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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

The Asia in Review (AIR) team is pleased to present you this week´s AiR issue with the latest events, developments and trends 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 celebrating Latvia's Republic Proclamation Day, Morocco's Independence Day as well as Oman's and Palestine'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: Easing COVID-19 measures

(ms) The Chinese government announced on November 11 that while the basic zero-COVID strategy will be maintained, the measures will be more "targeted and precise" to minimize economic and social disruptions, meaning a relaxation for both people inside and those entering the country, despite rising COVID-19 cases in the country.

After the National Health Commission's disease prevention and control bureau declared only last week that the COVID-19 measures in place to date would remain largely unchanged [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2], the adjustments now announced came as something of a surprise.

First, the required quarantine period for arrivals from abroad will be reduced from seven days hotel quarantine plus three days quarantine at home to five plus three days, and inbound airlines will no longer be suspended for two weeks if more than five passengers on board test positive, which is expected to significantly increase the number of flights to China and reduce the cost of tickets accordingly. Of particular relevance to the Chinese population, the new rules will no longer require "close contacts" of those tested positive to be quarantined, but only the direct close contacts of the infected person.

Although the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention said the changes are "cautious" and should not be interpreted as a "relaxation of control", the measures should appease the tense population to some extent. An exact beginning when the measures apply was not yet announced, but there are already first reports from the southern city of Guangzhou, which indicate that the first changes are already in effect in the city. [BBC] [CNN] [South China Morning Post]

China: Apple restricts AirDrop in China

(ms) In the iOS 16.1.1 update for all Apple users released on November 10, the AirDrop function "everyone" was specifically restricted for users within China, or mobile devices that were purchased in China. The function was used among other things in advance of the 20th National Congress held in mid-October to spread materials critical of the government.

With the changes, Apple users in China will no longer be able to permanently enable the AirDrop feature that allows them to receive data from people who are not among their contacts. From now on, the function can only be activated for 10 minutes, after which the function automatically switches off. The trigger for the update was probably the one-man protest shortly before the 20th National Congress at which banners with slogans critical of the government and direct criticism of President Xi jinping were hung on a bridge in Beijing [see AiR No. 42, October/2022, 3] and as a result, pictures of the protest but also new materials critical of the government were distributed via the now restricted function.

It is not the first time that Apple introduced such an extra regulation in China, for example the emoji with Taiwan's flag is not available in China. [9to5Mac] [The Guardian]

China: Three-year plan for Yangtze River Delta

(ms) The National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) released on November 10 a three-year plan which aims to establish a world-class business environment in the Yangtze River Delta.

The Yangtze River Delta includes Shanghai and parts of the neighboring provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Anhui and accounts for a quarter of China's GDP and for a third of all Chinese exports. Although the measures to be implemented have only been vaguely formulated, it is already known that in the coming years prevailing administrative barriers in the region will be lifted in order to increase local cooperation across provincial borders and to achieve a free and orderly flow of materials and other resources by 2025. Guidelines are also to be introduced to promote private investment, which is intended to restore the confidence of foreign investors in the Chinese economy and thus make it more lucrative and attractive for them to invest in China.

With the relaxation of the COVID-19 measures (see entry above) and the already shortened negative list, in which forbidden or restrictive areas for foreign investments are specified, China hopes for a return of the urgently needed capital sources from abroad. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

China: Bao Tong dies at the age of 90

(ms) Bao Tong, the close confidant and advisor to former Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Zhao Ziyang, passed away on November 9 as a result of his lingering illness, according to his children.

Bao was director of the Political Reform Office of the CCP Central Committee and political secretary to Zhao Ziyang during his time as premier, and then took over as political secretary of the Politburo Standing Committee after Zhao became general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in 1987.

Bao's legacy is closely linked to that of Zhao, as he was considered a close confidant of the former party chairman, who died in 2005, and was entrusted by him with important roles in economic and political reforms in China's "reform and opening era". The greatest legacy, however, will be his role in the Tiananmen

Square incident. The Tiananmen Square protests began as mourning for former CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang, who died in mid-April 1989, but turned into a nationwide protest against the CCP demanding democratic change. Bao supported the approach of Zhao, who advocated peaceful dealings with the mainly student-led protesters and prevented the declaration of martial law. But Deng Xiaoping declared martial law, and on July 3-4 the military violently crushed the protests, killing several hundred people. Zhao was forced to resign before that, and Bao was sentenced to seven years in prison for "leaking state secrets" and "inciting counter-revolutionary propaganda" for his role in the dialogue efforts.

After serving his sentence, Bao remained under house arrest and became one of China's biggest critics despite the strict surveillance that came with it. Mainly via Twitter but also in the form of guest articles in various newspapers, Bao criticized the Chinese government and specifically President Xi Jinping. Referring to the Tiananmen incident, Bao said in a guest article from this year: “The massacre helped to establish the current ‘core’ system, in which everyone is expected to be of one mind, in the world’s most populous country" [full text]. [Radio Free Asia] [The Guardian]

China: USD 56 billion for the indebted real estate sector

(ms) According to insiders quoted by Bloomberg, the Chinese government is urging second tier banks to provide the equivalent of another USD 56 billion to the heavily indebted real estate sector until the end of the year.

The new capital is to be provided in the form of loans, mortgages and bond investments, adding to the USD 85 billion already provided to the real estate sector in September [see AiR No. 40, October/2022, 1].

The cash injection is a further effort to get the real estate sector, and with it the weakening economy in general, up and running again. Among other monetary supports, interest rates have already been lowered and relaxed regulations on home ownership have been introduced to boost the confidence of potential buyers, but so far with limited success. [Bloomberg]

China: First Hong Kong citizen to be jailed for insulting Chinese anthem

(ms) A Hong Kong journalist pleaded guilty on November 10 to insulting the Chinese national anthem and desecrating Hong Kong's current flag, an offense introduced in mid-2020 in the wake of anti-government protests. She is the first person to be jailed for this offense.

The 42-year-old had waved a British colonial flag during the playing of the Chinese national anthem in July 2021 at a public viewing event celebrating Hong Kong's second Olympic gold medal, instead of a Chinese flag or the classic Hong Kong flag with the white five-petaled flower on a red background.

Since the public viewing was broadcast live on television and thus the journalist's action could also be seen, the responsible judge saw the need to sentence the woman with a prison term of three months, instead of a fine as was previously the case with guilty verdicts.

The possible sentence was set at a fine of about USD 6,500 up to three years imprisonment when the offense was introduced. [CNN] [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: British lawyer allowed to represent Jimmy Lai

(ms) Hong Kong's Department of Justice (DoJ) has lost its appeal against a ruling allowing British Kings Council Timothy Owen to represent Jimmy Lai in the high-profile national security case.

Jimmy Lai, the Hong Kong entrepreneur, and founder of the pro-democracy newspaper Apple Daily, which closed in mid-2021 after several raids by Hong Kong police, faces three national security charges including two counts of conspiracy to collude with foreign countries or external elements, and one count of collusion with foreign forces. For his defense, he chose Kings Council member Timothy Owen, who needs judicial permission to pursue his appeal in Hong Kong. He was granted permission on November 3, but the DOJ objected, arguing that Owens could have problems carrying out his duties due to the language of the National Security Law, which was introduced in the wake of the 2019 anti-government protests. The appeal was rejected by a Hong Kong court on November 9, and Owens will represent Lai at the trial scheduled for the beginning of December.

The judges' decision contradicted not only the Hong Kong DOJ but also former chief executive and current Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) vice-chair Leung Chun-ying, who wrote on his Facebook page that "Lai is not charged with any ordinary offence, but conspiracy to collude with foreign forces and it is unbelievable that this case could be represented by a foreign lawyer."

The ruling is viewed by observers as hope that despite the growing Chinese influence, judicial independence will remain at least in part, even for national security cases. [Hong Kong Free Press 1] [South China Morning Post]

On November 14, Lai announced that he and his legal representation would apply for a halt to the trial, with the application and a statement to be submitted by November 18. The reason for the motion is said to be that the trial of Lai, as it is a national security case, will be heard by a three-judge panel instead of a jury. The court announced that it would consider the motion at the start of the trial on December 1. [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

China: Air Force unveils new equipment during airshow

(ms) The Chinese Air Force unveiled more new equipment during the China 2022 Airshow, which ended on November 13 [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]. In addition to an updated drone, new weapon systems made their debut during the airshow.

The drone in question is the WJ-700 Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), which made its maiden flight just at the beginning of the year. Compared to the former model, the model on display features the country's first domestic one-ton thrust turbofan engine, which, combined with carbon fiber as the UAV's new construction material, is said to make the model lighter and thus more powerful. According to the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation (CASIC), the WJ-700 is capable of carrying a variety of missile types, from anti-ship to air-to-ground missiles to glide-guided bombs, plus a wide range of reconnaissance technologies that can be attached to the drone, making it highly flexible in its applications. [Global Times 1]

In addition to the drone, a container-type sea defense combat system debuted that can carry four YJ-12E supersonic anti-ship missiles, which can reach Mach 3

and operate at a range of 290 kilometers, as well as four YJ-18E anti-ship missiles, which has a similar range as the YJ-12E but can also be used for covert attacks due to its "subsonic cruise plus supersonic strike." With the possible armament but also with the stealth capabilities due to the new container design, the new combat system should further increase the defense capabilities, especially of the coastal regions. [Global Times 2]

Also unveiled was the HQ-9B surface-to-air missile weapon system with a new missile type. The new missile model is significantly smaller than the one normally used, allowing the HQ-9B to carry eight missiles of the new type instead of just four. While the larger missiles are used at medium to long range, the new types are intended to be used primarily at short to medium range, which would make the HQ-9B system more flexible in its operations. [Global Times 3]

China: Type 075 amphibious assault ship participates in combat-oriented training

(ms) The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy announced Nov. 10 that the third Type 075 amphibious assault ship has participated in combat-oriented training units, which may indicate that the ship has entered active service.

The Anhui would thus follow the Hainan and Gaungxi, the Type 075 ships already in active service. The PLA Navy highlights the speed at which the ship has progressed from construction, which only began in April 2020, to its operational readiness. The three Types 075 ships, with their helicopter landing docks, are expected to play an important role in the defense of territory claimed by China in the South China Sea, as well as in efforts to reunify Taiwan with the mainland, where China most recently during the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) held in mid-October did not rule out the use of force [see AiR No. 42, October/2022, 3].

According to further reports, five more models of the Type 075 are being planned. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Cultural Affairs Agency drafts rules for Unification Church probe

(sra) The Cultural Affairs Agency has drafted regulations, giving the central Japanese government the right to question the Unification Church in a probe of the religious organization's history of large donations, in conjunction with court rulings confirming two cases of illegal actions. The ministry of education announced the decision as the government's first time exercising the right to consult with the Religious Corporations Council, with the probe expected to occur by the end of November.

The highly contested Unification Church, now officially referred to as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, has been the center of Japanese political affairs as the organization's tactics against members, manipulating them to pay significant donations and pay for exorbitantly priced goods have also been linked to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lawmakers' affiliation following the investigation into the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The shooting was said to have been motivated by Abe's public ties to the religious group. On November 1, the organization came under further scrutiny as lawyers denounced a series of lawsuits filed by the church claiming defamation and suppression of the right to freedom of opinion and expression [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

The ministry confirmed that according to guidelines, religious corporations and members who have a history of repeated misconduct such as illegal acts under civil or criminal law may be questioned. As such, the Unification Church probe has been brought up due to the organization's accountability in 20 cases. A panel of experts created by the Cultural Affairs Agency drafted the standards for the right to probe the Church on November 8. Once the drafts have been confirmed, along with a list of questions sent by the government to the Religious Juridical Persons Council, the probe can begin. [The Asahi Shimbun 1] [The Japan Times]

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also announced new plans to create a bill, banning religious corporations from manipulating members to provide large donation gains. The bill would enforce future repercussions as the Church faces possible criminal charges as well as administrative penalties under the legislation, to also be submitted to the Diet session currently in place. Violators of the proposed law will be punished, as legal measures to be put in place were discussed by the LDP secretary-general and his counterparts from the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), Japan Innovation Party (JIP), the Democratic Party for the People and the Japanese Communist Party. The CDP and JIP have also called for third-party members or relatives of the Unification Church and related

organizations to be given legal rights to cancel any related donations made. In addition to these measures, the ruling LDP partner, Komeito, has also pushed for the right of group members' children to cancel donations and give them access to make claims for the damages made by the group if they can prove their rights were violated by their parents' donations. [The Asahi Shimbun 2]

Kishida's bill is said to be submitted for 2023, however, discussions since October 21 throughout the extraordinary parliamentary Diet session are calling for the enactment of the bill before the new year. This will depend on how effective talks are in deciding the specifics of the regulations. This will impact all religious organizations, and whether the government will determine a cap on donation amounts or the definition of 'mind control' in terms of coercion of group members remains unlikely. [The Mainichi]

The ongoing scandal has created further issues for the LDP and the Kishida administration, as the ruling party's ties to the critically acclaimed 'cult' have further deteriorated public support amid rising concerns about the influence it may have had on the current central government, regardless of the July cabinet shuffle. [The Diplomat]

Japan: Ex-Tokyo Olympic executive met with fourth indictment in bribery scandal

(sra) A fourth indictment has been filed against a former Tokyo Olympic executive for receiving bribes amounting to USD 370, 000 from major advertisement company ADK Holdings and stuff-doll manufacturer Sun Arrow Inc. The most recent allegations against Haruyuki Takahashi come in addition to accusations he received more bribes from three different companies for facilitating their selection as a sponsor or marketing agent of the 2021 Olympic and Paralympic Games saw new files charged on November 9.

The indictment follows the allegations that Takahashi received bribes on behalf of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee to provide large companies with multimillion-dollar contracts to work for the international event. Previous allegations of the scandal arose with suspicions of ADK Holdings making over USD 190, 000 in payments to be lobbied as a marketing agent. Sun Arrow Inc. also allegedly paid USD 49, 000 to ensure its contract, revealed on October 16 among other indictments [see AiR No. 42, October/2022, 3].

The bribes allegedly received by Takahashi now come to a total of USD 1.4 million, undermining the image of the Summer games amid the growing corruption scandal. Prosecutors also indicted Sun Arrow President Taiji Sekiguchi and executive Yoshihiro Sekiguchi without arrest, along with three others of ADK Holdings and the former head of a consulting firm used in Takahashi's acceptance of the bribes, Joji Matsui. [The Japan Times]

Takahashi continues to deny his part in these actions, although accusations now include five companies bribing him in relation to sponsor operations and licensed product sales, the indictment of two former colleagues, and the indictment of 12 corporate officials for paying out the bribes. [The Asahi Shimbun]

The corruption scandal has tainted the credibility of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games, evolving into a major criminal case of over USD 1.44 million in bribery money and indicting 15 officials up until November 14, with international investigations under French authorities questioning whether the event should be affiliated with public organizations in the future. [The Asahi Shimbun 2]

Japan: Minister of justice fired over death penalty gaffe

(sra) Japan's justice minister has been sacked for undermining his role in a political gathering, after making light of his authorization of death-row inmate executions. Yasuhiro Hanashi had only been the minister of justice since August this year, assigned from his previous role as a lawmaker within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

Hanashi's disrespectful remarks over his position came under fire by ruling and opposition ministers amid growing scandals surrounding the Kishida administration, however, the Prime Minster initially asserted the offence was not motive enough to remove the minister from his position. The impact of Kishida's slightly rising national support rate of 35 percent remains considerably low - reflective of the public discontent surrounding economic issues and rising inflation rates - may have influenced the change of stance on November 11, as the Prime Minister decided to appoint former agriculture minister Ken Saito as the new minister for justice. [The Asahi Shimbun]

The remarks made by Hanashi on November 10 have also drawn attention to Japan's highly contested punishment system among only 18 nations worldwide that carry out executions. The procedure has been criticized as the ambiguous information on the execution of death-row inmates is notorious for providing little to no communication prior and failing to provide inmates enough time to reflect on their crimes. [Kyodo News]

Japan: NRA proposes extending life of nuclear reactors, to be checked every 10 years

(sra) The Japanese Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) has proposed safety checks to be conducted once a decade for nuclear power plants over the 30-year mark in order to allow plants to continue to function, extending the life of reactors as per the government's aim to eliminate the current cap of operation.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced his administration's aim to shift toward nuclear energy in August to counter national carbon emissions and allow for a stable independent electricity supply. The extension of current nuclear reactors' functional lifespan, supported by Kyushu Electrical Power Co., ensures a more regular assessment of nuclear reactors while enhancing the amount of authorized running time by 20 years, similar to the regulations followed by the United States [see AiR No. 42, October/2022, 3].

The extension proposed by the NRA on November 2 will allow reactors to run beyond the 40-year cap currently allowed in Japan, with moves to draft a revision of the Nuclear Reactor Regulation Law before the end of 2022. However, the government is conscious of the opposition toward the introduction of the proposal, ensuring the extension can only be allowed once and with the pledge to decommission reactors when they reach 60 years of service. The new proposal will also require nuclear reactors to pass inspections, with no signs of degradation in order to run for 10 more years. [The Asahi Shimbun 1]

From November 14 - 18, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials and international experts are to conduct a second safety review of the treated water at Tokyo Electric Power Co. Holdings' (TEPCO) Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station. The mission in cooperation with the government will ensure the Advanced Liquid Processing System treated water meets safety standards in the dilution of radioactive

materials to allow the liquid to be released into the sea. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

The updated regulations will allow for more stringent safety standards for the long-term management of nuclear facilities. The government also seeks to deduct the off-line time periods of the plants from the 30-year limit, however, the NRA is opposed to this as the equipment continues to experience degradation throughout the in-between safety screenings period. The agency will also aim to create mechanisms to make it more difficult for older power plants to be approved as it emphasized strict regulations are to be sustained. [The Japan Times]

However, the government has experience opposition met through the anti-nuclear movement responsible for a petition created over 11 and a half years ago. The petition signed by over 8,831,163 people was delivered to the economy ministry on November 11, with the goal to suspend the construction of new nuclear plants, converting renewable Japan's energy policy to focus on natural resources and demanding the deactivation of a facility that reprocesses used nuclear fuel. [The Asahi Shimbun 2] The proposal has been met with further public opposition as the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011 shaped Japan to consider a future free of nuclear power plants. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has also opposed lifting the cap on reactor life spans which will ultimately give operators a service time of up to 70 years inclusive of their offline period to maintain with the initial regulations enforced by the NRA in March of that year which limited the operations of reactors to 40 years. [The Asahi Shimbun 3]

Throughout the announcement of the proposal, the government has also postponed the repayment of USD 68 billion to fund the regulated cleanup of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant disaster due to technical issues and economic hardships impacting TEPCO. The meltdown of highly radioactive areas remains contaminated 11 years on, as the debris within the reactors is both a legal and technical burden that is estimated to take over 40 years to solve. [Associated Press]

Japan: UN committee demands improvement of care at immigration detention facilities

(sra) The United Nations Human Rights Committee has urged Japan to shift its treatment of detainees at immigration detention facilities in an attempt to

improve the health conditions to adhere to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. On November 3, the UN committee launched its findings, stating concerns about the state of human rights for detainees being held by the Japanese government. Better access to medical care has been recommended in order to meet international standards. [NHK World-Japan]

Three deaths in custody occurred between 2017 and 2021, including the Sri Lankan woman whose death saw a lawsuit against the government for her lack of access to adequate medical facilities when she fell ill in a Nagoya City facility. Her death saw the Immigration Services Agency and Justice Ministry revise the immigration bill [see AiR No. 37, September/2022, 2].

Japan: Defense ministry seeks to remodel, increase capacity to enhance national security

(sra) The Japanese defense ministry is set to remodel its surface-to-air guided missiles to allow the interception of hypersonic glide weapons, suspected to be under development by China and Russia, with continued development to support the strengthening of national defense capabilities.

Amid growing geopolitical tensions between North Korea's ballistic missile launches, China's enhanced military exercises and the looming date of the revision of three key national security strategies and defense buildup documents, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has vowed to strengthen defense capabilities with an increased defense budget for the new fiscal year - in addition to national debt [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

The country plans to redevelop pre-existing missiles, with the aim to start the mass production of the Type-3 intermediate-range guided missiles by 2029, to be deployed by the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF). This follows through with the software launch update planned for 2026. The missiles will have the capacity to predict the flight path of hypersonic weapons and to track and detect them. Once the revision of the National Security Strategy is announced, it will reveal whether Japan can use the remodelled missiles to counter hypersonic weapons. [The Japan Times 1]

Japan's Coast Guard is also planning to further increase cooperation with the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) by providing surveillance footage from mid-October, including aerial images of unmanned aircraft

in Aomori Prefecture, to enhance national security. The Japan Coast Guard has been operating the US-made MQ-9B SeaGuardian drone over a few weeks, although as a maritime police agency, sharing the information may be potentially controversial. The MSDF will require updating its systems prior to the joint work to allow the information sharing of live data. [The Japan Times 2]

To increase mobility, Japan is to decide on possibly downsizing two Aegis destroyers under the ballistic missile interceptor system. Originally the destroyers were created for protection against ballistic missiles, but now the government plans to increase their capability to carry the US-made Tomahawk cruise missile if all goes ahead. The plan will scale the destroyers to less than half their original size to 6,200 tons, maintaining necessary air defense capabilities, along with Lockheed Martin Corp.'s SPY-7 radar. The new size of the vessel will lower the costs of the commission and will allow for seamless movement amongst other MSDF ships. [The Mainichi]

Additionally, Japan has eyed creating a land registration system similar to those introduced in Britain in 2021, the register of Overseas Entities, in an attempt to identify foreign powers considering purchasing land close to military facilities on international sanctions lists. Growing concerns about foreign governments having access to key infrastructure have the country limiting access to property assets in Japan, making it difficult for foreign owners to conceal their identities with shell companies or organizations. Currently, Japan holds 58 key locations of national security and is looking to impose new restrictions in surrounding areas [see AiR No. 42, October/2022, 3] [South China Morning Post]

South Korea: Protest of police and firefighters

(sm) South Korean police and firefighters protested their alleged scapegoating over the Itaewon incident, which tragically killed 158 people in a crowd crush in the Itaewon district of Seoul on October 29, and sued Interior and Safety Minister Lee Sang-min over his role in the tragedy on November 14. While the government blames police and fire department authorities for the negligence of their duties, officers call for higher-level government officials to take responsibility for the events.

The firefighters affiliated with the Korean Government Employees Union filed a complaint against Lee for alleged negligence of duty resulting in the deaths of

the Itaewon crowd crush and asked him to step down. Lee is the next highest official responsible for dealing with situations such as the Itaewon incident, according to the Act on Management of Disaster and Safety. The complaint was filed with an independent investigation team from the one currently looking into police and firefighters' alleged negligence of duty. The minister has not shown any immediate intention of resigning due to the Itaewon incident. [Yonhap News Agency_1]

The main opposition Democratic Party (DP) and two other parties (Justice Party and Basic Income Party) have furthermore criticized the government for their mismanagement of the Itaewon incident and submitted a request for a parliamentary probe on November 9, to determine responsible persons at a higher administrative level. They asked for the establishment of an additional committee of 18 members to supervise the probe into the appropriateness of governmental measures. [Yonhap News Agency_2]

The ruling People Power Party (PPP) remains strongly opposed to a parliamentary probe, arguing that it should only be conducted after current police investigations are finished. PPP floor leader Joo Ho-young stated that the ongoing compulsory investigation was the most effective means to uncover the truth, rather than a legally unbinding parliamentary probe, prone to be politically manipulated. On November 10, President Yoon Suk-yeol supported this argument, stating that the Korean people want to see a scientific and compulsory investigation into the Itaewon incident. [Korea Times]

A special investigation team had been launched on November 3, following reports that several Itaewon emergency calls had been ignored by officers, in an apparent negligence of their duties. The team had raided and collected more than 7000 pieces of evidence from about 55 offices, including the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency, Yongsan District Office, and Seoul Metro Headquarters. Several key policy officials in charge on the night of the incident, such as Yongsan Policy Station Chief Lee Im-jae, Yongsan Ward Office Chief Park Hee-young, senior emergency monitoring officer Ryu Mi-jin, and Yongsan Fire Station Chief Choi Seong-beom, have been suspended over allegations of negligence of duty. [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]

Choi's suspension has been strongly protested by fellow firefighters. The head of the firefighters' labor union Kim Joo-hyung defended Choi during an interview, arguing that once the chief had been informed, he was one of the first people on the scene

of the accident, despite not being on duty that day. Yongsan Fire Station Official Lee Eun-joo voiced her concern that officials are becoming themselves victims in this tragedy while having done their best to rescue the crushed people as fast as possible. Policy officers have also been protesting, arguing the central government should take more responsibility in the ongoing blame game [Korea Times]

South Korea: Yoon sparks controversy over press freedom with ban from presidential jet

(sm) On November 10, the South Korean presidential office prohibited Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) reporters from boarding President Yoon Suk-yeol's official jet ahead of his trip to Cambodia and Indonesia for the upcoming ASEAN and G20 summits. The office claimed the decision to be in the name of national interest, as the MBC's previous coverage of Yoon's alleged political blunder during the UN General Assembly in September had sparked international controversy.

The MBC, as a leading South Korean television and radio broadcaster, protested the decision and claimed it to be unconstitutional and in violation of the right to freedom of press. The media outlet, among other domestic and international press, had previously reported the president's alleged use of profanity to qualify US President Joe Biden and the Congress during a diplomatic visit to New York.

The presidential office defended its decision, arguing that the stakes in the upcoming ASEAN and G20 meetings were of national importance and that the repeat of such an incident would be unacceptable. Its statement explained that it had allowed reporters to board the presidential jet previously to facilitate the coverage of diplomatic and international news, but that the MBC had abused the presidential office's trust by distorting facts and telling a biased story about the happenings in New York. The MBC had furthermore not made any attempts to rectify the faulty news coverage, prompting the ban.

The MBC coverage on September 21 had used subtitles reading: "Biden will surely lose face if those bastards in the congress/assembly do not pass it." In response, the presidential office had issued a statement claiming it was unclear from the video footage what Yoon had really said. [see AiR No. 39, September/2022, 4]

In a joint statement with seven other press organizations such as the Journalist Association of Korea, the National Union of Media Workers, and the Broadcast Journalists Association, the MBC argued the ban to be unconstitutional because of the impossibility to keep up with the president's tight schedule using only commercial flights. The MBC has been the only outlet banned from the presidential jet despite a high number of other media reporting Yoon's words in New York similarly. The MBC stated it would find a way to cover Yoon's visit to Cambodia and Indonesia regardless.

The main opposition Democratic Party also sided with the media organizations, portraying the ban as an attempt to suppress the media, which is itself against national interest. The ruling People Power Party (PPP), however, sided with Yoon, as PPP representative Bae Hyun-jin, also a former MBC employee, dismissed any difficulties for the MBC to cover future diplomatic visits as it is a rich company. [Facebook, in Korean] [Korea Times]

South Korea: Ban of anti-Pyongyang leaflets to be unconstitutional

(sm) South Korean Unification Minister Kwon Young-se submitted an opinion to the Supreme Court of Korea, stating that the prohibition of sending anti-Pyongyang leaflets to North Korea is unconstitutional due to its restriction on the freedom of expression.

A copy of the opinion had been disclosed by a civic group on November 10, following the request of some 27 civic groups, such as the Lawyers for Human Rights and Unification of Korea, to revoke the anti-North Korea leaflet prohibition law enacted in March 2021. The Development of Inter-Korean Relations Act had been revised to make the sending of the leaflet's illegal with a prison term up to three years and a fine of KRW 30 million (USD 21,000).

The Kwon's opinion had been submitted for the court's constitutional review of the law, after it sparked controversy over its restriction of the freedom of speech. The government has argued the legislation to be necessary to avoid provocations engendering bellicose acts in border regions and ensure the safety of the people living there.

Kwon has qualified the sending of leaflets as political activity to influence the North Korean regime or people. The banning of such an activity is

unconstitutional because it infringes upon the freedom of political activities and the expression of political opinions. He also criticized the excessively vague wording of the current law, which states that the leaflet sending could cause "harm to the lives and bodies of people or grave dangers", leaving room for arbitrary enforcement.

The sending of such leaflets by civic groups, including defectors' groups such as the Fighters for a Free North Korea, is not uncommon in South Korea. The papers are often sent enclosed in plastic balloons containing propaganda against the Pyongyang regime. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Government to set up new migration policy agency

(sm) According to the Ministry of Justice on November 8, it is planning to accelerate the establishment of a new migration policy agency to create updated migration measures by the beginning of 2023.

A temporary task force of eight officials supervised by the Korea Immigration Service (KIS) will be responsible for mapping the detailed structure and mandate of the agency from mid-November for half a year. The task force will also be responsible for the drafting of long-term immigration policy through the cooperation with other government agencies and civil society.

The creation of a new immigration agency had been one of President Yoon Suk-yeol's campaign pledges and the idea gained popularity as he took office in May. According to Justice Minister Han Dong-hoon on November 7, the launch of immigration agency has been delayed as the ministry is focusing on the quality rather than the speed of the establishment process. If all goes well, the plan for the new agency should be submitted to the Ministry of Interior and Safety early next year to conduct the necessary revisions to the Government Organization Law.

The idea of an independent migration agency is not new, as migration policies are currently dealt with by separate government agencies in South Korea: the Ministry of Labor and Employment is responsible for migrant workers, the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family for migrating spouses and children, the Ministry of Education for international students, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for overseas ethnic Koreans, and the Ministry of Justice for administrative and legal matters such as visa status.

The government is seeking to promote inclusive migration policies to manage the economic impact of South Korea's decreasing labor force and aging population. Foreign residents accounted for four percent of the total population in 2019 shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak and the share is expected to increase in the future. Besides the establishment of the new migration agency, the expansion of the current point-based immigration system has also been up for discussion. High-skilled workers looking to settle in South Korea in the long-term could be evaluated by scoring points based on criteria such as age, level of education, and work experience. [Korea Times]

South Korea: Policy revision over cultural heritage preservation zone law

(sm) On November 9, the Cultural Heritage Administration (CHA) announced its plan to review the range of some 1600 cultural heritage preservation zones to enforce deregulation measures, during a government meeting chaired by Prime Minister Han Duck-soo.

The current law dictates the establishment of preservation zones in a radius of up to 500 meters around cultural, historical, and natural sites, in consultation with the CHA and city or provincial governors. There have been recent suggestions for reform to reduce that radius in line with deregulations measures to gain terrain for housing, commercial, and industrial areas.

The CHA will examine the currently existing heritage sites to decide whether they should be reduced or readjusted for public convenience. As many as 240 regulations exist within the CHA alone to protect cultural heritage. [Korea Times]

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

India: New chief justice takes oath, promises a no-stress court

(vv/lm) India's new Chief Justice Dhananjaya Yashwant Chandrachud during his swearing in on November 9 promised a stress-free Supreme Court that would legitimately address public concerns.

Justice Chandrachud is the son of former Chief Justice YV Chandrachud. The present CJI is a formidable legal figure, who's known for landmark verdicts in public interest and is often hailed for championing the most contentious LGBTQ+ rights in the country. More recently, Chandrachud was praised for legalizing abortion and upholding women's rights, while also recognizing marital rape as a legitimate circumstance to opt for abortion [see AiR No. 43, October/2022, 4] [Bar and Bench] [Economic Times] [Mint] [The Straits Times]

India: Supreme Court frees six assassins of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi

(wr/sn/lm) India's Supreme Court on November 11 ordered the release of six convicts who plotted the assassination of the country's former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, evoking protests from the opposition National Congress Party. India's top court said the convicts were being released based on their "satisfactory conduct" in prison and that they had served over three decades of jail time.

Gandhi was killed by a woman suicide bomber at an election rally in the southern state of Tamil Nadu in 1991. The assassination was carried out by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a Sri Lankan armed separatist group. Gandhi's killing was seen as retaliation for his decision to send Indian troops into Sri Lanka in 1987 to enforce a peace accord to end the island nation's civil war.

Over the years, various Tamil Nadu governments have requested the release of those found guilty over the killing. The six – three of whom had been condemned to death before their sentences were commuted in 2014 – are the last still in prison for the assassination. Earlier this year the court ordered the release of another convict who had been initially sentenced to hang citing good conduct [CNN] [Times of India] [The Straits Times]

India: Human rights body expresses concerns over pollution, warns state governments of penalties

(vv) Against the larger backdrop of India's latest air pollution crisis, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has warned the state governments of Delhi and neighboring Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh of heavy sanctions and penalties if immediate steps weren't taken to contain the "hazardous" levels of pollution. [Economic Times]

As the respective states submitted reports on policies and actions taken thus far in addressing the air pollution crisis, the NHRC expressed strict dissatisfaction with the said efforts [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]. The NHRC deliberated that stubble burning by farmers can't be blamed solely for pollution, as they are forced to burn crops to deal with the seasonal change and extreme winters, while adding that adequate support and harvest machines weren't provided by the four state governments to get rid of stubbles that are being burnt presently. [OpIndia] [Times Now] [India Today]

Meanwhile, Delhi's Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on November 9 suggested that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government should not blame only the capital for the pollution, because it was widespread across northern India. The environment minister, Bhupender Yadav, fired back by saying that Kejriwal's political party, a rival to Modi's, was to blame for allowing crop burning to escalate in the neighboring state of Punjab, where it holds power. [The New York Times]

India: Jharkhand chief minister greenlights preliminary enquiry against five former BJP ministers

(vv/lm) The chief minister of India's Jharkhand state, Hemant Soren, on November 14 gave the go-ahead to

the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) to register a preliminary enquiry into alleged disproportionate assets of five former ministers of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party in the state. [The Hindu]

The Jharkhand government on May 31 ordered a probe by the ACB to investigate alleged disproportionate assets of the five former ministers in the wake of a public interest litigation filed before the state's high court in 2020.Four of the five former ministers are currently state lawmakers.

The move comes at a time when Chief Minister Soren is facing fresh summons from India's Enforcement Directorate (ED) to appear before it on November 17 for questioning in a money laundering case linked to alleged illegal mining in the state. He was previously issued summons by the ED on November 3, which he eventually skipped and was granted relief by the Supreme Court on November 7, which stated that Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed against Soren weren't maintainable [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]. [Asian News International] [Hindustan Times]

In light of this, BJP officials called the registration of the preliminary enquiry a "political vendetta".

Nepal: Government announces two-day public holiday for upcoming elections

(lm) Nepal's government has announced a two-day public holiday for government entities for November 20-21, as the country is gearing up to vote in federal and provincial elections. [The Himalayan Times]

Close to 18 million voters will get an opportunity on November 20 to elect 275-strong House of Representatives as well as 550 members to the provincial assemblies. This will be the second general election since the Himalayan nation promulgated a new constitution in 2015, transforming what had been a unitary Hindu kingdom into a federal republic with three tiers of government: federal, provincial and local.

The key battle pits the ruling camp led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's Nepali Congress against a three-party opposition coalition helmed by ousted Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist). [The Diplomat]

The Election Commission said it would announce the final election results by December 8. [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: Prime Minister Sharif meets brother in United Kingdom over naming new army chief

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has met his older brother and former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the United Kingdom to discuss the appointment of the next army chief. Defence minister Asif Khawaja, who is traveling with the premier, confirmed the meeting of the Sharif brothers on a Pakistani TV channel on November 10. [Al Jazeera]

The current army chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, is due to retire on November 29. He was appointed the army chief by Nawaz Sharif's government in 2016 and was originally scheduled to retire in 2019. However, opposition leader Imran Khan as prime minister granted him a three-year extension that year. In April this year, the military said the army chief will not be seeking an extension of his tenure nor will he accept one, if offered. Bajwa himself said last month during an event in Islamabad that he will be retiring in the "next five weeks" [see AiR No. 43, October/2022, 4].

Pakistan: Opposition PTI resumes 'long march' without Imran Khan

(msk/lm) Pakistan's main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party on November 10 resumed its "long march" march to the capital Islamabad from Wazirabad city in Punjab province – a week after party leader and the former Prime Minister Imran Khan was shot at in an assassination attempt. [Al Jazeera 1] [ARY News]

The march is part of Khan's efforts to galvanize support against his removal from office in a no-confidence motion in April. He has alleged that Pakistan's then-opposition parties colluded with the United States to unseat him from power.

On November 3, he survived a gun attack – which supporters say was an attempted assassination – while he was leading a protest march. Khan suffered bullet wounds to his right leg; one person was killed and at least 10 injured. Since then, he has repeatedly accused current political leaders - including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, Major General Faisal Naseer – a senior official of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) – of hatching the plot to kill him. [AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

The military has denied any role in the attack and called Khan's allegation "baseless and irresponsible". Sharif's government has also rejected the charge, with the prime minister on November 8 writing a letter to the chief justice of the Supreme Court to form a judicial commission to investigate the assassination attempt. [Al Jazeera 2]

Meanwhile, the Punjab police filed a first information report (FIR) on the attack on November 7 following orders from the Supreme Court. The report did not include any of the accused named by Khan. [Al Jazeera 3]

In an interview with *Piers Morgan Uncensored* on November 9, Khan alleged there were two plots to "bump him off". "The first plot was when four people decided to bump me off. I found out because I was the head of the intelligence agencies for three and a half years," Khan told Morgan, without providing more details. Khan said a second plot was hatched in September. "Again I found out from within the intelligence agencies because people are appalled at what is going on," he said. [YouTube]

Pakistan: Journalist Arshad Sharif was tortured before being shot dead in Kenya, TV report claims

(msk/lm) Arshad Sharif, a prominent Pakistani investigative journalist, was brutally tortured for hours before being shot dead by police in Kenya, a private TV channel has claimed citing post-mortem reports.

Sharif, a well-known journalist favored by Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan, was shot dead by the Kenyan police on October 23 [see AiR No. 43, October/2022, 4]. He had fled the country in August after receiving death threats and being charged with sedition because of his critical views of the military establishment [see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3]. The details of the shootout given by Kenyan police, which they claim is a case of mistaken identity, are being called dodgy, and opponents of the current Pakistani government suggest the possibility of a targeted killing.

Speaking against this backdrop, Dunya TV host Kamran Shahid in his talk show on November 9 claimed that Sharif was shot at close range and that this was not a case of mistaken identity but a "planned murder". Citing the post-mortem reports, he further claimed that the slain journalist's fingernails were pulled out and his fingers and ribs were broken during torture. Meanwhile, forensic evidence from the bullet angles

has confirmed that the car was immobile. [The Express Tribune] [The News]

The Pakistani government, for its part, has denied any role in the death of the journalist, with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif writing to the chief justice of the Supreme Court to form a judicial commission to investigate the killing. [Al Jazeera]

Sri Lanka: Government announces budget aimed at clinching IMF deal, sees recovery by end-2023

(lm) Sri Lanka's government has pledged to boost tax revenue and reduce the budget deficit in 2023, in an effort by the South Asian nation to lock down a desperately needed bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). [Bloomberg] [The Straits Times]

Delivering the first annual budget since taking office in July, President Ranil Wickremesinghe said on November 14 that his government will target revenue of USD 9.27 billion, up 63 percent from the current year. Furthermore, the government plans to limit the increase in spending to 31 percent year-on-year, while at the same time reduce debt to less than 100 percent of the country's gross domestic product over the medium term.

Sri Lanka: More than 9000 complaints against police registered over past five years

(sn) Over the past five years, more than 9000 public complaints have been lodged against Sri Lanka Police with the National Police Commission. These complaints include cases of unlawful arrest, false charge, assault, torture, partiality, abuse of power, as well as police inaction. [Twitter]

Sri Lanka: Cabinet approves canceling spot, term tender for coal procurement

(sn) Sri Lanka has canceled the spot and term tender for the procurement of coal. Earlier this year, the spot tender was introduced as the International Competitive Bidding method. Yet the selected supplier expressed an inability to perform tender due to

concerns about payment guarantee and the impact it could have on the legal cases filed.

In light of this, Sri Lanka experiences coal deficits to supply all the power plants in the country. Since the bidders failed to comply with tender guidelines, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the Procurement Committee's request to call for government-to-government and prospective suppliers' proposals on a long-term credit basis instead. The Minister of Power and Energy also mentioned that advancing the last year's term tender coal supplies will fulfill the energy demands of November and December. [adaderana, newswire]

Sri Lanka: Ceylon Workers Congress party willing to join government coalition

(sn) The Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC), a Sri Lankan political party that has traditionally represented Sri Lankan Tamils of Indian origin working in the plantation sector, has indicated that it is willing to accept a Cabinet portfolio from President Wickremesinghe. [Colombo Gazette] [Twitter]

The CWC secretary general, Jeevan Thondaman, specified that he would be happy to work as a part of the Cabinet, but it depends on the portfolio. When asked if the CWC plans to work with former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party, the CWC secretary said it is unlikely to happen.

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

Cambodia: Army officer charged with illegal entry through Thai-Cambodian border

(sn) An armed Cambodian Army officer was arrested on November 5, 2022, after driving through the Thai-Cambodian border checkpoint without stopping, causing some panic. [khmertimes]

Indonesia: Protesters call for justice after soccer stampede

(os) Thousands of people held protests in Indonesia's East Java province to call for further investigation of the deadly stampede in a soccer stadium in October. [Reuters] [The Diplomat]

The stampede in Malang killed 135 people [see AiR No. 40, October/2022, 1]. According to Indonesia's human rights commission, the use of tear gas by police was the main reason for the unfolding of the crush. Several police officials were removed from office, and six people face criminal charges [see AiR No. 41, October/2022, 2]. However, protesters claim that not all people responsible for the tragedy have yet been held accountable and demand further action from the government.

Indonesia: Corruption commission chief under criticism

(os) Firli Bahuri, chairman of Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), has faced a backlash after visiting the governor of Papua, who is under bribery investigation.

The KPK claims that Firli, who met Governor Lukas Enembe with several investigators and doctors, was only fulfilling his duties. The team wanted to confirm that Lukas was indeed unable to be questioned in Jakarta. Lukas missed his first two summonses in September, citing health reasons [see AiR No. 40, October/2022, 1].

Critics, however, point out that according to KPK Law, the chief of the commission is not allowed to meet with those under investigation by the commission. Breaking this rule carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Activists call for the KPK chief to treat

Lukas like others who have skipped summonses. [The Jakarta Post] [Voice of Indonesia]

Indonesia: Acting Governors of three new Papuan provinces sworn in

(os) Since November 11 Indonesia officially boasts three more provinces. These are namely South Papua Province, Central Papua Province, and Pegunungan Papua Province.

The Acting Governors of the three New Autonomous Regions (DOB) were inaugurated after the regulation allowing the establishment of the provinces was passed in July 2022. The plan drew a lot of criticism as civil groups expressed their concerns that it would allow the government to impose tighter restrictions on the Papua region [see AiR No. 27, July/2022, 1]. The new governors were told to prioritize political and governmental stability while in office. [Tempo]

Indonesia: Increased security measures ahead of G20 summit

(os) In relation to the G20 summit in Bali, the Indonesian government has imposed measures to ensure security prior to and during the event.

The military will be responsible for the operation that will cater to the high-security needs. In the wake of the operation, 18 thousand military and police officers will be deployed to the Nusa Dua area, where the summit will take place. The Bali administration has issued restrictions on certain activities. Greenpeace Indonesia claims, they were intimidated to not continue a cycling campaign related to the G20 summit. They labeled this action of the authorities as a violation of the freedom of expression and the principles of democracy.

Also, the immigration office has stepped up its supervision of visiting foreigners to make sure they would not participate in protests during the time of the summit. Two Chinese citizens were arrested for allegedly trying to stage a protest during the G20 summit. Their stay permits allegedly did not allow them to participate in political activities in Indonesia. [The Jakarta Post 1] [The Jakarta Post 2]

Malaysia: Court rejects government bid to forfeit ex Prime Minister's luxury goods

(dql) A court has dismissed a request of the government to forfeit millions of dollars in luxury goods that was seized from jailed former Prime Minister Najib Razak. The court cited insufficient evidence for proving illegal activities in the context of the assets.

In 2018 public anger over his alleged involvement in a multibillion-dollar scandal at state fund 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) let to Najib's downfall. Currently, he is serving a 12-year in prison sentence after being found guilty in a 1MDB-linked corruption case. [Reuters]

Malaysia: Immigration Department estimates revenues of RM 5 billion for 2022

(gc) According to Home Minister Hamzah Zainudin, the Immigration Department is aiming to generate more than RM5 billion (USD 1 million) in 2022 through its different projects, including the premium visa program (PVIP). He stated that as of November 9, the collection totaled RM 4.8 billion, which is above the RM3.5 billion goal set for this year.

The PVIP, which was introduced on September 1, intends to spark the attention of international business moguls to invest and settle down in Malaysia for a 20-year term. The "Residency through Investment" initiative seeks to encourage foreign direct investment, which will boost the country's economy and create more jobs for citizens. [The Malaysia Insight] [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Indians increasingly supporting BN

(gc) It is anticipated that the Indian community would increasingly support the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN) in the upcoming the general election. According to BN deputy chairman Mohamad Hasan, it is a positive evolution from a number of by-elections as well as the elections in Malacca and Johor. Mohamad, who is running for the Rembau parliamentary seat, said he was sure he would get support from the Indian community.

The Election Commission has agreed on Nov 19 as date of the general election with early voting starting on Nov 15. [Free Malaysia Today] [The Malaysia Insight]

Myanmar: Videos show brutal interrogation, allegedly at hands of junta soldier

(jp) A video featuring an alleged Myanmar junta military member torturing a man garnered international attention. It was found on a phone in a township in Kayah state on November 6 by members of a local defense force. In the 17-minute video downloaded from the phone, one bound and blindfolded civilian was severely tortured by a man wearing a blazer with a Myanmar military badge on its sleeve. The junta soldier kept asking about Myanmar opposition group information again. [Radio Free Asia] [The Thaiger]

Singapore: Court of Appeals sides with opposition Worker's Party leaders on fiduciary duties

(ih) Singapore's Court of Appeals ruled on November 9 that members and senior employees of a town council currently led by the opposition Worker's Party (WP) did now owe fiduciary or equitable duties to the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council (AHTC). This ruling reversed the High Court's previous ruling that the WP leadership had breached fiduciary and other duties in 2011 when they waived the tendering process and appointed a firm headed by parties with close ties to the WP as managing agent for the AHTC. [CNA]

The court ruled that a Town Council's members and employees do not have a fiduciary relationship with the Town Council, as they are tasked with executing statutory duties according to public law. This responsibility is distinct from and cannot be converted to fiduciary duties, which exist under private law, according to the court.

The court also ruled that the AHTC leadership had acted in good faith in waiving the tender, and were thus immune from personal liability for this action under the Town Councils Act. However, the Court also found that the AHTC leadership had not acted in good faith in relation to their implementation of the payments process for FMSS, and thus could be held liable for negligence that occurred in this process.

Singapore: Parliament passes Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill

(ih) On November 9, the Singapore Parliament unanimously passed the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill, amending the National Broadcast Act to enable the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) to more effectively police harmful content online.

The bill empowers the IMDA to order social media platforms to take down egregious content on their websites. For the purpose of the bill, egregious content is defined as content advocating suicide, self-harm, physical or sexual violence, content containing the sexual exploitation of minors, and content that advocates behaviour that would result in a public health risk.

Content dealing with matters of race or religion that is likely to cause feelings of ill will against, or ridicule of, any racial or religious group in Singapore is also defined as egregious. These restrictions apply to content regardless of its location of creation or hosting, expanding the remit of the Broadcasting Act to entities outside Singapore's borders for the first time. [CNA] [The Straits Times] [parliament.gov.sg]

In the case of a failure by the platform to comply, IMDA can now fine the platform up to SG$ 1 million or direct internet service providers to block access to the website for Singaporean users. Internet service providers who fail to comply can be fined up to SG$ 500,000.

The Bill is anticipated to take effect in 2023, following an additional round of consultation with relevant stakeholders in the social media industry.

Singapore: Workers' Party holds biennial party elections

(ih) Singapore's main opposition Worker's Party (WP) held its biennial party elections on November 12. Silvia Lim was re-elected as Party Chairman and Pritam Singh as General-Secretary, despite their ongoing legal troubles stemming from their tenure at the Aljunied-Hougang Town Council [see entry in this edition]. Also re-elected to the Central Executive Committee (CEC) were Sengkang GRC MPs He Ting Ru, Louis Chua and Jamus Lim; Aljunied GRC MPs Faisal Manap, Gerald

Giam, and Leon Perera; and Hougang MP Dennis Tan. In addition to those re-elected, 3 new members were elected to the CEC: Nathaniel Koh, Ang Boon Yaw and Tan Kong Soon. [CNA] [The Straits Times]

Thailand: Prime Minister Prayut could join new party ahead of 2023 general election

(fj) Thailand's Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha is being courted to join the newly established Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party (RTSCP) after the conclusion of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Summit held in Bangkok later this week in efforts to "remake" his public image ahead of next year's general election. [Bangkok Post] [The Diplomat]

The news follows speculations concerning Prayut's political future and his strategy for the upcoming general election, as a ruling passed by the Constitutional Court in September determined that he would reach his eight-year term limit halfway through a potential next term in office [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3]. Recent statements by the leader of the Phalang Pracharath Party (PPRP), Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon, to the effect that he would not stop Prayut from joining another party had contributed to rumors of the prime minister being on the look for a new political party [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

While Prayut was nominated as a prime ministerial candidate by the PPRP in the 2019 election, he never formally joined the party, signaling that his primary allegiance continued to lie with his military background and not with party politics. The source with RTSCP is cited saying that with his prospective party membership, there would come a "refreshing change" in Prayut's public perception away from his military image and towards a "fully-fledged politician".

The RTSCP was founded in March 2021 by Seksakol Atthawong, a former aide to PM Prayut. The party is also expecting further members of parliament from the ruling coalition parties to join ahead of the upcoming general election tentatively scheduled for May 2023.

Thailand: Opposition key figure Phaetongtarn favored prime minister choice in central provinces, poll shows

(fj) Phaetongtarn Shinawatra, a key figure of Thailand's main opposition Pheu Thai Party (PTP) and the youngest daughter of exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, is the most favored choice for the position of prime minister among voters of the country's central provinces, according to a recent opinion poll.

On the level of party preferences, Phaetongtarn's PTP also comes out on top in the central region, further proving the party's ability to rally substantial support throughout the whole country. This broad appeal sets the populist PTP apart from its political competitors, as most parties heavily rely on support from their heartland, with relatively lower popularity in other regions of the country. [Bangkok Post 1]

The results of the opinion poll come only days after PTP leader Cholnan Srikaew publicly stressed that Phaetongtarn's recent announcement of her pregnancy would not affect the party's political strategy or its choices of whom to nominate as its prime ministerial candidates. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Senate to discuss opposition-sponsored motion on constitution referendum on November 21

(fj) An opposition-motion which seeks a referendum to be held on the drafting of a new constitution will be tabled in the upper House of Thailand's Parliament, the Senate, on November 21. [Bangkok Post]

The motion, led by the opposition Pheu Thai Party and Move Forward Party, is seeking a public referendum on the question if a charter drafting assembly made up of elected representatives should be tasked with developing a new constitution to replace the nation's current constitution, which dates back to 2017. Earlier this month, the motion had found overwhelming support in parliament's lower House [see AiR No. 45, November/2022,2].

For the referendum to take place, the motion needs to find support in the Senate. However, given that the opposition has already made several unsuccessful attempts to decrease the constitutionally granted power of the Senate, this will likely constitute a major obstacle for the motion. In fact, Senator Kamnoon Sidhisamarn has already raised concerns that the referendum, which is proposed to be held on May 7, the same day as the tentatively scheduled general election, might give unfair advantages or disadvantages to the winners of the election.

Another possible obstacle for the motion is the role of the Cabinet in advising the Election Commission on matters related to referendums, which gives further options for the government to break the momentum of the opposition's initiative.

Thailand: NPDP to propose amnesty bill for political cases

(fj) The New Palang Dhamma Party (NPDP), a junior partner in Thailand's government coalition, has announced the proposal of a bill to grant amnesty to those charged and prosecuted in political cases. The bill explicitly excludes violations of the royal defamation law as well as graft and serious criminal offenses.

The initiative by the NPDP, which is represented in parliament by a single lawmaker, has the declared goal of helping society to overcome polarized political conflict. Rawee Machamadon, the party's leader, has expressed his confidence that the bill will be passed before the upcoming general election. [Bangkok Post 1]

The NPDP's announcement comes only weeks after the opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) had proposed its own version of amnesty under its progressive political platform for the 2023 general election. MFP's proposal crucially differs in its scope insofar as it includes lese majesty cases as well as cases of sedition. The MFP's proposal thereby would have very different implications for the nation's pro-democracy protesters, many of which are facing charges of lese majesty and sedition under the computer crime law. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Rice price scheme to be approved by Cabinet

(fj) The income guarantee scheme for rice farmers will go before the cabinet for approval after its budget of around USD 4.1 billion was approved by the National Rice Policy and Management Committee in September.

Under the policy, which the government says affects over four million households, stable prices are guaranteed to protect farmers from having to sell their crops at a loss. This is done by subsidies that cover the difference between a guaranteed price and fluctuating market benchmark prices that are updated fortnightly.

As stated by Commerce Minister Jurin Laksanawisit, the Ministry of Finance has requested adjustments to the scheme's budget before it will undergo the cabinet's scrutiny, as market prices have risen above the guaranteed levels and fewer subsidies will need to be paid out. [Bangkok Post]

With Thai rice farmers' productivity lower than those of other regional countries, the continued economic soundness of the policy has been questioned. Securing popular support ahead of the next general elections has been put forth by some observers as a potential ulterior motive behind the scheme. [see AiR No. 36, September/2022,1]

Vietnam: National Assembly debates civil defense law

(ih) On November 9, Vietnam's legislature, the National Assembly, debated a draft law on civil defense as part of its fourth session. The law will clarify regulations on civil defense activities, the rights and obligations of the various organizations and individuals involved in civil defense activities, and the necessary state management and resources to implement these activities. It is one component of the implementation of the Politburo's August 30 Resolution on Civil Defence until 2030, which included provisions for a creation of a Law on Civil Defense by 2025. [Vietnam News]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Russia, United States disagree on East Asia Summit statement

(lm) The East Asia Summit, a forum held between member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the bloc's dialogue partners in Cambodia, ended on November 13 without a joint statement due to disagreements between Russia and the United States, making it unlikely the Group of 20 nations will reach a consensus in Indonesia either this week. The summit, held concurrently with the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, gathered leaders from ASEAN and the United States, China, Russia, India, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and New Zealand. [The Washington Post]

In televised remarks after the summit, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that no collective decisions were made because the United States and its allies had insisted on "absolutely unacceptable language regarding the situation in Ukraine." Lavrov also blamed Washington for dividing the 10-member ASEAN and accused NATO of expanding its activity in the Asia–Pacific region.

The White House reported that President Joe Biden had raised concerns about North Korea's missile tests and condemned Russia's "brutal and unjust war against Ukraine in the strongest terms."

Biden said the United States will "compete vigorously" with China and speak out about China's human rights abuses while "ensuring competition does not veer into conflict." He rearmed the importance of stability in the Taiwan Strait. The summit's chair, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, said the meeting included some heated discussion, but the atmosphere wasn't tense. He told reporters that "leaders talked in a mature way" and that "no one left."

ASEAN agrees on East Timor's ascension, issues 'warning' to Myanmar during summit in Cambodia

(lm) The leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on November 11 issued a "warning" to Myanmar to make measurable progress on the five-point peace consensus agreed jointly last year or risk being barred from the bloc's meetings. The heads of government also agreed on a need for "concrete, practical and measurable indicators with a specific timeline", and said that the ASEAN would review

Myanmar's representation at all levels of meetings. [Deutsche Welle] [Reuters]

Myanmar on November 11 issued an objection to the ASEAN statement, saying it would not follow its recommendations. It has previously blamed lack of progress on the pandemic and obstruction from armed resistance movements. Since seizing power in a military coup in February last year, Myanmar leaders have been banned from participating in ASEAN's top-level events.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo, whose country takes the bloc's rotating chair after Cambodia, told reporters on the sidelines of the summit that he had proposed broadening the ban, beyond summits, on Myanmar leaders, something urged by human rights groups.

Separately at the summit, the ASEAN leaders agreed "in principle" to admit East Timor as the group's 11th member, indicating the end is in sight for an 11-year quest to join the bloc. The former Portuguese colony initiated the process of accession in 2002 after gaining independence from Indonesia earlier the same year, but only formally applied for membership in 2011. The ASEAN will now draw up a roadmap whereby it will set out the criteria East Timor must meet before being granted full membership. [Voice of America]

United States, ASEAN reinforce ties with new Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

(lm) At the 10th annual US-ASEAN Summit, held concurrently with the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and US President Joe Biden elevated relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). [Reuters]

Under the framework of the newly established CSP, the United States and ASEAN will institutionalize and expand cooperation in health, transportation, women's empowerment, environment and climate, energy, foreign affairs, economics, and defense, in order to support robust implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. This new partnership also has a focus on maritime cooperation through ASEAN-led mechanisms that aim to uphold freedom of navigation and overflight and peaceful resolution of disputes.

In his first visit to Southeast Asia as president, Biden said the ASEAN-led regional architecture was at the heart of his administration's Indo-Pacific strategy and

Washington was committing resources, not just rhetoric, under the CSP. He pledged cooperation on issues "from the South China Sea to Myanmar and to find innovative new solutions to shared challenges." [The White House]

ASEAN strengthens trade agreement with Australia, New Zealand

(lm) The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Australia and New Zealand have announced the substantial conclusion of negotiations to upgrade the Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA), a tri-party free trade deal. The announcement was made on November 13 at the sidelines of the 40th and 41st ASEAN Summit and related summits in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The upgrade includes new chapters on micro, small and medium sized enterprise, trade and sustainable development, and enhanced provisions on electronic commerce, trade facilitation among others. The pact also offers more opportunities for cooperation on regional issues including the environment and climate change.

23rd ASEAN Chiefs of Army Multilateral Meeting begins in Hanoi

The army chiefs of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) last week met in the Vietnamese capital, Hanoi, for their 23rd multilateral meeting (ACAMM-23). The meeting was chaired by Lieutenant General Nguyen Tan Cuong, the Chief of the General Staff of the Vietnam People's Army and Deputy Minister of National Defense of Vietnam.

The focus of the meeting has been on finding methods by which the militaries of ASEAN member states can better cooperate to address shared security concerns. Non-traditional security challenges in particular have been highlighted as areas for cooperation in light of the significant role militaries played in the response to COVID-19 pandemic in ASEAN countries. Cyber-security and terrorism were also amongst the issues discussed as areas for cooperation and co-ordination between ASEAN member states. [Vietnam+] [VoV]

Putin, Biden not attending APEC leaders' meeting

(fj) Russian President Putin will not attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting held in the Thai capital, Bangkok, from November 18-19. He will instead be represented by First Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Belousov.

The APEC Leaders' Meeting will mark the final of a series of high-level summits taking place in Southeast Asia in November. Organized back-to-back with the ASEAN-related summits in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, the meetings are seen as a chance to bring together many world leaders in the geopolitically important region of Southeast Asia after Covid-19 had long interrupted in-person meetings.

The announcement of Putin's nonattendance in Bangkok is in line with his absence at the other November summits and shows his preoccupation with the war in Ukraine. As US President Joe Biden has also passed the invitation to join APEC, reportedly in favor of attending his granddaughters wedding in Washington, Chinese President Xi Jinping's confirmed attendance is likely to draw even more attention. [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World]

As Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is scheduled to meet Xi in Bangkok on November 17 ahead of the summit's main event, it remains to be seen to what extent the presence of the leaders of a number of close US-allies will ensure Washington's commitments to the region will still be duly felt. [Nikkei Asia]

Asian nations with mixed support at UN General Assembly resolution on Russian reparations for Ukraine

(lm) The United Nations General Assembly on November 15 voted to approve a resolution recognizing that Russia must be responsible for making reparations to Ukraine. The resolution, supported by 94 of the assembly's 193 members, further recommends that member states, in cooperation with Ukraine, create an international register to record evidence and claims against Russia. [Reuters] [UN News]

Fourteen countries voted against the resolution, including Russia, China and Iran, while 73 abstained, including India, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Cambodia,

Malaysia and Nepal. It was the lowest level of support of the five Ukraine-related resolutions adopted by the General Assembly since Russia's invasion in February. [MINT]

Indonesian president introduces G20 pandemic fund

(os) Indonesian President Joko Widodo, also known as Jokowi, has launched the Pandemic Fund under Indonesia's G20 presidency. The fund is aimed at helping low– and middle–income countries to finance measures to better prevent and cope with future pandemics.

Thus far, 15 countries and three philanthropic institutions have contributed around USD 1.4 billion. According to Jokowi, this amount is not yet sufficient. The World Bank in conjunction with the World Health Organization published a report that stated an amount of USD 31.1 billion is needed to prevent the risk of future pandemics. [Antara News] [Reuters]

China, Pakistan, India to attend Russia-hosted meeting on Afghanistan on November 16

(wr) Special envoys from China, India and Pakistan will attend multilateral talks hosted by Russia on November 16 to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. [TASS] [Voice of America]

The gathering, held under the framework of the so-called Moscow Format, will also be attended by representatives from Kazakhstan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Russian officials have confirmed that there will be no participation by Afghanistan's Islamist Taliban government, even though it took part in the last session of the format in October 2021 [see AiR No. 42, October/2021, 3].

The Moscow Format was initiated in 2016 in a bid to promote political reconciliation between the then-internationally backed Kabul government and the Taliban, who were at the time waging a deadly insurgency against Afghan security forces and their U.S.-led NATO partners.

United States, European Union expand sanctions against Myanmar

(jp/lm) The United States and European Union have announced new sanctions against dozens of Myanmar junta officials, including the country's top justice officials, high-ranking military officers, and entrepreneurs with close ties to the regime. [Reuters]

The EU sanctions apply to 19 more individuals and entities, including a minister and chief justice, and are a result of "the continuing escalation of violence and grave human rights violations following the military takeover two years ago", the European Council said on November 8. With the most recent wave of sanctions, the EU is penalizing 84 individuals and 11 organizations that are either members of the Myanmar regime or have ties to it. [Al Jazeera]

The United States Treasury Department, in turn, designated a Burmese arms dealer and his company as targets of sanctions under an executive order signed in February last year, following the military coup in Myanmar earlier that month. Kyaw Min Oo is believed to have facilitate arms deals and weapons purchases on behalf of the Myanmar military. [U.S. Department of the Treasury]

UN warns of worsening food crisis in Sri Lanka

(sn) Against the larger backdrop of a dire economic crisis in Sri Lanka, the United Nations has warned of a worsening food crisis in the South Asian island nation, saying the number of people needing urgent humanitarian help has doubled to 3.4 million. UN agencies working in Sri Lanka in a joint statement on November 8 said that they had raised USD 79 million to feed those in need, but the increasing number of poor people meant an additional USD 70 million was needed. [UN News] [UN Sri Lanka]

UN member states call on India to improve human rights record, minority rights protection

(vv/lm) UN member states have called on India to take a tougher stand on sexual violence and religious discrimination as they issued recommendations to New Delhi during a Universal Period Review (UPR)

during the ongoing session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, Switzerland.

The UPR exercise is held every four years, to assess the human rights record of any member states, ask questions and offer recommendations to the state in consideration. India, who has been under the global radar for its alleged abuse of minority rights and other human rights crimes, was on its fourth UPR review being questioned on its growing communal disharmony, hate speeches, sexual violence especially against women, and repeated internet shutdowns to allegedly silence voices of dissent against its authorities. [Al Jazeera]

Indian Prime Minister Modi's ruling party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is often accused of using the anti-terror law of India – Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) – to allegedly target minority groups without offering mechanisms for appeal and free trial.

The US ambassador to the UNHRC, Michele Taylor, recommended that the said law's broad application be reduced, adding that the application of the UAPA act has allegedly silenced human rights defenders in the South Asian country, which raises concerns on freedom of speech and other fundamental human rights that are an obligation to be fulfilled by the central government. Germany echoed the same views, expressing concerns over the treatment of marginalized groups of the country especially that of the Muslim community. [The Wire]

Canada urged Indian authorities to take not of serious sexual violence crimes in the country and demanded immediate investigation of religious violence committed against Muslim minorities. Switzerland, Belgium, Italy, and Finland were among other nations who sought the release of detained human rights defenders, asserting the need for communal harmony in a secular nation that India proclaims itself to be. [Al Jazeera]

India, however, offered clarifications to the said recommendations, defending its human rights records, and denying allegations of rising hate crimes against minority muslims. India's solicitor general Tushar Mehta, while appreciating the efforts of human right defenders, claimed that the works of the said human rights defenders must be in conformity with the law of the land and unwarranted activities have resulted in the arrests thus far. Mehta continued that India extends its commitment to protecting fundamental human rights, and strongly condemns acts of sexual or communal violence committed by any individual or groups regardless their religion. [Eurasia Review]

Indonesia under pressure at UN human rights review

(os) Indonesia presented its national report under the framework of the Universal Period Review (UPR) at the ongoing session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, Switzerland, on November 9.

The UN member countries conducting the review noted a number of issues. These included, among others, alleged human rights violations in Papua, freedom of religion and expression, the protection of rights of women, children and disabilities, the revision of the Criminal Code, and the death penalty in Indonesia. Concerns were also raised over laws that preserve discrimination regarding sexual orientation or gender identity.

However, member states also lauded some progress made by the Indonesian government. The countries named, for instance, the enactment of the 2022 Sexual Violence Law and the 2019 revision of the Marriage law.

Amnesty International Indonesia criticized the report for not reflecting the actions of the government in Papua correctly. Additionally, Human Rights Watch stated that Indonesia's reasoning for the violence in Papua was not sufficient. [Tempo 1] [Tempo 2] [The Jakarta Post]

UN member states urge Philippines government to address Duterte administration's human rights issues

(lm) Member states of the United Nations have urged the government of Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to address the alleged extrajudicial killings and other human rights issues that occurred under former President Rodrigo Duterte's administration. [CNN] [Rappler]

The states issued their recommendations during the ongoing session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), which marks the beginning of the Universal Periodic Review's (UPR) fourth cycle. The Philippines' first, second and third UPR reviews took place in April 2008, May 2012 and May 2017, respectively. [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights]

The UPR is a unique process which involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. Since its first meeting was held in April 2008, all 193 UN member States have been reviewed thrice within the first, second and third UPR cycles.

Reporters Without Borders nominates journalists from China, India, Myanmar, the Philippines for annual prize

(lm) Journalists from China, India, Myanmar and the Philippines are among 15 journalists and media outlets from around the world that have been shortlisted for the 30th annual Press Freedom Prize that *Reporters Without Borders* awards in three categories – journalistic courage, impact and independence. [Reporters Without Borders]

Island nations demand highly polluting emerging economies China, India to pay for climate damage

(wr/lm) The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a group of low-lying countries, have suggested that highly polluting emerging economies, including China and India, should pay into a special compensation fund to help countries rebuild after climate change-driven disasters - but added that it will not push for retrospective cash. [Independent] [Reuters]

The proposal was made by Bahamas Prime Minister Philip Davis on the third day of the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more commonly referred to as COP27, which is focussed on implementing ambitious promises made at COP26 in Glasgow last year.

The comments marked the first time India and China have been lumped into the list of major emitters that island states say should be held accountable for damages caused by sea level rise, drought and extreme storms.

India remained silent while China stepped up to clear its stance that it supports the mechanism of loss and damage fund but doesn't feel obliged to contribute, as it aligns itself among developing nations. [VOA]

Sri Lanka proposes to establish World's International Climate Change University

(sn) Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe attended the COP-27 (Climate Change) conference in Egypt on November 8. He proposed to establish the International Climate Change University in Sri Lanka with the ancillary institute in the Maldives. He notes that the collaboration of multilateral institutions such as World and Asian Development Banks and the Commonwealth is essential to develop the global center for policymakers, scientists and practitioners.

The president criticized G20 states for fossil fuel spending rates happening during the Ukrainian war and suggested the developed nations should lead the resolution of climate challenges instead. Sri Lanka plans to reduce the state's carbon emissions by 14.5% and aim for 70% of renewable energy for electricity generation by 2030. [newsfirst]

Bangladesh, IMF reach initial agreement for USD 4.5 billion

(az/lm) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Bangladesh have reached a staff-level for a USD 4.5 billion support program, a key loan that would allow the South Asian nation to preserve macroeconomic stability in the face of hiking fuel prices. [Bloomberg] [Newswire] [Reuters]

The IMF and Bangladesh agreed on November 9 on a 42-month arrangement, which includes USD 3.2 billion under the Extended Credit Facility and USD 1.3 billion under the multilateral lender's new Resilience and Sustainability Facility. Funds will be disbursed in seven tranches, with the first installment available in February 2023. [International Monetary Fund]

However, Bangladesh's main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has questioned the country's ability to repay the loan, as Dhaka is exhausting its reserve and facing the backlash of siphoning money abroad. The party's secretary general stressed that with this huge amount of loans, people would be under a heavy debt burden. He also suggested that because Bangladesh has already made the country's economy worse, the government should stop planning for megaprojects and help people in need instead. [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh is the third South Asian nation to secure a staff-level agreement with the IMF for loans this year,

after Pakistan and Sri Lanka. A staff-level agreement is typically subject to approval by IMF management and consideration by its Executive Board, which is expected in the coming weeks.

World Bank estimates 348 USD for climate and development challenges in Pakistan

(msk) The World Bank has estimated that the total investment needs for a comprehensive response to Pakistan's climate and development challenges between 2023 and 2030 amount to around USD 348 billion, which is equal to 10.7 per cent of the cumulative gross domestic product (GDP) for the same period.

This consists of USD 152 billion for adaptation and resilience and USD 196 billion for deep de-carbonization, revealed the Country Climate and Development Report for Pakistan released by the World Bank at the COP27 in Sharm El-Sheikh on November 9. The report warned that the combined risks from the intensification of climate change and environmental degradation, unless addressed, will further aggravate Pakistan's economic fragility, and could ultimately reduce annual GDP by 18 to 20 per cent per year by 2050. [Dawn]

In September, the government had estimated the economic loss from the floods about USD 12.5 billion [see AiR No. 36, September/2022, 1]. But the full extent of the damage remains unknown, and these numbers may still rise.

World Bank agrees to enliven five rivers surrounding Bangladesh's capital, involving about $20 billion

(az) The World Bank has agreed to providing technical assistant to develop an umbrella investment program designed for the restoration of five rivers surrounding Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka. High population growth, unplanned urbanization, encroachment of rivers and canals, and dumping of solid waste, discharging industrial wastes, and untreated sewage into the rivers have made them unusable for the vast population. However, facing two consecutive pandemic crises and the Russia-Ukraine war, Bangladesh can not afford to spend the considerable amount of money needed for the projects to clean the rivers. [The Daily Star]

Indonesia, Brazil, Congo launch partnership for rainforest protection

(os) The world's three largest rainforest nations Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Indonesia announced their partnership to preserve the forests.

The rapid deconstruction of rainforests exacerbates climate change, as the forests help regulate the global climate. Together, the three countries cover 52 percent of the world's tropical rainforest. According to a statement, which was signed by ministers of the countries ahead of the G20 summit in Indonesia, they want to work together to develop a funding mechanism to preserve biodiversity in developing countries. [Reuters] [The New York Times]

South Korea, Japan, US vow trilateral cooperation amid North Korea threats

(sra/sm) On November 13, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, US President Joe Biden, and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held trilateral talks in Phnom Penh in Cambodia on the sidelines of annual regional gatherings of the ASEAN and G20 countries. Yoon also held bilateral summits with his US and Japanese counterparts.

This was the first high level trilateral summit since the one on the sidelines of the NATO summit last June. The leaders adopted their first joint statement on comprehensive affairs such as North Korea, the economy, and national security. They vowed to take "resolute steps" to implement North Korea's complete denuclearization, reaffirming an international response if the nation decides to go ahead with its seventh nuclear test. The joint response will be carried out in detail by teams under the leaders' coordination. [Korea.net]

Trilateral talks centered around North Korea's nuclear activity, as the three nations agreed to work together to strengthen defense efforts as concerns of Pyongyang's armed aggression threatens security in the Indo-Pacific. The launches of ballistic missiles in October, believed to have been intercontinental missiles, flew over Japan and prompted national warnings for the first time since September 2017. The US security alliance with both South Korea and Japan has also sought revision of policies towards North Korea. [Reuters]

The summit is expected to promote further communication between South Korea and Japan, as the leaders pledged to improve relations affected by the 2018 South Korean court rulings of Japanese firms to provide compensation for their role in forced labor actions during World War Two [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida raised concerns that the trilateral cooperation is a significant alliance as future missile tests by Pyongyang threaten the security of the region. The leaders also addressed Russia's continued war in Ukraine, sharing their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, with efforts to deter unilateral forces of military aggression, alluding to the rise of China through economic security. Kishida also held bilateral talks with Biden prior to the trilateral summit, securing their defense alliance with Biden supporting Kishida's plans to increase Japan's defense budget. [The Japan Times 1]

In regards to North Korea's rising missile launches, the United States government has stated it will deploy an aircraft carrier in the Sea of Japan if nuclear tests are carried out, with plans to apply greater sanctions on crude oil and refined petroleum exports through the UN Security Council. To other G7 nations, Biden stated the need to condemn North Korea through "integrated deterrence" to work toward the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The leaders of Japan, South Korea and the United States will announce a trilateral meeting to consider discussions on applying their own unilateral sanctions on North Korea if the UN Security Council fails to enforce action on the nation, a possibility due to veto-wielding Russian and Chinese objections. [The Japan Times 2]

Yoon addressed South Korea's new Indo-Pacific strategy for a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, further cementing the country's alignment with the US' strategic vision of the region. Biden and Kishida encouraged the initiative. In his bilateral summit with Biden, Yoon discussed the strengthening of extended deterrence regarding North Korea and South Korea's ongoing concern with the US Inflation Reduction Act, which gives tax advantages to electric vehicles assembled in the US and using material from key partners. Biden replied that the US remains open to discuss the subject further considering the weight of South Korean car makers in the US automobile market. In his meeting with Kishida, the South Korean and Japanese leaders agreed to maintain efforts on finding a solution to controversial disputes over war history and expressed hopes for increased diplomatic exchanges in the future. Bilateral relations had reached a low over wartime forced labor

disputes under the previous Moon Jae-in administration. [Korea.net] [Yonhap News Agency]

Regional security concerns for the three leaders continue to increase as North Korea fired more than 30 missiles and heavy artillery fire on November 9. The country's launches seemed to land in the sea near the Korean Peninsula, and toward the Sea of Japan - within Japan's exclusive economic zone - at an altitude of 30 km. The missiles also happened to come around the time of South Korea's primary ally, the United States' midterm elections. The North Koren military announced the launches were simulated attacks on South Korea and the US, which has prompted further significance of the trilateral summit. [Al Jazeera]

South Korea to host drone show in Bangladesh

(az/lm) South Korea will serve as co-host for a half-day conference on unmanned aerial vehicles and related software in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, on November 16. The representatives from South Korea include the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport (MOLIT) and the Korea Institute of Aviation Safety Technology (KIAST), leading Korean UAV technology companies, and local private and government organizations. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh urges Japan to continue support to achieve LSD status in 2026, developed country by 2041

(az) Mentioning that Japan had remained a true friend and a trusted development partner in Dhaka's efforts towards achieving stellar socio-economic development, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen expressed hope that Tokyo can play a crucial role in Bangladesh's journey to achieve LDC status in 2026 and become a developed country by 2041.

Bangladesh's merchandise exports to Japan have almost doubled in the last decade, which reached over US$ 1.3 billion in the previous Fiscal Year. Besides, Japan is the second largest export destination of Bangladesh in Asia. On the other hand, Japan has committed to supporting Bangladesh by providing USD 4.8 billion as development assistance in forms like grants, loans, and technical support. [New Age]

Funds from Russia for Bangladesh's first nuclear power plant dwindle

(lm) Top bankers involved in the construction of Bangladesh's first nuclear power plant are working to facilitate the transfer of funds from Russia to the South Asian nation through a third country, as Western sanctions imposed on Moscow following its invasion of Ukraine hamper the refill of dwindling funds. [Prothom Alo]

Bangladesh and Russia agreed in 2011 to build two new nuclear power plants. The estimated cost of the project is USD 13 billion, and Russia has been financing the majority of the expenditure providing USD 11.38 billion. As of August this year, Moscow only provided USD 4.97 billion for the project that is supposed to be completed by 2025.

Separately, Bangladesh will soon begin burning coal at a large power station near the world's largest mangrove forest. [Voice of America]

Cambodia receives USD 70 Million grant from ADB to develop STEM Education

(sn) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) announced the ratification of a USD 70 million loan to Cambodia to support the reforms in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in upper secondary education programs. [cambodianess]

Cambodia-Vietnam trade and investment promotion forum attended by PMs

(sn) Vietnam-Cambodia trade and investment forum took place on November 8, 2002. It was organized and co-hosted by the Cambodian Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Vietnam, and the Council of Development of Cambodia. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and his Vietnamese counterpart Pham Minh Chinh attended the event. [newswires]

Xi Jinping meets Biden, Albanese and Macron in Bali

(dql) Ahead of and during the G20 Summit in Bali, that opened on November 15, Chinese President Xi Jinping

held bilateral meetings with U.S. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and French President Emmanuel Macron.

A day before the summit, Xi and Biden held a meeting on November 14, the first face-to-face meeting since Biden took office. During the meeting, that according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry was "in-depth, candid and constructive," two leaders expressed their commitment to reopening channels of communication, with Xi reassuring that China "has no intention to challenge or displace the United States," but warning against "politicizing and weaponizing economic and trade ties as well as exchanges in science and technology," and insisting that that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and an independent Taiwan "are as irreconcilable as water and fire." On the war in Ukraine, he called on the U.S., NATO and the European Union to hold "comprehensive dialogues" with Russia. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1]

According to the White House's readout of the meeting, Biden more assertively reaffirmed that the U.S. "will continue to compete vigorously with the PRC," that would include "investing in sources of strength at home and aligning efforts with allies and partners around the world." Biden raised concerns the human rights situation, expressed opposition to any unilateral changes to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait "by either side," voicing objections against Beijing's "coercive and increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan. The readout further states that both leaders reaffirmed their opposition to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine. [The White House]

The highly anticipated meeting between Xi and Biden is widely seen as being used by both to confirm readiness to restore communication channels, that Beijing cut in response to the visit of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan in August, while laying out priorities and marking red lines with regards to contentious issues, especially Taiwan, at the same time. [Nikkei Asia] [CNN] [Global Times]

Xi and Albanese, meanwhile, discussed ways to restore stable bilateral ties, without making any immediate concessions on either side on trade or security. Albanese described the discussion "positive and constructive," adding that "[w]e will cooperate where we can, disagree where we must, and engage in our national interest." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2] [Antony Albanese, Twitter]

Their meeting was the first meeting of the two countries' leaders after years of tensions between China and Australia over trade barriers imposed by

Beijing on Australian goods as retaliation for Canberra's demand for an independent investigation of Covid-19's origins in China, the exclusion of Huawei's involvement in 5G networks in Australia and the conclusion of AUKUS in September last year. It was a positive and constructive discussion. We will cooperate where we can, disagree where we must, and engage in our national interest. [The Sydney Morning Herald]

According to the Chinese readout of his meeting with Macron, Xi expressed his hopes for France's support in pushing the European Union "to stay committed to an independent and positive China policy." On the war in Ukraine, he reassured that "China stands for ceasefire, cessation of the conflict and peace talks." Macron, for his part, stated that both countries reaffirmed their determination to "put a stop to escalation and address the consequences of the war in Ukraine, to support the most vulnerable countries, to decarbonize our economies, and to take action to protect biodiversity." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 3] [Emmanuel Macron, Twitter]

The G20 summit, the world's largest economic forum, that runs until November 16, comes amid the ongoing war in Ukraine and multiple economic challenges including record inflation in many countries, soaring energy prices, supply chain disruption and a looming global recession. In a reference to the divisive nature of the summit-dominating war in Ukraine, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, the summit host, warned that there is "no other option, collaboration is needed to save the world," adding that "G20 must be the catalyst for inclusive economic recovery. We should not divide the world into parts. We must not allow the world to fall into another cold war." [Axios] [Al Jazeera]

German government prevents sale of semiconductor factories to China

(ms) The German cabinet has prohibited the takeover of two German semiconductor firms by Chinese companies.

Firstly, it blocked the planned purchase of the chip manufacturing factory Elmos by the Swedish company Silex, a subsidiary of the Chinese chip company Sai MicroElectronics. The other company is, according to several reports, the semiconductor company ERS Electronic. The government cited concerns over national security and risks of the transfer of sensitive technological knowledge for the move. [CNN] [Reuters]

The veto by the German cabinet comes after an agreement was reached in late October between the German government and Cosco allowing the Chinese state-owned company to acquire 24.9 percent of one of four container terminals in the northern port of Hamburg, Germany's largest port. The sale has been controversial both among Western partners and within the ruling coalition. Opponents fear that the deal would make Germany even more dependent on China [see AiR No. 44, November/2022, 1], which is already Germany's largest trading partner, although it should be noted that France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, which opposed the sale, have already signed similar deals with Cosco or other Chinese companies that are considerably larger than the Hamburg port deal. [Politico]

Canada about to release new Indo-Pacific strategy to challenge China

(ms) Canadian Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly announced during a speech held on November 10 the new Indo-Pacific strategy, which will be presented later this year and will address, among other things, the policy towards China.

Signaling an assertive stance to towards Beijing, she stated: "We will challenge China when we ought to, and we will co-operate with China when we must." Thus, Canada would continue to cooperate with China on global issues such as climate change, she said, but apart from that sees China as "an increasingly disruptive global power," cautioning Canadian companies against deepening their relationship with the world's second largest economy.

Regarding future Canadian activities in the region, Joly announced, first, that the Royal Canadian Navy would focus more on containing China's maritime borders and preventing an invasion of Taiwan. Second, Canada would seek to strengthen relations with India in the future as a democratic country in the region. Furthermore, Canada is said to be planning to provide the equivalent of USD 37 million to expand its network of China experts in embassies.

Relations between China and Australia have deteriorated significantly, especially since 2018 and the arrest of Huawei Technologies executive Meng Wanzhou, after which China responded by arresting two Canadians on espionage charges. Although the relation has eased somewhat since the release of the respective detainees, they remain strained.

Chinese Foreign Ministry reacted to the speech and announced on the same day to have initiated “strict steps” against Canada.

Joly's speech came just before Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau began his Asia trip on November 10 to participate in the ASEAN meeting in Cambodia, the G20 Summit in Indonesia and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' forum in Thailand. [CTV News] [Reuters] [The Guardian]

China and El Salvador are about to start FTA negotiations

(ms) China's Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) and Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele announced that the two countries will soon begin negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Both countries plan to successfully conclude the talks “as soon as possible.”

The start of the negotiations would simultaneously suspend the existing FTA between El Salvador and Taiwan and end it if the negotiations are successful. [Global Times] [Reuters]

United States seek closer ties with India, visiting treasury secretary says

(wr/lm) The United States is placing India at the heart of its “friend-shoring” approach, which seeks to detach global supply chains from the clutches of Washington’s adversaries, US Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen said during a visit to New Delhi on November 11. [Reuters] [The New York Times]

Yellen, the Biden administration’s top economic diplomat, traveled to New Delhi to participate in a meeting of the US-India Economic and Financial Partnership. She also held talks with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on India's assumption of the G20 presidency, conveying hopes that India would accelerate a global Common Framework for Debt Restructuring. [ANINEWS]

Furthermore, and against the larger backdrop of US efforts to prevent Russia from profiting from oil after its invasion of Ukraine, Yellen said that India stands to gain from a price cap on Moscow’s oil. The United States and its allies in the Group of Seven rich nations plan to cap prices of sea-borne oil shipments from December 5, with a second cap on oil products from February 5. [The Hindu]

Additionally, she projected confidence that India's membership in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) will facilitate a mutually coordinated policy stance on economic challenges faced.

Yellen traveled to the Indonesian island of Bali on November 14 for a joint meeting of G20 finance and health ministers before joining President Joe Biden at a G20 summit there on November 15-16.

India, United States hold fifth iteration of level business forum to deepen economic, commercial ties

(vv) India's Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and his United States counterpart Gina Raimondo on November 10 officially launched the fifth iteration of the US-India CEO Forum, which brings together top-level business executives to explore ways to strengthen economic and commercial ties between the two countries. [Business Today] [Economic Times] [Times of India]

During the event, which was held virtually, Goyal highlighted the significant growth in economic relations between New Delhi and Washington, while also citing common interests of sustainability, technology to be driving factors among others.

The said forum was resumed in 2014 in efforts to identify and strengthen efficient grounds for collaboration and mutual economic growth. The sixth edition of the India-US CEO Forum is expected to be held early next year, counting on frameworks and recommendations offered during the most recent virtual meet.

Indian foreign minister visits Russian counterpart in Moscow, says New Delhi continue to import oil

(vv/lm) India will continue buying Russian oil because it benefits the country, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on November 8 after meeting his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov for the fifth time this year, adding that the two countries were expanding their trade ties. [Deutsche Welle]

Jaishankar was visiting Moscow for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine in February. He was accompanied by senior officials from agriculture,

petroleum and natural gas, ports and shipping, finance, chemicals and fertilizer, and trade – which he said showed the importance of ties with Russia.

Lavrov said the two countries are seeking to expand their trade ties and cooperate more closely in the fields of nuclear energy and space travel. He also said he discussed the joint production of modern weapons with Jaishankar. Last year, the two countries inked a USD 677 million deal to manufacture around 670,000 AK-203 assault rifles in India as part of New Delhi's push for self-reliance in defense manufacturing [see AiR No. 49, December/2021, 1]. [Al Jazeera]

Jaishankar, for his part, stressed that India would continue buying oil from Russia. New Delhi, which has not explicitly condemned Russia for the Ukraine invasion, has emerged as Moscow's largest oil customer after China as Western buyers seek to wean themselves off fuel from Russia. [Reuters] [Voice of America]

It is worth noting that days before Jaishankar's visit to Russia, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Indians are "very talented people, purposeful, with such a drive for internal development will, of course, achieve outstanding results." Talking about bilateral relations between Russia and India, he added that the two countries have "special ties that are built on the foundation of really close allied relations for decades." [The Diplomat]

His trip came as United States Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visited New Delhi last week to hold talks with Indian officials, including possibly on capping Russian oil prices. [see entry in this edition]

Indonesia signs palm oil, fishery trade deals with China

(os) Nine Indonesian companies have signed contracts with 13 Chinese buyers agreeing to sell 2.5 million tonnes of palm oil products. Furthermore, a fishery trade deal was inked.

The deals sit at a total value of USD 2.6 billion and are following Indonesian President Joko Widodo's state visit to China in July. In April, Indonesia banned the export of palm oil to rein in rising cooking oil prices. The government waived the levy in July to promote exports. However, it is possible that the government will introduce it again in the second half of November. [Reuters]

In addition, the two countries signed an agreement related to Indonesian fishery products. The value of the deal and the number of products purchased have yet to be disclosed. The agreement allegedly comprises a framework for trade, exchange of information, promotion, and dispute settlement. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia provides humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees in Jordan

(os) The Indonesian Embassy in Amman has distributed humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees in Jerash, Jordan. Indonesia expressed its willingness to help mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people not only in Jordan but also in Palestine. The Palestinian refugees thanked Indonesia for its assistance. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia]

Indonesian president holds bilateral meetings with US, Turkish counterparts

(os) Ahead of the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesian President Joko Widodo met with his counterparts of the United States and Turkey in bilateral meetings to discuss their respective relations.

Jokowi met with US President Joe Biden on November 14 to discuss issues such as the current global economic condition. They also expressed their hopes for the outcomes of the G20 summit. [Tempo] [The White House]

The Indonesian President also met with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The two countries furthered their bilateral cooperation by signing several agreements. The agreements comprise the areas of defense, environment, forestry, research and technology, innovation, and development cooperation assistance. Two business-to-business agreements were also inked. These stipulate the joint production of electric buses and the construction of a toll road in Indonesia. [Antara News 1] [Antara News 2]

Indonesian president, European Council president meet on sidelines of ASEAN Summit

(os) On the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, Indonesian President Joko Widodo met with European Council President Charles Michel to discuss the cooperation between the EU and Indonesia and ASEAN. Jokowi pointed out that in face of current global crises, such as the food crisis, energy crisis, and inflation, cooperation is essential. Michel emphasized the EU's full support for Indonesia's G20 presidency. [Antara News]

Japan not present at COP27 summit, Kishida focuses on domestic issues

(sra) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida did not attend the COP27 World Leader Summit for the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Egypt due to domestic issues being dealt with under the current extraordinary Diet session.

Officials have criticized the choice to not attend as Kishida's lack of sustainable policies, with Japan being awarded the Fossil Award of the Day for being the biggest nation in the world for financing oil, gas and coal projects, countering international efforts to invest in more sustainable energy solutions. [The Japan Times] Instead of Kishida, Environment Minister Akihiro Nishimura is expected to attend the second week as a representative of the nation, joining vice-minister for foreign affairs, Masatoshi Akimoto. [The Asahi Shimbun]

The Kishida administration continues to suffer as public support remains below 38 percent amid a series of scandals involving the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, contentious Unification Group affiliation and the depreciation of the yen as inflation and the cost of living continue to increase [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2] making it a difficult period for the Prime Minister to leave the country. Japanese foreign reserves have also continued to fall by USD 43.5 billion since September down to USD 1.19 trillion, the steepest decline between months, impacted by US yen-buying intervention. [Reuters]

Japan holds summit meetings with Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam

(sra) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held summit meetings in Indonesia around the G20 Bali Summit with his counterparts from Cambodia,

Indonesia and Vietnam to discuss bilateral relations. The meetings were held between November 12 - 14.

Kishida joined Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen in a summit meeting to exchange diplomatic notes in regard to grant aid projects and development for further bilateral cooperation on the 70th anniversary of Japan-Cambodia diplomatic relations. The two leaders discussed improving relations to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," with the agreed intention to continue security cooperation between the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force to Cambodia, including the joint effort to realize the "Asia Zero Emissions Community." They also signed an MOU between Toyota Tsusho Corporation and the Cambodian Ministry of Economy and Finance to aid in Cambodia's automobile industry development. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1]

The Japanese Prime Minister also met up with the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Minh Chinh Pham, as they share 50 years of diplomatic relations between their nations. Kishida aims to improve ties with Pham through economic cooperation and human resource development and discussed his hopes that Vietnam will follow Japan in an effort to mitigate nuclear weapons, as he condemned Russian forces in Ukraine. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2]

In the meeting with the President of the Republic of Indonesia Joko Widodo, Kishida expressed the aim to improve collaboration between the two countries also sharing 50 years of bilateral cooperation. The pair spoke of the realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific, their shared role in the Asia Zero Emission Community Concept and Japan's assumption of the G7 Presidency for 2023. The leaders also discussed working in collaboration to counter the impact of climate change through the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP). [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3]

Japan, China arrange Kishida-Xi meeting

(sra) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is currently arranging a meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to be the first bilateral talks in three years. The meeting is set to take place on November 17 around the multilateral gatherings to take place, as both leaders are to attend the annual G20 summit and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Thailand where the two will meet. [Reuters 1]

Bilateral ties between China and Japan are still tense over the Senkanu Islands which are under Japanese control, yet claimed by Chinese rule in the East China Sea. Kishida has also raised concerns about China's stance on the use of military force in regard to Taiwan's sovereigny.

Kishida hopes to discuss the need to improve relations and create stable cooperation with China, with the aim to enhance diplomacy as ally US President Joe Biden is already set to meet with Xi throughout the week. Kishida is set to discuss China's maritime presence around the Senkaku Islands - known by the Chinese as Diaoyu. [The Japan Times]

Kishida met with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang on November 12 around the ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea meeting to discuss the importance of Japan-China relations. The 25th ASEAN Plus Three summit outlined the need to promote cooperation within areas such as the digital economy, enhancing regional security in the Indo-Pacific and in strengthening the agriculture sector. [Reuters 2] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Japan-US begin major joint military exercise, eye two-plus-two talks

(sra) Large-scale military exercises began in a Japanese air base with the US on November 10 as the allies joined to enhance their defense capabilities amid China's military expansion and the increasing presence of North Korea's ballistic missile launches. The bilateral military drills, known as the biennial "Keen Sword", are to continue until November 19.

The Japan-US drills are a way of deepening military cooperation as China continues to claim control over the South China Sea, as well as the string of islands under Japanese rule in the East China Sea. The nations are also concerned with this assertion of military power may be used to undermine Taiwan's sovereignty. With the intensifying missile firings by North Korea reaching 30 launches just in 2022, the security of the region is a major concern for Prime Minister Fumio Kishida [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2] as he seeks to revise the nation's self-defense principle.

The exercise involves over 26,000 Japanese and 10,000 US troops - and personnel from the Space Force - including 30 vessels and 370 aircraft between the two nations. The field training will involve amphibious landing exercises throughout remote islands in the

southwest to simulate defense measures in the region. [Associated Press News]

The drills will also include the participation of Australian, British and Canadian warships and airplanes in an effort to increase training strategies to reinforce regional security. The training between the Japanese Self-Defense Force and US forces will also work on a response to intercontinental ballistic missiles, defense in outer space and cyberspace. [The Japan Times]

Alongside joint military exercises, Japan and US are also planning two-plus-two security talks for January to further discuss security challenges, ensuring peace in the Indo-Pacific region and Russia's war in Ukraine. This will come after the National Security Strategy of Japan is revised and updated with new long-term security regulations, in conjunction with US President Joe Biden's first National Security Strategy released in October which aims to promote deterrence by increased alliance and response strength. [The Mainichi]

US to withdraw F-15 fighter jets from Japan

(sra) The United States has asserted its military presence in the southern island prefecture of Okinawa, Japan after the withdrawal of its F-15 fighter jets. However, the withdrawal will not impact the Kadena base as rotational deployments will see the continued US military presence on a temporary basis. As a key region for US military presence, Okinawa prefecture will see the plan to retire two squadrons of F-15s as a major reduction of US defense in the Indo-Pacific, which could also provide an opportunity for China to reduce its military aggression in the region. [Kyodo News]

The move comes as China enhances military expansion in the Indo-Pacific, especially toward Taiwan. Growing concerns have been expressed as the decision may cause misinterpretation as no permanent presence will replace the jets after 30 years of service and in connection to the relocation of the US Marine Corps Air Station from the Okinawa, Futenma base [see AiR No. 44, November/2022, 1].

In regard to the Okinawa relocation plan, city officials have alerted crucial minutes of the Japanese central government discussion do not exist, with Nago city failing to provide official records. Without documentation of the agreed plan, there may be a

violation of political accountability, to be constituted by the municipal Information Disclosure and Personal Information Protection Review Board. [The Asahi Shimbun]

Japan officially joins NATO's cyber defense center

(sra) The Japanese Ministry of Defence (JMOD) officially joined the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (CCDCOE), an international military and cyber defense organization. The official recognition of Japan's previous participation in 2021 and 2022 will see it become part of the research, training and development exercises in collaboration with other nations. [The Register]

North Korea, Russia deny exchange of weapons following US accusations

(sm) On November 9, Russia denied US reports that it had been conducting weapon exchanges with North Korea, after US National Security spokesperson John Kirby claimed on November 2 to have information about a North Korean supply of artillery shells and ammunitions for use in Ukraine by Russia. Pyongyang also denied the claims a day earlier on November 8 and criticized the US for its obvious lies. [Reuters]

Kirby had disclosed that North Korea may be covertly sending weapons to Russia while making it seem as if supplies were intended for the Middle East or North Africa. Pyongyang is suspected to be replenishing Moscow's stocks with Soviet-era ammunition, after its stocks have been allegedly depleted due to the Russia–Ukraine war. US officials had confirmed an intelligence finding about Russia's purchase of millions of rockets and other ammunitions from North Korea in September.

In the meanwhile, the North Korean missile that was fired over the de facto maritime border with South Korean in early November was found to be of a similar type to the ones used by Russia in its war against Ukraine, according to South Korea's military on November 9. The SA-5 type missile, developed by the Soviet Union in 1967, was composed of parts with Russian writing on them, although it could not be confirmed if they had been imported or assembled by Pyongyang. [Yonhap News Agency]

North Korea's official state media regards Kirby's statement as hostile propaganda against its regime and repeatedly dismissed such reports. Weapon exports to other countries would be in violation of the UN Security Council resolutions imposed on Pyongyang.

North Korea has maintained a close relationship with Russia in recent years, being the only country besides Syria to acknowledge Moscow's declaration of the Ukrainian Donetsk and Luhansk territories as independent. The North Korean regime has even implied sending workers to Russia-occupied territories to help with reconstruction. In early November, Russia sent its first train loaded with horses over its border with North Korea in two and a half years and should soon be followed by a train with medical supplies, according to Russia's Far Eastern Railway spokespeople.

Pyongyang may be looking to import Russian fuel and technology to develop its military capabilities, as it is suspected to plan to conduct its seventh nuclear test soon. The regime has also resumed its train exchange with its biggest trading partner China in September. [Chosun Ilbo]

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman postpones visit to Pakistan, India

(msk) Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman has cancelled a planned visit to Pakistan and India due to "scheduling issues", according to sources. He was scheduled to visit India on November 14 and Pakistan on November 21. The officials on both sides of the border said that new dates for prince's visit will soon be finalized. [Arab News] [The Hindu]

Pakistan is aided by Turkey to mitigate food security challenges

(tj) Turkey's state-run aid agency, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), is assisting flood-battered farmers in Pakistan to mitigate a looming threat to food security caused by recent floods and rains that inundated millions of acres of croplands across the country. TIKA has launched a program to provide wheat seeds to thousands of farmers to help them grow crops in southern Sindh and southwestern Balochistan provinces that have

been severely affected by the unprecedented floods. [The Express Tribune]

United States to spend USD 66 million on new facilities at Philippines military bases

(jd/lm) The United States has agreed to spend USD 66.5 million to start building training and warehouse facilities at three of its five military bases in the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). [Bloomberg]

The EDCA, which was first signed in 2014 during the administration of former President Rodrigo Duterte, allows US troops to rotate for extended periods and access local military bases. On November 15, Philippine military chief Bartolome Bacarro said Washington had proposed including five more military bases in the EDCA, but that would be subject to approval by the defense and foreign ministries. [Bangkok Post]

Germany's Chancellor Scholz urges closer EU ties with Southeast Asia during visit to Singapore

(lm) German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told business leaders in Singapore on November 14 that his country wants to deepen its cooperation with its Southeast Asian partners, emphasizing that the Asia-Pacific region is "far more than just China." Scholz also said he hopes to see quick progress in the European Union's trade negotiations with Australia, India and Indonesia and remains open to new agreements beyond that. [Associated Press]

Scholz was in Singapore on the second leg of an Asian trip that started in Vietnam and also took him to the G20 leaders' summit in Bali, Indonesia. The journey came just one week after Scholz's visit to China earlier this month, reflecting Berlin's efforts to diversify away from its top trade partner Beijing and to boost ties with fast growing economies in Southeast Asia. [Deutsche Welle]

Notably, the German leader said his country's political and economic position must reflect the fact that today's China is very different from the China of five or 10 years ago. A new national security strategy will emphasize "reducing risky one-sided dependencies

regarding certain raw materials or critical technology," he said, adding that decoupling was not the answer.

Vietnam

During his visit to Hanoi on November 13, the first for a German leader in more than a decade, Scholz discussed energy and trade ties with Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. He said Berlin wanted deeper trade relations with the Southeast Asian nation and would support the country's transition to a greener economy, including through the expansion of the metro system in Hanoi. [Reuters]

Observers argue that Scholz's stop in Vietnam highlights the country's growing role in global supply chains as many German firms consider diversifying their manufacturing operations away from China, their main hub in Asia. At present, About 500 German firms operate in Vietnam, of which around 80 have manufacturing plants in the country.

Singapore

Scholz's visit to Singapore, his first trip there as head of government since he took office in December of last year, rounds off a series of high-level diplomatic engagements, which began with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's visit in June.

During his visit, Scholz attended an official welcome ceremony in his honor and called on President Halimah Yacob. He also met Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and delivered a joint keynote address at the 17th Asia-Pacific Conference of German Business together with Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong. German Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck will also be in town for the conference. [CNA] [The Straits Times]

After his visit, Scholz headed to Bali for the Group of 20 summit.

South Korean president discloses his Indo-Pacific strategy and calls for closer cooperation with China, Japan amid ASEAN and G20 summit

(sm) From November 11 to 16, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol travelled for the first time to Southeast Asia since he took office to attend the ASEAN and ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, South Korea) summits on November 11 and 12 in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia on November 15 and 16, respectively.

On November 11, Yoon announced South Korea's first strategy for a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and its new Korea–ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI) at the ASEAN summit. Key elements of the Indo-Pacific strategy include the strengthening of the rule-based international order based on universal values, cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation, anti-terrorism, maritime, cyber, and heath security and the strengthening of supply chains and economic cooperation. He added that South Korea will be an active player in climate change, digital and health cooperation and denounced any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force in the region.

The announcement of the new Indo-Pacific strategy comes amid a recent increased North Korean ballistic and nuclear activity, with Pyongyang firing over 30 missiles on November 9 alone. The statement also cements South Korea's position as the US' strategic security ally amid the growing US–China rivalry.

The KASI is considered a core component of Seoul's Indo-Pacific strategy and promotes increased strategic dialogue between ASEAN countries and South Korea, especially concerning North Korea's denuclearization. Yoon proposed an upgrade of the South Korea–ASEAN Free Trade Agreement to encompass digital trade and called for more cooperation for electric vehicles, batteries, and digital technologies. He further promoted the establishment of a South Korea–ASEAN center on carbon neutrality and green transformation and suggested the upgrade of the bilateral relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership from 2024, which was welcomed by the ASEAN leaders. [Yonhap News Agency_1]

Yoon furthermore held bilateral talks with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen and Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha on November 11 and with Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. on November 12. [Yonhap News Agency_2] [Yonhap News Agency_3] [Yonhap News Agency_4]

Yoon expressed his hope for a reestablishment of trilateral cooperation mechanisms between China, Japan, and South Korean during the ASEAN Plus Three summit and suggested areas of cooperation between the three and ASEAN countries. While Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attended the plenary meeting, no trilateral summit was held. The three countries have not had a joint meeting since late 2019 due to the global pandemic and worsening bilateral ties.

Yoon expressed South Korea's willingness to solve joint regional crises together, pointing to the situation in Myanmar and North Korea's recent military assertiveness. The ASEAN leaders reciprocated Yoon's concern over North Korea and called for the swift cessation of military activities in the peninsula and a reestablishment of denuclearization talks.

The South Korean president briefly exchanged with Li in the waiting room and expressed his hope for bilateral relations based on mutual respect and reciprocity. While talking about the North Korean nuclear threat, Li voiced China's commitment to play an active role in the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Yoon also met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh on the sidelines of the summit. [Yonhap News Agency_5] [Yonhap News Agency_6]

On November 13, the president attended the East Asia Summit, a strategic forum to discuss key security issues, and held trilateral talks with Japan and the US concerning the North Korean nuclear and missile threat. Finally, on November 14 and 15, Yoon attended the G20 summit after flying to Bali, Indonesia and met with economic organizations and business leaders of the G20 member countries. [Korea.net]

US to buy South Korean howitzers for Ukrainian defense

(sm) The US will purchase 100,000 pieces of South Korean howitzer artillery to give to Ukraine, according to a US official on November 10.

The South Korean Defense Ministry confirmed in a statement the existence of the deal, concerning artillery shells to replenish US stocks. It disclosed, however, that the transaction was to be made under the assumption that the US would be the end user of the ammunition, maintaining its position on providing only defensive support to Ukraine. The deal's existence was disclosed amid US accusations of weapon exchanges between Russia and North Korea in early November. Both North and South Korea maintain generous stocks of ammunitions due to their decade-long tensions, according to security experts.

It is immediately unclear what the end destination of the weapons will be. Ukrainian leaders have however been pressing for more weapons to assist their counteroffensive as they have been using howitzers at a high rate, and stocks have been provided by the US military in the past. According to an official defense

briefing, Ukraine is using as many as 7,000 rounds a day, while Russia uses about 20,000.

US Army Lieutenant Colonel Marty Meiners stated that the US government had been in negotiations with South Korean non-governmental weapon companies and that any sales would consider Seoul's current security situation. North Korea has become increasingly assertive in recent months firing a record number of missiles into the East Sea, one of which landed in de facto South Korean territory in early November. [Associated Press] [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]

EU to support peace and stability on the Korean peninsula

(sm) On November 8, South Korean opposition Democratic Party (DP) leader Lee Jae-myung and EU ambassador to South Korean Maria Castillo Fernandez agreed on the importance of a permanent and stable peace on the Korean peninsula during a meeting in Seoul, following a record launch of North Korean missiles this month. Lee then sparked controversy by misquoting the ambassador, portraying her words as criticism against the incumbent Yoon administration's handling of the North-South crisis.

Lee praised the EU as a role model for South Korea, as a region that has come from conflicts to strategic alliance. Fernandez stressed the EU's reliance on dialogue and solidarity to develop its current regime and declared the EU ready to support such a process on the peninsula. They also discussed the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war, Fernandez expressing the EU's hope for South Korea's involvement, as a war that not only affect the European region.

Lee incorrectly quoted Fernandez in the subsequent press briefing. The DP apologized on the same day through its spokesperson Kim Eui-kyeom after the ambassador sent a text to the Special Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security Affairs Kim Gunn to complain about the incident, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Kim incorrectly told the press that Fernandez had criticized the Yoon administration for its lack of dialogue with Pyongyang, referring to the previous Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun administrations which had had such dialogue channels and summits with former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. Yoon Suk-yeol's name had never been mentioned by the ambassador during the meeting.

The EU delegation stated it had no authority to make judgement about the current South Korean leadership and that no comparison with previous administrations was intended. The EU support South Korea's current security and deterrence measures amid the North Korean threat. [Korea Times_1] [Korea Times_2]

South Korea, UNHCR sign agreement on increased cooperation

(sm) On November 10, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi and South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin signed a partnership framework agreement on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the ratification of the Geneva Convention for the protection of refugees in South Korea.

According to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Grandi was in Seoul to talk with Korean officials on the global situation of refugees in his third visit to the country since the beginning of his incumbency in 2016. Grandi qualified South Korea as key partner in the resolution of humanitarian crises and the management of forced displacements and strongly welcomed the agreement.

It has been ten years since South Korea first established its own comprehensive legislation on refugees with the passing of the Refugee Act. [Korea Times] [South Korean Ministry of Justice]

Sri Lanka's high commissioner meets India's National Security Advisor in New Delhi

(sn) The Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India, Milinda Moragoda, met India's National Security Advisor Ajit Dova on November 12 to review bilateral ties. The meeting highlighted a strong relationship between the two countries and, as such, the presence of shared security interests. [island] [The Diplomat]

This was the Sri Lankan envoy's first meeting with a top Indian official after the visit of a Chinese research vessel with extensive surveillance capabilities to the Chinese-controlled Hambantota Port cast a shadow on relations between New Delhi and Colombo.

Taiwan: Support from Slovakia and Formosa Club Chapters in the Caribbean, Latin America

(st) A resolution from the Slovakia National Council's foreign affairs committee supporting the inclusion of Taiwan in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been passed on 11 November, 2022. The committee stated that Taiwan's "professional, pragmatic, and constructive participation" has its full support in the UNFCCC.

This new resolution comes after four previous resolutions were passed by the National Council's foreign affairs, European affairs and health committees earlier this year for Taiwan's involvement in the World Health Assembly and the International Civil Aviation Organization. [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2] [Taiwan News 3] [Radio Taiwan International]

Support for Taiwan's inclusion at COP 27 and the Paris Agreement also came from the Caribbean and Latin America Chapters Formosa Club, a group of cross-party legislators across the world.

A statement on Taiwan's participation from China's representative to the UNFCCC was condemned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a "blatant lie". Xie Zhenhua's address during the Climate Implementation Summit at COP 27 on 8 October, 2022 mentioned that Taiwan's participation in the UNFCCC had been facilitated in line with the "one-China principle". [Focus Taiwan]

Trade Initiative Meeting between Taiwan, U.S. concludes

(st) On 9 November 2022, delegations from Taiwan and the U.S. met to discuss the U.S.-Taiwan Initiative on 21st-Century Trade. This comes after the exclusion of Taiwan from the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) which involves 13 other countries. There are 11 trade areas outlined in the negotiating mandate, and Taiwan seeks to complete negotiations before the annual Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in 2023.

Deputy trade representative of the Office of Trade Negotiations–Yang Jen-ni headed the delegation from Taiwan, with officials from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Justice, the National Development Council, the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and the Taipei

Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the U.S.

Assistant United States Trade Representative Terry McCartin led the U.S. delegation, with representatives from the National Economic Council, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Treasury, the Small Business Administration, and the Food and Drug Administration. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwanese firm put on US Department of Treasury's sanction list over sale of military technology to Russia

(dql) The U.S. Department of Treasury has put Taiwan's Sharp Edge Engineering Inc., an electronics component wholesaler on the list of companies, that are facing possible sanctions for selling semiconductors to Russia for its war in Ukraine. [Focus Taiwan] [Radio Taiwan International]

Taiwan, UK to boost bilateral trade, investment and semiconductor cooperation

(dql) During her meeting with British Minister of State for Trade Greg Hands on November 10, Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen expressed interest in an investment deal with the UK to promote mutual trade and investment. Hands, for his part, reaffirmed the UK's wish to closer cooperate with Taiwan in semiconductors, wind energy and education. [Taipei Times]

Laos, Thailand sign MoU to cooperate on postal, telecoms, digital technology

(td) Thailand's Ministry of Digital Economy and Society signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Technology and Communications of Lao PDR, with immediate effect, to foster cooperation on postal, digital infrastructure development, ICT, and e-commerce fields for eight years. With approval from the Thai Cabinet on October 25, the accord aims to increase exchanges between the two parties to ensure mutual operational efficiency and, thus, contribute to sustainable relationships. In the meantime, they also expect to deepen their partnership by means of investment promotion, technical development, market

expansion, and human resources development. Overall, based on the principle of reciprocity, the MoU would pave the way for collaboration in terms of the application of digital technologies for the interests of these neighboring countries, such as digital skills, electronic transactions, and cybersecurity. [Bangkok Post]

Cambodia, Thailand sign concessional loan agreement to fund national road project

(td) The Neighboring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA) of Thailand, on behalf of the Royal Thai Government, has reached a concessional loan agreement with the Cambodian Government to fund the upgrade project of the National Road 67, worth USD 30 million, in neighboring Cambodia. The NR67 is intended for facilitating transport from Phnom Penh and Siem Riep through Anlong Veng, a district in Oddar Meanchey province, en route to the border town with Thailand in Si Sa Ket province. By and large, the project will thus make transportation safer and more economical to boost cross-border trade, investment and tourism.

Broadly speaking, the national road aims to connect Cambodia with Thailand and Vietnam along the Southern Economic Corridor (SEC), in line with the Greater Mekong Sub-region Economic Cooperation Program, to foster regional economic integration. In the meantime, Cambodia can also play a supportive role in the development of Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) in terms of seamless connectivity. To those ends, the Thai Budget Bureau will supply the first half of loan, while the remainder will be funded by each domestic loan source in the country, on the condition that the project must use material supply and equipment from Thailand no less than 50% of the loan amount, and employ Thai contractors to supervise the anticipated two-year-long NR67 project. [AiR, No. 35, August/2022, 5] [Khmer Times] [MCOT Thailand]

China, Thailand holds joint commission meeting to follow up on construction of Thai-Chinese railway

(td) Thailand's Ministry of Transport, on November 7, co-chaired the 30th joint committee meeting on railway cooperation with the National Development

and Reform Commission (NDRC) of China, also attended by several other Thai government agencies, to follow up on the progress of the Thai-Chinese high-speed railway project. It consists of two phases starting from the capital Bangkok to Nakhon Ratchasima, then to the border province of Nong Khai in the northeast region, which will then connect with Lao's China-sponsored rail network seamlessly.

The first phase of the project, according to the bilateral contract, is supposed to be completed in 2026, but has been delayed due to problems surrounding covid-19 pandemic restrictions, land expropriation process, and the relocation of public utility. Therefore, the contract is likely to be renegotiated, and Thailand is determined to do what it takes to expedite the pace of construction. Otherwise, it will do nothing but further stall the progress of the project's second phase, which will be built 3-4 years after the first phase, and hamper regional connectivity.

Aside from those issues of concern, the two sides agreed to hold a tripartite meeting between China, Laos, and Thailand to coordinate their efforts as early as in 2023, prior to the 31st joint Thai-Chinese committee meeting. They discussed ways to streamline and facilitate cross-border transportation across the sub-region — if not the wider Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. In addition, China expressed its willingness at the meeting to assist in the construction of a new Thai-Lao Friendship bridge that the Thai and Lao Prime Ministers had earlier agreed in principle, besides those existing five linking bridges. [See AiR, No. 44, November/2022, 1] [Bangkok Post] [Bangkokbiznews, in Thai] [Manager Online, in Thai]

Thai prime minister welcomes US ambassador, agrees to strengthen ties with Washington

(td) Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha received a courtesy call from the U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, Robert F. Godec, and discussed ways forward to strengthening the long-standing ties between Bangkok and Washington. As the two sides have geared up for the commemoration of the 190th anniversary of diplomatic relations later this year, they set sights on greater multi-sectoral cooperation ranging from trade and investment, sustainable development in line with Thailand's economic model (Bio-Circular-Green), digital economy, renewable energy, to resilient supply chains.

Building on the existing cooperative frameworks including ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian

Nations), ACMECS (Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy), Mekong-US Partnership, and the recently introduced IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework), they can forge a constructive partnership for the interests and prosperity of the region, not limited to Thailand. Furthermore, the Premier and U.S. Ambassador also touched upon Thailand's prominent role in providing humanitarian assistance to Myanmar — gripped with domestic turmoil.

It is worth noting that Ambassador Godec is one of the seasoned U.S. foreign officers, notably with expertise in Thailand and Myanmar Affairs. Prior to his endorsement in August, he had addressed the United States' Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he would closely take note of the human rights situation in Thailand, as well as urge the country to be independent of Myanmar, in terms of energy security, to exert more pressure on the military government, pressing for the restoration of a path to democracy. [See AiR, No. 37, September/2022, 2] [Bangkok Post] [Royal Thai Government, in Thai]

Vietnam, Australia holds defense cooperation consultation

(ih) Delegates from Vietnam and Australia met in Hanoi on November 9 for the 6th Vietnam-Australia defense cooperation consultation. The sides discussed potential further joint works between now and 2023, and highlighted areas of successful cooperation between the two nations. In particular, the Vietnamese delegation expressed gratitude for Australia's support in transporting Vietnam's level 2 field hospital to South Sudan as part of a UN peacekeeping mission, and proposed that Australia provide further air transport and assistance to enable further deployments of the field hospital in peacekeeping missions. [Vietnam+]

Vietnamese, Cambodian prime ministers sign 11 agreements

(ih) Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh visited Cambodia for the first official visit to the country of his premiership, ahead of the ASEAN Summit taking place November 10-13. During the course of his meeting with Prime Minister Hun Sen, the two oversaw the signing of eleven documents on cooperation in the areas of land transport, commerce, border trade, telecommunications, labor, agriculture, TV and radio,

information and communications technology, financial innovation, digital transformation and payment systems. [Phnom Penh Post]

New Zealand's Prime Minister Ardern in Vietnam to talk trade

(lm) New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern began the second leg of an eight-day trip through Southeast Asia on November 14, landing in Hanoi at the invitation of her Vietnamese counterpart Pham Minh Chinh.

The New Zealand delegation includes, inter alia, Minister for Trade and Export Growth and Minister of Agriculture Damien O'Connor, indicating that trade will feature prominently on the agenda, with both countries targeting USD 2 billion in two-way trade each year by 2024. [Vietnam Briefing]

During her four-day visit, Prime Minister Ardern is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Chinh, make a courtesy call on Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, meet President Nguyen Xuan Phuc and National Assembly Chairman Vuong Dinh Hue, take part in a business dialogue between the two countries, and participate in an event on agricultural connectivity. [Vietnam Plus]

Prior to her arrival in Hanoi, Ardern attended the East Asia Summit in Cambodia. Later this week, she will attend the APEC Summit in Thailand, with regional security, climate change, and trade issues likely to be high on the agendas.

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

16 November 2022 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Ireland, America, and 25 Years of the Good Friday Agreement: A Conversation with Foreign and Defense Minister Simon Coveney

Spring 2023 will mark the 25th anniversary of Good Friday Agreement, which capped decades of bloody conflict over Northern Ireland. This online event features a talk with Simon Coveney, Irland's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defense about prospects for peace and reconciliation.

More about the event at [Carnegie].

17 November 2022 @ 11:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Carnegie Connects: America in the World with Thomas L. Friedman

At this online talk, Pulitzer Prize-winning New York Times columnist Thomas L. Friedman share his ideas and positions on a wide range of challenges to U.S. domestic and foreign policy, including inflation, crime, abortion access, U.S. democracy, and recession fears as well as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, China's rise as a peer competitor, and threats from rogue states such as North Korea and Iran.

For more information, see [Carnegie].

16 November 2022 @ 12:00-12:45 p.m. (GMT-5), The Heritage Foundation, USA

The American Stake in the Taiwan Strait

This webinar explores the importance of Taiwan to the U.S. in the wake of the recent Chinese Communist Party Congress that signaled that the threat to Taiwan is not only real, but intensifying.

If you are interested in joining the event, register at [The Heritage Foundation].

17 November 2022 @ 2:30-4:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Prospect of Political Change and Turkish Foreign Policy

This hybrid event discusses chances of political change in next year's presidential and parliamentary election.

See [Carnegie] for more details.

Recent book releases

Jeremy Friedman, ***Ripe for Revolution: Building Socialism in the Third World***, Harvard University Press, 368 pages, published on January 4, 2022. A review is available in [Foreign Affairs].

Adriana Petryna, ***Horizon Work: At the Edges of Knowledge in an Age of Runaway Climate Change***, Princeton University Press, 232 pages, published on March 1 2022, reviewed in [LSE].

Ronald H. Spector, ***A Continent Erupts: Decolonization, Civil War, and Massacre in Postwar Asia, 1945–1955***, W. W. Norton & Company, 560 pages, published on August 23, 2022. For a review, see [Asian Review of Books].

Christopher de Bellaigue, ***The Lion House: The Coming of a King***, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 304 pages, published on November 8, 2022, with a review in [The New York Times].

Jacob Soll, ***Free Market: The History of an Idea***, Basic Books, 336 pages, published on September 6, 2022. The book is reviewed in [The Guardian].

Calls for Papers

Bethune-Cookman University invites proposals for its annual ***Zora Neale Hurston Conference*** scheduled for February 16-17, 2023. The conference theme is "Hurston, Woman on Fire!". The deadline for submission is January 6, 2023. For more information, visit [CFP].

The **International Society for Cultural History (ISCH)** welcomes paper and panel proposals for its ***conference on the theme of "Cultural Histories of***

Empire". The conference is to be held on 19-22 June, 2023, in Singapore. The closing date for submissions in December 20, 2022. More about the call for papers at [ISCH]

Jobs and positions

Stanford University invites applications for a ***faculty position in the politics and foreign policy of Japan***. The closing date for applications is January 9, 2023. Find more about the job offer at [Stanford University].

The **Department of Social Sciences at Miami Dade College** seeks candidates for ***adjunct faculty position*** in International Relations. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. See [Miami Dade College] for further information.

The **Faculty of Liberal Arts at Thammasat University** welcomes applications for a ***full-time lecturer position*** in its British and American Studies (BAS) International Programme. The deadline for applications is November 20, 2022. Visit [BAS Thammasat] for more information.

The **School of Environment, Resources and Development, Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)**, Thailand, is offering a ***faculty position in Environmental Engineering and Management***. Applications are accepted until November 30, 2022. More about the vacancy at [AIT].

The **Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)** is looking for a ***Research Fellow in Migration, Climate Change, Disasters and Development***. Applications can be submitted until December 14. 2022. Further information are available at [SEI].

UNESCO invites applications for the position of ***Director of Office and UNESCO Representative to Thailand, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Singapore*** to be based in Bangkok, Thailand. The application deadline is December 23, 2022. More details are provided at [UNESCO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is looking for an ***Engagement Officer*** to be based in Berlin, Germany, with core responsibility lying in providing guidance and support in conducting communication assessment and analysis on the promotion of the Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources (EIOS) initiative and other public health intelligence activities. The application deadline is December 1, 2022. See for more information at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is hiring a Unit Head, AVP/SRH (Addressing needs of Vulnerable Populations). The position is based in Geneva, Switzerland. Core responsibility is to provide technical leadership, coordination, and managerial support within the Department/Programme, in the Addressing Needs of Vulnerable Populations Unit, ensuring efficient and effective implementation of the activities in this area. The application deadline is November 30, 2022. See for more information at [WHO].

Action against Hunger seeks candidates for the position of ***Country Representative for Libya***, responsible for developing and diversifying programs in the country and further structuring the Country team. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. More details of the vacancies are available at [Action Contre La Faim].

Action against Hunger invites applications for the position of ***Country Representative*** to be based in Bucharest and lead activities in Romania and Poland. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. More details of the vacancies are available at [Action Contre La Faim].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is looking for an ***Associate Director, Global Analytics***. The position is based in New York, USA. The application deadline is January 2, 2023. Further information is provided at [IRC].

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