German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance
CPG

Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

No. 34, August/2022, 4

Brought to you by CPG

Dear Readers,

The Asia in Review (AIR) team is pleased to present you this week´s issue with an update on the latest happenings and developments in domestic politics, international relations and geopolitics in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone celebrating Moldava's, Ukraine's and Uruguay's Independence Day in this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

Webpage: www.cpg-online.de,
Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CPGTU

Main Sections

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

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

China: Prolonged drought hits economy

(ms) The heat and accompanying drought, which has lasted for more than two months, has forced the southwestern Sichuan province to begin limiting power supply to both parts of industry and households, leading to factories closing or reducing production.

The Sichuan province, which supplies most of its nearly 100 million people with hydroelectric power, has been hit particularly hard by the heat wave, with the drought leading to lower water levels, which has massively affected the power generation of hydropower plants, forcing the restriction of electricity consumption.

Parts of central and northern China, meanwhile, are suffering from water shortages that could threaten both the drinking water supply for local residents and the watering of local fields, and therefore threaten this

year's harvest. Among other things, this has led local firefighters to begin bringing water to hard-hit villages.

In addition to the restrictions, regions around the Yangtze River are beginning "cloud seeding" programs, under which chemicals are exposed inside clouds to influence rainfall to raise the river's water levels. However, due to the few and often very thin clouds, this method has very limited application.

The drought and the resulting power outages and shortages are further damaging the Chinese economy, which has already been battered by the stringent COVID-19 measures and is generally stagnating. Chinese Vice Premier Han Zheng stressed that in addition to local measures, more efforts must be pursued to mitigate the damage to both the population and industry by accelerating the construction of power supply-related construction projects, improve power load management and promote the joint operation of coal power and renewable energy.

Also, China's State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters and the Ministry of Emergency Management are introducing plans to mitigate damage from flooding. At the moment, this applies mainly to parts of north-west China and Inner Mongolia, which have been affected by heavy rainfall. But it has already been considered that due to the dry soil and the resulting risk of flooding, the plan will also be applied in the regions now affected by drought.

It remains to be seen to what extent such droughts will influence China's climate policy. Although a change in China's energy policy can be seen with increased investments in renewable energies, it is questionable to what extent regions such as the Sichuan region, which obtain 80 percent of its electricity from hydroelectric plants, can actually insist on these more climate-friendly methods or whether coal will be increasingly used again to ensure the power supply. Especially in view of the fact that the economically strong provinces, such as Guangdong, Zhejiang and Shanghai have increased their investment in fossil fuels concerns have been raised whether this could endanger China goals of climate neutrality by 2060. [Al Jazeera] [Associated Press] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2] [Xinhua]

China: Plan to reduce carbon emissions published

(ms) The Ministry of Science and Technology has released a plan to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from 2022 to 2030. According to the plan carbon dioxide emissions are to be reduced by 18 percent of GDP carbon dioxide emissions by 2025, while energy consumption per GDP unit is to be reduced by 13.5 percent from 2020 levels. At the core of the plan is the advancement of technological innovations that will enable the carbon peak to be reached in 2030 and the goal of carbon neutrality to be achieved in 2060. [Global Times] [Xinhua]

The release comes after the Chinese government announced in early August that companies with annual sales of more than USD 2.9 million will reduce their energy consumption by the aforementioned 13.5 percent from 2020 levels by 2025. [South China Morning Post]

The plan is reflective of large efforts of the Chinese government to fight climate change. While China is still the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide, it is at the same time biggest producer of renewable energy and investor in clean energy, with investments in this sector worth USD 380 billion in 2021. [GRID]

China: Largest producer of most-cited scientific papers

(ms) According to data from the Japanese Science and Technology Indicators 2022 Report, China has become the global leader in scientific research output as well as in "high impact" studies.

The report, released by Japan's National Institute of Science and Technology Policy (NISTP), a research institution affiliated with the Japanese science and technology ministry, found that 27.2 percent of the world's top one percent of most-cited papers in the period between 2018 and 2020 came from China, surpassing the U.S. with 24.9 percent for the first time. The core areas, in which Chinese papers were the most cited ones, include materials science, chemistry, engineering, and mathematics.

Accounting for 23.4 percent of the global research output, China published an annual average of 407,181 scientific papers, compared with 293,434 journal articles on U.S. side.

Daily China, the Chinese Communist Party's newspaper was quick to take the report to hit against the US and U.S. President Joe Biden's recent signing into law the Chips and Science Act, which would authorize more

than 225 billion in research funding over the next decade to boost U.S. competitiveness against China in science and technology, accusing U.S. politicians of attempting “to decouple with China and suppress China's sci-tech progress.” [The Guardian] [China Daily]

China: Xi and Li focus on economy during inspections to Liaoning and Guangdong provinces

(ms) President Xi Jinping visited the cities of Jinzhou and Shenyang in northeastern Liaoning Province from August 17 to 18. The focus of speeches during and after the visit was on the economy, with Xi stressing that the Chinese Communist Party attaches great importance to transforming China from an economy of quantity to an economy of quality and a manufacturer of quality. The province, which as the only dual land and sea gateway in northeastern China is of important geographic significance for the One Belt One Road Initiative, is to focus on self-reliance in the science and technology sector, but also be open to foreign trade. [China Daily] [Xinhua]

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s concurrent trip to the city of Shenzhen in Guangdong covered visits to technology giant Huawei Technologies Co, Chinese carmaker BYD, among others, and spoke of the need for reform while voicing his support for greener engines. In a meeting with the leaders of Guangdong Province, which also included the leaders of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, Henan and Sichuan Provinces, Li called on the six Chinese provinces to revive the flagging Chinese economy by making full use of government policies and safeguard market drivers to stabilize the economy and ensure employment for migrant workers. Following the meeting, he promised future private enterprises interest-free funds to set up businesses. [CNBC] [South China Morning Post]

The visits are the first public appearance of Xi and Li since late July, suggesting the so-called Beidaihe summit has been completed. The secret annual meeting at the coastal venue is normally held around this time of year to coordinate agenda setting for the coming year, with participation of key incumbent and former party members. [Bloomberg] [SupChina]

China: “Ankang” still operating?

(ms) China is facing fresh allegation of inhuman treatment of convicted criminals. A report published on August 16 by the Spanish NGO Safeguard Defenders claims that the Chinese government continues to lock up activists and political opponents of the government in psychiatric institutions to punish them without them having actual psychological illnesses. This system is also known as “Ankang”, named after the system of police-run psychiatric hospitals for the criminally insane.

The practice of using mental hospitals for political repression has been a well-known tool of the Chinese government but was supposed to be changed after the adoption of the country’s first Mental Health Law, which made judicial review mandatory before a person charged with a crime could be forcibly committed to mental hospital.

The report is based largely on interviews and reports from victims or their families, looking at 99 cases between 2015 and 2021. It concludes that the Chinese government continues to resort to the “Ankang” practice, mainly targeting socially weak individuals, and that this is made possible by the government's collaboration with doctors and hospitals that certify the victims wrongly as mentally ill. [Safeguard Defenders] [The Washington Post] [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: 29 guilty pleas in Hong Kong's biggest national security case

(ms) In the largest national security case against 47 well-known Hong Kong activists and politicians who held an unofficial primary election to select opposition candidates in July 2020, reportedly 29 of the defendants, including pro-democracy activist Joshua Wong and legal scholar Benny Tai, had already pleaded guilty in July to conspiracy to commit subversion.

The guilty pleas had not been made public until now due to reporting restrictions on committal proceedings. The judge in charge of the case has now lifted these restrictions following a ruling by the Hong Kong High Court earlier this month in connection with three former leaders of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, in which the reporting restrictions were found to be unlawful and were accordingly lifted [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2].

As a result of the guilty pleas, the defendants now face long prison sentences under the Hong Kong National

Security Law implemented in June 2020. Those accused of "actively participating" in subversion face prison terms of between three and ten years. If convicted as a "domestic offender," the sentence ranges from at least ten years in prison to life imprisonment.

The 18 defendants who have pleaded not guilty will now face a trial, which will be held without a jury, as Secretary for Justice Paul Lam ruled that due to “involvement of foreign elements” the trial must deviate from the common law tradition of jury trial.

The chairman of Hong Kong’s Third Side, a political party in Hong Kong positioning itself between the pro-democracy camp and the pro-Beijing camp with one seat in the city’s 90-member parliament, demanded a jury trial, citing the need for “the participation of the public” in these cases “to introduce the public’s point of view and analysis”. [Hong Kong Free Press 1] [Hong Kong Free Press 2] [Global Times]

China: Head of defunct Hong Kong newspaper Apple Daily pleads not guilty

(ms) At a High Court hearing on August 15, six former senior executives of Apple Daily, a Hong Kong newspaper critical of the government that was shut down in June 2021 after several raids by Hong Kong police, reportedly announced they would intent to plead guilty to the charges, while Jimmy Lai, the founder of Apple Daily, pleaded not guilty, this became known when the relevant judges lifted the reporting ban for the case.

The defendants are charged under the sedition law revived after the 2019 protests with conspiracy to print, publish, sell, offer for sale, distribute, display or reproduce seditious publication.

Lai's plea of innocence comes just a week after he had filed a lawsuit challenging the investigation of his cell phone [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3].

The date of the trial of both for Lai and his former associates is not yet known. It is only known that the trial against Lai will take place without a jury. [RTHK] [South China Morning Post]

China: Minors plead guilty in Hong Kong national security case

(ms) On August 20, six members, three of them 17 and one 16 years old, of the Hong Kong group Returning Valiant pleaded guilty to charges of conspiring to incite subversion, making them the first minors to plead guilty in a national security case.

The defendants were accused of spreading seditious messages via social media and organizing street booths and press conferences for the group between January and May last year. Returning Valiant is a radical Hong Kong political group that has repeatedly advocated armed insurrection, including during the press conferences organized by the defendants.

Nine members of the group were arrested in July last year, including members under the age of 18, for allegedly planning a citywide bombing campaign targeting key transport infrastructure and court buildings.

The potential sentences against the minors in particular are difficult to predict, as this is the first guilty plea by minors in a national security case. According to the Juvenile Offenders Ordinance, prison sentences should be avoided for 14- to 15-year-olds and alternative solutions should be found if possible. The responsible judge has already signaled that he will seek a similar approach for the defendants and will check whether alternatives such as community service order, rehabilitation center or training center would be a possibility. If this is not the case, a prison sentence of up to ten years is possible under national security law in the event of a conviction for serious offenses. [Hong Kong Free Press 1] [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

China: Updated CH-4 drone completes maiden flight

(ms) In a news release from the China Academy of Aerospace Aerodynamics in Beijing, a subsidiary of China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp it was announced that the updated version of the domestically developed CH-4 or CASC Rainbow drone has passed all necessary tests, making it ready for operational deployment.

The new drone is equipped with a heavy fuel engine which is said to enable the drone to fly for longer periods of time and longer distances, but also to increase the altitude at which the drone can operate, as well as increase its payload capacity from 30 to 50 percent.

This will improve the effectiveness of the armed drone in its military use but also in its civilian purposes of high-resolution land observation, mapping, communications, aerial object detection, environmental monitoring, and forest fire prevention. [China Daily] [Frontier India] [Global Times]

China: Two new Chinese destroyers to be "ready for combat" soon

(ms) The Anshan and the Wuxi, two Type 055 10,000 ton-class large destroyers, will be ready for combat by the end of the year after successfully completing various military exercises, according to the People's Liberations Army Navy (PLA).

This would make them destroyer number three and four of the Type 055, after the Lhasa and Nanchang which are already in service. [Global Times]

Japan: Extraordinary parliamentary session demanded to check ties of Cabinet members with religious group

(sb) Japanese opposition parties have demanded an extraordinary parliamentary session to clarify the relationship between the members of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's recently reshuffled Cabinet [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3] and the Unification Church and to discuss other important issues such as inflation, consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and state funeral for former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

The religious group, founded in South Korea in 1954 by an anti-communist and self-declared messiah, expanded to Japan was one of the first foreign destinations where it established relationships with politicians in a bid to increase its followership, while politicians received access to church members to assist in campaigns.

It has become a political issue in the wake of the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe last month that might turn into a backlash against the LDP as suspicions of a close-knit network of contacts between LPD lawmakers and the Unification Church grow.

Abe's assailant has reportedly admitted that he believed the group forced his mother to make donations which ruined his family and that the former prime minister had ties with it.

Following Prime Minister's Kishida recent Cabinet reshuffle, seven ministers and 20 lawmakers appointed deputies for Cabinet members revealed that they had links to the Unification Church, which was founded by an anti-communist and is known for its mass weddings and "spiritual sales" of jars and other items to members for exorbitant prices [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3]. A survey conducted by Japanese newspaper Kyodo News found out that over 100 of all 712 members of the Diet have had some links with the religious group. Among them, close to 80 percent are LDP legislators.

Among the prominent figures caught in this controversy, is Koichi Hagiuda, a close aide of Abe and a member of the LDP's largest faction, who visited a facility connected to the Unification Church ahead of the July House of Councillors elections, in an apparent bid to obtain the support. Further, financial reports have revealed that a fund management organization for Hagiuda had made payments to a church affiliate in 2012 and 2014, while the LDP office of the Tokyo constituency, which is headed by him, had paid the group a total of some USD 440 on separate occasions in 2015 and 2017.

Further complicating the situation for the LDP, it has surfaced that the 2005 and 2006 "Review and Prospect of Internal and External Situations", the country's annual public security report included an entry titled "unique group," described as "a group engaging in activities based on unique doctrines and claims that deviate from social norms". The government admitted that this refers to the Unification Church. However, since the year after Abe assumed power in 2012, the report has not mentioned the group anymore.

In response to this development, under which public support for Kishida's cabinet shrank from 52 percent to 36 percent in mid-July, Kishida ordered Cabinet members and LDP executives to cut all ties with the Unification Church, while a multi-agency task force consisting of senior officials of the Justice Ministry, the Cabinet Secretariat, the National Police Agency and the Consumer Affairs Agency agreed on a plan to launch a campaign to support victims of the religious group as early as next month. [Kyodo News1] [Japan Today] [The Mainichi] [Kyodo News2] [The Japan Times] [Nippon.com] [Reuters] [The Guardian]

Meanwhile, Lower and Upper House exit polls data conducted by Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun and broadcaster Nippon TV networks show an increasing detachment of young voters from ruling the LDP. In the House of Councillors election in July only 32 percent of electorate aged 18-29 voted for the LDP,

compared with 46 percent in the 2017 House of Representatives election. [The Japan News]

Japan: Tokyo Olympic Games executive arrested

(sb) Former Tokyo Olympic organizing committee executive Haruyuki Takahashi and former chairman of clothing retailer Aoki Holdings Inc. Hironori Aoki have been arrested on August 17 on suspicion of having concluded a multimillion-yen bribery deal in September 2017 in the context of the selection of sponsors of the 2020 Olympic Games which were postponed to 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic

Takahashi is suspected of accepting more than USD 370,000 in bribes from Aoki and others from October 2017 to March this year for his support for the retailer in obtaining a Tokyo Games sponsorship contract.

Both Takahashi and Aoki denied any connection with the bribery case while the investigation is still ongoing with prosecutors analyzing recordings of conversations between the company and Takahashi.

The case is a blow to Japan's bid to host the Winter Olympic Games in 2030 in Sapporo. [Kyodo News1] [Kyodo News2]

Japan: Human Rights Watch demands blocking of training program for officers from Myanmar

(sb) Human Rights Watch has called on the Japanese government to immediately stop its military training program with Myanmar and launch an investigation into possible involvement of participants of the program in operations that violates the laws-of-war.

Human Rights Watch cited for its the case of Colonel Tin Soe who attended entering Japan's Ground Self Defense Force Staff College from August 2016 to March 2017 and then served as a military attaché for the Myanmar embassy in Tokyo from 2019 to 2021. He left Japan after being assigned as a brigadier general during the February 2021 military coup in Myanmar. In August 2021, Tin Soe was dispatched to the Eastern Command headquarters in Shan State's Taunggyi, in which the United Nations and human rights groups have reported extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary arrests. [Japan Today] [Human Rights Watch]

Japan: Increase of suicide rate

(sb) A recent study of University of Tokyo researchers has claimed that Covid-19 has led to 8,000 more suicides between March 2020 and June 2022 than could be expected without the pandemic

The most affected group were women in their 20s, who accounted for the largest increase with 1,837 self-killing. Besides, the number among women aged 19 and younger also saw a significant rise with 282 out of 377 pandemic-related suicides.

The study links of the increase in suicides of young women to pandemic-caused unemployment and the ensuing economic difficulties which affect more women than men.

In the light of these findings, experts have requested the government to reduce anti-pandemic measures to stimulate socialeconomic activities. [Japan Today]

Japan: Government is investigating over the mistreatment of pregnant trainees

(sb) The Immigration Services Agency of Japan and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare are working on a survey to find if foreign technical trainees have been fired or forced to leave the country by employers because they were pregnant or had a child.

The survey reaches out to around 490 people included in the government-sponsored technical internship program.

The move comes as data of the Ministry revealed that 637 trainees were forced to leave their jobs because of pregnancy between November 2017 and December 2020.

The program, launched in 1993, was meant to improve trainees' skills for a period in Japan to contribute to their home-country's economy upon their return. It has come increasingly under criticism over cases of exploitation of the trainees as cheap labor by involved Japanese companies.[Japan Today] [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1]

Japan: Deployment of 1,000 long-range cruise missiles to counter China

(sb) Japan is reportedly considering deploying 1,000 long-range cruise missiles around the southern Nansei islands to strengthen its defense against China.

Launched by ships or aircraft, the missiles can reach the coastal areas of North Korea and China. [Japan Today]

North Korea: Pyongyang targets DeFi for cryptocurrency

(my) Approximately USD 1 billion worth of cryptocurrencies was reportedly stolen from the Decentralized Financial (DeFi) platform as of July this year by hackers connected to North Korea.

DeFi is a blockchain-based financial system that relies on smart contracts rather than centralized financial intermediaries such as banks.

The blockchain analysis firm Chainalysis revealed on August 16 that as of July this year, the total loss of cryptocurrency due to hacking on the DeFi platform had reached USD 1.9 billion. While claiming that a large portion of the money could be tied to actors linked to North Korea, it estimated that hacker groups connected to North Korea had stolen USD 1 billion of the total. [Bloomberg]

The US has recently sanctioned Tornado Cash, a cryptocurrency laundering service, since it suspects that North Korea and hacker groups affiliated with North Korea were raising funds for nuclear development using cryptocurrency. [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3]

South Korea: Ruling party's emergency committee established

(my) South Korea's ruling People Power Party (PPP) has completed the formation of an emergency committee to serve as the party's interim leadership body with the endorsement of the nine committee members on August 16. Joo Ho-young, a moderate conservative five-term Member of the Parliament has been selected as new interim party leader.

The move brings a month-long feud within the party over its leadership to an end during former party leader Lee Jun-seok, who had been suspended from the party for six months over allegations over a sexual bribery scandal, and his supporters fought and filed an injunction against the establishment of the emergency committee, upon which the PPP's Supreme Council has now formally been dissolved and formally ended Lee's party leadership which would otherwise have lasted until June 2023. [Korea JoongAng Daily] [See also AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1]

The interim committee will be in operation until the conclusion of the national convention to elect a new Supreme Council. The convention's date has not been determined yet. [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean]

South Korea: Presidential office restructured

(my) South Korean President has appointed Korea International Trade Association Vice-President Lee Kwan-seop as new senior secretary for policy planning of the presidential office and former lawmaker Kim Eun-hye as new senior secretary for public relations on August 21.

The two senior positions have been newly established as part of a reorganization of the presdiential office, that seeks to bolster policy coordination and public relations.

While President Yoon insisted that the restructuring of the presidential office is made for the livelihood and stability of the people, not for any political advantages, the move comes as approving ratings for the Yoon administration plummeted to below 30 percent over public discontent with personnel appointments of Yoon and the flip-flops in educational policies as well as multiple allegations surrounding first lady Kim Keon-hee which are yet to be resolved. [The Korea Herald] [Aljazeera] [Yonhap News Agency 1, in Korean] [Yonhap News Agency 2, in Korean]

South Korea: PM demands change in disaster response system

(my) Prime Minister Han Duck-soo called for the establishment of a new disaster response system.

At a Cabinet meeting on August 16, he claimed the country's current disaster response mechanism is

insufficient to cope with unprecedented, climate-changed induced disasters. To properly prepare for upcoming disasters, he suggested strengthening safety management systems and overhauling them in line with environmental changes.

Referring to the regular session of the National Assembly to be held in September, he briefly added that he expected the National Assembly to deal with disaster prevention bills or budgets attentively, considering its importance to people's livelihood at this moment.

Han's call comes after historic floods that occurred in Seoul and surrounding cities on August 8 and 9 resulted in more than 7,000 flood victims, 14 fatalities and five individuals still missing. President Yoon Suk-yeol also called for reform of a disaster response system. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean]

South Korea: Presidential archives raided

(my) The presidential archives were raided on August 19 by prosecutors investigating two charges of power abuse involving the previous Moon Jae-in administration: the repatriation of two North Korean fishermen and the early closure of a nuclear reactor.

Accusations that the Moon administration expelled the two North Koreans back to the North without legal grounds in November 2019 against their will to defect to the South after convicting them of murdering 16 other crew members are being investigated by prosecutors.

The investigation team reviewed the data from a meeting that Chief of Staff Roh Young-min presided over two days after North Korean defectors were captured in November 2019. According to the officials, prosecutors are planning to examine the records of the Moon administration's decision-making process in relation to the repatriation case, to find out if the government built a repatriation policy without carrying out an adequate investigation.

Prosecutors from the Daejeon District Prosecutors Office also searched the presidential archives on the same day in order to search for possible illegalities in the Moon administration's decision made in 2019 to shut down an aging nuclear reactor ahead of its legal expiration date.

The raid followed criminal accusations filed in December 2021 against 15 government officials, including several of Moon's former aides, by civic activists opposed to the Moon administration's nuclear phase-out strategy for claimed illegal conduct related to the early closure decision for the Wolsong 1 reactor. The Wolsong 1 reactor, built in 1983 in Gyeongju, North Gyeongsang Province, was scheduled to run until 2022. However, citing the Moon government's viability assessment, the state-run Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co. decided in December 2019 to shut down the Wolsong 1 reactor. The reactor's economic viability, however, was excessively underestimated, according to the Board of Audit and Inspection. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Police oversight bureau chief accused of spying on former colleagues in labor union

(my) The recently appointed chief of the newly established police oversight bureau [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1], Kim Sun-ho, has refuted accusations of a parliamentary committee that he started his career in the police as a spy by providing information on his former labor activist colleagues.

In the late 1980s, Kim was a member of the Incheon-Bucheon Workers Union, a group of student labor activists. He cut up communication with the organization in April 1989. 15 other members were arrested around that time on suspicion of breaking the National Security Law. Kim started working for the police in the anti-communism division in August 1989.

Kim asserted that he left the labor activist group in his 20s due to his concern about the organization's promotion of the "Juche" ideology, North Korea's state ideology according to which a country will prosper once it has become self-reliant by achieving political, economic, and military independence. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean]

Bill for separated families proposed

(my) South Korean Rep. Tae Yong-ho of the ruling People Power Party, a North Korean defector-turned-representative, announced on August 22 that he has proposed a bill to establish a day for separated families to increase public awareness of the humanitarian issue.

To commemorate the first-ever family reunions between North and South Korea, which took place on September 20, 1985, Tae proposed declaring the day Separated Families Day.

Tae emphasized that since separated families are agony for Koreans both in the North and the South, public awareness of the problem should be raised in order to resume family reunions.

The first formal family reunion was held in 2000, following the initial gathering in 1985. Although 20 more reunion sessions took place until 2018, no additional reunion has taken place due to stiffened relationship between the two Koreas and the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Korean War from 1950 to 1953 separated families in the North and South. As of July this year, there were 44,014 surviving family members who had split up, with more than 66 percent of them being over 80. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Daegu military air base to be relocated

(my) The government announced on August 18 a strategic plan to move a military air base in Daegu by 2030. The Daegu military airport and air base currently located downtown will be moved to near Uiseong-gun and Gunwi-gun, North Gyeongsang Province. Additionally, it also calls for moving Daegu Airport, which is owned by the Korea Airports Corporation and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, in order for it to be reconstructed as an integrated military and civilian airport.

Due to the airport's proximity to the city's downtown, concerns about noise and safety were raised. Military operational activities were also constrained because of high-rise structures. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean]

Taiwan: Major parties in favor of lowering voting age

(gö) President Tsai Ing-wen who also doubles as chairwoman of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), advocated for the passage of a national referendum that would lower the voting age from 20 to 18 on August 17. The four major parties came to a

mutual agreement to lower Taiwan's voting age via constitutional amendment.

The minimum required for the referendum to pass are over 9.65 million votes and will be held on the same day as the local government elections on November 26. Tsai said that aligning Taiwan's voting age with other democratic countries would further consolidate the country's democratic system.

The opposition parties Kuomintang (KMT), Taiwan's People's Party (TPP) and New Power Party (NPP) are all rallying their supporters to cast their vote in favor of lowering the voting age to 18.

The voting age in Taiwan has not changed since its introduction in 1947. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Taiwanese F-16Vs perform a combat readiness exercise

(gö) Six Taiwanese F-16V fighters took part in several training missions on August 17 at Hualien Air Base. Two out of six fighters were armed with a full complement of anti-ship and air-to-air missiles to showcase and exercise the warplanes' combat readiness.

The exercise was held with the intention to attract media attention and display the highly advanced air force of Taiwan and its capabilities in response to the large Chinese military drills that followed US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan earlier this month.[Taiwan News][AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2]

Taiwan's Ministry of Defense said that the current situation is a good opportunity for Taiwan's divisions to enhance their skills. He declared that "We will seize this opportunity to test all the training we normally do, and through this improve our current methods and raise our combat effectiveness,". [AlJazeera]

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

Bangladesh: Visiting UN human rights chief calls for independent probe of enforced disappearances

(az/lm) The United Nations high commissioner for human rights, Michelle Bachelet, called on August 17 on the Bangladeshi government to establish "an impartial, independent and transparent investigation" into allegations of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killing and torture. At a press conference concluding her four-day visit to Dhaka, Bachelet also urged the South Asian nation to ratify the International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Enforced Disappearance. [OHCHR] [Voice of America]

The UN human rights chief arrived in Dhaka on August 14 and later met with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, several other ministers, civil society, rights activists and the families of alleged victims of rights violations [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3]. She also visited the Rohingya refugee camps in the southern district of Cox's Bazar and met Rohingyas who fled to Bangladesh in the face of persecution and killings by the Myanmar military. [South China Morning Post]

Bachelet welcomed the Bangladesh government's "impressive effort" in hosting hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who fled persecution in neighboring Myanmar in 2017. But she also expressed concern about increasing anti-Rohingya rhetoric and the stereotyping and scapegoating of Rohingyas as the source of crime and other problems. [Al Jazeera]

Bangladesh: Foreign Minister under pressure over comments for allegedly seeking help from India

(az/lm) Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen is facing criticism at home after telling an audience on August 18 that he had requested the government of

neighboring India to ensure the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would win the national election scheduled for next year. Momen visited India in mid-June to co-chair the seventh meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission. He also met with his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar and Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu [see AiR No. 25, June/2022, 3].

Following Momen's remarks, the joint secretary of Bangladesh's ruling Awami League party emphasized that the foreign minister was not a member of the party's central committee and was not given the task of addressing the matter abroad. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Prothom Alo]

Furthermore, a Supreme Court lawyer sent a legal notice August 21 seeking the resignation of Momen within 48 hours. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Against this backdrop, Momen later denied that he sought help from India, instead claiming that his talks in New Delhi centered on regional stability and security. [NewsOnAIR]

Bhutan: Government bans import of most vehicles as foreign exchange reserves plummet

(lm) Bhutan will ban the import of all vehicles except utility vehicles, heavy earthmoving machines and agriculture machinery to maintain macroeconomic stability as foreign exchange reserves have been dwindling, the government said in a notice on August 19. Foreign exchange reserves had declined to USD 970 million at the end of December from USD 1.46 billion in April 2021. [South China Morning Post]

India: Non-local voters allowed to vote in Jammu and Kashmir union territory, Election Commission says

(sr) India's Election Commission said on August 17 anyone living ordinarily in the Jammu and Kashmir union territory can get enlisted as a voter. Coming ahead of local polls expected by the year's end, the announcement has been criticized by some Kashmiri political parties as an attempt at "electoral demographic change" of the region – a scenario feared since the abrogation of its autonomy in 2019.

According to the chief electoral officer to the union territory, the decision to allow security forces stationed in Kashmir, and outsiders working in the region, to cast votes in local legislative polls will potentially increase the electorate by 2.5 million, or more than one-third. [The Times of India 2]

Representatives of the People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration — a political alliance between several regional parties in Jammu and Kashmir campaigning to restore its special autonomous status — met on August 22 to assess the announcement. Farooq Abdullah, former chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, told *Arab News* later that the union territory's identity was facing "a direct assault". [Arab News]

India: Definition of election 'freebies' required, Supreme Court observes

(sr) In the ongoing debate on the ethics of political parties promising freebies during elections, India's Supreme Court has asserted that it cannot prevent parties from making promises and that it was essential to define a "freebie". [The Indian Express]

Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, a lawyer and member of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), had filed a petition with the Supreme Court in January, seeking court intervention to regulate the distribution of freebies during elections.

Notably, the petition was filed at a time when the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is trying to make inroads into Prime Minister Modi's home state of Gujarat with promises of monthly allowances and free electricity. The AAP, which was founded in the context of the 2011 anti-corruption movement and is currently the ruling party of two governments, filed a plea in response to the BJP petition, claiming that free distribution in education and healthcare sector to disadvantaged people mustn't be labeled as freebies [see No. 33, August/2022, 3]. [The Straits Times]

India: Supreme Court seeks response of government, Election Commission on voting modes plea

(sr) India's Supreme Court has sought responses from the central government and the country's Election Commission on a Public Interest Litigation seeking alternative modes of voting for non-resident Indians

who are unable to be physically present in the constituency on election day owing to their employment, education, or otherwise. [The Indian Express]

India: Thousands of farmers return to New Delhi for fresh protests

(vv/lm) Thousands of farmers gathered in the Indian capital of New Delhi on August 22 to protest against what they said were unfulfilled promises by the government, more than eight months after they called off a year-long protest and the Modi administration pulled back three contentious agricultural laws. [CNN]

The legislation, introduced in September of last year, was aimed at deregulating the sector, allowing farmers to sell produce to buyers beyond government-regulated wholesale markets where growers are assured of a minimum price (MSP) [see AiR No. 39, September/2020, 5]. Farmers, fearing the reform would cut the prices they get for their crops, staged nationwide protests and clashed with the police on multiple occasions [see AiR No. 5, February/2021, 1]. In a surprise announcement last November, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said his government would repeal the three agriculture laws, in a rare apparent climb down ahead of pivotal elections in farming states [see AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4].

Last month, then, the government set up a panel of growers and government officials to find ways of ensuring MSP) for all farm produce and invited representatives of farmer organizations to join in. But the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), a coalition of over forty Indian farmers' unions, claimed that the Modi administration has not fulfilled promises it had made in November of last year when the laws were repealed. [Outlook India]

In related developments, farmers in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) on August 18 began a 3-day sit-in to protest against the state government over violence against farmers in UP's Lakhimpur Kheri district. The protest was joined by thousands of farmers from other parts of India seeking justice for victims of the violence, with nearly ten thousand farmers from Punjab alone arriving in buses and trains to join the agitation. [Hindustan Times]

Led by the SKM, protesting farmers are seeking the removal of Ajay Mishra Teni, India's home minister who represents a constituency of Uttar Pradesh. In October of last year Mishra's son was arrested on preliminary

charges of murder and sent to judicial custody after his car ploughed into protesting farmers, killing eight [see No.41,October/2021,2].

India: 11 men convicted in gang rape case released; Supreme Court to hear petition seeking reversal

(vv/lm) Eleven Hindu men jailed for life for the gang-rape of a Muslim woman and the murder of her relatives during anti-Muslim riots in 2002 have been freed on remission by the state government of Gujarat, a decision that drew condemnation from the victim's widower, lawyers and politicians. [Al Jazeera]

The men were part of a mob on a rampage in Gujarat 20 years ago when Prime Minister Modi was the chief minister of the state. They were first convicted and sentenced to life-imprisonment in early 2008 and released from jail on August 15, when India celebrated 75 years since the end of British rule.

The convicts had approached the Supreme Court in April seeking remission for their sentence and demanded to be set free under laws amended by Gujarat state government to allow reviewing of life-imprisonment sentences. The district jail advisory committee asserted later that its decision to free the 11 men was in line with a 1992 local policy on remitting prison sentences on grounds of age and good behavior. [Euro News] [Hindustan Times]

The decision to free the convicts caused massive outrage across India. It's been criticized by opposition parties, activists and several journalists, who said the release contradicted the government's stated policy of uplifting women and Muslims in a country notorious for violence against them. [BBC] [Deutsche Welle]

Against this backdrop, India's Supreme Court verbally agreed on August 23 to hear a Public Interest Litigation petition to reverse the state's remission order freeing the men. The petition holds that the men must serve their full life sentences. [Swissinfo]

India: Chief Bureau of Investigation raids Delhi Deputy Chief Minister's residence

(vv) India's premier investigating agency, the Chief Bureau of Investigation (CBI), on August 19 raided 21 locations, including the residence of Delhi Deputy Chief

Minister Manish Sisodia in connection with a case it had registered against him and several top excise officers in the capital over alleged corruption in rolling out the excise policy. [Hindustan Times]

The excise policy in question amended that liquor businesses in Delhi be removed from the retail stores under the national capital realm. The new policy sought open bidding to award 849 liquor vendors to private businesses, introducing more private liquor players in the market. In light of the ongoing police investigation, the Delhi government last month announced the rolling back of the policy. [Times of India]

The raid followed on the publication of a report, which was submitted in July and accused Sisodia of providing undue benefits to liquor vend licensees in lieu of "kickbacks" and "commissions". [The Indian Express]

Sisodia, a senior member of the Aam Aadmi Party which was founded in 2012 following the Indian anti-corruption movement, denied all allegations against him. He insisted that the investigation was the ploy of Prime Minister Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to target the good governance of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. [The Hindu]

India: New Bihar state law minister wanted in kidnapping case

(vv) A lawmaker from India's center-left Rashtriya Janata Dal party was sworn in as law minister of the eastern state of Bihar on August 16, the very day he was supposed to surrender before a local court in connection with a kidnapping case against him. [Hindustan Times]

Kartik Singh took oath as the newly appointed law minister of Bihar – India's third most populous state – after the regional ally of Indian Prime Minister Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) pulled out of the coalition government and joined an opposition alliance earlier this month. [No.33,August/2022,3]

The Hindu reported that Singh, who denied the existence of an arrest warrant, has been granted interim protection by a court until September 1. [The Hindu]

India: Government revokes plan to give free housing to Rohingya refugees after

Hindu right-wing protests

(vv/lm) The Indian government has backtracked on plans to provide housing and security to Rohingya refugees in the capital New Delhi following protests by a right-wing Hindu organization and the government of the National Capital Territory of Delhi. [Times of India] [Voice of America]

Fleeing persecution in Myanmar, Muslim-majority Rohingya began arriving in India during the 1970s and are now scattered all over the country, with many living in squalid camps. According to *Human Rights Watch*, an estimated 40,000 Rohingyas are in India - at least 20,000 of them are registered with the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Rights groups have criticized New Delhi for its attempts to deport the refugees instead of offering them asylum. [BBC]

Against this backdrop, India's Housing and Urban Affairs minister, Hardeep Singh Puri, on August 17 said the government had decided to provide accommodation, basic amenities, and police protection for Rohingya Refugees in the Bakkarwala area of Delhi — signaling a potential change in policy.

However, the announcement was strongly criticized by members of Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a right-wing Hindu organization that has been criticized for contributing to violence against Muslims in India, which called the Rohingya refugee community "infiltrators." The move was also criticized by the ruling party of the National Capital Territory of Delhi, the Aam Aadmi Party, whose top leader Manish Sisodia claimed to have not been informed about settling Rohingya refugees in the capital. [The Hindu]

In light of this, the government revoked its decision hours after Puri's announcement, with the home ministry denying saying "illegal foreigners" will be kept in a detention center till they are deported to Myanmar. [Al Jazeera] [The Strait Times]

Nepal: Madhesh parties contending for significance in their own base amidst controversies and divisions

(op) Two significant political parties representing Madheshi, several groups of people living in the Terai region of Nepal, are negotiating with larger parties for improved prospects in the November elections while seat-sharing discussions inside the ruling coalition take place. [The Kathmandu Post]

The Loktantrik Samajbadi Party is debating whether to join the ruling alliance, while the coalition's Janata Samajbadi Party is considering leaving and forming an alliance with the CPN-UML and other parties. Even the head of the ruling coalition, the Nepali Congress, is eager to include the Loktantrik Samajbadi. But complexity still exists. Even if their leaders claim they are in a secure position, the two Madhes-based parties are expected to have a difficult time during the elections.

Pakistan: Police charge ex-Prime Minister Khan under terrorism act after allegedly 'threatening' officials

(msk/lm) Pakistan's police have charged former Prime Minister Imran Khan under anti-terror laws after accusing law enforcement and judiciary of detaining and torturing a close aide, who is himself being detained under sedition charges. After news of the investigation broke, supporters gathered outside Khan's house vowing to "take over" if he was arrested. However, he has now been granted pre-arrest bail until August 25, when he is likely to appear before an anti-terrorism court in Islamabad. [BBC]

In a speech on August 20, Khan protested the arrest and alleged torture of his close aide Shahbaz Gill, who was taken to a police station on August 9 after a sedition case was filed against him for allegedly inciting troops and officers against the military leadership during an interview on *ARY News*. Following the interview, the TV station was also taken down and its news director was detained, in addition to the warrants issued for the channel's owner and CEO, a producer and two anchors for airing "false, hateful and seditious" content [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3].

Following his speech, Khan was charged under terrorism act for threatening the female judge and spreading terror among masses, according to the interior minister, who further stated that the arrest will be made after approval from the Cabinet. [Express, in Urdu]

The case comes at a time of heightened tension between Pakistan's government and Khan, who was ousted from power in April in a no-confidence vote. Since then, the former leader has toured the country to deliver a series of fiery speeches calling for fresh elections and fiercely criticizing both the government and the army.

Pakistan: Out of nine constituencies, ex-Premier Khan's papers rejected in one, challenged in another

(msk) The nomination papers of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan to contest by-polls for seats of Parliament's lower house have been rejected in one constituency and challenged in another. [Dawn] [Pakistan Today]

Khan, who was ousted from power in April in a no-confidence vote, in a surprise move erlier this month announced he will contest by-polls for nine seats of Parliament's lower house on September 25. [AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2]

Sri Lanka: Former President Rajapaksa tipped to return to country; ruling party seeks assurances from president

(msk/lm) Sri Lanka's ruling party has asked President Ranil Wickremesinghe to provide security and other assistance to enable his predecessor's safe return to home. [CNN]

Gotabaya Rajapaksa will return to Sri Lanka on August 24, local media reported last week, citing a former ambassador. At present, he is in Thailand after fleeing Sri Lanka in July on a military plane for Maldives, and then traveling to Singapore, days after angry protesters stormed his official residence and office [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3]. He tendered his resignation from Singapore, while public anger grew over his alleged mismanagement of the economy.

Against this backdrop, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya, an alliance of opposition parties, has demanded that Rajapaksa must be tried for allegations of misusing the USD 1 billion loan facility extended by India as part of its financial assistance to help the cash-strapped island nation deal with its unprecedented economic crisis. [The Hindu]

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

Cambodia: Four political parties working together on electoral reforms

(fe) Four Cambodian political parties started their collaboration to request meetings with the National Assembly (NA), National Election Committee (NEC), and the Ministry of Interior to present key documents and call for changes to the electoral system, which they claim are necessary to increase political freedom in Cambodia.

The four parties - Candlelight, Grassroots Democratic (GDP), Khmer Will (KWP), and Cambodian Reform (CRP) - met to discuss the documents which, according to the KWP President, include information on the responsibilities of national institutions.

While the NEC signaled willingness to hear suggestions for improvements, it clarified to be unable to amend the election process singleheaded. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Prosecution submits new evidence in treason trial against former opposition leader Kem Sokha

(fe) At the Phnom Penh Municipal Court the prosecution has introduced new evidence against former opposition leader Kem Sokha to increase pressure in his ongoing treason trial for allegedly collaborating with a foreign force to overthrow Hun Sen´s government in 2013. Sokha is the former head of the now-disbanded oppositional Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP).

The new evidence displays remarks made by former senior CNRP lawmaker Ho Vann about protests, which his fellow Sokha allegedly organized in the capital.

After the 52nd hearing on August 17, co-defendant Chan Chen opined that because the prosecution had

introduced fresh evidence, no progress had been made. Chen stated that the prosecution has agreed to present any new evidence as soon as it becomes available. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Prime Minister provides assessment of national human rights situation to UN expert

(fe) Prime Minister Hun Sen discussed with United Nations (UN) human rights envoy Vitit Muntarbhorn human rights-related issues in Cambodia. During his 11-day trip to the country, the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Cambodia met with officials and civil society representatives to review the status quo.

In his talk with Vitit, Hun Sen referred to his government's social security strategy as a means to provide direct monetary support to the poor and vulnerable during the pandemic in addition to wages raises for government employees, members of the armed forces, and increased veterans' pensions. Along with the implementation of pensions for employees in the private sector as they are required by Cambodian labor law, the government, according to him, also worked on raising the minimum wage for manufacturing workers.

Hun Sen further expounded on the Covid-19 statute and related legal measures, stating that they were all intended to preserve public order and national security as well as save citizens' lives and health. The Prime Minister also emphasized that the maintenance of human rights must be mutually supportive with the due exercise of democracy, and the promotion of peace and stability in the country. [Phnom Penh Post]

Indonesia: Government investigates personal data breaches on a major online platform

(jvk) The Ministry of Communications and Information is investigating an alleged mass leak of personal data from a state-owned subsidiary company, Indihome. The incident allegedly involved the browsing history, identification numbers, addresses, and passwords of around 26 million internet service users being leaked and uploaded to illegal websites.

The Ministry will soon issue a technical recommendation letter to the company to better

protect consumer data. A personal data protection bill was submitted in 2020, but bureaucratic rivalries have caused continuous delays. [Tempo] [Jakarta Post] [AiR No. 27, July/2022, 1]

Malaysia: Court upholds 12-year jail sentence of ex-Prime Minister Najib in final 1MDB appeal

(pe) On August 23, Malaysia's Federal court upheld a 12-year jail sentence for corruption against former prime minister Najib Razak in the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) financial scandal. [Bangkok Post]

Najib was convicted in July 2020 for criminal breach of trust, money laundering, and abuse of power. His conviction is one of many related to the 1MDB scandal, which has implicated many senior level officials on corruption charges.

The Malaysian Bar has criticized the conduct of Najib and his legal team during the trial for numerous attempts to delay or obstruct hearings. For instance, Najib replaced his legal team three weeks prior to the prosecution's closing remarks, to then ask to postpone hearings to allow his new lawyers more time to prepare, which was denied by the court. [First Post] [New Straits Times] [Reuters] [The Star] [AiR No.33, August/2022, 3]

Najib has pleaded not guilty to all charges. Furthermore, he has undertaken an Islamic oath (sumpah laknat) to pledge his innocence. [The Star]

Malaysia: Ex-navy chief pleads not guilty in littoral combat ship scandal, more expected to be implicated

(pe) A former Malaysian navy chief has pleaded not guilty to three charges of criminal breach of trust, in relation to the ongoing littoral combat ship (LCS) scandal.

The LCS scandal is linked to a Naval contracting project by which six littoral combat ships were commissioned to be built by BNS in 2011. To date, none of these ships have been delivered leading to the eventual implication of many high ranking officials.

Also charged was the former managing director of the case-related contractor firm Boustead Naval Shipyard (BNS) for allegedly making payments to three Singapore-based companies without the agreement of the company´s board of directors. If found guilty, he could face a maximum 20 years' imprisonment, whipping and a fine.

Current Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob expects more people to be brought to court and also emphasized the damage done by the scandal to perception of government integrity. [The Straits Times] [The Star]

Malaysia: Prime Minister reluctant on calling elections

(pe) Prime minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob has said that Malaysia's next general election (GE15) will only be called once current instabilities and economic issues have been tackled.

The date of GE15 remains to be uncertain after the Prime Minister, in an interview, stated that the government is prioritizing the response to key issues such as those related to the current global economic slowdown over elections. Acknowledging the need to provide the Malaysian people with a democratic mandate of the government, he highlighted his concerns with regard of short term challenges his government his facing, which must be overcome before a vote shall be held.

Ismail Sabri took over the prime minister's office following the resignation of Muhyiddin Yassin in August, 2021. The mandate of the current government will expire in July 2023, and GE15 must be held within 60 days of the dissolution of parliament.' [Channel News Asia]

Myanmar: Judicial reform transforms Yangon´s court structure

(jp) Myanmar´s military government reorganized the city of Yangon´s court structure in a larger judicial reform undertaken by two government Notifications (No 556/2022 and 572/2022).

By it, the formerly four district courts of the Yangon Region – the eastern, western, southern and northern one - were abolished and replaced by 14 new district courts. Three of them are newly established courts, the

rest are upgraded (lower level) township courts among which some received new facilities as well.

Each district court will be responsible for one up to five township courts. [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, in Burmese] [MDN]

Myanmar: Leading gem trader detained on suspicion of financing shadow government

(jp) Authorities arrested U Kyaw Thura, the owner of a Mandalay-based gem company, for allegedly having provided financial support to organizations opposed to the military council, precisely the National Unity Government (NUG) and affiliated groups. In addition, the military seized his houses at numerous places and a large quantity of uncut and cut gems. On August 17, the military had already arrested his driver. [RFA Burmese, In Burmese]

Myanmar: Educator sentenced to a total of eight years in prison

(jp) Ko Naig Thiha Kyaw, a member of the Central Committee Basic Education Staff General Strike Committee (BEGSC), has been sentenced to an additional five years in prison for violating Article 52 (a) of the Anti-Terrorism Act. He already received a first sentence on August 11, to three years in prison under Section 505 (a) of the Penal Code. The total sentence is now amounting to eight years in jail. The 25-year-old, was apprehended by military council forces on October 30, 2021, and, according to family members, interrogated for 91 days before his arrest. [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, in Burmese]

Myanmar: Military forces carry on with village arsons

(jp) More than 18 months after the Myanmar military coup on February 1, 2021, the ensuing and reinforced armed conflicts across the country continue to claim hundreds of victims weekly.

On August 18, a 600-home village in the central Magwe Region was burned to the ground by a fire allegedly started by Myanmar's regime forces. [Irrawaddy] [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, in Burmese]

Just two days earlier, on August 16, troops from the military council entered another village reportedly setting more than 30 houses on fire. [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, In Burmese]

According to ISP-Myanmar, the Institute for Strategy and Policy, by August 12, more than 28,000 homes and other buildings, including places of worship, have been intentionally burned down since the military took control of the government. An independent research group, Data for Myanmar, that tracks arson attacks, also reports that as of May 31, junta forces had destroyed approximately 18,886 civilian houses and religious buildings in 335 locations.

Moreover, since the coup, hostilities have displaced more than 800,000 civilians across the country of approximately 55 million citizens, with the highest number occurring in the north-western Sagaing region, where more than 240,000 people have been displaced.

The Karen National Union (KNU), which opposes the military government also by its armed wing, the Karen national liberation Army (KNLA), announced on August 16 that the number of war-affected refugees has increased to over three and a half hundred thousand (356,674) within the administrative area controlled by the KNU. [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, In Burmese]

Myanmar: World's third-highest death toll of social aid workers

(jp) CARE International, a humanitarian aid NGO based in Switzerland, announced on August 16 that Myanmar ranks third in the world for the highest number of social relief worker deaths after South Sudan and Afghanistan.

In addition to the one million people who have fled their homes due to the civil war in Myanmar, CARE International reports that more than 13 million people are at risk of starvation. [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, in Burmese]

The Philippines: Asian poll watchdog defines 2022 Philippine elections credible despite vote-buying problem

(jd) The Asian Network for Free Election (ANFREL), an international alliance of election watchdogs in Asia, released its final comprehensive assessment of the

2022 Philippine elections defining the polls as overall "credible and genuine despite lingering issues and challenges."

In its report ANFREL stated that the Commission on Elections (Comelec) was capable of conducting technically sound elections, which would be largely peaceful. This is despite a number of shortcomings observed by critics such as a large number of vote-counting machines failures.

While the Asian poll watchdog defined the Comelec as highly capable, it also pointed out the suppression of criticism towards it and the delays in addressing the disqualification cases related to the eligibility of current President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. due to his tax conviction in the 1990s.

ANFREL also showed concern over the rampant vote-buying mechanism in the country which, according to the alliance, is the country's elections biggest flaw, observing how the rate could usually range from PHP 100 to PHP 2,000.

Before the elections the Comelec activated a task force to address the vote-buying situation, however it is yet to be seen if any of the complaints will go through.

According to the ANFREL, despite the transparency issues that need to be addressed, the election management in the Philippines can be considered of better quality compared to most Asian countries. [Rappler]

The Philippines: Human Rights Watch review to the Committee on the Rights of the Child

(jd) Human Rights Watch submitted its review of the Philippines with inputs related to the Philippines' compliance with its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The goal of the Human Rights Watch is to shed light on issues and questions that both the Committee members, and in this case the government of the Philippines, may want or need to address.

In this submission the areas of concern were related to the shackling of people with psychosocial disabilities and the protection of education from attacks during armed conflict.

In 2020 Human Rights published a report that documented the practice of shackling of people with mental health conditions in 60 countries, including the Philippines, observing how the practice is related to both inadequate support and access to mental health services, and the stigmatization of people with psychosocial disabilities.

Observers have noted how in the Philippines this practice can be common in remote provinces for reasons related to poverty and access to dedicated services.

Media in the Philippines have reported several cases of shackling over the years, which included several children as well.

To address the issue of shackling, the Human Rights Watch encourages the Committee to ask the Philippine government to provide data on the number of children that were victims of such practice, the measures already adopted by the government, and the steps it is willing to take to develop and support mental health services; it also asks the Committee to include some recommendations such as banning the practice through law, developing a proper support plan and ensuring it is provided effectively also to the children who have been released from that state, carrying out a deinstitutionalization policy and raising awareness about psychosocial disabilities.

For what it concerns the issue related to the protection of education from attacks, it has been observed that armed hostilities continued in the Philippines in 2020 and 2021 in Mindanao and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, in the south, and in Negros and the Central Visayas region, in the center of the country.

The cited violence and conflict affected children and obstructed their education.

Human Rights Watch encourages the Committee to ask the Philippine government for data on how many people have been prosecuted for attacks on schools and to recommend to the country to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration while sharing the Philippines laws and policies related to the protection of schools from attacks. [Human Rights Watch]

The Philippines: President Marcos Jr. invites social media vloggers while media sector remains under pressure

(jd) While facing challenges by some of the country´s established independent media, President Marcos Jr's government seeks to promote the vlogger community that strongly supported him during the recent national elections.

While the administration is considering accreditation for vloggers to report from the presidential palace, it is still unclear whether professional journalists will be welcome.

Many journalists fear, in fact, that the current administration could adopt the same hard line against media critics as its predecessor under Rodrigo Duterte.

In June, for instance, more than two dozen media web sites were blocked and accused of having links to "Communist-Terrorist Groups". Among the tagged media organizations were the independent news site Pinoy Weekly and the country's longest running online publication Bulatlat.

Under the Duterte administration, press freedom was systematically attacked with the former president having shut down ABS-CBN due to unfavorable coverage, and both Rappler and her founder journalist Maria Ressa having been confronted with several court cases.

According to many professional journalists in the country, there is no sign that the new administration will adopt a much different approach to media freedom. [Al Jazeera]

The Philippines: Police commanders directed to discipline personnel after 92 extortion cases filed

(jd) Philippine National Police (PNP) Chief Azurin requests his police commanders to exercise disciplinary authority over their personnel after reports on police crime. According to the PNP Integrity Monitoring and Enforcement Group (IMEG), an internal investigations unit, 92 cases of robbery and extortion have been filed against policemen only in July.

In addition, IMEG operatives have recently arrested three members of the Manila Police District for money extortion, while another policeman is wanted for alleged kidnapping and rape.

Against a recently adopted national police reform program, PNP chief Azurin requested superiiors to discipline their men or facing to be dismissed from

their posts, and "be replaced with more accountable and responsible PNP personnel." He also reminded the superior police officers that they could be held administratively accountable based on the doctrine of command responsibility. [Inquirer News] [Philstar]

The Philippines: Missionaries nuns charged with terror financing

(jd) On August 15, at least 16 people who are part of Rural Missionaries of the Philippines (RMP), including nuns, have been charged by the Department of Justice (DOJ) for the non-bailable accusation of allegedly funding the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples' Army (CPP-NPA).

The group of people were charged under the anti-terrorism financing act which penalizes individuals found to have made "available any property or funds, or financial services or other related services" to an individual or group tagged as terrorist.

In a press release, the DOJ accused RMP of funding CPP-NPA by wiring the latter a portion of money it received from foreign funders, basing the allegations on a probe by the Anti-Money Laundering Council and testimonies of people who claimed to be former communist insurgents.

RMP has consistently denied to be a communist related organization and has never been designed as a terrorist group. The CPP-NPA, on the other hand, was identified as such by the Anti-Terrorism Council in 2020. [Rappler]

On August 18, the nuns from the Rural Missionaries of the Philippines issued a statement denouncing the criminal charges filed by the Department of Justice defining them as "preposterous" as they affirmed that all of their projects and activities are well-documented, reported and accounted for. The nuns also stated that one of the former NPA members testified against them in exchange for the release of her mother.

The retired Bishop of Sorsogon said that by charging the nuns the state wanted to send a message of warning to silence all Marcos and Duterte dissenters within the Catholic Church by showing how they would have to face the consequences of criminal prosecution. [The Catholic Spirit]

The Philippines: Muslim women in Bangsamoro unite to lift region from poverty

(jd) In Bangsamoro, one of the poorest regions of southern Philippines, local Muslim women have joined forces with the goal to lift people in the region from poverty.

Bangsamoro, the only Muslim-majority territory in a predominantly Christian country, has been the center of a 2014-peace process after four decades of separatist conflicts which caused over 150,000 casualties.

Under the peace agreement, fighters agreed to turn over their firearms in exchange for self-administration leading to the formation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao in 2019. The transition of the region to autonomy is supposed to last until the election of its legislature and executive in 2025. The region is home to around 4.7 million people with a poverty incidence rate of 63 percent.

Against this background, the joint forces of the local women through cooperatives for economic empowerment started to work for uplifting the community by activities supporting agriculture, weaving and other craft, and the selling of related products to keep the organizations running. [Arab News]

Singapore: Government to repeal colonial-era law banning gay sex

(pe) After years of debate, Singapore has announced that it will repeal the colonial-era 377A law, which criminalises sex between two men. The law has been seen as effectively being a ban on homosexuality, with long standing campaigns both supporting and advocating against its removal.

LGBT activists have hailed the decision, announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on national television. However, they have also expressed concerns over his statements around gay marriage, delivered in the same speech. Lee stated that he would ensure better legal protection for the definition of marriage as one between a man and a woman, which may include changing the constitution, and could lead to challenges for those advocating for gay marriage in the country.

While conservative groups in Singapore have campaigned to keep the law in place, the government had in recent years promised not to enforce it. Observers state that the decision to repeal the law entirely demonstrates the desire of Singapore to be seen as a diverse global financial hub. [BBC] [The Guardian]

Singapore: Prime Minister calls for full backing of his successor in National Day Rally Speech

(pe) Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong has called on Singaporeans to back Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong as his successor, in his National Day Rally speech.

He spoke of the need for good leadership for the nation, in light of the uncertain economic challenges and political instabilities across the region. He stressed that Singapore, as a small nation, must ensure good leadership in the short and long terms, as a priority. He spoke of a fruitful future that he envisions for Singapore, provided Singaporeans put trust in the government.

Wong, his successor, currently serves as Deputy PM as well as Finance Minister. There is currently no clear plan for him to take over leadership. It has been suggested that he may take over before the next general election, which must be held by November 2025. Others have suggested that Lee would continue to lead the ruling party through the elections, passing to Wong once a victory is secured. [Straits Times]

Additional remarks made during the speech included assurances that the government will support Singaporeans amidst a rising cost of living, including cash payout schemes and tightening monetary policy. [Channel News Asia]

Thailand: Opposition group files petition to Constitutional Court on Prime Minister's debated term limit

(td) The opposition has filed a petition at the Constitutional Court to seek a ruling on the end of the term of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether the court will accept the case, and a ruling date is yet to be set.

With the mounting pressure on him, it rests on the court's nine-member judge panel to rule on the suspension of Prayut's premiership. Unless the court rules that he can remain in power, he and his cabinet ministers might stay on in a caretaker government, with Prawit Wongsuwan serving as Interim Prime Minister, although Prayut would still be allowed to attend cabinet meetings as the concurrent defense minister – pending a slap election.

In contrast, it is speculated that he will likely opt for a dissolution of the Parliament, prior to the verdict, to hold on to power as interim premier until a new cabinet is set up regardless of the Court's ruling. In this regard, according to the leader of the opposition Pheu Thai Party, he called for the Court's injunction to prevent any social disorder caused by his decision.

As of now, the Constitutional Court is merely the agency in charge of this controversial case as both the EC and the Office of the Ombudsman previously dismissed all the petitions filed by the opposition political activists to rule on Prayut's premiership term. Whereas the Ombudsman claimed they did not have an authority to act on the calls, the Election Commission considered that a group of 171 members of Parliament had submitted their petition to the Court already. Thus, it has sparked public outrage and led to suspicions of the independence of the agencies, whereby a prominent anti-graft activist would petition the National Anti-Corruption Commission.

Meanwhile, a dozen youths and political activists have resumed their protest to exert more pressure on Prayut. [AiR, No. 33, August/2022, 3][Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2][Bangkok Post 3][Bangkok Post 4][Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Former Prime Minister denies brokering secret coalition deal

(pe) Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has denied rumors that he has been brokering a coalition deal with the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) and the main opposition Pheu Thai Party.

Thaksin had been accused of having secret discussions with PPRP leader Gen Prawit Wongsuwon, who is also deputy prime minister. There has been much speculation that Pheu Thai and the PPRP were planning on striking an alliance, after both parties had backed changes in the MP-calculation methods that observers suggest would favor a coalition between the two. [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Member of ruling party resigns citing discontent with parliamentary debates

(td) A member of the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), commonly known as Madam Dear, announced her resignation from the party in a show of disapproval of the final parliamentary debate over the new electoral bill which failed due to the lack of quorum.

As a result, her party-list MP seat in the House of Representatives has been left vacant, and it is reported that the current government spokesperson, Thanakorn Wangboonkongchana, will take over her post. In her view, she was disappointed that the House had become an arena for political games, and by no means reflected the will of the people. In light of the matter, the majority of her fellow MPs from the ruling PPRP were intentionally absent to boycott the final session; otherwise, the parliament could have brought the new electoral bill to final discussion before its deadline on August 15. [AiR, No. 33, August/2022, 3][Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: 2023 Bangkok Metropolitan Administration budget approved

(fj) The Bangkok Metropolitan Council has approved the 2023 budget of THB 79.7 billion (USD 2.23 billion) allocated to the city's administration office (BMA).

This approval goes along with changes in the planned use of the annual budget, as the BMA is seeking to effectively address the capital's most pressing issues and improve residents' quality of life.

As cases in point, the BMA's Culture, Sports and Tourism Department and its Traffic and Transportation Department will receive budget rises of TBH 230.74 million (USD 6.45 million) and THB 165.52 million (USD 4.63 million) respectively. The Office of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation will obtain THB 466.45 million (USD 13.03 million), more than double its 2022 funding.

These adjustments are offset by cuts in other areas, among them the Public Works Department and the Drainage and Sewage Department, which see their budgets cut by THB 1.63 billion (USD 45.5 million) and THB 700.27 million (USD 19.57 million) respectively.

Bangkok's recently elected governor Chadchart Sittipunt has welcomed the approval of the budget, stressing the need to put the BMA's money to use prudently and in a way that will strengthen residents' trust in the city's democratic governance. [Bangkok Post] [The Nation Thailand]

Thailand: Cannabis and hemp bill scrutiny underway following push from opposition group

(td) Following Thailand's decriminalization of cannabis and hemp in June, the Stop Cannabis Addiction Movement (SCAM) has reportedly been a driving force behind the push for a new and stricter cannabis law to restrict the production and consumption of the substance. Consequently, to ensure social order and allay concerns, the House scrutiny committee has put forward the related bill to further readings after its first round.

In brief, the pending bill will ban vulnerable groups from accessing to marijuana-related products, restrict the number of plants each firm or household can possess, formalize the registration to seek permission, oversee the sale and export of cannabis products, confine them to medical centers, and ban them in the public.

Meanwhile the Public Health Ministry stands firm on the appropriate utilization of them for alternative medical purposes, the vast majority of public commentators consider that the term "decriminalization" has led to confusions and spelled the misuse of those lucrative plants. [Prachathai English][Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Four charged with murder of rights activist amidst debate over anti-disappearance law

(pe) Four officials have been formally charged with the abduction and murder of a human rights defender. This coincides with an ongoing push in Parliament to enact the country's first anti-disappearance law, which aims to bring greater protection for human rights campaigners in the country.

Porlajee "Billy" Rakchongcharoen was allegedly murdered in 2014, his supporters alleging that he was abducted due to his ongoing efforts to advocated for

the Karen people on Thailand. The four suspects include Chaiwat Limlikitaksorn, who was head of Kaeng Krachan National Park in Phetchaburi province at the time of Billy's disappearance. Billy has been campaigning against the national park's efforts to remove native Karen populations from the territory when he disappeared. Chaiwat had previously been acquitted of suspected involvement in the murder of another Karen-rights activist three years prior.

Those advocating for Billy have hailed the move to press charges on the accused, although some have expressed concerns that they do not have visibility over the quality and quantity of evidence stored, which may hinder the case.

This case has fuelled ongoing debate around the human rights situation for activists like Billy. Currently, a murder trial can only be pursued if the investigators are able to retrieve physical evidence, such as body parts. Activists argue that this has led to perpetrators kidnapping activists and avoiding retribution as they destroy all evidence.

In September 2021, Parliament adopted the Draft Prevention and Suppression of Torture and Enforced Disappearance Act. The bill broadens punishable acts related to kidnap and torture, as well as ensuring protections against evidence tampering or destruction. It also requires officials to make audio and video recordings while as part of the arrest and interrogation processes.

The draft bill is still being deliberated in the Parliament, as the Senate has voted to amend some provisions. Notably, one of these provisions include the removal of the stipulation that perpetrators could not be given amnesty. As a result of those changes, the bill has been returned to the lower House for approval. [Bangkok Post] [Prachatai 1] [Prachatai 2]

Thailand: Musician faces prison sentence for royal defamation

(pe) A musician has been sentenced to nine years in prison, after being found guilty of royal defamation due to Facebook posts he made in 2016.

Parinya Cheewinkulpathom, aka "Port Fai Yen" is a member of a Thai band, the other members of which have all fled Thailand. The posts that he made were critical of the royal defamation law and the severe penalties that it carries, and made implications about

the Monarchy that courts have found to violate that same law.

Parinya has been found guilty on all counts but has had his sentence reduced to six years in recognition of the testimony that he had given.

Human rights groups have reported that over 200 individuals have been charged with defaming the monarchy over the past 18 months. [Intell Asia] [Prachatai]

Thailand: Defense plan cleared despite fierce opposition

(pe) The Thai parliament has cleared a USD 5 billion allocation of the larger defense budget, despite arguments from the opposition.

The budget has been highly criticized by a number of MPs, who voiced concerns about the government's ever-increasing expenditure on defense, which some allege is mismanaged.

A cabinet resolution dictates that any initial allocation of budget that is approved by the scrutiny committee must account for over 10% of the entire budget earmarked for a programme. One MP argued that the initial fund recently approved by the government for jet procurement, broke this rule. Those opposing the defensive budget sought to use this as an example of mismanagement. However, the Deputy Chairman of the budget scrutiny panel dismissed these claims, saying that the issue could be resolved by asking the cabinet to waive this minimum requirement. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Separatist group claims arson attacks in 17 Locations in southernmost provinces

(fj) Between August 16 and 17 a wave of coordinated arson and bomb attacks occurred at 17 locations across the southernmost provinces of Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat, leaving a 21-year-old dead and at least seven more people slightly injured. The attacks, for which the separatist group Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) has claimed responsibility in a social media post, targeted convenience stores, petrol stations and a cellular tower.

According to the BRN, these targets were chosen as representations for Thai capitalism, which the militant group perceives to have a destructive effect on local communities and their economies. In an attempt to underline the symbolic and circumspect nature of their attacks, the BRN stressed that it had warned staff and customers about the imminent danger and offered condolences to the family of the deceased victim.

The central Thai government has reacted strongly to the events, declaring that security levels were heightened in response to the attacks and that concerted efforts would be made to catch the perpetrators. Furthermore, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has condemned the acts, stressing the considerable material and personal damage has been incurred through the attacks, thereby counteracting the efforts of the BRN to style their actions as proportional and benign. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

These attacks mark the latest outbreak of violence in the long-standing insurgency in the country's southernmost provinces, which has claimed more than 7300 lives over the last 18 years. While the level of violence has been on a steady downward trend over the last eight years, this incident suggests that many of the grievances fueling the insurgency in Thailand's only three provinces with a Muslim majority remain unaddressed. [The Diplomat] [Deep South Watch, in Thai]

Vietnam: Homosexuality is 'not a desease,' government says

(bs) The Vietnamese ministry of health is ready to outlaw conversion therapy for LGBTQ+ people. According to a LGBTQ+ activist, the government has officially announced that homosexuality is "not a disease" denouncing the practice of conversion therapy.

Official authorities have informed provincial and municipal health departments across the country, while the government published the announcement online in early August.

The announcement followed with further guidelines, which include enhancing educational activities on the LGBTQ+ community, monitoring medical centers, instructing the medical staff on the most appropriate mechanisms, and spreading awareness. [Aljazeera]

Vietnam: Religious groups cancel celebrations fearing authorities' crackdown

(bs) The Vietnamese authorities led a crackdown on a religious pilgrimage group on August 20, two days ahead of the celebration of the "International Day Commemorating Victims of Violence based on Religion or Belief."

The police forced a religious group in the southwestern An Giang province to disperse while celebrating the memorial day.

Meanwhile, in other provinces across the country several religious groups opted against the celebrations fearing police harassment.

Since late-2021, Vietnam has increasingly monitored activities by religious and ethnic groups. According to local activists, the government has been cracking down particularly on religious dissidents and religious minorities, the Protestant Ede and Duong Van Minh sect to mention two.

Moreover, in July, the authorities arrested members of the Peng Lei Buddhist House, which led to a widely criticized combined sentence of more than 23 years for six members of the religious group charged with "abusing democratic freedoms" under Article 331 of the Criminal Code. [Radio Free Asia]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

International Monetary Fund requests ‘adequate assurances' from Sri Lanka’s creditors

(msk) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has requested “adequate assurances” from Sri Lanka’s creditors for a new program as representatives of the Washington-based lender prepare to visit Colombo this week. The goal of the visit is to make progress on a staff-level agreement for an aid package “in the near term,” to help the island nation weather a severe economic crisis, the IMF said on August 19. [NDTV]

President Ranil Wickremesinghe earlier this month told Parliament that the loan package being negotiated with the IMF is for between USD 2 and 3 USD billion. Wickremesinghe also said he would present an interim budget in September focusing on fiscal consolidation measures agreed with the multilateral lender. [AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1]

Reuters reported last week that Sri Lanka will ask Japan to invite the Indian Ocean island’s main creditor nations, including China and India, to talks on bilateral debt restructuring.

Delays in coal-plant closure likely to stall India’s climate action

(vv) The Indian government has dulled-down on its reduction in using coal-fired power plants as it adds more such sites, a move that only extends its reliance on fossil-fuel generated energy for a longer period of time and stalls any climate change efforts. [The Straits Times]

As India is confronted by surging electricity demand amidst a global energy crisis, officials have proposed to reduce less than 5 gigawatts of existing coal-fired energy and fuel, as compared to government’s claims in 2020 of reducing 25 gigawatts of fossil-fuel generated energy by the end of the decade. Officials studying the matter believe this reduced shuttering of coal-fired capacity only harms India’s pursuits of climate action, amidst rising concerns of pollution and other climate concerns in the country.

While Prime Minister Modi seeks to create a solar and wind power hub in India and produce 500 gigawatts of clean power capacity by 2030, the frustratingly high gas and fuel prices at present has made India burn more coal and possibly continue its reliance on coal

power for decades more. The same trend seems to be followed in other parts of the world too, as the West seems to depend more on fossil fuel generated energy amidst a global energy crisis.

South Korea joins Australia-led multi-national military exercise

(dql/my) South Korea are participating for the first time in the 2022 Pitch Black military exercise, a large-scale, multi-national air force exercise that is hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force and attended also by Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the United Arab Emirates, the U.K., and the U.S. Besides South Korea, Germany and Japan are also joing the exercise for the first time.

The biannually held drills kicked off on August 10 and will run until September 8, involving about 100 aircraft and 2,500 personnel. [Air Force Technology]

South Korea will deploy a squadron of KF-16 fighters as well as one KC-330 tanker plane and some 130 personnel to the exercise. The KC-330 tanker aircraft would provide aerial refueling for the six KF-16 fighter jets, which will be the first direct refueling mission for KC-330. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean]

Concurrently, the Ulchi Freedom Shield (UFS), a joint South Korea-US live-fire exercises, is running from August 22 to September 1, involving thousands of troops and combine land, sea and air forces.

According to the South Korean Defense Ministry, the government and the military will exercise government-wide crisis management and aid procedures, in an effort to strengthen their ability to carry out an all-out war in preparation for North Korean provocation. The UFS exercises will be divided into two parts: training to defend the Seoul area, and training for counterattack operations to ensure the safety of the capital region.

Prior to the main practice, South Korea and the US conducted a four-day pre-training crisis management practice from August 16. [KBS World] [DW]

Meanwhile, North Korea's media outlet Ryeomyeong denounced UFS as "a pathetic action that confronts a nuclear power." It continued, "[d]espite our repeated warnings and great concerns, Yoon Seok-yeol's traitorous faction joined forces with the US to push

ahead with the joint military exercise, a large-scale exercise for the invasion war." [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean]

Japan, the U.S. and South Korea conduct Pacific Dragon drills

(sb) On August 18, the Pentagon reported the end of the multinational Pacific Dragon drills held from 8 to 14 Aug., in which the U.S., South Korea and Japan took part.

It has been the first time since 2017 that the three countries collaborated in a ballistic missile defense exercise off the Pacific Missile Range Facility (PMRF) in Hawaii to tackle North Korea threat, protect security and international order. Participants also shared tactical data link information following a trilateral information sharing agreement. [Japan Today] [Department of Defense, USA]

Meanwhile, on August 15, Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada held a phone call with the U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, with both minister reassuring the importance of boosting the Japan-U.S. alliance for a free and open Indo-Pacific, while condemning China's military drills in the region. Hamada has also communicated that Japan is planning to increase its defense capabilities for national security, a long-held demand of the U.S.

They agreed to have closer cooperation with South Korea, especially in response to North Korea ballistic missile and nuclear tests. [Kyodo News]

Bangladesh to start free trade talks with India, despite request from China, Japan

(af/lm) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheik Hasina has greenlighted formal negotiations with neighboring India on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), two weeks before a proposed visit to New Delhi starting September 6. The CEPA with India would be Bangladesh's first trade pact with any country, and Dhaka seems to have given preference to New Delhi despite requests from China and Japan. [Dhaka Tribune] [Financial Express]

According to a feasibility study of Bangladesh's Foreign Trade Institute and India's Center for Regional Trade, the deal will increase the export earnings of

Bangladesh by USD 3-5 billion and that of India by USD 4-10 billion. [The Economic Times]

Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia, and India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh.

Beijing to accept punitive measure against contractor after fatal collapse of elevated bus line in Bangladesh

(az/lm) China has assured Bangladesh that it was to accept any punitive punishment against a Chinese company, China Gezhouba Group Corporation, after a section of an elevated rapid transit route built by the company collapsed and killed five people driving on a road underneath. [Radio Free Asia]

Gezhouba Group is building the 20.2-kilometers-long rapid transit line, which will connect the Gazipur area of Dhaka with Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The disaster was the third mishap to occur along the elevated route since March 2021, and the second deadly one since last month.

It was reported that a high-level delegation of the Chinese contractor for the project has already arrived in Bangladesh to investigate the incident by providing all necessary assistance to the probe committee formed by the Road Transportation and Highways Division. [bdnews24] [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh to return Rohingya refugees to Myanmar

(jp) On August 15, United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet visited Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar region. Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh's Prime Minister, informed the head of the UN Human Rights Office that Rohingya refugees who fled violent persecution in Myanmar must return to their country. During her visit, refugees begged Bachelet to help make Myanmar a safer place to live so they could return home.

Worth mentioning is that Myanmar denies citizenship and other rights to members of the Rohingya Muslim ethnic minority.

In August 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh in response to a rebel attack.After nearly five years, Bangladesh has become impatient with its large refugee population, and Bachelet is concerned about "increasing anti-Rohingya rhetoric" and the scapegoating of the Rohingya people.

In March, after reports of widespread atrocities against civilians by Myanmar's military were confirmed, the United States labelled the persecution of Rohingya people in Myanmar "genocide." [Alijazeera] [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, in Burmese] [Radio Free Asia, Facebook, in Burmese] [OHCHR]

Cambodia's defense minister signs military cooperation agreement with China

(fe) On August 13–16, Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF)'s General Tea Banh met with his Chinese counterpart, Weng Fei He, to discuss strengthening cross-border military cooperation. During the meetings, the parties signed agreements on Military Cooperation and Military Techniques Cooperation. These protocols will enhance the fighting capability of the RCAF in addition to modernizing the hardware and software infrastructure of Cambodia and boosting the nation's military industry.Tea Banh stated that organizing upcoming meetings of a joint commission between the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) and the RCAF was the primary goal of the visit.

Tea Banh claims that two subcommittees, one for military cooperation and the other for military-technical cooperation, have been established between China and Cambodia. Future discussions would also cover the RCAF's medium- and long-term development goals, as well as some immediate practical agreements between the RCAF and PLA to facilitate China's military assistance to Cambodia. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia increases efforts to combat human trafficking by assisting foreign victims

(fe) Following Taiwan's declaration to liberate more than 300 of its residents who were lured into Cambodia by illegal scam groups, the country has increased its efforts to assist foreigners victims of human trafficking. The majority of the victims were promised high salaries for job positions in IT, but were

instead made to work in call centers where they were mostly duped into paying for fraudulent government fees or investment opportunities. [The Star]

Several people have reportedly been seized on suspicion of human trafficking activities, while another group of victims have been placed in protective custody, according to Interior Minister Sar Kheng. He claimed that police were still working to ascertain the factuality of the victims' claims and that several foreigners had admitted to the authorities that they had been tricked to Cambodia for what they thought were legitimate jobs with excellent pay, but they had been forced to work illegally at jobs that were not what they had agreed to.

Police at Taoyuan International Airport have been patrolling with banners alerting travelers to the risks of phony job offers that promise huge profits in Southeast Asia. More than a dozen people have been jailed in Taiwan as a result of recruitment strategies that attempted to lure young people into vocations touted as extremely lucrative opportunities in computer engineering and similar fields. To track down fraudsters, Taiwanese authorities have also contacted travel providers. [ABC News]

Cambodia, Philippines celebrate 65th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic ties

(jd/fe) On the occasion of the 65th anniversary of diplomatic relations between The Philippines and Cambodia, the leaders of the two countries have exchanged letters in order to celebrate and reaffirm the strength of their ties while pledging to improve their relations.

Cambodia's King Norodom Sihamoni expressed in a letter his strong belief that the close ties based on friendship and cooperation between the two countries, which started in 1957, will continue to prosper and grow despite the impacts of regional and global challenges.

The Prime Minister of Cambodia reaffirmed the commitment to work more closely together for the mutual benefit of the people and the prosperity of the ASEAN community.

In his letter to the king and the prime minister of Cambodia, Philippines' President Marcos Jr. has declared his reciprocal commitment to further strengthen and expand their partnership and cooperation, as both countries strive towards greater

economic and social development for the benefit of their peoples.

An exchange of diplomatic letters was also made between the Cambodian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and his Philippines' counterpart, in which both stated that they are committed to deepening ties between the two countries. [Philippine News Agency] [The Phnom Penh Post]

Japan Security Advisor holds talks with Chinese top diplomat, agrees to uphold communication amid increasing tensions

On August 17, Japanese Security Advisor Takeo Akiba held his first in-person meeting with Yang Jiechi, Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission General Office of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and member of the CCP Politburo, vowing to keep up communication but also exchanging opposing views on Taiwan.

Because multiple Chinese rockets landed in the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone after being fired in military drills that were held in response to US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2], Akiba reiterated the Japanese protest against the Chinese military drill around Taiwan and stated that peace and stability in the Taiwan strait is essential. However, Yang reiterated the Chinese stance and claimed that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China.

A previous meeting between the Chinese and Japanese foreign ministers which was scheduled for August 4 was previously canceled by China after Japan urged China to stop its military drills. On August 18, the Chinese Foreign Ministry again criticized the Japanese approach toward Taiwan, claiming that Japan "supports US erroneous moves and unwantedly accuses [and] smears China." The Foreign Ministry also reiterated that China does not recognize the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone.

Due to the continuous territorial disputes and steadily increasing Chinese military capabilities but also the threat posed by North Korea, the Japanese government is reportedly seeking to boost its counterattack capability, modifying existing missile systems to extend their range from 100km to 1.000km so that they are able to reach coastal areas of both North Korea and China. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [The Japan Times] [The Yomiuri Shimbun] [Xinhua]

However, despite the current deterioration in relations Japan and China both sides seem to have the intention of fostering diplomatic exchange. According to the Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi, Japan is currently considering a summit between Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Claiming that "Japan is always open to dialogue" Hayashi said that the meeting, which is most likely going to take place online or via phone call, will be held in the spirit of improving bilateral relations. [Reuters 3] [Voice of America]

Chinese President Xi Jinping to attend G20 summit alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin

(jw) Chinese President Xi Jinping as well as his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin will attend the G20 summit in November, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said in a Bloomberg interview on August 16. Should Putin and Xi attend the summit hosted by G20 chair Indonesia, the summit would be the first global summit since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the heightened tensions over Taiwan [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2].

After declaring their "no-limits strategic partnership" shortly before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, China and Russia kept close ties and will most likely be confronted at the summit over Ukraine as well as Taiwan and other issues that put a strain on their relations with western countries, primarily the US. Previously, the US and European countries indicated their disapproval of Putin being allowed to attend the summit but did not further pursue efforts to expel Russia from the forum against resistance from countries like China and India with closer ties to Russia. [BBC] [Bloomberg] [CNN] [Reuters 1]

Meanwhile, China and Russia continue their close economic partnership with China importing a large portion of the goods that western countries reject due to the continuing Russian war in Ukraine. New data on July 2022 show that Russia remained China's largest oil supplier before Saudi Arabia. China was also Russia's largest oil buyer. Furthermore, Chinese imports of Russian coal increased heavily, jumping to their highest in at least five years in July. Western countries disapprove of the close economic ties between China and Russia but indicated that China would only be punished if it directly undermines sanctions on Russia for example by providing military support. [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3]

China imposes sanctions on seven Taiwanese politicians

(gö/ms) China imposed sanctions on seven Taiwanese politicians following the most recent Taiwan trips of US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi's and US lawmaker Ed Markey's delegations. The seven Politicians and their families are no longer allowed to travel to mainland China or the special administrative regions of Hong Kong and Macau. Companies and its associated investors are also not permitted to profit in China anymore.

Amongst the affected are politicians such as Xiao Biqian, Taiwan's representative to the US, Hsiao Bi-khim who serves as deputy representative, Secretary-General of Taiwan's National Security Council Wellington Koo, and Ker Chien-ming, majority leader of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taiwan's parliament.

In addition, separate sanctions will also be imposed on Su Tseng-chang, Premier Minister of Taiwan, You Si-kun President of the Legislative Yuan, the legislative body of the Taiwanese government and founding member of the DPP, and Jaushieh Joseph Wu, Foreign Minister of Taiwan. [Reuters] [Aljazeera]

Lithuania protests against sanctions imposed on deputy transport minister due to Taiwan visit

(jw) According to the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, Lithuania summoned the Chinese Chargé d'Affaires, issuing a formal diplomatic protest to China on August 19, demanding that China lifts restrictions that were imposed on Lithuanian deputy transport minister Agne Vaiciukeviciute after her visit to Taiwan between August 7 and August 11 [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3].

A statement released by the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry claimed that the Chinese "unilateral decision [to impose sanctions] was unjustified" and "violated international law and Lithuania's sovereignty". The Chinese Foreign Ministry claimed that the sanctions are legitimate, stating that the Vaiciukevisiute's visit "clearly violates Lithuania's political commitment to upholding the one-China principle, the common understanding of the international community and

basic norms in international relations." [Global Times] [Lithuania Foreign Ministry] [Reuters]

Chinese-Canadian tycoon Xiao Jianhua sentenced to 13 years in prison

(jw) Chinese-born Canadian citizen Xiao Jianhua was sentenced to 13 years in prison on charges of financial offenses after last being seen in January 2017 before he was taken from a Hong Kong hotel. Xiao, who made billions investing in banks, insurance firms, real estate and agriculture was reportedly held in isolation by Chinese authorities, prompting concerns about Hong Kong's judicial independence a few years before extradition from Hong Kong to China was legalized despite heavy protests. [see AiR No. 28, July/2022, 2]

Xiao as well as his company both pleaded guilty to the charges and were fined USD 950.000 and USD 8.1 billion respectively. Canada complained that Canadian diplomats were barred from seeing Xiao. However, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, China does not recognize Xiao's dual citizenship and treats him as a Chinese citizen. [Associated Press] [BBC]

China tests missile ahead of US-India joint military exercises close to disputed Tibetan border

(jw) While the US and Indian military prepare for joint military drills in the Himalaya, close to the Chinese border, China tested an updated surface-to-air defence missile in Xinjiang. Observers cited by the South China Morning Post said the missiles are HQ-17A air defense missiles which belong to a highly mobile and accurate system that can fit into one vehicle.

The missile act is reportedly also intended as a show of force and an act of deterrence shortly before the US and India will hold joint military drills less than 100km away from the disputed border between India and China. According to the US State Department, the drills are a crucial element for the "shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region" [CNN] [South China Morning Post] [The Hindustan Times]

India, Thailand review trade, defense ties during Jaishankar visit to Bangkok

(vv/lm) During a visit by India's Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar's visit to Thailand both countries reviewed the progress made across areas of bilateral cooperation, including trade, security and defense. The visit, which ran from August 16 to 18, was to co-chair the ninth meeting of the India-Thailand Joint Commission. Both countries also mark the 75th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations and mutual cooperation. [Bangkok Post] [NewsOnAIR] [The Print]

Jaishankar used an event in Bangkok to defend New Delhi's decision to import crude oil from Russia amidst the Ukraine-Russia war and global surge in energy prices, claiming that India chose the best deal to support energy demand in its country. He also said India's diplomatic relations with the ASEAN is a milestone in India's foreign policy and diplomacy, making India and Southeast countries strong partners in coordinated efforts to development in the Asian region as a whole. [NewsOnAIR] [Hindustan Times]

He also defended his country's ties with the Myanmar junta, saying New Delhi's position on Myanmar has been consistent over decades and goes back to the country's struggle for freedom against colonialism. He also said that, as a direct neighbor, India could not avoid dealing with the military junta regime because of border issues such as organized crime, coronavirus and Indian insurgents in Myanmar. [The Straits Times]

India's top Security Advisor on Russia visit, meets counterpart for defense talks

(vv) India's National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval met his Russian NSA Nikolai Patrushev in Moscow on August 17 to discuss defense, energy, counterterrorism, and Afghanistan, among other areas of mutual concern. [The Print]

Patrushev visited India twice last year to discuss Indo-Russia's joint efforts in establishing mechanisms to deal with the current situation in Afghanistan, especially on account of India extending its diplomatic presence in Kabul.

Doval's current visit echoes the diplomatic dialogue held earlier, including some prevailing matters that the international community has much criticism for. Given India's purchase of crude oil from Russia, at a time when the West has imposed economic sanctions on Russia due to the Russia-Ukraine war, defense and security cooperation between India and Russia had

become more pertinent, claimed both NSAs. [Economic Times]

India and Russia have outlined a coordinated defense map, given the many defens- related equipment both countries have sold to each other at special prices. Russia also appreciated India's independent stand at the UNSC over the Ukraine Russia War and has beat Saudi Arabia to become India's second-largest crude oil supplier. The purchase of crude oil from Russia, at discounted prices, have helped India manage the surging energy demand amidst a rapidly growing population in the country and a global energy crisis, claims Indian Foreign Minister Dr. S Jaishankar. India and Russia have also approached a progressive trade relation, with more Indian retailers establishing presence in Russia.

Meanwhile, India claims to have taken note of Ukraine's growing diplomatic relations with neighbor Pakistan, given the long-standing security tensions between India and Pakistan, and Ukraine's stand on the Kashmir issue at UNHCR. The recent statements of Ukraine's Foreign Minister's response to India defending their crude oil purchase from Russia has also caught the attention of Indian authorities, without giving away much on their exact views.

India, Singapore vow to boost bilateral ties

(pe) India and Singapore have jointly agreed to strengthen their cooperation across a range of areas, including trade, investment and innovation, as well as defense.

The talks, which took place during the 16th round of Foreign Office Consultations, are part of a regular dialogue between the two nations. Besides discussing relations with Singapore, India also indicated a desire to raise ASEAN engagements to a higher level.

Additionally, the increased number of Indian tourists in ASEAN was discussed, with the parties agreeing on the need to explore facilitating more green travel options. [Republic World]

Indonesia, Singapore conduct bilateral naval exercises

(pe) The Singapore and Indonesian navies took part in a bilateral military exercise, hailed by the countries' respective defense ministers as a testament to their close relationship.

The exercise, called the Joint Minex Pandu is one of many regular joint exercises, conducted by the two nations that share a maritime border. During the session, a number of mine-countermeasures, table-top planning exercises, and live gunnery firing activities were carried out. [Straits Times]

Indonesia, European Union launch first navy exercise on anti-piracy operations

(ai) On August 13-14, the Indonesian navy and the European Union (EU) navy conducted a joint military exercise. Indonesia was represented by the corvette KRI Sultan Iskandar, while the EU, instead, was represented by the NAVFOR Somalia with the Operation Atlanta frigate.

The exercise between the two navies was carried out in the framework of an anti-piracy operation. Moreover, the exercise included other military technologies such as cross-deck helicopters and practical exercises such as boarding suspicious vassals.

This first exercise could turn into a closer one between Indonesia and the European Union, which could strengthen the exchange of information and experiences for the security of the Indo-Pacific.[Tempo English] [Tempo English][Naval News] [Navaltday.com] [EEAS.EUROPA]

A.M Farul Baqi contributed research to this article

Australia concerned over Bali bomb maker's early release

(jvk) Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese expressed distress in the Indonesian court's decision to reduce the prison sentence of a man involved in a 2002 terror attack, known as the Bali bombings. Australia is expected to make diplomatic contact with Indonesia over the issue.

The man had made the bomb responsible for the terror attack in Bali that killed 202 people, among them 88 Australian citizens. He was given a five-month prison sentence reduction as part of a series of remissions granted to inmates. He was a member of

the Al-Qaeda linked militant group, Jemaah Islamiyah. [Jakarta Post] [South China Morning Post]

A.M Farul Baqi contributed research to this article

Japan resumes import of Russian energy sources, plans to remain in the Sakhalin 2 gas project

(sb) The Japanese Finance Ministry has released information according to which Japan has resumed its purchases of Russian oil in July, after the imports from Russia went down to zero in June.

According to the Ministry, July oil imports from Russia were 65.4 percent lower than the same time last year, while imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and coal also saw a decrease by 26.1 percent and 40.1 percent respectively, compared with July 2021. However, due to rising commodity prices, the value of these imports rose by 45.1%.

This is in line with a statement in May by then Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Koichi Hagiuda who said that while Japan will reduce its reliance on Russia energy resources, an immediate cut was not feasible. [The Economic Times]

Meanwhile, Japan will reportedly remain in Russia's Sakhalin 2 oil and gas project and will announce its intention by the early September deadline, set by the project's new operator that was established under a decree signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in June and that is affiliated with Russian energy company Gazprom. The decree effectively brought the project under the control of the Russian government [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2].

This comes after the new operator has submitted an offer to Japanese power companies and other buyers with the same prices, supply levels and other conditions as before.

As Sakhalin 2 is a key supply source for some Japanese energy firms, accounting for about 9 percent of Japan's imports of liquefied natural gas, the Japanese government is in talks with several energy companies as well as with trading houses trading Mitsui & Co. and Mitsubishi Corp., which both hold 12.5 percent and 10 percent stakes in the project, over the importance of their stay in the project. [Kyodo News] [Japan Today]

Large Japanese delegation visits Mongolia

(dql) A large Japanese delegation of nearly 90 people consisting of representatives of culture, arts and nine members of parliament and government, led by Moto Hayashi, member of the House of Representatives of the Japanese Parliament and Chairman of the Japan-Mongolia Parliamentary Friendship Group. The visit comes as both countries celebrate 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

During a meeting with Chairman of the Mongolian Parliament G. Zandanshatar, both sides discussed bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the public and private sectors and exchanged views on regional and international arenas. [Montsame]

For a discussion of Mongolia's role in Japanese foreign policy under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe under whom the two countries became strategic partners, see Bolor Lkhaajav in [The Diplomat].

Myanmar military to import oil from Russia

(jp) At a news conference on August 17, a Myanmar military spokesperson revealed that Junta Chief Min Aung Hlaing had previously visited Russia and discussed the country's oil and gas resources. The country through which Myanmar now imports its fuel in Singapore. Following the conference, Myanmar now has the authorization to import gasoline from Russia.

Publicly available reports indicate that the first shipment of fuel oil will commence in September. According to a statement published in a state-run newspaper, the Myanmar military has formed a Russian Oil Purchasing Committee. This committee will be headed by a close ally of Min Aung Hlaing and will oversee fuel purchasing, importing, and transporting at reasonable prices following Myanmar's requirements.

In addition to political instability and civil unrest, Myanmar has been severely impacted by high fuel prices and power outages. As a result, the country's military leadership has been forced to import fuel oil for use in power plants. Since the military takeover in February of the prior year, fuel prices have increased by approximately 350%, reaching roughly $1 (2,300–2,700 kyat) per liter. According to media reports, gas stations in several regions have ceased operations in the past week due to a lack of fuel. [VOA News] [Eleven Myanmar] [Bloomberg]

Kim Yo-jong slams Seoul's denuclearization policy

(my) Kim Yo-jong, younger sister of North Korean Kim Jong-un and widely believed to be second in power only to him in North Korea, expressed her strong rejection of the South Korean government's "audacious initiative".

The "audacious initiative" is an approach of the Yoon Suk-yeol administration toward North Korea, aiming at providing economic and diplomatic aid to North Korea in return for denuclearization steps on Pyongyang's side.

In a statement titled "[d]on't dream in vain," released on August 19, Kim criticized "[t]he audacious initiative is the height of stupidity," and that it is a replica of 'denuclearization, open and 3000' suggested by former President Lee Myung-bak (2008-2013).

North Korean media Tongil Shinbo had already criticized the policy saying it is just a modified version of Lee's plan that was "thrown in a trash bin ten years ago" on August 7. [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2] The 'denuclearization, open and 3000' policy planned to provide North Korea with the aid necessary to raise its per capita income to USD 3,000 within 10 years if it chose to denuclearize. [KyungHyang, in Korean] [Yonhap News Agency]

Meanwhile, North Korea fired two cruise missiles on August 17 – two days after Yoon's Liberation Day speech. The two missiles were fired into the Yellow Sea/West Sea from Onchon in South Pyongan Province, North Korea.

The South Korean presidential office explained that it held a meeting to check the security situation to check the readiness of the Korean military. [CNN]

South Korean ex-spy chief warns the North's nuclear test

(my) Park Jie-won, a former director of the National Intelligence Service of South Korea, claimed on August 22 that North Korea would likely conduct a nuclear test before the US midterm elections in November to demonstrate its nuclear capability.

"They are going to demonstrate a threat that its missile can fly to the US carrying a miniaturized and lighter

warhead, and to strike a blow at the Joe Biden administration ahead of the midterm elections," Park stated in an interview with KBS Radio.

Additionally, Park warned that the North could act provocatively in opposition to the joint military exercises that South Korea and the US began on August 22.

It is estimated that North Korea has finished all required preparations for its seventh nuclear test since June. The North's latest nuclear test was conducted in September, 2017. [Yonhap News Agency]

Pakistan to dissolve CPEC Authority once China agrees

(sg) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced his country's intention to dissolve the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Authority. Sharif justified the decision as a move to fast-track the implementation of CPEC projects, the progress of which has stalled in recent months.

The multi-billion-dollar CPEC scheme is a flagship of the Chinese Belt and Road initiative. It aims to link the western Chinese region of Xinyang with the port of Gwadar in Pakistan's Balochistan Province through a series of large infrastructure projects. The USD 60 billion economic programs are contentious, with many projects delayed and growing resentment towards the Chinese in Pakistan.

According to *The Express Tribune*, as of May 2022, only 3 of 15 projects in the port of Gwadar have been completed, while nine others remain far behind schedule. In addition, Beijing has grown frustrated with increasing security threats against the Chinese residing in Pakistan. In April this year, a suicide attack against a language institute in Karachi led to deaths of three Chinese teachers [see AiR No. 18, May/2022, 1]

According to Pakistani officials, the CPEC Authority had become an obstruction to the rapid implementation of projects due to the collapse of relevant decision-making chains. The previous government of former Prime Minister Imran Khan had reluctantly ratified the CPEC Authority. Still, it refrained from filling its chairman's post after Lt Gen Asim Saleem Bajwa stepped down late last year. In the future, the planning and development ministry in Islamabad aims to oversee CPEC projects. [The Express Tribune]

In response to Pakistan's request to dissolve the CPEC Authority, the Chinese Foreign Ministry on August 21 commented: "China understands the efforts of the Pakistani side dedicated to integrating resources, improving efficiency and adjusting institutions." The statements did not explicitly state approval to Islamabad decision. [The Wire]

Iran, Pakistan agree to sign free trade deal in coming months

(sg) Iran and Pakistan signed multiple Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) during the 21st meeting of the Iran-Pakistan Joint Economic Commission (JEC) in Islamabad last week. In addition, the two countries announced their intention to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in the coming months.

The meeting marked the first JEC summit since 2017, with Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi heading the Iranian delegation to the three-day talks, focusing on establishing stronger cooperation with Islamabad. The two sides signed three MoUs in maritime, museum, and information broadcasting and discussed proposals to develop more significant barter trade. [The News International]

Tehran and Islamabad, who currently enjoy a preferential trade agreement, discussed the fast-tracked implementation of their FTA, with a high-ranking official stating that the two countries are expected to sign an agreement within the next six months. [PressTV.ir]

This pact would make Iran one of Pakistan's closest trading partners – only three other countries, Sri Lanka, China, and Malaysia, share this link. The news comes just one week after Pakistan signed a Preferential Trade Agreement with close ally Turkiye [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3].

For Pakistan, close cooperation with Tehran opens significant trade opportunities with the wider Central Asian region and Europe. Iran could also become a substantial source for Pakistan's strained energy supply by providing much-needed Liquified Natural Gas (LNG). [The Express Tribune]

However, a lack of connectivity between the two countries could hamper bilateral trade. Ongoing western sanctions against Iran have prevented the establishment of significant banking and business relations. In addition, a gas pipeline between the two

countries has faced significant delays amid sanctions and political pressure.

India, Pakistan's nemesis, has also sought to mend ties with Iran to boost trade with Russia and Central Asian countries. New Delhi sees Tehran as a crucial point in its International North-South Transport Corridor from Russia to India and South-East Asia. Likewise, connectivity has remained a problem; however, the two have now agreed to funnel trade through Chabahar Port, Iran's only port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. Chabahar lies just 80km from Pakistan's Gwadar Port, the principal seaport along the flagship China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1]

Pakistan's army chief to visit United States soon, report claims

(sg) The United States and Pakistan officials are discussing a potential trip by Pakistan's army chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa to Washington in the coming weeks, the *Dawn* newspaper reported, citing a diplomatic source. [The Hindu]

Recently, Bajwa has played an increasingly important role in Pakistani foreign politics. In the last few weeks, the army chief called on high-level officials from the US, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2], while also representing the Queen of the United Kingdom Elizabeth II at the Sovereign's Parade at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst on August 12 [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3].

The news comes after General Bajwa reached out to United States Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, seeking Washington's help in securing an early release of an essential USD 1.17 billion installments from the International Monetary Fund to his country [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1].

Against this backdrop, the expected visit is seen by many as proof of Islamabad's growing ties with the West. Relations between Islamabad and Washington had soured under Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in April. Khan antagonized the US throughout his tenure, welcoming the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan last year and accusing Washington of being behind the attempt to oust him – a claim consistently dismissed by the US and Pakistan's National Security Council, a body of top civil and military leaders.

Notably, reports of a possible trip to Washington emerged as General Bajwa hosted US Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander General Michael E. Kurilla at the Pakistan Army General Headquarters on August 18. The pair discussed Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts, regional peace and stability contributions, and a joint Pakistan-US military exchange training program. [Dawn]

Pakistan, United Kingdom reach deal over criminal repatriation

(tj/msk) Pakistan has signed a deal with the United Kingdom to expedite the repatriation of criminals and rejected asylum seekers, an agreement that was criticized by some for favoring London. [Arab News] [Gulf News]

The agreement was signed by Pakistan's Interior Secretary Yousaf Naseem Khokhar and British Home Secretary Priti Patel on August 17. Patel had pushed for the reciprocal deal, as she reportedly has plans to create a performance table of countries based on their willingness to cooperate over the return of foreign criminals from Britain.The deal with the South Asian country follows similar agreements with Serbia, Nigeria, Albania and India.

Among foreign criminals in Britain, Pakistanis make up the seventh-largest nationality. Between January 2019 and December of last year, the UK has deported almost 11,000 foreign national offenders globally.

However, UK-based immigration lawyers have raised several objections on the deal and termed it as favoring the UK. They argue that Islamabad does not have the infrastructure to support the convicts once they are back in Pakistan. [The News]

United States delegation visits former Filipino senator in detention

(jd) A US congressional delegation of lawmakers was allowed to visit former Philippines' Senator De Lima, who has been in jail since 2017 due to drug charges attributed to her after speaking out against the controversial war on drugs adopted by the previous Duterte administration.

Led by Senator Markey, the delegation was previously denied visiting de Lima due to pending approval from the court but were then able to see her after the

Department of Justice allowed the former senator's urgent motion for the court's approval.

After the visit the delegation did not meet with the press and the American embassy refrained from issuing any statement, however Markey affirmed that De Lima has been held on politically motivated charges for too long and called on the new government to release her and drop all charges without delay.

De Lima was jailed under the Duterte administration due to charges that accused her of favoring an illegal drug trade during her term as Justice Secretary, but at least three of the government's witnesses have admitted that they had been coerced by the police into testifying against the former senator.

De Lima has continuously denied all the charges against her, and one of the three drug charges has been dismissed by the courts. The bribery charges filed against her were also dismissed by the Ombudsman due to inconsistencies in testimonies. [Benar News] [Inquirer]

Philippines considers buying helicopter from United States after scrapping deal with Russia

(jd) The Philippines' government is considering buying Chinook helicopters from the United States after canceling a deal to purchase 16 Russian helicopters due to the fear of US and western sanctions against Moscow.

The Philippine Ambassador to the US affirmed that the cancellation of the contract happened mainly because of the war in Ukraine and stated that although Washington did not pressure the Philippines to drop the USD 213 million deal, it was still a wise choice since countries that purchase Russian equipment could have to deal with western sanctions.

The ambassador also claimed that the American Chinooks would be able to replace the helicopters and added that the United States has offered to come up with a special price, similar to the amount that was supposed to be dedicated to the Russian helicopters, and that they would offer maintenance services and helicopter parts as well. [AP News] [Philippine News Agency]

Defense meetings held between Seoul and Washington

(my) On August 16 and 17, the US Department of Defense and the Ministry of National Defense of South Korea held the Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue and the Korea-US Deterrence Strategy Committee in Seoul. During these meetings, security cooperation was discussed as well as a "tailored" deterrence strategy to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

The two sides also discussed recent developments in North Korea's nuclear test and reaffirmed their commitment to working together to respond forcefully and severely should North Korea carry out a nuclear test.

The General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) between South Korea and Japan was also acknowledged during the meeting as playing a significant role in both bilateral and trilateral security cooperation. GSOMIA, signed by South Korea and Japan in November 2016, permitted intelligence exchange between the two countries regarding North Korea's military and social trend, nuclear weapons, and missiles. The Moon Jae-in administration opted not to prolong the agreement in August 2019 since it believed it to be ineffective for South Korea's national interest.

In addition, on August 18, Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup met with US Cyber Command Commander Paul Nakasone to discuss developing cyber cooperation as well as cyber threats and countermeasures. The two countries will collaborate closely in order to increase their capabilities through information and operational exchanges and regularized joint training in order to respond to cyber threats that are growing more sophisticated. [US Department of Defense] [Korean Policy briefing, in Korean] [Yonhap News Agency]

Seoul expresses concerns over new US law affecting Korean automakers

(my) South Korea has voiced its concerns about a new US law that exclusively offers tax breaks for electric vehicles (EV) made in North America.

The Inflation Reduction Act, which US President Joe Biden signed into law on August 16, calls for increasing tax breaks for EV purchasers, but only for models assembled in North America. The bill also includes clauses that would prevent EV from earning benefits if

their batteries or battery components are made using minerals produced in China.

South Korean automakers including Hyundai Motor Co. and Kia Corp., two major South Korean automakers that produce the IONIQ 5 and EV6, have expressed concern over the law. It might be a major setback for Hyundai Motor and Kia at a time when sales of their flagship EV have been rising steadily in the US market over the past few years.

Foreign Minister Park Jin delivered South Korea's concerns about the new legislation during a telephone conversation with the US Secretary of State Tony Blinkon on August 19. On August 22, Trade, Industry and Energy Minister Lee Chang-yang said at the National Assembly that the government will actively review whether to file a complaint with the WTO, while the officials are working to convey messages to the US. Lee claimed that the law may violate the principle of national treatment in the US-Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and the most-favored-nation treatment of WTO. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2, in Korean] [The JoongAng Daily]

South Korea signs health cooperation agreement with Gates Foundation

(my) Bill Gates travelled to South-Korea in his capacity as co-founder of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for a two-day visit from August 15 to 17.

According to a press release of the presidential office, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed by the Gates Foundation, the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under which all parties commit to intensifying their R&D and partnerships with healthcare groups. South Korea also agreed to assist in training 370 people from lower-income countries in vaccine production this year and to expand the number to 2,000 people per year starting 2026.

During the visit Gates met with President Yoon Suk-yeol to discuss ways to counter the Covid-19 pandemic by ensuring equitable access to vaccines and cooperative efforts to enhance global health and spoke at the National Assembly about the value of international cooperation in responding to and gearing up for Covid-19 and other upcoming infectious diseases.

Founded in 2000, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is the second-largest donor to the World

Health Organization (WHO) contributing 9.49 percent to the WHO's funds surpassed only the Germany with 17.13 percent. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Press release, in Korean] [Reuters] [Yonhap News Agency, in Korean] [WTO]

Qatar's deputy prime minister visits Korea

(my) Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani visited South Korea and discussed cooperation between the two countries.

He met with South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol on August 18. They shared the expectation that the temporary visa exemption agreement, which was signed the day before, would help enhance cross-border travel for a range of purposes as well as workforce exchanges. The two parties agreed to broaden the areas of cooperation to a wider range such as food security and climate change.

Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin also met with Al Thani on August 17 and discussed expanding bilateral cooperation in the fields of energy security and construction industry. Park further expressed his hope that South Korean businesses would continue to take part in Qatari construction projects.

Both ministers shared optimism in expanding their governments' cooperation in liquefied natural gas (LNG) commerce to other connected industries, including the construction and transportation of LNG carriers.

Qatar was the biggest LNG exporter to South Korea until 2021. The necessity to expand their energy cooperation to new renewable energies such as solar energy and hydrogen fuel was agreed upon by the two parties.

On August 17, the National Assembly Speaker Kim Jin-pyo also held a meeting with Al Thani, requesting Qatar's support in hosting the International Exposition 2030 in Busan. The two countries have maintained "exemplary collaboration" in the energy and construction sectors since 1974, said Kim, who also expressed the hope that their close cooperation will spread to other sectors. [KBS World] [Qatar Tribune] [The Korea Herald]

Taiwan to begin trade talks with the US

(gö) The Office of the US Trade Representative has announced that formal trade negotiations between the US and Taiwan would begin this fall, citing that both sides "decided to commence formal negotiations for the purpose of reaching agreements with high-standard commitments and economically meaningful outcomes in accordance with the negotiating mandate set forth below." [Office of the United States Trade Representative]

Topics to be discussed include trade facilitation, regulations, the fight against corruption and trade between small and medium-sized enterprises, environmental and labor standards, agricultural goods and digital trade.

The announcement, coming after Washington and Taipei had presented trade initiative in June and amid high Sino-U.S. tensions over Taiwan, marks a step toward an agreement that would deepen economic and technological ties between the two sides. As the world's leading supplier of computer chips Taiwan particularly hopes the deal will pave the way for more investments from other countries and grant access to other international trade pacts from which the nation has been excluded at the insistence of China.

Taiwan's top trade negotiator John Deng said: "Its [China's] economic coercion targets are not just the United States or Taiwan, it's done to a lot of countries. Its harm to the global economic and trade order is great." [Reuters] [Focus Taiwan]

China Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, warned that the "US must not negotiate agreements with sovereign implication or official nature with China's Taiwan region or send any wrong signal to the 'Taiwan independence' separatist forces in the name of trade and economic interactions." [Foreign Ministry, China]

Pro-Taiwan caucus in Ukrainian parliament to deepen ties

(gö) Ukrainian lawmakers have formed an inter-parliamentary group to promote bilateral ties, with 15 Members of parliament joining the new group aiming for new ways "to deepen trade, economic, cultural, humanitarian, and other ties between Ukraine and Taiwan", and the possibility to open a Taiwanese representative office in Ukraine.

Whilst advocating for boosting ties between Taiwan and Ukraine, some Ukrainian lawmakers call for an end

to Ukrainian-Chinese cooperation as China refuses to condemn Russia's military operations in Ukraine.

Oleksandr Merezhko, the head of the pro-Taiwan caucus said: "We are grateful to Taiwan for its aid and support of Ukraine against Russia's aggression. In particular, we value the fact that Taiwan has introduced sanctions against Russia and provided millions to support our cities damaged by Russian aggression." [Focus Taiwan]

Many Taiwanese citizens are trapped in Cambodia

(gö) Taiwanese authorities said that at least 373 of their citizens have been tricked into working for Cambodia based on fraud-rings as of late. These people were lured there by false job advertisements with high paying positions on social media platforms such as Facebook.

Taiwan's Cabinet said that out of the 373 Taiwanese 333 are still stuck in human trafficking operations in Cambodia. An investigation conducted by the National Police Agency (NPA) revealed that from 1,000 Taiwanese citizens who travelled to Cambodia per month only about 10 percent returned.

An inter-ministerial task force was set up to combat the human trafficking rings luring Taiwanese citizens into illegal work abroad. 23 people who have been associated with posting fake job advertisements and arranging trips to Cambodia have been arrested in Tainan, Kaohsiung and Taipei.

The main opposition Kuomintang (KMT) criticized the leading Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP's) inability to protect the youth from human trafficking rings. [Focus Taiwan]

Back in March of this year over 1,200 Thai people got rescued by Cambodian authorities after they were lured into working for illegal call center gangs based in Cambodia. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights released a statement concerning the Human Rights issues in Cambodia. The embassies of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Thailand, and Vietnam have also issued concerned notices regarding "a crisis of forced labor, slavery and torture" to the Cambodian government. [AiR No. 11, March/2022, 3] [The Diplomat]

Cooperation with China is, according to Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), possible through the

established communication channels under the 2009 Cross-Strait Joint Crime-Fighting Judicial Mutual Assistance Agreement. The MAC also stressed the demand for increasing cooperation with Malaysia and Thailand to combat Cambodian fraud rings. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan reports new aircraft and vessels surrounding Taiwan Strait

(gö) Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) reported that five warships and 15 People's Liberation Army (PLA) aircraft were detected on August 22 around the Island's surrounding region. Taiwan's armed forces have monitored the situation with combat air patrols, naval vessels, and land-based missile systems. [Ministry of National Defense, Taiwan, Twitter]

11 out of the 15 warplanes had flown along the east line of Taiwan's air defense identification zone. 51 warplanes and six warships were also detected last week before on August 18. 25 out of the 51 warplanes either violated Taiwan's median line or crossed the southwestern part of Taiwan's air defense identification zone.

A Chinese warship belonging to the PLA has been spotted while the island was about to start conducting new missile tests. The vessel had been the only ship left on August 18 after China's military drills in that region. The missile tests are conducted by the state-run weapon developer and manufacturer National Chung Shan Institute of Science at Jiupeng military base in Pingtung County on Aug. 18 and 19 and on Aug. 25 and 26. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan welcomes more foreign delegations

(gö) The governor of the US state Indiana, Eric Holcomb, was the latest US official to visit the Taiwan after Senator Ed Markey and US House of Representatives Speaker Pelosi, arriving on August 21 for a four-day visit. Holcomb met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on August 22. During the meeting Tsai reassured Taiwan's willingness to cooperate with the U.S. and other allies to ensure supplies of semiconductors, calling them "democracy chips."

He is also slated to meet with representatives of Taiwan's semiconductor industry before leaving for South Korea on August 24. [Eric Holcomb Twitter] [Reuters]

Meanwhile, a Japanese parliamentary delegation led by the head of Japan's Taiwan friendship parliamentary group Keiji Furuya, arrived on Monday in Taipei and is scheduled to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen and other high ranking Taiwanese officials. The aim of the visit is to discuss enhancing defense mechanisms with the U.S. to strengthen Taiwan. [Radio Taiwan International] [Taiwan News]

Thailand court rules in favor of electricity purchase from Lao dam

(td) Following a long-standing dispute between Thai authorities and local villagers living by the lower Mekong River, the Thai Supreme Administrative Court ultimately ruled in favor of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT)'s power purchase agreement (PPA) to buy electricity from Xayaburi Dam in Lao PDR – finalizing a ruling on the decade-long case. It argued the PPA had led to no direct effects on people and the environment.

As the Lao government and a Thai private developer CH. Karnchang embarked on the building of Xayaburi Dam in 2010, the Mekong People's Network from eight provinces filed the lawsuit to the Lower Administrative Court two years later to prosecute all those responsible agencies. Given that the PPA had led to the construction and operation of the dam, they accused it of causing a myriad of transboundary social and environmental concerns.

Nevertheless, the lower court dismissed the case due to the legality of the bilateral contract between Laos and Thailand, and reaffirmed that all the related procedures had been carried out properly. Consequently, the Thai civil-society activists turned to the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) for a ruling in 2014 in a bid to scrap the agreement, which would thus halt the operation of the Xayaburi Dam, and shield the locals from repercussions.

Despite unwavering efforts, the local demands and concerns have yet not been addressed as the SAC dismissed their lawsuit two consequent times. That said, prior to the recent verdict in 2022, it was a last-ditch effort of the group of river activists to call for the suspension of electricity import from the controversial dam. After all, they are likely to pursue a new lawsuit in

another case, at least to raise awareness and understanding of the people.

In fact, residents in the lower Mekong sub-region of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam have grappled with unpredictable cycles of floods and droughts for several years, as a result of a multitude of dams built upstream in China and Lao PDR. Yet, as the Xayaburi Dam is Laos' first one in the Lower Mekong mainstream, it has posed a serious and imminent threat to the ecology, biodiversity, as well as viability of the Mekong in the years ahead.

In light of the livelihood of their respective citizens, Cambodia and Vietnam had voiced their concerns before the complete construction of the Xayaburi Dam in 2020. They accused Laos of unfulfilling its commitments in line with the Mekong River Commission's (MRC's)' "1995 Mekong Agreement" in that a consultation must be finalized before any sub-regional projects can get underway. In addition, as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) has been introduced since 2015 to advance free flow of goods and investment, Laos is regarded as one of the key destinations for regional investors in the energy sector due to its relatively weak environmental laws.[Radio Free Asia][The Third Pole]

Thai-Chinese joint air force drill raises concerns over military cooperation with US and foreign policy stance

(td) Against the backdrop of Chinese military operations across the Taiwan Strait after the United States House Speaker's visit to Taiwan, China and Thailand have resumed the 12-day joint air force drill codenamed "Falcon Strike" in August 2022 – raising a question regarding Thailand's foreign policy stance amid the Sino-US rivalry. Nonetheless, the Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) insists there is no hidden agenda behind the bilateral cooperation.

In response to the public speculation that the military exercise will hamper a deal in purchasing the US-made F-35 fighter jets, the RTAF believes that it is unlikely to affect the agreement as it takes into account the US permission and constraints on the use of its military hardware. In addition, it is worth noting that the RTAF deploys only non-U.S.-made fighter jets in its operation with China.

On the contrary, some international political commentators consider that the drill will lead to knock-on effects on Thailand's military cooperation with the

US as the country is getting closer to China, and it could be sharing the advanced technology with the Asian superpower

After all, in practice, Thailand seems to have maintained hedging and balancing strategies to manage its uneasy relations with China and the US in order to walk a fine line. In terms of military, to add, Thailand has until now diversified its arms suppliers to retain an equilibrium, which would bring about the interoperability with several nations. In this case, an example is the Royal Thai Navy's debatable plan to procure a Chinese-made submarine. [AiR, No. 32, August/2022, 2][Bangkok Post][Thai Enquirer][The Diplomat]

Timor-Leste in gas dispute with Australia, threatens to engage China

(pe) The President of Timor-Leste has warned that he will seek Chinese support if Australia fails to back a pipeline between the Timor Sea and Timor-Leste's southern shores. He has stated that if Australia favors building the pipeline into Darwin, Northern Australia, then he would seek Chinese investment as an alternative.

The coastal oil fields in question, Greater Sunrise, are considered by observers to be critical for the financial future of Timor-Leste. Therefore, there is a political urgency to ensure that the pipeline is constructed with relative speed. Timor-Leste and Australia have a long running allyship, although the relationship has faced political strain in recent years, due to issues such as the discovery of Australian spies in the Timor Leste government. [The Guardian]

Vietnam seeks to learn from Israel's expertise innovation and technology

(fe) Vietnam's President Nguyen Xuân Phuc showed interest in enhancing cooperation with Israel in areas where the country is known to excels such as innovation, science and technology, and renewable energy.

This interest was expressed during a gathering with former Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Barak. The meeting also resulted in discussions over the possibility of increasing the number of high-level

contacts between the two countries and assisting one another at international meetings and organizations.

Vietnam's President Phuc also added that while Vietnam has been implementing a plan to create a sustainable digital society by 2025 with a goal to 2030, it seeks to learn from Israel's experience in upholding security and national sovereignty over cyberspace. By sharing his knowledge of developing policies to support new businesses, advancing science, technology, and innovation, encouraging the development of young talent, and building connections with authorities and organizations in Israel and around the world, the host hoped that the former Israeli prime minister would use his position and influence to further strengthen bilateral ties. [Vietnam News]

Vietnam, Kazakhstan strengthen long-standing friendship and cooperation

(fe) At a reception for Kazakh Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi in Hanoi, President Nguyen Xuan Phuc said that Vietnam and Kazakhstan should expand their cooperation in sectors with high potentials, such as agriculture, tourism, and transportation. He praised the official's visit to Vietnam to mark the 30th anniversary of the two nations' diplomatic ties and expressed his opinion that it will strengthen and advance the two nations' long-standing friendship and cooperation.

The President remarked that Vietnam always places a high value on its longstanding friendship with Kazakhstan and expressed his happiness at the progress made in their bilateral political relations, including the regular exchange of delegations at all levels through Party, National Assembly, and State channels. [Nhan Dan Online]

He added that Vietnam and Kazakhstan should make the most of the Vietnam-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Free Trade Agreement, of which Kazakhstan is a member, in order to further their economic ties. The leader hailed the move to establish a direct flight route between Kazakhstan and Vietnam in order to promote delegation exchanges and cross-border cooperation in the travel and transportation industries.

Tileuberdi congratulated Vietnam on its socio-economic development achievements, international integration, and the effective battle against COVID-19. Vietnam is an important partner of Kazakhstan in Asia-Pacific, he said, stressing that Kazakhstan wishes to enhance cooperation with the Southeast Asian nation

in economy-trade, investment, finance, education-training, culture-tourism, transportation, clean energy, and high technology. [VOV World]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

24 August 2022 @10 :00 am, (GMT+5), Center for Strategic and International studies (CSIS), United States

Upacking the New US Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa

Secretary of State Antony Blinken launched the new U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa on August 8 in Pretoria as part of his visit to South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Rwanda. Join Mvemba Phezo Dizolele, Senior Fellow and Director of the CSIS Africa Program for a conversation exploring the objectives of the new strategy, its strengths and weaknesses, and the future of U.S.-Africa relations.

More information on [CSIS]

24 August 2022 @1pm, (GMT+5), Center for Strategic and International studies (CSIS), United States

The future of Army Vertical Lift

As the Army looks beyond the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and to a future of competing against highly capable state actors the service is rethinking its approach to vertical lift. The future of vertical lift will feature bold engineering innovations, including

Modular Open System Approaches, that the Army believes will enable its aviators to have a decisive edge at far greater ranges than ever before.

More information on [CSIS]

24 August 2022 @10:00, (GMT+5), Wilson Center, United States

Ripples of War – Six Months Since Russia's Invasion into Ukraine

The world has shifted dramatically since Russia invaded Ukraine and began a full-scale war throughout the country. The impacts of the war for sanctions, global governance, energy and security have continued to shift.

More information on [Wilson Centre]

25 August 2022 @10:00 am, (GMT+5), Center for Strategic and International studies (CSIS), United States

Sharpening the Democracy Playbook: A practical Approach for Venezuela

The erosion of democracy around the world has followed similar patterns, or a "playbook," which authoritarian leaders are increasingly replicating to undermine democracy. Despite being well-known, the dictator's playbook continues to be a successful one, prompting the need for a democracy playbook for like-minded countries and individuals. While some of the key components of a democracy playbook are widely agreed upon, there remains considerable uncertainty on the specific steps toward reform. In Venezuela, the Maduro regime has used—and perfected—the dictator's playbook. With elections likely looming in 2024, it is important to understand whether the exercise of elections could serve as an important rallying point for a democracy playbook in Venezuela.

More information on [CSIS]

25 August 2022 @5:15 pm, (GMT+5), The Heritage Foundation, United States

Navigating the Navy's future featuring Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Micheal Gilday

Where is the US Navy heading? Gilday's recently updated Navigation Plan provides key insights into how the Navy must operate, with goals that are reasonable. But are they achievable given inflation and budget pressures? Is the Navy equipped to provide sufficient deterrence, or are resources too slim?

More information on [Heritage Foundation]

25 August 2022 @12:00, (GMT+5), Urban Institute, United States

The Prescription: Fiscal Policy for Today's Economy with Ben King

Ben King will discuss the clean energy incentives in the inflation reduction act and how the new law will help the US meet its emissions reduction target.

More information on [Urban Institute]

25 August 2022 @3:00 pm, (GMT+5), Urban Institute, United States

Using Model Estimates of Poverty in Schools

Eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch is not always the most reliable measure for comparing school-level economic need because these measures often vary by state and across time. A new, Urban-created measure —Model Estimates of Poverty in Schools—estimates the school-level share of students from households with incomes at or below the federal poverty level between fall 2013 and fall 2018. Join Urban Institute experts as they provide an opportunity to learn about the challenges of using free and reduced-price lunch measures, explain how and how not to use the new poverty in schools measure, and demonstrate how to access the tool and explore the data in a hands-on workshop.

More information on [Urban Institute]

25 August 2022 @3:00 pm, (GMT+1), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

A conflict-prone UN Security Council? How small states can navigate the UNSC in the new era of great power rivalry

Against the backdrop of intensified US-China great power competition and the deepening isolation of Russia by the West, the UN Security Council (UNSC) risks becoming increasingly paralyzed given the veto power prerogatives held by the five permanent council members. Indeed, we might see a return to the Cold War era when the UNSC was systematically prevented from pursuing its authorized mandate of maintaining international peace and security. While this seems to bode ill, especially for small states relying on the effectiveness of multilateral institutions such as the UNSC, it may also open up new opportunities for small states if they understand how to navigate, mediate or even bypass a conflict-prone UNSC.

More information on [DIIS]

25 & 30 August 2022, @11 :00 am, (GMT+2), African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, South Africa

Evaluating Ecosystem Services with Remote Sensing

Healthy ecosystems provide essential pieces of daily life for humans such as clean water, food, medicines, carbon sequestration, protection against extreme weather, and much more. Natural capital accounting recognizes that these assets must be maintained, managed, and measured for critical decision-making activities. NASA data can be used to accurately map ecosystems to support effective planning and sustainable decision-making. This training will outline the basics of ecosystem services and natural capital accounting. It will also provide an overview of how Earth Observations (EO) can be used to support global frameworks and initiatives such as standards set by the United Nation's System of Environmental Economic Accounting (UN-SEEA)

More information on [ACCORD]

28 August 2022 @2:45pm, (GMT+3), Asian Development Bank Institute, Japan

ADBI Session on Shock Resilience, Economic Recovery, and Sustainable Development (2022 East Asian Economic Association Convention)

To take place during the 17th East Asian Economic Association Conference, this ADBI session focusing on Asian economies will feature new research on macrofinancial resilience and sustainable economic recovery.

The session will highlight the importance of institutional quality in crisis periods and COVID-19's impact on households and the implications for human capital development.

More information on [ADBI]

29 August 2022 @1:00pm, (GMT+5), Atlantic Council, United States

What may the next decade of US-Caribbean energy cooperation bring?

Across the world, energy prices have spiked over recent months and have increased attention to the volatility of energy markets. Countries in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) import more than 85 percent of their commercial energy supplies. One result: people across the Caribbean pay almost double the average price for electricity as in the United States. CARICOM houses a mixture of hydrocarbon and renewable reserves that can take a region vulnerable to rising energy costs to one that is energy secure. Here, the United States can play an important role to help CARICOM countries capitalize on energy resources while strengthening US-Caribbean relations over the next decade. Join to learn more.

More information on [Atlantic Council]

31 August 2022 @1:00 pm, (GMT+5), Wilson Center, United States

Pioneering Space force: a fireside chat with General John W. "Jay" Raymond

This event is to take a closer look into the past, present and future of the US'sixth and newest branch of the military, the Space Force. We will reflect on the

progress made over its first years—the successes, challenges, and lessons learned—as well as offering insights into the road ahead.

More information on [Wilson Center]

Recent book releases

Daniel E. Agbiboa, ***They Eat Our Sweat: Transport Labor, Corruption, and Everyday Survival in Urban Nigeria***, Oxford University Press, 288 pages, published on February 2, 2022. For a review see [LSE].

Anya Kamenetz, ***The Stolen Year: How COVID Changed Children's Lives, and Where We Go Now***, Public Affairs, 352 pages, published on August 23, 2022, reviewed in [The New York Times].

Calls for Papers

The **China-Eurasia Council for Political and Strategic Research** invites paper proposals for its conference ***"Eurasian Research on Modern China and Eurasia,"*** to be held on December 2-3, 2022. The deadline for abstract submission is November 5, 2022. For more information, see [Chinastan].

The **Hellenic Association of Political Scientists** invites proposals for chapters in a ***collected volume on "Comparative Health Policies and National Healthcare Systems: management, economics, governance and reforms"***. The closing date for manuscript submission is August 31, 2022. If you are interested, find more details at [IPSA].

Jobs and positions

The **USAID i**s seeking a ***Project Management Assistant [HIV/AIDS]*** to be based in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The job role is to provide support to Contracting Officer Representatives/Agreement Officer's Representatives Applications are accepted until September 15, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [USAID].

UNICEF welcomes applications for the position of ***Coordinator,*** Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, at the level of Assistant Secretary-General. The position is based in Geneva. Applications are accepted until

September 23, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [SUN].

The **Danish Refugee Council** is seeking a ***Grants Management Coordinator*.** The position is based in Beirut. The post holder is also responsible for providing regular support and guidance to project cycle management and program strategy; advising and supporting field teams. Applications are accepted until August 30, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [DRC].

The **UNDP** is seeking applications for the position of ***National expert*.** The position is based in Ukraine. The role of the consultant is to prepare an assessment of the quality of infection control in collective centers for internally displaced persons in Kharkiv, Sumy, Dnipro, and Chernihiv oblasts. Applications are accepted until August 30, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is seeking applications for the position of ***National Consultant for Guarantees of Origin Legal Expert*.** The main objective of the assignment is to support SAEE [Ukraine's State Agency on Energy Efficiency and Energy Saving] in further developing guarantees of origin legislation. The position is based in Ukraine. Applications are accepted until August 30, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is seeking applications for the position of ***national expert on Capacity Development in the area of Access to Public Information.*** The main tasks of the assignment are to provide expert support to the Ombudsperson's Office. The position is based in Ukraine. Applications are accepted until August 30, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is seeking applications for the position of ***Project Analyst***. The position is based in Armenia. The role of the position is to provide daily coordination, analysis and strategic advice of the project [NPSA-9] Applications are accepted until August 31, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is inviting applications for the position of ***Coordination Specialist for the project NPSA 10.*** The position is based in Kabul. he Coordination Specialist will also work in close collaboration with the Communications Team, Human Rights Due Diligence Specialist as well as Monitoring and Evaluation Team. Applications are accepted until August 30, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is inviting applications for the position of ***Trail Monitoring Specialist.*** The position is based in Iraq. The job role is to Ensure effective information gathering, storage, synthesis of trial monitoring observations. Applications are accepted until August 24, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is inviting applications for the position of ***Communications Advocacy Specialist***. The job location is based in Hanoi. The job role is to lead the planning and design of internal and external strategies for communications, advocacy and outreach. Applications are accepted until August 30, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is inviting applications for the position of ***Senior Public Finance Advisor.*** The job location is based in Fiji. The job role is to provide strategic advice to partner governments on mainstreaming risks into national planning and budgeting functions. Applications are accepted until August 29, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is inviting applications for ***consultant to support taskforce on prevention of sexual harrasement and sexual exploitation and abuse***. Applications are accepted until 15 September, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

The **UNDP** is inviting applications for ***project assistant NPSA- 5.*** Applications are accepted until 30 August, 2022. The job role is to provide Overall technical, administrative, and logistical support to PILLAR Project activities. More information about the position is provided at [UNDP].

UNICEF is inviting applications for the position of ***National Individual Consultant.*** The job location is based in the Republic of Moldova. The individual contractor is expected to support the Communication and Programme team. Applications are accepted until 29 August, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNICEF].

UNICEF is inviting applications for the position of ***Social and Behavior change officer.*** The job location is based in Somalia. The job role is to support strategy design and development of S&BC activities. Applications are accepted until 29 August, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNICEF].

UNICEF is inviting applications for the position of ***National Consultant for the development of the community based total sanitation***. The job location is

based in Jakarta. The job role is to conduct regular consultation meetings with MoH and UNICEF to discuss the work progress. Applications are accepted until 26 August, 2022. More information about the position is provided at [UNICEF].

Team:

Afif Zaman (az), Aniello Iannone (ai), Beatrice Siviero (bs), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Farul Baqi (fb), Felix Jonas Jantz (fj), Francis Ezeh John (fe), Gizem Öztürk (gö), Henning Glaser (hg), Jennifer Marie Domenici (jd), Jessica Pierre (jp), Joanna V. Kumendong (jvk), Julian Wendt (jw), Lucas Meier (lm), Margot Renard (mr), Mashal Shahid Khan (msk), Minyoung Yoo (my), Oshin Pandey (op), Peer Morten Strantzen (ms), Phoebe Ewen (pe), Sebastian Gräff (sg), Shilpa Ramachandran (sr), Sitha Komatineni (sk), Sofia Bertolino (sb), Theerapon Damrongruk (td), Tomwit Jarnson (tw), Varshinya Varadhachari (vv), Venus Phuangkom

We would greatly appreciate your feedback! Please send any feedback you have regarding this newsletter to: info@cpg-online.de

Also, don't forget to Like CPG on Facebook, and browse our *website* for other updates and news!

German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance - CPG
Room 207, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

www.cpg-online.de
www.facebook.com/cpgtu

Preferences | Unsubscribe