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Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to this week's issue of the Asia in Review providing you the latest events and developments in domestic politics, international relations and geopolitics in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Wishing you an informative read, I extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Botswana's, Turkmenistan's, Cyprus', Nigeria's, Tuvalu's Independence Day and China's National Day in this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: Former Justice Minister and the former Vice Minister of public security sentenced to Life for Corruption

(ms) Courts have handed down suspended death sentences against former Chinese Justice Minister Fu Zhenghua and former Vice Minister of public security Sun Lijun, which will be commuted to life in prison without parole after two years.

Sun's sentence was announced on September 23 after he pleaded guilty in early August to accepting bribes of more than USD 95 million, manipulating the stock market and possessing two illegal firearms. The case surrounding Sun received special attention because he is alleged to have plotted against President Xi Jinping together with other senior officials, mainly from

China's security apparatus [see more AiR No. 28, July/2022, 2].

Fu, who was convicted just one day before Sun for accepting bribes equivalent to about USD 17 million and using his position to cover up his brother's crimes, is also said to have been part of the political clique that wanted to oust Xi.

In addition to Fu and Sun, the former disciplinary chief of the Ministry of State Security, Liu Yanping, and the former party secretary of the Jiangsu Provincial Political and Legal Committee, Wang Like, both of whom had also been accused of corruption, were other high officials said to have been part of the plot.

The former police chiefs of Shanghai, Chongqing and Shanxi Province were also sentenced to 14 and 15 years in jail and life imprisonment, also suspected of being part of the plot against Xi. [Global Times 1] [Global Times 2] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2]

The five sentences against Fu, Sun and the police chiefs' come just weeks before the 20th national congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), at which Xi Jinping is seeking an unprecedented third term as party leader. They are part of the crackdown on high-profile officials targeted in the anti-corruption campaign that began in 2012 with Xi's inauguration but which has intensified this year ahead of the national party congress.

In addition to actually fighting corruption, which is said to be widespread within the party, political experts believe Xi Jinping used the anti-corruption campaign as a "political purge." Between Xi Jinping's inauguration and the almost simultaneous launch of the anti-corruption campaign until June 2021, according to official data, 393 leading cadres above the provincial ministerial level, officials who are often groomed for top positions, as well as 631. 000 section-level cadres, also known as "flies", have been investigated and potential political rivals such as Zhou Yongkang, a former senior leader of the CCP, or Sun Zhengcai, a potential successor to Xi, have been sentenced to life imprisonment on corruption charges and thereby eliminated.

Because of this, it can be assumed that the timing of the current sentences, so close to the National Congress, is not so much a coincidence as a deterrent against potential political opponents and a demonstration of power. [Foreign Affairs] [Radio Free Asia 1]

Meanwhile, human rights lawyer Zhou Shifeng was released on September 26 after serving a seven-year prison sentence. Zhou was arrested during a crackdown on human rights lawyers that began on July 9, 2015. More than 300 of his colleagues were arrested and convicted alongside him. He was convicted of subversion of state power and accused of being influenced by "anti-China forces over a long period of time."

Shortly before his release, there were growing fears that Zhou, despite the official end of his prison sentence, would be placed under house arrest due to the timing of the National Congress and the tightened control by the Chinese Communist Party. [Radio Free Asia 2] [South China Morning Post 3]

China: CCP introduces new regulations on promotion and demotion of officials

(ms) The Organization Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee on September 21 issued new regulations regarding the promotion and demotion of officials within the party.

Under the new regulations, frameworks that determine whether an official is qualified for a post were concretized, including a review of political performance, belief in the Party's cause, sense of duty, ability, work style and morale. Through the regulations, it shall now be easier to demote officials even if they are not engaged in severe violation of laws and disciplines, but do not perform their work satisfactorily, among other things, the possibility of "early retirement" shall now be extended.

The stricter examination of officials is intended on the one hand to raise more competence among the cadres, thereby achieving the second centennial goal of “building a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious” more effectively, and on the other hand, according to the party, to prevent the emergence of corruption or at least to remove it at an early stage along with the corresponding official. [Global Times]

China: Stepping up crackdown on Taiwan's pro-independence forces

(ms) Just a week after U.S. President Joe Biden made a statement that the U.S. would defend Taiwan if China attacked [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3], the State Council's Taiwan Affairs Office announced that stronger action is needed against efforts by Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party and the U.S. to undermine the "One China Policy." The ministry added that while China favors peaceful reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, it would not shy away from stopping secessionist activities in Taiwan. [WIO News]

China: Survey launched to counter shrinking birth rate

(ms) The China Population and Development Research Center (CPDRC) and China Family Planning Association launched a survey of about 20,000 men and women between 20 and 44 from 100 counties, cities, and districts across the country except the five western provinces to find the cause of declining marriage and birth rates. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

The survey is another step by the Chinese government to counter stagnant population growth, which could even lead to a decline and aging of the overall population if the trend remains unchanged. So far, such measures have been seen mainly at the local level, with restrictions on single mothers or unmarried couples bearing children being lifted in the Anhui province just two weeks ago [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3].

China: Water level of largest lake at a record low

(ms) Due to the droughts that has begun in July still persisting in parts of China's country, central Chinese province of Jiangxi declared a "red alert" related to the province's water supply. In the course of the last months the water level of the Poyang freshwater lake, which is mainly responsible for the water supply of the province, dropped by more than twelve meters and according to the local monitoring center the level could drop even further.

In neighboring Anhui Province, the effects of the drought are also being felt, with ten reservoirs there falling below the "dead pool" level, meaning that they cannot discharge water downstream.

The low water levels mean that the hydropower plants cannot operate at full capacity, that it is more difficult to supply drinking water to the population [see No. 34, August/2022, 4] and that the important autumn harvest could be endangered.

China's rice imports rose by about 43 percent year-on-year in the first eight months, but at least according to the Chinese government, this is said to be due to low rice prices rather than possible crop failures. [Global Times] [Reuters]

China: New achievement in testing of hypersonic technology

(ms) The China Aerodynamics Research and Development Centre announced that it has developed what it claims is the world's most advanced system for testing an aircraft's ability to unload a weapon or small spacecraft at extremely high speeds. The use of two robotic arms, instead of just one, allows free adjustment of the object to be unloaded as well as the aircraft itself, and also improves the ability to simulate tests at speeds above Mach 5, or hypersonic flights, giving China an advantage in the development of hypersonic technologies such as missiles over its competitors. [South China Morning Post]

According to a report by Striders Technologies, a US strategic intelligence platform, a decisive factor in the development of technological advances, such as the hypersonic technology mentioned in this entry, but more generally in areas relevant to the military, is a strategy by the Chinese government to specifically place Chinese scientists at Los Alamos National Laboratory, United States Department of Energy national laboratory, who make relevant scientific contributions to the U.S. military and then lure them back to China through various incentives in order to bring the technological advances and necessary know-how developed in America to China. [Striders Technologies]

China: Hong Kong Journalists Association chairman granted bail without travel restriction

(ms) Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) Chairman Ronson Chan was released on bail after pleading not guilty in court following his arrest in early September on charges of obstructing police and

disorderly conduct after allegedly refusing to identify himself at a checkpoint [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2].

In light of the Hong Kong government's crackdown on activists and the press since the 2019 anti-government protests, it was unexpected that a travel restriction on Chan was waived by the court, allowing him to begin his six-month fellowship at Oxford University. Chan's trial is scheduled for mid-May next year. [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Trial begins in high-profile case against Cardinal Zen

(ms) The trial of Cardinal Joseph Zen, the former bishop of Hong Kong, and five other major pro-democracy figures began on September 26. The defendants are accused of failing to register the 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund as a society.

The 612 Humanitarian Relief Fund, established by Zen among others in the wake of the 2019 anti-government protests, provided anti-government protesters with financial aid who face legal troubles or were in need of medical treatment. [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Another prominent government-critic Weibo account deleted

(ms) The Weibo account with more than 400,000 followers of Lao Dongyan, a criminal law professor at Tsinghua University in Beijing, who has been very prominent in opposing the abuse of Covid-19 restrictions by various mid- and low-level governments, has been deleted.

Lao's account is just another step in the Chinese government's tightening of online speech regulations against government-critical news and individuals ahead of the 20th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, at which President Xi Jinping is seeking an unprecedented third term as party leader. [South China Morning Post 1]

China: Former General Manager of Lion Fund Management Co. under investigation

(ms) The former General Manager of Lion Fund Management Co, the subsidiary of Chinese state-owned company Sinochem, which engages in the trading, extraction and production of chemicals and oil, is under investigation for alleged serious violations of party disciplines and law.

The man under investigation ran a local asset management firm after being removed from office in 2019 and is another case in the anti-fraud campaign against the country's financial sector, which President Xi Jinping called a major success as recently as mid-June this year [see AiR No. 25, June/2022, 3]. [Bloomberg]

China: Expansion of submarine base

(ms) Satellite images from late July show that China is expanding the submarine base of Yulin naval base in the southern province and island of Hainan, adding two new piers to the four existing ones, which are used for berthing submarines.

The Yulin Naval Base hosts a sizable portion of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) South Sea fleet. Among others, Yulin is home to nuclear-powered attack boats and ballistic missile submarines. These include six Type 094 or Jin-class submarines with nuclear propulsion and ballistic missiles; likewise, an underground submarine cavern provides further berthing space.

In addition to a large number of submarines, the Shandong aircraft is also stationed there. [Defense News]

China: Aircraft carrier Fujian begins mooring trials

(ms) China appears to be tightening the schedule for the operationalization of its third and most advanced aircraft carrier, Fujian.

According to the state news channel CCTV, the installation and calibration of equipment on the carrier will be done simultaneously with the now announced mooring trials, which could shorten the time to actual operational readiness to a relevant extent.

During the mooring trials, all of a ship's systems – from propulsion to mechanical equipment – are tested to see how they function individually and together. If

these tests are successful, the Fujian will then only have to undergo sea trials and further tests, such as the deployment of aircraft on the ship before it enters service.

When completed, the highly advanced aircraft carrier is expected to play a major role in the Taiwan-China Strait and intensifying U.S.-Sino relations, which have tightened significantly recently, especially with the Taiwan visit by Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in early August [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1]. [CGTN] [South China Morning Post]

China: Newest Type 075 Landing Helicopter Dock about to enter service

(ms) The latest Type 075 landing helicopter dock (LHD) of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is reprtedly about to enter service. While reviewing recent images of the third Chinese Type 075 LHD, the pennant number on the ship could already be seen, which military experts say indicates the ship is ready for service.

The Type 075 LHD is capable of carrying attack helicopters and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) capable of vertical takeoff and would provide increased flexibility for drone missions for the PLA. Especially since the increased patrols, penetration, and fly-through of Taiwanese airspace with primarily UAVs, which China stepped up in response to the visit of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in early August [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1], serving as both an intimidation tactic and a test of the Taiwanese military's response time, the new LHD, along with its two other Type 075 predecessors, could further expand China's efforts in the Strait. [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Kishida approval ratings plummet amid Unification Church scandal, Abe state funeral

(sra) The rate of approval for Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has continued to decline from its steady 52 percent in July, to below the 30 percent mark in a recent poll – a first since he was initially voted in as Prime Minister in October 2021. The drop has affected the public's support for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) on account of its involvement in the

Unification Church scandal as well as the continued backlash following the exorbitant cost of the state funeral for former Prime Minister Shinto Abe.

The Kishida administration continues to face division and weariness in the country amid the fraudulent scandals connecting the ruling party to the religious group which manipulated its followers to contribute large donations sending many to bankruptcy, not to mention the controversy regarding the state funeral to be held on September 27. Since the assassination of Abe on July 8, the developments occurring under Kishida's leadership have perpetuated a sense of disapproval and demonstrated his failure to promote the credibility of the LDP [see also AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3].

The Kishida cabinet approval rating has now fallen to 29 percent predominantly due to the increasing ties of its members to the Unification Church, following the nature of the information coming from a self-reported survey. The choice to not go ahead with an investigative body has impacted the perception of the LDP as it continues to be criticized the more cases come to light. In a September 17 and 18 national opinion poll, the support of the public has shifted to Digital Minister Taro Kono, with 14 percent of responders in favor of him occupying the role of the next Prime Minister of Japan. [Asia News Network] [The Mainichi 1] [The Mainichi 2]

In addition to the loss in support for Kishida's administration is the public division over the state funeral. Kishida's announcement to hold the ceremony was made without prior consultation with the Diet, stating Abe's legacy in diplomatic and economic success should be honored. This has been objected to by at least 12 municipalities, ordering the cancellation of the funeral due to the political links Abe held with the Church, its unjustified cost of at least USD11.5 million, not including security costs and the insufficient legal basis for it to go ahead. [The Mainichi 4]

Further opposition toward the state funeral was displayed on September 21 as a 70-year-old man covered himself in oil before he lit himself on fire in protest of the ceremony, close to the prime minister's office in Tokyo. Abe has been named one of the most divisive leaders in postwar Japan due to his revisionist view of war throughout history, autocratic leadership and his endorsement of an improved military. [The Guardian] [The Associated Press 1]

Hundreds of protesters sought the cancellation of the state funeral on September 24, as demonstrators opposed Abe's supportive views of war and militarism

in Japan. Those in attendance claimed the former Prime Minister did not represent the voice of "regular" civilians, and thus see no valid reason for the ceremony to be held. Demonstrators clearly stated their discontent toward the rise of national military spending, a contradiction of the post-war constitution brought on by the Abe administration. [The Associated Press 2]

Days earlier, a protest also erupted in Tokyo on September 19, with over 13,000 people demanding the cancellation of the state funeral, unaffected by the severe weather conditions brought on by Typhoon No. 14. The groups objected to the state funeral, stating Abe's scandalous involvement with the church and Kishida's pledge to use taxpayer money to fund the ceremony is unacceptable. [The Asahi Shimbun]

Regardless, it has been confirmed that the younger generation of Japanese citizens benefitted economically from the Abe administration and the rising stock average and high rates of employment, thus tending to support the state funeral, whereas the older generations heavily oppose Abe's ties to the religious group due to previous scandals within his government. [The Japan Times 1]

The lead-up to the state funeral has seen criticism of Abe's eight years of leadership and its impact on Japanese democracy. His involvement in numerous political scandals over the years such as the alleged spending of government funds, his almost authoritarian style of dealing with government affairs and the demise of diplomatic relations between China, Russia and South Korea under Abe's rule has been highlighted once again. [The Japan Times 2]

This political division has spread to lawmakers, raising concerns over the outcome of the ceremony and those wishing to pay their respects versus those who refuse to attend. Members of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), Japanese Communist Party leader Kazuo Shii and even members within the LDP have announced their opposition, stating they will skip the funeral entirely. [The Japan Times 3]

Japan: Government intervenes in market, pledges sustainable national growth

(sra) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced the government seeks to push for more international investment in the economy to increase domestic growth in his speech at the New York Exchange on September 22. Through the mobilization

of policies including budget, tax and deregulation, Kishida vowed to achieve “a new form of capitalism” in an attempt to counter concerns of the weakening yen against the USD, and later that day intervened in the foreign exchange market.

It comes as the economic situation in Japan was continuing to worsen due to the quickest rise in inflation in 31 years, and the government has been questioned for its ongoing monetary stimulus. Consumer prices rose 2.8 percent in August since 2021 and increasing electricity bills have quickened the pace, pressuring the Bank of Japan (BOJ) since June as inflation continues above the 2 percent target, blamed on increasing energy costs due to Russia’s war on Ukraine. [Kyodo News] [South China Morning Post]

The plans include altering wages to be based on performance levels instead of the traditional system that relies on seniority levels, encouraging spending on financial assets by capping the limit of time allowed on investments and also confirming the need to strengthen ties with the US semiconductor sector. [NHK World-Japan]

The intervention of the government saw the dollar fall more than 2 percent to 140.3 yen, the move may provide only a temporary solution amid the yen’s 20 percent depreciation just this year - the lowest in 24 years. It also reiterated the central bank’s strategy to not follow through on raising interest rates unlike other nations, aiming to counter a slowing global economy [Reuters] [The Japan Times]

Japan: Major national policy shift for tourism

(sra) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has announced a significant policy shift in the tourism sector, stating the rejection of the daily arrival cap of 50,000 foreigners and facilitating visa-free travel into Japan from October 11. The announcement comes due to the falling value of the yen and the easing of the coronavirus pandemic restrictions in the country after two and a half years. [The Japan Times]

The announcement on September 22 at the UN General Assembly in New York comes as Kishida attempts to overcome the detrimental impact to his administration due to the Unification Church scandal within the Liberal Democratic Party and rising inflation in the country.

The government will also offer a domestic travel program providing discounts in the entertainment and tourism sector to encourage a boost to the economy as the yen falls to its lowest value in 24 years, attracting foreigners to benefit from the cheap exchange rate. [Japan Today]

Japan: Ageing population, less than 400,000 births in 6 months

(sra) The Japanese government has revealed that the population of over 75-year-olds now makes up over 15 percent of the now ageing nation, with over 65-year-olds equating to 29 percent, placing the country as the oldest society in the world. This also comes with the declining number of newborn babies from January to June this year.

Concerns about an ageing population impact the national healthcare system and local communities, with the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research estimating the older generation to equal a least 35.3 percent of Japanese society by 2040. [Japan Today 1]

The result of this data is correlated with the falling figures of newborn babies down by five percent from 2021 data. The 384,942 births in the first six months of the year have been the lowest record registered by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare since 2000. This has placed pressure on the government due to the heightened spending on social security services such as medical care and pensions for the elderly population. [Japan Today 2]

Japan: Plans to increase defense spending to USD 279 billion in 5 years

(sra) Japan will increase its current spending on defense to over USD 279 billion in the next five years as part of the Medium-Term Defense Program. It was announced on September 24 addressing Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's claims to strengthen the country's defense industry as a result of growing tensions from Chinese and North Korean military expansion.

The Defense Ministry will be requesting the budget for fiscal 2024, with specific costs to be finalized. The government had previously stated its plans to double the national defense expenditure to 2 percent of

Japan's GDP in order to level up to its counterparts of the NATO alliance [see also AiR No. 36, September/2022, 1]. The funds, once implemented, will be utilized in arms production, improve combat capabilities and update missiles and munitions storage. [Japan Today] [The Mainichi]

This boost toward military expansion is highly controversial in the face of the postwar Constitution that has maintained pacifist restrictions on the ministry. The expansion will involve increased defense imports from foreign militaries in order to build up Japanese defence capabilities and technology resources. Although the ministry is seeking to advance domestic research and production to become a more independent industry, the foreign market of military sales is a competitive field due to the sophistication and expensive nature of international defense systems. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Former GSDF Major General states Cyber Ministry needed

(sra) The former Major General of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), Tanaka Tatsuhiro, has asserted the need for a national cybersecurity ministry amid growing concerns about information warfare with a significant increase in ransomware attacks this year. It comes as the online security measures within the country fall behind the standard of most western and other nations, including China, North Korea and Russia, placing pressure on the Japanese government.

Although the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) recently launched the Cyber Defense Command in March 2022, it is merely the culmination of pre-existing cyber-units from the GSDF, Air SDF and Maritime SDF due to the regulations in place by the postwar constitution.

Tanaka mentioned rising tensions with Taiwan and China may impact Japanese online infrastructures such as electricity and telecommunications. In an interview, he also stated that the Digital Agency in place, such as the National center of Incident readiness and Strategy for Cybersecurity (NISC) is not an adequate, defense system in place to manage a crisis once it has occurred. The investment toward cybersecurity will prevent any attacks from happening in the first place, not considering cyber retaliation to align with the constitution in place. [The Diplomat]

The measures come as Japan experiences an 87 percent increase in ransomware attacks since 2021.

Over 114 cases have impacted national businesses and large corporations, where the attackers forced payments to restore access to company data or risk being publicly disclosed. [Kyodo News]

South Korea: Police drops charges against ruling party's former leader

(my) The South Korean police have decided not to hand over charges of accepting sexual favors against Lee Jun-seok, the former leader of the ruling People Power Party (PPP), to the prosecution for indictment, citing the expiration of the statute of limitations, as well as insufficient evidence for the allegation of bribery. The Police, however, will continue to investigate the alleged attempt to destroy evidence of the sexual favor allegations.

Lee was suspected of receiving sexual favors in 2013 and receiving holiday gifts in 2015 from Kim Sung-jin, CEO of a technology company. After suspicions first surfaced in December 2021, the PPP ethics committee suspended his party membership for six months in July [see AiR No. 28, July/2022, 2]. Followed by the launch of the first emergency committee in August, Lee was ousted from his post as party leader. He was questioned by police on September 17 over allegations of sexual favors and bribery [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3]. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Ex-lawmaker convicted of leaking confidential diplomatic information

(my) Khang Hyo-sang, a former lawmaker of the former Liberty Korea Party (now the ruling People Power Party), was sentenced to six months in prison and suspended for one year after the court found him guilty of disclosing confidential diplomatic information.

In May 2019, Khang was accused of leaking the phone call that then-President Moon Jae-in proposed to then-US President Donald Trump to visit South Korea. The telephone conversation was confidential under the National Intelligence Service Act of South Korea since it was information not disclosed by the two governments. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Ex-unification minister questioned over repatriation of North Korean fishermen

(my) The prosecution has questioned former Unification Minister Kim Yeon-chul over the forced repatriation of North Korean fishermen in 2019.

Two North Koreans captured in South Korean waters in 2019 confessed to killing 16 of their crew on the ship. At that time, the Moon Jae-in government forcibly repatriated them to North Korea, ignoring their willingness to seek asylum in South Korea.

This incident has been criticized both domestically and internationally for violating the non-refoulement principle. The prosecution has been investigating former high-ranking officials from the Moon administration, including the former head of the National Intelligence Service [see AiR No. 34, August/2022, 4]. The ex-minister is suspected of ordering to stop investigating the case at an early stage. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Former Yongin Mayor sentenced 7 years in prison for bribery

(my) Jung Chan-min, a ruling People Power Party lawmaker, was sentenced to seven years in prison and a fine of KRW 500 million (USD 356.2 thousand) for taking bribes when he was serving as Mayor of Yongin. He was accused of providing a real-estate agent preferential permission of development and buying land cheaper than the market price from the agent [KBS World]

South Korea: Government and ruling party to consider reviewing all stalking cases

(my) The South Korean government and the ruling People Power Party (PPP) agreed to consider reviewing all stalking cases reported to the police. The need for enhancing legal measures against stalking started to be emphasized when a victim was killed by a stalker at a subway station she worked at on September 14.

The victim had already sued the suspect, a former co-worker, twice but he had still been able to trace the victim's workplace through the company's intranet.

To prevent similar potential crimes, the government and PPP said they discussed investigating more than 2,000 stalking-related cases. The prosecution and police promised to form a consultative body to better cope with stalking crimes and come up with comprehensive and strong protection measures for stalking victims. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Gender Equality ministry to maintain current legal definition of family

(my) The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family has withdrawn its support for a revision of the Framework Act on Health Families, which seeks to expand the legal definition of families.

The Act that came into force in 2005 defines "family" as a unit formed by marriage, childbirth, or adoption. Foster families or cohabitation couples have not been recognized as a family in policies for childcare, tax support, inheritance, and loans or in medical emergencies under the current law. Reflecting concerns that various types of family composition are being disregarded, a revision was proposed in 2020 at the National Assembly to delete the definition of "family" in the Act so that various types of families can be included in the policy support.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family issued a statement on September 25, saying it seeks to avoid "meaningless debates" about the legal definition of families. Rather, it added that it will expand support for unmarried and cohabiting families by finding feasible measures. [Hankyoreh, in Korean] [Korea Times]

Taiwan: Cabinet approves bill to amend minimum security prison rules

(gö) Taiwan's Cabinet has approved a draft amendment to the Prison Camp Act which intends to make it harder for prisoners to be transferred to minimum security facilities. It also calls for prisoners to be moved back to a higher security facility if they fail to return on time after being granted a temporary leave.

The draft amendment was introduced in the wake of the death of two police officers who were killed by a minimum-security prison inmate who ran off while being on a two-day leave.

Under current Taiwanese law, prisoners can only appeal for transfer if they were not convicted of sexual

assault, drug-related felonies, or prison breaks. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Increase of military drills on offshore islands

(gö) Taiwan has decided to increase the frequency of its live-fire drills on their offshore islands. The drills on Penghu County will be held once every month, while the islands of Kinmen and Matsu who are closer in range to China will hold military drills every two months.

This recent decision follows the increase of Chinese military exercises around the Island that have been going on since U.S. House of Representative Speaker Nancy Pelosi's trip to Taipei in August. Combat readiness in case of Chinese invasion is the purpose behind the drills, as well as to familiarize soldiers with rapid deployment tactics and weapon use. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Plan to boost nation's asymmetric warfare capabilities

(gö) Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense (MND) has announced plans to boost its nation's asymmetric warfare capabilities, under which it he wants to build ten more Tuo Chiang-cuo corvettes.

The plan is to have six ships ready to sail by 2023 and the others to follow between 2023 and 2026. Every vessel is equipped with Hsiung Feng II and III anti-ship missiles, Sea Sword air defense missiles, a 76 mm gun, a T-74 machine gun, and a Phalanx close-in weapon system. The armed ships have the ability to simultaneously hit air and sea targets. [Taiwan News]

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

Bangladesh: Country observes violent clashes between ruling, main opposition party

(az) In a more aggressive gesture, both Bangladesh's ruling Awami League and the main opposition BNP political parties are increasingly facing off each other on the streets. While the opposition party's protests are turning into a mass movement, the ruling party plays a vigilant role by attacking the opposition members on the street to crush the movement. Centering the next national election, both the parties are again against each other on the street to demonstrate each other's power, resulting in chaos during their face-off.

The law enforcers are also instructed not to allow BNP to hold frequent rallies and demonstrations in Dhaka. While facing challenges from both the law enforcers and the members of the ruling party, the opposition party BNP eventually came on the street with sticks in their hand to show a more violent gesture.

The death of several BNP leaders and members around different parts of the country makes the party more focused on the violent demonstrations, clashing with the ruling party members and police on the street. According to the report of *Business Standard*, more than 100 demonstrations of BNP have been attacked by the ruling party since July. The clashes left three dead among the BNP leaders and many injured.

While Awami League leaders promised to left BNP with limited space, the opposition party came to the street promising more intensity in the future. However, both sides use their youth wings in the front lines to face each other on the streets, causing the destruction of private properties and bloodshed like in the past. [The Business Standard 1] [The Business Standard 2]

Bangladesh: Youth penalized with ten years prison for vandalizing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's photo

(az) A man in Bangladesh has been penalized with ten years of jail and a fine of an additional USD 193 for vandalizing a photo of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in December 2015. It is alleged that the man removed the hanging photo of the prime minister from the office of a local administrator and later vandalized it. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Study shows women-related news under-reported by media outlets

(az) Working in cooperation with local organizations in Bangladesh, the Sweden-based Fojo Media Institute in a study has found that women-related news and articles decreased in the South Asian nation by 10 percent over the past 15 years. Although the main focus of the media outlets was on sex crimes, the least or the most underreported issue regarding women's rights was gender inequality.

Despite the High court's directives in 2009 to ensure a harassment-free workplace, this study shows that the media also didn't come forward to properly register the harassment and sexual abuse incidents at the workplace. The study added the comparison that the women related that accounted for 26 percent in 2005 and fell to 16 percent within 2020. In addition, the percentage of comments from female experts in different fields remained the same at 9 percent in those 15 years. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Multiple injuries during clashes of rivaling factions of ruling party youth wing

(az) After infighting among the members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the youth wing of the country's ruling Awami League party, 15 activists of the BCL have been reported injured. The rivalry among the followers of the college unit president, the general secretary and a large section of other BCL committee members caused the clash just before a press conference organized by two office holders to deny a series of allegations against them by general students. The common allegations were that the two office holders were involved in seat trading, extortion,

torturing students, and controlling college hostels and canteens, which is also very common in public universities in Bangladesh. [New Age]

India: Election authority of main opposition Congress party launches election process for new leader

(lm) The Election Authority of India's main opposition Congress party (INC) started the election process for a new party leader on September 22, and polling is expected to take place on October 17, provided that there is more than one candidate. [The Straits Times]

Notably, the nearly 9,000 party delegates could elect a new president from outside the Nehru-Gandhi for the first time in nearly 25 years. According to party sources, Ashok Gehlot, a Gandhi family loyalist and the incumbent chief minister of Rajasthan state, and Shashi Tharoor, a lawmaker from the southern state of Kerala and a former top United Nations official, could file nominations this week.

Since the defeat in the general election in 2019, many senior INC leaders have quit to form their own party or to join the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, blaming the weak party leadership of Rahul Gandhi, the son of ailing party president Sonia Gandhi, who took charge temporarily in 2019. Rahul, who is currently leading the INC's five-months-long protest march, has declined to stand in the upcoming party election.

India: Supreme Court reserves verdict on hijab row

(vv) India's Supreme Court on September 22 reserved its verdict on a number of petitions challenging a decision by the high court of southern Karnataka state that upheld a ban on Muslim women wearing hijab in educational institutions. [The Indian Express]

In January of this year, a row erupted in the southern state of Karnataka when Muslim students at a junior college were denied entry for wearing a hijab on grounds of violating the college's uniform policy. The dispute was followed by wide-spread outcry, many people voicing criticism from different parts of the country and several Muslim students protesting against the authorities of the junior college. The matter eventually reached the court, with the Karnataka High Court ruling that wearing of hijab isn't mandatory in

Islam and that uniform policies must be followed in educational institutions, regardless the religious identity.

The court order fueled more protests, and the matter was moved to the highest court of India – the Supreme Court. The petitioners fighting the hijab ban, implored on the High Court ruling made in February this year, and requested the apex court to consider the religious freedoms of the minority and especially privacy of women. [AiR No. 7, February/2022, 3]

Following a marathon hearing of ten days, the Supreme Court drew a momentary curtain on the case seeking time to ascertain any ruling on the petitions. While no definite date was mentioned by the bench of justices who asked for more time, a tentative date, though, seems to be October 16 and an official announcement is expected soon. The extensive hearing saw close to two dozen lawyers arguing on different aspects of the issue in question, speaking on several forms of freedom and basic rights. The defendant of the Karnataka government, though, maintained throughout the proceedings that their circular to establish mandatory regulations of uniform was aimed only at promoting uniformity, equity, and discipline, while also adding that their notice is devoid of any communal inclinations. [Hindustan Times]

India: Multiple raids on popular Muslim group; nearly 250 detained

(vv) Government agencies and police forces in India have raided premises of the Popular Front of India (PFI), and Indian Muslim political organization, across the country in two rounds for alleged terror links. At the time of writing on September 27, close to 350 arrests were made in connection with the prominent Muslim organization. [NDTV]

The PFI was first formed as a coalition of three Muslim groups, soon after which its members established a political wing named Social Democratic Party of India to contest assembly elections in the country. Many have demanded a permanent ban on the popular Muslim group, while supporters of the PFI have called the demands a communal hatred towards the minority. [Al Jazeera]

The multiple raids were conducted by the National Investigating Agency (NIA) in coordination with the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and state police forces, terming it a crackdown on terrorism and “anti-India” activities. In what is now called as the largest ever

crackdown, most of the raids and arrests were made in the southern part of India namely the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana. Five cases have been filed against top leaders of the PFI, including funding of terrorism, organizing training camps for terrorist activities, and providing with arms and weapons to support terror-related violence and hate crimes. As of today, a total of 19 cases are in probe relative to the PFI members and its top leadership. [Hindustan Times]

Speaking against the raids and allegations of terror links, PFI members have maintained that they work for the welfare and rights of the minority Muslims in the country. The Islamic outfit added that the central government run by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is practicing a totalitarian regime, using government agencies to specifically target the minority. BJP and other prominent right-wing Hindu organization members have denied the allegations, stating that they welcome peace and harmony with the Muslim community provided that their virtues are of nationalism.

India: Central government raises concerns over Rohingya issue to Delhi High Court

(vv) India's central government in an affidavit filed on September 20 to the Delhi High Court (HC) raised concerns over alleged unauthorized Rohingya migrants having potential links with Pakistan-based terror groups and other similar bodies operating in different countries. [Hindustan Times]

The Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) claimed in its report that there is an organized influx of illegal migrants from Myanmar through agents facilitating unauthorized crossover into the Indian borders, via Bangladesh. The affidavit filed by FRRO comes after an application b, a woman from Myanmar seeking exit permits to leave India and travel to the United States along with her three children, was rejected.

The woman subsequently filed a petition against the rejection in the Delhi HC pleading that her family is a victim of persecution in Myanmar and her husband Amin, who moved to the US in 2015 and secured citizenship for himself and permanent residence visas for his family, is making great efforts to get his family together. Begum stayed at a refugee camp in Bangladesh, before moving to India and filing the exit applications. The Indian authorities had asked her to arrange for a "No Objection Certificate" (NOC) from the

embassy of Myanmar, but Begum claimed that she is "stateless" and has no means to organize the paperwork asked for. [Business Standard]

The central government, however, claims that the petitioner is an illegal migrant on paper and granting exit permits to a third country would damage the international relations of the Indian government as it would be an indirect facilitation in resettling refugees who are considered "illegal" by the state. The central government stated that the petitioner has allegedly committed gross violations of Indian laws, who crossed over with no validation or documentation proof of her nationality and neither provided any pre-existing record of her stay prior to the crossover. The FRRO added that this may harm the already existing vulnerabilities in the country's national security, given the several terror threats looming at large, while also claiming that an influx of illegal migration from neighboring countries is affecting the demographic profile of bordering states. The central government asserted that its first priority is the security of its own citizens. [The Print]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

India: Anti-conversion bill passed in southern Karnataka state

(vv/lm) The Legislative Assembly of India's southern Karnataka state on September 1 passed a bill to crack down on allegedly "illegal" religious conversions in the state, despite fierce criticism from opposition parties and the Christian community. Karnataka is the tenth Indian state with anti-conversion laws.

The provisions of the bill states that violations of the law will result in imprisonment anywhere between three to five years, while involving forceful conversion of a minor will result in imprisonment anywhere between three to ten years. A compensation payment up to USD 6,000 will also be demanded from the accused, depending on the degree of violation and the victims involved. [Economic Times]

The bill was first introduced by the state government – run by Prime Minister Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – and passed through parliament's lower house in December of last year. While it didn't have enough support from the upper house at the time, the measure was enforced in May by an ordinance signed by the local governor.

The leaders from the opposition Congress party (INC) asserted their firm objections to the bill claiming that the intention of the ordinance is politically motivated to serve the communal interests of the BJP, adding that it is illegal and unconstitutional. INC members, while staging a walkout during the voice vote, stated that they shall challenge the bill in the top courts, seeking a stay or a permanent strike down on the ordinance.

The Christian community in Karnataka also expressed firm criticism towards the bill, stating that it is against the secular fabric of the country and involvement of the state and government in such matters shows undue communal bias. The Christian leaders added that the contentions of the bill must be that of legal tenacity and the community will only accept the court's observations on this matter. [Vatican News] [The Hindu]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

India: Supreme Court issues notice to central government on fraudulent religious conversions

(vv) India's The Supreme Court on September 23 issued notice to the central government while hearing pleas requesting more stringent provisions within the Indian Penal Code against forced religious conversions through intimidation, allurement of money and monetary privileges. [Mint] [Union of Catholic Asian News] [India Today]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

India: Swedish Defense manufacturer Saab to set up new facility

(lm) Swedish aerospace and defense company Saab AB will set up a facility to manufacture its Carl-Gustaf M4 weapons system in India. The facility will begin production in 2024, a top executive said on September 27. [The Straits Times]

The Carl-Gustaf M4 is a man-portable, multi-role weapon system that allows dismounted soldiers to effectively deal with multiple challenges on the modern battlefield. There's been an increased interest in the weapon system, which can be used against tanks, since the conflict in Ukraine.

India: Defence ministry signs deals on missiles for Navy

(vv) India's defence ministry on September 22 signed deals worth USD 210 million with BrahMos Aerospace for the procurement of additional surface-to-surface missiles for the Indian Navy. [Hindustan Times] [The Telegraph]

BrahMos Aerospace is a joint venture between the Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO) of India and joint stock company Military Industrial Consortium of Russia, a non-government private owned multinational corporation with manufacturing concentrations in cruise missiles. The BrahMos variants are a versatile set of missiles that can be launched from land, air, and sea, with all three variants currently in service with the Indian armed forces.

The latest deal was signed under the Make in India category that refers to the procurement of products from an Indian vendor and mandates the use of a minimum 40 percent indigenous products. This marks a step ahead in India's efforts of "Atmanirbhar" which translates to self-reliance especially in its defence sector and encourages indigenous production of critical military arms and ammunitions.

Pakistan: Ex-premier Khan evades court contempt indictment after apology to judge

(msk/lm) Pakistan's former Prime Minister and chairman of the main opposition party, Imran Khan, has apologized for criticizing magistrate over the detention of a close aide, likely averting a court case that could have seen him being disqualified from politics for at least five years. The hearing has been adjourned until October 3. [Dawn] [Daily Times] [The Straits Times]

The Islamabad High Court had initiated contempt proceedings against Khan over his diatribe against a female judge, who had ordered the arrest of one of his top aides, Shahbaz Gill [see AiR No. 34, August/2022]. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party official 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 [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3]. Gill was granted bail September 15.

Khan had also faced prosecution in an anti-terror court over the same remarks, but the case was dropped earlier this month.

Pakistan: Senate takes up bill seeking changes to transgender protection law

(fm) Pakistan's Senate on September 26 took up a bill that seeks changes to the The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act of 2018 (Act), a law that provides legal recognition to transgender persons and prohibits discrimination and harrasement. The bill inter alia stipulates that transgender persons have the right to receive education, healthcare and employment.

The Act protects the rights of transgender people to self-identify as either men or women, or as a combination of both, and to have their identity recorded on all official documents, such as passports, national identification cards, driving licenses, and academic transcripts. Even though the act was approved by Parliament in 2018, recent weeks have seen new discussions on social media, with critics challenging a specific paragraph that states that "a transgender person shall have a right to be recognized as per his or her self-perceived gender identity." [Deutsche Welle]

This clause has been condemned by clerics and prompted a senator from the religious Jamaat-e-Islami political party to file a petition in the Federal Shariat Court. The court is a constitutional court, which operates separate from civil courts and has the authority to examine whether certain laws comply with Islam.

Against this backdrop, representatives of the Pakistani transgender community on September 24 slammed religious elements in the country who are opposing the Act. Addressing a news conference in the National Press Club, transgender community representative Nayab Ali said that the law guarantees all fundamental rights of the transgender community of Pakistan, but it was being attacked by far-right members of society. [DAWN]

Pakistan: Six killed in second military chopper crash in over a month

(msk) Six Pakistani servicemen, including two major-ranked officers, were killed in a helicopter crash in southwestern Pakistan - the second deadly chopper incident in just over a month. On August 1, an army helicopter crashed in Balochistan during a flood-related operation, killing six including a senior army official [see AiR, No. 32, August/2022, 2].

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) insurgent group in a statement claimed it had shot down the chopper which had allegedly arrived in the province of Balochistan to rescue two army officers BLA militants had kidnapped in an ambush. The claim could not be verified from independent sources. [Al Jazeera] [The Straits Times]

Sri Lanka: Police fire tear gas to disperse protesters; at least 84 arrested

(kh/lm) Sri Lankan police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse hundreds of demonstrators on September 24, a day after President Ranil Wickremesinghe declared multiple key locations in the capital Colombo as high-security zones and severely curtailed protests rights in areas close to these premises. At least 84 protesters were arrested during the demonstrations, which were held to demand the release of activists detained under anti-terrorism legislation. [Al Jazeera] [Newswire]

It is worth noting that some of the locations designated as “high-security zone” are the same areas that served as sites for protest camps during the large demonstrations that earlier this year demanded the resignation of then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Since assuming office in July, incumbent President Wickremensinghe has taken a tough line against activists. [Business-Standard]

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court flags petroleum products amendment bill as inconsistent with constitution

(kh) Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court has flagged an amendment bill that was gazetted last month and allows selected specific sectors of the economy to individually import necessary fuel quantities – the so-called Petroleum Products (Special Provisions) Amendment Bill – as inconsistent with the Constitution. [Colombo Gazette] [News First]

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

Cambodia: Crackdown on illegal gambling

(th) Cambodian authorities have conducted raids across the country and arrested hundreds of foreigners as part of their efforts to combat illegal gambling. [ASGAM] [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Extraordinary Chambers in the courts come to an end

(th) In a ruling on September 22, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) upheld genocide convictions and the life sentence against former Khmer Rouge leader Khieu Samphan, rejecting his appeal against the 2018 verdict.

The ruling ends work of the ECCC, that was set up in 2007 to investigate the atrocities committed by the Khmer Rouge, who ruled Cambodia in the 1970s and caused the deaths of perhaps two million people. With the tribunal costing over USD 330 million and only three people convicted, Khmer Rouge survivors have mixed feelings about the end of the ECCC. [AlJazeera] [BBC] [The New York Times]

Cambodia: Fifth trial of mass dissidents begins

(th) The fifth mass trial of members of the banned opposition Cambodian Nations Rescue Party (CNRP) has started in Phnom Penh. The court indicted 38 former CNRP activists, including former CNRP Chairman Sam Rainsy and leading former CNRP politician Mu Sochua. [UCAnews]

Of the 38 defendants, only three are present in Phnom Penh; the rest are in exile or in hiding, according to defense attorney Sam Sokong. [AlJazeera]

Prosecutors accuse the defendants of attempting to overthrow the Cambodian government and inciting the population to protest through the planned but failed return of Mu Sochua to Cambodia. If convicted, the defendants face prison sentences of between five and ten years. [UCAnews]

Members of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights (APHR) group have condemned the trial. Kasit Piromya, APHR board member and former Thai foreign minister, criticized this latest trial, stressing that "[n]o one should be fooled by Hun Sen's latest charade that the courts in Cambodia stand for anything other than a weapon in his relentless campaign to wipe out the country's political opposition [...]." [TOC]

Cambodia: Authorities crack down on cybercrime syndicates

(th) Authorities in the port city of Sihanoukville have uncovered evidence of human trafficking and torture involvement by local cybercrime syndicates. The crackdown was aimed at cracking down on syndicates that lure and trap foreigners to force them to work.

In some cases, evidence of torture of the migrants was also found. The latest crackdown was triggered by a growing international criticism of human trafficking in Camodia. [BBC] [The Register]

Indonesia: New personal data protection law passed

(ai) The Indonesian parliament has passed a personal data protection law that holds personal data managers responsible if the private data of third parties are released for uses not permitted by law.

Offenders face up to five years of imprisonment. Further, falsification of personal data carriess a sentence of up to 6 years of imprisonment. The law

also imposes hefty fines on all companies that allow data leakage, up to two percent of annual revenue.

The Indonesian government had pushed for this law after a series of incidents that saw a breach of the personal data of citizens and companies. [Techcrunch] [TheJakartaPost]

Indonesia: Case of corruption among members of the Indonesian Supreme Court

(ai) Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has accused Supreme Court Judge Agung Sudrajad Dimyati bribery in handling Supreme Court cases. Investigations found sufficient evidence to charge Sudrajad and ten other people.

According to the Commission, the case involving Sudrajad was related to the management of the Intidana Savings and Loans Cooperative lawsuit. Sudrajad is accused of receiving bribes of USD 142,000 for a sentence favoring men representing the Intidana. [Jakarta Globe] [Tempo]

Indonesia: Human rights court indicts former soldier for gross human rights violations

(ai) The Human Rights Court in Indonesia has indicted retired former Major Isak Sattu. He is charged with crimes against humanity for killing four teenagers and injuring between 17-21 people, women and children, during a demonstration in Papua in 2014. He is facing a 20 years in jail sentence.

Established in 2000, the Indonesian Human Rights Court is a little-used, specialized court that hears cases of "gross violations of human rights," including genocide and crimes against humanity.

The court's move comes as violence in West Papua continues to escalate after the West Papua National Liberation Army, an insurgent group an the armed wing of the Free Papua Organization, issued a Declaration of War against Indonesia in 2018. Six Indonesian soldiers were arrested for killing and mutilating indigenous Papuans earlier this month. The government is facing accusations of covering up the violence and limiting the international community's

access to information. [JURIST] [Human Rights Wacth] [RNZ]

Malaysia: Opposition leader denies preferential prison treatment

(pe) The Opposition Leader has defended himself from claims that he received special treatment in prison when he served time on sodomy charges, before he was pardoned in 2018.

Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has been accused of hypocrisy, after allegedly criticizing jailed former prime minister Datuk Seri Mohd Najib Razak for receiving his own special treatment. Najib was imprisoned recently due to bribery and corruption, on charges that he continues to deny and for which he is seeking royal pardon.

Ibrahim claims that he had to serve ten years in prison before being transferred to the Cheras Rehabilitation Center (HRC), whereas Najib has been going in and out of prison to get treatment and was admitted to hospital barely a month after his conviction. Najib's quick transfer from jail cell into hospital has been widely criticized by his opponents, who state that hospital conditions are far superior to jail. His supporters claim that this is unfair, as Najib suffers from health issues that require close medical attention.

The authorities and prison department have denied the allegations of any preferential treatment. [Malay Mail 1][Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia: Amidst speculation, Prime Minister says he has yet to decide GE15 date

(pe) Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob says that he has yet to decide when to dissolve Parliament and call the next general election (GE15). Ismail Sabri further stated that the decided date will depend on the outcome of discussions by Umno's top leadership.

He made the statements during a media conference at the United Nations General Assembly. He stated that discussions must take place between the president, deputy president and three vice-presidents before a decision will be made.

There has been ongoing speculation about the date of GE15, which will rely on the Prime Minister's announcement of the dissolution of parliament. [The Star]

Malaysia: Activists welcome PMs remarks on Rohingya refugees

(pe) Rohingya activists have shown support for Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob, who has made remarks encouraging countries to help Rohingya refugees.

The head of the Myanmar Ethnic Rohingya Human Rights Organization Malaysia (Merhrom) remarked on Ismail's recent statements, which included calling on nations to increase the resettlement quota for Rohingya refugees. He also said that he hopes Malaysia will continue to negotiate with the resettlement countries for long-term solutions.

Ismail had stated that Malaysia has accepted nearly 200,000 Rohingya refugees, and is committed to tackling the root cause of the crisis. According to the UN, over a million Rohingya refugees have fled Myanmar since the early 1990s, with many currently seeking refuge in Bangladesh. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Human rights group calls for tougher anti-trafficking laws

(pe) A prominent human rights group has urged for stricter human trafficking laws to be established in Malaysia, following a string of reports related to the labor exploitation of domestic workers.

Remarks were made by the secretary general of Malaysia International Humanitarian Organization (MHO), who stated that large recruitment fees were leading to maids losing substantial amounts of money, in the worst cases amounting to forced labor. Furthermore, he stated that many employers also fall foul of a lack of regulation, as they turn to illegitimate agencies in order to avoid high hiring costs. This may lead to ultimately funding trafficking activities as well as potential loss to the employer if their maid chooses to abandon their post. He is advocating for more stringent rules to force out illegitimate agencies and ensure that maids are properly registered and tracked.

Malaysia has been criticized in international reports for lacking protections for migrant workers, and faces

pressure from numerous rights groups as a result. [UCA News]

Myanmar: At least 13 killed in junta strike on school in Sagaing region

(tp) Two military helicopters have attacked a Buddhist school in Myanmar's Sagaing region, killing at least 13 people and injuring many more. One of the school's volunteer teachers claimed that numerous faculty and students had been detained and transported by the military to Monywa City for medical attention when the bodies of the dead children were burned by troops in the town nearby. [Irrawaddy] [The Guardian]

Myanmar: Retired general assassinated by guerrillas in Yangon

(tp/lm) Ohn Thwin, a retired general and former ambassador, was reportedly assassinated on September 24 by resistance forces opposed to military rule in Myanmar. [The Diplomat]

Ohn Thwin, who served as Myanmar's ambassador to Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and South Africa, is the highest ranking official to fall victim to the resistance so far. His killing follows the assassination of Thein Aung, the chief finance officer of the military-linked Mytel Telecommunications Co., whose cellphone towers have also become the target of insurgent attacks. Another recent target was Than Than Swe, the deputy governor of the Central Bank, though she survived the assassination attempt and later received a promotion.

Philippines: Manila court dismisses Department of Justice's petition to declare Communist Party of the Philippines and related armed wing as terrorists

(jd) The Manila Regional Trial Court-Branch 19 dismissed the Department of Justice's (DOJ) petition filed in 2018 to declare the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army (CPP-NPA) as a terrorist group based on the Human Security Act of 2007.

In the ruling, Manila regional trial court judge argued that the CPP and its armed wing NPA did not fulfill the criteria necessary to be designed as terrorists, stating that the groups were engaged in a rebellion rather than terrorism and that their use of violence can be seen as a mean rather than the goal. In addition, the ruling expressed how the violence in rebellion is usually directed against the government, while in terrorism the goal is to create a condition of fear and panic among the populace. [The Diplomat]

Justice Secretary Remulla stated that the law used in the regional trial court case was repealed by the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 and that the jurisdiction over proscription cases falls under the Court of Appeals (CA), therefore The DOJ is set to file a new proscription case against the CPP-NPA before the CA. [CNN Philippines]

Philippines: Activists vow to never forget human rights abuses under former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, as imposition of martial law marks 50th anniversary

(jd) On September 21 Filipinos marked the 50th anniversary of Ferdinand E. Marcos' martial law declaration.

As victims recalled the horrors they had to endure under his regime, activists vowed to "never forget" the human rights abuses carried under the former dictator.

Amnesty International estimates that around 70,000 people were imprisoned, 34,000 tortured, and over 3,200 were killed after Marcos imposed martial law in 1972 and security forces were deployed against rivals, critics, and dissidents.

Martial law victims and activists have described the Marcos regime as one of the country's darkest periods and, as his son Marcos Jr. is now the president of the Philippines, they accuse him and his supporters of distorting history and facts about martial law and falsely portraying it as a "golden age" for the Philippines.

While campaigners have urged the current president to recognize the violence, the latter has refused to apologize, and, in one of his first interviews after his electoral victory, he stated that the 1972 martial law proclamation was necessary during that period because the country was facing national security

threats from communist rebels and Muslim separatist guerrillas in the south.

During this 50th year anniversary President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was in New York to address the United Nations General Assembly and his visit was accompanied by protests in the US as well.

About 8,000 people gathered in the University of the Philippines' main campus to remember the thousands of Filipinos who were victims of the martial law era.

As of now 11,103 people have been officially recognized as victims of torture, killings, enforced disappearances and other abuses, and according to the Human Rights Violations Victims' Memorial Commission, there are around 100,000 applications of victims that are still pending for verification and approval. [ABS-CBN News] [Benar News]

Singapore: Social housing policy consultations launched by National Development Minister

(pe) National Development Minister Desmond Lee has addressed the public in the first of a series of consultations regarding public housing development in Singapore. The series will continue until December.

Lee highlighted that public housing is a crucial social policy that can have a direct impact on people's standard of living. He told the audience that the Housing Board is working to reduce construction delays launching up to 100,000 new flats from 2021 to 2025. He also stated that the approach is dynamic and will be adapted to meet the needs of the public.

He further explained the Ethnic Integration Policy, which aims to ensure that certain groups are able to access the housing market that otherwise may have faced discriminations. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Foreign Minister highlights important of multilateralism

(pe) Singapore's Foreign Minister has stressed the importance of multilateralism in order to maintain global security, while addressing the General Debate of the United Nations General Assembly.

Vivian Balakrishnan stressed that global security has suffered in recent years, with divisions deepening. He stated that the United Nations is crucial in order to deal with the challenges of the future, to uphold and strengthen a rules-based system. He further elaborated, to say that Covid-19 has demonstrated the need for such cooperation, and that future such challenges will require a similar approach. [The Star]

Thailand: Covid-19 emergency decree to be lifted

(fj) Thailand's Centre for Covid-19 Situation Administration (CCSA) has declared that the state of emergency imposed for the controlling of the pandemic will be lifted on October 1 and the CCSA dissolved. This will also entail the cancelation of the entry regulations as well as the domestic restrictions put in place by the CCSA. [Bangkok Post]

The state of emergency has been in place since March 2020 with the CCSA's evolving measures including entry regulations, quarantine requirements and strict constraints on public gatherings. Citing the stable and moderate number of new infections as well as the prevalence of mild cases as reasons for the present step, the CCSA sees its dissolution in the context of a broader return to normalcy. Covid-19 will also be downgraded from the status of a dangerous communicable disease to that of a communicable disease under surveillance. [Thai Enquirer]

With its dissolution, the orders and restrictions put in place by the CCSA will become void. This prospect has prompted the group *Thai Lawyers for Human Rights* (TLHR) to note that according to their count the emergency decree has been used in 647 cases against people involved in political protests. [Prachathai]

In related developments, a lawsuit filed by a group of activists in October 2020 that accused suspended Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, acting Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan and four other defendants of unlawfully issuing the emergency decree has ended on September 26 with the acquittal of the defendants. The court ruled against the activists, who alleged political motivations for the issuance of the decree. Conversely, the court maintained that the decree was justified by the pandemic situation. [The Nation Thailand]

Thailand: Tentative date for next 2023 election set; politicians warned of vote-buying

(td) Assuming that the incumbent government shall not dissolve the Parliament before the end of its four-year term on March 23, 2023, Thailand's Election Commission (EC) has proposed that the date for the next general election in 2023 be slated for May 7, which is 45 days after the end of the House's term, pursuant to the Constitution. Also, during a 180-year period ahead of the next poll starting from September 24, all the MPs are warned of engaging in activities which could be construed as vote buying. [AiR, No. 38, September/2022, 3] [Bangkok Post 1] [Thai PBS World]

The latter issue has become a point of debate as scores of parliamentarians and politicians, in general, find the regulations and recommendations prescribed by the EC, leading up to the next poll, not clear enough that they could open to conflicting interpretations. In their views, instead of warnings, the EC should have provided them with clear-cut guidelines regarding their political remit. In other words, what they can or cannot do throughout the 180-year period. Each contesting party may also exploit those loopholes to bully one another. In particular, should Prayut opt for a dissolution of the House, it would be obscure if the rules apply to such a circumstance. [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

In order for the EC to be authorized to prepare for the poll to come, at the end of the day, the Royal Decree on the election of MPs must come into force no later than the deadline on March 30 next year. Nonetheless, what makes the matter challenging is that the organic bills on political parties and election process revised in 2021 in line with the 1997 Constitution to favor larger political parties – which result in the reversal from one-ballot to dual-ballot system, and the increasing number of constituency MPs from 350 to 400 – are now being vetted by the Charter Court following failed attempts of several micro parties to make some amendments in their favor. [AiR, No. 35, August/2022, 5]

In light of the contention, those minnow parties expect the use of figure 500 instead of 100, as stipulated in the debatable bills, as a divisor to calculate and determine the number of party-list seats each contesting party will receive so they stand a better chance of securing party-list seats. Thus, they have referred the bills to the Court to have them scrutinized for constitutional validity. After all, in the event of house dissolution, the EC tends to revert to the organic

bills amended last year, whilst the Court has yet to deliver its verdict. This is what a dozen political parties find challenging as they need to have their branch offices in all 400 constituencies in place prior to a slap election. Whatever lies ahead, both Deputy Prime Minister Wissanu Krea-ngam and now Acting Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwan have downplayed public speculation that Prayut would disband the House in time. [Bangkok Post 4] [National News Bureau of Thailand, in Thai]

Thailand: Royal defamation case delayed as defendants' requests for documents are refused

(fj) The court proceedings in the case of seven activists in Thailand being charged for royal defamation have been substantially delayed because documents requested by their lawyers have not been made available. The reason given was that the information contained in the documents could damage the monarchy.

The charges brought against the activists go back to a big gathering of protesters that took place on September 19 and September 2020 in Bangkok's Sanam Luang district. Among other charges, the activists have been indicted by the public prosecutor for making false statements relating to King Vajiralongkorn in their speeches, particularly concerning the crown's budget and the monarch's alleged stays abroad.

The witness examination process in the case already started in December 2021 but the defendants' lawyers have not yet been able to cross examine the prosecution witnesses as they have not received the documents needed to support their clients' statements. The documents in question include records of King Vajiralongkorn's travels and the Crown Property Bureau's budget spending.

Upon requests made by the lawyers, the relevant agencies refused the defense lawyers access to the documents. For example, the Immigration Bureau indicated that it was unable to disclose the King's travel records as it was covered by Section 14 of the Official Information Act which protects information that could damage the monarchy. The lawyers also sought the court to obtain the documents through court summons, but the court either refused to grant the request or the summons were left unanswered. The judge in the case stated that the witness examination should proceed without the documents and that the

defendants do not need to prepare any evidence as the onus is on the prosecutor to prove the defendants' guilt, not the other way around. If such a proof could not be made, the defendants would be considered innocent. [Prachathai]

Thailand: Security forces on guard over planned protests around ruling on prime minister's tenure

(fj) The Secretary-General of the National Security Council (NSC), General Supoj Malaniyom, has stated that the security authorities were ready to ensure law and order on September 30, when the Constitutional Court is scheduled to give its ruling on suspended Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha's tenure. [Bangkok Post]

With the position as Prime Minister falling under a constitutional eight-year term limit, the opposition had sought the nation's highest court to rule on the case of Prayut's premiership [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3]. While the outcome of the ruling remains open, the government's fear of public backlash is intensified by Thailand's increasingly tense political climate in the run-up to the general election scheduled for 2023. Given this situation, the head of the NSC publicly noting that the security authorities are aware of several planned rallies is likely part of broader efforts to deter the gathering of protestors.

What remains to be seen is how the government will react to the progressively clear advantage in popular appeal that opposition parties are enjoying. Some observers are noting that the parties in power are likely to evade defeat in a free and fair election by strategies of postponement and skewing the outcome. [Council on Foreign Relations] [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Opposition Pheu Thai Party brings candidate in position for possible suspension of prime minister

(fj) Thailand's main opposition Pheu Thai Party has announced that it would nominate its chief strategist Chaikasem Nitisiri for the parliamentary vote for the position of prime minister in case the Constitutional Court should rule on September 30 that suspended Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha has already reached his eight-year term limit. [Bangkok Post 1]

If the court's verdict will leave Prime Minister Prayut ineligible for continuing his role, a successor will have to be selected by parliamentary vote from among the list of candidates already proposed during the last prime ministerial race in March 2019. According to Pheu Thai's leader Cholnan Srikaew, this regulation leaves Chaikasem Nitisiri as the party's only potential candidate, after two other front runners had already left the party in pursuit of their own political projects. [Bangkok Post 1]

Looking beyond the ruling on Prime Minister Prayut's contested tenure, Pheu Thai is showing confidence with a view to the general election scheduled to take place in May next year. After two clear victories in votes for the chiefs of provincial administration organizations in the party's traditionally strong Northeastern region on August 16 and September 25, Pheu Thai leader Cholnan stated that there was a clear desire among the voters for a change in national political leadership. However, with the 250 appointed senators voting together with the 500 elected members of parliament on the selection of the Prime Minister, Pheu Thai would need to gain at least 376 seats in parliament to single-handedly elect its candidate. As the biggest opposition party, Pheu Thai currently has 131 members of parliament. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Government borrowing plans cut slightly as Covid-19 related expenses go down

(fj) The government is planning to borrow around USD 60 billion in the coming fiscal year beginning on October 1. This constitutes a reduction of around three percent compared to the target initially set for the period and, according to unspecified sources, goes back to cuts in Covid-19 related spending. [Bangkok Post 1]

The news coincides with a report that the government's revenue collection surpassed its target for the first eleven months of fiscal 2022 thanks to economic recovery and growing domestic consumption which is also linked to the normalization of business as Covid-19 pressures have been easing. The generally positive trend in fiscal revenues was strong enough to outweigh losses in revenue owed to the reduction of the diesel excise tax put in place to dampen rising energy prices. [Bangkok Post 2]

Vietnam denies allegations despite seeking a position on the UN Human Rights Council

(fe) Vietnam has rejected criticism that has been raised in the context of the country's bid to become a member of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the period 2023-2025. The Foreign Ministry called information about Vietnam's human rights situation put forward by international organization against its campaign "inaccurate" and "biased". [Hanoi Times]

The statement comes in response to accusations of Human Rights Watch over the adoption of a "Stalinist model of repression with propaganda" by the Vietnamese police. [Radio Free Asia 1]

The human rights organization also called for an investigation into allegations of torture against detained land rights defender Trinh Ba Tu. [Radio Free Asia 2]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Japan, South Korea, US affirm joint stance on North Korea

(sm/my) Leaders of the US, Japan, and South Korea left remarks on North Korea's nuclear program in a speech at the UN General Assembly on September 21.

US President Joe Biden cited North Korea as one of the disturbances to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime. He insisted North Korea was

violating UN sanctions and promised to use diplomacy to address nuclear threats. [Yonhap News Agency 1]

Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio expressed willingness for dialogue with North Korea, stressing that Japan was ready to participate in talks and that he will not miss the opportunity to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un without any conditions. [France 24]

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, for his part, did not directly refer to North Korea in his speech. He warned that freedom and peace of citizens around the world are threatened by collective abuses of human rights and weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons.

Rather, he met with UN Secretary-General António Guterres and urged the international community to take stern action if North Korea conducts additional nuclear tests. Yoon said he would make every effort to open up North Korea's closed doors and contribute to world peace. In response, Guterres said the UN Security Council would clearly respond to provocations that threaten freedom and peace. [Yonhap News Agency 2]

On September 8, North Korea passed legislation that allows the preemptive use of nuclear weapons during catastrophic crises. When announcing the bill, it showed its willingness not to give up its nuclear program [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2].

On September 22, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, South Korean and Japanese Foreign Ministers Park Jin and Yoshimasa Hayashi held a trilateral meeting on the fringes of the UN General Assembly in New York, their first since last July.

The three reiterated the importance of working together over North Korean's recent nuclear threat and criticized the country over its destabilizing communication on the issue. Earlier this month, Pyongyang has passed a policy making preemptive nuclear strikes possible, foreboding a potential seventh nuclear test.

Blinken, Park and Hayashi assured the strong response of the international community should such a test take place in the future and pressed North Korea to resume negotiations with South Korea over its "Audacious Initiative". The Audacious Initiative was launched by South Korea in August in hopes to commit Pyongyang to denuclearization in exchange for economic aid. North Korea has refused to open dialogue with the US and South Korea on the topic. On September 8, North Korea passed legislation that allows the preemptive

use of nuclear weapons during catastrophic crises. When announcing the bill, it showed its willingness not to give up its nuclear program [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2].

Beyond the North Korean issue, Japan, South Korea, and the US vowed to strengthen their trilateral security cooperation by increasing deterrence capabilities and expressed their will to support Pacific island nations by providing aid against climate issues, illegal fishing, and bolstering maritime security. They also criticized Russia's belligerent actions in Ukraine and condemned any similar attempts to change territorial status quos by force, eyeing China's recent assertiveness in the East and South China seas. [Kyodo News] [Yonhap News Agency]

India, Brazil, South Africa discuss humanitarian crisis in Ukraine

(vv) India, Brazil and South Africa on September 21 discussed ways to step up trilateral conversation on multilateral issues in a range of shared interests, as the Indian foreign affairs minister Dr. S Jaishankar hosted the 10th India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Trilateral Ministerial Commission Meeting along with Brazilian foreign affairs minister Carlos Alberto Franco Franca and South African health minister Dr. Joe Phaahla in New York.

The IBSA is a trilateral development initiative between India, Brazil, and South Africa to promote South-South cooperation. The ministerial commission meeting included conversations on mutual defense and security concerns, diplomatic and economic cooperation, the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO) and G20, touching on major issues in the international agenda.

The three countries discussed reforming a multilateral trading system so as to ascertain a trilateral voice in making the WTO respond to the needs of its developing country members. Sustainable Development was also an important agenda in the talks, with trilateral conversations to jointly work on raising their respective UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) ranking and support global partnerships in achieving SDGs. Climate Security, counterterrorism, transnational crimes, and developmental issues were among the other important agendas of the ministerial talks. [Economic Times]

Key focus, however, was drawn towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the focus on the humanitarian

crisis in the war-torn Ukraine. The three foreign ministers jointly called for immediate cessation of hostilities and urged the path of diplomacy to resolve the conflict. The three countries reinstated that they stand firmly for peace and territorial sovereignty, and that global order must be respected relative to international law. [Tribune India]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

India signs special trade agreements with economic power giants

(vv) As India focuses on economic growth amidst inflation management, its latest free trade agreements with the European Union (EU), United Kingdom and Canada have ensured a positive growth trajectory for the South Asian country in a post-COVID economic order. While India and the European Union (EU) commission are looking towards speeding up the dialogue for Free trade Agreement (FTA), India has also simultaneously signed a trade pact with UK that is likely to come through by the end of October, and an interim trade pact with Canada that's likely to take off by the end of 2022.

The FTA is beneficial to all nations involved as the agreement allows for minimal barriers in trades, investments, exports and imports between cooperating parties and nations, forming both bilateral and multilateral free trade pacts. As India's commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal met with the executive president of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis in Bali on the sidelines of the G20 ministerial meeting on September 21, the discussions held included a comprehensive EU-India FTA dialogue, focusing on the 1st Joint Trade and Technology Council and the EU-G7 initiative to price cap Russian oil to help manage global energy inflation. India's trade pact with the EU is one of the most significant deals for the South Asian country as it will provide easier access to the entire EU market and help with India's post-COVID economic order. [The Hindu]

On the other hand, the UK and India are likely to strike a deal by the end of October, the Indian commerce ministry officials stated on September 20. Rajendra Ratnoo, joint secretary at the commerce ministry, while addressing an India-UK business outreach event asserted that there are great positive sentiments over the potential of FTA between India and UK, and the shared economic benefits from the trade deal for both cooperating nations. The FTA deal, Ratnoo believes, will only double bilateral trade between India and UK by

2030. The special trade pact is expected to boost Indian exports and its labor-intensive sectors, while also providing comprehensive strategic partnership between India and UK since Brexit. [Money Control]

An interim trade pact between Canada and India isn't far behind, as the Canadian High Commissioner in India Cameron MacKay stated that both countries have struck an agreement for an early progress trade agreement (EPTA) by the end of the 2022 calendar year, which will later be followed by a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement) that may take longer to come through. Round four of trade negotiations are expected to take place in October, in New Delhi, to arrive at a final interim pact and seal the deal officially. MacKay acknowledged that Canada hosts the world's largest Indian diaspora and looks to pursue mutually beneficial stronger economic relations with India. [The Hindu Business Line]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

France to host international conference to support flood-devastated Pakistan

(fm) In a meeting on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, French President Emmanuel Macron has assured Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif that Paris will help the South Asian to recover from the disastrous floods and put its economy back on track. Macron later also announced holding an international financial and development conference this year, with the goal of assisting in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Pakistan's flood-affected areas and, with the help of climate-resilient reconstruction related financing, to accelerate transition to renewable energy. [The News]

In related developments, it was reported that a high-level French delegation will soon be visiting Pakistan to review the entire spectrum of bilateral relations. [Business Recorder]

Sri Lankan government tackling the economic crisis with the help of regional, international community

(kh) Due to the ongoing economic crisis, Sri Lanka's inflation rate has jumped to 70.2 percent in the last month from 66.7 percent in July, the statistics department reports. This increase of almost 4 percent

is evident that the crisis is exacerbating due to the lack of foreign reserves. Continually, food prices have jumped to 84.6 percent, meanwhile, prices of non-food items increased by 57.1 percent. The economy has contracted 8.4 percent in the last three months, which is one of Sri Lanka's steepest declines in a three-month period. [FMT]

Therefore, Sri Lanka's government is engaging with its creditors to cease further exacerbation of the economy.

During an online presentation held on Friday, Sri Lanka's central bank officials mentioned to investors and its creditors that Sri Lanka will possibly receive the USD 2.9 billion loan from the IMF in December this year. Until mid-November Sri Lankan government will be working with its official and private sector creditors to get financial assurances. In the meeting, Sri Lankan officials requested its creditors for a reduction to the debt Sri Lanka owes them, which is a requirement by the IMF so they can provide them loans. [Reuters]

Furthermore, it is claimed that the financial assurances are heavily dependent on China which holds almost 10 percent of Sri Lanka's debt. If China agrees to provide financial assurances then other creditors such as India, Japan, and the US will likely follow suit. However, China has so far offered more loans to Sri Lanka, instead of reducing the outstanding debts. [Reuters]

Moreover, Japan has reiterated its support for Sri Lanka by stating that it will help the island nation to convince and reach an agreement with its creditors, such as China and India, regarding the financial assurances so that the IMF bailout is finalized. [CNA]

India is also showing its willingness to enable Sri Lanka to obtain the IMF loan, as its High Commissioner held the first round of talks with the Sri Lankan government after Sri Lankan officials requested them. Indian officials also stated that they will continue to work with Sri Lankan stakeholders to assist their country. During the talks, the Indian High Commissioner discussed the likelihood of more long-term investments by India. This will include investment in green energy projects such as solar and wind power, Trincomalee oil storage tanks, railways, ports, and the agriculture sector. India has so far provided almost USD 4 billion to Sri Lanka this year as financial assistance. [ColomboPage]

Simultaneously, following the Sri Lankan president's meeting with Indian High Commissioner, China supplied a stock of medical equipment and essential medicines that are worth 600 million LKR of worth. The donation was made through the China International

Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA). The Chinese embassy stated that they will continue providing medicine and medical equipment worth 5 billion LKR to Sri Lanka within the coming months. [ColomboPage]

Continually, during a forum held in Colombo, this Thursday, foreign diplomats from 23 countries stated that they will support the Sri Lankan government in getting the IMF loan. The ambassadors belonged to countries that are both, members and non-members of the Paris Club. [NewsFirst]

Also, the UK has planned to provide USD 3.2 million to Sri Lanka to help vulnerable communities during the crisis. The funding was announced by the UK minister of state for the Middle East, South Asia, and the UN, Lord Tariq Ahmad, during his meeting with Sri Lanka's foreign minister. It will be channeled through UN partners and Red Cross and will be allocated towards food, seeds, and mental health care, especially for survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. Furthermore, Lord Ahmad stated that his country is committed to supporting the Sri Lankan people during this challenging time. [Ada Derana]

Lastly, during Sri Lankan and Singapore's prime ministers' meeting in Tokyo, the latter expressed his willingness to invest in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's prime minister stated that his government's priority is to make the Free Trade Agreement effective with Singapore. The investment will be primarily aimed to enhance Sri Lanka's economy. [ColomboPage]

Asia's major palm oil importing countries forms alliance to safeguard joint economic interest

(kh) The edible oil industry associations from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal have formed an alliance, known by its acronym APOA. It is aimed to empower countries that regard palm oil as an affordable source of food and nutrition. It will protect the business and economic interests of the member countries in the palm oil sector and will provide them the bargaining power to make imports sustainable by increasing the consumption of palm oil.

The alliance was formed by the Asian countries because of the high level of demand for palm oil in the Asian market, as Asia is responsible for 40 percent of palm oil's demand worldwide. India is the largest importer among the APOA as it accounts for 15 percent of global imports, meanwhile, Pakistan and

Bangladesh account for 4 and 2 percent of global demand, respectively. The alliance will be open for membership and will be further expanded in the coming years, as it is expected that Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia, which are one of the largest palm oil producing countries, will soon join it.

APOA will be initially supervised by the Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA) of India and will be chaired by Atul Chaturvedi who is currently the Director of Adani Wilmar Ltd. [Economic Times]

BRICS nations reject double-standards in countering terrorism

(vv) Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, forming the BRICS, have jointly rejected "double standards" in the global fight against terrorism, and call for the adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) within the United Nations (UN) Framework.

Brazilian foreign minister Carlos Alberto Franco Franca, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov, Indian external affairs minister Dr. S Jaishankar, Chinese minister of foreign affairs Wang Yi, and minister of international relations and cooperation of the Republic of South Africa Naledi Pandor met on September 22, along the sidelines of the high-level UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York, hosting their annual BRICS meetings. The ministers at the annual meet expressed firm condemnation of terrorism in all forms and rejected the double-standards in addressing terrorism and extremism conducive to terrorism. The ministers urged the adoption of CCIT - which was first introduced by India at the UN in 1986 but wasn't implemented as no unanimity existed on the definition terrorism and acts of terrorism among the member states. The CCIT as a treaty contends to criminalize all forms of international terrorism and stop funding, support and facilitation of arms and ammunition to terrorists globally. The CCIT proposed treaty is supported by BRICS collectively, who seek for its inclusion into the UN framework on counterterrorism. [The Hindu]

Multilateral negotiations were also initiated by the BRICS to consider biological and chemical terrorism as legitimate global terrorism threats. The BRICS nations reiterated that they firmly believe terrorism isn't associated to any religious identity, nationality, or civilization, but requires formidable attention especially towards its implications on basic human rights. The unambiguity on the understanding of global terrorism, extremism and radicalization, and the ways

to counter such threats is what the BRICS reject as a whole, maintained the member states. The BRICS demand for a non-politicized approach in addressing terrorism in all of its forms and manifestations, considering a collective global view rather than just a selective regional view, limited to the UN's standard frameworks, of what its far-reaching implications are to the global order and global security. [The Hindu]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

United States support Germany, India, Japan as permanent members of UN Security Council

(vv) A senior official of the United States on September 22 said that US President Joe Biden supports Germany, India, and Japan as permanent members of a "reformed" United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in continuation of President Biden asserting commitments to reforming the UNSC.

While addressing the UNGA, President Biden on September 21 asserted that the UNSC must become more inclusive so as to better respond to the immediate needs of today's world. President Biden also added that his administration supports increasing the number of both permanent and non-permanent representatives of the UNSC, and that includes extending permanent membership to nations that his administration has long supported. Ukraine President Zelensky, too, urged for permanent membership of Japan, Brazil, Turkey, India, Germany, and Ukraine, to make security conversations more globally inclusive and introduce better reforms in the UNSC.

German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, echoing the views of President Biden, requested support for their candidacy as a permanent member adding that the country has for long followed the principles of the United Nations (UN), and that the European country be given cooperation and support from powerful economies of the African, Asian and South American region.

Indian Foreign Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, too urged that India not sitting as a permanent member at the UNSC is a global issue, and that the transformation pending in the UNSC will require more representation. Italian President, Philippines President and Mongolian President were also among the many to voice support for more inclusivity in the UNSC for better reforms and efficiency. [Business Standard] [CNBC] [The Hindu] [The Week] [The Siasat Daily]

Ms. Sitha Komatineni contributed research to this entry.

Bangladesh Prime Minister Hasina denounces 'tragedy' of rich countries in climate crisis

(az) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a recent interview with the *Associated Press* said the urgency to combat the impacts of climate change is not being matched by actions of countries responsible for emissions. [The Straits Times]

According to the premier's suggestion, the fund of USD 100 billion sought by the year 2020 in the Paris Agreement to help the developing countries deal with the climate disaster should be increased further. She denounced the developed countries' role in this regard and said they are busy getting richer and not truly concerned about the others, calling it a 'tragedy'.

The prime minister also spoke about the Rohingya refugees inside Bangladesh who are out of their patience staying in Bangladesh. On the other side, the local community suffers because of the millions of refugees. The Rohingyas will not be granted any open space inside Bangladesh, and if any country wants to share the responsibility of taking them, they can. [Prothom Alo]

Bangladesh to trade in local currencies with China and India to counterbalance US dollar dominance

(az) To counterbalance the dominance of the US Dollar in global trade, Bangladesh is moving to trade in local currencies with two of its largest trading partners, China and India. Experts see Bangladesh as a test field for reducing the dollar's dominance.

To avoid exposure to Dhaka's falling reserve of USD, the State Bank of India has asked exporters to trade with Bangladesh in rupee and taka. It also warned against settling deals in the US Dollar. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), with its two most influential members, China and India, has urged increasing trade among its members with local currencies. Bangladesh, although not yet a member of the organization, has already applied for observer status in it. [CGTN]

The urge from the Bangladeshi side emerged from the situation of the Russia-Ukraine war, which put Bangladesh into a severe crisis. Due to its effect, Bangladesh lost much of its foreign reserve due to the fall of the value of the Bangladeshi Taka against the US Dollar. Bangladesh also wants to reduce its trade dependency on the US and has no problem trading with local currencies. Bangladesh is thus looking for a way to trade with its key partners. A Bangladesh Bank staff already informed that banks were permitted to use Chinese Yuan (or RMB) for overseas trades. As Bangladesh imports mainly from China, the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI) also suggested the Chinese Yuan, RMB (Renminbi), as the second international currency instead of the dollar. [NDTV]

United States announce over USD 170 million in humanitarian assistance for Rohingya refugees

(az) The United States has announced more than USD 170 million in additional humanitarian aid for Rohingya people, including those living outside Myanmar such as in Bangladesh. With this new funding, Washington's total assistance in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis has reached nearly USD 1.9 billion. Announcement of the latest humanitarian aid comes about a month after the United Nations refugee agency said the funding to help the Rohingya refugees living in squalid camps in Bangladesh was "well short of needs". [bdnews24] [The Straits Times]

Defense Expo Korea gives rise to high level meetings with defense officials around the world

(sm) From September 21 to 25, the Defense Expo Korea (DX) 2022 took place in Goyang, South Korea, and gave defense experts and government officials the opportunity to meet for the international defense exhibition. 350 defense companies from 43 countries showcased innovative military technology, such as drones, robots, ground and naval weapons at the event. The event gave rise to several high-level meetings between defense officials from ASEAN countries, Slovakia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Romania.

36 foreign officials from 13 countries (eight ASEAN countries, Australia, India, Maldives, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, among others) were brought

together for the Korea ASEAN Plus International Forum on Logistics as a way to strengthen defense cooperation. [Yonhap News Agency_1]

Moreover, South Korean and Romanian Defense Ministers Lee Jong-sup and Vasile Dincu signed a revised letter of intent and agreed to sign a defense cooperation agreement at an early date, as they discussed matters such as transnational security threats and cyberattacks. Similarly, Lee met with Slovakian Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad to sign a memorandum of understanding on defense cooperation to cover areas such as cyber security and climate change. Senior defense officials of South Korea and Lithuania, as well as top military officers of South Korea and Estonia agreed to deepen their defense cooperation. [Yonhap News Agency_2] [Yonhap News Agency_3] [Yonhap News Agency 4] [Yonhap News Agency_5]

The DX 2022 is held biennially and was co-hosted by the Association of the Republic of Korea Army and the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency and sponsored by the ministries of defense and industry this year.

South Korea is trying to highlight its defense capabilities as it aims to become the fourth biggest arms exporter in the world. The DX Korea is a good opportunity to expand its market, as top defense company representatives, military and government officials can conclude arm deals. [The Korea Times_1] [The Korea Times_2]

Cambodia and Bangladesh discuss free trade agreement and increased investment to boost rice trade

(th) On the sidelines of the 77th United Nations General Assembly in New York, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Bangladeshi Prime Minister Hasina Wajed met to discuss ways to boost cooperation and trade relations between the two countries as well as the conclusion of a free trade agreement.

Hun Sen particularly encouraged increased Bangladeshi investment in Cambodia to further facilitate rice trade. [Khmer Times] [Phnom Penh Post].

Hun Sen on state visit to Cuba

(th) During his visit to Cuba, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and the Cuban government signed three Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in the fields of health, education, and international affairs [Khmer Times].

These MoUs are part of efforts to strengthen and expand bilateral cooperation between the two countries. [Khmer Times 1] [Khmer Times 2].

China and U.S. foreign ministers discuss Taiwan issue

(ms) On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly currently being held in New York, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his U.S. counterpart Antony Blinken met for talks that were said to have focused primarily on Taiwan.

The meeting comes after the visit of the United States House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi in early August [see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1] and the recent statement of the US President Joe Biden hat in case of an attack by China the US would defend Taiwan [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3].

According to the U.S. State Department, Blinken reaffirmed during the conversation that the U.S. is committed to the "One China Policy" and is interested in maintaining an open exchange with China. At the same time, Blinken stressed that "maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" is critical to regional and global security. [CNN] [Deutsche Welle]

On the other hand, Wang criticized the U.S., accusing it of sending "very wrong, dangerous signals" on Taiwan, saying that the U.S. actions contradicted the One-China Policy. Wang advised the U.S. not to interfere with the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland. Wang also warned that, according to the Chinese government's understanding, the more pro-Taiwan and separatist forces proliferate in Taiwan, the less likely a peaceful solution to the Taiwan issue will be found. [Reuters] [Global Times]

Although both parties viewed the meeting as positive and productive, it did not mark a turning point in U.S.-China relations, according to China. The meeting between the two officials likely served to lay a foundation for the first face-to-face meeting between U.S. President Joe Biden and China's President Xi Jinping, which could potentially be held at the G20 meeting in Bali in November.

China and India advocate peaceful resolution in Ukraine

(ms) Both Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, in their respective speeches during the UN General Assembly, advocated for a peaceful resolution to the war in Ukraine.

While Wang met with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on the sidelines of the General Assembly on September 21, he advocated deeper strategic cooperation between China and Russia and promoted a common path in areas of global governance and countering what he saw as unilateralism. At the same time, Wang consolidated China's position on Ukraine and advocated a peaceful solution to the conflict. As he did during the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Wang stressed during the talks with Lavrov, but also with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, whom he met on September 23, that in China's view, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries must be respected. In his speech on September 24 before the UN General Assembly, he reiterated the need for peace talks and the need to recognize the "legitimate security concerns of all parties". China, as it had done in advance of the meeting, has expressed support for Russia against the sanctions imposed by the West, but has not gone so far as to support Russia's military ambitions, since, among other things, the annexation of Crimea, but also of the eastern territories of Ukraine with China's support, could set a possible precedent that could strengthen, for example, the Uyghurs in Xinjiang or the people of Taiwan in their independence ambitions. [Global Times] [Reuters] [Twitter]

Jaishankar, like Wang, also met with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov before his speech to the General Assembly. The meeting is said to have focused on Ukraine, in addition to issues of bilateral cooperation, UN reforms, and a discussion of the G20 meeting to be held in Bali in November. Lavrov is said to have explained the Russian perspective to Jaishankar, whereupon, as he did later in his speech to the General Assembly, he advocated a peaceful resolution of the conflict and continued to refuse to sever business ties with Russia and join Western sanctions. Even though Prime Minister Narendra Modi told Russian President Vladimir Putin two weeks ago that this is not the time for war, and Jaishankar told the UN Security Council early last week that human rights and international law must be respected even during a conflict, thereby at least publicly distancing India from Russia regarding

Ukraine, India, like China, rejects sanctions against Russia and advocates a peaceful solution that also takes Russian interests into account. [Associated Press] [Hindustan Times] [The Guardian] [The Hindu]

Australia strives for improvement of relations with China

(ms) During the UN General Assembly, which is currently taking place in New York, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with his Australian counterpart Penny Wong on September 22, during which both parties expressed their committment for improving bilateral relations.

Although few concrete details are known about the rather brief meeting, topics discussed reportedly included trade blockades, which were a reference to China's import ban and taxes on Australian products. After the meeting Wang stressed China's willingness to firmly support free trade and trade facilitation and to work to build an open economy.

The strained relationship between Australia and China as well as the "trade blockade" is mainly due to the previous government led by Scott Morrison which took a much more aggressive course against China. Among the causes for the low in Sino-Australian relations are several incidents, e.g., Australia criticized with other countries human rights violations against the Muslim minority of the Uyghurs in the northwest Xinjiang region and in Hong Kong. China, on the other hand, blamed Australia for announcing a purchase of a nuclear submarine from AUKUS members Britain and the United States. Another incident was the indictment of Australian journalist Cheng Lei in February 2021 for "suspicion of illegally supplying state secrets overseas," who, according to the Australian consulate, is being held in poor conditions by the Chinese government. Lei's case was also reportedly raised at the current meeting by Wong. [Deutsche Welle] [Global Times] [Sky News Australia]

Since Prime Minister Anthony Albanese took office this year, an improvement and a rather approaching China course on the part of Australia is recognizable. [Reuters]

China will "fight" any UN actions on human rights abuse of Uyghurs

(ms) As a result of the UN Human Rights Report published at the end of August, in which the treatment of the Uyghur Muslim minority in the northwestern Xinjiang region was classified as possible amounting to a crime against humanity [see AiR No. 36, September/2022, 1], a group of countries is considering acting against China at the current session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. In response to these possible plans, China announced that it would fight any sanctions or measures taken against China.

While the issue of the Uyghurs was also raised, for example, in the speeches of U.S. President Joe Biden and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in their addresses to the UN General Assembly, the Xinjiang Regional Government presented human rights achievement of the region in a meeting of the 1st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council on September 22. In particular, the fights against terrorism, protects human rights and strives for economic development, as a result of which a considerable number of citizens of the region are said to have been lifted out of poverty, were highlighted as positive developments. [Global Times] [Radio Free Asia] [Reuters]

China and UAE reach agreement on joint lunar mission

(ms) China and the United Arab Emirates have agreed on a joint lunar mission for 2026. The mission is to be an unmanned landing mission using a lunar hopper, a probe equipped with four to six legs that will allow it to repeatedly catapult itself into the air and land safely, making it far more suitable for investigating craters on the moon, which is also the goal of the mission.

The Lunar hopper is to be part of China's Chang'e 7 mission, which is to examine the craters of the moon for evidence of water.

The planned mission would be the second joint mission of the UAE and China. Already in 2018 in the course of the Chang'e 4 mission, China transported an Arab camera into space. [South China Morning Post]

With an eye on China, United States to develop drones with India

(lm) The United States is developing a program that would allow India not only to use drones, but to export

the technology to other countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Historically, most of India's defense technology and equipment have come from Russia — a practice Washington would like to change. New Delhi, for its part, wants to diversify its weaponry, and also to develop its domestic defense industry. [EY] [The Straits Times]

Separately, India and the United States have been negotiating for some time on a different drone deal. New Delhi wants to purchase 30 Predator Armed drones for roughly USD 3 billion.

Indonesia kicks off meeting of G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG)

(dql) Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has kicked off on Monday the third G20 Anti-Corruption Working Group (ACWG) meeting in Canberra, Australia. Part of Indonesia's G20 presidency, the meeting will run until September 29.

Issues discussed at the meeting include strengthening the role of audit in corruption eradication as well as public participation and anti-corruption education. Frameworks on regulating monitoring and supervision of the profession regulation on graft money laundering are also on the agenda. [Antara News]

Indonesia, Russia to deepen ties

(dql) Indonesia and Russia are set to discuss enhancing bilateral ties during the visit of Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko, the chief of the Federation Council – the Upper House of the Russian Federation – to Jakarta, schedule for October 6.

Issues on the agenda are said to include a potentila resolution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, deepening diplomatic ties between the parliaments of the two countries and boosting cooperation in various areas such as investment, trade, education, and tourism.

This reflects Indonesia's continued efforts to pursue an independent foreign policy with regards to the war the Ukraine. According to Bambang Soesatyo, chief of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) – the country's legislature –, the fact Indonesia supported along with 140 other countries the UN resolution that urged Russai to end the war, does not mean Indonesia taking side with Ukraine but "that its support is merely based

upon humanitarian grounds and anti-war principles." [Antara News]

Japan vows to strengthen security cooperation with UK and Philippines at UN General Assembly

(sm) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and his British counterpart Liz Truss, who met on September 20 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, agreed on signing a defense cooperation pact and to increase communication on a joint fighter jet development. Similarly, on September 21, Kishida met with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to discuss topics such as security, energy, and infrastructure.

In this first meeting between Kishida and Truss since she became Prime Minister, they both expressed their concerns about the looming change of balance of powers in the East and South China seas, where China has stepped up military activities. They also discussed enhanced cooperation concerning energy and economic security. Kishida had already talked about a stronger defense cooperation with Truss' predecessor Boris Johnson in May, in which the two countries agreed on disaster relief cooperation and joint military drills. [Kyodo News_1]

Kishida and Marcos, in their first talks since Marcos became president, also expressed their concerns on China's growing assertiveness in the East and South China seas and criticized Beijing's "economic coercion", a term used to refer to China's use of industrial subsidies to influence other countries' policies. They reaffirmed their will to cooperate on security, the safeguard of supply chains and energy. Plans for the visit of Marcos to Japan are underway.

Both Japan and the Philippines are involved in territorial disputes with China. Beijing has been routinely sending ships to patrol the waters around the Senkaku-Diaoyu islands, which are administered by Tokyo but claimed by Beijing. [Kyodo News_2]

Micronesia criticizes Japan for plan to release Fukishima water into the Pacific

(sm) On September 22, the President of Micronesia David Panuelo denounced Japan's plan to release

water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant into the Pacific in his address at the UN General Assembly.

Panuelo expressed great concerns about a potential nuclear contamination and maritime pollution of the Pacific and warned of the transboundary and intergenerational threat Japan's action could represent for Micronesia. The plan had previously been heavily criticized by China, South Korea, and Taiwan, who are also likely to be affected by negative consequences of the nuclear discharge. Regional fishing unions have protested the risk to their livelihoods and to the food security of Pacific states.

In July, Japan announced the plan to release the water used to cool nuclear reactors at the Fukushima power plant after the 2011 nuclear disaster [see AiR No. 30, July/2022, 4, AiR No. 47, November/2021, 4]. More than 1.3 million tons of water have been stored near the power plant since 2011. The Tokyo Power Electric Company plans to filter the contaminated water before releasing it into the Pacific Ocean to free up tank space. The International Atomic Energy Agency has been independently analyzing the water to be released, amid growing international concern on the issue [KBS World] [Reuters_1]

Japanese Prime Minister criticizes Russia, praises Turkey, and calls for security council reform at UN General Assembly

(sm) In his address at the UN General Assembly in New York on September 20, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida called for a UN Security Council (UNSC) reform as an essential measure to restore the stability of the international order.

The Prime Minister heavily criticized Russia's invasion of Ukraine and qualified the ongoing conflict as a breach of the rule of law. According to Kishida, Russia, as a permanent member of the UNSC with veto powers, has been jeopardizing the credibility of the institution. In the ongoing war, Russian President Vladimir Putin has not excluded the use of nuclear weapons if deemed necessary. The Japanese Prime Minister, originating from Hiroshima, the first city to suffer through a nuclear bombing during World War Two, proclaimed the nuclear threat to be unacceptable and proposed to reform the UN institution at the upcoming 2024 UN Summit for the Future.

This is not the first call for a UNSC reform from world leaders. Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan have been pushing for change as the Group of Four since 2004.

Echoing Kishida's address, the four countries have issued a statement criticizing the slow advance of talks over the issue and emphasized the need for the representation of developing countries, especially African countries, and major contributors.

The Quad Group (US, Japan, UK, Australia) also met on September 22 to support the expansion of the UNSC to more countries. Reshuffling the UNSC permanent members (US, UK, France, China, and Russia) would require an amendment of the UN Charter, a hard to pull off change. Japan has secured its position as one of ten non-permanent members from January 2023 for the twelfth time. [Current Affairs] [Kyodo News_1] [Japan Today]

Kishida further warned that the change by force of the status quo of territories would not be tolerated, referring to China's recent incursions in the Taiwan Strait and reaffirmed his willingness for a dialogue without preconditions with North Korea over its nuclear program and the abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 80s. [Kyodo News_2]

In subsequent brief bilateral talks with Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Kishida commended Turkey for its role in the resumption of the Ukrainian grain exports amid the ongoing conflict. Erdogan has also been one of the strongest advocates for a UNSC reform, proposing a rotating membership instead of the currently permanent positions. Turkey had mediated a meeting between the belligerent parties on the Russian Black Sea blockade in July, leading to renewed grain exports.

The two leaders also agreed to accelerate talks over an economic partnership agreement. [The Mainichi] [Anadolu Agency]

Japan participates in meeting to ensure the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

(sm) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and other countries' leaders (Germany, Australia, The Netherlands, Canada, New Zealand, Comoros, Finland, and Vatican) met on September 21 to prompt the rapid entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

The CTBT prohibits nuclear explosive tests. While 174 countries have signed and ratified the treaty, eight of 44 countries possessing nuclear test capabilities have still not done so. The US, China, North Korea, India,

Iran, Israel, Pakistan, and Egypt were urged to rapidly adhere to the principles of the CTPT.

The meeting took place as the likelihood of a nuclear threat is on the rise, considering the Russia-Ukraine war and North Korea's recent passing of a law authorizing the use of nuclear weapons for preemptive strikes. Russia President Vladimir Putin had insinuated that the use of nuclear weapons in the ongoing war was not to be excluded Russia would be forced to do so. The joint statement expressed concerns over a possible seventh North Korean nuclear test and urged the country to take steps towards denuclearization. [The Mainichi]

Japanese gas company Toho renews deal with Russia over liquefied natural gas supply

(sm) On September 20, the Nagoya-based Toho Gaz Corporation announced a renewed deal with Russia to purchase liquefied natural gas (LNG) from its Sakhalin 2 oil and gas project. The company will buy about 500,000 tons of LNG per year until 2033.

Sakhalin 2 represents about 20 percent of Toho Gas' LNG supply and about nine percent of national LNG imports. The deal comes after a series of Japanese energy companies, such as Jera Corporation (a joint venture between Chubu Electric Power Corporation and Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Incorporation), Hiroshima Gas Corporation, and Kyushu Electric Power Company Holdings Incorporation, have stricken similar agreements with the Russian Sakhalin 2 project.

These recent LNG agreements come amid concerns over energy scarcity, as Japan has sided with Western countries in issuing sanctions against Russia over the ongoing Ukraine–Russia war. While Western companies are decoupling their energy demand from Russian suppliers, Japan remains partly dependent on the Russian gas supply through Sakhalin 2. The Japanese government also plans to reopen some nuclear power plants to face potential energy shortages this winter. [The Mainichi]

Malaysian Prime Minister laments UN's perceived lack of action on Myanmar

(pe) The Malaysian Prime Minister has criticized the United Nations Security Council over its response to the ongoing political crisis in Myanmar. The remarks were made in an address to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

In his remarks, the Prime Minister alleged that the UN had essentially handed responsibility for the crisis to ASEAN, while distancing themselves from the civil war that has led to thousands of deaths.

He also remarked to ASEAN's 'Five-Point Consensus' which had called for an end to violence, the appointment of a special envoy and multilateral discussions. He expressed disappointment that the implementation of the consensus has not been successful, and that a tougher approach and involvement by the UN is needed. [Aljazeera]

Saudi-Malaysia relations set to develop, ambassador states

(pe) The Saudi ambassador to Malaysia has made statements praising the development of relations between the two nations. He made the remarks during an event to celebrate the 92nd National Day of Saudi Arabia.

Ambassador Datuk Mahmoud Hussein Saeed Qattan said that he has seen an increase in trade exchange as well as a number of memorandums of understanding (MoU) with several Malaysian companies, boosting investments. Furthermore, he highlighted the fact that Saudi Arabia has now offered 300 scholarships for Malaysian students to continue their studies in Saudi-based universities. Additionally, he said more than 120,000 Saudi tourists visited Malaysia in 2019. He took the opportunity to encourage further development of the relationship and continued collaboration. [Malay Mail]

Turkey says Malaysia and Indonesia interested in buying armed drones

(pe) Amidst soaring international demand for armed drones, Turkey has claimed that both Indonesia and Malaysia have expressed interest in buying the unmanned weaponry from them.

The Turkish foreign minister claimed that agreements had been signed, in a press conference held in Japan.

He further stated that Turkey would readily meet Japan's needs for drones if the desire arose. [Reuters]

Mongolia at the UN General Assembly

(dql) In his address at the UN General Assembly Mongolian President U. Khurelsukh urged the international community cited the global military expenditure USD 2.1 trillion in 2012 and urged the international community to allocate this money to the least developed and developing countries, with the aim to lift many millions out of poverty, to free them from hunger and disease, and to provide them with education and create jobs. [Montsame 1]

During a meeting on the sidelines of the Assembly, Khurelsukh met with the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen for bilateral talks at which both leaders agree to expand cooperation between Mongolia and the European Union, in particular in the field of economy, forest protection and green energy. [Montsame 2]

He also held a meeting with Slovenian President Borut Pahor, with both side agreeing to further deepening bilateral relations and cooperation in economy, education, science, tourism, and forest management. [Montsame 3]

Meanwhile, Mongolian Foreign Minister Batmunkh Battsetseg and Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto discussed bilateral relations and cooperation, especially ways to enhance the implementation national development agenda of Mongolia's government, the Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030, under which the country seeks to become a leading middle-income country based on per capita income, with stable and democratic governance and a multi-sector economy.

The ministers also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of diplomatic training. [Montsame 4]

North Korea fires short-range ballistic missile

(my) North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile toward the East Sea in the early morning of September 25. The missile launch came two days after a US aircraft carrier group arrived in Busan for a South

Korea-US joint maritime exercise held from September 26 to 29.

South Korean presidential office held a standing committee meeting of the National Security Council to discuss countermeasuresh. The committee noted that it was the first ballistic missile fire after North Korea announced on September 8 its legislation that would allow it to preemptively use nuclear weapons [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2]. South Korean military claimed the possibility of additional launches. [Yonhap News Agency 1] [Yonhap News Agency 2, in Korean]

UN expert on North Korean human rights supports Seoul's offer to Pyongyang on separated family issue

(my) Elizabeth Salmón, the UN's special rapporteur on North Korean human rights, supported South Korea's proposal to North Korea to hold talks on separated families caused by the Korean War (1950-1953).

South Korean Unification Minister Kwon Young-se recently proposed a dialogue with North Korea aimed at finding a fundamental solution to the war-torn family problem [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2]. Salmón called the proposal encouraging, saying efforts to reunite separated families should be made regardless of politics. Salmón had also called for the reunion of separated families during her visit to South Korea in August.

North Korea did not respond to South Korea's proposal. [KBS World]

US warns North Korea over arms supplies to Russia

(my) Elizabeth Rosenberg, US treasury assistant secretary for terrorist financing and financial crimes, stressed that it is clearly a violation of international sanctions for North Korea or Irania to supply military equipment to Russian companies subject to sanctions. Rosenberg also said sanctions would continue if Russia were provided weapons for use in the Ukrainian war. [Korea Herald]

The US State Department confirmed on September 6 that Russia is trying to buy rockets and shells from North Korea [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2].

In response, Korean Central News Agency, a North Korean media, said on September 22 that North Korea has never exported weapons or ammunition to Russia and has no plans to do so. They claimed that “hostile forces” were spreading false rumors in pursuit of their political and military goals. [The Guardian]

United States urges Pakistan to seek China debt relief after floods, premier calls on Paris Club nations

(lm/tj) Addressing a press conference after talks with his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced USD 10 million in new aid for the floods-devastated South Asian nation and called on the government in Islamabad to seek debt relief from its key economic and political partner China. Pakistan owes USD 30 billion, or about a third of its external debt to Beijing. [The Straits Times 1]

Using a similar language, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif recently made an urgent appeal for debt relief from the so-called Paris Club, a group of officials from major creditor countries, excluding China. In an interview with *Bloomberg* Television, Sharif said his government had just signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) with "very tough conditionalities" that include taxes on petroleum and electricity. [The Straits Times 2]

Notably, citing a United Nations policy paper, the *Financial Times* reported on September 23 that Pakistan’s creditors should consider debt relief so that policymakers in Islamabad can prioritize financing the disaster response over international debt repayments. [Financial Times]

United States push for ‘constructive’ India-Pakistan relations

(lm/tj) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on September 27 he had discussed with his Pakistani counterpart Bilawal Bhutto Zardari what the American top diplomat called “managing a responsible relationship” with neighboring India. [The Straits Times]

Timing and context of remarks are noteworthy: Just a day earlier, India’s defence and foreign ministers in separate statements opposed a decision by

Washington to sell F-16 aircraft sustainment and related equipment to Pakistan in a deal valued up to USD 450 million [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2].

Asked about the F-16 deal, the US State Department later said that Washington had independent relations with New Delhi and Islamabad. [The Indian Express]

South Korean President stresses international cooperation for peace at UN General Assembly and reaffirms support for overseas Koreans

(sm) During his address at the UN General Assembly on September 20, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol held a keynote speech calling for multilateral cooperation and international solidarity to uphold universal global norms and maintain peace. He subsequently met with UN Secretary-General Antony Guterres, urging him for a firm response to North Korea's recent nuclear activity. [NHK News] [South China Morning Post]

While stressing the importance of jointly tackling global challenges such as pandemics, climate change and humanitarian crises, Yoon encouraged richer countries to share their technological knowhow and innovations with less developed countries. He assured South Korea's commitment to increasingly contribute to the management of global issues and to expand its Official Development Assistance (ODA).

To tackle the COVID-19 pandemic, South Korea has pledged USD 300 million to the Access to COVID-19 Tools-Accelerator Initiative, the largest international initiative to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 health technologies and is set to increase its green ODA to boost decarbonization and access to green technologies in developing countries. [Yonhap News Agency_1]

Yoon also talked about human rights breaches and attempts to alter the status quo by coercion, referring to North Korean and Russian nuclear threats. In his 25 minutes meeting with Guterres, the President asked for the UN's support and international condemnation in case of a seventh North Korean nuclear test. Gutteres affirmed his support for Pyongyang's denuclearization and assured that the UN would appropriately respond to such a threat.

Yoon furthermore informally met with former World Bank President Jim Yong Kim with whom he agreed

that international financial organizations would be ready to extent support to a denuclearizing North Korea. The likelihood of such a development remains to see as Pyongyang has recently passed a policy authorizing preemptive nuclear strikes for self-defense. [see Air No. 38, September/2022, 3] [Yonhap News Agency_2]

Finally, Yoon assured his support during a meeting with Korean residents in New York, addressing concerns over recent hate crimes against US citizens of Korean descent during the COVID-19 pandemic. He promised to bring up the issue with US authorities and to strengthen support for overseas Koreans through culture and language initiatives. One of Yoon's campaign promises was to establish an Office for overseas Koreans; the corresponding bill is expected to pass through the National Assembly at an early date. [The Korea Times] [Yonhap News Agency_3]

South Korea, US presidents meet over defense cooperation and Inflation Rate Act concerns

(sm) South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and US President Joe Biden met on the fringes of the UN General Assembly on September 22 and agreed on increased defense and deterrence cooperation to face the North Korean nuclear threat. They also had opportunities to hold brief informal talks during a fundraising diner later that day and during the Queen's funeral on September 18.

Yoon brought up concerns over the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which gives tax advantages to companies assembling their electric vehicles (EV) in the US. Biden replied he was aware of the South Korean concerns and supported ongoing talks to find a solution to the issue. The IRA is perceived as discriminatory by South Korean EV makers such as Hyundai. The presidents agreed on cooperation over liquidity facilities for financial stabilization if necessary. [Yonhap News Agency_1]

The White House stated the two leaders had also discussed supply chain and energy security, technological cooperation, global health, and climate change. Last week, US-South Korea high level ministerial talks on defense technology cooperation took place and a consultation mechanism over the IRA was established. [see Air No. 38, September/2022, 3] [Yonhap News Agency_2]

South Korean and Japanese leaders agree on tighter future cooperation

(sm) South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister agreed to restore bilateral ties and shared their concerns over the North Korean nuclear threats on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on September 21.

It was the first talk between Japanese and South Korean leaders since 2019, as relations are at an all times low due to territorial disputes and wartime labor issues. During the informal 30-min talk, Kishida and Yoon agreed to strengthen their bilateral and trilateral defense cooperation with the US and to continue high level communication. Yoon stated his support for Japan in the unresolved matter of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s.

The meeting came as the Foreign Ministers Yoshimasa Hayashi and Park Jin agreed to work towards a solution for the forced war time labor compensation issue on September 19. In 2018, Korean Supreme Court issued a court order asking two major Japanese companies to compensate victims of wartime labor in Korea. As the companies failed to comply, a new court order to liquidate South Korea-based assets of the companies was heavily criticized by the Japanese side, which considers all World War Two reparations as settled since the signature of a bilateral agreement in 1965.

The countries have moreover been fighting over the Tokyo-claimed, Seoul-administered Dokdo-Takeshima islands in the Sea of Japan. [The Japan Times]

Japanese, South Korean Foreign Ministers discuss wartime labor issue and future defense cooperation

(sm) On September 19, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and his South Korean counterpart Park Jin met on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York and agreed on joint efforts to resolve the two countries' wartime forced labor compensation issue and to increase security cooperation in view of North Korea's recent nuclear assertiveness.

The meeting took place as the South Korean supreme court issued the order to liquidate the South Korean assets of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Ltd. and the Nippon Steel Corporation, two major Japanese

companies whose assets were seized after they failed to comply with a 2018 South Korean court order to compensate victims of colonial time forced labor. The Japanese side claims that all reparations for damages resulting from its colonial rule had been settled by a 1965 bilateral agreement and has warned Seoul of serious consequences if the assets de facto were to be sold off. [The Japan Times]

This is not Hayashi and Park's first meeting over the controversial wartime compensation issue, as previous meetings on the topics had taken place last July in Tokyo and in Phnom Penh in August. A public-private consultative body has been created last July, as South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol had hoped to avoid a further worsening of bilateral relations by preventing the assets' liquidation.

The ministers also discussed recent security concerns as North Korea is suspected of launching a seventh nuclear test soon. They vowed to increase the bilateral and trilateral security cooperation with the US to counter any potential North Korean threat. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and President Yoon are expected to address both topics in an upcoming summit, in hopes of bettering the strained relationship. [Kyodo News] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea, EU discuss energy and climate cooperation in Seoul

(sm) On September 21, the EU delegation visiting Seoul discussed nuclear energy cooperation and the current geopolitical situation with South Korean Deputy Trade Minister Jeong Dae-jin to enhance energy security and tackle climate change.

During talks with the EU Parliament's First Vice President Othmar Karas and EU industry and energy committee chair Cristian-Silviu Busoi, Seoul expressed its will to work closely with EU countries planning to build new nuclear facilities, as it aspires to participate in nuclear power plant construction projects with countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic.

Jeong also asked for support concerning the US' recent implementation of the Inflation Rate Act, a tax advantage granted to electric car makers assembling their vehicles in the US, perceived as discriminatory by Korean electric car makers such as Hyundai. The German and Swedish electric car industries are similarly impacted by the new US policy. [Yonhap News Agency_1] [Yonhap News Agency_2]

Singapore recognizes India's importance to ASEAN in collaborative visit

(pe) Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has noted the increased and intensified cooperation with India, in a recent speech. He made reference to the "Act East" policy of collaboration between the two nations, in an address as part of a five-day visit to India.

Wong also stated that he can envision India taking on a larger role in regional and international affairs, as the country's influence continues to grow. He stated that India is a strategically important partner to Singapore and that he hopes to see India be increasingly engaged in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) going forward.

The two countries have also agreed on several new areas of cooperation during recent talks, including on food and energy security, on green technology, particularly green hydrogen, on digital connectivity and skills development. [Outlook India]

Singapore & Australia to sign new green agreement

(pe) The Singaporean Prime Minister is planning to visit Australia next month, where a new green economy deal is due to be made.

The visit will be part of an annual meeting between the two nations. The proposed agreement will streamline climate-friendly financing and technology development as well as facilitate future renewable energy and hydrogen deals.

Additional meetings due to be attended by Australia in coming months include Cambodia's East Asia Summit, the G20 leaders' meeting in Bali, and APEC in Thailand. [ABC News]

Malaysian government agrees to allow entry to 10,000 Sri Lankan workers

(kh) The Malaysian government has agreed to allow 10,000 Sri Lankan migrants to enter the country following a request by the Sri Lankan government. The Malaysian human resource minister stated that this

decision is aimed to support the South Asian Island nation in tackling its economic crisis and to help Sri Lankan migrant workers to feed their families back home.

Sri Lankan president met with Secretary General of the Commonwealth

(kh) During his visit to the United Kingdom to participate in the State Funeral Service of the Late Queen Elizabeth 2, the Sri Lankan president met with the Secretary General of the Commonwealth to discuss his country's engagement with the Secretariat and talked about matters of mutual benefit and interest. [ColomboPage]

U.S., Canadian war vessels sail through Taiwan Strait

(gö) Amid rising tensions between China and Taiwan, the U.S. Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer Higgins and the Royal Canadian Navy's Halifax-class have sailed through the Taiwan Strait on September 20. According to the countries' militaries, the war vessels were on a routine transit via the Taiwan Strait.

This has been the second joint transit of the U.S. and Canada since October 2021 and the second of a U.S. warship in September.

While China has denounced the transits, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry said these operations in the Taiwan Strait clearly showcase how democratic allies support Taiwan's sovereignty in opposition to territorial claims by Beijing. [Reuters]

Taiwan and the Czech Republic sign six cooperation agreements

(gö) Taiwan and the Czech Republic have concluded six memorandums of understanding and cooperation agreements laying the foundation for future bilateral cooperation regarding of technology, education and culture.

The agreements were signed by Taiwan's representative to the Czech Republic Ke Liang-ruey and the Czech representative to Taiwan David Steinke. Both representatives included one memorandum of

understanding each on semiconductor and education cooperation. The memorandums of understanding were part of a visit from the Czech delegation to Taiwan.

Taiwan's Foreign Ministry called the agreements "a milestone" for Taiwanese-Czech cooperation that will "help consolidate the resilience of democratic supply chains in the face of authoritarian threats." [Focus Taiwan]

U.S. Congressmen introduce bill to accelerate arms delivery to Taiwan

(gö) Two U.S. Congressmen have introduced a new bill to speed up the transfer and delivery of weapons to Taiwan and allow a war reserve stockpile to make Taiwan combat ready in case of Chinese invasion.

The draft Accelerating Arms Transfers to Taiwan Act authorizes the creation of a war reserve stockpile in Taiwan by making Taiwan eligible for priority delivery of excess defense articles. This will require the U.S. Secretary of Defense to utilize the Special Defense Acquisition Fund (SDAF) to speed up weapons procurement for Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan]

Thailand's Royal Thai Navy signs deal to procure Israeli-made unmanned aerial vehicles

(td) Thailand's Royal Thai Navy has signed an agreement with Elbit Systems, an international defence electronics firm based in Israel, to procure Israeli-made Hermes 900 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) – simply known as drones – with an offer of the non-tariff price at around USD 120 million. According to a local source, the Royal Thai Navy would purchase seven of those UAVs in question although it had not provided in-depth details of the plan. [Bangkok Post] [Reuters]

With the Hermes 900 drone regarded as a top-notch of its kind in terms of surveillance and military operations, the Thai Navy expects to be well equipped with advanced defence technology to safeguard the sovereignty and maritime territory of Thailand, to patrol shipping routes, and to assist prospective attack missions as well as sea rescue operations. Therefore, after a delivery from Israel, the UAVs will then be dispatched to each navy region.

Thailand's industry minister to further discuss gold mine dispute with Australian firm

(td) Pursuant to the international arbitral tribunal's resolution to finalize a verdict on a dispute over gold mining between the Thai government and Kingsgate Consolidated Ltd – an Australia-based corporation – on December 31, the Thai Industry Ministry, led by Minister Suriya Juangroongruangkit, is on his way to attend another round of talks with the private firm later this September in Australia to settle the conflict, albeit of no confirmed date. [Bangkok Post]

The long-standing dispute between the two parties has arisen since the now-defunct Thailand National Council for Peace and Order invoked Section 44 of the interim charter, promulgated following the military coup in 2014 to suspend gold mining in 2017, to subside health and environmental impacts in response to the local villagers. Hence, the operation of Chatree gold mine in the northern provinces of Phichit, Phitsanulok and Phetchabun, administered by Kingsgate's subsidiary Akara Resources Plc, came to a halt after such a unilateral expropriation.

In regard to the abrupt suspension, the Australian company brought the matter before the international court of arbitration to demand compensation for the losses it had suffered. Nonetheless, the court has postponed its ruling to give the two sides more time to iron out their differences. In light of this, Thailand is likely to agree to the company's terms, allegedly, instead of paying a considerable amount of more than USD 666.8 million. Supporting this claim is the repeated calls on the company to resume mining in the country.

After all, the government denied a public speculation that it has allocated some additional budget to fund the legal battle. Looking into details, although the time frame for negotiation has been extended to until 2023 from the previous 2017-2021, the total amount of budget remains the same at around USD 21.2 million. Despite that, the scandal has been a contentious issue among the parliamentarians and critics at large, given the national financial burden, which passes on to the people, throughout the course of legal proceedings.

Vietnam denies deal to raise rice export prices with Thailand amidst soaring

production costs

(td) With soaring production costs amidst the war in Ukraine, climate change, and COVID-19 pandemic, Thailand and Vietnam could raise rice export prices by 20%, in tandem, to enhance competitiveness in the global market and, notably, alleviate the burden which bears on the local farmers. Nonetheless, according to a couple of news reports, Vietnam, in contrast, denied that it had reached a deal with Thailand to pursue such a course of action. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Nikkei Asia]

In that regard, following prior talks between the Thai Agriculture and Cooperatives Ministry and its Vietnamese counterpart – Agriculture and Rural Development Ministry – the latter argued that they would conduct general cooperation activities, whereas the first one aimed to push for fairer prices by means of the pricing mechanism to ensure that export prices are in proportion to the actual production costs; be it fertilizers, chemicals, or fuel.

After all, according to analysts, should the Thai-Vietnamese cooperation be plausible, it might pave the way for the formation of a new group of rice exporting countries to increase their leveraging power and boost farmers' incomes. In practice, however, it is challenging as India – the world's biggest rice exporter before Vietnam and Thailand – holds the greater say in the setting of rice prices, which itself has also lately imposed an export duty of 20% on certain types of rice to secure domestic supplies. Come what may, the two countries set sight on the growing export of rice products in great demand, in a concerned manner, to contribute to global food security.

Cambodia, Thailand step up cooperation on defence and joint cross-border development

(td) In late September came a flurry of high-level engagements between Cambodia and Thailand to foster their vibrant bilateral ties, including an official visit by Lieutenant General Hun Manet – Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF), and Commander of the Royal Cambodian Army – to Thailand on 19-20, following the 7th summit between Cambodia-Thailand border provinces held virtually on 16 this month.

On security and defence cooperation, Manet led a delegation from the RCAF to the Royal Thai Army to

discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interests and concerns with his counterpart, Narongpan Jitkaewtae, Thai Army Commander-in-Chief General. Among the key talking points, the two army chiefs concentrated on the progress on the implementation of their terms of reference, signed on February 3, to ensure the synergy between them. Therefore, the two armies assured to maintain and enhance their working relations at whichever possible level. [The Phnom Penh Post 1]

Furthermore, both armies pledged their commitments to work side by side to combat an array of transnational crimes to bring about peace, stability, and common prosperity – which would create an environment conducive to the increasing cross-border trade and job opportunities. On this occasion, he also paid a call on Thai Defence Minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha, to exchange their broad views on military cooperation and regional developments whilst Cambodia is serving as rotating chairman of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2022. [The Phnom Penh Post 2]

With regards to the cross-border cooperation – supported by respective armies, whose efforts aim at stabilizing the Cambodia-Thailand border – Cambodia Interior Ministry Sar Kheng along with Anupong Paochinda, his Thai counterpart, co-chaired the 7th summit, at which they reached an 18-point agreement to materialize their joint efforts forward to revamp all the practices and regulations about border crossings after the covid-19 pandemic. They had the facilitation of trade and other economic activities, transport, and labor employment as the focal point of their talks. Besides, other areas of cooperation, e.g., public health and natural disaster, were discussed. [The Phnom Penh Post 3]

In the meantime, during the meeting, the two parties were reported to propose a plan to upgrade three border checkpoints including An Ses, Thmar Da, and Chob Koki into international ones, let alone the feasibility of other projects in progress. Even if the Thmar Da border checkpoint is regarded, in practice, as a de facto international border checkpoint, Thailand has yet to recognise it as Cambodia had requested. On top of that, had the An Ses border been internationalised, both sides could have generated more revenues from trade and investments. As of now, it is worth noting that 7 international border checkpoints between Cambodia and Thailand are in place. [Khmer Times]

Myanmar military-linked drug cartel and weapons broker arrested by Thai authorities

(td) Thai enforcement officers have detained a Myanmar tycoon, Tun Min Latt, who has close personal ties with the junta-led government at home, along with three Thai nationals on charges of conspiracy to drugs trafficking and money laundering, thereby seeing their assets worth 200 million baht (USD 5.4 million) confiscated. It is an effort to tackle such activities at the Thai-Myanmar border town of Tachileik in the northern province of Chiang Rai.

According to the United Nations, a Myanmar-based company associated with him made a considerable amount of donation, through illegal activities, to the Myanmar military in 2017. Besides, he has been a helping hand for the army in securing weapon supplies against the backdrop of domestic insurgencies. His businesses, thus, are the target of sanctions and inspection. In this regard, he is now reported to have engaged with a Thai politician.

Considering a report from *Justice for Myanmar*, Upakit Pachariyangkun, one of the Thai Senators, struck a deal with the family of Tun Min Latt to establish a casino known as *The Allure Resort*, becoming operational in 2003. However, Upakit has lately defended himself, as reported in the *Bangkok Post*, arguing that he sold his stocks to a third party in 2015 before entering politics four years later, and that he was not involved in any grey business.

After all, despite his denials, one of the four suspects is allegedly Upakit's son-in-law. For now, the Office of the Narcotics Control Board is examining and verifying the impounded assets to ensure if there are others involved in their offences. Whatever the legal proceedings underway, this case indeed poses a challenge to the relations between Thailand and Myanmar, often deemed as intimate and strong, due to their business and military links. [Bangkok Post] [Bloomberg] [Myanmar Now] [Reuters]

Vietnam emphasizes international justice and unity at UN General Assembly

(fe) In his remarks at the General Debate of the 77th session of the United Nations General Assembly on September 24 in New York, Vietnamese Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh emphasized multilateralism and the necessity of international

cooperation in the face of a turning moment in history as disputes, confrontations, and transgressions of international law grew more severe.

In addition to reiterating his support for multilateralism, he emphasized the need for global partnerships and cooperation at all levels.

Regarding the regional situation, the Vietnamese leader emphasized that Southeast Asian nations were working to create a strong and unified ASEAN Community, which would play a key role in the regional security architecture and foster collaboration with partners. [Vietnamnews.vn]

Over 1,000 Vietnamese freed from Cambodian forced labor

(fe) Approximately 1,000 Vietnamese nationals who were deceived into forced labor in Cambodia have been rescued last week, according to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The announcement comes as Vietnamese agencies have recently taken the initiative in collaborating with Cambodian counterparts broaden investigations, and identify, as well as to rescue Vietnamese nationals who have been tricked into performing illegal labor by brokers. [Vietnamnews.vn]

Vietnamese and French civil servants strengthen connections

(fe) On September 23, French Minister of Public Transformation and Service Stanislas Guerini and the Vietnamese Minister of Home Affairs Pham Thi Thanh Tra met in Paris to discuss civil service cooperation.

Pham said that to address climate change, the Vietnamese Ministry of Home Affairs will soon focus on administrative reform, digital transformation, and civil service reform.

The French Minister, for his part, reassured that France is willing to share its expertise in updating the professional training of senior officials, adding that his ministry is prepared to successfully assist the Vietnamese Ministry of Home Affairs.

Both parties vowed to keep advancing cooperation in civil service reform, digital transformation, raising the

bar for employees, and other initiatives within the parameters of the agreement. [Vietnamnews.vn]

Vietnam is viewed by Mongolia as a crucial Southeast Asian ally

(fe) Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia Batsumber Munkhjin, who traveled to Vietnam to co-chair a political consultation between the two ministries, met with Vietnamese Minister of Foreign Affairs Bui Thanh Son on September 23. Both parties expressed their commitment to deepen their relationship and to strengthen cooperation, especially in economy, trade, and investment.

The two sides also agreed that disputes in the South China Sea should be resolved peacefully through dialogue and by international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), without using or threatening to use force, and without taking any actions that would further exacerbate the situation.

Pham, furthermore, pledged to assist Mongolia in enhancing its relationships with APEC, ASEAN, and other frameworks and channels for cooperation. [Vietnamnews.vn]

The UN supports Vietnam's developmental goals Secretary-General

(fe) On September 23, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres spoke with Vietnamese Permanent Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly about how the UN will continue to pay attention to and support Vietnam's development priorities towards green and sustainable environmental policies.

Pham reassured Vietnam’s commitment to collaborating with other UN members to achieve significant shared goals, such as the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and peacekeeping missions.

He further suggested that the UN actively assist the process of establishing the Just Energy Transition Partnership, with Vietnam is robustly executing its pledges made at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) to achieve net zero emissions by the year 2050. [Vietnamnews.vn]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

28 September 2022 @ 9:0010:00 a.m. (GMT-5),
Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

A Conversation with Thomas West in the Context of Afghanistan One Year Later

The event features a talk with Thomas West, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Deputy Assistant Secretary, on conditions in Afghanistan one year after the Taliban takeover, reflecting on ongoing U.S. responsibilities to and interests in Afghanistan and examining current conditions in Afghanistan and the role of regional actors in the country.

For more details, go to [CSIS].

29 September 2022 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-5),
Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Overcoming Barriers to Humanitarian Access in Northern Ethiopia

This online seminar will explore how humanitarian and development agencies, as well as their donors, can navigate access constraints, return to an enduring cease-fire, and respond to the humanitarian needs in northern Ethiopia in a manner that reinforces–rather than undermines–stability.

Further event information is available at [CSIS].

3 October 2022 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore

The Belt and Road Initiative in Cambodia: Costs and Benefits, Real and Perceived

With China being Cambodia's largest bilateral donor, lender, investor, and trading partner, economic relations have been strengthened by Cambodia's active participation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This webinar will look into the costs and benefits in Cambodia, both real and perceived, of the country's participation in the BRI.

More details are provided at [ISEAS].

29 September 2022 @ 12:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Asia Society, Australia

The Business of Climate Change in the Indo-Pacific

This online seminar will share insights on how Australian businesses can benefit from the shift to green energy across the Indo-Pacific, the four billion people region at the forefront of the effects of climate change.

For more information, see [Asia Society]

Recent book releases

Dionysia Katelouzou and Dan W. Puchniak (eds.), ***Global Shareholder Stewardship***, Cambridge University Press, 722 pages, published on May 12, 2022, reviewed in [LSE].

Anthony J. Barbieri-Low, ***The Many Lives of the First Emperor of China***, University of Washington Press, 360 pages, published on August 9, 2022, with a review in [Asian Review of Books].

Max Fisher, ***The Chaos Machine: The Inside Story of How Social Media Rewired Our Minds and Our World***, Little, Brown and Company, 400 pages, published on September 6, 2022. For a review, see [The Guardian]

Calls for Papers

InMind Support invites proposals for the online international conference "***Human Rights, Violence and Dictatorship***" to be held on 17-18 November 2022. The closing date for proposal submission is October 28, 2022. For more information, visit [InMind Support].

IOS-Press invites proposals chapters of a ***book titled "Artificial Intelligence in Cybersecurity: The State of the Art"***. The submission deadline is October 1, 2022. If you are interested, find more details at [CFP].

Jobs and positions

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a ***Multimedia Communication Officer (IPSA10)*** to be based in South Sudan. Core responsibility is to contribute to the implementation of the overall UNDP Country Office Communications Strategy. Applications are accepted until 1 October 2022. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks ***Consultant -Risk Committee Review*** to be based in the United States. Core responsibility is to review and incorporate learning from audits and other reviews. Applications are accepted until 30 September 2022. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a ***Procurement Specialist*** to be based in South Sudan. Core responsibility Ensure effective and efficient implementation of procurement and operational strategies. Applications are accepted until 30 September 2022. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a ***Programme Specialist, Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW)*** to be based in South Sudan. Core responsibility Design and formulate programme/project proposals and initiatives. Applications are accepted until 30 September 2022. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks an ***Intergovernmental Engagement Specialist*** to be based in the United States. Core responsibility is to sSupport BERA's leadership role on UNDP internal preparation for the Executive Board's (EB) sessions. Applications are accepted until 30 September 2022. More information is provided at [UNDP].

Team:

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