeatedly: In 2023, India will receive the first

two of four new frigates from Russia, and in 2025, will begin leasing its third nuclear-powered submarine – dubbed Chakra III – from Moscow, all major deals already sealed [see AiR No. 35, August/2021, 5]. [Voice of America]

India's refusal to call out Russia also risks sparking tensions within the multilateral grouping called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The three other members – Australia, Japan, and the US – have announced sanctions on Russia. India's position could also rankle countries in Europe, many of which it counts on for trade and arms and for support in countering China. [South China Morning Post]

Pakistani Prime Minister Khan meets Russian President Putin amid Ukraine invasion

(tj/lm/kd) Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan met with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin on February 24, a long-planned meeting that – while overshadowed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine – represented a key milestone for a relationship that has quietly grown in recent years.

Prime Minister Khan's trip to Moscow focused solely on bilateral cooperation, especially with regards to the USD 2.5 billion PakStream Gas Pipeline project, according to a Pakistani readout. The Pakistani leader also met Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, while Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi held brief talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4] [The Express Tribune 1] [The New York Times, $]

While Pakistani officials insisted that Prime Minister Khan's Moscow trip had nothing to do with the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, some commentators called the ill-timed visit a "diplomatic disaster" that may give the impression that Islamabad indirectly endorsed President Putin's decree on breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine, and even the invasion. [Deutsche Welle]

At the same time, there is reason to believe that Islamabad is trying to carefully avoid criticizing Moscow's policy in Ukraine. In a February 22 interview with Russian state-controlled channel before his trip, Prime Minister Khan offered a tepid denunciation at best, stating "This [Ukraine crisis] does not concern us. We have a bilateral relationship with Russia, and we

really want to strengthen it." [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4].

During his visit to Moscow, then, Khan expressed "regret" that a military conflict was not averted, according to a Pakistani readout. Foreign Minister Qureshi used a similar language in a phone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart on February 27, but, like his prime minister, stopped short of criticizing Russia's actions. [Al Jazeera] [The Express Tribune 2]

Pakistan's balancing act is less intricate than India's [see entry above], thanks in great part to two geopolitical conditions: First, Islamabad's relationship with the United States is fraught, especially since Taliban rulers of neighboring Afghanistan seized power in August last year [see latest AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]. Moreover, Pakistan has long sought to leverage its alliance with China to work more closely with Russia, especially in landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia.

But political analysts argue that Islamabad must be careful not to edge too close to Moscow, given its commercial relationships with Europe and its desire to play a greater role on the global stage. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Pakistan's powerful military chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, was meeting with officials of the European Union in Brussel in the lead-up to Prime Minister Khan's Moscow trip to discuss regional security in South Asia and relations with Afghanistan. [Foreign Policy, $]

Southeast Asian Nations release joint statement on Russian invasion of Ukraine

(bs) On February 26, foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) shared their deep concern in a joint statement on the Russian war attack on Ukraine. The ASEAN members' representatives have urged to use diplomatic means to solve the situation and encouraged everyone to agree to a peaceful resolution in line with international law principles.

In the statement, the representatives did not condemn nor support the Russian invasion of another sovereign country. That reflects the low percentage of Southeast Asian nations that signed a draft United Nations resolution calling for Russia to end its aggression against Ukraine. Only Singapore and Timor-Leste have signed it so far [The Diplomat]. In a statement, the Singaporean foreign ministry said that "Singapore strongly condemns any unprovoked invasion of a

sovereign country under any pretext" reiterating that "the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected."

On February 24, Russian troops invaded Ukraine firing missiles and killing over 40 Ukrainian soldiers and several civilians. The European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States have immediately issued strict economic sanctions on Russia in an attempt to encourage its military retreat from Ukraine. [The Wall Street Journal]

Although in the joint statement the ASEAN countries have not expressed their stance on the issue, over the past few days, a number of Southeast Asian country representatives have shared their nation's diplomatic position. The Indonesian President, for instance, has called for the immediate end of the war in Ukraine and instructed the Foreign Ministry to evacuate Indonesian citizens from the region. [The Jakarta Post]

Meanwhile, while the Malaysian Prime Minister made a tame statement saying that he regretted the latest development in Ukraine, Cambodia and Vietnam restrained from any substantive comments on the situation. The Philippines and Thailand shared concerns over their citizens in Ukraine, and Laos released a statement on a national level in support of a "peaceful settlement to the situation through diplomatic means." [Benar News] [The Laotian Times] [Bangkok Post]

The only voice out of the choir was that of Myanmar's military government, which expressed its full support to Russia for invading Ukraine calling it the right move to "consolidate its (Russian) sovereignty" and to "show the world that Russia is a world power." On the other hand, Myanmar's shadow government openly condemned the attack and called for international peace and solidarity with the people of Ukraine. [VOA News]

Australia accuses China of providing a lifeline to Russia

(xh) In reaction to China's lift of trade-restrictions on Russian wheat, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison accused on Friday, February 25, China of undermining Western sanctions against Russia, arguing that Russia should not be given a "lifeline" in this situation as it is invading another country. [ABC Net]

On Sunday, Morrison confirmed that Australia will support the Ukraine with “lethal aid” in additional to the nonlethal military equipment previously provided

Days earlier, Morrison demanded an investigation after alleging that a Chinese ship had fired a laser at an Australian surveillance plane without any explanation on Thursday, February 17. Morrison called the incident an “act of intimidation” and described it as “dangerous and reckless” claiming it had the potential of endangering lives. [Al Jazeera]

China’s Defense Ministry denied the laser allegations claiming in return that the Australian aircraft came too close to the Chinese airspace and that it launched a sonar buoy in the sea to detect information from Chinese submarines. [Reuters] [The Guardian 1]

These statements are the latest reflections of highly strained relations between China and Australia that begun to sour in 2020 when Australia called for an independent investigation into the origins of Covid-19. In response, China posed tariffs and trade restrictions on Australian goods worth billions of USD. Further, infuriating Beijing, Canberra last year concluded with the US and UK the defense pact AUKUS, which would allow Australia to obtain nuclear-powered submarines.

European, Indo-Pacific foreign ministers met at first Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

(bs/bp) On February 22, 27 European Union Foreign Ministers and 30 ministers from the Indo-Pacific region met in Paris for the Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific chaired by the current French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) and other EU High Representative.

The forum was organized to follow up with the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the Global Gateway Strategy, which were adopted in September 2021, and aimed at demonstrating Europe’s commitment to multilateralism in the Asian region.

One of the main objectives of the EU-Indo-Pacific cooperation is to strengthen strategic connectivity with Indo-Pacific partners by implementing the Global Gateway through the mobilization of a €300-billion investment for connectivity infrastructure projects,

good governance and environmental sustainability, including the transition to climate neutrality.

Moreover, the EU agreed to a strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific to support regional security and stability while reaffirming the EU's commitment to international and maritime law in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The EU voiced its intention to coordinate with its Indo-Pacific partners in strengthening maritime presence in the North-West Indian Ocean as well in the South China Sea aiming at supporting stability and security in the region. The meeting also confirmed the joint commitment between the members of the two regions to ensure freedom of navigation.

Another discussed point was to allow the EU to have a permanent presence in the Indo-Pacific region and to help facilitate cooperation between partners by enhancing the information exchange process. The focus was specifically on security and defense as part of the discussion regarded the ongoing power game between China and the United States to establish stronger ties in the Indo-Pacific region creating a limited choice for the countries in the Indo-Pacific area. The participants then agreed to speed up the implementation of the 2021 EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, which includes initiatives in the fields of security, digital connectivity, climate change, and biodiversity and committed to establishing its economic and political presence in the region with the objective to provide an alternative to the current choice between the United States and China. [European Council on Foreign Relations] [EEAS Europa]

United Arab Emirates to buy Chinese military aircraft

(xh) On Wednesday, February 23, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) announced plans to purchase a dozen of Chinese jets to improve their national defense after undergoing a series of attacks from Yemeni rebels. [South China Morning Post]

This purchase worries the US of a possible further involvement of Beijing with the UAE. The Emirates have deepened ties with China in the past two decades, becoming China's most important economic partner in the Gulf region and taking part in the Belt and Road Initiative with a $3.4 billion deal signed in 2019. [CNBC]

In December 2021, the UAE threatened to refuse to buy 50 US warplanes because of the US concerns

about the Emirates' relationship with China. The concern stemmed from UAE's use of Huawei 5G technology. [NIKKEI Asia]

Last week, the situation has shifted, and the UAE and US still have to finalize their deal of 50 US jets, while the final contract with China is meant to be signed soon, according to Tawazun Economic Council. [South China Morning Post]

Canadian court finds Chinese overseas affairs agency involved in espionage

(xh) In what is seen as a precedent-setting judgement, the Canadian Federal Court on February 24 ruled that Overseas Chinese Affairs Office (OCAO) is involved in espionage that harms Canadian national interests.

The ruling upholds a decision of the Immigration Citizenship and Refugees Canada (IRCC) in a case of a Chinese couple moving to Canada, sponsored by their naturalized Canadian daughter. However, their application for permanent residency was turned down on grounds the father had worked for the OCAO for 20 years as a senior administrator in China. The IRCC cited specific legislation that bars former workers of Chinese espionage agency from immigrating to Canada to prevent Canada's interests being harmed. The court followed the IRCC's decision acknowledging that the OCAO had carried out "covert action and intelligence gathering against [overseas] Chinese communities and other minorities around the world."

The OCAO is an administrative office under the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist Party responsible for liaising with overseas Chinese residing abroad or returning to China. The United Front Work Department, which reports directly to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and is responsible for gathering intelligence on, managing relations with, and attempting to influence elite individuals and organizations inside and outside China, has come increasingly under scrutiny over influence operations it is accused of. [National Post] [South China Morning Post]

China to host Afghanistan conference

(dql) Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi revealed in a statement made in a news conference on Friday, February 25, that China will host

a two-day Afghanistan conference that will be attended by the foreign ministers of China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – the six neighbors of Afghanistan – at the end of this month to discuss ways out of the economic and humanitarian crisis the Taliban-ruled, conflict-ridden country is facing.

Taliban's power seizure in Afghanistan in August was followed by wide-ranging international sanctions which go back to the Islamist group's first time in power from 1996 to 2001, with the US and other Western countries also suspending financial aid to Kabul and immediately freezing billions of dollars in the Afghan central bank's assets, mostly held in the US. This pushed the country to the brink of collapse, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis. The United Nations estimates some 23 million people – more than half of the population – suffer acute hunger.

The meeting will mark the third such dialogue among Afghanistan's neighbors since the Taliban's power seizure in August, following the inaugural gathering in September in Islamabad and the second in Tehran in October. [VoA]

China appoints new ambassador to Horn of Africa

(xh) On Tuesday, February 22, China appointed a new ambassador for the Horn of Africa, a region that includes the turbulent countries of Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The appointed envoy, Xue Bing, former ambassador of Papua Guinea has gained experience working in Africa, America and Oceania. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, his role will be to promote China's peaceful engagement in the conflict-ridden region with his biggest challenge will the ongoing war in Ethiopia between the central government and the northern region of Tigray that has so far displaced millions of people and pushed hundreds of thousands into famine conditions.

Xue's goal will be to reach a long-term stability among the conflictual countries through China's economic aid. Beside Beijing's investment in the region, China's interest also stems from its naval base in Djibouti, which allows Beijing to overlook the Gulf of Aden, a major global shipping route where oil from the Middle East and goods from Asia travel to Europe. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

China temporarily detains Japanese diplomat

(cm) Earlier last week a diplomat in the Japanese Embassy in Beijing was detained temporarily while on duty by Chinese authorities. The Chinese Embassy in Tokyo stated on Wednesday, February 23, that the official had engaged in inappropriate activity and had been consequently investigated and questioned in accordance with the law, without further elaborating.

The Japanese government lodged a protest with China through diplomatic channels. Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Takeo Mori also demanded that China issues an apology and prevents a recurrence, citing a violation the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. [Kyodo News]

South Korea calls for regional efforts to solve historical disputes in Asia-Pacific

(mpk) Speaking at the Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum hosted by France in Paris on February 22, South Korean Foreign Minister Chung Eui-Yong called for regional efforts to resolve historical issues in the Indo-Pacific region, in an apparent reference to long-standing dispute between South Korea and Japan over forced labor and 'comfort women' during Japan's rule on the Korean peninsula. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

In a separate meeting on the sidelines the forum with UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay, Chung shared concerns over Japan's bid to have the Sado mine, a gold mine that was turned into facilities to produce war materials and where Koreans were forced to work during World War II, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage. [Yonhap News Agency 2] [See also AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

North Korea: Bank accounts of citizens observed by the Vietnamese government

(mpk) According to report of the Financial Action Task Force, the Paris-based intergovernmental organization founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, Vietnam is close monitoring more than 30 bank accounts of North

Korean nationals in the country – predominantly embassy employees – as Hanoi joins efforts to implement UN sanctions against Pyongyang. [Yonhap News Agency]

More Chinese military airplanes entered Taiwan ADIZ amidst proposal of reduction

(eb) Nine Chinese airplanes, including eight Shenyang J-16 fighter jets and one Y-8 tactical reconnaissance aircraft, entered the Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) of Taiwan on February 24. This incursion, which happened on the same day as the Russian invasion of Ukraine, marked the 13th ADIZ violation so far in February 2022. [Taiwan News 1]

On February 27, eight more Chinese airplanes (six fighter jets and two anti-submarine planes) entered the ADIZ [Taiwan News 2] while the Taiwan's military announced that after the Lunar New Year meteorological balloons from China were spotted above Taiwan's airspace. However, given that were likely just conducting observation on the atmospheric pressure, they were assessed to not be a threat. [Focus Taiwan]

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) rebuked a proposal by the parliamentary Legislative Research Bureau to reduce the size of Taiwan's ADIZ in order to reduce air force deployments to respond to incursions of Chinese airplanes. Instead, the DPP proposed tighter cooperation with allied countries to deter Chinese militarism in the first place. [Taipei Times]

Meanwhile, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson of the 7th fleet of the United States conducted on February 26, a transit in the Taiwan Strait through international waters as part of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, according to the US Navy. [US Navy]

China formally condemned the crossing of the strait and defined the action a "proactive support to the separatists" [CGTN].

China warns US to not include Taiwan in Indo-Pacific Strategy

(eb) During a call between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on

Tuesday, February 22, during which the two diplomats discussed the Ukraine crisis, the latter also advised the former to exclude Taiwan from the US Indo-Pacific Strategy, warning that not doing so would send the signal of an attempt at containing China.

Long awaited, the Biden administration presented in February its Indo-Pacific Strategy [see AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3] in which the defense of Taiwan is mentioned as one of the main areas of interest of the Indo-Pacific strategy and the US pledge to "work with partners inside and outside of the region to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, including by supporting Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, to ensure an environment in which Taiwan's future is determined peacefully in accordance with the wishes and best interests of Taiwan's people. According to the Wang. [Reuters] [The White House]

Echoing his stance, Wang on Monday, February 28, delivered a recorded message at the anniversary commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Shanghai Communique in which he insisted that the US need to "stop supporting Taiwan secessionists and stop interfering in China's internal affairs," as the only way to "safeguard peace and stability across the Taiwan Straits and safeguard the overall interests of China-US relations." [Global Times] [Daily Mail]

The Shanghai Communiqué, issued on February 28, 1972, on the final day of the visit to China by President Richard Nixon, paved the way for the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US.

Defying Wang's advice, a delegation composed by former Joint Chief of Staff Chairman Michael Glenn Mullen, deputy national security advisor under President Bush Meghan O'Sullivan and former National Security Council senior directors for Asia Mike Green and Evan Medeiros has arrived in Taiwan on March 1, in an unexpected visit to discuss defense perspectives of Taiwan amidst the recent attack of Ukraine by Russia. The delegation is set to remain in Taiwan for 24 hours. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan to take countermeasures in response to developments in Ukraine

(eb) After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Taiwan as well is being involved in the ripples of the attack in Europe. Countermeasures taken by the government of Taiwan include evaluation of repercussions on the market's prices and the hypothesis of a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

President Tsai Ing-wen said that she will participate in any initiative that could de-escalate the situation and that Taiwan will contrast any comparison between the situation in Ukraine to the one of Taiwan. Although very different in the matter, President Tsai fears that it might affect the morale of Taiwan. [Radio Taiwan International]

For this reason, Taiwan's Army was mobilized to be on the watch for any potential threat coming from China. [Taiwan News 1] Foreign Minister Joseph Wu fears that China might take advantage of the ongoing chaos in Europe to attack Taiwan. [Mint] The Taiwan government is taking note of how Ukraine could not defend itself at the best of its condition, especially regarding the preparedness of the reservists. The DPP announced that it will revise the training of the reservists and that will work to enlarge their numbers. [Taipei Times 1]

Another possible consequence of the escalation in Ukraine might affect the inflation and the prices of goods in Taiwan. Taiwan's government declared that it will join the other countries with heavy sanctions against Russia [Al Jazeera] especially by limiting the export of semiconductor and exposing itself to economic retaliation from Russia.

Taiwan's largest producer, the TSMC, announced that it will comply to rules that limit exports to Russia. [Formiche.net] The Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics mentioned that a spike in prices of commodities is possible after the most recent news and a full-scale invasion could drive up the price of bulk agricultural goods, such as wheat and corn, according to the president of the Taiwan Institute of Economic Research (TIER). [Focus Taiwan] Natural gas' price in particular could triple in the timespan of just a week according to Minister of Economic Affairs [Taiwan News 2] and local authorities said that they will intervene on the stock market should the rise in prices become irrational. [Taiwan News 3] Corn has been stocked in order to prevent spike in prices, stockpiling 2.59 million tons and ordering as many in order to fodder the livestock production in the country for several months. [Taipei Times 2]

Taiwan aided Somaliland against drought with US$500,000

(eb) On February 21, Taiwan's envoy to Somaliland Allen C. Lou handed out a donation of USD 500,000 to the Vice President of Somaliland Abdirahman Abdillahi

Ismail Saylici. Taiwan has also declared that it will donate 300 tons of rice to help fight the famine that is affecting the country. [Taiwan News]

Since the establishment of mutual relations in 2020, the bilateral relations between Somaliland (a part of Somalia that declared its independence and that has not received international recognition) have been steadily improving. Earlier this year Taiwan donated 150,000 vaccines to Somaliland and a delegation of the African state's government had its first official visit to Taipei, where they held meeting with Taiwan's President and ministers.

One-hundred Taiwanese entrepreneurs to move in Lithuanian markets

(eb) Almost one-hundred Taiwanese firms' representatives attended the "Lithuania Investment and Market Opportunities Presentation" held by the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA) held on February 24, recording the highest participation ever. Taiwanese representatives highlighted the positive qualities of the Lithuanian market such as highly skilled and multilingual workers, advanced infrastructures and highly tolerant trade environment. Bilateral trade between the two countries reached USD 174 million last year. [Taiwan News]

This intensification of the relations follows the block of Lithuanian goods by China after the name of Taiwan's Representative Office was changed from "Chinese Taipei" to "Taiwan". [BBC]

Taiwan's security is key for Japan, former Japanese Prime Minister says

(eb) During an interview, former Prime Minister of Japan Abe Shinzo reiterated his opinion on Taiwan's security, saying that "if Taiwan has a problem, Japan has also a problem". Abe also declared that the US should end the ambiguity on Taiwan and should fully commit to defending it.

Abe also declared that North Korea is taking advantage from the chaos by conducting another missile test and that based of his twenty-seven encounters with Putin, the Russian president never completely trusted NATO and that Putin's views on US-Russia relations are deeply-entrenched. [Taiwan News]

Nepal approves contentious USD 500 million US aid grant despite protests

(lm) Nepal's Parliament on February 27 ratified a United States-funded infrastructure assistance package which critics say undermines the Himalayan nation's sovereignty as protesters opposed to the proposed funds clashed with police on the streets. [South China Morning Post] [The Kathmandu Post] [The Straits Times]

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a US government aid agency, agreed in 2017 to provide USD 500 million in grants to fund an electricity transmission line and road improvement project. But for the past five years, Nepal's Communist parties – including those in the ruling coalition – had refused to ratify the deal over fears that it would ensnare Kathmandu in Washington's deepening competition with China. They also said the aid would undermine Nepal's laws and sovereignty.

Against this backdrop, the US sent a warning to lawmakers in Nepal earlier this month, saying it will initiate a review of bilateral relations with Kathmandu if the Himalayan nation doesn't ratify the assistance package by the end of this month. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

While protests before the vote were smaller compared with previous days, they were more violent, with demonstrators pelting police with stones and pushing barbed wire and metal barricades. Riot police responded with tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds. [The Himalayan Times]

Seemingly caught off guard by Nepal's last-minute approval of the MCC grant, China on February 28 said Washington should not undermine the sovereignty of other countries through "coercive diplomacy". Before, an article in the state-run *Global Times* on February 26 said the MCC may look like just an economic aid program, it actually serves Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy that mainly intends to hinder the development of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, and contain China's growing influence in the region. [Global Times 1] [Global Times 2]

India to finalize terms of free trade deal with Gulf Cooperation Council soon

(lm) India and the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have agreed to fast track long-stalled negotiations for a free trade deal and hope to conclude initial discussion before the end of this year, according to India's commerce minister. New Delhi is working to conclude at least six bilateral trade agreements this year.

A Framework Agreement on Economic Cooperation between India and the GCC member states – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – was signed in August 2004, and subsequently, two rounds of negotiations were held in 2006 and 2008. However, the talks fizzled out shortly thereafter, as the GCC decided to defer its negotiations with all countries and economic groups. [The Tribune India]

India's discussions on reviving the negotiations started last year, reflecting a broader urgency that many experts say had previously been missing on the part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government when it comes to embracing an aggressive trade policy. The move gained traction after New Delhi pulled out of the China-dominated negotiations on the world's largest trade deal with fifteen other Asia-Pacific economies, collectively known as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, in November 2019 [see AiR No. 46, November/2020, 3].

Crucial to the success of the GCC negotiations, India signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE earlier this month, marking the first bilateral trade accord concluded by the UAE, and India's first bilateral trade agreement in the Middle East and North Africa region [see AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]. This wide-ranging trade and investment pact can serve as the template for a larger pact with the GCC, *Moneycontrol* reports, citing senior commerce department officials. [Moneycontrol]

Seeking to develop economic alternatives to China, India will also continue negotiations for an FTA with the United Kingdom this March. The deal to boost two-way trade by USD 38 billion a year by 2035 is reportedly being keenly pursued by London to make up for the significant setback to its commerce with its biggest trading block, the European Union (EU), since Brexit [see AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3]. [Livemint]

Last December, India and Australia decided to bypass an interim harvest trade agreement and accelerate a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA), officially known as the bilateral Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) [see AiR No. 52, December/2021, 4]. Australian Trade Minister Daniel

Tehan visited New Delhi on February 10 for talks with his Indian counterpart on the proposed trade deal.

In May last year, at their bilateral summit, India and the EU decided to resume long-stalled talks for a comprehensive trade and investment treaty (BTIA) [see AiR No. 19, May/2021, 2].

New Delhi is also negotiating an FTA with Canada; Trade Minister Mary Ng will likely visit New Delhi on March 11 to hold talks with her Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal and revive long-stalled free trade negotiations. [Financial Express]

Afghanistan, Pakistan hold talks over contested border, days after deadly clash

(lm) High-level delegations of Pakistan and Afghanistan were set to meet on February 28 at a major crossing to discuss trade flows and people's movement across the two countries' border that has become a center of the increasing tensions between Islamabad and the Afghan Taliban. [NDTV]

Prior to the bilateral engagement, clashes between Afghan and Pakistani security forces of left at least three people dead and several wounded. Both sides later blamed each other for starting the clashes at the Chaman-Spin Boldak crossing that later spread to several nearby villages. The crossing reopened on February 27, following negotiations between tribal notables and religious leaders. [Dawn] [Reuters]

Adding to the along the two nations' border are growing security risks. Militant attacks in Pakistan have increased by 42 percent in 2021, compared to the previous year, according to a report by the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS) that was published this January. The report documents that the Pakistani Taliban, known by their acronym TTP, alone was responsible for 87 attacks that killed 158 people, an increase of 84 percent relative to 2020. [PICSS]

The deteriorating security situation was one of the top agenda items in talks between Afghan Taliban authorities and NSA Yusuf when the latter visited Kabul last month [see AiR No. 5, February/2022, 1]. But despite repeated attempts, Islamabad has been unable to get firm guarantees from the Afghan Taliban that they would take action against TTP hiding inside Afghan territories.

This might explain why Pakistan was the first country to charge that, under the new rulers in Kabul, Afghan soil is being used for international terrorism. Islamabad made the accusation after TTP militants firing from inside Afghanistan killed five Pakistani soldiers at a border post in northwestern Kurram district on February 6. [AiR No. 6, February/2022, 2]

Further complicating the situation, the Afghan Taliban are infuriated by a fence Islamabad is erecting along the 2,700-kilometre border, running along the United Kingdom's colonial-era Durand Line, which Afghanistan has never formally accepted. In at least three separate 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].

Pakistan looks to exit 'grey list', faces new review at FATF gathering

(lm/kd) Pakistan's efforts to investigate and prosecute leaders of UN-designated terror groups will be evaluated during an ongoing meeting series of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an inter-governmental organization that sets standards to curb money laundering and terror financing.

The latest meetings of the FATF's Plenary and Working groups opened on February 25 and will run until March 4. After its conclusion, the financial watchdog will announce whether Pakistan is to be retained on its list of Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring – often externally referred to as the 'grey list' – to which Islamabad was added again in June 2018 after a three-year hiatus. Although it doesn't entail sanctions or other punitive measures, Pakistan's presence on the grey list does generate reputational costs and often discourages investors.

In June last year, the FATF noted that Pakistan had made significant progress and had largely addressed 26 out of 27 items on the action plan it first committed to in 2018 [see AiR No. 26, June/2021, 5]. But during its last Plenary meeting in October last year, the FATF urged Islamabad to do more to investigate and prosecute leaders and commanders of UN-listed terrorist groups involved in terror financing.

In the lead-up to that session, Pakistan had arrested and prosecuted around 30 designated terrorists and their associates, including firebrand cleric Hafiz Saeed [see AiR No. 47, November/2020, 4] and Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, leader of the Islamist terrorist group

Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which has longtime ties to the Pakistani security establishment [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1]. But just weeks after the conclusion of the plenary meeting in October, a case brought against three key LeT leaders, including Saeed's brother-in-law, collapsed a month later because of an improper investigation.

Given Pakistan's economic struggles, the government is keen to shake off its status. Islamabad earlier this month said it had "faithfully complied" with the FATF conditions and was hoping for a "positive direction." In a thinly veiled reference to India, Islamabad also said "there are issues of politicisation by some countries, and that remains a problem".

Indian foreign minister expected to visit Sri Lanka this month to defuse tensions over fishing rights

(lm) A long-running fisheries conflict between fishermen from India and Sri Lanka has again acquired intensity with the Sri Lankan Navy arresting more than 80 fishermen from the Indian Tamil Nadu state and the Puducherry union territory over the past month for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) and fishing in Sri Lankan waters. [The Hindu 1] [The New Indian Express]

Recent developments add to already heightened tensions between fishermen of northern Sri Lanka and the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Earlier this year, the death of two Sri Lankan fishermen during mid-sea clashes with Indian trawlers had caused a massive protest in the Sri Lankan city of Jaffna, with protesters demanding stringent action by the government.

Sri Lanka banned so-called bottom trawling in 2017, and imposed hefty fines on foreign vessels engaging in illegal fishing in its territorial waters the following year. While the moves deterred Indian fishermen for some time, Sri Lankan fishermen, over the last two years, yet again flagged an increase in Indian trawlers sighted along the Indian Ocean island's coast. [AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3]

Following the protests, the Sri Lankan Navy significantly stepped up patrolling, making frequent arrests in the Palk Strait where India and Sri Lanka are only separated by 12 nautical miles. Also in February, Sri Lanka began auction more than 130 vessels seized from India's Tamil Nadu fishermen for allegedly encroaching Sri Lankan waters.

Against this backdrop, the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M K Stalin, wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, requesting him to direct the Ministry of External Affairs to take up the matter with Sri Lanka and secure the immediate release of the fishermen and their boats. In fact, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is likely to visit Sri Lanka later this month, possibly accompanied by a senior representative from the Tamil Nadu state government, diplomatic sources told *The Hindu*. [The Hindu 2] [The New Indian Express 2]

During a New Delhi visit by Sri Lankan Foreign Minister G.L. Peiris earlier this month, both countries agreed that the next meeting of a joint working group on fisheries would be convened soon. But no date has been proposed yet. [AiR No. 6, February/2022, 2]

India, Pakistan hold annual meeting under Indus Waters Treaty

(lm) Representatives from India and Pakistan are currently holding a meeting of a bilateral commission created to implement and manage the goals, objectives and outlines of the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) in Islamabad.

The Permanent Indus Commission is supposed to meet at least once a year – alternately in India and Pakistan – under the IWT, which governs water usage on the Indus and its tributaries that flow through the two countries.

While the agenda of the meeting was yet to be finalized at the time of writing, there is reason to believe that the Pakistani side will raise its objections regarding at least two Indian hydroelectric plants located at shared rivers. Islamabad claims that these projects violate the World Bank-mediated IWT – a claim New Delhi denies. Islamabad is also expected to seek information on new projects planned by India on western rivers, and flood data arrangements for the flood season. [Gulf News] [The Hindu]

In March of last year, the commission held its first meeting after a three-year hiatus [see AiR No. 12, March/2021, 4]. Hence, resumption talks represented a thawing in bilateral ties, which have been frozen since a 2019 suicide attacks that killed 40 Indian soldiers in the Indian-administered Kashmir town of Pulwama [see AiR (3/2/2019), AiR (4/2/2019)], and India's decision later that year to strip the region's constitutional

autonomy in order to bring it into closer embrace [see AiR No. 32, August/2019, 1].

Crucially, the reconvening of the commission followed a rare military agreement earlier in March to observe a ceasefire along the Line of Control – the de facto border that divides the disputed Kashmir valley between the two countries – and all other sectors. [AiR No. 9, March/2021, 1]

European Union delegation to review labor, human rights standards for Bangladesh's EBA eligibility

(lm) A delegation of the European Union will visit Bangladesh later this month to review Dhaka's progress on implementing human rights and labor standards under the "Everything but Arms" (EBA) scheme. During their Dhaka visit, the five-member delegation will hold talks with officials of the ministry of labor and employment, and also the ministry of commerce. [The Financial Express]

The EBA program offers Bangladeshi exporters duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market in exchange for their country ratifying and complying with 15 core international conventions covered in the EU's Generalized Scheme of Preferences regulation. These conventions among others relate to human rights, labor rights, protection of the environment and good governance.

Within the EBA scheme, the EU has intensified its engagement with three EBA beneficiaries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar. But Dhaka is by far the most important beneficiary from the EBA arrangement: About 97 percent of Bangladesh's total exports make use of the duty suspensions granted under the EBA. [GSP Hub]

Bangladesh hires United States-based law firm to 'deepen' ties with Washington

(lm) Bangladesh's government recently hired a United States law firm to push back against the decision by the US government to impose sanctions on the country's elite police unit, and seven of its current and former senior officials, including the current head of the country's police force. [Netra News] [The Daily Star]

Ties between Washington and Dhaka have been strained since the US Treasury Department last December announced sanctions on Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), citing "serious human rights abuses." It also sanctioned the current director of the security force and five former senior RAB officials, including Bangladesh's top police chief. [AiR No. 50, December/2021, 2]

The new sanctions marked the first time Washington ever sanctioned Dhaka, which it has described as a key partner, and followed the US' decision to exclude Bangladesh from US President Joe Biden's Summit For Democracy, an international dialogue for global democratic revival held in November [see AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5].

In light of this, a committee of Bangladesh's parliament recommended Prime Minister Hasina's government to appoint a lobbyist in Washington [see AiR No. 2, January/2022, 2], while a cabinet committee directed foreign ministry to provide the US with "accurate" information [see AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3].

Washington commemorates 45 years of US-ASEAN relationships by hosting ASEAN Leaders for a summit

(bp) On February 28, the United States (US) announced that President Joe Biden will be hosting a summit with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) leaders on March 28-29. The objective of the meeting will be to strengthen the partnership between the US Biden-Harris administration with ASEAN countries.

Leaders from ASEAN nations of Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, and Indonesia are all invited to the summit. Given ASEAN's hardline stance on Myanmar by restricting the junta leaders from participating in political summits, it is expected that Myanmar will be restricted from attending the Washington summit, however has not yet been officially announced.

The summit will demonstrate the commitment of the US towards supporting the bloc and mark 45 years of US-ASEAN relations, as Biden continues to treat relations in the Indo-Pacific as its top foreign policy priority to compete with China's growing influence in the region. Biden also participated in ASEAN's summit in October last year wherein he pledged upwards of US$100 million to ASEAN countries to be used to

develop new climate initiatives, increase spending towards healthcare, and support the economic recovery of the bloc members post-COVID-19. [abc News]

ASEAN, UK discuss advancing economic cooperation and improving trade links

(bp/lb) On February 23, the United Kingdom Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan held talks with the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Lim Jock Hoi on ASEAN-UK relations, sustainability and climate change, development of infrastructure, digital innovation, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF), and ASEAN Centrality in the Indo-Pacific region.

The parties also committed to the implementation of the ASEAN-UK Joint Ministerial Declaration on Future Economic Cooperation, which was agreed upon in 2021.

ASEAN appreciated the consistent support from the UK and recognized the importance of elevating the ASEAN-UK partnership in trade and investment. The Secretary-General of ASEAN offered the UK to be part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement, which will allow free trade and expand UK investment in the region.

Moreover, recognizing post-pandemic recovery efforts, the ASEAN also voiced the need for an alignment of priorities and policies between ASEAN and the UK in areas of digital transformation, infrastructure, and sustainability, to ensure that both parties benefit from a strong recovery in a post-COVID environment. [Asean.org]

On February 22, Indonesian Trade Minister Muhammad Lufti met with Trevelyan in Jakarta for the first UK-Indonesia Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), a ministerial-level dialogue that began in 2021 establishing working groups on renewable energy and green growth and is aimed at promoting investment and trade relations between the two countries through increased cooperation.

Both countries are committed to enhancing their trade relationship and enhancing the current bilateral trade and investment and they are considering signing a free trade agreement (FTA). Currently, the UK is not one of the major exporters to Indonesia. According to the

Indonesian Investment Ministry, only 1.03 percent of the foreign direct investment in the country is from the UK. [The Jakarta Post]

During her visit to Asia, Trevelyan also held discussions with the Japanese government with regards to the UK's final stage for the accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a free trade area worth £8.4 trillion in GDP.

In Singapore, Trevelyan and Singapore's Trade Minister S Iswaran signed the UK-Singapore Digital Economy Agreement under which the two countries will pursue memoranda of understandings that will provide a framework for bilateral cooperation pertaining to forward looking and emerging issues. [Singapore Business Review]

Myanmar: Rights groups urge European Union to enforce sanctions to reduce junta's revenues

(bs/ny) Human Rights Watch urged the European Union (EU) to enforce the sanctions imposed on February 21 against Myanmar's state-owned and private companies and on 22 people for serious violation of human rights. The rights group has also called for extra-European states, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, Thailand, South Korea, and Australia, to promptly adopt similar measures such as asset freeze, protected trust funds, and travel bans.

Since the February 2021 coup, the EU had already imposed several sanctions on the junta including an embargo on arms and equipment, export ban and restrictions, and the prohibition on military training or military cooperation with the Myanmar military. [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]

A part of the new sanctions calls for European gas and oil companies to terminate their operations in Myanmar in order to reduce the junta's revenues. However, other human rights organizations raised concerns over the risk that the involved companies would benefit the junta by selling their stakes to the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE). The concerns refer to a derogation allowed by the EU which would enable financial transactions with the MOGE when it is required for "the transfer, before 31 July 2022, of shares or interests necessary for the termination of contracts." The derogation might be in

violation of the Treaty on European Union, according to International Federation for Human Rights. [FIDH]

The new sanctions do indeed impose restrictions on stake transfers to Myanmar oil and gas companies. In fact, the concerned firms are forbidden to transfer or sell their stakes to MOGE.

A number of companies have already announced their withdrawal from their operations in Myanmar, while others are beginning the process; that includes Italian ENI, French TotalEnergies, American Chevron, and Australian Woodside. Meanwhile, Thailand state-owned PPT and South Korean POSCO are urged to establish a safe trust account to prevent the junta to access the revenues and align their operations with the EU sanction guidelines. [Human Rights Watch]

Meanwhile, the United Nations (UN) has released a report that lists China, the Russian Federation, India, and Serbia as the four countries that have not stopped selling arms to Myanmar after the military coup in February 2021. However, the UN Security Council has not yet passed a resolution calling for an immediate arms embargo. [Mizzima]

The Gambia urged International Court of Justice to dismiss Myanmar's objections to genocide case

(bs/ny) The Gambia has urged the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the primary judicial body of the United Nations that settles disputes between nations, to dismiss the preliminary objections filed by the Myanmar military junta in an attempt to overthrow the case of the alleged violation of the 1948 Genocide Convention for perpetrating atrocities against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority in 2017.

The military junta, which overthrew the democratically-elected government in Myanmar with a coup in February 2021, aims to have the case thrown out on technical grounds claiming that the Gambia, by filing the case on grounds of alleged genocide against the Muslim Rohingya ethnic group to the ICJ in 2019, was acting as an intermediary for the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which not being a nation itself has no legal standing to file cases to the ICJ. If the court rejects the preliminary objections recognizing the Gambia as the legit prosecutor, the case will proceed. [The Diplomat] [US News]

In mid-February, the ICJ allowed leaders on the military junta to represent Myanmar in the trial despite the appeals from the international community in favor of the National Unity Government, the Myanmar shadow government, as a formal prosecutor. The decision would legitimize the junta's unlawful seizure of power, according to rights groups.

In 2017 the Myanmar government began a violent crackdown against the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority forcing over 730,000 people to flee the country. The group is the largest community of Muslim people in Myanmar and has been a victim of abuses and atrocities for over a century due to both historical and cultural differences with the Buddhist majority in the country. The violence against Rohingya people escalated from 1982 when Myanmar's government denied them the right to citizenship. The members of the Rohingya Muslim minority have since then become stateless. [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]

After the beginning of the ICJ hearings on the case, Myanmar has announced its intention to welcome back displaced Rohingya people and asked the secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for assistance in the re-admission process. However, the refugees in Bangladesh said they would not return unless they are granted equal rights, citizenship, and freedoms by the Myanmar government. [Radio Free Asia]

No labor deal reached between Indonesia and Malaysia

(lb) Indonesia and Malaysia have not finalized a labor deal to regulate the rights of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Although the countries have met multiple times to negotiate the deal the signings have been delayed due to persistent disagreements on some pending issues.

The director said Indonesia has asked Malaysia to abolish the Maid Online System, which bypasses the 2017 migrant worker protection law and allows migrant workers to work in Malaysia without following the appropriate procedure. The governments have been in discussions to ensure respect for migrant workers, previous talks have included the implementation of a "one channel system mechanism" ensuring Indonesian migrant worker (PMI) rights and reducing the number of PMI entering Malaysia illegally.

Indonesia and Malaysia's bilateral agreement on the placement and protection of Indonesian domestic workers expired in 2016, due to Indonesian workers being abused in Malaysia Indonesia passed the Migrant Worker Protection Law in 2017. Since the legislation was passed, Indonesia has insisted countries with Indonesian workers must have a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that fulfilled workers' rights.

As thousands of Indonesian workers travel to Malaysia and work in plantations, construction, and domestic services, the countries have been negotiating a labor agreement to solve the reported abuse and lack of protection of rights for Indonesian workers in Malaysia. [The Star] [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4] [AiR No. 50, December/2021, 2]

Singapore, Vietnam sign bilateral agreements to strengthen ties

(avdv) On February 25, during a visit to Singapore, Vietnam's President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong signed five agreements on bilateral cooperation in defense, digital economy and intellectual property among others.

One Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) concerns the renewed Defence Cooperation Agreement that will enhance cooperation among both countries for military cooperation and countering terrorism.

Another MoU aims at enhancing cooperation on agricultural (trade) knowhow and practices and to strengthen the supply chain to secure a fluid trade.

The parties also signed a deal on digital economy cooperation aiming at securing bigger shares to the market space of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The deal was immediately followed by an agreement on intellectual property rights and the last one on social mobility across both countries to promote "social cohesion and community building". [Channel News Asia] [The Straits Times]

The mutual efforts of the two countries in strengthening cooperation was also evident from the signing of another MoU between a telecommunication company in Vietnam and a fund management company in Singapore with which they agreed to a joint investment of 2.5 billion USD "to develop an industrial and urban complex in the northern province of Bac Giang". [VietNamNet]

Singapore, India sign cooperation agreement on Science, Technology, Innovation

(avdv) On 23 February, Singapore and India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on strengthening their bilateral cooperation in advanced emerging technologies.

Such advances have far-reaching implications in multiple industrial and services sectors. Singapore and India have also signed an agreement to facilitate the cooperation between companies to work on Science, Technology, and Innovation projects. [Prensa Latina]

The two countries already had a similar agreement in the past, but this new MoU provides a refreshed understanding of the areas of interest to align to the latest scientific advances and technological developments. Indeed, the focus will primarily be on deep tech, "which includes technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things and involves the construction and built environment sector," but also, on "clean tech, involving renewable energy, as well as genome and bioinformatics research". [Ministry of Trade and Industry] [The Straits Times]

Cambodia, Thailand: Thai workers rescued from illegal work in Cambodia

(bs) Cambodian authorities rescued and repatriated over 1,200 Thai people who were deceived into working illegally for call center gangs in Cambodia.

According to the Thai workers, the job, advertised on social media as a high-paid role, would consist in contacting people in Thailand and scamming them to transfer money to the gang's bank accounts or luring them to join online gambling platforms.

When the workers could not meet the high sale standards, they would be moved to work for another criminal gang. Moreover, the gangs would require the workers to pay back the costs for entering Cambodia illegally and providing them with a job. [Bangkok Post]

The Philippines signs deal with Polish aerospace company to purchase military helicopters

(lb) Philippines defense secretary has signed a $624 million deal with Poland aerospace manufacturer company PZL Mielec to purchase 32 S-70i Black Hawks, training for pilots, maintenance crews, and logistical backup. The helicopters can be used for troop transport, combat operations, and disaster response.

This is the second purchase the Philippines has made from PZL Mielec, 16 Black Hawks were previously purchased and used to respond to a typhoon in December 2021.

Previous purchases by the Philippines to modernize its army includes four Cessna 172S Skyhawk trainer Aircraft from the United States, two warships from South Korea, and a number of Indian-made BrahMos medium-range ramjet supersonic cruise missiles. [Business Standard] [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3] [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4] [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

Laos receives funds from the European Union for country development

(bs) The Lao government met virtually with representatives from the European Union (EU) in the tenth meeting of the Joint Committee Working Group on Cooperation to discuss strengthening cooperation in trade, economics, and investment.

The parties also agreed to enhance multilateral cooperation in education, nutrition, and governance in a five-year plan. Moreover, they agreed to speed up the implementation of the Laos-EU cooperation partnership on green and inclusive growth in Laos.

The EU, discussing future cooperation plans, presented the Team Europe Strategy for the Lao PDR for 2021-2025, a joint program to support Lao development in green and inclusive economy through a EUR550-million fund.

The project was developed in the framework of the EU plan to strengthen ties in the Indo-Pacific region by aligning its operations to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s agenda. [Vientiane Times $]

South Korea Navy chief met with Indonesian counterpart

(bs) The Korean and Indonesian Navy admirals met on February 21 to discuss cooperation in military and defense acquisitions. The Indonesian geographical location is of “great interest” to the Korean Navy chief, Admiral Kim Jung-so, and he shared his hopes to strengthen military relations with the country.

During the meeting, Admiral Kim enquired about the second batch of submarined that Indonesia ordered from a Korean shipbuilding company. South Korea had agreed to deliver three submarines to Indonesia, but after the first delivery financial issues forced the countries to halt the delivery finalization.

According to Admiral Kim, Indonesia requested South Korea's support in training submarine crews, submarine maintenance, and technology transfers. [Naval News]

Malaysian Prime Minister discussed relations with Cambodia

(bs) Cambodian president of the National Assembly met with Malaysian Prime Minister Dato ‘Sri Ismail Sabri bin Yaakob to discuss multi-sectoral cooperation between the two countries’ legislative bodies. The party also showed satisfaction in the current bilateral diplomatic cooperation in tackling regional and international issues and agreed in drafting new agreements for future cooperation also in the sectors of trade and investment. [Khmer Times 1]

The parties have also discussed a potential solution to enhance trade cooperation and reduce the trade deficit between Malaysia and Cambodia which would encourage Malaysia to import Cambodian long grain rice and increase palm oil export. [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia to welcome Iran’s oil and gas explorations

(bs) Cambodia’s Minister of Mines and Energy has called for Iran’s help to explore the country’s potential in oil and gas production.

During the meeting with the Iranian Ambassador, the Cambodian minister praised Iran for its significant experience in the field and advanced proposals to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation between Iran and Cambodia by inviting Iranian investors to explore new oil and gas sites.

The parties also discussed setting up a refinery in Cambodia and developing effective technical assistance and personnel training in the oil sector. [New Straits Times]

Vietnam receives special US Envoy for climate change

(bs) Vietnam President Nguyễn Xuân Phúc requested continuous support from the United States (US) in a meeting with a US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate.

The US representative said that the countries should enhance their bilateral cooperation in order to be ready for the UN Climate Change Conference 2022. He also committed to helping Vietnam to transition to clean energy and renewable sources such as solar energy.

Vietnam, in an effort to improve its fight against climate change, has recently announced the decision to end its coal-fired power generation by 2050. The US envoy ensured that the US will continue to provide financial and technical assistance to Vietnam to support the country's commitment to reach zero emissions by 2050 made at the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow in late 2021. [Vietnam News]

Vietnam, during the COP26, also signed a declaration where the country promises to end deforestation and reduce methane emissions. Vietnam's interest in combating climate change finds its roots in the fact that 70 percent of Vietnam's population lives in coastal areas and is increasingly at higher risk of sea-level rise, floods, and drought. [The Diplomat]

Australian foreign minister met Lao counterpart on 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations

(bs) Australian and Lao foreign ministers met to celebrate the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations

between Australia and Laos.

The parties discussed strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation, including a plan to move forward with the new ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. They also discussed future cooperation in human resource development, national defense, trade and investment, infrastructure, agriculture, and how to efficiently tackle the project Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) in Laos. [The Laotian Times]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

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

India's Century? A Conversation with Indrani Bagchi

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, India's international status changed dramatically. Its geopolitical policies and power have now extended to the Indo-Pacific reaches. Moreover, the nation has recognized as a key player in addressing global governance issues such as climate change, and a potential leading actor in technology field. This webinar will feature a former journalist at the Times of India Indrani Bagchi. After almost twenty years of experiences in monitoring India's international affairs, the speaker will explore India's ability and way of handling international concerns and discuss opportunities and threats via the lens of some major global events and concerns.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

2 March 2022 @12:00-1:15 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

State Violence: Problematic Policing and Criminalization in Comparative Perspective

This virtual panel discussion will take a look at specific cases from Africa, the United States, and Latin America to define the linkages between state violence, criminalization, and police, and suggest that police and criminalization do unequal harm to underprivileged and impoverished people.

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

2 March 2022 @1:00-2:15 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Russia, Ukraine and NATO: The View from Paris

The French have played a key role in defining Western strategy and diplomacy, with President Macron visiting both Moscow and Kyiv in February. In this webinar, editorial director, leader writer, and columnist Sylvie Kauffmann of Le Monde will talk about the situation from the perspective of Paris.

Follow [FSI] to learn more about the event.

2 March 2022 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Does Russia's invasion of Ukraine mark the end of the post-Cold War era?

This virtual discussion will investigate Russian President Vladimir Putin's underlying goals, evaluate the US and its allies' response, and consider the crisis' broader geopolitical consequences.

For more information, see [BROOKINGS].

2 March 2022 @ 2:00-3:45 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

The Powell Fed: Looking Back and Looking Ahead

This webinar will revisit Jay Powell's first four years as chairman of the Federal Reverse and discuss threats and opportunities that he and his Fed colleagues will confront in the coming four years.

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

2 March 2022 @4:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Robert G. Wesson Lecture: Facing Autocracy, a Global Challenge

The gradual downturn of democracy in Venezuela is a perfect case of how democracy may succumb to tyranny. With the rise of autocracy in various forms across the world, it is crucial that new organizational and democratic leadership must be encouraged and strengthened. This online session will discuss this global challenge and ways to restore democracy.

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

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

Women Firing Up Plastic Waste Action in Vietnam

Vietnam is dealing with an avalanche of plastic waste while infrastructure is poor, and many people do not have access to waste collection. Women-led NGOs are campaigning for rounded solutions to the country's plastic waste problems by collaborating with waste collectors and lawmakers to promote progressive laws. This online session will monitor this development in countering climate change in Vietnam.

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

2 March 2022 @ 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Russia Without Memorial

Over thirty years ago, Memorial was established as an NGO dedicated to recording and keeping the memory of Soviet political repressions. This webinar will examine the future of Russia after the closure of the nation's most dominant NGO.

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

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

The Ukraine Crisis and Asia: Implications and Responses

Hosted by the CSIS Asia Program, this online session will discuss Russia's invasion of Ukraine, explore how the U.S. should prepare for geopolitical confrontation on two fronts, and address the influence that the conflict has on relations between China and Russia, as well as across Asia.

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

2 March 2021 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Press Briefing: Ukraine Update

This press briefing will discuss the intense situation in Ukraine, including its security, economics, energy, humanitarian, and other public concerns.

More information is available at [CSIS].

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

Rights Revoked: The State of Human Rights in Afghanistan After Six Months of Taliban Rule

This virtual conference will feature a conversation between experts about the urgent human rights threats that people in Afghanistan are confronting, as well as diplomatic and political strategies for dealing with the human rights crisis.

Find more about the webinar at [CSIS].

2 March 2021 @ 8:30-9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Climate & Energy in the 117th Congress: A Conversation with Rep. John Curtis

This webinar will feature a conversation with Representative John Curtis who will explore opportunities for the U.S. to take a leading role in the world's energy and climate change issues.

More information is available at [CSIS].

3 March 2022@ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), ASH Center for Democratic Governance Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, USA

Crisis in Ukraine: The View from Beijing

This webinar will feature a conversation between experts who will discuss the current crisis in Ukraine, China's response, and the future direction of the relationship between Russia and China.

Visit [ASH CENTER] to find more event details.

3 March 2021 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Launch of the Feb. 2022 Issue of the International Review of the Red Cross: "Counterterrorism, Sanctions and War"

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) will host the February 2022 issue of the International will organize the February 2022 issue of the International Review of the Red Cross, "Counterterrorism, Sanctions and War" to discuss solutions for conflict between counterturns policies and the capacity to offer fundamental humanitarian assistance.

For more details, see [CSIS].

3 March 2022 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Russia's Aggression: European Perspectives and Responses

As the conflict between Russia and Ukraine worsens, focus has shifted to the international community's response while a perception of European vulnerability has evolved. This webinar will look at European viewpoints and responses to the war, as well as how the most vulnerable Eastern European members might safeguard themselves in this crisis.

Visit [Wilson Center] to find more event details.

3 March 2022 @1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Anti-System Politics in Europe and America

This webinar will feature Jonathan Hopkin, Professor at the European Institute and the Department of Government of the London School of Economics and Political Science, who will use a comparative approach to analyze why different types of anti-system politics occur in different nations and how political and economic factors influence the degree of electoral volatility.

Find more about the webinar at [FSI].

4 March 2022 @5:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

China Chats with Stanford Faculty: Information Flow Between Global and Chinese Social Media with Professor Jennifer Pan

Despite the interconnectedness of social media, the Chinese government has been exceedingly successful in restricting the international stream of data through measures such as firewalls and filtering. Accompanied by Professor Hongbin Li, Professor Jennifer Pan will present research-based explanations for this unique type of information flow issue in China.

Find more at [FSI].

4 March 2022 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Kennan Long View Series | Germany's Role in European Russia Policy: A New German Power?

This webinar will present Dr. Liana Fix of the Körber Foundation and German Marshall Fund who will discuss her recent book, Germany's Role in European Russia Policy: A New German Power?

Visit [Wilson Center] to find more event details.

7-15 March 2022 (GMT+1), The International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT), Switzerland

World Bank Fragility Forum

This nine-day virtual conference will look into how the international community can effectively assist countries that are in a vulnerable state and will discuss how the World Development Report (WDR) can be applied to new dynamic circumstances.

For more event details, visit [ISSAT].

7 March 2022 @ 3:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Thirty Years of US-Kazakhstan Relations: The Winter Crisis and Path Forward

In its 30th year of independence, Kazakhstan stands at a crossroads, emerging as a regional leader while the U.S. reconsiders its position in Central Asia. This webinar will present a dynamic discussion on what is the ideal way for the two countries to achieve their common interests over the next thirty years.

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

7 March 2021 @ 2:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Global Security Forum: Foreign Policy in an Era of Domestic Division

This webinar will examine U.S. domestic divisions, including political, geographic, racial, socioeconomic, and other sectors, and will discuss how domestic affairs might affect U.S. national security and engagement overseas, as well as chances for collaboration.

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

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

Building a new Middle East: Promoting Tolerance through Education

The Abraham Accords offer an unprecedented opportunity to end decades of hatred and mistrust. Education programs can help to correct historical inaccuracies and dispel long-held prejudices. This virtual forum will focus on the role of education in promoting tolerance and address how normalization can be used to foster a more accepting and peaceful region.

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

8 March 2022 @5:00-6:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Sandford University, USA

Singapore Today: The Challenges of Race, Inequality, and U.S.-China Relations – A Conversation with Linda Lim

Singapore's traditionally strong economy and secure dominant-party system are facing significant challenges as the globally wealthy nation-state is more sensitive to deglobalization trends than the majority of countries. Global challenges together with the intertwining of internal issues of race, immigration, and inequality have led the PAP government to make pledges of more liberal welfare measures while also enacting more authoritarian limitations on freedom of expression. This webinar will feature Linda Lim, a Singapore economist and professor emerita of corporate strategy and international business at the

Stephen M. Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, who will address the current challenges facing Singapore.

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

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

Americans in China: Navigating the Personal and Political in the Cold War and Engagement Eras

This online forum will present a discussion based on "Americans in China: Encounters with the People's Republic of China" (Oxford, 2022), authored by Terry Lautz. The book tells the stories of Americans who lived and worked in China through the accomplishments and failings of the Cold War, tracing China's modern history and articulating how the two countries may influence each other's development.

Visit [Wilson Center] to find more event details.

8 March 2021 @ 8:00-9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Rating India 2022: Key Opportunities and Risks

This online forum will feature a conversation between prominent rating agency executives who will offer insights about potential major economic trends that their companies are tracking and may have a significant influence on India's overall economic direction.

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

Recent Book Releases

Darmawan Prasodjo, ***Jokowi and the New Indonesia: A Political Biography Hardcover***, Tuttle Publishing, 352 pages, published in March 1, 2022. Visit [Asian Review of Books] for a review.

John Lough, ***Germany's Russia problem: The struggle for balance in Europe***, Manchester University Press,

256 pages, published on July 13, 2021, reviewed in [LSE].

Gulbahar Haitiwaji, **Rozenn Morgat**, ***How I Survived a Chinese "Reeducation" Camp: A Uyghur Woman's Story***, Seven Stories Press, 240 pages, published on February 22, 2022. For a review, see [Publishers Weekly].

Suchitra Vijayan, ***Midnight's Borders: A People's History of Modern India***, Melville House, 336 pages, published on May 25, 2021, reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Toby Green, ***The Covid Consensus: The New Politics of Global Inequality***, C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 288 pages, published on April 22, 2021, with a review in [LSE].

Moeen Cheema, ***Courting Constitutionalism: The Politics of Public Law and Judicial Review in Pakistan***, Cambridge University Press, 256 pages, published on December 16, 2021. Find more information at [CUP].

Calls for Papers

The **Dar al-Kalima University** invites paper proposal for its 24th ***International Conference "Culture and Digital Transformation: Challenges and Opportunities for Southwest Asia and North Africa"*** to be held on June 10-11, 2022. Closing date for submission is March 19, 2022. See [Dar al-Kalima] for more information.

The **Law School of Mykolas Romeris University** in Vilnius, Lithuania, invites manuscripts for an ***edited book on the theme of "Law and Sustainability"***. Deadline for submission is March 21, 2022. Visit [CFP List] to learn more about the call.

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a ***Programme Specialist - Environment and Energy*** to be based in Tripoli, Libya, with core responsibilities in ensuring the strategic direction of UNDP programme as well as the effective management of the Environment and Energy programme. Closing date for applications is March 16, 2022. For more details, see [UNDP].

The Office of the **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)** is hiring a ***Senior Protection***

Associate to be based in Uvira, Congo. Deadline for applications is March 16, 2022. Find more information at [UNHCR]

The **World Bank Group** is recruiting a ***Financial Analyst*** to be based in Chennai, India. Applications can be submitted until March 11, 2022. More details are available at [World Bank Group].

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