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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Lebanon's and Suriname's Independence Day, Bosnia-Herzegovina's Statehood Day and Mongolia's Republic 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: COVID-19 protests in Guangdong and Lockdown in Beijing despite announced relaxations

(ms) Protests against COVID-19 measures in Guangdong Province erupted early last week. The protests follow ambiguities by the local government in the wake of announced relaxations [see AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3] but concurrent containments of new COVID-19 outbreaks.

In videos circulating on social media since November 15, several hundred people in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong province, are seen running through the streets, rioting, and in clashes with local police and disease prevention personnel. Similar to the protests in Tibet at the end of October [see AiR No. 45,

November/2022, 2], the protests are said to be led by migrant workers who are unable to work because of the COVID-19 measures, but at the same time are unable to return home and in some cases are being housed in poor conditions. Again, problems of lack of food and medical care for people in quarantine or residents of lockdown areas are reported.

In addition to these ongoing problems, the Guangdong province also shows the ambiguity of the current course under Xi. While it was announced on November 17 via Chinese state media that the relaxations associated with the new measures will be introduced in 28 provinces in China and that six provinces will even dispense with mass nucleic acid testing in the future, it remains unclear how the government will deal with the rising COVID-19 numbers, as the zero-COVID strategy remains in place. The situation in Guangzhou casts doubt on the extent to which the easing can actually be implemented and whether it has a real positive impact on the quality of life of the population. Although the Guangdong government has refrained from a complete lockdown, more than nine million people are still under strict restrictions in the capital alone, and entire residential units have been locked up. [Financial Times] [Global Times] [Radio Free Asia]

On November 21, despite announced relief, a lockdown was imposed in Beijing, at least in parts of the city, and it was ordered to switch back to remote teaching, following an increase in COVID-19 cases in the Chinese capital, which on November 20 led to China reporting the first COVID-19 death since May 26. Although a citywide lockdown has not yet been imposed, restrictions are in place in all areas. [South China Morning Post]

A report by the organization Freedom House, which was published in mid-November, suggests that such protests as see in Guangzhou are not as rare as they have been portrayed in the media so far. According to the report, between June and September of this year a total of 668 so-called dissident events took place, of which 95 Percent took place offline. Even if about 60 percent of the protests were attended by only 10-99 people and only 7 percent by 100-999, this number is extraordinary, especially in a country like China where public protests are considered rather unusual. It should also be noted that the report does not include data on the Qinghai and Lanzhou provinces and especially the Xinjiang region, so it is likely that the numbers could be even higher. [Freedom House] [VOA News]

China: Former senior official of Public Security Ministry pleads guilty to corruption charges

(ms) Liu Yanping, former secretary of the Central Discipline Inspection Committee, part of the Central Discipline Inspection Commission (CCDI), China's anti-corruption body mainly responsible for the anti-corruption campaign under Xi Jinping that began in 2012, pleaded guilty on November 17 to taking bribes worth the equivalent of USD 33 million and is believed to be the latest convict from the clique around Sun Lijun, who allegedly planned a coup attempt against Xi Jinping.

Liu, who was expelled from the party in September [see AiR No. 36, September/2022, 1] after being accused in March of "suspected violation of discipline law," an often-used euphemism for corruption, has now pleaded guilty to the charges.

Liu is said to have been part of a clique around former public security vice-minister Sun Lijun, who pleaded guilty in July, also to charges of accepting bribes [see AiR No. 28, July/2022, 2]. The political clique around Sun is said to have planned a coup against President Xi Jinping. After other high-ranking party officials who were allegedly part of the plot, such as former Justice Minister Fu Zhenghua along with former police chiefs of the Shanghai, Chongqing and Shanxi Provinces, were convicted shortly before the 20th National Congress of the CCP, Liu may now represent the last official who has been part of the plot to be found guilty with near certainty in the wake of his guilty plea, putting an end to the high-profile case. [South China Morning Post]

China: Tencent receives first game license in 18 months

(ms) The National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA), China's media regulator, has released 70 game licenses for November, including for the Tencent game Metal Slug, the first game license for the world's largest gaming company since mid-2021.

In the wake of the crackdown on the high-tech sector, which sought to curtail the proliferating sector to make it more controllable under the "common prosperity" campaign, China’s thriving gaming sector was hit hard. On the one hand, the Chinese government restricted the weekly video gaming time of under 18-year-olds to three hours under the argument of combating

addiction among minors, which dealt a hard blow to the Chinese video game industry. In addition, the NPPA imposed a nine-month ban on new licensing that ended in April of this year. Unlike in most other countries, video games need a game license from the NPPA to be published in China, which is supposed to ensure that the content of the games are in accordance with, or do not go against the values of the Chinese government.

Although the end of the ban in April was seen as an easing of the crackdown on the games industry, the NPPA has tightened the criteria for obtaining licenses, limiting the variety of games published in China and generally shrinking the Chinese player base. This has led to the large gaming companies, such as Tencent and NetEase, looking for markets abroad, which is not necessarily conducive to China's struggling economy. [Al Jazeera] [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Tougher regulations against internet comments

(ms) The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) announced on November 16 that it will implement new regulations that will significantly tighten control over social media platforms.

Affected by the new regulations, which will officially come into force on December 15, are all platforms that have the capacity to display public opinion or be used for "social mobilization," and to post comments in the form of text, emoticons, images, audio, and video. The new regulations require the platforms concerned to increase control over comments. Comments on non-news stories will have to be moderated after publication, and service providers will have to set up special teams to review and edit comments, a system to classify users and evaluate users' commenting behavior and report possible misconduct to the relevant authority.

The tightening may have been triggered by a social media livestream of the State Council's press conference on the latest measures to control and prevent COVID-19 disease on November 11, in which the comment section was flooded with the word "Urumqi," the name of the capital of the Xinjiang region, to draw attention to the protests that broke out there in late October [see AiR No. 44, November/2022, 1]. As a result of the incident, three people are already under investigation on charges of "maliciously flooding." [Radio Free Asia 1] [Radio Free Asia 2] [Reuters]

China: New surveillance tools against Uyghurs discovered

(ms) A report published in early November by the computer and network security company Lookout claims that the Chinese government is using two new surveillance tools to target the Uyghur Muslim minority living mainly in the northwestern Xinjiang region. [Lookout]

The tools in question are "BadBazaar" and "MOONSHINE" and are both capable of monitoring activity over private networks, VPNs and messaging service providers such as Whatsapp, which is blocked in China. BadBazaar hides behind a variety of apps and was discovered by Lookout back in 2021 in an English-Uyghur translator app. The tool is said to collect location information, lists of installed packages, call logs and associated geocoded locations, phone calls and contacts, installed Android apps, SMS information, mobile device information and Wi-Fi connection data, according to the report.

Moonshine is a surveillance tool which was already being used specifically against Tibetan groups in 2019 and was spread through phishing messages through WhatsApp. The now newly discovered variants are slightly modified and hide like BadBazaar in apps which are especially used by Uyghurs and can collect on call recordings, contact data, device location data, SMS messages, camera recordings, microphone recordings and WeChat data.

As the report points out, the proliferation of the two surveillance tools in particular shows the ever-evolving ways in which the Chinese government, despite global attention and criticism of its treatment of Uyghurs and Muslims in the country, continues to expand its control of minorities in increasingly professional ways. [Radio Free Asia]

China: British lawyer ultimately allowed to represent Jimmy Lai

(ms) Having already lost its appeal on November 9 of a decision allowing British royal counsel Timothy Owen to represent Jimmy Lai in the high-profile national security case [see AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3], the Hong Kong Court of Appeal on November 21 denied the secretary for justice a final chance to appeal the court's decision.

Owen is now safe to represent Lai, the founder of the pro-democracy Apple Daily magazine that was closed after several raids in mid-2021, at the trial beginning December 1 on 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. [Hong Kong Free Press 1]

In another case related to the 2019 anti-government protests, a court sentenced five people for rioting 2019 near the Central Government Offices. While the three adult convicts were given prison sentences of up to four years and seven months, the two who were still minors at the time of the crime were sentenced to detention in a training center. [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

China: World's first hypersonic engine with detonation waves developed

(ms) A paper in the peer-reviewed Journal of Experiments in Fluid Mechanics on November 11, authored by a team from the Institute of Mechanics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), reveals that China has developed the world's first hypersonic detonation engine, said to be capable of accelerating an aircraft to Mach 9. The detonation engine is said to be significantly more fuel efficient than conventional scramjets, especially at top speeds above Mach 8.

Several countries are working on the development of detonation engines, but most of them are powered by hydrogen, which is much more expensive and carries a greater risk of explosion than the jet fuel used by the Chinese model. [South China Morning Post]

Japan: New minister of interior

(dql) Japan's former Foreign Minister Matsumoto Takeaki is the country’s new internal affairs minister. Prime Minister Kishida Fumio appointed him on November 21 after Terada Minoru resigned a day earlier who had come under mounting pressure over accusation of having paid money to six local assembly members in his constituency in Hiroshima Prefecture in return for supporting him in his election campaign in last year’s October general.

Further complicating the political situation for Kishida who is struggling with persistently plummeting approval ratings since the assuming power October

last year, Terada's resignation is already the third of a minister with less than a month. Last month economic revitalization minister Daishiro Yamagiwa resigned over revelations of his ties to the Unification Church, a religious group, that 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. Weeks earlier, justice minister Yasuhiro Hanashi was sacked for undermining his role in a political gathering, after making light of his authorization of death-row inmate executions [see AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3].

The resignation of Hanashi and Terada are considered as weighing heavily as both belong to Kishida's faction in the LDP. [NHK] [Kyodo News]

Japan: Draft bill in support of victims of Unification Church's donation-seeking revealed

(dql) Ruling and opposition parties have disclosed a draft bill that seeks to tackle the Unification Church's practice of soliciting donations that have come under heightened scrutiny in the wake of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's assassination in July. The suspect has reportedly confessed that he shot Abe after his mother went bankrupt due to donations to the religious group of more than USD 700,000. Abe is believed to have had ties with the group.

Under the bill, support will be provided to spouses or children of religious group followers who have made excessive donations that have caused the financial ruin of their families. Donated money would be partially paid back in case the donations were made under coercion or conditions of anxiety. Further, the bill prohibits donations made under the 'advice' that a donation is needed for the well-being of the donator or their family members. It also bans groups from soliciting donations for which taking up a loan or mortgaging the donor's house would be required. [The Japan Times 1]

Meanwhile, the government announced that it will question the religious group about a system of adoption of children that it has been practicing for more than 40 years. The investigation will seek to find out whether the group has illegally arranged adoptions

without approval from prefectural governments to act as an adoption agency. [The Japan Times 2]

Japan: New law on electoral districts passed

(dql) The Japanese passed an amendment bill to the Public Offices Election Act that rearranges the distribution and boundaries of lower house single-seat constituencies. Under the new law ten single-seat electoral districts will be added to five prefectures, while cutting one each from ten prefectures. In total, the move affects 140 constituencies in 25 prefectures.

The law seeks to reduce the vote disparity below the 2-fold level between densely and sparsely populated districts and comes in response to rulings of the Supreme Court that ordered the legislature to correct vote-value disparities in past elections that it deemed constitutionally problematic or even unconstitutional [see AiR No. 44, November/2022, 1]. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Proposal for post-divorce joint custody of children

(dql) A commission of Japan's Ministry of Justice has proposed amendments the country's Civil Code to allow joint custody of children after divorce.

The current law grants only one parent custody and has come under criticism for excluding one parent from raising children.

In 2020, the number of divorces stood at more than 193,000, making up about one third of marriages that year. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Foreign trainees reveal labor rights violations in work training program

(dql) 11 Vietnamese technical interns, who left a Japanese garment firm early November because it declared bankruptcy, have claimed outstanding overtime work payments since 2020 of some USD 190,000. The claims were made at a press conference, during which some of them revealed that in some months, overtime surpassed 150 hours, with hourly wage of between USD 2.5 and 2.9 paid for most of the hours which is about half of the minimum wage.

The claims highlights, once more, abuse of Japan's government-run Technical Intern Training Program, a work training program that was create in 1993 with the aim to transfer knowledge and skills to developing countries and to provide foreign nationals with employment opportunities in Japan. In response to mounting criticism over labor rights violations in companies participating in the program, the government has established an expert panel to review program. A final report outlining ways to improve the program is expected for autumn next year. [The Mainichi] [Kyodo News]

Japan: New military aircraft, warships

(dql) Japan's Coast Guard (JCG) has disclosed a new surveillance drone – the MQ-9B SeaGuardian unmanned aircraft – to the public.

A development of US energy and defense corporation General Atomics, the new 11.7-meter-long drone is capable of flights of 24 and more hours to collect information and will be used in accident searches and to monitor suspicious vessels.

Flight operations were commenced in October. [The Mainichi]

Meanwhile, the number of vessels in Japan's fleet Aegis-equipped destroyers capable of intercepting ballistic missiles has been increased from the current six to eight. According to Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force, the two new destroyers Maya and Haguro which were commissioned in 2020 and 2021 respectively successfully intercepted ballistic missiles outside the Earth's atmosphere after they had been launched in Hawaii. [The Mainichi]

For technical details of the SM-3 interceptors tested, see [USNI News].

Furthermore, the government is reportedly planning to purchase US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles in a bid to boost the country's counterstrike capabilities, while domestic development on the weapons in still ongoing. [NHK]

This is in line with a latest proposal submitted by the government's panel for defense buildup and budget financing which pushes for the acquisition of an enemy base strike capability in response to North Korea's missile tests, intensifying Sino-US tensions over Taiwan, and Russia's war in Ukraine. It is also in line with the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's call for an

increase of defense spending to 2 percent or more of gross domestic product to reach the level of spending of North Atlantic Treaty Organization member states. [The Mainichi]

Mongolia: Parliament passes 2023 state budget

(dql) The Mongolian parliament has approved the country's 2023 state budget on November 18 that estimates revenue at USD 5.5 billion and spending at USD 5.9 billion.

Next year's budget is the first under the austerity law that was enacted in April.

The Mongolian government projects economic growth to be at about 5 percent in while the inflation rate is expected to be reduced to a single-digit level. In September, the annual inflation rate was at 13.8 percent. [Montsame] [Xinhua]

South Korea: Interior Ministry raided, minister indicted over Itaewon crowd crush

(sm) While an independent investigation team from the South Korean National Policy Agency started investigating Interior Minister Lee Sang-min over his responsibility during the Itaewon crowd crush on November 16, it raided 22 locations, such as the interior ministry and the Seoul metropolitan government on November 17.

Lee is suspected of dereliction of duty resulting in the death of 158 partygoers in a deadly crowd crush in Seoul's Itaewon district on October 29. While higher level officials have been trying to push responsibility on officers and firefighters, the workers union of the latter had filed a complaint with the National Police Agency on November 14 against the interior minister.

More precisely, it is being investigated whether Lee held responsibility over the situation according to the Government Organization Act and the Framework Act on the Management of Disasters and Safety. The latter puts the interior minister in charge of national disaster and safety management. The Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials has been notified on the investigation, as this office could potentially be taking over the case.

65 investigators were dispatched to 12 emergency-related offices of the interior ministry to gather evidence. In total, seven high level officials are suspected of an inadequate disaster response. Among others, the chief of Yongsan Fire Station and Police Station Choi Song-beom and Lee Im-jae were questioned on November 21. Lee in the meanwhile has been understating his influence over the national police, which is allegedly limited to the appointment of high-ranking officials and shows no intentions of stepping down [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]. [Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Ruling party slams opposition over budget cuts

(sm) On November 17, the ruling People Power Party (PPP) representative Joo Ho-young criticized the main opposition Democratic Party (DP) for planning budget cuts which would cause the misfunctioning of government affairs.

According to Joo, the DP wants to cut KRW 100 billion (USD 75 million) worth of budgets for policies President Yoon Suk-yeol pledged to enact during his electoral campaign. The opposition which holds the majority in South Korea's National Assembly for instance disapproves of Yoon's project to relocate the presidential office, while opening the former to the public. Joo accused the DP of assigning some KRW 3.4 trillion (USD 2,5 billion) worth of budget to its own policies. The DP's actions are obstructing the government's work and in disaccord with election results, the representative continued.

The National Assembly is currently reviewing its budget plans for fiscal 2023, most parliamentary standing committees having finished their first review. The opposition had been calling for the ruling party's cooperation on reducing unnecessary budget waste by focusing on blocking tax reductions for the rich.

Yoon won presidential elections against opposition leader Lee Jae-myung by a very thin margin in March 2022, prompting a flurry of disagreements and tensions in the current state apparatus. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Former government suspected over North Korean cash remittance case

(sm) On November 17, ruling People Power Party (PPP) interim chief Chung Jin-suk voiced suspicions that the former Moon Jae-in administration had been involved in a case of foreign currency smuggling to North Korea between 2018-19.

The South Korea underwear maker Ssangbangwool is currently under investigation over the transfer of millions of USD to North Korea via China. The case is developing into a bribery scandal, as Chung questioned Moon's role in the smuggling of some KRW 7 million (USD 5000) to North Korea's United Front Department head Kim Yong-chol.

It is unclear how the South Korean NGO Asia Pacific Exchange Association, who had also been involved in the case, and Ssangbangwool realized the transfer without alerting the National Intelligence Service. Chung advanced the hypothesis that the former Moon administration got Pyongyang to attend the 2019 Hanoi Summit between the US and North Korea by covertly providing financial assistance through these companies. [see AiR No. 42, October/2022, 3] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Enhanced human rights protection for seasonal workers

(sm) On November 16, the South Korean Ministry of Justice issued a statement saying it would improve the human rights protection for seasonal foreign workers by providing better legal coverage and volunteers taking care of language and communication issues.

Seasonal foreign workers are allowed to stay up to five months in Korea for labor in the agriculture and fishery sector, which need short-term intensive work during precise periods of the year.

The measures taken by the ministry represent an attempt for more procedural transparency and justice and will enable it to assess human rights violations of foreign seasonal workers more accurately in South Korea.

One goal of the measure is to minimize conflict between South Korean employers and seasonal workers due to culture and language differences. Foreign students and immigrant residents can volunteer to help with such communication issues. This will be integrated in an early adaptation program tailored to workers needs which will provide education on their rights among others.

Legally, new criteria for assessing the range of human rights violations against foreign workers have been established. An index provides information on violations of visa issuance, employment and questionnaires issued before going home.

A previous policy requiring seasonal workers to leave a refundable security deposit to avoid the withdrawal of candidates during their worker selection process will furthermore be abolished, as a measure that had attracted criticism previously.

To act against corruption among brokers, an official institution should be established dealing exclusively with seasonal work proposals for foreigners. [Korea.net]

Taiwan: Large rallies ahead of local government elections

(dql) A week before the local government elections to be held on November 26, political parties have staged big rallies to present their closing appeals to voters on November 18.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) seeks to be more successful than in the 2018 elections, in which it won only six mayoral and county magistrate seats and lost seven others to the main opposition Kuomintang (KMT), which, for its part, hopes to add more cities and counties to the 14 that are already under its control.

Meanwhile, the Central Election Commission (CEC) has announced that a legislative by-election will be held on January 8, 2023, for the vacant seat of Chiang Wan-an who submitted his resignation as lawmaker on November 10 to run for Taipei mayor in the upcoming election.

In the local government elections 22 cities and counties will be up for grabs. On the same day, a constitutional referendum will be held in which voters will decide over a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age from 20 to 18. [Focus Taiwan 1] [Taipei Times] [Focus Taiwan 2]

Taiwan: Military drills simulate Chinese invasion

(dql) Army personnel stationed in outlying Penghu County have carried monthly live-fire exercises on

November 16 during which the use of artillery and tanks to counter invading Chinese forces was simulated. The drills involved

105mm and 155mm howitzers, 50mm machine guns, T74 squad automatic weapons and M60A3 battle tanks targeting enemy forces attempting a beach landing. [Focus Taiwan]

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

Bangladesh: Two militants sentenced to death for killing US blogger escape from court

(lm) Two Islamist militants who were on death row for killing a United States blogger critical of religious extremism escaped while being escorted to a court hearing in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, on November 20. [The Guardian] [The Straits Times]

The two men were among those convicted of the murder of Avijit Roy, an American-Bangladeshi blogger and writer who was hacked to death by machete-wielding assailants in February 2015 while returning home with his wife from a book fair. Five members of the Islamist militant group were sentenced to death in 2021, while one was jailed for life.

India: Special court approves Delhi deputy chief minister's close aide to turn witness

in state excise policy probe

(vv) A special court in the Indian capital New Delhi on November 16 approved a plea by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to make a businessman, previously an accused and alleged close aide to Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, an approver in the excise policy case. [Mint] [The Hindu]

The deputy chief minister, following the raids and subsequent rounds of questioning, denied all allegations claiming that Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were threatened by the growing popularity of the Delhi chief minister and have been using state agencies to crack down on the Delhi government. The BJP denied the allegations, maintaining that the CBI conducted investigations on merits and that Delhi's ruling party was attempting to cover up its crimes. [latest AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]

India: Government proposes new privacy law allowing some cross-border data transfer

(lm) India's government on November 18 unveiled a revamped data protection bill that will allow companies to transfer some users' data abroad, while giving authorities powers to exempt state agencies from the law in the interests of national security. According to India's IT minister, the government would seek passage of the draft by the end of the next parliamentary season in April or May 2023.

The government began deliberations on legislating protection of personal data after a 2017 Supreme Court ruling recognised privacy as a fundamental right in a ruling on a case challenging the government's digital ID system called Aadhaar. In August the administration withdrew the original draft from 2019 that had included stringent restrictions on cross-border data flows. [Reuters] [Financial Times]

India: Government unveils framework to combat fake online reviews, ratings

(lm) The Indian government on November 21 unveiled a set of voluntary guidelines for online reviews to protect online customers against fake reviews and unverified ratings. In June, a department at the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public

Distribution set up a committee to develop a framework on checking fake and deceptive reviews in e-commerce. If the guidelines become mandatory, companies could face action for unfair trade practice, for suppressing negative reviews or for enabling planting of fake reviews. [The Straits Times]

India: Opposition Congress party to file petition with Supreme Court challenging release of six assassins of former Prime Minister Ghandi

(vv/wr) India's main opposition the Congress party (INC) will file a plea with the country's Supreme Court to challenge the apex court's decision from earlier this month to release six convicts who plotted the assassination of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Notably, Prime Minister Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has also filed a petition with the top court, asking to review its order. [Deccan Herald] [MSN] [Hindustan Times]

Gandhi was killed by a woman suicide bomber at an election rally in the southern state of Tamil Nadu in 1991. The killing was seen as retaliation for Gandhi's 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 – were the last still in prison for the assassination. [AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3]

India: Opposition Congress leader sparks row with remarks on Hindutva pater

(vv) The leader of India's main opposition Congress party (INC), Rahul Gandhi, recently sparked a row and invited polarizing opinions as he called Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the ideological pater of the far-right Hindutva ideology, a traitor. [Times of India]

Reading out from a letter written by the late Savarkar to the United Kingdom back during India's struggle for independence, Gandhi claimed that Savarkar allegedly begged to remain the British's loyal servant. Gandhi continued that this was an act of treason, especially towards Mahatma Gandhi and former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, who risked their lives in pursuit for

freedom. Gandhi added that while Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru were jailed a number of times by the British, no such letters of compromise were written by them nor did they wilt to alleged pressures of the British ruling authorities.

While a section of the political spectrum supported Gandhi after the said comments, the ruling party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expressed strict objections and claimed that Gandhi was spreading lies to defame an honest man like that of Savarkar. The BJP continued to question Gandhi's merits to accuse a man of Savarkar's stature, reminding him of Nehru's alleged acts of treason.

The remarks, however, surprisingly invited polarizing opinions from within the INC itself, with All India Congress Committee (AICC) members profusely exclaiming that Gandhi was advised against speaking on Savarkar, yet he went against the strict instructions again. Congress' Maharashtra state leadership too worried of internal dispute, especially with ally Shiv Sena who may not be welcoming of comments allegedly against Hindu ideology. Gandhi's response on the same is expected soon. [The Indian Express]

India: Human rights body holds third hearing as air quality in Delhi worsens

(vv) India's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on November 19 held the third round of virtual meetings with chief secretaries of Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh state to discuss the country's current air pollution crisis. [Economic Times] [Hindustan Times]

As politicians continued to trade blames over the worsening air quality, the NHRC summoned the chief secretaries of four northern states that recorded the worst levels of pollution, reprimanding them for not taking adequate measures to address the pollution crisis. The NHRC further warned of sanctions on the said states if immediate actions weren't taken to address stubble burning and the worsening air quality.

During the meeting, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal blamed the central government run by ruling party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for rejecting solutions proposed by his party to contain pollution levels, citing stubble burning by farmers in neighboring states to have contributed to air pollution. However, the NHRC rejected the observation, stating that farmers were forced to burn crops as sufficient machines and equipment weren't provided to rid of

winter crops sustainably [see AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3].

Furthermore, the NHRC in the more recent meeting asked the Delhi state government, led by Kejriwal, to submit a comprehensive timeline to rectify the causes of poor air quality at hotspots and city centers, while inquiring about progress thus far. The NHRC also reviewed reports submitted by chief secretaries of Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, while demanding proposals for alternate ways of garbage disposal and landfills. Seeking further updates, the next date for hearing has been scheduled for November 25.

India: Police in Kashmir raid journalists' houses over online threats

(lm) Indian police raided the houses of several journalists on November 19 in an investigation of anonymous online threats to around a dozen journalists in Kashmir. The raids were at the houses of half a dozen journalists, including writer and author Gouhar Geelani, the official said. Police have blamed the Pakistan-based Islamist militant Laskhar-e-Toiba organization and its Kashmir-based offshoot, The Resistance Front, for the threats. [The Straits Times]

India: Human rights watchdogs call for immediate release of rights defender Khurram Parvez

(lm) International human rights organizations in a statement have called for the immediate and unconditional release of Kashmiri human rights defender Khurram Parvez, who was arrested one year ago on November 22, 2021 on terrorism and other charges. [Amnesty International]

Parvez, who has long been a vocal critic of Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party-led government, was arrested late on November 22 last year by the National Investigation Agency (NIA), India's counter-terrorism agency. His residence and office in Kashmir's main city Srinagar were searched and a mobile phone, laptop and books seized. [AiR No. 48, November/2021, 5]

In May, the NIA filed a preliminary charge sheet before the NIA Special Court in New Delhi against Parvez and stated that they will continue investigating this case. The NIA accused Parvez of "running a network of over

ground workers of the [Pakistan-based armed militant organisation] Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) for furthering activities of LeT and to commit terrorist attacks in India". His detention has since then been extended at least five times by the NIA Special Court in New Delhi under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, which allows for the extension of the detention period for up to 180 days if the investigating agency is unable to complete the investigation of a case within a 90-day period.

India: Startup launches country's first privately built rocket

(wr) An Indian aerospace startup has launched the country's first privately built rocket, Vikram-S, a milestone in the South Asian nation's efforts to foster a commercial space industry to complement its state-run space program known for its affordable launches and missions. Until now, the state-run Indian Space Research Organisation had a monopoly on launching rockets in the country. [CNN] [MSN] [ThePrint]

Nepal: Newer parties could make gains in general election, observers say

(lm) Results from Nepal's parliamentary elections held on November 20 began to emerge the following day, with observers saying more established parties could lose some support to newer parties and younger candidates. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters]

About 61 percent of 18 million eligible voters voted over the weekend for the 275-member federal parliament. Of them 165 seats would be filled on the basis of first-past-the-post and the rest through proportional representation. Elections of 550 members of the seven state assemblies were simultaneously held. All results are expected within two weeks.

The ruling four-party coalition led by Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba is pitted against the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (UML) headed by former Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. There were no pre-election polls, though prior to the election political analysts had expected the ruling alliance led by the Nepali Congress to retain power.

Local media reports said the opposition UML was leading in 10 constituencies, the centrist Nepali

Congress in six and the newly formed National Independent Party in five seats, though party officials said it was too early to get a sense of the final results.

Pakistan: New army chief to be named by November 25; opposition leader Khan announces rally in garrison city

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will announce the new chief of the country's military by November 25, days before the incumbent General Qamar Javed Bajwa retires. The defense ministry will soon send the premier a list of names of five or six final candidates to be promoted to the top post, Defense Minister Asif said on November 21.

Notably, the army chief handover will coincide with a protest by supporters of the opposition Pakistan Tehreeke-Insaf (PTI) party of former Prime Minister Imran Khan in Rawalpindi, a garrison city that is home to Pakistan's military headquarters. Khan's PTI on November 19 had withdrawn its earlier petition seeking permission to protest in capital Islamabad.

The rally in Rawalpindi will mark the first appearance at a public rally by Khan since he survived a gun attack – which supporters say was an attempted assassination – while he was leading a protest march in the country's Punjab province on November 3. [AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]

Pakistan: Media leak of powerful army chief's family wealth probed

(lm) Authorities in Pakistan ordered an immediate investigation on November 21 into what the government said was an "illegal" and "unwarranted leakage" of confidential tax documents of the family of the country's military chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa. [Voice of America]

Online investigative news portal *FactFocus* in a report published on November 20 alleged that General Bajwa's immediate and extended family members had accumulated wealth and property worth nearly USD 56 million during the army's chief extended six-year term in office ending later this month. The report went on to claim, citing leaked tax documents, that General Bajwa's wife transferred funds overseas, making investments in oil business and the real estate, even though she was not an income tax filer until her

husband's appointment to the office of the chief of army staff. [FactFocus]

Pakistan: Film ‘Joyland’ releases in some cinemas after government overturns ban

(fm/lm) The award-winning movie “Joyland”, a film that explores the relationship between a married man and a transgender woman, opened in cinemas in parts of Pakistan on November 18, after authorities in the South Asian country overturned a ban imposed following complaints the homegrown film was unsuitable for viewing. [CNN]

In May, Joyland won the Un Certain Regard Jury Prize and the unofficial Queer Palm award at the Cannes Film Festival. It then became Pakistan's official entry to the Oscars for the international feature film award.

At home, however, the movie was originally banned for showcasing after receiving written complaints that it included "highly objectionable" content. But a government adviser tweeted on November 16 that the censor board review committee had subsequently cleared the film, with requested edits.

Against this backdrop, the movie was listed for viewing in some theaters across Pakistan on November 18, except in the province of Punjab, where the Informational and Culture Department said it could not be exhibited “in the wake of persistent complaints received from different quarters.” [Al Jazeera]

On November 20, then, hundreds of transgender activists and their allies protested the southern port city Karachi. Participants held a symbolic funeral for transgender victims of abuse in addition to giving ferocious speeches and performing exciting dance routines. [The Straits Times]

Sri Lanka: Former Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa returns

(sn/lm) Sri Lanka’s former Finance Minister and the brother of the country’s former president, Basil Rajapaksa, returned to the South Asian island nation on November 20. Analysts suggest that the move is an attempt to reunite the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party, which Rajapaksa has helped rebuild into a political force. [News Wire]

Rajapaksa, who also holds US citizenship, left the country in September after the Supreme Court granted him permission to travel overseas until January 15, 2023 to seek medical treatment and to attend to some personal matters.

Sri Lanka: Court extends travel ban on state minister of tourism

(sn) A writ petition challenging the citizenship of Sri Lanka's State Minister of Tourism Diana Gamage will be called up on November 28. Furthermore, the court extended a travel ban imposed on Gamaga until December 15.

Gamage had revoked her British citizenship before the parliamentary elections. However, the petition demands authorities to disqualify her seat in Parliament following constitutional amendments in October which prohibits holders of two passports to serve as lawmakers. [News Wire, Colombo Gazette, Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Human Rights Commission to inspect police, public security officials on police brutality

(sn) The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) has summoned the Secretary to the Ministry of Public Security and the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to appear in front of the Commission on November 21. The Human Rights Commission plans to investigate the continuous human rights violations committed by the police.

Besides, the IGP has recently ordered the Police Special Investigation Unit to inspect the Chief Police Inspector of Pandora South Police on activities associated with manhandling of female officers. The former lawmaker, Hirunika Premachandra, led a demonstration with a group of people near the police station on November 14. She got arrested by the Cinnamon Gardens Police. [News Cutter, News First, Daily Mirror]

Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights

and National Security in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: NagaWorld protesters summoned for questioning in courts

(sn) In the case against the protesting NagaWorld employees the first hearing of two employees was held from 14· to 16. November. NagaWorld workers began protesting in December 2021 against the mass lay-offs associated with the company's reduction of state. Despite the request of authorities to stop the demonstration, it continued until NagaCorp filled out the case against multiple protesters and labor union members.

The summoned witnesses suggest that the company aims to dissolve the labor union with its acquisitions. The three charges are alleged breaking & entering, intentional damage and illegal confinement. The protesters demand to drop the accusations, allow union members to return to work, and hire more than 100 employees with union leaders within them. Until then, NagaWorld workers aim to continue protesting peacefully. [Vod English 1, Radio Free Asia 1/2]

Cambodia: Police investigation open on 200 kg of drugs found in crashed military vehicle

(sn) The Anti-Drug department and specialized forces of the Phnom Penh Municipal police found 200 kg of methamphetamine in a military vehicle that crashed on November 13. 2022. The driver left the location of the encounter immediately. [Phnom Penh Post, Vod English]

Cambodia: Freedom of expression in Cambodia CCHR November 2022 Snapshot Report

(sn) On November 16, 2022, the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) released the Freedom of Expression in Cambodia snapshot report. It covers state activity against free press and human rights agents from January to September 2022. During the covered period 13 journalists were arrested, 11 correspondents were detained, and four media licenses were revoked. 14 incidents targeted human rights defenders, and three people received conviction orders. [CCHR Cambodia]

Indonesia: Bill for creation of another new province passed into law

(os) The House of Representatives has passed the Southwest Papua Province Bill into law. This bill will be the legal foundation for the creation of a new province in Papua. This move should allegedly counter ongoing conflicts and expedite regional development in the region.

After last week's inauguration of the Acting Governors of three new regions in Papua [see AiR No.46, November/2022, 3], the government now wants to move forward with the formation of yet another new province in the region. According to Article 93 of Government Regulation No. 106 of 2021, the creation of Southwest Papua province is aimed at expediting equity development, improving public services, and increasing the livelihood and dignity of the Papuan people.

Vice President Ma'ruf Amin has previously expressed his hopes for a swift ratification of the bill in order not to hinder preparations for the 2024 elections. [Antara News 1] [Antara News 2] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Boats with more than 200 Rohingya refugees landed on coast

(os) Two boats with a total of 230 Rohingya refugees have landed in the Aceh province of Indonesia since November 15.

The refugees include children and women and are all healthy, according to the government of the province. However, the local government could not confirm

whether they are going to take the refugees or not. They are currently in contact with Indonesian immigration, foreign ministers, and the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees.

The Rohingya are a persecuted Muslim minority mostly born in Myanmar but considered illegal immigrants there. In recent years, many of them have undertaken journeys to countries such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. [Reuters] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Chairman of second-largest Muslim organization re-elected

(os) Haedar Nashir has been re-elected for a second term as chairman of Muhammadiyah, which is Indonesia's second-largest Muslim organization.

Haedar was elected during the organization's national conference in Solo in Central Java on November 20. In his term until 2027, he plans on taking a more collective approach to leadership. He also wants to promote the progressive views of Islam. Even though Muhammadiyah might not be involved in national politics to such an extent as the country's largest Muslim organization Nahdlatul Ulama, the organization still proves to be influential. President Joko Widodo as well as several other high-ranking members of the ruling party attended the event. [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Laos: First national Political-Ideological Affairs Meeting Since 2003 begins

(ih) The Fifth National Political-Ideological Affairs began on November 17. The meeting will include the Politburo, Members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and retired State and Party officials. It will review work undertaken since the last meeting in 2003, and define the direction, targets, and focal duties of political-ideological affairs for the future according to Vice President and Politburo member Dr. Bounthong Chitmany, who gave the opening remarks. [Vientiane Times 1]

On November 18, the Secretary General of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party's Central Committee Thongloun Sisoulith addressed the meeting, highlighting six key areas the Party needed to address. These were corruption; excess bureaucracy; the need to narrow the development gap; addressing

unbalanced development; ineffectual state organizations; and the unprogressive, conservative, and lazy attitude of government officials. [Vientiane Times 2]

Laos: World Bank Releases its October 2022 Economic Monitor Report

(ih) The World Bank released the second instalment of its biennial Economic Monitor Report for Laos on November 21. The report highlighted the impact of the 68 percent depreciation in the Laotian Kip since the beginning of 2022, which has driven considerable inflation. The report also projects that publicly guaranteed debt would surpass 100% of GDP by the end of 2022. The World Bank has projected accelerated growth for the country in the medium term but noted this growth will be entirely dependent on the country's ability to restructure its debt burden. The Bank expects if things continue unchanged the country's external debt service will average around USD 1.3 billion per year, or approximately 50 percent of the country's target revenue for 2022. [The Phnom Penh Post]

It also highlighted the challenges of Laos current development model, in which growth has been driven primarily by capital intensive, natural resource driven sectors such as mining and hydropower. According to the World Bank these sectors have created few opportunities for quality employment, limiting their ability to engender broad-based development. Their capital-intensive nature has also contributed significantly to the country's debt load. [Laotian Times] [World Bank]

Malaysia: Spotlight on king to resolve election stalemate

(lm) Malaysia's voters delivered an inconclusive message in the general election on November 19, leading to a hung in Parliament and shifting the spotlight on the country's monarch who appoints the person he believes has majority support in the legislator as prime minister.

The Pakatan Harapan coalition of opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim topped the elections with 83 parliamentary seats, but failed to reach the 112 needed for a simple majority. Ibrahim had been locked in a battle to form a majority government with former

Prime Minister Muhyiddin, whose Perikatan Nasional won 72 seats.

Against this backdrop of unclear results in parliamentary elections, Malaysia's King Al-Sultan Abdullah gave political parties until 2 p.m. on November 22 to put together alliances needed for a majority. But caretaker Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob later said the highest-decision making body of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO)-led Barisan Nasional alliance decided not to support any group to form a government.

In light of this, the king will pick the next prime minister soon, state news agency *Bernama* reported on November 22, citing the national palace, which did not specify timing for the monarch's decision. [The Washington Post] [Reuters] [Deutsche Welle]

Myanmar: Amnesty for 6000 prisoners, including prominent internationals

(jp) The military junta in Myanmar has released thousands of detainees, including prominent prisoners such as the former British ambassador, a Japanese journalist and an Australian professor [FAZ, Tagesschau|. The former foreign prisoners have since returned to their home countries [AlJazeera|.

Philippines: Labor department vows assistance to displaced workers amid fishing restriction

(tjb) The Philippine's Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has pledged to aid 35,000 workers in the fishing sector displaced by the country's imposition of a closed fishing season. A closed fishing season is implemented annually in the Philippines usually from December until February. The policy is aimed at stopping overfishing by big fishing corporations so that a dwindling fish population can recover. [ABS-CBN]

Earlier, in anticipation of the fishing regulation, the country decided to import 25,000 metric tons of fish. Activist groups, however, denounced the policy since it could force local fishermen to sell their fish at a lower price, losing their income in the process. [GMA] [Manila Bulletin]

Singapore: DIS Holds Inaugural Cyber-Defence Exercise

(ih) On November 15 and 16, The Singapore Armed Forces' new branch, the Digital and Intelligence Service (DIS), held its first cyber-defence exercise since its formation in October 2022. The exercise, named the Critical Infrastructure Defence Exercise, focused on defending against a simulated attack on Singapore's critical power and water infrastructure.

Sixteen public and private sector organizations including Infocomm Media Development Authority, Land Transport Authority, M1, Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore, Singtel, SMRT, Sembcorp, Pavilion Energy, the Public Utilities Board, Senoko Energy, Singapore LNG Corp, SP Group, Tuas Power ST Engineering, and YTL PowerSeraya, participated in the exercise. Each sent two to five participants from their cyber security teams, who were tasked with identifying attacks launched by staff from the Cyber Security Agency of Singapore (CSA) and the DIS in real time and developing mitigating strategies.

In addition, the DIS and CSA signed a joint operations agreement during the exercise in order to create a framework for the two agencies to engage in closer collaboration. [Straits Times]

Singapore: News site and former GIC economist forced to make corrections under fake news law

The Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (Pofma) Office has issued correction notices to Former GIC Economist Yeoh Lam Keong and the news site The Independent Singapore. The corrections were issued in response to statements that were made by Mr. Yeoh criticizing the government's decision to raise the general sales tax on November 7, in which he alleged that the Singapore government has SG$ 30 billion in structural fiscal surplus available to it for spending. This statement by Mr. Yeoh was included in two subsequent articles in The Independent Singapore. The Ministry of Finance refuted Mr. Yeoh's claim, stating that the annual fiscal balance for the government was typically SG$ 2.2 billion a year, and requested Pofma

Thailand: Justice Minister objects to proposed amnesty in political cases

(fj) Justice Minister Somsak Thepsutin of the ruling Phalang Pracharath Party has objected to a recent proposal by the New Phalang Dhamma Party (NPDP) to grant amnesty to those charged or prosecuted in so-called political cases between 2006 and November 30, 2023.

Somsak criticized the NPDP's policy suggestion as ill-timed and as a potential cause of disunity among the government coalition parties ahead of the general election tentatively scheduled for May 2023. Instead of trying to push for this policy in the current term, he urged parties to position themselves clearly on the issue and let voters make their choice on the issue at the ballot box.

While the bill has been described by NPDP leader Rawee Machamadon as applying to political cases in general, it explicitly excludes cases of lese majesty. The proposal does also not cover corruption as well as serious criminal offenses such as murder. [see AiR No. 46, November/2022,3]

Rawee has stated that the amnesty proposal would be a way for the government to live up to its pledges to promote "national reconciliation" amidst Thailand's increasing political tensions. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Phaetongtarn Shinawatra also favored PM choice in the eastern provinces, poll says

(fj) Phaetongtarn Shinawatra's broad popular appeal is confirmed by the most recent of a series of weekly regional opinion polls as the youngest daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra came out as the most favored choice for the position of prime minister among voters of Thailand's eastern provinces.

On the party-level, Phaetongtarn's Pheu Thai Party (PTP) also tops the poll, ahead of the Move Forward Party (MFP), placing the two biggest opposition parties clearly ahead of the most popular government party, the Phalang Pracharath Party.

Between them, the PTP and the MFP command a clear majority among eastern voters, a recurring pattern seen in other regions of the country and signaling a clear lack of popular support for the incumbent government coalition. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Phalang Pracharath Party announces main themes for election campaign as Prayut remains silent

(fj) The Phalang Pracharath Party (PPRP) has announced the three core themes around which the leading member of the government coalition will build its bid to win the electorate's support. Under the titles of Pracharath Welfare, Pracharath Economy and Pracharath Society, the campaign stated goal is to elevate Thai people's livelihoods.

The PPRP, which embodies perhaps most clearly the kingdom's particular interlinkage of military and politics, has been shown in a number of recent opinion polls to be lacking in popular support. Yet, in announcing the initiative, the PPRP's leader and Deputy Prime Minister Prawit Wongsuwon has stressed the continuity of the policies grouped under the three guiding themes of the campaign with the work the party has been doing as a member of the government. [Bangkok Post 1]

A major question regarding the PPRP's strategy for the upcoming election remains the role of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha. Prayut ran in the 2019 election under a nomination by the PPRP even though he never officially joined the party as a member. While there have been speculations that Prayut might choose to join the Ruam Thai Sang Chart Party, Prayut himself has so far not given any clear statement on his role in the upcoming elections. [see AiR No. 45, November/2022,2] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Jurin Laksanawisit to be nominated as the Democrat Party's prime ministerial candidate

(fj) Deputy Prime Minister Jurin Laksanawisit and leader of the Democrat Party is to be nominated as the Democrat Party's prime ministerial candidate in the upcoming election tentatively scheduled for May 2023. The statement by the party's speaker comes as the party had been repeatedly weakened by defections among its members of parliament.

Since the last election in 2019, more than 20 former MPs have defected from the party. While some observers have stated that Jurin has been failing to create unity within his conservative party, the party spokesman stressed that Jurin's leadership remained unaffected by the decision of some of its members to leave and join other parties. [The Nation Thailand]

In Thailand's political system, where parties remain weak relative to strong political figures and their personal networks, politicians frequently move between parties or rally under the banner of newly founded ones. The recent defections show that the Democrat Party, even though it is the nation's oldest political party, is not immune to such fluctuations. Furthermore, with its traditional electoral basis clearly centered in Thailand's southern provinces, recent polls have confirmed that the Democrat Party under Jurin has not been able to follow the example of Pheu Thai Party and the Move Forward Party which enjoy a much more regionally diversified electoral support.

Thailand: Anti-APEC crackdowns prompt use of force probe

(ts) The "STOP APEC 2022" local protesters clashed with riot police as they left the protest-designated area, Lan Khon Mueang, for the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, with the intent to draw international leaders' attention to the petition against Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha. They demanded that the hosting incumbent abdicate his lead. [Thai Enquirer] During the rally, the escalated situation saw ten people with minor injuries while five police officers were reportedly hurt. Among the injured were the Reuter's journalist and a reporter from the local media - The Matter. The latter was witnessed being attacked by riot police, which sparked strident criticism about practices of excessive force. [Bangkok Post 1]

The Royal Thai Police (RTP) yet seeks to clear the air. The investigation into the assault of two journalists continues as stated by the national police chief Police General Damrongsak Kittiprapas on November 19. In line with this development, all 25 detained protesters are now released on bail of THB 20,000 each. They are, however, bound by conditions: refraining from political rallies, and likewise causing no social unrest. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Vietnam: National Assembly passes revised Anti-Money Laundering Law

(ih) On November 15, the Vietnamese National Assembly passed a revision of the Law on Money

Laundering Prevention and Control. The law lays out measures for the prevention and detection of money laundering, as well as how organizations and individuals involved in money laundering are to be dealt with. The law also addresses money laundering for the purpose of terrorist financing and for facilitating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

In addition to the revised money laundering law, the National Assembly also passed a resolution promoting the implementation of policies and approved a new campaign on thrift practice and wastefulness control to be launched nationwide in 2023. [Vietnam+]

Vietnam: Dissident receives eight year prison sentence for Facebook posts

(ih) On November 18., a Vietnamese court sentenced chemistry teacher and salesman Bui Van Thuan to eight years in prison for posting commentary critical of the Vietnamese government and Communist Party on social media. Multiple posts on Facebook made by Bui Van Thuan were deemed to be illegal under Article 117 of the Penal code. Notably, Bui Van Thuan's arrest in August 2021 came shortly after a Facebook post of his on August 21, 2021, questioning the viability of the government's plan to deploy troops to Ho Chi Minh City in order to deliver essential goods to people unable to shop due to the city-wide lockdown in force at the time. [Reuters] [Human Rights Watch] [wipo.int]

According to Bui Van Thuan, prior to his arrest he had been subject to a government harassment campaign beginning as far back as late 2016, with police pressuring multiple landlords to evict him over time. He has stated this harassment campaign ultimately resulted in him quitting his job as a teacher and moving from Hanoi to Thanh Hoa province.

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

APEC Economic Leaders' in Thailand, world leaders meet on sidelines to enhance relations

(td) Hosting the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting throughout the year 2022 has presented an opportunity for Thailand to take an active role in reshaping the regional economic order for the post-pandemic recovery, based on a multilateral trading system. From November 16. to 19., the APEC Leaders' Summit and related events were held in Thailand despite an array of geopolitical conflicts and great-power politics, as well as a wave of protest against the Thai government.

Thailand tried to focus the summit mainly on economic issues rather than security ones. The summit was nonetheless overshadowed by geopolitical events. Aside from the war in Ukraine and the strained relations between People's Republic of China and Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), United States Vice President Kamala Harris – who represented President Joe Biden – convened a special meeting session with allies, in particular Japan and South Korea, to condemn North Korea over the violation of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions following a fresh round of nuclear test.

The summit concluded with a joint statement that recognized the war in Ukraine for its adverse effects on the global economy – which is similar to the statement released after the G-20 summit. In addition, the APEC leaders have endorsed the *Bangkok Declaration* to drive sustainable economic development in line with Thailand's Bio-Circular-Green (BCG) Economic Model (See APEC). Concluding the summit, Thailand has also handed over the chairmanship of APEC to the U.S., which will host the summit next year in San Francisco – reportedly – to advance the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for free and fair trade. VP Harris said the U.S. would also propose setting a target for reducing carbon emission. [Kyodo News] [Nikkei Asia] [Reuters 1] [Washington Post]

On the sidelines of the APEC summit many leaders took the opportunity for bilateral takes with Chinese President Xi. Japan's Prime Minister, Fumio Kishida, said he and his Chinese counterpart had agreed to build a constructive and stable relations between the two economies, to promote closer cooperation in the areas of environment and health care, and to resume bilateral and high-level economic dialogue. [Voice of America]. , In a talk with Xi, Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. made his stance clear that he would uphold the ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration which China has rejected. Thus, they touched upon the crafting of the Code of Conduct for the SCS, aside from general issues of their interests. [The Manila Times]

In addition, Xi Jinping was reported to have met with the leaders of Brunei, Chile, New Zealand, and Singapore to focus on economic cooperation to forge ahead their partnerships. [CGTN] [Reuters 2] [Radio New Zealand] [See Mothership] Last but not least, although he had met with Joe Biden at the G-20 summit, Xi also briefly met with the U.S. Vice President, who reaffirmed the need to keep the lines of communication open to manage their uneasy relations as well as growing competition. In the meantime, Morris Chang, the founder of Taiwan Semiconductor Company (TSMC), representing Chinese Taipei, had, in his words, a brief but happy chat with Xi despite worsening cross-strait relations [Reuters 3] [Reuters 4]

As a special guest of the Royal Thai Government, the leaders of non-APEC member economies including France and Saudi Arabia also made their way to attend the summit. On the sidelines of the APEC summit, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman – as Prime Minister – met with his counterparts from Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and France as well, to advance bilateral ties and cooperation. [Alarabiya News] [The Strait Times] [Rappler]

As for the French President, Emmaneul Macron discussed ways forward with the Filipino President to expand cooperation in the fields of agriculture, energy, and defense. [Philippine News Agency]

On official visit to attend the summit, the Thai government arranged a respective leader-level visit for dozens of economies to Government House to advance their bilateral relations as well as, for some, strategic partnership.

Ahead of the summit, Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha welcomed Vietnamese President, Nguyen Xuan Phuc, for talks on economic, political, and security to materialize their close cooperation as a strategic

partner. Right after their meeting, the two sides have signed five documents particularly the Plan of Action on Implementing the Thailand-Vietnam Strengthened Strategic Partnership 2022 -2027, in addition to the POA are those related to economic and financial cooperation. [The Nation Thailand]

Likewise, Japanese PM Kishida paid a call on his Thai counterpart to promote the elevation of their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership as the two economies are commemorating the 135th anniversary of their diplomatic relations this year. In this regard, they have signed the Five-Year Joint Action Plan (2022-2026) to navigate their economic relations ahead. [Royal Thai Government, in Thai] It is worth noting that Japan and Thailand have been strategic partners for ten years.

Apart from Japan and Vietnam, Prayut hosted Chinese President Xi to discuss ways and means to enhance their Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership, which marks its 10th anniversary this year. To that end, they have endorsed the Joint Action Plan on Strategic Cooperation between the two economies (2022-2026) to give multi-sectoral cooperation projects a boost. In the meantime, other documents signed encompassed maritime security, science and technology, digital economy, and trade and investment. [Royal Thai Government 2, in Thai]

Saudi Crown Prince MBS, one of the APEC's special participants, met with Thai Prime Minister to discuss issues of their interests, and – significantly – sign several Memorandums of Understanding to expand cooperation in multiple dimensions including, the establishment of the Saudi-Thai Coordination Council, energy, investments, tourism and anti-corruption efforts. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 1]

Furthermore, Macron, another special guest of the Chair, also met with PM Prayut, whereby they reaffirmed their commitment to reinforcing stronger partnership through the Roadmap for Thai-French Relations (2022-2024), with a view to elevate their relations by 2024. They, further, agreed to take immediate steps. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 2]

Once more, Prayut hosted U.S. Vice President and Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, at the Government House. As for the U.S. side, VP Harris welcomed the long-standing relations between the U.S. and Thailand, and both sides underscored the need to develop their dynamic and multi-faceted cooperation further. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand 3]

Whereas for his talk with the Canadian side, Prayut and Trudeau had a general discussion mainly on regional situation, economic relations, and human security. [Royal Thai Government, in Thai 3] On the sidelines of the APEC summit, Prayut also had face-to-face meetings with his Australian and New Zealand leaders, Anthony Albanese and Jacinda Arden, to foster ties and cooperation. [Bangkok Post]

G20 summit concludes with leaders' declaration

(os) The Group of 20 (G20) summit in Bali under Indonesia's chairmanship ended on November 16 after the leaders agreed upon a joint declaration stating that most members condemned the war in Ukraine.

The Ukraine conflict dominated the two-day summit which commenced on November 15 [see AiR No.46, November/2022, 3]. The second day started with an emergency meeting of G7 and NATO leaders to discuss the landing of missiles in Polish territory near Ukraine, killing two people. Due to conflicting positions on Russia's war in Ukraine among the G20 participants, there have been concerns that the summit would not result in a joint statement.

Thus, Indonesian President Joko Widodo expressed his gratitude to the leaders, who still were able to agree unanimously on a declaration. The declaration's most contentious paragraph states that most members condemned the war in Ukraine, but recognizes that there have also been different views regarding that issue. [CNN] [Reuters 1] [The Jakarta Post 1]

For host of the summit Indonesia, the meeting has taken place under different circumstances than the host expected when planning it. During its chairmanship of the G20, Indonesia wanted to focus on global health architecture, sustainable energy transition, and digital transformation. Now, the Ukraine conflict and a struggling global economy were the most pressing issues for the leaders.

Still, the issuance of a joint statement can already be regarded as a success for the chairmanship of Indonesia. In the wake of the vast variety of challenges the global economy is facing, the leaders agreed to pace their interest hikes carefully in order to avoid spillovers. Another win for Indonesia was the creation of a pandemic preparedness fund [see AiR No.46, November/2022, 3]. Indonesian President Joko Widodo handed the G20 chair over to Indian President Narendra Modi and expressed his hopes for a

continuation of policy under India's chairmanship. [G20 Indonesia] [Reuters 2] [The Jakarta Post 2] [The Jakarta Post 3]

G20 presidency handed over to India

(wr/lm) In a ceremony at the end of the Group of Twenty Leaders' Summit in Bali, Indonesian President Joko Widodo handed over the presidency of the G-20 to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Taking charge in times of global challenges, "India's G20 presidency will be inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented" being the voice of the global South.

India will formally begin its presidency on December 1, and host the next G20 Leaders' Summit in New Delhi in September 2023. Navigating the bloc, being the voice of the region and bridge between developed and developing world, gives New Delhi an opportunity to show what it can do diplomatically on the global stage. [Reuters] [Economic Times] [Jakarta Post]

Five ASEAN countries sign MoU on cross-border digital payments

(ih) On the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali, representatives from the central banks of Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in regional payment connectivity.

The banks will collaborate to strengthen cross-border digital payment infrastructure between their respective countries, including through cross-border QR code-based payments, and to expand existing bilateral payment connectivity arrangements.

Notably, transactions would be settled in local currencies, negating the need to use US dollars for these cross-border transactions, according to Bank of Indonesia Governor Perry Warjiyo. The agreement could potentially be expanded in the future to include other ASEAN member states and economic partners outside the region. [Bank of Thailand] [Bangkok Post] [Free Malaysia Today]

Cambodia: 43rd ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) meeting in Phnom Penh on November 20, 2022

(sn) Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the 43rd General Assembly of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) is the first in-face meeting between the delegates since 2019. In 2022, the assembly groups eight parliaments from Brunei, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam. Malaysia skips participating since it has elections at the time, while Myanmar is occupied with its political & humanitarian crisis. Nonetheless, over 500 delegates came to Phnom Penh to attend meetings from 20. To 25. of November. [Khmer Times, Voice of Vietnam, Phnom Penh Post]

India delivers G4 statement to demand UN Security Council reform

(wr/lm) India on November 17 delivered a joint statement on the behalf of the so-called G4 group of countries which support each other's bids for permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). An equitable representation reform at UNSC reflects emerging geopolitical reality, New Delhi said, adding that "the longer the reform is stalled, the greater its deficit in representation and representation is an inescapable precondition for its legitimacy and effectiveness."

Among the five permanent members of the 15-nation UNSC, permanent members France and the United Kingdom reaffirmed their support, while the United States and Russia had earlier supported a permanent seat for India in the UN body. [Hindustan Times] [Business Today] [MSN]

The G4 grouping comprises Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan.

Pakistan's ninth IMF review delayed due to flood damage assessment

(msk) Talks between Pakistan and the International Monetary fund for loan money are delayed because the Washington-based lender wants Islamabad to quantify the financial impact of this year's devastating floods before moving forward with releasing another USD 600 million tranche from a USD 6 billion loan package. The IMF in August approved the seventh and eighth reviews of Pakistan's bailout program, allowing for a release of over USD 1.1 billion [see AiR No. 35, August/2022, 5]. [Bloomberg]

Sri Lanka, World Bank discuss future development plans

(sn) On November 17, Sri Lanka's finance ministry held a discussion with World Bank representatives on the future development plans and policies in the country. The negotiations focused on improvements in the competition, protection institutions, debt management, tax administration, systemic risks, and policy uncertainty areas. The World Bank Director of Sri Lanka and the delegation also met President Ranil Wickremesinghe and briefed him on the matters discussed during the conference. [News.lk, Colombo Page]

Sri Lankan refugees ask UN High Commissioner to resettle instead of returning home

(sn/lm) Over 300 Sri Lankan refuge seekers currently in Vietnam have called on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to not return them to Sri Lanka and instead resettle them in a third country, as refugees.

Vietnamese Coast Guard vessels on November 8 had rescued 303 suspected illegal migrants from Sri Lanka, including many children, who were at risk, drifting on the high seas between Vietnam and the Philippines, when their vessel had broken down. The boat was thought to be heading to Canada, about 6,000 nautical miles across the Pacific Ocean. [AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2] [The Island]

Sri Lanka exploring debt relief through nature conservation

(sn) Sri Lanka is in the early stages of structuring a deal with the United Nations Development Program and other agencies for a debt-for-nature swap program that could see the island nation's cut in exchange for restoring its degraded ecosystem. Furthermore, the European Union has offered a climate-finance deal to the Sri Lankan government that includes funding options along with debt relief. [Bloomberg]

President Ranil Wickremesinghe also aims to meet the conditions for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) USD 2.9 billion program. On November 20, the

president inspected the Wind Power Station in Mannar owned by the Ceylon Electricity Board. Subsequently, he held discussions with government officials to establish green hydrogen, reforestation, and improved water management system projects.

The president also joined the inspection of the Talaimannar Jetty and discussed its restoration and future use under the regional development plan. Concurrently, the Agricultural Ministry of Sri Lanka plans to revoke the ban on glyphosate herbicides. Initially, the ban was introduced in 2015. However, since there were no alternative measures for weed control, a decrease in harvests and illegal herbicide imports accompanied the ban. [Ada Derana, The Leader, Colombo Page]

India may transport Russian gas, oil to Bangladesh, according to news report

(lm) India is mulling to serve as a transit country to transport Russian gas and oil to Bangladesh through the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFPL) project which connects refineries in India's northeastern Assam state refinery in Numaligarh via the Siliguri Marketing Terminal in West Bengal to Dinajpur in Bangladesh. [The Economic Times]

Philippines rejects United Nations call to pass same-sex marriage, divorce bills

(jd) The Philippines has rejected recommendation from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)'s Universal Period Review that call for the legalization of same sex marriage and protection of the LGBT community from discrimination, divorce and abortion. The country has already accepted 200 out of the 297 recommendations, however, according to the justice secretary, some of the rejected ones are not acceptable in a predominantly catholic nation. [One Nation]

NGO releases 24th annual Landmine Monitor

(jp) The International Campaign to Ban Landmines has released the 2020 edition of the Landmine Monitor. The report found that Sri Lanka completed the destruction of its stockpile of landmines in 2021, while

India introduced a new type of Anti person landmine. Regarding Myanmar the report found the country to be among the most likely ones to be currently producing landmines, as well as among those states most heavily using landmines in its ongoing internal conflict. [International Campaign to Ban Landmines]

Turkey wants to strengthen defense cooperation with Bangladesh, envoy says

(az) Emphasizing the Turkish development in defense product production and Bangladesh's ability to produce military equipment in a joint venture, the Turkish Ambassador Mustafa Osman Turan expressed the wish to expand Turkey-Bangladesh defense cooperation by manufacturing weapons and transferring related technology.

Turkey has proposed the expansion of strategic cooperation through the navy and coast guard, and it has already provided Bangladesh with armored personnel carriers, rocket launchers, drones, and many other defense products. Besides weapon supply, Turkey has so far trained approximately 3,000 Bangladeshi army officers. [Daily Sabah]

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina invites Singapore to invest more

(az) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has invited investors in Singapore to invest more in her country through special economic zones. Singapore's minister for transport and minister in charge of trade relations, S Iswaran, also expressed that Singapore is willing to cooperate with Bangladesh in many sectors, mainly tourism, sustainable and renewable energy. While celebrating 50 years of cooperation between both countries, Iswaran also urged for new ways to explore various cooperation sectors between both countries in Bangladesh. [The Daily Star]

Cambodian PM calls off G20 meetings after testing positive for COVID-19

(sn) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen tested positive for COVID-19 in Indonesia just before the G20 summit in Bali. The Prime Minister canceled the following

meetings and returned to Cambodia. [Channel News asia]

Cambodia and India sign MoU for wildlife conservation and tiger rehabilitation program

(sn) On November 12, 2022, the Cambodian Minister of Environment and the Indian ambassador to Cambodia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in biodiversity conservation and sustainable wildlife management. The primary agenda of these cooperation strategies is the rehabilitation of tigers and their habitats in Cambodia. India has efficient tiger breeding programs that will facilitate the integration of tigers into their natural environment. Cambodia started participating in the international program in 2010. In the meantime, the national tiger population has doubled in the country ever since. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Ream Naval under base modernization project managed by China to host Japanese Navy ships

(sn) Following the ASEAN Summit conversation about the Ream Naval Base between the US and Cambodia, Chinese and Cambodian officials reassured the public that the activity identified by observers is a routine modernization project where China assists Cambodia. Prime Minister Hun Sen also confirmed that soon there would be a visit of Japanese Self-defense ships to the Ream Naval base, but the date is yet to be specified. [see Khmer Times, Cambodianess]

US arrests Cambodian Wildlife Official in a monkey smuggling ring

(sn) On November 16, 2022, the deputy director of Wildlife and Biodiversity of Cambodia's Forestry Administration was arrested at a New York international airport. The Miami Federal prosecutors also charged the Forestry Administration Director General Keo Omaliss and 7 other people involved in a major primate supply organization. The organization was based in Hong Kong and Cambodia and provided monkeys to US clients for research purposes. There are restrictions on import of the animals into the US since international trade law protects long-tailed

macaques. [Radio Free Asia, The Diplomat, Yahoo! News]

Xi and Kishida agree on five-point consensus on stabilizing ties

(ms) In the first meeting of the two leaders of China and Japan in nearly three years, China's President Xi Jinping and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida agreed on a five-point common understanding on stabilizing and developing bilateral relations. An agreement on Taiwan and the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, however, was predictably not achieved.

At the November 17 meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Bangkok, the two leaders agreed to expand their communication and mutual trust under the key statement that the two countries should "be partners, not threats." The two countries are to resume a new round of High-level Economic Dialogue since they were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, promote cultural exchanges between the two countries in light of the 50th anniversary of the 1972 agreement of establishing relations of perpetual peace and friendship, and strengthen coordination and cooperation in international affairs between the economic powers.

The maritime tensions were also discussed at the meeting. It was agreed to try to establish a direct telephone line between the two defense ministries. Agreement on the territorial claims over Senkaku Island in Japan or Diaoyu Islands in China was expectedly not found, the same applies to Taiwan.

Kishida reportedly pleaded for peaceful relations and against military action in the Taiwan Strait during the talks, after China increased its military presence there in August in response to U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan and held a variety of military exercises, during which five missiles fell within Japan's exclusive economic zone, east of Taiwan [see AiR No. 32, August/2022, 2]. Xi dismissed Japan's interference saying that "China does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, nor does It accept anyone interfering in China's internal affairs under any pretext." [FMPRC] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [The Diplomat]

Xi meets with Harris during APEC

(ms) Following the November 14 meeting with President Biden just before the start of the G20 summit [see AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3], Chinese President Xi also met with Vice President Kamala Harris on the sidelines of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Bangkok on November 19.

The meeting was another step-in effort articulated on November 14 to maintain lines of communication between the world's two largest economies, both the U.S. and Chinese governments said following the meeting. The Chinese side added that it hoped Harris "will play an active role in working with China to promote the two nations' relations to return to a healthy and stable track," in view of economic sanctions imposed by the Biden administration in recent months that have hit China's high-tech sector in particular. [Associated Press] [VOA News]

Tense economic relations between the two countries were the subject of a meeting on November 16 between a delegation of U.S. business representatives and China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC). The November 16 meeting was the second meeting of these parties and aims to improve the strained economic relations between China and the U.S. The meeting can also be seen as another effort by the Chinese government to present China as committed to further opening up the economy to the international market and put more emphasis on economic growth in the weakening Chinese economy. [South China Morning Post]

The meeting came amid the release of the "2022 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission," which warns that "China has subverted the global trade system and moved further from the spirit and letter of its obligations under its WTO accession protocol," citing Beijing's "subsidies, overcapacity, intellectual property theft, and protectionist nonmarket policies," that "have harmed workers, producers, and innovators in the United States and other market-based countries." It report also warns of China's "massive buildup" of cyber capabilities in the past ten years, that "poses a formidable threat to the United States in cyberspace today." [USCC]

US court sentences Chinese intelligence official to 20 years for espionage

(ms) On November 16, a Chinese intelligence official was sentenced by a U.S. court to 20 years in prison for

industrial espionage over stealing trade secrets in the aviation industry.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice report released in the wake of the case, Xu Yanjun, 42, allegedly made contact with an employee of GE Aviation, an aerospace company that works closely with the U.S. military, during a visit to a Chinese university in mid-2017 at the expense of the Chinese government, and in 2018, when the FBI was already taking over the GE Aviation employee's role in the communications with Xu, ordered the employee to share information with him about GE Aviation's "system specifications and design processes." Xu also organized a meeting with the employee in Europe, during which he was detained by security authorities.

According to the Justice Department report, Xu also allegedly "attempted to recruit employees to travel to China, and solicited their proprietary information, all on behalf of the government of the People's Republic of China."

As recently as late September, Striders Technologies, a U.S. strategic intelligence platform, published a report [see full report], that the Chinese government is deliberately placing Chinese citizens, in this case in the Los Alamos National Laboratory, a government institution, in order to lure them back to China with lucrative offers after working there for a longer period of time, in order to make the technical achievements of the USA their own [see AiR No. 39, September/2022, 4]. [Radio Free Asia] [US Department of Justice]

EU Chamber fears reversing of economic opening in China

(ms) Jörg Wuttke, President of the EU Chamber of Commerce expressed concerns during the Caixin Summit in Beijing on November 17 that China is moving away from its opening up course towards a politicized economic policy.

Wuttke sees the openness to investment that has transformed China into the second-largest economy since its introduction in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping as endangered representing a concern shared among European companies that China is once again isolating itself more from foreign actors by its own ideology. In particular, China's zero-COVID policy, which has been in place for almost three years, is a big factor in these concerns and plays a big role in the movement for European companies to start looking for markets and business opportunities in other parts of the world,

including China's direct neighbors, such as India, and to check to what extent the investment rules there would make it attractive for an engagement and a possible relocation of business sites.

Nevertheless, Wuttke remains optimistic to a certain extent and makes it clear that despite the problems and the difficult situation of the Chinese economy, China will remain one of the first if not the first destination for the big European companies, but it will take a big efforts on the Chinese side to restore the confidence of foreign companies in the Chinese market. [South China Morning Post]

China and Indonesia to intensify cooperation

(ms) During the G20 Summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indonesian President Joko Widodo held a meeting at which both parties agreed to expand infrastructural cooperation, as well as cooperation on maritime issues.

China and Indonesia have maintained good relations in recent years, through the Chinese large-scale infrastructure project the Belt and Road Initiative. Chinese companies in cooperation with Indonesia are building the Southeast Asian country's first high-speed railway. The test run of the line was jointly visited by Xi and Widodo shortly before the start of the G20 Summit.

China also expanded its health diplomacy in Indonesia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with "Peace Ark", a hospital ship of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which left for its second voyage to Indonesia in early November to provide medical care to local people. [Business Wire] [The Diplomat]

According to a joint statement [see full statement] released after the meeting, the two countries mainly discussed intensifying the already existing cooperation, both countries agreed on a "Plan of Action for Strengthening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" between their countries for 2022-2026, which will cover the roadmap for concrete projects. There will also be closer cooperation on maritime projects and marine science and environmental protection.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to uphold the principle of non-interference in each other's internal affairs and continue to support each other on issues of national sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity.

With regards to Taiwan, Indonesia affirmed its commitment to the "One-China Policy" and supports peaceful reunification of the island with the mainland.

China and Indonesia will resume their joint military exercises and training, which had been suspended by the COVID-19 epidemic, to play a greater role together in maintaining regional security and stability, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense announced on November 18. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Argentina extends currency swap deal with China

(ms) On the sidelines of the G20 meeting in Bali, Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Argentine counterpart Alberto Fernández held a meeting in which the currency swap deal between the two countries was extended by the equivalent of USD 5 billion.

China will provide Argentina with RMB 35 billion, which, according to the Argentine government, will be used primarily to replenish local reserves in order to re-stabilize the Argentine peso and cover trade costs and future debt repayments. Furthermore, relations between the two countries are to be expanded, with Xi announcing that China is willing to import more high-quality products from Argentina. [AA] [CGTN] [Reuters]

India, United States launch annual joint military training exercise

(wr/lm) Military personnel from the United States and India on November 16 launched the 18th edition of the joint military training exercise “Yudh Abhyas 2022” in India’s Uttarakhand state. The wide spectrum of the 15-day-long exercise, conducted only about 100 kilometers from the notional demarcation line that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory, primarily focuses on high altitude and extreme cold warfare. The objective of the annual exercise is to exchange technology, tactical skills and maneuvers between the armies of both countries, to launch coordinated relief efforts in the wake of any natural calamity. [SouthAsian Times] [NewsOnAir] [NDTV]

India, United Kingdom announce visa deal

(wr/lm) India and the United Kingdom have finalized a reciprocal migration deal ahead of British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's first face-to-face meeting with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi. Under the deal struck on the sidelines of the Group of Twenty Leaders' Summit in Indonesia, up to 3,000 visas will be granted to young Indian nationals to work in the UK for up to two years.

Successful conclusion of the visa deal comes after talks on a UK-India trade deal were scuppered after British Home Secretary Suella Braverman expressed concerns about a potential increase in Indian migration to the Kingdom. In light of this, the visas agreement will be seen as a signal that London is open to granting more work and study visas to Indian citizens as part of commitment to a hoped-for free trade agreement. [Deccan Herald] [Politico] [Hindustan Times]

Nepal invites India's chief election commissioner as poll observer

(wr) In the lead-up to Nepal's general election held on November 20, the country's election commission had announced a raft of measures, including observance by Indian Election Commission delegation and closing the Nepal-India border. [PTI] [IB Times] [The Week]

India voices concern over "slowed projects", looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan under Taliban

(wr) The political situation Taliban-ruled Afghanistan has complicated the implementation of potential three billion dollars investment projects by India, according to the Counsellor in India's Permanent Mission to the United Nations. Given its neighboring position, India has direct stakes in ensuring peace and stability in the state of Afghanistan, with intent of regional connectivity. It reaffirmed its commitment towards humanitarian assistance and concerns regarding terrorism. [Deccan Herald] [NDTV]

Moreover, on November 18 India attended the Moscow format of talks on Afghanistan along other regional key players and called for creating a "truly inclusive" government in Kabul as a solution to domestic and regional security. [AiR No. 46, November/2022,3]

Previously, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the UAE on June 28 and met President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. This visit was followed by External Affairs Minister Jaishankar traveling to the Emirates in late October to co-chair a Joint Commission and Strategic Dialogue meeting.

Indians no longer require police clearance certificate to obtain visa for traveling Saudi Arabia

(wr) Indian nationals no longer need a police clearance certificate to obtain a visa for traveling to Saudi Arabia. The decision of exemption reflects efforts to further strengthen bilateral relations and facilitate faster visa approval, the Saudi embassy in New Delhi said in a statement. Saudi Arabia, India's fourth-largest trading partner, hosts over two million Indian citizens. [NDTV] [Hindustan Times]

UAE foreign minister on two-day official visit in India

(vv) Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan on November 21 began his two-day official visit to India for bilateral discussions on trade, strategic ties, and global issues. Sheikh Abdullah, who is accompanied by a senior-level delegation, will hold talks with India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar. As the UAE is a key energy supplier to India, bilateral trade and energy security are expected to be primary agendas of the discussions between high-level delegations of both nations. [Hindustan Times] [Mint] [ThePrint]

India, Australia discuss finalization of trade agreement at G20

(wr/lm) India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese at the sidelines of the Group of Twenty Summit in Indonesia on November 16, with the conversation centering on ways to deepen cooperation in the field of Indo-Pacific security, as well the finalization of a bilateral trade agreement.

An interim Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) was signed in April this year, and the two countries agreed to set up a sub-

committee charged with transforming the interim deal into a full-fledged Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). But the ECTA needs to be ratified by the respective Australian and Indian parliaments before taking effect [see AiR No. 14, April/2022, 1]. Neither nation has yet done that.

At their 17th Joint Ministerial Commission meeting in September 2021, both sides had formally re-launched CECA negotiations and reaffirmed their commitment to reach the interim agreement by December, and to conclude the negotiations on a full CECA by the end of 2022. [AiR No. 52, December/2021, 4]

A bill on the trade agreement with India entered the Australian Senate on November 22, a day after it easily passed the House of Representatives. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's center-left Labor Party government does not hold a majority in the upper chamber, but it can count on the support of the conservative opposition that was in power until May elections and negotiated the deal.

Besides the bill on the trade deal with India, the Senate will also vote on a bill on a trade agreement between Australia and the United Kingdom. [Associated Press] [Australian Financial Review] [West Australian]

Indonesia, Canada to work closer together in countering terrorism

(os) Indonesia and Canada inked a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to cooperate in combating terrorism on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Indonesia on November 16.

The signing of the MoU was predicated on the Indonesia-Canada Action Plan cooperation framework for 2022-2025. The cooperation encompasses the exchange of information, capacity building, good practices, and expert-level meetings. It is not only aimed at enhancing the country's cooperation in countering terrorism, but also at preventing transnational crimes and tackling human trafficking. [Antara News] [Prime Minister of Canada]

Indonesian President, New Zealand Prime Minister hold bilateral meeting

(os) Indonesian President Joko Widodo met with New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern on the sidelines of the APEC summit in Bangkok on November 18.

Topics included cooperation in the economy, energy transition, and Asia-Pacific relations.

Jokowi pointed out that the countries should increase market access in a vast variety of industries, particularly in agriculture. He also emphasized Indonesia's willingness in transitioning to new and renewable energy and invited New Zealand businesses to invest in geothermal energy in Indonesia. Moreover, the Indonesian President expressed his hope for increased engagement between ASEAN and Pacific nations. PM Ardern congratulated Indonesia for their hosting of the G20 summit and put forward New Zealand's support for Indonesia's chairmanship of ASEAN in 2023. [Tempo]

Indonesia, Japan announce initiative to work towards zero net emissions in Asia

(os) Indonesia and Japan announced an initiative which is aimed at realizing the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) concept.

Both countries expressed their willingness to help Asia lead the global energy transition process and stimulate economic growth at the same time. They invite other countries in the region to join the initiative. Japan emphasized its willingness to leverage funding from Japanese public institutions to support the energy transition process in Indonesia.

Among others, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation and PLN have signed a memorandum of understanding, to enhance cooperation between PLN and the Japanese business community in regard to a sustainable energy transition. [Antara News]

Indonesian, US defense ministers meet in Jakarta

(os) Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto met with his US counterpart Llyod Austin in Jakarta on November 21 to discuss military cooperation between the two countries. [Antara News] [The Jakarta Post] [U.S. Department of Defense]

This has already been the fourth meeting of the two leaders, after the most recent meeting taking place just last month [see AiR No. 43, October/2022, 4]. Austin stated that the frequency of the meetings highlights the importance of cooperation between both countries. Prabowo emphasized Indonesia's support

for US presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesia's government is likely to sign a deal with Boeing over the sale of F-15 fighter jets, as negotiations are in an advanced stage. The deal would be beneficial for interoperability of the Indonesian and US militaries, according to Austin. Both countries also expressed their willingness to increase joint exercises. At the moment, both militaries are holding the Keris Marine Exercise (MAREX) in Lampung, Indonesia. The exercise is running from November 11 until November 25.

The meeting can be considered as part of US efforts to increase its presence in the Indo-Pacific region in the wake of China's growing influence. Indonesia pursues a policy of non-alignment and tries to maintain good relations with both, the US and China.

Indonesia, Chile sign service agreement to boost trade

(os) Indonesia and Chile have added a trade in service agreement (TIS) to their bilateral trade agreement to promote bilateral trade between the two emerging economies.

The agreement was signed under the Indonesia-Chile Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IC-CEPA). Indonesia seeks diversification of export destination markets as part of its larger strategy to become a developed country by 2045. As the strongest economy in Latin America, Chile poses great potential for Indonesia. The Indonesian government hopes that bilateral trade between both countries will exceed USD 1 billion in the following years. [Antara News] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesian, UAE presidents inaugurate mosque

(os) In the wake of the visit of United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Muhamad bin Zayed Al Nahyan to the G20 summit in Indonesia, he inaugurated a mosque in Solo, Indonesia, together with Indonesian President Joko Widodo. The mosque was a gift from the President of the UAE who stated that the mosque is a symbol of the close relations between Indonesia and the UAE. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia]

Japanese Prime Minister Kishida reiterates opposition to change of Indo-Pacific status quo by force

(dql) In a press conference following the conclusion of the APEC summit in Bangkok, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida referred to Russia's war in Ukraine to reiterate his opposition to any unilateral attempts of change status quo by force in the Indo-Pacific and in East Asia in particular. He also reaffirmed Japan's commitment to strengthen the deterrence of the security alliance with the U.S. [Kyodo News]

Japan to expand space cooperation with NASA

(dql) Japan and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) have concluded an agreement under which the Japanese government agreed to provide components for various modules and a cargo resupply mission the lunar Gateway. NASA, meanwhile, will fly an astronaut from the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), the country's national air and space agency to the Gateway on a future Artemis mission.

Further to the agreement, Tokyo reaffirmed its willingness to extend its participation in the International Space Station (ISS) beyond 2024 till 2030. [Space News]

Commenting on the agreement, US Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel hailed it as symbolizing a "new stage of the U.S.-Japan relationship," that serves "peaceful endeavors [in space] for the benefit of mankind," while accusing China of "trying to militarize space." [Nikkei Asia]

Saudi-Arabia cancels joint business forum with Japan

(dql) According to the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), a Saudi Arabian delegation of government and business led by Minister of Investment Khalid Al-Falih cancelled a business forum with their Japanese counterparts d business leaders that was slated for November 21. No reason for the cancellation was disclosed.

Japan is among Saudi Arabia's most important economic partners, with trade between the two

countries amounting to nearly USD 34 billion in 2021. Riyadh is Tokyo's largest supplier of crude oil, exporting about 1 million barrels daily. [Bloomberg]

Japan to cooperate with UK, Italy in next-generation F-X fighter development

(dql) Japan, the UK and Italy are reported set to conclude an agreement in December under which the three countries will join hands in developing and building a next-generation fighter jet to replace the Mitsubishi F-2, a Japanese version of the F-16, that is currently in operation in the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force and jointly developed with American aerospace, arms, defense, information security, and technology corporation Lockheed Martin. The deployment of the new fighter jet is scheduled for 2035.

This agreement will mark Japan's first partnership with European countries for the development of a jet fighter. [Nikkei Asia]

Japan conducts joint exercise with US, Australia

(dql) Japan's Defense Ministry has confirmed a trilateral military exercise with the U.S. and Australia on November 18-19 during which the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force's Asagiri-class destroyer Setogiri carried out for the first time an asset protection for four US and Australian warships. [Ministry of Defense, Japan, Twitter 1] [NHK]

In an earlier move last week, Japanese and Malaysian military forces carried out a joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercise from November 14-17. [Ministry of Defense, Japan, Twitter 2]

Laos, Australia upgrades bilateral ties

(ih) Laotian Prime Minister Phankham Viphavanh and the Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese met on the sidelines of the 2nd ASEAN-Australia Summit and the East Asia Summit in Phnom Penh. Following the meeting, the two premiers announced that their respective countries would upgrade their bilateral ties to a Comprehensive Partnership. [Vientiane Times]

Delegation of Russian troops train Lao soldiers on explosive ordnance disposal

A delegation of 24 Russian troops visited Laos from November 17. to 24. to engage in a joint training operation with the Lao People's Armed Forces, training them in explosive ordnance disposal operations. [Laotian Times]

Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia signs joint statements on CLV Development Triangle Area, CLV Parliamentary Summit

On November 20., the heads of the National Assemblies of Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia signed a joint statement on the establishment of a CLV parliamentary summit to promote the sharing of experiences, information, and best practices. The inaugural summit will be hosted in 2023 by the Lao National Assembly. [Xinhua]

Additionally, the three countries signed a joint statement committing to strengthening cooperation between the countries on the CLV Development Triangle Area. [Lao News Agency]

Laos: Second meeting of the Golden Triangle Prosecutor Network held in Luang Prabang

(ih) From November 16. to 18., officials from the Lao Office of Supreme People's Prosecutor, the Thai Office of the Attorney General, and the Myanmar Union Attorney General Office at Naypyidaw attended the second meeting of the Golden Triangle Prosecutor Network in Luang Prabang. The officials examined the implementation of decisions made at the first Golden Triangle Prosecutor Network meeting, and developed plans to further coordination, training, and information exchange to address shared challenges in combating drug-related crimes in the Golden Triangle. The officials also indicated a desire for the implementation of regional legislation such as the ASEAN Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Transnational Crime, the Convention on Combatting Terrorism, the ASEAN Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters, and the Master Plan for the Pillars of the ASEAN Political-Security Community in order to better address the challenges of transnational organized crime. [Xinhua] [Laotian Times]

North Korea fires ballistic missiles in protest of Japan, South Korea, US summit during G20

(sm) North Korea fired one short range ballistic missile (SRBM) and an intermediate range ballistic missile (IBRM) into the East Sea on November 17 and 18, respectively. The launch of the missiles was accompanied by a message by North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui who protested the trilateral summit between Japan, South Korea, and the US held on the sidelines of the G20 in Cambodia on November 13.

Choe voiced North Korea's criticism against the three countries' joint deterrence capabilities, especially Washington's willingness to use both nuclear and conventional options and repeated joint drills between the three armies as a clear sign of aggression against North Korea. The allies were bringing tensions on the peninsula to an unprecedented phase, she added, and Pyongyang would not hesitate to retaliate, as demonstrated by their own missile launched hours after the message was sent on November 17. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [Yonhap News Agency_1]

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida expressed condemnation of the "totally unacceptable" missile launches, that he said has fallen within the Japanese exclusive economic zone in the Sea of Japan. Further, Japanese Self-Defense Forces and US armed forces carried out a joint exercise on November 18 over the island of Kyushu in northwestern Japan, in an immediate response to the missile tests. The drill involved five Japanese F-2 fighters and two U.S B-1 bombers. [NHK]

On November 21, another attempt by UN Security Council members to take action against Pyongyang was blocked by China and Russia, who are currently in a deadlock with the US over the Russia–Ukraine war and tensions over Taiwan. During the G20 meeting on November 14, the US and its allies urged China to intervene in the rising tensions on the peninsula, as the country with the most economic leverage over Pyongyang. China has however, insisted that dialogue with the regime remains essential, stalling a more active involvement in the conflict and opposing further sanctions on the country. [Yonhap News Agency_2]

North Korea has been launching a flurry of missiles off its coast in the last three months, after the government passed a law making preemptive nuclear strikes for self-defense legal. The country has been firing SBRMs

and IBRMs at an exceptional rate, 63 missiles in total this year and 23 missiles on November 3 alone. One IBRM flew over Japan while another SBRM landed in South Korea's de facto maritime territory, an action unseen since the end of the inter-Korean war [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

North Korea warns Japan of persecution against pro-North Korea ethnic Koreans

(sm) On November 16, the North Korean Central News Agency issued a message warning Japan of discriminating against ethnic Korean residents in Japan which support the Pyongyang regime.

The persecution of members of the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon) and North Korean residents would be taken as a diplomatic affront, not without consequences, the message admonished. The firing of an intermediate range ballistic missile over Japan on October 4 constituted a warning against any further hostile action, it said.

The number of hate crimes against ethic Koreans in Japan has recently risen, apparently prompting North Korea to act against it. The regime has launched a flurry of missiles off its East Coast, one flying over Japan in early October, while another intercontinental ballistic missile launched on November 3 has presumably failed. [Korea Herald]

Pakistan reopens Afghan border crossing shut over fatal shooting

(tj/lm) Pakistan on November 21 reopened a crucial southwestern border crossing with neighboring Afghanistan, a week after sealing the facility over the killing of a Pakistani security guard by an gunman Islamabad described as an Afghan "terrorist". [Al Jazeera] [Voice of America]

The deadly shooting, which also wounded two soldiers, took place November 13 at the Chaman border terminal between the two countries, known as the Friendship Gate. A top Chaman district administration official announced on November 21 that Pakistan had agreed to restore the cross-border movement after receiving "firm assurances" from the Afghan Taliban government that "the culprit will soon be arrested and severely punished."

Philippines's President Marcos Jr. looks to Beijing visit, expanding ties after meeting Xi Jinping on APEC sidelines

(jd/lm) China's President Xi Jinping and his Filipino counterparty Ferdinand Marcos Jr. vowed to expand bilateral ties while meeting on the sidelines of the APEC Summit in the Thai capital Bangkok, with the Philippines leader saying he looks forward to a state visit to Beijing in January. [South China Morning Post]

Chinese President Xi told Marcos Jr. that the stability in the South China Sea is crucial in order to maintain good bilateral ties between the two countries. Xi's remarks refer to ongoing disputes related to the South China Sea which involve the Philippines and other countries, although a 2016 international ruling declared that China's claims on the archipelago's territorial waters have no legal basis. The Chinese president said that amicable negotiations are necessary to address the situation. [Reuters]

US Vice President Kamala Harris visits Philippines, vows Washington's 'unwavering commitment'

(tjb) United States Vice President Kamala Harris has visited the Philippines for a series of meetings with top government officials that sought to rebuild bilateral ties that were fractured over human rights abuses in the Southeast Asian nation. [Philippines Daily Inquirer]

On November 21, Harris paid a visit to both President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and her Philippine counterpart, Vice President Sara Duterte. During the talks, the two sides discussed 21 new projects funded by Washington, including more defense sites around the Philippines under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), a military agreement that allows the US military to construct and operate facilities in the Philippines. [Rappler]

On November 22, Harris became the highest ranking US official to visit Palawan island, which is home to a Philippine military base. In her remarks, Harris said that her country is committed to the mutual defense treaty signed by the Philippines and the US in 1951. She said that an attack on Philippine vessels in the South China Sea would invoke the pact. In light of this, Harris' visit also acted as a symbolic message to China as she spoke to the Philippine Coast Guard in Palawan,

an island close to territories Beijing claims. [CNN] [Deutsche Welle]

Activists, however, were unhappy with the visit. They criticized the visit as a US policy to use the Philippines as a launching base for Washington's war against Beijing. [Reuters]

Philippines, China tussle over retrieving suspected rocket debris floating in disputed South China Sea

(lm) A Chinese coast guard ship has been accused of "forcefully retrieving" floating debris, believed to be from a rocket launch, from a Philippine vessel in the South China Sea. The Chinese vessel twice blocked the Philippine naval boat on November 20 before finally seizing the object. China denied there was a forcible seizure and said the debris was handed over by Philippine forces after a “friendly consultation.” [BBC] [CNN]

Philippine to reopen new embassies after Senate approves budget

(tjb) The Philippines will attempt to restart diplomatic relations with four countries as it plans to reopen embassies in Cuba, Ireland, Finland, and Romania. [The Manila Times]

China, South Korea summit highlights different diplomatic positions

(sm) On October 15, Chinese President Xi Jinping and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol held the first China-South Korea summit in three years on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia. The 25-minute meeting highlighted the different diplomatic positions both countries hold on defense and economic issues.

The last bilateral high-level meeting had taken place during a trilateral summit between China, Japan, and South Korea, with former South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Xi meeting in December 2019. While Yoon explicitly asked for China to take a more active role in managing North Korean nuclear threats, Xi focused on economic issues, such as their bilateral free trade agreement and supply chain security. The official

statements of the two countries also reflect this difference in issue focus.

According to the South Korean presidential office, Yoon urged China to take a more involved role in curbing the recently escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula, as a member of the UN Security Council. The request comes as North Korea has launched a record number of missiles in the last weeks, 23 missiles on November 2 alone, in retaliation to South Korea-US joint military exercises on the peninsula. Xi responded by stating that peace on the peninsula is a common interest and expressed his hope for improved relations between South Korea and its neighbor. He added that China would support and cooperate with Yoon's audacious initiative, which asks for Pyongyang's denuclearization in exchange for economic aid, if North Korea accepts the plan [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2]. [South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

Xi's deflected Yoon's request for a more active involvement by suggesting continued dialogue with the North. The Chinese leadership has been increasingly concerned with the recent increase in joint military operations between South Korea, the US, and Japan as it sees the US' presence on the peninsula as a security threat. China, as North Korea's main trading partner and aid provider, is believed to hold the most sway over its political decisions. Together with Russia, China has blocked the adoption of multiple UN resolutions and sanctions against North Korea, in opposition to the US and other UN Security Council members. [Associated Press]

Instead, the Chinese statement focused on the acceleration of bilateral free trade agreement negotiations and cooperation on the green economy, supply chain security, climate change, pandemics, and high-tech manufacturing. Xi was furthermore reported to have criticized the politicization of economic cooperation, considering recent deals between the US and its allies aiming to exclude China from supply chains due to national security concerns. The statement omitted any discussion about North Korea and stressed the need for increased dialogue and political trust with South Korea instead. [Reuters]

South Korea is left in a difficult diplomatic position, as it has increasingly strengthened its economic and defense partnership with the US over the last months, creating tensions with China, its most important economic partner. In 2017, Beijing had sharply protested the establishment of a US missile defense system on South Korean territory and warned of economic retaliation. Seoul now participates in several

US-led initiatives, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity and Chip4, and Yoon announced his US-aligned Indo-Pacific strategy at the ASEAN summit on November 11. [Korea Herald]

South Korea, Saudi Arabia to strengthen defense, economic cooperation

(sm) On November 17, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Saudi Prime Minister and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman met in Seoul and agreed to deepen their cooperation in the energy, defense, and infrastructure industry, in views of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative, which aims to diversify its economy.

The Saudi Prime Minister first held a series of meetings with important South Korean business leaders and officials, such as Samsung, Pohang Iron and Steel Company Holdings, and Korea Electric Power Corporation, making deals worth KRW 40 trillion (USD 30 billion), on November 16. Saudi Arabia and South Korean business leaders signed 26 Memorandums of Understanding in total, covering infrastructure, agriculture, and petrochemicals. [Reuters]

Bin Salman had last visited Seoul in 2019 to present his Vision 2030, a plan devised to steer the Saudi economy away from its dependence on oil towards alternative energy resources, such as hydrogen. He also met with former South Korean President Moon Jae-in in January 2022.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of their bilateral ties, Yoon and bin Salman agreed that now is the right time to bring their cooperation to the next level, Saudi Arabia being a key contributor to South Korea's economic and energy security. The crown prince stated that South Korean companies had been a major support in Saudi infrastructure development and expressed his wish for both countries to work together on the development of hydrogen energy, nuclear power, and carbon captor technology. [Korea.net]

Saudi Arabia has been looking for partnerships with South Korea and its businesses on the USD 500 billion project named Neom, which focuses on the development of ecological and smart cities in the Northwest of the kingdom.

Moreover, the country has been searching for partners for its plan to build a new nuclear power plant by 2030. The partner for the USD 9 billion project is likely to be

either Russia's Rosatom or South Korea's Korea Electric Power Corporation. South Korea's bid in the deal might be hindered by the tense relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US, as South Korean nuclear reactors use US-developed technologies, which cannot be transferred without the US Department of Energy's approval. Saudi Arabia is South Korea's largest oil exporter and trading partner in the Middle East, accounting for USD 27,6 billion in 2021. [Korea Times]

South Korea, The Netherlands agree to boost their cooperation on energy and semiconductors

(sm) While meeting on November 17 in Seoul, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte agreed on stronger cooperation over semiconductor chips and nuclear energy, upgrading their relationship to a strategic partnership.

South Korean and the Netherlands are complementary partner in the chip industry, as the former focuses on semiconductor manufacturing while the latter specializes in semiconductor production equipment. Both leaders agreed that the strengthening of their countries' ties in the high-tech department would contribute to stabilizing global tech supply chains. A communication channel should also be established to discuss the Netherlands' project of building new nuclear power plants on its territory.

The two then exchanged their countries' positions on regional and global issues, such as tensions in the Korean peninsula and the Ukraine–Russia war. Rutte supported the maintenance of strong sanctions until Pyongyang's complete denuclearization, and both stressed the necessity of a united response from the international community to deescalate tensions. They subsequently condemned Russia's aggression of Ukraine and reaffirmed their commitment to liberal and democratic values.

Rutte and Yoon issued a joint statement on their bilateral strategic partnership, outlining their commitment to a secure, free, and interoperable cyberspace and green energy development among others. [Yonhap News Agency]

UN Special Rapporteur urged South Korean government on impose sanctions on Myanmar

(jp) While visiting Seoul, the UN Special Rapporteur human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews, urged the Government of South Korea to impose sanctions on Myanmar. Andrews spend his six-day official visit meeting Korean officials as well as economic actors. The South Korean Government didn't respond to Andrews demand to impose sanctions, but it did express a deep concern about the developments in Myanmar. [VoA]

Singapore, South Korea first digital partnership

(sm) On November 21 in Singapore, Singapore and South Korea signed a digital partnership agreement (DPA) to strengthen economic cooperation, according to the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy.

South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Deug-geun visited the country for the occasion of its first ever DPA. Negotiations for the partnership had been underway since June 2020.

The agreement aims at establishing rules for swift and safe digital transactions including trade, the exchange of content and boost cyber resilience for consumer safety. The DPA will also promote South Korean goods and services towards a larger ASEAN audience through the access to leading online Singaporean shopping platforms, such as Lazada and Shopee.

Both countries are important economic partners, Singapore being Seoul's eleventh biggest trading partner. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan, Nauru reaffirm diplomatic ties

(dql) Taiwan's Foreign Minister and Nauru's President Russ Joseph Kun have signed a joint communiqué that reaffirms diplomatic relations between Taiwan and the island country in Micronesia and pledges "to deepen cooperation in areas such as trade and investment, coast guard affairs, port management, police affairs, ICT, vocational training, climate change, and women's empowerment."

The signing of the communiqué took place during Kun's six-day visit to Taiwan last week that also included a meeting with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. [Foreign Ministry, Taiwan] [Focus Taiwan]

Thailand and Japan elevate ties to comprehensive strategic partnership

(fj) Thailand and Japan have elevated their bilateral ties to the level of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met in the context of the APEC Leaders' Meeting held in Bangkok.

The elevation of ties follows the signature of "The Five-Year Joint Action Plan on Japan-Thailand Strategic Economic Partnership" by the two countries' foreign ministers on November 17. The guiding document for bilateral economic relations focuses, among other things, on infrastructure and the Bio-Circular-Green Economy, the sustainability approach that Thailand has been pushing as one of the major takeaways during its hosting year of APEC. [The Nation Thailand 1]

The importance that the two countries accord to their economic ties was further underscored by a meeting between Thai Minister of Commerce, Jurin Laksanawisit, and the Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Yasutoshi Nishimura on November 16. With the general topic of discussion being the prospect of deepening commercial cooperation and furthering trade, the two presented a project to strengthen business networks between Japanese and ASEAN companies. [The Nation Thailand 2]

While the Thai Foreign Ministry noted that the elevation of bilateral ties reflects a mutual interest in deepening "cooperation on all fronts", economic aspects clearly remain much more pertinent to the Japan-Thai bilateral than more contentious security cooperation. As geopolitical tensions in the Asia-Pacific are rising, it remains unlikely that the present elevation in tier will see the two nations join hands in a broader number of strategically important dimensions. [The Nation Thailand 1]

Vietnam, UK, EU negotiating financing package for transition away from coal

(ih) Vietnam is negotiating a climate financing package with the EU and UK to help the country transition away from coal and increase the use of renewable energy sources. The Just Energy Transition Partnership, as the package is called, will likely provide financing in the range of USD 11-14 billion, of which USD 5-7 billion would come from public loans and grants. The

remaining balance of the financing package would originate from private sector sources. The parties involved intend to announce the deal on December 14. during the EU-ASEAN summit, if the negotiations are finished by that time. [Bloomberg]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

29 November 2022 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Solving America's Military Recruiting Crisis

Fiscal year 2022 appears to be the worst year for military recruiting in terms of meeting numerical goals since the start of the All-Volunteer Force. 2023 is believed to be even more challenging. This hybrid event offers insights on the causes and possible solutions to the military recruiting crisis in the USA.

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

23 November 2022 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, Belgium

The Sound of Economics Live: Reflections on COP27

This livestream event looks at what was said and decided at this year's COP27 in Egypt, addressing the following questions. What are the preliminary impressions? Are we delivering on the Paris Agreement

and how efficient is COP in getting there? We ask these and more questions while unpacking the meeting.

You can find more information and register at [Bruegel].

25 November 2022 @ 2:00-4:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, Belgium

Crisis-proofing the EU: internal market in the service of external resilience

This livestream event explores sources of EU resilience: external initiative Global gateway and internal instruments such as the EU industrial policy and the internal market. How can the internal market develop to act as a cornerstone of EU's external resilience?

Visit [Bruegel] to learn more about the event.

28 November 2022 @ 5:00-6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, Belgium

Inequalities, inclusion, and employment: a transatlantic perspective

This livestream roundtable discusses factors that contribute to inequalities on both sides of the Atlantic in the US and EU, and looks at how should policymakers address them?

See [Bruegel] for more event details.

25 November 2022 @ 10:00 a.m. - 12:50 p.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Malaysia's 15th General Election – Results and Analysis

This webinar analyzes different aspects of Malaysia November 19 general election including seat configurations; coalition formation and campaign strategies; the role of the media; and campaign dynamics and results in different parts of the country.

If you are interested in joining the event, register at [ISEAS].

28 November 2022 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Torn Between Two Powers: The Philippines in the US-China Rivalry

This online seminar lays out the preliminary contours of the Philippines' foreign policy under the Marcos Jr administration, focusing on the following questions: What are the foremost foreign policy challenges faced by the Philippines? How will the Marcos Jr administration hedge and balance its relations between the two superpowers? What are the options for the Philippines if contingencies arise from the regional flashpoints brought about by the intense rivalry between Beijing and Washington?

See [ISEAS] for further information.

Recent book releases

Maria Ressa, ***How to Stand Up to a Dictator: The Fight for Our Future***, Harper, 320 pages, to be published on November 29, 2022. For a review, see [The Guardian]

Andy Greenberg, ***Tracers in the Dark: The Global Hunt for the Crime Lords of Cryptocurrency***, Doubleday, 384 pages, published on November 15, 2022. The book is reviewed in [The New York Times].

Paul Amar, Lisa Rofel, Fernando Brancoli, Maria Amelia Viteri, and Consuelo Fernandez (eds.), ***The Tropical Silk Road: The Future of China in South America***, Stanford University Press, 472 pages, to be published on November 29, 2022, with a review in [Asian Review of Books].

Barney Walsh, ***Ugandan Agency within China-Africa Relations: President Museveni and China's Foreign Policy in East Africa***, Bloomsbury, 232 pages, published on October 20, 2022. Visit [Asian Review of Books] for a review.

Calls for Papers

The ***co-editors*** of the ***volume "Family and Social Change in the Global South: A Gendered Perspective***" invite proposal for a book chapter/article. The deadline for submission of proposals is May 29, 2023. For more information, visit [CFP].

Lingue e Letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente (LEA), a double-blind peer-reviewed international scholarly journal of the University of Florence, welcomes proposals for article to be published in its issue on the theme of ***"Past and present changes in gender dynamics"***. The closing date for submissions is May 8, 2023. More about the call for papers at [University of Florence].

Jobs and positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for an ***International Energy Efficiency Action Plan Expert*** to be based in Baghdad, Iraq. The deadline for submission of applications is December 6, 2022. For more information, visit [UNDP].

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 **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].

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].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is hiring a ***Senior Progamme Development Advisor***. This position is based in the USA. The closing date for application is February 23, 2023. More about the position at [IRC].

POLITICO, a global news and information company at the intersection of politics and policy, welcomes applications for the position of ***Intelligence Analyst*** to be based in Brussels. Responsibilities focus on written analysis, sharp summaries of policy debates and analysis of legislative files. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. Further details of the vacancy are available at [POLITICO].

European Endowment for Democracy (EED) is looking for a ***Research & Activity Coordinator*** to be based Brussels. Core responsibility is to coordinate research related activities related to EED's work in Eurasia. The deadline for application is December 18, 2022. See [Euro Brussels] for more information.

Team:

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