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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to this week's Asia in Review issue whose international relations section is dominated by the war in Ukraine and the growing role China is playing therein.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Georgia's Day of National Unity and Senegal's Independence Day in this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: Former justice minister expelled from CCP

(dql) In what observers see as the latest high-profile party-internal purge, former Justice Minister and deputy police chief Fu Zhenghua has been expelled from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) over "over serious violations of Party discipline and laws". This comes months after he had been detained last September and put under investigation while serving as deputy head of the Committee on Social and Legal Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, one of China's major political bodies.

Fu is also accused of colluding with Sun Lijun, the former vice-minister of public security who is awaiting trial on corruption charges, to set up gangs to pursue personal interests.

Fu had become a rising star within the party apparatus after he was appointed to lead the investigation of China's former security chief Zhou Yongkang, who was eventually sentenced life to prison in 2015 for power abuse and corruption. [Xinhua] [South China Morning Post] [The Guardian] [See also AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3]

China: Former investigative journalist pleads guilty in soldier defamation case

(dql) According to a Chinese court, former investigative journalist Luo Changping pleaded guilty to defaming Chinese soldiers with remarks he posted on social media after watching the war movie "The Battle at Lake Changjin" which depicts Chinese soldiers fighting American forces in the Korean war.

In his comments, Luo likened the Chinese troops to a "sand sculpture company," that "didn't doubt the 'excellent decision' of the higher-ups." The expression "sand sculpture" in Chinese, when used as an internet slang term, is a euphemism for "stupid".

Widely known in China for investigative journalism, Luo became the first Chinese to be granted Transparency International's Integrity Award from in 2013 for his report on a former deputy director of the National Development and Reform Commission. The official was eventually handed down a sentence to life in prison for corruption in 2014. [South China Morning Post] [Hankyoreh]

China: Rights activists to face trial

(dql) Women's rights campaigner and freelance journalist Sophia Huang Xueqin and labor activist Wang Jianbing are set to stand trial and to face charges "incitement to subvert state power," after the police handed their cases over to prosecutors for investigation. Both were last September.

Huang has raised to prominence among women's rights activists as an outspoken member of China's #MeToo movement. In June 2019, she took part in a protest in Hong Kong against a bill to allow extradition

to mainland China. A strong supporter of the #MeToo movement in China, too, Wang begun advocacy and legal support work for workers with occupational diseases in 2018. [Radio Free Asia]

China: Scholars under pressure over participation in international conference

(dql) At least five Chinese scholars based in China have reportedly been put under pressure to withdraw their online participation in conference that was hosted the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) on 24-27 March and aimed at bringing together young and established Asia studies scholars from across the world.

In one case, police officers questioned a scholar for hours at his home in China after the presentation of a research paper, while in another case scholars were told by university administrators to drop their presentations. [NPR]

Japan: Emergency action enacted to secure key materials

(cm) On March 31 the Japanese government announced that emergency measures will be taken in order to secure supplies of seven materials, including oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and rare metals, from producers other than Russia. The other materials specified are coal, used for power generation and in steel manufacturing, neon and other gases used to make semiconductors, and palladium and ferroalloys to purify exhaust gas for vehicles.

Japan's trade ministry has been trying to reduce Japan's reliance on Russia following the country's invasion of Ukraine, although on the same day Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated Japan's intention of not withdrawing from the Sakhalin 2 oil and gas project in the Russian Far East, unlike other countries did. [Kyodo News]

Japan plans to ask other producing countries to increase output and to secure its position as destination for such maximized production. Other actions will be government support to domestic production and minimized usage of materials that include LNG and gases in chip manufacturing. [Nippon]

In this regard, Japanese industry minister Koichi Hagiuda and Kuwait's oil minister Muhammad Al-Faris

discussed a boost in crude oil production in Kuwait on March 31 though a JPY 120 billion loan to Kuwait Petroleum Corp. to be soon decided by Western and Japanese financial institutions. [Arab News]

On April 3 the industry ministry stated the possibility of expanding a subsidy program for gasoline and other fuels in order to cushion rising prices, as a part of the relief package that Kishida ordered to be completed by the endo of the month. The change in the subsidy scheme might consist of a reduction of the base price and a rise in the payment ceiling, or a combination of the scheme with the lifting of a freeze of tax trigger clauses. [CNA]

Japan: Former PM Abe in the front line of the constitutional reform debate

(cm) In a speech in Yamaguchi on April 3 former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe demanded an early amendment to the Constitution of Japan, calling for the beginning of a new era. The speech is a part of the nationwide activities organized by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to promote the constitutional revision.

Abe presented the party's four-point proposal (already compiled under the Abe administration), including writing the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in Article 9, which renounces war and prevents Japan from maintaining any war potential.

Abe's role in the constitutional reform debate is encouraged by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, as it draws conservative voters in preparation of this summer's House of Councillors election, but it might also cause backlash from opposition parties. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Relaxation of travel restrictions and borders

(cm) From April 10 Japan's daily limit on overseas arrivals will be raised to 10,000, and the country's travel warning will be eased for 106 nations, following the global decreasing trend of COVID-19 infections.

The loosening of border controls comes as a response to heightened demand for entry by returning Japanese nationals, non-tourist arrivals, such as students, and foreign residents. For the 106 countries listed the government lowered its travel advisories to level 2,

meaning that Japanese citizens are only asked to refrain from nonessential travelling to such areas. On the other hand, level 3 warning is still in force for 56 countries, to which all travel should be avoided. [The Japan Times]

Japan: High number of cadets refuses to pursue a career in the SDF

(cm) 72 cadets who graduated from the National Defense Academy have declined their appointments as officials in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF). Out of 479 regular cadets they amount to 15 percent, as well as to the second highest number recorded, with an increase of 44 from last year.

The record of 94 cadets choosing not to join the SDF after graduation was in 1990. Of the 72 this year, 33 have chosen different professions, nine will graduate outside of the academy and 30 declined because of personal reasons. Since 2013, those who refuse to enter the SDF have not been allowed to the graduation ceremony and have been receiving their diplomas separately.

Nonetheless, Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi said, in a news conference on March 29, that the Defense Academy is still trying to persuade the cadets not to decline and have them meet with their advisers. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Law to set up cybercrime bureau at National Police Agency approved

(cm) On March 30, the revised Police Law establishing a special investigative bureau dedicated to tackling cybercrime cases was enacted by the Diet, Japan parliament. The unit, which became operative on April 1, is the first one to be given investigative powers, rather than administrative, within the National Police Agency.

The new team, composed of about 240 officials, will investigate attacks on national and local governments, from within Japan and overseas. The Agency aims to build cooperation with investigative authorities in other countries, possibly sending investigators abroad to participate in joint operations, as the growing sophistication of cyber-attacks requires sharing information like never before. [The Mainichi]

North Korea: Human rights situation worsened, Amnesty International says

(mpk) According Amnesty International, the human rights situation in North Korea has worsened in 2021, with North Koreans' rights to free travel, health, and food have been heavily restricted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In its annual report, the human rights organization – among others – points to the fact that until the end of last year, only sixty-three North Koreans took refuge in South Korea, marking the lowest number since data of defectors from the North to the South have been made public in 2003. With four camps for political prisoners in operation, freedom of expression appears also to remain seriously limited, too. Furthermore, North Koreans "were excluded from vaccinations amid the pandemic without a choice," while families were forced into quarantine at home without any support and adequate food supply. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [The Amnesty International Report 2021/22]

Meanwhile, London-based nonprofit organization Korea Future announced that it has launched a comprehensive database to document human rights violations and atrocities in which the North Korean penal system is involved.

Named North Korean Prison Database, the online archive contains currently nearly 260 detailed in-person interviews that have been conducted with survivors, perpetrators, and witnesses since from March last year. Nearly perpetrators with links to almost 5,200 human rights violations committed against 785 detainees in 148 penal facilities between 1991 and 2019 have been identified. [The Korea Herald]

Furthermore, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on April 1 agreed on a resolution to condemn North Korea's human rights violation for the 20th consecutive year and to call on Pyongyang to negotiate with the international community to supply COVID-19 vaccinations for its citizens and open borders for the return of international organizations and diplomats. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

South Korea: Presidential office under pressure over First Lady's wardrobe expenses

(mpk) President Moon Jae-in's office has come under pressure after a complaint has been filed against South Korean First Lady Kim Jung-sook with the National Police accusing her of embezzlement. The complaint came on the heels of rumors that Kim was using public funds for her clothes and accessories after a social media post drew public attention to a highly costly wardrobe and demanded its return at the end of President Moon's term in May. [The Korea Times 1]

The presidential office denied the rumors, declaring that its special activities fund was not used for Kim's personal clothes, and adding that the Moon administration's average annual budget of USD 7.9 million for special activity expenses of the president was the lowest wealth since 1994. [The Korea Times 2] [Yonhap News Agency]

Complicating the situation, on March 2 the presidential had appealed a ruling of a court in February which ordered it to disclose details of expenses for ceremonious and special activities by President Moon Jae-in and the First Lady [see AiR No.10, March/2022, 2].

South Korea: Former prime minister to return to politics under new president's administration

(mpk) President-elect Yoon Suk-yeol, who will officially take up the presidency on May 10, appointed former Prime Minister Han Duck-soo as the new prime minister for the incoming administration.

Yoon cited for his decision Han's vast experience wealth in policy fields currently important for the country, including economy, trade and diplomacy.

Han has served in the public sector for more than four decades, including as Minister of Finance, Minister of Foreign and Trade Affairs and as Ambassador to the US. From April 2007 to February 2008 he was prime minister under President Roh Moo-hyun.

Largely an administrative position, the prime minister in South Korea is in charge of overseeing ministries, and acts on the president's behalf. His appointment by the president must be approved by parliament. [Reuters] [Hankyoreh]

South Korea tests second solid-fuel space rocket in response to North Korea

(mpk) In the wake of North Korea's missile tests, South Korea successfully tested a solid-fuel space rocket on March 30, marking the second time such a test was conducted after the first last October. The Defense Ministry hailed the test as milestone in the country's efforts to advance independent space-based reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities. [Aljazeera]

Meanwhile, the Ministry's Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) – the country's arms procurement agency – announced that South Korea will also improve key technologies this year, including radar-evading drones, low-Earth orbit satellites, high-energy laser weapons and other cutting-edge defense assets. To this end, a budget of more than KRW 266 billion (USD 220 million) has been allocated for this year. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Struggle between two ministries for trade authority

(mpk) Two South Korean ministries currently clash over the question which should have the authority over country's trade. While this authority is currently in the hands of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, the Foreign Ministry claims that it should hold this authority arguing that diplomacy and trade cannot be separated under the concept of "national economic security".

Backdrop of this clash is that the line between trade and diplomacy has become growingly blurred allowing the energy ministry to perform diplomacy-related activities. The foreign ministry argues that this s depriving it of its core diplomatic tools. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: New regulations on child abuse penalties proposed

(mpk) The Sentencing Commission of South Korea's Supreme Court has proposed to harshen punishments for child abuse. Among others, it suggested at least 20 years to life imprisonment for those convicted of murder by abuse and a sentence up to 22-and-a half

years in prison for those convicted of child abuse resulting in death.

Current guidelines punish child abuse resulting in death with a prison term of four to seven years, with the possibility to extend the punishment to up to 10 years depending on the seriousness of the crime.

The new non-binding guidelines will go into effect in June. [The Korea Times]

Taiwan: Constitutional Court declares clause in Indigenous status law unconstitutional

(dql) On April 1, Taiwan's Constitutional Court ruled that a legal provision of the Status Act for Indigenous Peoples is unconstitutional, citing violation of the Constitution's "intention" to protect Indigenous Peoples' right to personal identity and guarantee racial equality. The government was ordered to amend the law within two years. In case the deadline was not met, Indigenous identity would be automatically obtained by the affected people, along with registration of their Indigenous status.

In its decision, the court referred to Article 4, Paragraph 2 of the Act under which "[c]hildren of intermarriages between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples taking the surname of the indigenous father or mother, or using a traditional Indigenous Peoples name, shall acquire Indigenous Peoples status."

Background of the decision is the case of a 7-year-old girl with a Chinese surname whose mother has Truku blood while the father is non-Indigenous. A request for a registration of his daughter's Indigenous status was rejected

because the girl used the father's Chinese surname and therefore did not comply with the provision in question in the law. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Cabinet approves amendment bill to extradition law

(dql) Taiwan's Cabinet approved on March 31 a draft amendment bill that seeks to enable the government to extradite of Taiwanese nationals to other countries

in which they have been charged with a serious crime while no such trial is possible in Taiwan.

The extradition would apply to an offence for which the penalty in Taiwan would be imprisonment of more than three years, with the case not being prosecuted in Taiwan. It would also apply cases where Taiwanese national has been already handed down a sentence of over year in jail for criminal offences in a foreign country. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Portable tank killer missiles tested

(dql) Tawain's military has been reportedly successfully tested US-made Javelin missiles in training, in a bid to assess their effectiveness in supporting deterrence of potential Chinese attacks.

According to Military News Agency, which is affiliated with the Defense Ministry, the 66th Marine Brigade, fired portable missiles, called "tank killers", which Ukraine has been using to destroy Russian armoured vehicles. [South China Morning Post]

In a separate development, Taiwan's Mirage 2000 fighter jets resumed operation after a comprehensive inspection, along with additional training for pilots, has been completed. The probe was necessitated by a crash in mid-March. [Focus Taiwan]

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

India: Three Kashmiri students accused of celebrating Pakistan cricket win get bail

(rk/lm) The high court in India's northern Uttar Pradesh state has granted bail to three Kashmiri students who had been arrested last October and charged with sedition for allegedly raising pro-Pakistan slogans following the country's win over India at the cricket world cup. The court in its order observed that the foundations of the country were strong enough to tolerate "empty slogans". The judges also expressed concern over the "snail's pace" with which the trail was progressing against the students. [Khmer Times] [The Independent]

Days after the much-hyped India-Pakistan cricket match, the three students were arrested after a complaint was filed against them by a leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's youth wing on charges of sedition, cyberterrorism and "promoting enmity among groups". At the time, Yogi Adityanath, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh who is known for anti-Muslim bigotry, said anyone celebrating Pakistan's victory would be charged [see AiR No. 44, November/2021, 1].

When they were presented at a local court in Agra for the first time later the same month, the three students faced a hostile crowd outside the court, and lawyers in the city refused to represent them. In light of this, they then directly went to the Allahabad High Court for bail [see AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4].

India's ruling BJP is routinely accused by critics for abusing laws such as of sedition, the National Security Act, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and anti-religious conversion laws to target dissenters and minorities in the country.

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura.

India: Rana Ayyub, journalist and Modi critic, barred from leaving country

(lm) Rana Ayyub, a prominent Indian journalist and sharp critic of Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government, was prevented from boarding a plane at the Mumbai airport on March 29. Coincidentally, she was traveling to London to participate in a conference on the Indian government's alleged crackdown on press freedoms. [Al Jazeera]

According to media reports in India, officials stopped her as part of an investigation into alleged "laundered donations" she had raised through a crowdfunding campaign to provide assistance to those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The latest developments come after United Nations-appointed independent rights experts last month called for an end to "judicial harassment" against Ayyub, days after the country's Enforcement Directorate had launched the investigation against her [see AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]. Ayyub has categorically rejected the allegations.

Significantly, the case is based on a complaint filed against Ayyub in September 2021 by the Hindu IT Cell, a far-right Hindu nationalist group that uses aggressive online tactics to target people whose views it disagrees with. If the Modi administration hoped it could avert embarrassment by preventing Ayyub from speaking out at a conference in London, the strategy backfired. Journalists around the world have loudly condemned New Delhi for keeping Ayyub from leaving. [Committee to Protect Journalists]

India: Delhi court grants bail to creators of app that virtually 'sold Muslim women'

(lm) An Indian court has granted bail on humanitarian grounds to two men accused of creating separate apps that put up images of more than 100 prominent Muslim women in a fake online auction. The judge said one of the accused, Aumkareshwar Thakur, was a "first-time offender" and "prolonged" incarceration would harm him. However, Thakur will not be able to walk out of jail now as he is named in another chargesheet filed by Mumbai Police in the matter. The bail order for the second accused, Neeraj Bishnoi, isn't public yet. [BBC] [The Hindu]

The two men were arrested in January for allegedly creating the apps *Sulli Deals* and *Bulli Bai*, respectively.

In both cases, there was no actual sale – the purpose was to degrade and humiliate Muslim women, many of whom have been outspoken about the rising tide of Hindu nationalism under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Though both apps were created months apart from each other, Thakur was arrested only after the *Bulli Bai* app generated anger and outrage in January. [AiR No. 2, January/2022, 2]

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura.

India: Central government lifts contentious security law from districts in three northeastern states

(rk/lm) India's central government has decided to lift a contentious federal law that gives the army sweeping powers from various districts in the country's remote northeastern states of Nagaland, Assam and Manipur, citing an "improved security situation". [The New Indian Express]

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), passed in 1958 to control armed separatist movements in the northeast. Considered draconian and violative of human rights, it shields military personnel from prosecution even if they shoot someone mistakenly in a "disturbed area" on suspicion of that person violating any law. It also provides the armed forces with powers to take out searches and make arrests without a warrant. [India Kanoon]

The move to suspend implementation of the law in some districts comes after an elite military commando unit shot dead six laborers returning to their homes in Nagaland's Mon district last December, believing they were targeting insurgents. Another eight people were killed by the troops when they were confronted by a furious crowd, with a soldier also killed and a military vehicle set alight [see AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1]. Later in the same month, India's Home Ministry extended the implementation of the AFSPA in Nagaland for another six months, citing "disturbed and dangerous" conditions in the state [see AiR No. 1, January/2022, 1].

While Mon district remains on the list of "disturbed areas", together with another 13 districts of Nagaland, another seven districts will be dropped from the list based on the recommendations of a high-level committee formed after the killings in early December. The relaxation has been most substantial in Assam, where it has been removed entirely from 23 districts

and partially from one, thus limiting its operation fully to only nine districts. In Manipur, on the other hand, only six districts have been excluded from the disturbed area notification, and the AFSPA is still in force in 16 districts, including several hill districts. [The Hindu] [The Print]

Various agreements have been signed by the central government in the last three years to restore peace and normalcy in the northeast, including the Bru-Reang refugee agreement (2020), the Bodo Accord (2020), Karbi Anglong Agreement (2021), and most recently the Assam-Meghalaya border dispute resolution agreement on March 29.

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura and Ms. Chithra Madhusudhanan.

India: Fifteen indigenous Light Combat Helicopters to be procured by Army, Air Force

(lm) India's Cabinet Committee on Security, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved a USD 51 million procurement of 15 Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) from local manufacturer Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, with five units for the Army and ten for the Air Force. [Aviacionline.com] [The New Indian Express]

Under the "Make in India" policy driven by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, India is continuously increasing its capability to indigenously design, develop and manufacture advanced cutting-edge technologies and systems in the defense sector. Production of the LCH – which are already in the import embargo list – will further reduce import dependence for combat helicopters in the country.

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura.

India: Army inducts small number of Russian man-portable air-defense systems, but bigger deal still pending

(lm) The Indian Army has inducted a small number of man-portable air-defense systems – or MANPADS – recently purchased from Russia under emergency procurement, *The Hindu* reported, citing defense sources. However, against the larger backdrop of western financial sanctions imposed in response to

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a much larger contract for 5,000 missiles, 258 single launchers and 258 multi-launcher MANPADS is still pending and under review by the defense ministry.

The Request for Proposal for a so-called Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORAD) was issued in 2010; five contenders responded and eventually three made it to the trials – MBDA of France, Rosoboronexport of Russia and SAAB of Sweden. Eventually all three companies were declared technically compliant in 2017 and Rosoboronexport was declared the lowest bidder in November 2018.

India's defense services were planning on clearing payment for military procurement from Russia by March 31 when the previous fiscal year concluded but were unable to do so due as Moscow was hit by stringent economic sanctions after its invasion of Ukraine in February.

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura.

India: With two more successful tests, Army version of surface-to-air missile completes trials

(lm) Just three days after India's premier research and development agency, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), successfully conducted a series of trials of a new medium-range surface-to-air missile, the agency again demonstrated the missile's efficacy by testing it in sea-skimming and high-altitude modes, thus completing the development trials of the system. The missile, a land-based variant of India's long-range surface-to-air missile known as Barak 8 which is already used by Air Force and Navy, is developed by the DRDO in cooperation with Israel Aerospace Industries. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5] [Israel Defense] [The New Indian Express]

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura.

Pakistan: Parliament's lower house dissolved as Prime Minister Khan calls for new elections

(tj/ha/fq) Pakistan's president on April 3 dissolved parliament's lower house, the National Assembly, after Prime Minister Imran Khan sidestepped a vote of no

confidence challenge and alleged that a conspiracy to topple his government had failed.

Previously, an increasingly united opposition had tabled a no-confidence motion on March 28 in a special session of the National Assembly. The Pakistani Constitution stipulates that voting must take place three to seven days after a no-confidence motion is introduced on the parliamentary floor. But on March 31, parliament adjourned until April 3. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

Khan was widely expected to be ousted as premier if the no-confidence vote had taken place. In light of this, lawmakers had gathered to vote on the motion when the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, Qasim Suri of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, ruled that it was an alleged "foreign conspiracy" led by the west against his government. [Al Jazeera 1] [The Guardian]

Minutes later, Prime Minister Khan went on national television to say he would ask President Arif Alvi to dissolve the National Assembly and call early elections. In his speech, Khan blamed "foreign" forces for his political troubles and accused the opposition of colluding with the United States to unseat him, saying Washington wants him gone because of his foreign policy choices that often favor China and Russia. The White House has denied Khan's claims. [Dawn 1]

It's been a whirlwind week for the prime minister. On March 28, one of Khan's coalition partners, the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) reaffirmed its support for him after he appointed the party's *de facto* leader Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi as the new chief minister for Punjab province — long a PML-Q demand [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]. But then he got bad news on March 30, when his biggest coalition ally, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-P), announced it was joining the opposition looking to oust the prime minister following a written agreement between the two sides. After the decision was made, federal ministers belonging to MQM-P, Law Minister Farogh Naseem and Minister for Information Technology Aminul Haq, resigned from the cabinet. [Dawn 2] [Reuters]

Khan's PTI party does not have a majority in the National Assembly by itself and has relied on the support of coalition allies, the biggest of which was the MQM, based in the southern port city of Karachi. In light of the party's decision to withdraw from the ruling alliance, the PTI had lost its parliamentary majority, complicating Khan's ability to survive the then imminent no-confidence vote. [Al Jazeera 2]

Against this backdrop, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who heads the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP), has promised to fight back with a sit-in protest in parliament. He also said the deputy speaker's ruling throwing out the no-confidence vote was illegal and vowed to go to Pakistan's Supreme Court. [Deutsche Welle]

Pakistan: Supreme Court delays verdict on fate of Prime Minister Khan

(lm) Pakistan's Supreme Court has delayed its verdict on whether the prime minister, Imran Khan, had violated the constitution by dissolving parliament to sidestep a no-confidence vote that he appeared certain to lose.

Khan's decision to call for parliament to be dissolved on April 3 had been justified by him on the basis that it was an alleged "foreign conspiracy" led by the west against his government. However, the opposition, who had tabled the no-confidence vote and claimed to have enough support to win, accused the prime minister of treason and submitted a petition to the Supreme Court challenging the actions. [The Guardian]

But despite the chief justice promising to issue a verdict on April 4, the hearing was adjourned for the second time on April 5 without any evident reason. [Al Jazeera]

But regardless of what the court decides, Pakistan's democracy will suffer as the country looks to be heading for fresh elections before the completion of the current term of the parliament and prime minister in 2023. Khan nominated the former chief justice Gulzar Ahmed as caretaker prime minister until elections, but in the meantime, Pakistan has no cabinet or government as both were dissolved and interims have not been decided.

Furthermore, the bid for a vote of no confidence has raised the risk of an economic crisis coming as does amid a pending International Monetary Fund (IMF) review on the next tranche of a $6 billion rescue package. The IMF review was scheduled for last week but has yet to happen. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

Pakistan: Army chief corrects government's neutrality stance on Russia, India, United States

(fq/lm) Speaking at the Islamabad Security Dialogue on April 2, the chief of Pakistan's powerful army, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, offered a series of remarks that were notably at variance with that of the country's embattled prime minister, Imran Khan. [News 9]

In his televised speech, the general stated that Pakistan shares a "long and excellent" strategic relationship with the United States, but it does not believe in "camp politics" – two days after Prime Minister Khan accused the White House of planning to oust his government by backing a no-confidence vote against him in parliament's lower house. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

General Bajwa also slammed Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling for immediate cessation of what he described as a "huge tragedy" being inflicted on a smaller country. The Army chief's rare criticism of Moscow evidently differed from that of the prime minister, who has advocated Islamabad's neutrality in the conflict and refused to criticize Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions. [Voice of America]

Arguably most significant, however, was that General Bajwa said that all disputes with India should be settled peacefully through dialogue, arguing that Islamabad continues to believe in using diplomacy to resolve all outstanding issues, including Kashmir, to keep the "flames of fire away from our region". These remarks had a wider meaning, for they drove at some sort of trilateral dialogue involving India, Pakistan and China to create an inclusive peace. [The Hindu]

At a time when the prime minister's relationship with Pakistan's powerful military is said by some political analysts and opposition members to have cooled down. The military, which has intervened in civilian politics for decades and was seen as largely responsible for Khan's election win in 2018, said that it is neutral in this situation – what many read that as saying that it has withdrawn its support from the prime minister [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4]. Last year, the army's tacit backing helped Khan survive a similar challenge when he was forced to test his majority in parliament. [TIME]

Prime Minister Khan had previously clashed with top generals after publicly disagreeing with General Bajwa over the appointment of Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum as new head of the country's powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) last October. At the time Khan delayed the appointment and publicly voiced support for the incumbent ISI chief, General Faiz Hameed, widely seen as his ally, to stay in the role. [AiR No. 41, October/2021, 2]

Pakistan: Local Taliban attack troops in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province

(ha) Eight members of Pakistan's paramilitary security forces were killed in two separate clashes with Pakistan Taliban militants last week in country's northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On March 31, members of the Pakistani Taliban — also known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) – launched attack on a military compound in the city of Tank, triggered a shootout with security forces in which at least six troops and three insurgents were killed. The second incident took place in the adjacent district of South Waziristan where two military officers and four militants were killed. [Arab News] [Associated Press] [The News International]

The Pakistani Taliban have been emboldened since the Afghan Taliban last year seized power across the border in Kabul. The group has stepped up attacks on Pakistani security forces since December of last year when it refused to extend a monthslong ceasefire with the government in Islamabad [see AiR No. 50, December/2021, 2]. In light of this, Pakistan's military reached out to the TTP last month, in the latest of a series of attempts to reign in and accommodate the group politically in order to defuse its potential for violence [see AiR No. 9, March/2022, 1].

In related developments, security officials claimed on March 29 they had arrested four suspects allegedly affiliated with TTP. The suspects were allegedly trying to target political gatherings in the capital, Islamabad. According to officials, detonators and other explosive materials were recovered from them. [Dawn]

Pakistan: Widow of murdered journalist pardons all accused in the case, including PPP lawmakers

(ha) The widow of a Pakistani journalist who was allegedly tortured to death last year has pardoned all suspects in the case, including two lawmakers of the opposition Pakistan People's Party (PPP). In a video message, she stated clearly that she had taken the decision as he had not the capacity to fight the case,

adding that “justice can't be served in Pakistan.” [The News International]

The journalist, Nazim Jokhio, was found murdered at the farmhouse of PPP’s lawmaker Jam Awais last November. Awais along with his brother, lawmaker Jam Abdul Karim, and others were later booked for allegedly torturing Jokhio to death after he stopped them from hunting endangered species of birds. Karim was later declared as absconder as he fled to the United Arab Emirates, while Awais was granted protective bail last week so that he could participate in the vote on a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan.

However, legal experts believe that the widow’s pardon holds no legal value as she was neither the complainant in the case nor could she be considered Nazim’s legal heir. Furthermore, the case falls under the ambit of the anti-terrorism law and there is no provision for a compromise in such cases. [Dawn]

Sri Lanka: Entire cabinet resigns as violent protests erupt over economic crisis

(lm) The entire Sri Lankan cabinet, a string of lawmakers aligned with the coalition government, and the central bank governor have resigned, as thousands of protesters in the capital defy curfew orders to demand the resignations of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his elder brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, amid the country’s worst economic crisis in decades.

Sri Lanka has experienced economic stress for months, driven in great part by the COVID-19 pandemic’s devastating toll on the country’s tourism industry. Foreign exchange reserves have fallen 70 percent in the last two years to about USD 2.3 billion, leaving the Indian Ocean island nation struggling to pay for essential imports, including food and fuel. As anger grew, a huge crowd tried to storm the office of President Rajapaksa on March 15 when members of the political opposition led a march of anti-government protesters through Colombo. [AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4].

Last week, things began to fall apart when public anger boiled over into violent protests, resulting in clashes between hundreds of protesters and security forces outside Rajapaksa’s private residence in a suburb of Colombo on March 31. Police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the crowds, after they set several police and army vehicles ablaze. The following day,

police arrested 53 people, and imposed a 36-hour curfew in and around the capital. Local media reported that five news photographers were detained and tortured at a police station. But despite the crackdown, protests continued, and spread to other parts of the country. [The Guardian]

Against this backdrop, President Rajapaksa assumed emergency powers by decree at midnight April 1, saying in a government gazette notification that he took the decision in the "interests of public security, the protection of public order and the maintenance of supplies and essential services". Under the decree, the president can authorize detentions, seizure of property and search of premises. He can also change or suspend any law except the constitution. [BBC 1] [CNN]

But the move did little to appease the anger of thousands, who defied the nationwide curfew on April 3 and took to the streets to protest against the government's handling of the economic crisis and to demand the ouster of the president. In an attempt to quell growing social unrest, Sri Lankan authorities blocked access for nearly 15 hours to social media platforms that were used to organize the protests. [ABC News]

Later the same day, however, all 26 ministers – including three members of the all-powerful Rajapaksa clan – stepped down. Central bank governor Ajith Nivard Cabraal, who had opposed aid from the International Monetary Fund, offered to quit separately the following day. In light of this, many opposition lawmakers demanded criminal liability for the bank's mismanagement, which they see as responsible for the soaring prices and shortages of goods. [Deutsche Welle] [Nikkei Asia]

But despite the mass resignation of cabinet ministers, President Rajapaksa held on to power, and on April 4 called on opposition parties to help him form a national government and accept cabinet portfolios. He also tweaked his cabinet, including by appointing Ali Sabry to replace Basil Rajapaksa as finance minister.

But several ministers were simply reappointed to their old posts: G.L. Peiris as foreign minister, Dinesh Gunawardena as education minister and Johnston Fernando as highways minister. Furthermore, the freshly appointed finance minister announced on April 5 he was quitting the job to make room for someone outside politics who might be "suitable to handle the situation". [BBC 2] [The Straits Times 1] [The Straits Times 2]

It is unclear what the implications of the MPs actions are at this point – they have distanced themselves from Rajapaksa's Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) led coalition but have not extended support to the opposition.

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

Cambodia: Prime Minister Hun Sen to run again for office with eldest son as reserve candidate

(pw) Prime Minister Hun Sen announced his plan to run as a prime ministerial candidate of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) in the 2023 general election.

At the same time, the CPP named Hun Sen´s eldest son, Lieutenant General Hun Manetas, as reserve candidate. Lt. Gen. Hun Manet is the incumbent commander-in-chief of the Royal Cambodian Army. The Prime Minister confirmed that Lt. Gen. Hun Manet ´s nomination is a measure to ensure stability during and after the 2023 election.

Hun Sen started his career as a renegade battalion commander of the Khmer Rouge´s Democratic Kampuchea who fled internal purges to Vietnam in 1977, returned as a leader of the Vietnamese-sponsored force that took power from the Khmer Rouge in 1979, and became deputy prime minister and foreign minister with only 26 years. In 1985, he assumed the premiership. After the Paris Peace Treaty of 1991 that formally ended the Cambodian civil war,

his opponent Prince Norodom Ranariddh got most votes in the 1993 elections leading to a joint premiership of Hun Sen and Ranariddh after Hun Sen denied his opponent´s legitimacy to rule. In 1997, he staged a coup d´état against his opponent to assume the sole premiership he holds since then again.

With 37 years, Hun Sen is the currently longest-serving prime minister in the world. [Khmer Times 1] [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia: Opposition party's candidates removed from commune election list

(pw) On April 1, all candidates from the opposition Candlelight Party were removed from the candidate lists in three provinces in light of the upcoming commune elections scheduled for June 5, according to the party's vice-president.

Moreover, he alleges that the National Election Committee violated the election laws by not questioning witnesses on the complaints which the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) filed against the Candlelight Party.

These complaints were made amid the Candlelight Party's threat not to accept the upcoming commune votes due to the CPP's harassment of Candlelight Party members and activists. For example, four Candlelight Party members were arrested in Phnom Penh on April 1 with three being shortly released afterward. [Radio Free Asia]

Cambodia: Foreign witnesses to be summoned in former opposition leader's treason trial

(pw) Lawyers of former opposition leader Khem Sokha announced the intention to summon as witnesses in Sokha's treason trial foreign witnesses who are accused of being involved in a conspiracy with Khem Sokha to overthrow the Cambodian government.

Sohka was arrested in September 2017 for allegedly attempting to overthrow the government of Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. He was then accused of "conspiracy with foreign power" for having allegedly received foreign donations during his presidency of the Cambodian Center for Human

Rights, a local NGO he founded in 2002. [AiR No. 4, January/2022, 4]

The trial will resume on April 6. If found guilty, he could face up to 30 years in jail. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Inter-country child adoptions resumed amid rights group concerns

(pw) Cambodia has resumed inter-country child adoptions after halting it in 2014 soon after its legalization. The Social Affairs Ministry stated that it will approve at least nine applications submitted by international agencies after saying that Cambodia now has the appropriate protection mechanisms and ability to enforce the various duties, requirements, and restrictions imposed on the relevant parties under the Laws on Inter-country Adoptions.

Cambodia had been a significant source of children adopted abroad before the 2000s. Nonetheless, after claims that Cambodian mother gave their children to adoption agencies in return for payment, the United States and other countries began to ban adoptions from Cambodia. Consequently, Cambodia outlawed international adoptions in 2009 due to the significant decrease in the practice.

In spite of the legal changes, the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, a local rights group, was concerned about the resumption of inter-country adoptions over fears of lax enforcement and mistreatment by the adoptive parents. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Authorities denied reports of Thai citizens forcibly held in Cambodia by criminal gangs

(pw) Responding to news reports that gangs deceived around 2,800–3,000 illegal Thai workers to work as scammers in Cambodia, Cambodian authorities denied any illegal detention happening in Sihanoukville province and ensured that the Cambodian police would cooperate with the Thai authorities to repatriate their citizens.

Reported criminal activities in Sihanoukville rose after the Cambodian authorities lifted the Covid-19 restrictions on companies.

The reports on the trafficking of Thais corroborate the broader human trafficking pattern in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. The Malaysian police have obtained details of trafficking rings tricking Malays to work as forced laborers in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand. Also, it was reported that in March 2022 that Laotians and Thais were deceived into working in casinos located in Laos, where failing to meet sales quotas could mean being sold off to other employers in areas such as the sex industry. [Radio Free Asia]

Cambodia: Cambodia responds to UN human rights rapporteur's statement

(pw) After a United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteur reported to the UN Human Rights Council a regression of the civic and political space in Cambodia, the country´s government has voiced its disagreement with the claims. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reiterated that the country was adhering to democratic principles and has been improving in several areas.

The report comes months before the upcoming commune elections in Cambodia, which are scheduled for June 5. [The Phnom Penh Post 1]

Moreover, the Cambodian Justice Ministry mentioned that the dwindling civic space only applies to small numbers of people who broke the law to serve their political agenda and interests alongside human rights activists who used the cover of civil society groups to commit acts violating the law.

Cambodia's Permanent Representative to the UN responded to the report by saying that it fails to set the record straight and has issues with balance, impartiality, objectivity, and non-selectivity. For example, he stated it did not highlight that mass trials in Cambodia were related to unjustifiable crimes. Furthermore, he addressed the report's concerns over an all-intrusive single-party rule by stating that the ruling Cambodian People's Party was democratically elected by 77% of the voters in 2018. [Khmer Times] [The Phnom Penh Post 2]. It is worth to mention, however, that, before the elections, leading oppositional politicians preferred exile before what they expected as politically hijacked criminal investigations against them, media were banned and the major opposition party dissolved.

Indonesia: President aims at funding new capital construction with Arab investments

(bs) Indonesian President Joko Widodo is allegedly seeking funding from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to proceed with the construction development project of the country´s new capital. The funds were sought after Japanese investor SoftBank Group pulled USD 34 billion out of the project. Currently, state funds will cover one-fifth of the foreseen financial needs.

SoftBank Group announced that although it is pulling back from the Nusantara Development Project, its investments will be reallocated to "provincial-level developments in Indonesia."

Recent official statements reported that the UAE agreed to invest around USD 20 billion in the new capital Nusantara. Meanwhile, Indonesia has been working on strengthening its partnerships with Saudi Arabia in various fields, including oil and gas projects. However, critics say that seeking investments from Saudi Arabia might pose some challenges as the Nusantara capital city project "does not align with Saudi Arabia's future goals," meaning green energy, technology, and agriculture. The project has been under the scrutiny of environmentalist groups, for its potential threat to the environmental sustainability in the Borneo. [Soth China Morning Post]

In January, Indonesia approved the bill to relocate part of the national budget to the construction of the new Indonesian capital on the Borneo. The plan was originally drafted in 2019 but was then postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. [AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3]

Experts estimated that the capital relocation will lead to an increase in the population of Nusantara by 10 times to about 1.9 million by 2045. The surrounding regions will also increase their population to around 11 million, from the current 3.7 million, by the same year. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

Indonesia: Relatives of Communist Party members to be allowed to join armed forces after decade-old ban

(bs) Relatives and descendants of former members of the Indonesian communist party will be allowed to join

the National military after being banned from the role since 1966. The decision was announced by Indonesia's military chief on March 30 after claiming that the military has no legal basis to keep the ban in place.

On September 30 and October 1, 1965, groups allegedly led by the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) attempted a coup to overthrow Sukarno's presidency. After countering the attempt, the national military began a massive anti-communist crackdown. Those (allegedly) linked to the communist party and their family members faced death, abuses and persecution, and were eventually barred from joining the military, police force, or civil service.

President Suharto, the general who succeeded the overthrown Sukarno, became the longest-serving president of Indonesia, holding office from 1967 to 1998. According to historical findings, over 500,000 people were killed after the attempted coup that brought him and his staunch anti-communist regime to power. [Benar News]

Indonesia: Islamic school teacher sentenced to death for raping 13 students

(bs) An Indonesian court ruled a death sentence against an Islamic school teacher for raping 13 female students. After the man had initially received a life sentence, the prosecutor appealed to the High Court to call for a harsher sentence. The call for the death penalty was supported by Indonesian officials and the Child Protection Minister, while the human rights commission stated its opposition to such punishment. The possibility of a further appeal has not yet been discussed.

From 2016 to 2021, the teacher allegedly sexually abused 13 school girls between 12 and 16 years of age. Following the abuse, eight of the girls were found pregnant. [CNN]

Indonesia: Three people killed in clashes with Papuan separatist group

(bs) Three people were killed in two separate armed clashes in Papua. The attacks were allegedly led by the West Papua Liberation Army, the armed wing of a local pro-independence organization.

After the national security forces shot one of the separatist group´s commanders, the militants torched nine classrooms in a local school, injuring two teachers to protest the Indonesian influence in the development of Papua.

The region of Papua was colonized by the Netherlands in 1898. Since 1949, when Indonesia gained national independence, Papua struggled for its own independence. Papuan independence was initially supported by the Dutch government which recognized West Papua as geographically, ethnically, and culturally separate from Indonesia. Soon after the 1961 Papuan declaration of independence, Indonesian troops invaded the area followed by a protracted armed conflict between Indigenous Papuans and the Indonesian army. The Netherlands, by signing the so-called New York Agreement, then handed over the control of West Papua to the United Nations (UN) in 1962. Since then, Indonesian security forces signed responsible for a long time for severe human right abuses. In 1969, Papua was incorporated into Indonesia as a result of a UN-led ballot, the "Act of Free Choice," about which was defined as fraudulent as the indigenous Papuans were reportedly never consulted.

The region, however, has maintained its ethnic and cultural independence from Indonesia. Local Papuans have remained subjects of abuses and repressive acts by Indonesian authorities and continued to also militarily challenge the Indonesian forces which allegedly carried out frequent extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and other human right violations.

In early March, the UN condemned the Indonesian government for the "shocking abuses" against indigenous people in Papua in response to several petitions received in 2021 to investigate extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, torture, and the forced displacement of over 5,000 Papuans. [ABC News] [AiR No. 10, March/2022, 2] [Free West Papua]

Malaysia: Upper-House passes new constitutional amendment bill

(bs) On March 31, Malaysia's Senate passed the 2022 Constitution Amendment Bill. The Law aims to exempt the application of Article 119 of the Constitution to the Royal Rulers and their close family members by introducing Article 119A, which governs that Royal Family members are not allowed to vote in order to preserve their political neutrality.

Article 119 regulates the ability of Malaysian citizens to vote in elections. It was amended in 2019 when the parliament introduced Article 119(1)(a) reducing the voting age in national and state elections from 21 to 18 years old. [Library of Congress]

Although the new amendment prevents Royal Family members from voting, it does not exempt them from their involvement in political activities. [Malay Mail 1]

Moreover, the new Constitution Amendment Bill governs three criteria to define the practice of "party hopping"—voting contrary to one's party – in the parliament. The criteria were presented on March 30 to clarify the implementation details of the Anti-Hopping Law which will be tabled at a special House sitting on April 11. The anti-party-hopping bill aims at ensuring that the will of the people is maintained in Parliament by requiring re-elections in case of a party-hopping by a member of the parliament. [Malay Mail 2] [Malay Mail 3]

Malaysia: New bill increases maternity leave in adherence with international standards

(bs) Malaysia increased maternity leave from 60 to 98 days to align the national regulation to the International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions.

On March 30, the Senate passed the new legislation as part of the 2021 Employment Amendment Bill which, among other issues, aims at ensuring more protection for women involved in the employment sector and at encouraging more women to join the workforce.

Malaysia ratified 18 ILO conventions and one protocol, 14 of the ratified conventions are currently in force in the country. [International Labour Organization] [Malay Mail]

Myanmar: Over 10,000 imprisoned by military junta amid prison protests

(cmsk/bs) According to the latest data collected by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the number of people imprisoned by the military junta since the February 2021 coup has now surpassed 10,000. Out of 10,044 people who are currently held in detention, only 905 have been sentenced in person.

Moreover, the military tribunal has sentenced 100 people to death, including two minors. [AAPP]

Meanwhile, on April 3, Myanmar's junta has killed at least one detainee and injured five others in a protest crackdown in a prison in Sagaing Region. The inmates carried out a protest to voice the ongoing abuses, torture, and human rights violations in the prison.

Since the 2021 coup, the junta has been responding to several protests carried out by prisoners with beatings, shootings, denial of medical treatment, and enforced isolation. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: New police law charges police with military defense duties

(cmsk) The State Administration Council - Myanmar´s institutionalized military junta comprising senior officers and some civilians - has issued a new Police Force Law which allows the junta to use the police to fight against resistance forces. The new legislation, issued without parliamentary approval, rescinds previous regulations of colonial origin. [Myanmar Now]

The law effectively empowers the junta inter alia to arrest and detain citizens without a warrant for playing wind instruments and banging pots, an action that became a symbol of anti-military protest after the February 2021 coup. Also, the law requires that future police reforms will have to be first approved by the military.

About 7,000 members of Myanmar's 80,000-strong police force are reported to have defected since the 2021 coup. Other laws amended by the junta include the Counterterrorism Law, Section 505 of the Penal Code for incitement, and the Telecommunications Law. A cybersecurity law is also being drafted. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5] [RFA]

Myanmar: Military tribunals issue harsher sentences for anti-junta protesters

(cmsk/ny) After the military junta allegedly assumed almost full control over the country´s judiciary, the latter is said to have alarmingly increased the number of maximum sentences handed down against protesters, a veteran lawyer said. Under the 1959 Defense Services Act, Myanmar's Supreme Court cannot intervene in cases tried by military tribunals.

103 of 175 activists have received a death sentence by military courts, while the remaining 72 have been given longs sentences including life in prison for allegedly leading anti-junta protests or being linked to terrorist groups. Most of the detainees are reportedly between 23 and 27 years of age.

Many of the young adults who received severe punishments since the coup on February 1, 2021 have been prosecuted under Section 302 of the Penal Code and under the country's Counterterrorism Law which was amended in August 2021 to introduce harsher penalties. [RFA]

Myanmar: Deadly clashes continue across the country

(cmsk) Anti-junta forces and military units continued to clash across the country over recent days.

In Chin State, in Western Myanmar, anti-junta forces attacked a military convoy killing 20 junta soldiers, and in a separate attack in the same area, the death of two junta soldiers has also been reported. Food supply routes, as well as phone and internet service, have been cut off in the region. The junta is known to cut off utilities when attacks are imminent. [Irrawaddy 1]

A large-scale anti-junta attack on a police station in the northern Magway Region ended after regime forces opened fire from two helicopters forcing the resistance groups to retreat. [Myanmar Now 1]

In Magway Region's Pauk Township, a column of 100 junta soldiers and members of a pro-junta militia entered a village and opened fire to ward off anti-junta resistance forces. Junta forces also burnt down the village. A farmer's wife and daughter are reported to have been among 30 people who were held by the junta and militia forces. The farmer's wife, whose body was later found, is suspected of being raped before being stabbed to death along with the couple's three-year-old daughter. [Myanmar Now 2]

The military has also raided villages in the central Magway Region and allegedly used two civilians as human shields, according to residents. On the same occasion, the anti-junta People's Defense Forces allege that the military has tortured two civilians to death. [Irrawaddy 2]

In Kayin State, near the Thai border in southeast Myanmar, the Myanmar military has been using

helicopters to attack villages in the area. Despite the airstrikes, 61 junta forces were killed in an ambush while resistance forces reportedly suffered no casualties according to Cobra, a local resistance group. [Irrawaddy 3]

During the same week, in the Mandalay Region of central Myanmar, soldiers arrested and abused four people, including an 11-year-old boy. The child and a woman were released, but two men are still held by the junta for interrogation. All four, including the child, were allegedly tortured, according to anti-junta People's Defense Forces. [Myanmar Now 2]

While analysts see Myanmar's civil war as having turned into a protracted conflict [The Washington Post], intense fighting between junta troops and ethnic Karen rebels in Myanmar's eastern Kayin state has forced more than 10,000 civilians to seek shelter near the country's border with Thailand. Thai officials are reported to be refusing entry to refugees and tightening security in the border region. Aid workers warn of a food shortage, while health services and other essential supplies are also absent. A reporter linked to the anti-resistance Karen Information Center news agency has also been allegedly detained. [RFA]

Myanmar: Armed group rejected cease-fire request from military junta

(bs) The armed wing of the Shan State Progress Party (SSPP) in Shan State, in Northwest Myanmar, refused to withdraw troops from the southern part of the state after receiving a request from the country's military junta.

The SSPP met with junta representatives of the National Solidarity and Peace Negotiation Committee on March 31 when the Myanmar military drew the request to the party to withdraw its armed troops from the south of Shan state. The parties attempted to engage in peace talks on the de-escalation of fights in the region in light of the upcoming general elections expected to take place in 2023.

The party has been involved in violent fighting with the Shan armed group, the Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS), over territorial claims. [The Irrawaddy]

The Philippines: Commission on Elections holds presidential debate

(dvr) The Commission on Election held the second presidential debate on April 3. The nine presidential candidates who attended the debate discussed various issues among which was the “war on drugs” that has killed about 30,000 people since the beginning of President Duterte’s administration in 2016.
While Leody de Guzman of the Party of the Laboring Masses and Vice President Leni Robredo showed their intention to launch probes into the high number of extrajudicial killings and implement alternative punishments for drug crimes, Senator Manny Pacquiao, on the other hand, reiterated his support for capital punishment against drug importers claiming that he “will kill” and “make executions public.” Although, he voiced strong disagreement with extrajudicial killings. [Rappler 1] [Rappler 2]

Manila mayor Isko Moreno and Leni Robredo showed a unified stance on the country’s commitment to strengthen the implementation of the 2016 ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which ruled in favor of the Philippines’ jurisdiction on defined areas in the South China Sea. The ruling was reportedly downplayed by President Duterte in order to build stronger investment ties with China. On this basis, Robredo aims at bringing the Philippines to take the lead and rule by example. She reiterated the importance of forging a Code of Conduct for the South China Sea that has been under negotiations for 20 years. [Rappler 3]

During the debate, the presidential candidates also discussed climate change. Robredo stated the importance of having a clear road map to achieve a 75 percent reduction in emissions by 2030 while implementing efforts to reduce the use of coal in favor of green and renewable energy. De Guzman also condemned the fossil fuel industries’ influence on the government’s decisions and voiced the need to give up coal production, but also pointed out that the country has not yet enough renewable energy sources to completely replace the use and production of coal. [Rappler 4]

In the same light, a think tank organization on international studies urged the next presidential administration to include climate-change related threats into the key sector of national security. The institute also mentioned how the environmental challenges have “undermined the country’s capacity to respond to crisis and emergencies.” [Manila Bulletin]

All the candidates present at the debate agreed on the key role of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in the Philippines. They all talked in favor of increasing the CHR’s budget if elected. [Rappler 5]

The Philippines: International reports condemn extrajudicial killings while President Duterte alleges leftist parties to planning coup

(bs/dvr) Amnesty International condemned the Philippines and the extrajudicial killings under Duterte's government in its 2021-22 Human Rights Report. The report highlights the human rights situation in 154 countries and provides governments with recommendations. [CNN Philippines]

The Philippines' government denied the accusations claiming that the reports were based on outdated and unverified data. On the same day, a national coalition of rights groups launched a campaign urging the international community to impose sanctions on President Duterte and other high officials for their alleged violations of human rights. The coalition announced its intention to work with the governments of Australia, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the European Union to enforce Magnitsky sanctions on those high officials involved in extrajudicial killings and other rights violations in the Philippines.

Magnitsky laws allow outside countries to impose sanctions on foreign nationals responsible for human rights violations or corruption in that foreign country. The United States was the first country to enact and implement laws to punish Russian officials who allegedly killed Russian tax lawyer Sergei Magnitsky while held in jail in 2009. Magnitsky legislation has since then been enacted in other countries including the United Kingdom, Estonia, Canada, Lithuania, Latvia, Gibraltar, and Kosovo. [Philstar]

The reports come right after President Rodrigo Duterte urged the Filipino population to not vote for five parties that are allegedly linked to the "infiltrated" Communist wing in parliament in the upcoming presidential election on May 9. The president also alleged that these groups are plotting to overthrow the government, claiming that they are using public funds to support Communist rebels.

Among the five groups that Duterte named as allegedly linked to the Makabayan bloc, the parliamentary front for the communist movement, there are the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT), the women's rights groups Gabriela, and the nationalist group Bayan Muna among others. [Inquirer 1] [Manila Times]

The groups have all denied the accusations asserting that they have been victims of Duterte's "red-tagging" policy that would label a person, personality, or group as communist. The practice makes members of communist groups and activists subjects of harassment or persecution.

Such practices were already condemned in early 2022, on February 16, in a resolution issued by the European Parliament. The resolution urged the authorities to cease "red-tagging" people and organizations and condemned the high number of extrajudicial killings and other serious human rights violations committed in the "war on drugs" under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte. [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]

Duterte's "war on drugs" issue also reemerged in late March, when the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) reported that the extrajudicial killings of people allegedly involved in drug-related crimes are a violation of international drug control conventions. The INCB then urged the Philippines to immediately end the practice and to expedite ongoing investigations. The INCB's observations were mostly based on the findings of the United Nations Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court (ICC), which estimated that since the beginning of Duterte's presidency in 2016, around 30,000 people were killed in the "war on drugs." [Inquirer 2]

In response to the INCB, President Duterte has ordered the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) to submit an up-to-date report on the number of seized drugs to the ICC and local human rights groups. [Inquirer 3]

Singapore: Capital punishment resumed after two years from latest execution

(bs) Singapore carried out its first death execution since 2019 by hanging a Malaysian man who lost his last appeal to a Singaporean Appeal Court on March 29. The man was charged with drug trafficking and was believed to be mentally disabled. The court rejected the petition claiming that the appeal was "an abuse of process" and that "international law does not apply."

The event sparked worries among the citizens. On April 3, 400 people gathered in protest of the resumption of capital punishment calling for the immediate end of the death penalty in Singapore. [Independent $]

The man was convicted in 2013 and sentenced to death in 2015. After the announcement of the impending execution in October 2021, the man's lawyers brought the case before the constitutional court asking to rule on the alleged unconstitutionality of the method of administration of the death penalty in Singapore. Moreover, following the international outcry from human rights groups, on February 16, Singapore suspended the execution. However, all the appeals were rejected. [AiR No. 8, February/2022, 4]

According to a statement by Amnesty International in late 2021, the man was sentenced for an "offense that does not meet the threshold of the 'most serious crimes' to which the use of the death penalty must be restricted under international law." [CNN] [The Guardian]

Thailand: Cabinet delays the Marriage Equality bill

(kc/bs) On March 29, the Thai cabinet rejected a draft law that would allow same-sex marriage across the country. The Marriage Equality Bill was filed by the opposition Move Forward Party and, according to the cabinet, was too similar to the Civil Partnership Bill which had already been proposed by the government and approved by the cabinet itself in July 2020. [Thai PBS World]

A non-profit organization, however, claimed that the draft law still has a possibility of being brought before the parliament for a first reading. In fact, Article 118 of the 2019 Rules of Procedure of the House of Representatives stipulates that a bill proposed by the Council, is put forward by more than 20 members of the parliament, or receives 10,000 citizen signatures, can be accepted by the parliament for its first reading.

Although the Civil Partnership Bill was approved after being proposed in 2013, the law received criticism not only for allegedly not granting enough rights to the LGBTQ community but also, conversely, for introducing some regulations in favor of same-sex couples. While religious and conservative groups moved against the bill itself, LGBTQ advocates argued that although some equality rights would be recognized, such a law would not allow formal recognition of LGBTQ unions as marriages or LGBTQ couples to adopt children or the equalization of the social security benefits of LGBTQ unions to those of married couples. Thus, the Equal Marriage Bill was proposed in an attempt to introduce

major amendments, including a change in the formal definition of a spouse from "a man or a woman" to "a person." [No. 48, November/2021, 5] [Thansettakij, in Thai]

In November 2021, the Constitutional Court, while ruling on the constitutionality of the current Thai marriage law, encouraged the government to draft regulations on the rights of "gender-diverse people." The ruling came after an LGBTQ couple and the Foundation for Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Rights and Justice (For-SOGI) filed a petition in 2019 to the Constitutional Court asking to rule on the alleged unconstitutionality of Section 1448 of the Thai Civil and Commercial Code, which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. [AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]

Thailand: Parliament committee agrees on different ballot numbers

(kc) During an examination of the two election-related amendment bills a parliamentary committee voted in favor of using different candidacy numbers for constituency candidates and their political parties. [Bangkok Post] [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

The opposition Pheu Thai Party objected that the use of ballots with different numbers is a systematic design to prevent major parties from a landslide victory. Meanwhile, members of the coalition parties showed their support for the decision of the commitee claiming that the move might reduce vote-buying. [Thairath, in Thai]

The examined amendment bills are two of the ten original bills that aimed at modifying two major organic laws, namely the Political Parties Act and the MP Election Act. Seven out of ten bills were passed in Parliament in February, while the remaining are expected to be discussed by August. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

Thailand: Election Commission demands opposition party's clarification for royal budget address

(kc/bs) The Election Commission (EC) summoned the Move Forward Party (MFP) to testify in a case on an alleged offense that could lead to the party's dissolution. The party requested clarification on what

sections of the speech given by one of its members in a parliamentary debate on the royal budget allocation might constitute a legal ground for the dissolution of the party.

The petition was filed in August 2021, after members of the MFP discussed the royal budget in parliament during a budget expenditure motion. The motion asked the EC to investigate a potential violation of the Political Parties Act of a statement that, according to the prosecution, could undermine the constitutional monarchy by referring to Section 112 of the Criminal Code, the lese mèjesté law on royal defamation. The petition also suggested that the EC refers the case to the Constitutional Court. [Bangkok Post] [Prachatai, in Thai]

Thailand: Land Department revokes family-owned deeds of opposition politician

(kc) The Land Department signed an order to revoke the Land Utilization Certificate of Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, former leader of the now-defunct Future Forward Party, after three family members were accused of public land encroachment. The 59 land properties belonged to the Juangroongruangkit family since 1990 and represent an area of more than 338 hectares. [Thai PBS World]

The department issued the revocation order on the grounds that the documents on the land's use are no longer valid as the land sits in a zone that was declared a forest reserve in 1984.

The revocation, however, can be challenged before the Administrative Court within 15 days from the order. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Ceasefire in Pattani during Ramadan

(kc) The Thai government and Muslim separatist insurgents in southern Thailand agreed to halt military operations in Patani province during the Muslim month of Ramadan from April 3 to May 14.

Both sides agreed to the ceasefire in the fourth peace dialogue between the Thai government and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. [AiR No. 3, January/2022, 3]

The agreement is the latest ceasefire following one earlier during the COVID-19 outbreak in April 2020. [Bangkok Post] [BBC, in Thai]

Vietnam: Rights group urged European Union to call on government to respect human rights

(bs) Ahead of the upcoming meeting between the European Union (EU) and Vietnam scheduled for April 6, Human Rights Watch urged the European Union to call on Vietnam to end violence and abuse against activists, and release political prisoners.

The rights group also requested the EU to establish clear and measurable guidelines on the respect of human rights in Vietnam and delineate international sanctions in case the violations continue.

Human Rights Watch also mentioned the escalation in the arrest of people on arbitrary charges as a means to silence opposition voices. In July 2021, for instance, authorities arrested a journalist and a lawyer on tax evasion charges right after their attempt to join the Domestic Advisory Group, an independent civil society body in charge of monitoring the implementation of the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement. The men were then convicted in early 2022 to four and five years in prison. During the same period, Vietnamese authorities also arrested an environmental activist on tax-evasion charges. The activist ran a project funded by the EU.

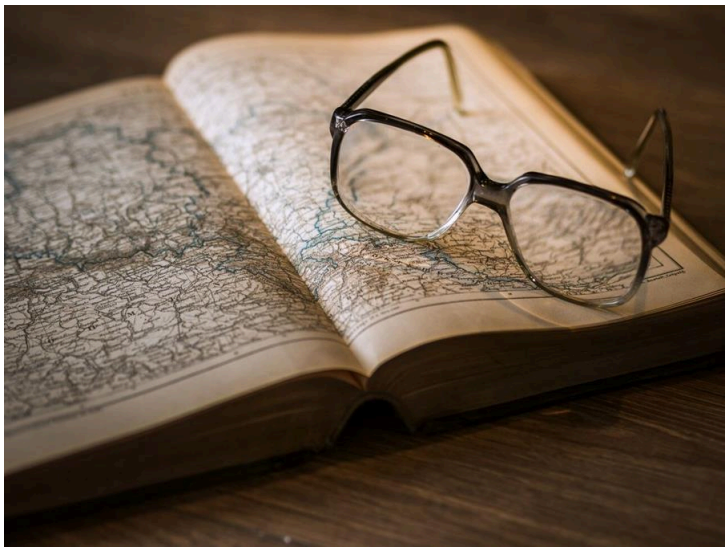
Furthermore, another journalist was arrested in 2019 after voicing concerns about human rights violations in Vietnam before the European Parliament. The journalist was sentenced to 15 years in prison.

According to Human Rights Watch, 153 people are currently incarcerated in Vietnam as political prisoners. Most of them were charged with anti-state propaganda or with abusing the rights to freedom and democracy under articles 117, 88, and 331 of the penal code. [Human Rights Watch]

Vietnam: Australian government demands release of man imprisoned on terrorism charges

(bs) The Australian government urged Vietnam to immediately release a Vietnamese-Australian citizen on health grounds. The man was sentenced in 2019 to 12 years in prison on terrorism charges for allegedly supporting a pro-democratic group that was banned as a "terrorist group" by the Vietnamese government in 2016. [New Canaan Advertiser]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia



China reaffirms close ties with Russia at foreign ministers' meeting

(jw) Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov traveled to China to attend multilateral meetings on Afghanistan, hosted by his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi (see below). However, his attendance was overshadowed by continuing discussions on China-Russia relations amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

After a meeting with Wang on March 30, the Russian foreign ministry emphasized both countries' willingness to cooperate and speak "with a united voice" on global issues. Both countries condemned "the counterproductive nature of the illegal unilateral sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and its satellites."

China's foreign ministry, for its part, quoted Wang as hailing Sino-Russian ties that "have withstood the new test of [an] evolving international landscape." Without naming the US and the West and avoiding the word

“war”, Wang called the “Ukraine issue” an “outcome of Cold War mentality and bloc confrontation,” demanding that the “legitimate security concerns of all parties should be addressed,” in peace which China supports.

Commenting on the Lavrov/Wang meeting, the ministry reaffirmed in a separate statement three “no-limits” in elevated Sino-Russian relations, including "no limits to China-Russia cooperation, no limit to our pursuit of peace and maintaining security, and no limit to our opposition to hegemony." [Foreign Ministry, China] [Global Times] [Reuters]

Despite these assurances of unity and close ranks with Russia, China is also reaching out to Ukraine. Wang held a phone call on April 4 with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba to express Beijing’s support of a diplomatic resolution of the conflict and reaffirm that it seeks to play a role therein.

It was the second phone talk between the two ministers since the begin of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and comes amidst mounting international condemnation of Russia over images of dead civilians scattered across the streets of Bucha, a suburb of Kyiv. [South China Morning Post] [The New York Times]

China, EU officials hold summit on Ukraine, economic cooperation and political differences

(jw) Top officials from the European Union (EU) and China met virtually on April 1 and discussed a wide range of topics relevant to EU–China relations.

The ongoing war in Ukraine was on top of the agenda as the EU was keen on pressing China to assume a more critical stance towards Russia and its invasion of Ukraine. However, the positions seem to be hardened as both sides “exchanged very clearly opposing views” according to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. Amid China’s repeated condemnation of sanctions on Russia and its attempts to portray the US and NATO as the responsible actors for the Ukraine war, EU representatives expressed their hopes that China would refrain from undermining sanctions on Russia and instead use its influence on Russia to advocate for peace. However, while China provided reassurances that it supports peace, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang stated that Beijing would pursue peace in “its own way”. EU representatives did not mention any reassurances that China would refuse to support

Russia militarily or economically. China continuously refuses to condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine and stands by the "no-limits" strategic partnership between China and Russia that was announced right before the beginning of the war. [Associated Press] [Reuters]

In addition to the Ukraine war, the participants of the summit discussed economic cooperation and political differences. While EU representatives stressed that the progress of economic cooperation relies heavily on China's approach toward the Ukraine war, both sides agreed that the potential for cooperation is big as China and the EU are tied together economically. Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that "China and the EU share extensive common interests and a solid foundation for cooperation." EU officials also saw common ground in certain areas and emphasized their willingness to work together in tackling climate change and COVID-19.

However, EU representatives highlighted political differences that stand in the way of strengthening EU-China ties. They pressed China to ease its pressure on Lithuania which was hit by extensive trade sanctions after deciding to open a Taiwan Representative Office. The EU views these sanctions as unjustified and has filed a suit before the WTO. However, the Chinese foreign ministry reiterated its stance on Lithuania and stated that everything would go "back to normal" once Lithuania returns to the one-China principle. Lithuanian officials originally called for the EU-China summit to be canceled [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4]. In addition to demands for lifting pressure on Lithuania, EU representatives also urged China to lift sanctions on members of the European Parliament, ease market access for European companies attempting to do business in China, and ensure compliance with human rights and labor rights, especially in Xinjiang. [Global Times] [The Diplomat]

China hosts multilateral meetings on Taliban-ruled Afghanistan

(jw/sg/lm) China last week hosted a series of multilateral meetings, featuring delegates from the United States, Russia, and South and Central Asian countries, to discuss ways to stabilize Afghanistan and convey to its Islamist Taliban rulers the need to moderate polices and "earnestly" fight terrorism. [Voice of America]

The events in the ancient town of Tunxi began on March 30 with a two-day conference of foreign ministers from Afghanistan's immediate neighbors — Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan — chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Afghan acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was also attending the meeting – the third iteration since the mechanism establishment in September 2021 – as well as representatives of Indonesia and Qatar, who joined as guests. Uzbekistan will host the fourth foreign ministers' meeting. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

In a separate meeting at the same venue, China's special envoy to Afghanistan, Yue Xiaoyong, hosted his United States, Russian and Pakistani counterparts for a new round of talks under so-called Extended Troika framework. Participants of the four-way meeting agreed to a mechanism for regular meetings and three working groups to coordinate on political and diplomatic affairs, economics and humanitarianism, and security and stability.

The Chinese and Pakistani foreign ministers held a meeting with Afghanistan's Muttaqi under a tripartite dialogue process aimed at exploring ways to help the Taliban tackle economic challenges. Additionally, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met individually with his counterparts from Russia, Pakistan and Qatar.

The China-hosted diplomatic engagement comes against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine more than a month ago, raising tensions between Moscow and Washington and the West at large.

They also come after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang made a surprise stop in the Afghan capital, Kabul, earlier this month – the most high-level visit by a Chinese official since the Taliban's seizure of power – and received assurances from Muttaqi that Afghanistan was committed to eliminating terrorism. That visit came just a day after the Islamists' U-turn that brought to mind their policies from the 1990s, when they last held power in Afghanistan. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

A joint statement issued after the foreign minister's meeting noted the importance of ensuring women's rights and children's education and protecting the rights of all ethnic groups. In a thinly veiled reference to the United States, it also "urged the countries mainly responsible for the current predicament in Afghanistan" to end its unilateral sanctions on the country and unconditionally return Kabul's state assets. [ABC News]

India defends buying discounted Russian oil, criticizes West for relative uninterest in Afghanistan

(lm) India's external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, has defended his country's right to buy discounted oil from Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, despite an appeal from his British counterpart, Liz Truss, for democracies to work together to counter authoritarians. [Al Jazeera]

Since Western sanctions were imposed on Russian entities after Moscow invaded Ukraine this February, refiners in India have bought at least 13 million barrels of Russian crude oil, compared with about 16 million barrels in all of 2021, according to *Reuters* data [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]. Furthermore, Russia is offering a discount of USD 35 a barrel as other buyers – most notably the United States and United Kingdom – backed away, *Bloomberg* reported on March 29. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Against this backdrop, Truss, appearing alongside her Indian opposite at an economic forum in New Delhi, repeatedly said she was not seeking to lecture the Indians, or anyone, on how to respond to the Russian invasion. Instead, she cast the conflict as democracies versus authoritarianism, saying it had underlined the need for "like-minded nations" to cooperate more closely on defense, trade, and energy and food security. Truss also advocated for more stringent sanctions on Russia relating to the ports, gold and energy sectors. [BBC]

In response, however, Jaishankar remarked that there seemed to be a "campaign" to distort India's attitude to discounted Russian oil. The foreign minister pointed out that Europe before the war purchased vastly more petroleum products from Russia than India.

He also argued the west had to recognize that power was being diffused around the world, arguing that an enormous economic rebalancing has led to the replacement of the centrality of the Group of Seven (G7) with that of the Group of Twenty (G20). Notably, Jaishankar contrasted the concern western governments have shown about Russia's invasion with what he described as the relative uninterest in the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, saying people seemed motivated by the proximity of a crisis, as much as anything. [The Guardian]

Research was contributed by Ms. Poonam Behura.

Russia's foreign minister visits India amid flurry of Western diplomacy over New Delhi's Ukraine stance

(sg/lm) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov arrived in India on April 1 to sit down with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Foreign Minister S Jaishankar amid an all-out attempt by international diplomats to exert pressure on New Delhi over its middle-ground position towards Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Lavrov arrived in India after meeting with Chinese officials in Beijing, where he had hailed China as part of a new "multipolar, just, democratic world order." Crucially, the Russian top diplomat seemed to have been singled out for attention by Prime Minister Modi, who had not met the string of other foreign ministers to arrive in New Delhi in recent days, including the British foreign secretary, Liz Truss, and the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5, entry in this edition].

Upon his arrival, Lavrov praised India's refusal to condemn the Ukraine invasion, while also predicting Moscow and New Delhi would find ways to circumvent "illegal" western sanctions and continue to trade. In fact, media reports point at a Russian proposal to use the country's messaging system SPFS to make rupee-ruble-denominated payments – a move that would circumvent a ban on seven Russian banks from the international SWIFT payment system [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]. Russian central bank officials are expected to visit India this week to discuss details, according to *Bloomberg*. [Bloomberg, $] [The Indian Express]

In a meeting with India's Jaishankar, Lavrov said Russia's military offensive in Ukraine was not "just about Ukraine, its neutrality", but rather a "question of world order". He also suggested that the United States had now suppressed all attempts at establishing autonomy by Europe, with the latter now completely in lockstep with the White House, a status to which he said Europe was reconciled. In words designed to attract approval in India, he said the west's real endgame was the re-establishment of a unipolar world. [The Guardian]

Notably, Lavrov's trip to India also coincided with a visit to India by the US deputy national security advisor for international economics and Russia sanctions architect, Daleep Singh. Singh arrived in New Delhi on March 30 for discussions on US-India economic

cooperation but also, according to a National Security Council statement, the "consequences of Russia's unjustified war against Ukraine." Indeed, while current US sanctions on Moscow do not prevent other countries from buying Russian oil, Singh warned of "consequences" for countries, including India, that seek to evade Washington's sanctions on Russia by doing business with Moscow using local currencies. [Reuters]

Crucially, Singh also pointed at India's ongoing border conflict with Beijing in the Himalayan heights, casting doubt on whether Russia would come to New Delhi's defense in the event of future Chinese incursion. [Times Now News] [India Today]

Amid growing tensions between the West and Russia, India continues to walk a diplomatic tightrope. So far, New Delhi has supported calls for a cease-fire and a diplomatic solution, but also abstained from successive United Nations resolutions condemning Russia's invasion [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]. Against this backdrop, analysts said Lavrov's visit sought to give both sides a chance to reassure each other – that India would not waver from its position of neutrality towards Moscow, and that Moscow would continue to prioritize ties with New Delhi even as it boosts its relationship with Beijing.

At the same time, some observers argue that recent developments reflect growing unease with New Delhi among fellow members of the four-nation Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a grouping which joins India with the US, Australia and Japan, and which is seen as presenting a united front against Chinese interests in the Indo-Pacific. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited New Delhi earlier this month, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison also held a video summit with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. Both these engagements came after US President Joe Biden had singled out India for its "somewhat shaky" response to the Ukraine crisis [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4]. [Deutsche Welle]

India, Australia sign 'historic' interim trade agreement

(lm) Australia and India signed an interim free trade deal on April 2 that will see an easing of tariffs on various Australian goods and duty-free access for India on a vast majority of products. The two countries further agreed to set up a sub-committee charged with transforming the interim deal into a full-fledged

Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). [The Economic Times]

Indian Trade Minister Piyush Goyal and his Australian counterpart Dan Tehan signed the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) during a virtual ceremony witnessed by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and India's Narendra Modi. [Deutsche Welle]

ECTA removes tariffs on more than 85 percent of Australian exports to India, including coal, wool and copper. It covers more than 95 percent of Indian goods imported by Australia, such as textiles, leather and jewelry. However, some agricultural industries including dairy, chickpeas and beef were left out of the interim agreement. [Voice of America]

India and Australia started negotiations for CECA in 2011. There were nine rounds of negotiations before both countries decided to suspend negotiations in September 2015, pending the outcome of other multilateral regional negotiations. At their 17th Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in September of last year, both sides then formally re-launched CECA negotiations and reaffirmed their commitment to reach an interim agreement by December 2021, and to conclude the negotiations on a full CECA by the end of 2022. [AiR No. 52, December/2021, 4]

Australia: Government pushes for large defense budget to counter Chinese economic maneuvers, cyber-attacks

(jw) The Australian government moves to heavily increase its defense budget with a new focus on cybersecurity as it fears Chinese incursion on the digital space.

On March 29, a USD 7.5 billion spending package that is meant to increase Australian defensive and offensive capabilities in the cyberspace was unveiled. The changes come as Australia frequently finds its companies and organizations targeted by hackers, allegedly from China. However, observers also trace the increase in the Australian government's defense spending back to Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's efforts to get reelected in two months. The budget changes come only a week after US President Biden announced an increase in defense spending to face China [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4] and are apparently part of a larger strategy of diversifying trade and increasing resilience against what Australian

officials call “economic coercion” by China. [Bloomberg Quint] [South China Morning Post]

China-UK relations: British judges resign from Hong Kong’s highest court

(jw) Two British judges, Robert Reed and Patrick Hodge, announced on March 30 that they would step down from their duties as non-permanent judges on the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal (CFA), the highest court in the former British colony. Reed, who is president of the UK supreme court, justified his resignation with the loss of freedom and rule of law in Hong Kong, stating that “the judges of the Supreme Court cannot continue to sit in Hong Kong without appearing to endorse an administration which has departed from values of political freedom, and freedom of expression.”

Observers especially stressed the role of Hong Kong’s national security law that was imposed by Beijing in June 2020 [see AiR No. 26, June/2020, 5] and has since been used to target more than 100 democracy-advocates and drastically limits personal freedom. Great Britain criticizes the security law as a violation of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration that was crucial in establishing the “one country, two systems” formula under which Hong Kong was given back to China in 1997. Part of this agreement is also the appointment of foreign jurists to the CFA. After the resignation of the two British judges, fourteen foreign judges remain on the panel. However, there are speculations that many of them from countries like Australia or Canada might shortly follow suit and hand in their resignations.

The UK government backed the decision of the judges, with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson asserting that the judges “concluded that the constraints of the national security law make it impossible for them to continue to serve in the way that they would want”.

The judges’ decision was however criticized by Hong Kong Chief Executive Carry Lam who claimed that the resignations are politically motivated and a result of pressure from foreign entities. She rejected the notion that rule of law is under attack in Hong Kong and stressed that the national security law was necessary to uphold stability in Hong Kong and has no impact on the independence of judges. [CNBC] [Reuters] [The Guardian]

Prime Minister Sogavare dispels concerns over potential Chinese military base on Solomon Islands

(jw) The Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare reacted to concerns over a security pact that the island nation is set to conclude with China. A draft that has previously been released entails an agreement under which China is allowed to station police, military personnel and other armed forces in the Solomon Islands. The Chinese forces deployed should support the Solomons in maintaining social order.

However, the specific details and volume of the agreement are not yet clear, as the ministers of the Solomon Islands have not signed it yet. After officials from the US, New Zealand, and Australia expressed their reservations about China gaining more of a foothold in the region [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4], President of the Federated States of Micronesia David Panuelo joined the critics and warned that pacific islands could become collateral damage in the competition between China and the US due to Sogavare's actions.

In response, Sogavare released a statement in which he rules out a Chinese military base on the Solomon Islands as part of the agreement. However, he rejected the criticism voiced by different countries stating that the notion that "the region's security is threatened by the presence of China in the region" is "utter nonsense" and stems from a "very insulting" notion that the country cannot handle its sovereign affairs.

The Chinese foreign ministry echoed Sogavare's response to criticism and rejected "attempts to provoke, obstruct and undermine China's friendly relations with the island countries." [ABC News] [CBS News] [Reuters] [The Guardian]

China-US trade dispute continues as China falls short of fulfilling Phase One trade agreement

(jw) The China-US trade dispute that escalated under the Trump administration continues as major area of conflict have not yet been resolved. In light of China falling short of meeting its obligation to import an additional USD 200 billion worth of goods from the US, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai does not

demand further punitive measures but calls for enhancing the tools available to the US government.

According to Tai, China only follows those parts of the Phase One trade agreement reached under the Trump administration "that fit its own interests". Thus, despite commitments of China, "follow-through or real change remains elusive". Although the US remains willing to engage with talks on China, protective measures against Beijing's economic policies such as heavy industrial subsidies in critical technology sectors need to be quicker, more precise, and supplemented with support for American companies through domestic investments, according to Tai. Tai's remarks come as the House and Senate deliberate a USD 52 billion program to support domestic semiconductor production. [Politico]

China-US audit talks show further progress

(jw) After Chinese authorities prepared multiple companies to release more information to US auditors indicating willingness to comply with demands of US regulators [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4], Beijing moved forward to change audit secrecy laws. This marks another concession as Beijing wants to prevent around 270 Chinese companies from being delisted in the US stock market. The drafts of updated confidentiality rules seek to require that overseas-listed Chinese companies' books are inspected mainly by Chinese regulators. According to the China Securities Regulatory Commission, this facilitates "cross-border regulatory cooperation, including joint inspections, which will help safeguard interest of global investors". However, the draft contains "procedural requirements" aimed at making the release of confidential information more difficult and rarer. Even though the change of the confidentiality rules renders information more accessible to US auditors than previously, US Securities and Exchange Commission chairman Gary Gensler stressed that the US continues to demand full compliance with US audit inspections. Despite the progress, Gensler did therefore not step away from the threat that around 270 Chinese companies could be delisted by 2024. [Financial Times] [Reuters]

US officials wary of increasing Chinese influence in Latin America and the

Caribbean

(jw) General Laura J. Richardson, commander of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) pointed at increased activities of both China and Russia south of the US at a Senate hearing. Richardson highlighted that China's activities in Latin America and the Caribbean largely serve its own interests as it "continues its relentless march to expand economic, diplomatic, technological, information technology, and military influence". According to him, the Chinese do not invest in the countries south of the US, but "extract" the countries' potential and do not put a halt to but instead support criminal activities, corruption and violence ultimately also threatening the US. He recommended the US to engage in close cooperation with regional partners to provide a valid alternative to countries that consider deepening ties with China or Russia. [Diálogo]

China moves to implement a tit-for-tat response toward US visa restrictions

(jw) As a direct response to the expansion of US travel bans against Chinese officials allegedly involved in suppressing freedom of speech and religion [see AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4], the Chinese foreign ministry announced restrictions on the visas of US officials. It claimed that the restrictions are countermeasures against the spread of "fabricated lies" about human rights violations and interference in Chinese internal affairs. [Global Times] [Reuters]

Undersea cable to Kenya for better internet connectivity completed by China

(jw) China's "digital silk road" progresses as Kenya has been connected to a 15,000 kilometer long cable. Just like many African nations, Kenya is gradually more digitalized and in dire need of sufficient infrastructure to ensure internet connectivity. Thus, it is willing to participate in the UDS 425 million PEACE cable, which stands for "Pakistan and East Africa Connecting Europe" and promises to enhance development and connectivity by linking Asia, Africa, and Europe.

Some observers voiced concerns, that China might use its infrastructure projects like the PEACE cable and an even larger 2Africa cable which is currently in planning to monopolize internet access and spy on different countries. Chinese technology company Huawei is a

major stakeholder in the cable and has built 70 percent of Africa's 4G network which causes concerns in the US which has sanctioned Huawei and fears that it might lose its foothold on the African continent due to Chinese "digital soft-power". [VOA]

Chinese mining company reaches settlement with Congo

(jw) After a legal battle over the Tenke Fungurume copper and cobalt mine situated in southern Congo, mining company China Molybdenum – China's largest molybdenum producer and one of the five largest in the world – regained control over the mine. This comes after the Democratic Republic of Congo withdrew a legal case and agreed to settle the dispute outside court. Originally, China Molybdenum was sued over not declaring reserves found at the mining site to reduce the amount of royalty payments that need to be paid to the Congolese government. Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi frequently voiced his criticism of mining and infrastructure contracts signed between previous Congolese administrations and Chinese companies and tried to renegotiate them. [South China Morning Post]

Japan to ban Russia-bound luxury goods and gold exports

(cm) The latest additions to the list of sanctions imposed by Japan on Russia following its attack in Ukraine was the ban of gold and luxury goods, such as jewelry, cars, liquor and cosmetics, exports to the country; it became effective on April 5. The move followed Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's commitment to coordinate with Western allies after the latest Group of Seven (G7) meeting in Brussels. [Kitco]

The Japanese government is currently in the works of submitting law revisions to implement further sanctions against Russia, which will allow Japan to raise the preferential tariffs rates, after the G7 members agreed to strip the country of its most favored nation status. Japan is currently drafting a bill to revise the foreign exchange law to target anonymous cryptocurrency transactions evading the sanctions. [Nippon]

Japan to hold 2-plus-2 talks with Philippines and India in April

(cm) Japan has planned to host its first joint meeting of diplomats and defense officials with the Philippines and India from early April on, to discuss the growing presence of Chinese maritime military and concerns over the possibility of increased activity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Filipino Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin and National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana are expected to meet with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi for the first-ever two-on-two talks between the two countries. China is involved in a territorial dispute with both Japan, over the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands, and the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, over island and maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Defense Minister Rajnath Singh are likely to visit in mid-April for the latest rounds of talks between Japan and India, ongoing since November 2019, to reaffirm plans of defense cooperation in fields such as outer space and cyberspace. The two countries are members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue with the U.S. and Australia, and Japan aims to confirm the organization's shared goal of a free and open Indo-Pacific and, again, reprimand Russia's invasion of Ukraine, regardless of India's traditionally close ties with Moscow. [Kyodo News]

Japan imposes sanctions against North Korea over missile development

(cm) On April 1 the Japanese government approved sanctions against North Korea over its recent test launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) which fell in Japan's exclusive economic zone on March 24. The targeted four groups and nine individuals involved in the nuclear and missile developments will be subject to an asset freeze, which came in effect the same day it was approved by the Cabinet.

Japan already unilaterally imposes bans on trade and vessel entries from North Korea, and the latest move comes after the United States asked for resolution to strengthen sanctions against Pyongyang's end of its self-imposed moratorium on ICBM launches since April

2018 at the United Nations Security Council on March 25. [CNA]

Japanese Prime Minister meets with Polish and Ukrainian counterpart in Poland

(cm) Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi met with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba in Warsaw on April 2, reaffirming Japan's resolution to assist Ukraine. Hayashi flew to Poland as a special envoy of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, with the intention of returning to Japan with Ukrainian evacuees, reportedly around 30.

Hayashi stated the Japanese government's plan to provide more humanitarian aid to civilian; the evacuees will also fly on a government plane, as airfares have quickly gone up since the invasion, to make it easier for them to fly to Japan. Until last week, Ukrainian nationals accepted in the country have been 337.

On April 4 Hayashi exchanged views with his Polish counterpart Zbigniew Rau and discussed Tokyo's suggestion of airlifting evacuees from Ukraine to Japan. He also reaffirmed Japan's commitment to working with the "strategic partner Poland to maintain the free and open international order." [Japan Today] [Kyodo News]

Japan extends emergency humanitarian aid to Gaza

(cm) Japan's Foreign Ministry announced on April 1 that the country will provide an emergency grant aid of JPY 400 million (USD 3.35 million) to the Gaza Strip, in response to the worsening of the humanitarian situation following the COVID-19 pandemic and floods. The aid, to be extended through the E-Health system and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, will include assistance for COVID-19-affected patients and healthcare services. [Arab News]

UN Security Council report: North Korea improves nuclear capabilities

(mpk) The UN Security Council released last week the annual report of expert panel on North Korea.

According to a report which covers the period from August 2021 and January 2022, North Korea continues and improves its nuclear ad ballistic missile programs in violation of resolutions of the Security Council. In the report, it was also highlighted that North Korea seems to achieve its target to develop various delivery platforms using either solid or liquid propellant ballistic missiles, while looking for materials and technology for its nuclear and ballistic missile programs from other countries.

To fund these programs, the reports claims that North Korea might have stolen cryptocurrency worth as much as USD 400 million in 2021. [United Nations Security Council Report, 1 March] [Yonhap News Agency 1]

Meanwhile, according to a news report, which cites US officials, North Korea has begun construction activities, including digging tunnels, at an underground nuclear test site north of Pyongyang. The report echoes government sources in Seoul which said that Pyongyang is possibly working on a shortcut to one of the underground tunnels at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site that Pyongyang said it had dismantled it in 2018. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

North Korea to provide Guinea with medical aid

(mpk) A review of diplomatic activities of North Korea by a media outlet, reveals that in early March, North Korean Ambassador to Guinea Ri Chong Gyong and Guinea's public health minister came together to talk about strengthening medical cooperation," which observers see as indicating that Pyongyang will send doctors and nurses to the African country.

The meeting follows Ri's meeting in February with Mali's then-interim president Bah Ndaw at which "consolidation of cooperation in the field of health," was discussed. In 2020, North Korea and Nigeria signed an agreement on bilateral public health cooperation.

According to World Bank data, as Guinea, Mali and Nigeria are the countries having the lowest ratios of doctors to people in the world, they cooperate with North Korea and seek its medical professionals, despite the fact

this move will violate UN Security Council sanctions as North Korean medical teams have been forbidden to work overseas since December 2019. [NK news]

South Korea, the US to develop new operational war plan to deter North Korea

(mpk) Amidst North Korea's missile test activities [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5], General Won In-choul, chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his US counterpart General Mark Milley approved during a meeting on March 30 at the US Indo-Pacific Command Headquarters, Camp H.M. Smith in Hawaii, a Strategic Planning Directive to revise the current Operations Plan (OPLAN 5015), signed in 2015, and to allow the two countries' militaries to begin to develop a new operational war plan, addressing Pyongyang's growing threats and security environment that is rapidly changing. The OPLAN 5015, lastly changed in 2010, is predominantly focused on handling conventional attacks. The update is supposed to react to North Korea's advanced missiles.

The new plan will be based on the Strategic Planning Guidance, which South Korean Defense Minister Suh Wook and his US counterpart Lloyd Austin agreed on in December during the Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) in Seoul, with both sides reaffirming commitment to a "diplomatic approach" and "dialogue" but also clarifying that, the allies would prepare to "defend against the full range of threats." [The Korea Herald] [See also AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1]

On the same day, a Trilateral Chief of Defense (Tri-CHOD) meeting between Won, Milley and their Japanese counterpart General Koji Yamazaki was also held. In the joint declaration, the parties reaffirmed the importance of close trilateral cooperation and coordination to enhance regional security. [KBS]

South Korean military denies statements about North's latest missile test

(mpk) Contradicting claims of North Korea, South Korea's Defense Ministry argued in a briefing to the National Assembly that on March 24, North Korea launched the same type of intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) which was tested in 2017, rejecting claims of North Korea that the missile type was a new one. The Ministry said that its assessment suggests

that the latest ICBM tested appears to be similar to the Hwasong-15 rather than the newest Hwasong-17. The latter is said to have a range of about 15,000 kilometers, some 2,000 km longer than the Hwasong-15.

Observers believe that Pyongyang's claims and boast of a successful Hwasong-17 test firing are due to the need for a domestic propaganda victory ahead of a key anniversary, the birth anniversary of founding leader Kim Il-sun on April 15. [France 24] [Yonhap News Agency] [See also AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5, AiR No.12, March/2022,4].

South Korea eases invitations of more Ukrainian family members to the country

(mpk) South Korea has announce to expand its support for Ukrainians amid the ongoing war. On March 29, South Korean Justice Ministry announced that Ukrainian nationals will be allowed to invite more family members to South Korea. This applies also to Ukrainian of Korean descent.

So far, only parents, spouses, and underage children could be invited but the relatives will be now expanded to siblings and grandparents. [The Korea Times]

In a separate announcement, the South Korean Foreign Ministry said that war survivors will be able to enter the country without passports. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korean Vice Foreign Minister visits Bangladesh after 25 years

(mpk) A delegation of South Korean senior diplomats, led by First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jong-kun visited Bangladesh to discuss with their Bangladeshi counter-parts ways to boost diplomatic relations and deepen bilateral cooperation in various fields, including economy, technology, and infrastructure. Both sides also agreed to work together in regional and global issues of shared interest and concern, such as global peace and security, climate change.

Choi's trip to Dhaka marks the first visit of a South Kores Vice-Foreign Minister to the South Asian country in 25 years. [The Financial Express] [The Korea Herald]

US criticizes Taiwan's import rules on pork

(dql) In its recently released 2022 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers, the Office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) has criticized Taiwan for introducing mandatory country-of-origin labeling for pork imports from the US as well as a cap on ractopamine content for some pork products. The USTR argued that these measures "inaccurately implied that there is a food safety concern with US pork products." [Focus Taiwan 1]

On January 1 last year, the Taiwanese government had lifted a ban against imports of US pork containing ractopamine, a leanness-enhancing livestock drug, after establishing maximum residue levels (MRLs) and putting in place country-of-origin labeling measures [see AiR No. 1, January/2021, 1].

Meanwhile, USTR Katherine Tai during a hearing of the US Senate Finance Committee on US trade policy avoided commit on whether Taiwan will receive an invitation to join the planned Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), whose concept was launched by the Biden administration last October as a means of boosting US trade and economic ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific region to counter China. While calling Taiwan an "essential trading partner [...] and also an essential partner overall.," she revealed that in the matter of inviting Tawain to the IPEF "no decisions have been made." [Reuters] [Focus Taiwan 2]

Cross-strait relations: Chinese military aircraft enters Taiwan's ADIZ

(dql) According to Taiwan's Defense Ministry, eleven Chinese war planes flew into Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) on March 31, including two twin-engine Xian H-6 strategic bombers, four Chengdu J-10 fighter jets, four Shenyang J-16 fighter jets, and one KJ-500 airborne early warning and control aircraft.

This comes as China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force reported recently conducted a cross-day-and-night, cross-regional maneuver exercise that involved fighter jets flying across over 5,000 kilometers in less than 20 hours.

The incursion came also as US and Philippines forces were conducting their annual joint military drill in the South China Sea. [Focus Taiwan] [Global Times]

Taiwan, Paraguay strengthen technical cooperation

(dql) On March 31, Taiwan and Paraguay concluded two memoranda of understanding (MOUs) under which Taipei will Taiwan will provide assistance in fighting African swine fever in the South American country and continue to advance bilateral cooperation in trade. Further a letter of intent (LOI) was signed to expand cooperation in industrial policy. [Merco Press]

Bay of Bengal nations hold fifth summit, sign long-awaited charter

(sg/lm) Leaders of the regional organization comprising seven littoral countries dependent on the Bay of Bengal, known by its acronym BIMSTEC, have agreed to urgently use their geographical advantage and other resources to address their post-pandemic vulnerabilities and collectively strengthen their ability to face future calamities.

BIMSTEC – a six-member grouping comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Sri Lanka – was formed in 1997 and meets every four years. This year's summit was hosted by Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, with leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand all addressing the summit virtually.

The inclusion of Myanmar's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin at the meeting had raised eyebrows, particularly against the backdrop of ASEAN deciding to invite only non-political representatives from Myanmar following the army's seizure of power in February 2021. Lwin also participated remotely in a meeting of foreign ministers on March 29 that was attended in person by the other ministers. [AiR No.13, March 2022, 5]

At last week's summit, leaders of BIMSTEC signed the long-awaited charter, which establishes formal purpose and principles of the organization. Officials and ministers also signed three agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters, a technology transfer facility and cooperation between diplomatic academies. [Associated Press]

In a speech to delegates, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pushed for greater regional cooperation, saying that "[...] recent developments in Europe have raised questions about the stability of the

international order". Modi also said New Delhi would contribute USD 3 million to the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate to further trans-national cooperation in disaster management. Additionally, India will also provide USD 1 million to boost the grouping's secretariat. [Hindustan Times] [The Indian Express]

For India, the focus on BIMSTEC marks a strategic pivot away from the eight-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which has largely become dysfunctional because of differences between India and Pakistan [see latest AiR No. 2, January/2022, 2]. Officials said India would take charge of BIMSTEC's matters related to the "security pillar", which includes maritime security. [The Straits Times]

Thailand took over as BIMSTEC's chair nation for the next two years.

India hopeful of signing early harvest trade with Canada by end of the year, diplomat says

(lm) India is hopeful of concluding an Early Progress Trade Agreement (EPTA) with Canada by the end of the year, India's high commissioner to Ottawa told the *Hindustan Times*, a month after the Canadian trade minister, Mary Ng, visited New Delhi to meet with her Indian counterpart, Piyush Goyal, and to attend a ministerial conference. [Hindustan Times]

Ng's marked the first high-level India visit by a Canadian government official since Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's ill-fated tour of the country in 2018. That trip generated so many negative headlines that it became a political issue back home, thereby derailing efforts by Trudeau to lessen Canada's dependence on the United States. The two sides resumed discussions on ways to complete a full-fledged Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in June 2021.

Last November, Ng started trade talks with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an economic bloc that comprises 10 countries including Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore. This was months after she announced the kick-off of discussions in June with Indonesia, who is also an ASEAN member, to draw up a free-trade agreement.

Indian army chief on official visit in Singapore for talks with military, defense leadership

(lm) The chief of the Indian Army, General MM Naravane, travelled to Singapore this week for talks with the members of the city-state's military and civilian leadership to discuss the roadmap to further enhance bilateral military cooperation. General Naravane, who is currently completing a three-day visit to Singapore, called on Defense Minister Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen and discussed regional geopolitical developments. The Indian general also called on his Singaporean counterpart Brigadier-General David Neo, who assumed his position last month. [The New Indian Express]

Nepal's premier visits India, meets Prime Minister Modi to deepen economic, trade ties

(sg/lm) Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba completed a crucial a three-day visit to neighboring India this week in a bid to improve relations and deepen bilateral cooperation following a bitter border dispute over a Himalayan territory two years ago.

Deuba's visit marked the highest-level of diplomatic exchange between the two sides since bilateral ties had derailed in May 2020 due to a border row over the Lipulekh Pass and other mountain territory that lies at a strategic three-way junction with Tibet and China [see AiR No. 24, June/2020, 3]. Although both countries had resumed dialogue in August of the same year, a meeting of a foreign-secretary level bilateral mechanism to address the issue is yet to be announced.

Against this backdrop, Deuba met with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi and sought his help to a diplomatic solution to the border dispute. The Indian leader, in turn, urged Deuba to avoid "politicization" of the boundary dispute, a reference that observers said could be referring to the context of forthcoming local elections in Nepal slated for May 31. [Deutsche Welle]

Beyond the border issue, energy cooperation and connectivity featured prominently in last week's engagement. The two prime ministers remotely inaugurated an electricity transmission line that will supply hydroelectric power generated in the

Solukhumbu area to Nepal's national power grid. They also agreed to speed up the Pancheswar hydroelectric in west Nepal, which was inked during Deuba's official visit to India as prime minister back in 1996. [The Hindu]

After their meeting, Deuba and Modi jointly inaugurated the first cross-border rail service connecting the two countries, which was reconstructed under India's line of credit. Likewise, they also jointly launched India's largest transaction network, RuPay, for use in Nepal and inaugurated the Solu Corridor 132 KV Electricity Transmission Line and Substation in Nepal. The two countries have also signed various agreements on Nepal's entry into the India-led International Solar Alliance; Indian technical assistance to Nepal's railway sector; and cooperation in the petroleum sectors. [Asianet News] [Reuters]

Timing of the summit is notable, as it came just a week after a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Nepal [see AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]. Wang arrived in Kathmandu just a few weeks after the government ratified a USD 500 million infrastructure grant from the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a United States agency. That grant was controversial, as White House officials have described it as a part of the Indo-Pacific program, making some Nepalese worried about getting caught up in US-China competition [see AiR No. 9, March/2022, 1].

India starts supplying rice, diesel to crisis-hit Sri Lanka

(lm) India on April 2 delivered 40,000 tons of diesel to crisis-hit Sri Lanka, with an equal-sized consignment of rice also being prepped, in the first major food aid since the two countries signed a $1 billion loan deal last month. [Al Jazeera] [Hindustan Times]

Timing of the shipments is notably, as they come just days after India and Sri Lanka signed an agreement to set up hybrid power projects on northern Sri Lankan islands on March 29, in a deal seen as a strategic victory in New Delhi's competition with China for influence in the Indian Ocean.

India's external affairs minister, S Jaishankar, who attended the signing ceremony in Colombo also met with Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his brother, Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa. In these meetings, the Sri Lankan officials sought an additional credit line of USD 1.5 billion from New Delhi to import essential commodities, on top of USD 2.4 billion India

has transferred since January by way of a currency swap, loan deferment and credit lines. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5]

Against this backdrop, Colombo last week asserted that the recently signed maritime security pacts with New Delhi will "neither result in hindrance nor threat" to the island nation's security as "misinterpreted" by several media outlets in this country. [The Tribune]

Beleaguered Pakistani prime minister claims US diplomat involved in 'conspiracy' to topple his government

(fq/lm) Just hours after Pakistani Prime Minister Khan dissolved the country's parliament to sidestep a no-confidence vote that he appeared certain to lose, the premier claimed a senior United States diplomat was allegedly involved in the "foreign conspiracy" to topple his government through the motion.

On April 3, the deputy speaker of the National Assembly, Qasim Suri of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, dismissed a no-confidence motion moved by the joint opposition, ruling that it constituted a "foreign conspiracy" led by the west against his government.

Addressing a meeting of Pakistan's premier forum for national security and foreign policy, the National Security Committee, later the same day, Khan claimed that the US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, Donald Lu, involved in the alleged foreign conspiracy to topple his government. Specifically, the premier claimed that Lu had warned the Pakistani envoy to Washington that there would be "implications" if Khan survived the no-trust vote in the National Assembly. [Dawn] [Geo News]

Pakistan's opposition leaders have ridiculed the allegation; the White House dismissed it. [FirstPost]

Malaysia, Indonesia sign agreements on migrant workers' protection and palm oil price

(lb/bs) On April 1, Malaysia and Indonesia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on the protection of migrant workers. The agreement outlines the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant

workers in Malaysia and ensures the implementation of designed mechanisms for the recruitment process.

The two countries have been negotiating the deal since 2017 when Indonesia passed the Migrant Worker Protection Law. Indonesia and Malaysia's bilateral agreement on the placement and protection of Indonesian domestic workers expired in 2016 and Indonesia has, since then, been pushing to have a new agreement on workers' rights. Particularly, Indonesia urged Malaysia to abolish the Maid Online System, which bypassed the 2017 law by allowing migrant workers to work in the country without following the proper procedure. The new MoU thus introduced a "one channel system mechanism" which ensures Indonesian migrant worker rights and aims at reducing the number of illegal migrant workers in Malaysia. [AiR No. 9, March/2022, 1]

The agreement will also ensure workers' minimum wages and allow migrant workers to file complaints. Following the signing, Indonesia's president said that the countries will be discussing a partnership to address the high rates of human trafficking. According to a rights group's report, each year, Malaysia receives between 100,000 and 200,000 Indonesian workers who are often recruited by trafficking gangs [Independent] [Reuters].

The majority of migrant workers are employed in palm oil plantations. As Malaysia and Indonesia are the two major producers of palm oil, accounting together for about 85 percent of the global palm oil production, in the same meeting on April 1, the countries agreed that it is their responsibility as top world producers to determine the global price.

The agreement followed a recent increase in the palm oil price in the international market. In mid-March, Indonesia raised the maximum taxation on palm oil export in an attempt to be able to compete in the global market. Also, since January, when the price surged 40 percent, the country has introduced, removed, and re-introduced palm oil export volume restrictions after failing to achieve the expected goals in the cooking oil market price. [AiR No. 12, March/2022, 4] [The Straits Times]

UN, ASEAN special envoys met to discuss the Myanmar conflict

(pw) The United Nations (UN) special envoy on Myanmar, Noeleen Heyzer, met with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) special envoy to

Myanmar, Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn, to discuss potential joint efforts to foster peace in Myanmar. During the meeting, Prak Sokhonn provided details to Heyzer on his visit to Myanmar as the ASEAN special envoy, including ASEAN's three critical priorities on ending the violence, distributing humanitarian aid, and creating an environment of trust. He also noted the political actors' unwillingness to negotiate with each other. Additionally, he talked about proposals for a meeting on humanitarian assistance.

Myanmar's military has controlled Myanmar since February 2021, after overthrowing the democratically-elected government in a violent coup. Consequently, the military government began a widespread crackdown against its resistance forces leading some UN specialists to consider Myanmar to be in a state of civil war.

Both the UN and ASEAN have attempted to resolve the conflict peacefully. The UN's efforts to take substantive coordinated actions are constrained by the veto powers of China and Russia, who are close allies of Myanmar's military government. Similarly, the military government effectively disregarded ASEAN's attempts in reaching a diplomatic solution, even though Myanmar is an ASEAN member. [Associated Press News]

ASEAN commission on human rights held virtual meeting

(pw) On March 30-31, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)'s Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) held its 34th meeting with Cambodia as its chair. In this meeting, the AICHR approved three recommendations, including the necessity of protecting women, children, and human rights to reduce poverty in accordance with the AICHR's 2022 framework, the provision of AICHR's 2023 framework to the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and the co-hosting the fourth AICHR–EU human rights policy dialogue by AICHR Cambodia and Indonesia.

Moreover, the meeting also focused on adopting five summaries of the AICHR's activities in 2021 and talked about various documents relating to efforts to enhance human rights in ASEAN were talked about as well. Additionally, plans for joint working groups, action plans, and strategic frameworks to foster and promote some human rights aspects were also discussed. [AICHR] [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia, India sign three cooperation agreements

(pw) Cambodia and India have signed three memoranda of understanding (MOUs) on Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics (STEM), and tourism. The countries have agreed to develop an application to promote tourism and ecotourism communities, and Cambodia will take measures to facilitate tourist arrivals in Cambodia.

Furthermore, Cambodia is looking forward to submitting a new Quick Impact Project (QIP) proposal to India on cooperation in health, tourism development, and digital education with an emphasis on women's literacy.

Since 2015, India approved 46 QIPs in various fields, 21 of which have been completed, while the other 25 are at different stages of implementation. Under the QIP program, India will assist in executing 10 QIPs in Cambodia by financing up to USD 50,000 for each project. [Khmer Times 1] [Khmer Times 2]

Australia to provide financial aid to Cambodia

(pw) Australia committed to providing USD 107 million to Cambodia for the period of 2022-2030 in the framework of the countries' Partnership for Resilient Economic Development program. In two meetings, the Australian Ambassador to Cambodia met respectively Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. During the meetings, Australia has also agreed to provide cooperative assistance to the agricultural and agro-industrial sectors in Cambodia and pledged to deliver 33 vaccine refrigerators to Cambodia as part of a partnership between Australia and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). [Khmer Times] [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia to pursue economic cooperation with francophone countries

(pw) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen met with the Secretary-General of the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) to discuss cooperation in economy, investment, and trade. During the meeting,

the Prime Minister said that political cooperation might also benefit from solid economic and trade cooperation. Previously, on March 28, the OIF secretary-general met with Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn at the inauguration of the OIF's first economic and trade mission in Southeast Asia and the signing of agreements on the cooperation between professional trade and economic organizations. They also discussed strengthening Cambodia–OIF ties. [Khmer Times]

The Philippines: New diplomatic lodges against China in the South China Sea

(dvr) China urged the Philippines to "respect China's sovereignty and rights and interests" and stay away from Chinese patrols at Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea. The call came after the Philippines filed a domestic diplomatic complaint in early March on a Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) vessel being too close to some Philippine Coast Guard patrol ships constraining the movement of the vessels in the Scarborough Shoal violating the 1972 International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGS).

Although China reiterated its sovereignty and jurisdiction claims over the shoal and the maritime territory, the Philippines stand on its rights over the Exclusive Economic Zone in the area that was granted by the International Court of Justice in 2016 when it ruled against China's claims over the area invalidating the China's nine-dash line unilateral demarcation. [AiR No. 13, March/2022, 5] [Inquirer]

The Philippines to visit China for diplomatic meeting

(dvr) President Duterte has announced an imminent meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping to discuss the effects of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict on Asia and current China-Philippine relations. The meeting is scheduled for April 8. [The Manila Times]

On February 24, the Russian army invaded Ukraine, and the threats of the use of nuclear weapons on Ukraine sparked global fears of an escalation in violent attacks across the world. President Duterte mentioned his fear that China might follow the Russian lead and invade Taiwan.

When Duterte assumed office in 2016, he attempted to distance the Philippines from the US and strengthen ties with China and Russia. However, to date, in the last month of President Duterte's six-year term, no major investment, defense, or cooperation plans with either Russia or China have been finalized. During his term, Duterte faced increasing criticism on his stance with China for both an alleged lack of investment from China and its increasing presence in disputed areas in the South China Sea. In November 2021 President Duterte expressed "grave concerns" about China's influence and rekindled defense ties with the US. [Asia Times][Radio Free Asia]

Rights group reports alleged illegal deportation of Rohingya refugees by Indian government

(cmsk/bs) India forced the return of a female member of the Rohingya ethnic minority to Myanmar where her life will be at risk, Human Rights Watch reported.

According to the human rights organization, Rohingya Muslim refugees in India face tightened restrictions, arbitrary detention, and violent attacks that are often incited by political leaders.

At least 240 Rohingyas in India are currently detained on charges of illegal entry, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). Moreover, out of the 40,000 Rohingya people who are currently in India, at least 20,000 are UNHR registered as refugees.

The Indian authorities allegedly deported the woman to Myanmar in violation of an order issued a few days earlier by the Manipur State Human Rights Commission. The Commission directed that the decision be put on hold for alleged violation of the right to life and personal liberty guaranteed in the Indian constitution, Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the international principle of nonrefoulement or nonreturn. Although India is neither a party to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention nor to its 1967 Additional Protocol, the prohibition of returning political refugees is now customary international law, meaning that it bounds every country to comply with its principles regardless of their stance.

Nonetheless, the Indian government renewed its plan to keep deporting Rohingya immigrants who do not hold regular immigration documents under the Foreigners Act. [Human Rights Watch]

South Korea to provide loan for Cambodia's prioritized projects

(pw) South Korea has agreed to provide a USD 1.2 billion concessional loan to fund prioritized sectors and projects in Cambodia under a five-year framework agreement from 2022-2026. Among Cambodia's priority sectors there are transportation, water resources, wastewater management, health, and emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2000, South Korea has provided more than USD 1.211 billion for 26 developmental programs under preexisting concessional loan frameworks.

Additionally, both countries have committed to increasing trade activities and encouraging greater South Korean private sector investment in Cambodia, especially in Cambodia's key sectors, including the green infrastructure, agriculture, tourism, logistics, and digital sectors. [Khmer Times]

Thai Army head officers discussed increased cooperation on security, crisis management, development with Laos

(pw) Representatives of the Royal Thai Army met with their Lao counterparts on an official visit to Laos on March 29-30. In the meeting, the parties discussed cooperation on security, crisis management, and development.

The parties agreed to establish joint special forces training and to enhance cooperation on cross-border trade, illegal smuggling, and illegal drugs combat. Additionally, both countries agreed that increasing cooperation is crucial for managing natural disasters and disease in the border areas. [Matichon, in Thai]

European Union sends humanitarian aid for Rohingya refugees in Southeast Asia

(cmsk/bs) The European Commission will allocate EUR 48.4 million to humanitarian aid for displaced people in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and within Southeast Asia who have fled their countries as a consequence of the ongoing Rohingya refugee crisis.

The Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority has been denied citizenship in Myanmar since 1982 as the country did not recognize them as an official ethnic group. Rohingya people have thus been regarded stateless ever since. Myanmar is currently facing charges before the International Court of Justice for allegedly violating the 1948 Genocide Convention for abusing, killing, persecuting, and expelling Rohingya people from the country in an escalation of violence in 2017.

The European Commission announced the intention to allocate EUR 22.4 million for Myanmar, EUR 24 million for Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, and EUR 2 million for refugees displaced across Southeast Asia. [European Commission]

Philippines' Armed Forces receive boat engines donation from the United States

(lb) The United States (US) donated 18 boat motors worth USD 630,000 to the Philippines which are designated to be used to enhance national maritime law enforcement operations.

The contribution came within the framework of the US commitment to support the 2nd Special Operations Unit of the Armed Forces of the Philippines and other partners in the province of Palawan to strengthen security in the region and ensure environmental conservation. [PhilStar Global]

EU, Indonesia hold 6th Political Dialogue

(lb) On 22 March 2022 the European Union (EU) and Indonesia held the 6th Political Dialogue under the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in Brussels. The countries discussed international issues including the Russia-Ukraine war, EU-ASEAN relations, multilateral cooperation, COVID-19 recovery, Indonesia G20 Presidency, and regional security developments. The EU and Indonesia also spoke of the importance of strengthening the international rules-based order and commitment to multilateralism. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Of The Republic Of Indonesia]

Singapore, US expand bilateral economic cooperation

(lb) Singapore and the United States signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to expand their bilateral and economic cooperation that is outlined in the Singapore-US Partnership for Growth and Innovation.

The agreement aims at developing common technical standards and building more trustworthy systems. The two countries will collaborate on the digital economy, smart cities, energy and environmental technologies, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and supply chain resilience. The MoU also includes agreements on artificial intelligence (AI) governance and cybersecurity initiatives across the region. [ZDNet]

The Philippines, United States conduct major joint military exercise

(dvr) On March 28 the United States (US) and the Philippines started a joint military exercise that includes live-fire maneuvers, aircraft assaults, urban warfare, and beach landings and will last until April 8.

The exercise, called Balikatan, has been held annually since 1991 and is a key part of the 1951 US-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty with which the countries committed mutual military support in case of attack.

However, since Duterte entered office in 2016, the Philippines' administration opted to nurture relations with Russia and China and set aside its ties with the US. Duterte, to strengthen its plan, laid aside a ruling of the International Court of Justice in favor of the Philippines in a maritime territorial dispute on the South China Sea and began further diplomatic engagement with China. In 2020, Duterte also announced the plan to cancel the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), a US-Philippine pact that governs the deployment of US troops in the Philippines. The decision was then dropped in August 2021, when the Philippines' administration showed its intention to reestablish strong ties with the US. [SCMP][The Diplomat][AP News]

Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines to enhance successful maritime security cooperation

(bs/lb) High representatives from Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines renewed their countries' commitment to strengthening the Trilateral

Cooperation Agreement (TCA) signed in 2017 to combine efforts to tackle the high number of piracy attacks and kidnappings by Islamist groups in the Sulu and Sulawesi seas.

The parties praised the success of the TCA and agreed to deepen the cooperation. In 2021 there were no reports of kidnapping for ransom compared to the ten attacks and six attempted attacks reported in 2016, according to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia.

Moreover, the countries agreed to deploy a permanent Trilateral Maritime Patrol Liaison Officer in each country's maritime command center in charge of exchanging information and monitoring the maritime territories. They also began talks about potential cooperation in land-security operations. [South China Morning Post] [Shephard Media]

Malaysia is also working toward including Thailand and Brunei in its two trilateral cooperation agreements (TCA) to protect the Sulu Sea and the Malacca Straits. The minister said the trilateral arrangement may change the trilateral arrangement to a quadrilateral. [The Star]

Thailand, Saudi Arabia sign two labor agreements

(kc) On March 28-29, high officials from Thailand and Saudi Arabia met to discuss the direction and guidelines for promoting bilateral cooperation. The parties agreed on a roadmap to strengthen relations between the two countries, including political cooperation and security as well as ineconomic, social, and cultural areas. [Matichon, in Thai]

On the same occasion, the two countries signed two labor agreements aiming at creating a legal framework to regulate the employment of the Thai workforce in Saudi Arabia and the workers' rights. [Saudi Gazette]

Chinese, Thai foreign minister agree to revive and deepen bilateral trade and investment

(dql) In a meeting on April 2 in Tunxi, China, the discussion between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Thai counterpart Don Pramudwinai focused on

ways to revive the promotion of bilateral trade and investment, with the latter calling on Beijing to facilitate the imports of Thai agricultural products and fruits which suffer disruptions from China's strict measures against the pandemic.

Both ministers also discussed possibilities to extend the Sino-Thai railway project to Malaysia and Singapore, with Wang generally urging Thailand to work with China to accelerate cooperation in the frame of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The two ministers also issued a joint statement in which they reaffirmed their support for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. [Thai PBS World] [The Nation, Thaiand]

Myanmar's junta representatives visit China

(cmsk) Myanmar junta's high representatives met with their Chinese counterparts on a diplomatic visit to China on April 1. The parties have agreed to enhance their current diplomatic relations and strengthen bilateral exchanges. They also discussed speeding up the work on the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor which includes a series of infrastructure projects in support of the economic connectivity between the two countries. On the same occasion, China reiterated its support for the Myanmar military junta. [AP News]

After the February 1, 2021 coup that overthrew the democratically elected government in Myanmar, China had initially faced challenges in terms of the diplomatic investment it employed to build effective cooperation with the ousted government. However, by mid-2021, China began to show its full support for Myanmar "to independently choose a development path that suits its national conditions." During the same period, Chinese authorities and businesses also begun to invest in commercial activities with the military junta. Moreover, in late 2021, China delivered to Myanmar's navy a refurbished Ming-class submarine. [The Diplomat]

India signs agreement to finance four development projects in Laos

(pw) On March 31, Laos and India signed a memorandum of understanding under which India will provide approximately USD 185,000 for four

development projects in Laos including the construction of a healthcare center in the southern Attapeu province, the construction of classrooms in Savannakhet, in the South of Laos, and the improvement of organic coffee manufacturing, diversification of the rural economy, and capacity building of locals in the northern Luang Namtha province. India's funding for such projects is accessible through the Mekong- Ganga Cooperation Framework's Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

In 2012, India, as a member of the aforementioned framework, initiated its QIPs by annually assigning USD 1 million to the member countries to carry out small projects not exceeding USD 50,000 for each project. 11 projects, valuing around USD 533,000 in total, have been approved by Laos since the QIP's inception. [Vientiane Times]

Cambodia: Prime Minister denied new airport be a Chinese military base

(pw) Prime Minister Hun Sen denied claims that the new Siem Reap International Airport, slated to be completed by March 2023, is a Chinese effort to reinforce its military presence in Cambodia. Moreover, he mentioned that Cambodia's constitution prohibits the construction of foreign military bases and that only foreign military attaches are allowed in Cambodia. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Laos, United Kingdom engaged in political dialogue

(bs) From March 30 to April 2, the United Kingdom's high representatives met with their counterparts in the UK-Laos Political Dialogue to discuss bilateral cooperation on education and health, climate change response, and COVID-19 safety measures. The parties also addressed regional and global security issues. [Gov.UK]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

6 April 2022 @11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. (GMT-8), Hoover Institution, Stanford University, USA

Crossing the Strait? PLA Modernization and Taiwan

This webinar will be based on Dr. Phillip C. Saunders' recent book, Crossing the Strait: China's Military Prepares for War with Taiwan. Significant open-source research of PLA attempts to develop essential power projection capabilities will be discussed, as well as the influence of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on views in China, Taiwanese, and America.

Find more about the webinar at [Hoover Institute].

6 April 2022 @ 12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-8), World Affairs, USA

Ukraine under Fire

As Russia's aggression in Ukraine has continued and the Ukrainian people has waged a determined resistance, Ukraine has been pleading with western partners for stronger support and action. This webinar will feature Oleksiy Honcharuk, Ukraine's 17th Prime Minister who will examine the current state of the country and discuss ways for western allies to help Ukraine in this crisis.

For more details, see [World Affairs].

6 April 2022 @ 4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-8), World Affairs, USA

Is the U.S. Losing Its Intelligence Advantage?

Although the U.S. has long possessed an advantage in the covert field of intelligence, on the internet nowadays, any country can conduct intelligence, monitoring, cyber warfare, and disruption. This webinar will identify changes that must be made in American intelligence in order to safeguard the nation's security.

For more details, see [World Affairs].

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

Turkey's 2023 Elections: The Main Opposition Party at the Crossroads

This webinar will address the reforms of Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (RPP) and the possibilities for the coalition of Turkey's six opposition parties signed in February 2022.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

6 April 2022 @12:15-1:15 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Stanford University, USA

Pathways Into a Tech Policy Career

This webinar will feature a panel of experts who will talk about numerous paths to a successful career in technology policy.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

6 April 2022 @ 2:30-4:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Office of Communications, USA

Addressing the national mental health crisis: Opportunities and challenges

This event will feature a conversation among specialists and advocates in the field of mental health about the Biden administration's mental health plan.

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

7 April 2022 @11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Stanford University, USA

Scaling Political Information Campaigns

This virtual conference will feature Katherine Casey, an Associate Professor of Political Economy at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, who will present her research findings on two main dimensions of political change: from low information/low accountability political equilibrium to another equilibrium where voters are well-informed and politicians are held accountable, in the context of Sierra Leonne's national scale-up of political communication campaigns.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

7 April 2022 @12:00-1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Stanford University, USA

Cybersecurity Law: A View from the Front Lines

Congress recently enacted a regulation obliging key infrastructure owners and operators to report to the federal government in the event of a cyber incident. This forum will examine the latest developments in cybersecurity legislation, providing practical guidance on compliance, litigation tactics, and broad perspectives on the future direction of U.S. cybersecurity policy.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

7 April 2022 @1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Stanford University, USA

New Political Geography of Skills and Dilemmas for the Left

This webinar will feature Jane Gingrich, a professor of comparative political economy in the department of politics and international relations at the University of

Oxford, who will present her paper. The article explores how social democratic parties' electoral success has dwindled in the aftermath of the financial crisis. It will argue that two fundamental economic developments have put social democratic economic policy under strain.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

7 April 2022 @5:30-6:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Stanford University, USA

'Hallyu' in North Korea: Can South Korean Popular Culture Bring About Real Change?

This online panel will discuss the propagation of the Korean Wave (Hallyu) in North Korea, explore how popular the trend is in North Korea, and examine its potential contributions to the North's social change.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

7 April 2022 @ 12:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs- Victoria, Australia

Canada's relationship with the United States: It's more than just the President

This webinar will feature His Excellency Mr. Mark Glauser, High Commissioner of Canada to Australia, who will share his views on the relationship between Canada and the U.S.

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

7 April 2022 @ 5:30-6:30 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs- Victoria, Australia

Navigating Gendered Games in Global Politics

This webinar will focus on gender disparities and constraints that prevent women from being represented in IR, a predominantly male-dominated field. Dr. Jacqui True, the speaker, will also discuss how Australian IR researchers and students who have a critical influence in theorizing change and envisioning

the future can help bring about needed reform in the field of international relations.

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

7 April 2022 @ 2:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

Managing strategic competition to avoid a US-China war

This online forum will feature former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who will share his perspectives on U.S. and Chinese leaders' plans, address the dynamics underlying the relationship's most contentious flashpoints, and suggest new safeguards to keep geopolitical rivalry from devolving into armed conflict.

More information is available at [Atlantic Council].

8 April 2022 @ 11:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Office of Communications, USA

Crimes against humanity, genocide, and ecocide: Of rights, responsibilities, and international order

This virtual conference will feature Philippe Sands, professor of law at University College London and Samuel and Judith Pisar visiting professor of law at Harvard Law School. The experts will examine the evolution of individual and collective rights under international law and suggest novel proposals for expanding the reach of international law to prosecute severe harm to global stability.

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

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

Health Economics Seminar - Impacts of Child Health on Parents' Economic and Mental Wellbeing - Achyuta Adhvaryu

This webinar will feature Achyuta Adhvaryu, PhD, of the University of Michigan Ross School of Business,

who will present her paper focusing on child health's effects on parents' economic and mental well-being.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

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

Recent Advances in the Development of an Alternative Global Rare Earth Supply Chain

This webinar will provide insights into the current state of development of an alternate REE supply chain and the prospects for future strategic, technological, and economic international engagements through an in-dept investigation.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

12 April 2022 @5:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Students, Stanford University, USA

Gender Equity in Higher Education: Korea's Experience in Global Context

This webinar will feature a conversation between Namhee Kim and Christine Min Wotipka who will talk about gender equity in Korea’s higher education system in the global perspective.

Further information is accessible via [FSI].

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

Democracy under siege: What does the Ukraine crisis mean for Taiwan?

China is strongly contemplating "armed reunification" with Taiwan more strongly than at any point in the last 50 years. Russia’s aggression toward Ukraine has demonstrated the critical need to defend democracy threatened by totalitarianism. As a result, Taiwan and its democratic partners must work jointly to ensure the stability and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. This

webinar will examine the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Taiwan's Straits security.

More information is available at [Atlantic Council].

12 April 2022 @ 6:30-7:30 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs- Victoria, Australia

Russia after Ukraine

As the war in Ukraine has continued, many cannot envision how this conflict would end. This webinar will investigate the question of regime change as a result of the ongoing war and examine the notion that regardless of who leads Russia, the country will continue to pose a significant threat to the Western world.

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

12 April 2022 @ 5:30-6:30 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs- Victoria, Australia

Reflections on a United Nations' Career

This online forum will feature a conversation with Ian Howie, whose Reflections on a United Nations Career are essential debriefings of an insider's experience of the UN. During the session, the speaker will offer a first-hand look at the realities of a career UN official's life.

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

Recent Book Releases

Kevin Rudd, ***The Avoidable War: The Dangers of a Catastrophic Conflict between the US and Xi Jinping's China***, Public Affairs, 432 pages, published on March 22, 2022. A discussion of the book, see [Youtube].

Dimitar Gueorguiev, ***Retrofitting Leninism: Participation without Democracy in China***, Oxford University Press, 254 pages, published on November 9, 2021, discussed in [Youtbe].

James Brown, Guibourg Delamotte, and Robert Dujarric (eds.), ***The Abe Legacy: How Japan Has Been Shaped by Abe Shinzo***, Lexington Books, 316 pages, November 17, 2021, with a review in [AIIA].

Greg Bluestein, ***Flipped: How Georgia Turned Purple and Broke the Monopoly on Republican Power***, Viking, 328 pages, published on March 22, 2022. For a review, see [The New York Times].

Stephanie Hare, ***Technology Is Not Neutral: A Short Guide to Technology Ethics***, London Publishing Partnership, 288 pages, published on February 22, 2022, reviewed in [LSE].

Calls for Papers

InMind Support invites paper proposals for the ***international conference on "Discrimination, Violence, and Intolerance"*** to be held on May 19-20, 2022. Closing date for proposal submission is April 30, 2022. For more information visit [InMind Support].

The **International Centre for Economics, Humanities and Management (ICEHM)** welcomes paper proposals for its 41st ***international conference on "Economics, Humanities, Social Sciences & Crisis Management"*** scheduled for August 11-12, 2022, in Milan, Italy. Submission deadline is April 15, 2022. Further information is available at [ICEHM].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a ***Project Manager***. The position is based in Delhi, India. Deadline for application is April 19, 2022. For more information, see [UNDP].

FHI 360 is recruiting a ***Team Leader*** for the Discovery and Exploration of Emerging Pathogens – Viral Zoonoses (DEEP VZN) project, funded by USAID-funded. The position is based in Bangkok, Thailand. Learn more about the job offer at [FHI].

The **European Commission's Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations** is offering the position of ***Director***. Closing date for applications is April 22, 2022. More details are available at [EC].

The **Department of Political Science and International Relations at University of Delaware (UDEL)** welcomes applications a temporary ***Assistant Professor of American Politics***. Applications can be submitted until the position is filled. Fore further information, visit [UDEL].

The **Department of History and Political Thought at Concordia University**, Irvine, CA, is hiring a ***full-time faculty member***beginning in July 2022. Review of application materials started and continues until the position is funded and filled. See [CUI]

Team:

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