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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone celebrating Morocco's Proclamation of Independence Day in this week.

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

China: Final end to zero-COVID policy

(ms) After the rapid departure from its zero-COVID policy, which has been in effect for about three years, China finally said goodbye to its COVID policy with the opening of the border to Hong Kong and the lifting of the quarantine requirement for people entering China.

The move comes ahead of the lunar new year which falls on January 22 which will see large masses of Chinese people travel home for the holidays. [The Guardian]

Meanwhile, on January 8, China's Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) announced that Pfizer's antiviral COVID-19 drug Paxlovid will not be included in the list of medicines covered by basic medical insurance, citing the U.S. pharmaceutical company's high drug price as the reason.

Paxlovid has so far been covered by the country's universal health insurance due to temporary measures dating back to March last year. Pfizer did not agree to the price reduction demanded by the Chinese side for inclusion in basic coverage, which would make the drug available through state insurance systems, according to the NHSA. Pfizer already cut prices by as much as 62 percent over recent negotiations with the NHSA.

Pfizer will, however, continue to cooperate with the Chinese government and will continue to make the COVID-19 drug available to the Chinese population through the existing channels.

In addition, the Chinese government also is still in negotiations with Pfizer on a licensing agreement that would allow domestic companies to manufacture generic versions of Paxlovid. Five Chinese companies have been producing low-cost generic versions of Paxlovid for low-income countries under an agreement with the U.N.-backed Medicines Patent Pool, but they are not allowed to sell the products in China. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China: Rumors about a possible relaxation of "Three Red Lines" property rules

(ms) According to reports, the Chinese government is working on plans to relax and adjust the restrictions on borrowing for property and move away from the so-called "Three Red Lines" in order to tackle the existing housing crisis in the country.

The "Three Red Lines" are policies introduced in August 2020 which limit the amount of new debt incurred by property companies following certain debt-to-cash, debt-to-assets and debt-to-equity ratios. The strict requirements are seen as having contributed to China's biggest real estate crisis that hit the country last year, with many construction companies including Evergrande, which was at the time China's largest developer, unable to comply with the regulations due to their large debts, resulting in many liquidity shortages, leading to construction stoppages and non-completion of many construction projects across the country.

Under the planned new regulations, the restrictions on the debt growth of developers are to be relaxed, the amount of the relaxation is to be dependent on how many of the "Three Red Lines" are complied with by the respective company. Initial plans call for companies that meet all three thresholds to be exempt from

credit caps instead of the current 15 percent annual debt growth and to be able to use bank guarantees to pay deposits on land purchases. [Bloomberg 1] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Meanwhile, the Chinese government is said to be planning further support measures for the country's big real estate firms, with the Financial Stability and Development Committee reportedly having urged banking and securities regulators to help shore up the balance sheets of some "systemically important" developers. The reason for this, according to experts, is that in order to be qualified for the planned measures, companies must prove in an audit that they have reliable financial statements and have not committed any serious violations, such as non-payment of debts. [Bloomberg 2]

In addition to the support for enterprises, the Minister of Housing and Urban-rural Development, announced on January 5, in line with a People's Bank of China (PBC) notice published the same day, that first-time home buyers will be supported by lowering down-payment rates and mortgage interest rates. Local authorities may, if the prices of newly built homes fall for three consecutive months within a year, maintain, lower, or even eliminate the minimum interest rates on loans for a first home. The measure aims to restore consumer confidence in China's real estate market, which has suffered greatly from the debt crisis and COVID-19. [South China Morning Post]

China: Fear of Beijing's interference in appointment of Dalai Lama's successor

(ms) The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), which is sometimes referred to as the Tibetan government-in-exile, has expressed concern that the Chinese government will interfere in the appointment of a successor of the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso.

The CTA fears that, like in 1995, China is trying to exert influence over the appointment of the spiritual leader, when they were accused of detaining the then six-year-old boy Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, who was appointed the 11th Panchen Lama, the second highest spiritual leader of Tibet and co-responsible for the appointment of the new and then 15th Dalai Lama. He has not been seen since and China appointed its own candidate. [Outlook India]

Already in early October, a report by the International Tibet Network (ITN) appeared [ITN] claiming to possess Chinese government documents proving that the

Chinese government plans to appoint its own successor to the Dalai Lama [see AiR No. 41, October/2022, 2]. At the time, the Chinese government did not respond to the allegations.

However, regarding the newly formulated concerns, the Chinese government insisted that it "will support and guide the work of finding the successor of the 14th Dalai Lama and the successor, like his predecessors, will be finally approved by the central government." It also accused the current Dalai Lama of spreading lies about the Chinese government. [Global Times]

China: Ant Group receives permission for raising USD 1.5 billion

(ms) The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) has announced on January 4 that Alibaba subsidiary Ant Group's plan to raise the equivalent of USD 1.5 billion for its consumer unit has been approved, signaling progress in the government-ordered overhaul of the financial technology company after its failed initial public offering (IPO) in October 2020 [see AiR No. 46, November/2020, 3].

Ant Group's consumer credit division was allowed to increase its capital from USD 1.16 billion to USD 2.7 billion.

The approval reflects the government's easing of the crackdown on the big tech sector, which began at the end of last year, when big tech companies were given a key role to play in the recovery of the Chinese economy. [Associated Press] [Bloomberg]

In response, and because of the accompanying impact on China's relationships with domestic major technology companies, not only Alibaba's share price but also those of other major Chinese technology companies rose by up to more than 10 percent. [CNBC]

Shortly after the announcement of the permission, Ant Group announced that Jack Ma, founder and until then main shareholder, will give up large parts of his shares in Ant Group. Until now, Ma had held 50.5 percent of the voting rights in Ant Group, but with the relinquishment of his stake, these are now expected to fall to 6.2 percent, according to Reuters. It is not yet known to what extent this relinquishment of shares was linked as a condition to the permission for the expansion. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China: Xi's continuing crackdown on academia

(ms) An article of Hong Kong-based newspaper South China Morning Post draws attention to the current challenges Chinese scholars are facing in their academic work in China.

The newspaper cites Chinese academics who describe ever-growing difficulties in expressing their scientific views and exchanging them with colleagues and fellow scholars in public. This applies especially to positions that deviate from those held and promoted by the Chinese Communist Party. They added that at universities a professor's evaluation in the social sciences is rather based on his/her contribution to the party's ideology rather than academic performance while fear of student informants and surprise inspectors is widespread.

The cited professors claim that the suppression of scholarship has already been showing consequences, as the ability of students to develop critical and innovative thinking in social sciences are showing signs of impairment. Furthermore, an increase in hostility towards "foreign actors" is noticeable in the work of students. [South China Morning Post]

China: Aircraft carrier Shandong holds combat-oriented exercises

(ms) China's second aircraft carrier, the Shandong, successfully completed combat-oriented training in the South China Sea on December 4, according to Chinese state broadcaster CCTV.

The military exercises come almost simultaneously with the start of the annual People's Liberation Army (PLA) training for the new year. A video from CCTV demonstrated the capabilities of the respective forces. [Global Times 1]

In a video released at the same time, a new semi-submersible heavy-lift ship, the Yinmahu, was presented showing it during ship-transport trials. The ship could play an important role in transporting equipment and ships, especially in the event of war, or could serve as a makeshift dock that could complete ship repairs on site. [South China Morning Post]

Also overlapping in time were the exercises of the Shandong in the South China Sea and those of China's first aircraft carrier of the Liaoning in the Western

Pacific, which included orbiting the U.S. military base on the Micronesian islands of Guam [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1].

The deployment of two aircraft carriers in two different waters speaks, in the view of Chinese analysts, to the PLA's increasing military quality and capacity. [Global Times 2]

China: Start of second construction phase of Shenhai-1 gas field

(ms) The China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) announced it has begun the construction of the second phase of China's first independently developed ultra-deepwater gas field, the Shenhai-1.

Shenhai-1 is located nearly 200 kilometers off the coast of southern Hainan Province. With the second phase, which is expected to include 12 new wells, the peak annual output of the block is expected to rise from 3 billion to 4.5 billion cubic meters, which would cover 90 percent of Hainan Province's 2021 gas consumption.

In China's goals to reach the peak of carbon emissions 2030 and to become climate neutral by 2060, natural gas plays an important role, as it has been designated by the Chinese government as a transitional resource.

Shenhai-1 is expected to become even more prominent in supplying fuel to the Greater Bay Area as production expands. [CGTN] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Tokyo government to offer financial incentives to fight declining birth rate

(dql) In a bid to tackle the declining birth rate, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has announced plans to offer about USD 38 per month to those aged 18 and younger, regardless of the income of the parents.

The city government cited high education costs as one cause for parents' reluctance to have children. [The Mainichi]

In an earlier move, the Japanese government announced to increase financial incentives to families to move out of greater Tokyo in a bid to lower the city's population density and to address population decline

in regions that are hit by the migration of younger people to Tokyo, Osaka and other big cities [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1]

Japan: Suspected shooter of former Prime Minister Abe to stand trial

(dql) Tetsuya Yamagami, the suspect in the shooting death of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is set to face indictment after the conclusion of a nearly six-month period of evaluation to determine his mental ability to stand trial.

Prosecutors are expected to indict him on charges of murder and other offenses on January 13. [The Mainichi]

On July 8 former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was shot dead during his Upper House election campaign speech for the ruling Liberal Democratic [see AiR No. 28, July/2022, 2].

North Korea: Former foreign minister's execution

(sm) According to a major Japanese newspaper, former North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Yong Ho, who played an important role in facilitating North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's summits with former US president Donald Trump in 2018 and 2019, was executed last year.

Ri had not been sighted since the beginning of 2019, after failed denuclearization talks between the US and North Korea in Vietnam. The last mention of Ri in North Korean media was in April 2020, when he was further removed from the position in the state affairs commission, after he had already been fired from his job as foreign minister. The South Korean national intelligence service confirms that he had been removed from his position, but holds no certain proof of his execution.

The Japanese Yomiuri Shimbun claimed Ri had been executed between summer and fall of 2022. The reason for Ri's alleged execution and that of a few fellow diplomats working at the North Korean embassy in the UK could not be confirmed.

The revelation comes after the North Korean state media recently confirmed the demotion of high level military official Pak Jong Chon. Several key party and

military officials have furthermore been reshuffled by leader Kim Jong-un, in an apparent attempt to retain more power over ruling elites. [KBS World] [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1] [Reuters] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: North Korean drone enters no fly-zone around presidential office

(sm) One of the five North Korean drones which entered South Korean territory on December 26 was found to have flown into the no fly zone around the South Korean presidential office in Seoul.

A South Korean military official confirmed the information that the unmanned drone had been sighted within the banned 3,7 kilometer radius around president Yoon Suk-yeol's office on January 5. The drone had allegedly briefly flown over the Northern tip of the zone without coming close to any key defense facilities in an area dubbed "P-73". The official dismissed suspicions that the drone may have taken photographs of the presidential office or Joint Chiefs of Staff headquarters, given the altitude at which the vehicle flew.

This has raised additional aerial security questions, after the military officially apologized last week for having failed to shoot down any of the five drones. Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup brought up the drone incursion into the presidential no fly zone in a anti-drone briefing attended by Yoon.

Shortly after the incident, the president ordered an additional anti-drone unit to be created within the South Korean military and sought to update its anti-drone military technology. The military held air defense drills later on January 5 and trained for the potential incursion of more North Korean drones into the South Korean territory.

The army is furthermore considering buying an Israeli anti-drone technology called Sky Spotter system, which aims at detecting unwanted aerial activity early.
[see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4] [Yonhap News Agency_1] [Yonha News Agency_2]

South Korea: Navy holds year's first anti-drone drill

(sm) On January 4 and 5, the South Korean navy held its first maritime and aerial exercises of 2023, aiming at

better countering future potential North Korean drone attacks.

The naval exercises on January 4 took place in the seas around the Korean peninsula and involved 13 warships and four aircrafts. They carried out both tactical and formation training, such as moving in rows or maneuvering in a synchronized manner, as well as live-fire training. The drills were led by chief of naval operations admiral Lee Jong-ho, who insisted on the importance of realistic training to psychologically prepare soldiers in the case of an attack.

The anti-drone training on January 5 was held in Gyeonggi, Gangwon and greater Seoul area and attended by high level military officials such as the joint chiefs of staff. Both the ground operations command, and air command took part in the drills. Some 50 aircrafts, including 500MD choppers and KA-1 light attack airplanes participated.

The exercises come after the penetration of North Korean drones into South Korean territory on December 26. President Yoon Suk-yeol had ordered the military to prepare for a better retaliation against drone attacks, as the military did not manage to shoot down any of the five North Korean drones in question. Anti-drone drills had previously taken place on December 29 shortly after the incident. [KBS World] [see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Education's financing to become decentralized

(sm) On January 8, the government backed by the ruling People Power Party (PPP) decided to transfer the power to finance local universities to provincial governments in the next two years.

The decision was taken in the first 2023 regular high-level meeting attended by top government and PPP officials, such as Prime Minister Han Duck-soo and chief of staff Kim Dae-ki among others. In the context of the educational reform planned by the Yoon administration for 2023, regulations on the operation of universities were loosened to give them more authority on department structure, student numbers, and assets.

Provincial universities have been struggling to attract more students due to a decreasing birth rate and the popularity of metropolitan universities. The reform is

aimed at empowering those universities and their local governments with funds.

Kim asked for the support of the main opposition Democratic Party (DP), which holds the majority of seats in parliament, to pass the structural reforms in education, labor, and pensions proposed by the current government.

Strong party rivalry has caused 95 out of 100 proposed bills to fail passing in parliament. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Parliament passes motion for extension of probe into Itaewon incident

(sm) On January 6, the South Korean parliament passed a motion to extend the period of the parliamentary investigation into the Itaewon incident by ten days until January 17.

The decision came after the public voiced its criticism over the briefness of the probe, as it had been delayed by party conflict over the annual budget in late 2022. The ruling People Power Party (PPP) agreed with the extension, which was proposed by the main opposition Democratic Party (DP) a day before.

The investigation into the tragic crowd crush which killed some 159 partygoers on October 29 will now last 45 days in total. Additional hearings are scheduled to take place this week. In the meanwhile, the police investigation running parallel to the parliamentary investigation has found the officials of the interior ministry and Seoul city government not responsible for the mismanagement of the incident. [KBS World] [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2] [Korea Times] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Ruling party lawmaker takes back his candidature for party chief

(sm) On January 5, ruling People Power Party (PPP) representative Kweon Seong-dong stated he would take back his candidature in the upcoming party leadership race, set to be held on March 8.

Kweon, as a close confidant of incumbent president Yoon Suk-yeol, explained he did not wish to jeopardize the party's harmony and the next presidential elections

by creating misunderstandings around Yoon's favoritism towards him.

The PPP will elect its new leader on March 8, during its national convention. The party has been led by an interim leadership committee since August 2022, when its former chief Lee Jung-seok was suspended over allegations of sexual bribery.

PPP representatives Kim Gi-hyeon, Ahn Cheol-soo, and Yoon Sang-hyun have currently declared their candidature for the leadership race. [see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4] [Yonhap News Agency] [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan: Legislature approves amendment bill to counter dee pfake pornography

(dql) Taiwan's parliament has adopted amendments to the Criminal Code aimed at curbing the use of technology-enabled sexual images and video.

Under the amendments the production and spread of such images and video for profit constitutes a crime punishable by a prison term of up to seven years. They also contain an additional article that targets a new form of crime using artificial intelligence - deep fakes - which involve inserting the likeness of a person into an existing image or video.

The move comes against the backdrop of the arrest in 2021 of a Taiwanese YouTuber for producing and selling "deepfake" pornographic videos of female politicians and other prominent women. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Tactical drone involved in combat readiness drill for the first time

(dql) Taiwan's army has carried out an exercise that involved for the first time a tactical close-range rotary-wing drone.

The drone was developed by Taiwan's state-run weapons developer National Chung-Shan Institute of Science & Technology (NCSIST).

The exercise focused on a simulation of a raid of an airport by invading forces, prompting a combined combat operation with infantry forces and armored battalions to repel an enemy takeover. [Focus Taiwan]

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

Bangladesh: Court orders police to confiscate properties of BNP chairman Rahman

(az) After issuing an arrest warrant against Tareque Rahman, the acting chairman of Bangladesh's main opposition party, a Dhaka court went a step further and ordered police to confiscate Rahman's bank accounts and land-related properties after a case was filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission. [The Daily Star]

According to the Commission, Rahman, his wife and his mother have allegedly accumulated illegal assets worth around USD 464,000, and they have concealed the information of wealth worth around USD 208,000.

Rahman and his family have been residing in the United Kingdom since they left Bangladesh in September 2008.

Bangladesh: Minority communities demand protection

(az) Against the larger backdrop of national elections to be held in December this year, minority communities in Bangladesh are increasingly concerned about possible pre-election violence. [The Daily Star]

The general secretary of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Oikya Parishad has demanded the implementation of seven points and road march programs for minority communities in Bangladesh. He also pointed to the negligence of the ruling party in fulfilling the rights of minorities around the country.

To protect their own rights and interests, the minority groups are pushing forward their own movements to fulfill the promises. And to strengthen their movement further, they have demanded to form a minority ministry, as the government allegedly neglects to implement fruitful initiatives for them.

Bangladesh: Rights groups blame government for laxity in protecting the indigenous Mro community

(az) Three human rights organizations have blamed the Bangladeshi government for allegedly failing to protect the indigenous Mro community, a subgroup of the Chin people who live in the border regions between Myanmar , Bangladesh, and India. [The Daily Star]

Recently, 100 attackers hired by the rubber industries in the Lama upazila have blazed and destroyed dozens of Mro homes. Besides, the attackers also looted mobile phones, household items, poultries, cattle, and other belongings of the Mro people. During the attack, the victims fled to the surrounding jungle area to avoid harm. Because of the multiple acts of violence by the dominant rubber plantation industries, the rights organizations demanded the resettlement of the Mro communities, as the inactivity of the government may lead to further attacks in the future.

Besides the demand to ensure justice by the government, the Human Rights Forum also demanded that a probe committee be formed, and attackers be punished through a proper investigation. Due to the sudden attack on the indigenous people in that area, the organizations also urged the government to provide immediate food support and shelter for the victims.

Bangladesh: Sylhet tea industry faces upset as tea workers demand dues

(az) Followed by Bangladeshi tea workers' demand for the payment of dues, several labor organizations have stepped up for dues stretching back some 20 months.

After having several meetings with the plantation owners to demand the due payment and eventually informing Prime Minister Hasina, the tea workers did not find any profitable solution to the issue. At last, they decided to go on the streets to demonstrate bigger movements.

In August last year, the tea workers demanded a wage hike, which halted the industry for 11 days. However, the wage was later on increased by only around 50 cents after the prime minister intervened in the issue. The workers are now planning to wage a bigger movement if they do not get their due payments soon. [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh: Persistent decrease of government spending in medical sector

(az) As the government continuously decreases the expenses for medical purposes, people in Bangladesh are now forced to bear 75 percent of the total medical expenses, according to a report by the Health Economics Unit (HEU). The report also revealed that while in 2018, the total government expenditure for the health sector was around 28 percent, the amount fell to 23 percent in 2020. Because of the shrinking budget for the medical sector, people are even selling their lands and property to treat major diseases like paralysis, cancer, and kidney diseases. [Prothom Alo]

In separate developments, another report recently revealed that the COVID-10 pandemic has disrupted the steady flow of foreign remittances, which account for roughly seven percent of the country's gross domestic product. [Asia Times]

India: Election Commission plans remote voting for internal migrants

(lm) The Election Commission of India (ECI) has said it is ready to pilot a remote voting proposal for domestic migrants using a newly developed "multi-constituency remote electronic voting machine" that will such individuals to vote from their place of residence so that they do not have to travel either to their home state or district to cast their ballot. [The Straits Times]

India: Supreme Court stays order on mass evictions in Uttarakhand state

(wr/lm) India's Supreme Court has stayed an order by the high court of Uttarakhand state directing the removal of encroachments on Indian Railways' land - a decision that would have led to the eviction of around 50,000 people. The apex court said a "workable solution" must be found. [BBC]

The legal battle began after a public interest litigation on illegal mining in the area was filed in 2013 - later, the scope of the case was widened to include the alleged encroachments as well. In December last year, a two-judge bench of the Uttarakhand high court had asked the railways to "use the forces to any extent determining upon need" to evict the "unauthorised occupants" after giving them a week's notice. From January 1, the residents started getting eviction notices. [MSN] [Hindustan Times]

India: Kerala assembly speaker criticizes BJP for not holding parliamentary debates

(wr) The speaker of legislative assembly in India's Kerala state, A.N. Shamseer, has criticized the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party for passing bills in the national assembly without sufficient debate. He also made allegations against Prime Minister Narendrai Modi for interfering with the judiciary and the Election Commission. [ThePrint]

India: Protests grow after Delhi women dragged to her death

(wr/lm) The death of a woman in India's capital Delhi on January 1 has provoked outrage and calls for justice.

The woman was driving home from work when her scooter and a car collided. News reports say the car driver and four passengers, all male, did not stop, dragging her body for miles through the streets of outer Delhi. The dead woman's family have alleged that she was sexually assaulted because her body was naked when it was recovered - but police have said the post-mortem report does not indicate this. [The Guardian]

The case has also sparked a political row in Delhi. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which governs the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi, has been protesting against the central government over what it calls weak security in the city. The AAP does not have any control

over the city's police force, which reports to the home ministry. [CNN]

India: Google alleges antitrust body copied parts of European Commission ruling on Android abuse

(wr/lm) Google has told an Indian appeals tribunal that the country's antitrust investigators copied parts of a European Commission ruling against the technology company for abusing the market dominance of its Android operating system. The Competition Commission of India (CCI) in October last year fined Google USD 161 million for exploiting its dominant position in markets such as online search and the Android app store, and asked it to change restrictions imposed on smartphone makers related to pre-installing apps. [Reuters] [MSN]

India: Visiting Microsoft CEO meets with prime minister, external affairs minister

(wr) India's external affairs and prime ministers have met the CEO of Microsoft in the Indian capital New Delhi while hosting the Microsoft Summit. The chairman praised India's digital transformation over the period. On his four-day visit to India, he showed confidence in the tech dynamics and digital potential of India and ensured investments in businesses. [The Print] [Business Standard] [India Today]

In related developments, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Microsoft have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that seeks to empower space tech start-ups across the country with technology tools and platforms, go-to-market support and mentoring to help them scale and become enterprise ready. [Microsoft]

India: Government designates The Resistance Front as terrorist organization

(wr) India's home ministry has declared the The Resistance Front (TRF), an offshoot of the militant Islamist Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) group, as a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). A gazette notification said the TRF came into existence in 2019 as a proxy outfit of the LeT, a

Pakistan-based organization that operates against India and Pakistan. [Deccan Herald] [Money Control]

In related developments, at least ten people have died in explosions and shootings that occurred in recent days in India's Jammu and Kashmir union territory. The attacks have taken place in the mostly Hindu-populated parts of Kashmir. [Voice in America]

India: Defence minister reviews Andaman and Nicobar Command preparedness

(wr) Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on January 3 reviewed the operational preparedness of the Andaman and Nicobar Command, India's first and only tri-service theater command. He also took stock of the infrastructural development in the region. The Nicobar and Andaman Islands, India's farthest military outpost, holds geo-strategic significance for New Delhi in light of the growing presence of China in the Indian Ocean. [Hindustan Times]

In related developments, Indian and Indonesian officials in a recent meeting agreed to strengthen links between Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Aceh - a plan that is part of the Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific signed in 2018 between the two countries. [The Straits Times]

Maldives: Lawyers of former President Yameen to file appeal once trial report is available

(lm) The lawyers of former Maldives President Abdulla Yameen have said they will appeal against his conviction and jailing for 11 years on corruption and money laundering charges once they have received the trial report. [raajje]

Yameen, the opposition Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) candidate for the next election due this year, was sentenced to 11 years in prison and fined USD 5 million last December after being found guilty of corruption and money laundering charges related to receiving kickbacks from a private company.

Nepal: Newly appointed Prime Minister 'Prachanda' survives vote of confidence

(lm) Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" survived a decisive vote of confidence in parliament on January 10 with support from both his seven-party coalition and the opposition. He received the support of 268 of the 270 members who were present in the lower house of parliament in the voting. [abc news]

Dahal was appointed prime minister on December 25 for a third time, in alliance with the main opposition Communist Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party after the national election had returned a hung parliament. At present, he has named only three deputies and four Cabinet ministers.

Pakistan: Pakistan Taliban threatens top political leadership including prime minister

(fm/tj) The Pakistan Taliban, known by its acronym TTP, on January 4 warned the country's ruling parties of "concrete action" against their top leadership in the government for "declaring war" against it during a meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC) two days earlier. [Al Jazeera]

The NSC, which includes Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, the newly appointed army chief General Asim Munir and other officials, held a two-day meeting on December 30 and January 2 to assess the security situation in Pakistan. During the meeting, the political and military leadership vowed that no nation will be allowed to shelter militants who stage attacks against the country — a thinly veiled reference to neighboring Afghanistan. [AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1]

Against this backdrop, the TTP in a statement last week claimed that the Pakistani government was acting on orders from the United States. The statement also included a note of caution for Pakistan's religion-based political parties, urging them not to be a part of any action against the group.

Sri Lanka: Local elections to be held before the end of February

(sn) Sri Lanka will hold local government elections before the end of February, officials said on January 4, after they were delayed by a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a brief statement, the Election Commission said nominations for the more than 8,000

counselor positions would be open from January 18 to 21, after which the vote must be held within 28 days. [Al Jazeera]

President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who replaced his deposed predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa, faces potential embarrassment in the vote, as he was the United National Party's sole representative in parliament. He has attempted to stall the polls, saying the bankrupt country cannot afford to spend the USD 27.6 million they would cost, but the independent Election Commission went ahead anyway.

In the first days of 2023, a retired military official signed a writ petition to suspend elections due to the economic crisis in Sri Lanka. A few months earlier, an oppositional member of Parliament accused the Election Commission of delaying local elections. [The Island] [AiR No. 49, December/2022, 1]

Sri Lanka: Former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa returns from Dubai

(sn) Sri Lanka's former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who was ousted from power last year over his administration's poor handling of the island nation's economy, returned to the country on January 5 from a private trip to Dubai. [ADA derana] [The Economic Times]

Earlier this month, Rajapaksa applied for restoration of his US citizenship after he failed to get asylum in any country upon fleeing Sri Lanka during the anti-government protests in 2022. However, Washington is yet to consider the request. [AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4]

Sri Lanka: Cabinet approves new electricity tariff without disclosing raise

(lm) Sri Lanka's Cabinet on January 9 approved new electricity tariffs to take effect later this month, but did not disclose how much higher the new tariffs would be. Authorities raised electricity tariffs by 75 percent last August and a Cabinet proposal to raise them by a further 25 percent had been under consideration this week. [The Straits Times] [Xinhua]

Sri Lanka: Court requests British High Commission report on state minister's citizenship

(sn) The Colombo Chief Magistrate's Court has ordered the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to obtain a report from the British High Commission in Colombo on the citizenship of Diana Gamage, a British citizen and a member of Parliament. Gamage is facing the risk of losing her parliamentary seat for not holding Sri Lankan citizenship. [ADA derana]

Sri Lanka: NMSJ urges passing bill seeking to regulate election campaign financing

(sn) The National Movement for Social Justice (NMSJ) has urged Sri Lanka's parliament to pass a proposed bill on election campaign financing. The organization said that the act seeks to foster conditions of free and fair election culture by regulating electoral campaign expenses. The NMSJ chairman noted that it is still essential to include provisions in the bill, for example a constraining list of potential funding organizations for the election expenses matters from those which receive foreign aid. [The Island]

Sri Lanka: Activist held in remand custody writes letter calling residents to take action

(sn) A leader of the Inter-University Students Federation (IUSF) leader in custody for more than 130 days under Sri Lanka's contentious Prevention of Terrorism Act has written a letter calling on the general public to come together in times of struggle. [Colombo Gazette] [News First]

Sri Lanka: President orders Senior Advisor on National Security to create a secretariat for illicit drug suppression

(sn) Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe has asked his Senior Advisor on National Security and the Chief of Staff Sagala Ratnayaka to create a secretariat empowered to prevent illicit drug use in the country. This security division should obstruct the import of drugs and suppress dealers within the country.

Parliament plans to pass an act that will authorize the new administration to implement the Presidential Task Force on Drug Prevention. The government launched the Presidential Task Force in December 2022 to prevent the use of dangerous drugs, particularly among school children. [Colombo Page]

Sri Lanka: Forest density declined to 16 percent, report says

(sn) The Center for Environment and Nature Studies (CENS) in a report says that environmental destruction has caused the forest density in Sri Lanka to shrink to 16 percent from 83 percent in 1882. The data from the CENS show that in 2021, 65 acres of forest were destroyed per day, ranking the country among the top four states destroying primary forests. In addition, the CENS indicates that climate change significantly impacted the island state in 2022. Severe droughts and natural crops' decrease due to warmer temperatures further caused the forest density to decline. [Colombo Page]

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

Cambodia: PM exposes nephew's mistress and requires him to return to his family to avoid demotion

(sn) Following the beginning of 2023, Cambodian PM Hun Sen exposed photos and made a public statement on Facebook about the relationship between his

nephew - lieutenant general Hun Chea and his mistress.

Hun Chea is married to another woman, with whom he has children. The Prime Minister posted photographs of his nephew with a mistress, calling out the Lieutenant General for adultery. He also named the women and warned his nephew to reconsider moral values to preserve the three stars of his Lieutenant General status.

Hun Chea received an imprisonment sentence for threatening to kill a person in 2018, was involved in a traffic accident causing a motorcyclist death in 2008, and was reported to be involved in drug use and shootings. The Lieutenant General chose to reunite with his wife following the demands of the Cambodian PM to review existing options. [Khmer Times 1], [VOD News], [PM Hun Sen Facebook], [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia: Social Affairs Ministry responds to the recent death reports in Prey Speu detention center

(sn) The Phnom Penh Social Affairs Centre, Prey Speu, may undergo institutional modernization following several reports of deaths of the detainees placed in the center temporarily.

The Director-General of Technical Affairs at the social affairs Ministry, Toch Channy, said that the request for renovation is pending approval from Minister Vong Soth. He also responded to the inquiries from the NGO (nongovernmental organization) LICADHO to shut down the detention center over the continuous human rights violations.

Toch Channy replied that the investigation determined that some of those claims were true, but the negligence was not the cause of the fatalities. The detainees are often homeless, and there is a level of concern about where to relocate these people if the center is shut down.

International Human Rights organizations, such as Amnesty International, also called the Cambodian government to cease the activity of the Prey Speu Center. The facility is usually used for extrajudicial detention of marginalized and vulnerable populations, and there is no provision for medical treatment in the center. [VOD News], [Phnom Penh Post], [AinR No. 50, December/2022, 2]

Cambodia: Former Kep Official who evades prosecution for assaulting CPP female counterpart remains in search

(sn) Phou Li, a former Kep Province Deputy Governor, has absconded after his removal from office and the court hearing appointment on the acts of aggression towards his female counterparts of December 29, 2022. If convicted - he should receive a jail term of 2 to 5 years.

One woman, the head of the Kep provincial tax office, received significant injuries from the attack, and the victims sued the former authority. PM ordered the removal of the Deputy Governor from the office immediately last week. The General Department of Taxation announced that it seeks legal action against Phou Li from authorities and justice for the attacked women. [Khmer Times], [Camboidaness]

Cambodia: Kandal residents ask for land titles as new international airport construction site merges with their area

(sn) As the new Phnom Penh international airport construction continues, Kandal province residents are substantially becoming affected by the work progress.

Overseas Cambodian Investment Corporation hosts the new airport development. Citizens from four communes of Kendal Strug district reported that workers in the developer company uniform visited to inform them about the necessity to dismantle areas around their houses used for animal up-keeping.

On December 27, 2022, having concerns about the future loss of land ownership by local people, the representatives for Kandal province residents demanded local administration provide the provincial families with land titles. The administration did not respond to the request from residents, but its deputy governor commented that these are merely worries rather than objectively existing issues. [VOD News]

Cambodia: As the NagaWorld strike continues throughout 2023, protesters start to sell food to support themselves

(sn) Despite criticisms, Cambodian courts chose to uphold a verdict detaining Chhim Sithar, a president of

Labour Right supported by the Union of Khmer Employees. She was among the conveners of demonstrations in 2021-2022, aiming to defend the rights of NagaWorld group employees and represent their interests.

In response, the NagaWorld employees continued to strike by peacefully protesting throughout the first week of 2023 in front of the NagaWorld casino. Their demands included the release of union leaders, allowing employees affected by state reduction to return to work, and better wages & working conditions.

Around 100 people gathered in the Phnom Penh central area, near the NagaWorld casino, selling food and souvenirs to support themselves while protesting on December 30, 2022. On January 6, 2023, the strikers requested NagaWorld to contact their foreign company owner to resolve the dragging-on conflict of interests. [Radio Free Asia Dec 28 2022], [Radio Free Asia Dec 30 2022], [Radio Free Asia Jan 6 2023] [AinR No. 48, November/2022, 5], [AinR No. 51, December/2022, 3]

Cambodia demolishes burned down Poipet casino, while some bodies remain unidentified & Cambodians missing

(sn) Following the probe conducted on the fire break out in the Diamond City Hotel casino, Poipet town, on December 28–29, Cambodian authorities ordered demolishing the remaining ruins of the burnt-down facilities. Media reports that Cambodian authorities decided to raze the casino to pave a way for the new construction.

The deputy chairman of the National Committee for Disaster Management confirmed 26 official deaths – one Nepalese, one Malaysian, and the majority being Thai visitors. On the other hand, Nhem Phoeng, the chief of administration at the municipal offices of Poipet, said that most of those who died were employees at the casino.

When the fire broke out, up to 1,500 people could be trapped in the casino. Observers suggest that companies and state authorities might have neglected safety regulations compliance, causing the failure in the electric circuit that led to the infamous accident.

The Cambodian state still gave no official confirmation of Cambodian deaths from the accident and noted that the remaining unidentified bodies were foreign nationals. As such, the public remains concerned with

their lost family members – the former casino employees who are now gone missing. While some still hope to discover their loved ones alive, others – think of how to live after the accident if the government is unwilling to acknowledge the responsibility for these deaths and recognize the need to support the affected families. [Khmer Times], [Aljazeera], [VOD News 1], [VOD News 2], [Radio Free Asia]

Cambodian rapper's "Worker's Blood" video on 2014 protests ordered to be banned by the Culture Ministry

(sn) The Cultural Ministry of Cambodia brought to the attention of the National Police the Cambodian rapper, Kea Sokun, for his music video "Worker's Blood" which calls for justice over state agents killing at least 4 workers in a 2014 Phnom Penh demonstration.

The music video contains old clips of the protests. The Culture Minister, Phoeurng Sackona, ordered the police chief to remove the video from public access. She cited the demand as the clip was "provoking and inciting content that may cause insecurity and social disorder."

The rapper was previously charged in 2020 with "incitement to commit a felony or cause social unrest" and received an 18-month prison sentence for a song he released that criticized the state handling of the Vietnam border dispute. He served the remainder of the verdict in suspension after the release in September 2021. [Radio Free Asia], [VOD News]

Indonesia: Parties reject proposal for closed-list electoral system

(os) Eight parties have made their opposing stance clear in regard to a proposal to return from the current open-list proportional election system to a closed-list system for the 2024 General Election. [Antara News] [The Jakarta Post]

A member of the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has filed a proposal with the Constitutional Court to review the country's election law. The proposal suggests a return to the old closed-list proportional election system. Under that system, voters could only vote for parties. The parties were then responsible for deciding which candidates made the cut according to the number of votes.

Eight pro-government and opposition parties have now released a statement in which the parties stress the importance of maintaining the current system. Under the current open-list system, the electorate can vote for the candidates from the parties directly. According to the statement, this system is pivotal for ensuring democracy in Indonesia. Experts also claim that implementing the old system might be harmful to democracy.

Indonesia: Police officer detained for allegedly taking bribes

(os) Indonesia's Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has arrested a police officer for allegedly taking bribes. [Jakarta Globe]

Police officer Bambang Kayun was accused of misusing his authority and accepting bribes of around USD 380,000 in an inheritance dispute. After further investigation, the KPK identified that Bambang, who is working at the National Police headquarters, has accepted a minimum of USD 3.2 million since 2016 in different cases. The corruption watchdog explained that they would investigate the case in more detail in order to filter out other potential suspects.

Indonesia: Five sentenced to prison in palm oil export scandal

(os) Five individuals were sentenced to jail by a Jakarta court for illegally handing out palm oil export permits. The defendants encompass a former senior official at the trade ministry, a high-profile market analyst, and palm oil company executives. [Jakarta Globe] [Reuters]

Former Trade Ministry's director general of international trade Indrasari Wisnu Wardhana had been accused of taking bribes for issuing export permits for palm oil while exports of the product were restricted by the Indonesian government. In regard to the accusations of abuse of power and causing state losses, he received a prison sentence of three years.

Market analyst Lin Che Wei served as an advisor to the coordinating minister for the economy. He allegedly recommended export permits to companies. He was given a prison sentence of one year. Three business executives of major palm oil companies were also handed prison sentences between twelve and 18 months. All of them will also have to pay a fine.

The defendants were all given much lower sentences than what the prosecutors called for. They preferred imprisonment for them between seven and twelve years. According to the prosecutors, the illegal palm oil exports resulted in about USD 1.2 billion in losses for the Indonesian government.

Indonesia: Rohingya refugees land on Indonesian coast

(os) After hundreds of Rohingya refugees had landed on the Indonesian coast the last year, a boat with 185 refugees has landed again in the province of Aceh. [Reuters]

The majority of people that the boat carried were women and children. In December 2022, over 200 refugees arrived in Indonesia [see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4]. The Muslim minority group is heavily persecuted in their origin country, Myanmar. Thus, they try to flee to other countries, such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the year 2022 might have seen the largest number of deaths of Rohingya refugees at sea in nearly a decade.

Indonesia: Supreme Court upholds death sentence of child rapist

(os) The Indonesian Supreme Court has rejected an appeal by Herry Wirawan, who had raped 13 of his students during his time as a teacher at an Islamic boarding school. As a result, the court upholds his death sentence. [Antara News] [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Initially, Herry received a sentence of life imprisonment for raping and impregnating female underage students between 2016 and 2021. Prosecutors, however, filed an appeal, which resulted in the death sentence given by the West Java High Court. An appeal of this verdict by Herry was now rejected by the Supreme Court. His only legal options left are now requesting a judicial review or a presidential pardon.

The ruling has met mostly positive responses in Indonesia. Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Minister Bintang Puspayoga subscribes to the view that the sentence displays that there is no tolerance for sexual abuse in Indonesia. The National

Commission on Violence Against Women, however, points out that the death penalty does not significantly seem to prevent any future offenders from committing crimes.

Laos: 2023 GDP growth rate of 4.5 percent passed by National Assembly

In the face of mounting economic challenges, the National Assembly has approved a growth rate of 4.5 percent of GDP for 2023. This would constitute a minor increase relative to the recorded 2022 growth rate, which stood at 4.4 percent.

However, high inflation rates are undermining much of the significance of economic goals expressed in terms of Laos's local currency, the Lao Kip. In dollar terms, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita has been declining since 2020, as it fell from USD 2,161 (2020) to USD 2,004 (2021), and further to USD 1,729 in 2022. Continuing this trend, the reported expected GNI per capita in dollar terms by the end of 2023 will be down to USD 1,534. [Vientiane Times 1]

With recent reports pinning the year-to-year inflation from December 2021 to December 2022 at over 39 percent, the government's concomitant announcement that it would aim to keep inflation below a ceiling rate of 9 percent for 2023 is very ambitious. [VientianeTimes 2]

Taking a broader view, the government's public commitment to continued economic growth rings hollow when viewed against the confluence of inflation, a high external debt burden and the destabilizing effect of Chinese controlled special economic zones that constitute major challenges for the country and its newly appointed Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone. [Radio Free Asia]

Laos: 500 KV transmission line to Cambodian border put into operation

(fj) Laos has launched a 200 km long network of 500 Kilovolt power transmission lines from Champasak province in the south of the country to the Cambodian border.

Forming part of the Laotian government's broader strategy to capitalize on the nation's strength in hydropower and other forms of electricity generation, the managing director of the state-owned Electricité du

Laos lauded the project as an important component towards the nation's economic goals. [The Star]

Costing USD 150 million, the project was realized under a so-called build-operate-transfer (BOT) contract by Yunnan Energy Investment. Often used in the development of large-scale infrastructure development projects that are conducted as public-private partnerships, a BOT contract implies that the private company tasked with building the infrastructure will receive a concession to operate the completed project for a certain time before it is returned to public property. The length of the concession to Yunnan Energy Investment has not been reported. [Lao News Agency]

Laos: Green light for mineral exploration in Borikhamxay

(ts) Borikhamxay provincial authorities have recently signed MOUs with Vientiane Energy Continent Company Limited, green-lighting the exploration for minerals in two districts of the province, Xaychamphon and Viengthong. Silica will be explored for nine months in the former district while Vienthong will simultaneously experience the search for ore stone for a longer period of twelve months.

Preconditions prevail in the Lao Official Gazette that the prospector must have at least five years of experience in the pertaining field. Further required is the early declaration of financial status with a minimum of USD 10 million for those looking to explore precious metals, e.g., gold and silver. The less value the mineral places, the less money an investor requires for the exploration. [Vientiane Times]

Malaysia: Proposals for alternatives to death penalty for over 1,300 inmates on death row under review

(dql) Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister has disclosed that the government is reviewing proposals for alternative punishment for more than 1,300 inmates on death row.

This comes after in December newly appointed law and institutional reform minister Azalina Othman announced that the unity government will introduce amendments to the law that carries a mandatory

death sentence when the parliament convenes in February. [The Star] [Anadolu Agency]

Myanmar: Government to grant amnesty for 7,012 prisoners as part of Independence Day celebrations

(ih) Myanmar's military government has granted amnesty to 7,0012 prisoners as part of the country's independence day celebrations. Amongst those granted amnesty was former Minister for Religious Affairs and Culture Thura Aung Ko, as well as a number of journalists, student leaders and activists. [Bangkok Post] [CNN]

Myanmar: Fighting in Karen State severely curtails cross-border trade between Thailand and Myanmar

(ih) The cross-border trade between Thailand and Myanmar has been severely curtailed by ongoing fighting between the Tatmadaw and resistance forces led by Karen National Liberation Army along the Asian Highway between the townships of Kawkareik and Myawaddy in Karen State. Strict security checks by junta forces and restrictive rules governing the value of imports, the currency used in transactions, and requirements to conduct business at the less favorable official exchange rate have also damaged the border trade. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta head calls for international support for 2023 elections in Independence Day speech

(ih) In a speech given during a ceremony celebrating Independence Day in Naypyidaw, junta leader Min Aung Hlaing called on the international community and the people of Myanmar to support an election to be held in August 2023. The first steps towards the election are expected to occur in February, when the country's state of emergency will lapse.

The election is widely seen as an attempt by the military administration to legitimize their regime through an electoral victory. However, the logistics of orchestrating a successful election in the midst of a widespread guerilla war against the government is

likely to be extremely difficult, and it remains unclear if the election would affect any change in Myanmar's current international status. [AP News] [The Diplomat]

Thailand: Government backtracks on entry requirements two days after announcing compulsory vaccination certificates

(fj) Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul has stated that new entry regulations only announced on January 7 and requiring vaccination certificates for all international travelers to Thailand from January 9 onwards will be retracted. Calling such requirements "inconvenient" and noting that enough vaccination doses had been administered globally, he proclaimed that an expert committee had concluded that such controls were unnecessary. [Bangkok Post 1]

On January 7 the the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand had announced obligatory checks of foreign arrivals over the age of 18, which would have required them to provide certification of either two vaccinations, recent recovery, or proof of why they are not able to receive a vaccine. [Bangkok Post 2]

Citing responses from tour operators in many European countries and elsewhere, the Phuket Tourist Association promptly reacted by addressing a letter to Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, Minister of Tourism and Sports Phiphat Ratchakitprasarn and Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul in which the negative impact of the ad-hoc nature of the new entry requirement was pointed out. According to the letter, the restrictions have led to the cancellation of more than 1,000 room-night reservations from Germany alone. [Bangkok Post 3]

The announcement by the Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand came in the wake of China's sudden discontinuation of its Zero Covid Policy, which came with the reopening of borders on January 9. With Chinese tourists playing a major role in Thailand's travel sector, the news of Beijing's border opening has been a cause for hope for the country's tourism-dependent economy.

In the debate ensuing China's reversal, Minister of Public Health Anutin has attempted to assuage popular concerns about a potential rise in Covid infections related to the arrival of Chinese tourists, stating that the health sector was well prepared and that the situation was under control. He suggested that

any entry requirements specifically tailored to Chinese visitors would amount to undue discrimination and were therefore inappropriate. [Bangkok Post 4]

Meanwhile, the Ministers of Public Health, Transport, as well as the Sports and Tourism ministries have personally staged a special welcome for the first Chinese tourists arriving with the first flight operated by Xiamen Air at Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi Airport on January 9. At the reception, officials presented a large banner written in Chinese characters, reportedly translating to "Chinese-Thais come from the same family. Amazing Thailand will always warmly welcome Chinese people". [The Nation Thailand]

Philippines: Country orders colonels and generals to resign

(jd) The Philippines ordered all colonels and generals of the Philippine National Police (PNP) to submit their courtesy resignation as the government seeks to remove top police officers linked to illegal drug trade from the organization.

The order is not mandatory, as appointed government officials were asked to hand in their resignation out of respect for the appointing authority, and will continue to operate until their resignations are accepted.

The Secretary of the Department of the Interior and Local Government stated that the president will only accept the resignation of officers that have proven links with illegal drug trade. [The Star]

Philippines: Military chief suddenly replaced by retiring general

(jd) Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s office has unexpectedly announced the replacement of military chief Bacarro, appointed five months ago to take the place of retiring general Centino, with Centino himself.

Bacarro's term was supposed to end in August 2025, and while Centino is reaching the mandatory age of retirement for the military, a new law now qualifies him for a three-year long term.

The Presidential Communications Office did not state the reason for the change of leadership in the Armed Forces of the Philippines. [AP News] [Rappler]

Philippines: Martial law survivor reports death threat

(jd) A playwright and Martial Law survivor reported to have received death threats over the phone from someone that claimed to be part of a unit seeking to take down communists.

The man delivering the threat on the phone invited the playwright to stop his activities as his unit is waiting for a final order from the “higher ups" to act, and said that the call was already a warning message.

The Martial Law survivor was one of the activists arrested during the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and is a co-convenor of the Campaign Against the Return of the Marcoses. [Inquirer] [Philstar]

Singapore: New law to introduce “guilty until proven innocent” standard of proof for high-rise littering

(ih) On January 9, the Environmental Public Health (Amendment) Bill was introduced in Singapore’s parliament. The law will give suspected offenders 14 days to provide evidence proving their innocence, after which they will be assumed to be guilty. [Straits Times]

Singapore: Government to stay the course on COVID-19 policy despite concerns about Chinese travellers

(ih) The Singaporean government has decided not to alter its existing travel restrictions in response to China’s reopening to international travel. According to Health Minister Ong Ye Kung no change is required given the low numbers of arrivals from China, the absence of any new more dangerous COVID-19 variants, and the high rates of vaccination amongst Singaporeans. [Straits Times]

Thailand: Majority expects political chaos and corruption in 2023, poll shows

(fj) A nationwide telephone poll conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration

shows the population's broadly pessimistic outlook regarding Thailand's political situation.

Around 81 percent of respondents expect "political chaos" to either remain the same as 2022 or to worsen further. Looking ahead to the upcoming election, around 62 percent of respondents expect vote buying to take place, whereas only around 20 percent stated there would be no vote buying.

Opinions on the economy and the pandemic were more positive, with around 37 percent expecting the economic situation to improve and around 34 percent expecting it to remain the same. Regarding Covid-19, around 35 percent take the situation to no longer be worrying while 32 percent of respondents expect the spread of the disease to lessen. [The Nation Thailand]

Thailand: Royal Police Cadet Academy signs MoU with Huawei for development of ICT capabilities

(fj) The Royal Police Cadet Academy has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Huawei Technologies (Thailand) Co., Ltd. concerning specialized training in information and communications technologies (ICT).

With the stated goal of improving the police force's capacity in technological crime investigation and the suppression of cybercrime, the partnership will reportedly include the exchange of experience and information in talent development. The MoU initially covers two years of cooperation. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Disciplinary probe following National Park scandal

(ts) Natural Resources and Environment Minister Varawut Silpa-archa ensures a deep disciplinary probe against the former Chief of the Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation (DNP) Rutchada Suriyakul Na Ayutya who was recently transferred to the Prime Minister's Office as a consequence of a big bribery scandal.

Rutchada was caught red-handed on December 27 right at his office where envelopes, clearly senders' name-labeled, with a huge amount of cash over THB 4.9 million were found. He has been suspected of accepting bribes from National Park subordinates in

light of their transfers and promotions following a charge of such misconduct brought by Chaiwat Limlikitaksorn, the former head of Kaeng Krachan National Park. Being moved to the PM's Office in light of careful investigation, the former Chief is, however, released on bail. As the process of investigation continues, Varawut claims to have ample evidence to launch a proper disciplinary probe. Seventeen related officials are correspondingly reported giving statements to the police citing their fear of positional transfer mistreatment as a motive for paying bribes. They are still summoned to give further statements to the police this week. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: State Railway tries to cover up logo scandal

(ts) The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) explains the details of the logo work of the country's new central station. SRT's revealing of its THB 33-million budget for change and installation of the new terminal's nameplate, from Bangsue Grand Station to the kingly approved "Krung Thep Abhiwat Central Terminal", has drawn harsh criticism over being too expensive and its questionable procurement.

SRT tries to cover it up by delineating the overall expenses. Logo characters, glass work, design work, removal, installation, one-year warranty, value-added tax, and lighting system, are all claimed to add up to the enormous controversial cost while requiring a special procurement method due to redesign urgency within a warranty time. Making up the most part is the composition of 110 characters alone in both Thai and English, with 3 and 2.1 meters high respectively, which is estimated to cost THB 19 million. This expensiveness is affirmed by Prapas Chongsanguan, a current member of Pheu Thai and former SRT governor, saying no innovative technology is utilized for the logo work.

SRT, however, further claims that the procurement process complies with Section 56 of the Government Procurement Act. Worth noting is also the only qualified contractor, Unique Engineering and Construction Plc, one of Thailand's four largest construction companies. [Thai PBS World 1] [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World 2]

Thailand: Pheu Thai MP barred for life from position

(ts) The Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Political Office Holders has ruled Pheu Thai MP Anurak Tangpanithanont of Mukdahan Province out of his tenure.

The MP has been found guilty of unscrupulous bribery for he called THB 5 million from Sakda Wichiansilp, director-general of the Department of Groundwater Resources in passing budget allocation back in 2021 when Anurak was among the House sub-committee in charge of the budget review. He was suspended from the position on December 15, the day the court accepted this case filed by the National Anti-corruption Commission. As the court reached a guilty verdict, it confirmed the continuation of his abstaining as MP. That is, Anurak's misconduct is viewed as a serious violation of the ethical code, thus resulting in his being barred from holding political positions for life and from casting a vote for ten years. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post]

Vietnam: Second Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly opens

(ih) The Second Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly (NA) began on December 5. Minister of Planning and Investment Nguyen Chi Dung presented a report to the NA on the National Master Plan for the 2021-2030 period with a vision to 2050. Under the plan, Vietnam is set to become an upper-middle income country by 2030 and a high-income country by 2050. GDP growth is expected to average 7 percent from 2021-2030, and stay within the range of 6.5 to 7.5 percent until the year 2050. The tasks required to achieve these goals are categorized in four groups: the expansion of the country's national infrastructure; environmental protection; accelerating existing plans to restructure the economy; and forming economic corridors, industry-urban-service corridors and locomotion zones in key areas.

The Chairwoman of the NA's Committee on Social Affairs. Nguyen Thuy Anh will deliver a report on the draft Law on Medical Examination and Treatment (amended) during the Extraordinary Session. Minister of Health Dao Hong Lan is expected to deliver a report on the ministry's implementation of the regulations on COVID-19 prevention and control in Resolution No. 30/2021/QH15. The NA will hear additional reports on supplementing and adjusting the budget, and refinancing plans for local administrations. [Vietnam+ 1] [Vietnam+ 2]

Vietnam: National Assembly votes to dismiss two deputy prime ministers from office

(ih) The Vietnamese National Assembly voted to dismiss Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Vu Duc Dam and Deputy Prime Minister Pham Binh Minh from their posts on January 5 during the first day of the Second Extraordinary Session. The two DPMs, who are the most senior officials to be dismissed since Politburo member Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee Secretary Dinh La Thang in 2017, had already been removed from their positions on the Politburo and the Central Committee of the Communist Party [See AiR No.1, January/2023, 1].

No official reason was given for their dismissal from their DPM posts, just as was the case with their positions on the Politburo and the Central Committee. However, their dismissals have come in the midst of major public investigations of corruption in the procurement of COVID-19 test kits from Viet A Technology JSC, and surrounding the repatriation flights organized by the Foreign Ministry for Vietnamese citizens stranded abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both scandals occurred within departments under the authority of DPMs Dam and Minh.The Viet A Technology JSC scandal occurred while DPM Dam was responsible for healthcare, and DPM Minh was responsible for the repatriation flights. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Vietnam: Court sentences former AIC chairwoman to 30 years in prison for medical equipment bid-rigging scheme

(ih) The former chairwoman and general director of Advanced International Joint Stock Company (AIC) Nguyen Thi Thanh Nhan was sentenced to 30 years in prison by the Hanoi People's Court on January 4 for her role in masterminding the bid-rigging of 16 contracts to supply medical equipment to Dong Nai General Hospital. AIC made a profit of USD 6.5 million on the contracts acquired through this bid-rigging. She was tried in absentia, as she is currently hiding abroad.

Another 35 people were convicted at the trial for their roles in the bid-rigging, eight of which are still evading authorities. The former provincial Party Committee Secretary of Dong Nai province was sentenced to 11 years in prison for accepting bribes; the former People's Committee Chairman Dinh Quoc was sentenced to 9 years in prison for the same

offense. The former Director of the Dong Nai General Hospital was sentenced to 10 years in prison for rigging the bids, in addition to 9 years in prison for bribery. [RFA]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Pakistan receives more than USD 8 billion in foreign aid for flood relief

(fm) Pakistan announced on January 9 that donors had pledged to donate more than USD 8 billion to assist Islamabad in recovering from last year's devastating floods. Officials from some 40 countries as well as private donors and international financial institutions gathered at a conference organized by the United Nations where Pakistan asked for USD 8 billion over the next three years. [Deutsche Welle] [The Straits Times]

Among the donors were the Islamic Development Bank USD 4.2 billion, the World Bank USD 2 billion, the Asian Development Bank USD 1.5 billion as well as the European Union and China. France, Germany and the United States also made contributions.

However, with a humanitarian aid package of USD 816 million less than half financed, efforts to get funds for the initial emergency phase of the catastrophe response were unsatisfactory, according to UN data.

Pakistan asks IMF for restructuring 'pause' during meeting in Switzerland

(lm) Pakistan held talks on January 10 with an International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation on the sidelines of a conference in Geneva, Switzerland, in an effort to restart a stalled bailout program that has left Islamabad with only enough foreign exchange reserves to cover about three week's worth of imports.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said that he had pleaded to the IMF to pause in its demands for economic reforms before releasing USD 1.1 billion originally due to be disbursed in November last year.

The Pakistani government, facing an election later this year, has resisted the Washington-based lender's demands that it raise electricity and gasoline prices, as well as taxes. Nor is the administration willing to let the rupee fall further in value, with the IMF saying that the market should determine the level of the currency. [The Straits Times] [The Bangkok Post] [The Wall Street Journal]

UN delegations enquire about the victims of enforced disappearances

(az/lm) A United Nations delegation on January 3 visited the home of an alleged victim of enforced disappearance and spoke to his family. The believed victim, opposition politician Sajedul Islam Sumon, went missing in 2013 after he was picked up by law enforcement people in the leadup to the 2014 national election. The UN delegation inquired about any pressure the victim's family was under or if they faced any harassment because of the incident. [The Daily Star]

The visit by the UN delegation comes after the US ambassador to Bangladesh on December 14 had to cut short a meeting with some families of alleged victims of enforced disappearance because of pro-government protesters who tried to force their way into the meeting venue and surrounded his car.

Bangladesh, Maldives, Vietnam among 12 nations beginning three-year term on UN Human Rights Council

(lm) Bangladesh, Maldives and Vietnam were among 14 nations that on January 1 began their three-year term in the 47-member United Nations Human Rights Council. The Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the UN Office in Geneva, Dr. Asim Ahmed,

will serve as the Vice President of the intergovernmental body for 2023 representing the Asia Pacific Group. [The Edition]

Sri Lankan president to participate in Voice of the Global South Summit (VGSS) chaired by India

(sn) Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe will be among 20 world leaders participating in the Voice of Global South Summit (VGSS) chaired by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 12-13 through video conferencing.

The events aim to raise perspectives of member states on such questions as global price increases due to the Russian war with Ukraine, Covid pandemic risks & regulations, and fuel and fertilizer supplies. The summit will have 10 sessions covering foreign, environmental, energy, health, trade & finance, and education sectors.

These meetings add to the foundational ground for the upcoming G20 2023 summit, taking place in India in later September. [Colombo Page]

India deploys its largest single unit of women peacekeepers in UNISFA

(wr) India has deployed the country's largest single unit of women peacekeepers in the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA). Abyei is a disputed territory between South Sudan and Sudan where conflict has worsened, and women and children are facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. [Outlook India] [Business Standard]

India to witness flurry of visits by top foreign leaders

(lm) India is expected to witness a flurry of visits by top foreign leaders including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, French President Emmanuel Macron and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in the next few months. The primary focus of these visits are expected to be on expansion of bilateral cooperation in areas of energy, trade, technology, defense production, health-care and people-to-people exchanges. [Money Control]

While Chancellor Scholz is expected to be in India later next month, Albanese is set to visit the country in early part of March, the people said. The French side was initially exploring the visit by Macron in the first week of March but nothing has been firmed up yet, they said, adding the trip may even be advanced or could be pushed back.

President of Egypt Abdel Fattah El-Sisi will visit India later this month to grace the Republic Day celebrations as the chief guest.

The foreign ministers of G20 countries will also be in New Delhi to attend a foreign ministerial meeting of the powerful grouping which is likely to take place on March 1 and 2.

Several foreign leaders will also visit India to attend the 'Raisina Dialogue' that is scheduled to be held from March 2 to 4.

Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is also likely to visit India in the next few months.

Officials of India and Saudi Arabia are also looking at a bilateral visit to New Delhi by Saudi Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

India in talks with South Asian neighbors for cross-border trade in rupee

(wr/lm) India is trying to facilitate a mechanism to settle trade with South Asian countries in Indian rupees to ensure growth and development opportunities. Furthermore, the Indian central bank has launched a digital currency, currently under the trial phase. [Mint] [The Indian Express]

The initiative of trade settlement in Rupees is India's priority as an outcome of the emerging economic crisis due to the pandemic, global recession, and financial market tightening amid the Russia-Ukraine war.

Cambodia is expected to boost revenue in 2023 following Indonesia's joining of RCEP

(sn) Following Indonesia joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the trade between Cambodia and the new RCEP member is expected to rise over USD 1 billion in 2023.

Indonesia is the largest Southeast Asian economy. In Cambodia, – the free trade pact came into force on January 1, 2022. To date, Cambodia's top export destinations from RCEP states by export product value are Vietnam with USD 1.8 billion, China with USD 1.1 billion, and Japan with USD 1.06 billion. [Khmer Times]

Cambodian AmCham and the Ministry of Justice consider judiciary cooperation

(sn) The America Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia (AmCham Cambodia) and the Ministry of Justice consider the opportunities for judiciary cooperation. The president of AmCham Cambodia introduced the company's newly formed legal commission to the Minister of Justice, Koeut Roth. The Minister welcomed the initiative and expressed anticipation of progress in this direction. [Khmer Times]

Cambodian Ministry of Commerce to host the 3rd Cambodia–Turkey Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting

(sn) On January 5, 2023, the Ministry of Commerce held an inter-ministerial meeting to prepare for the 3rd Cambodia–Turkey Joint Economic Commission (JEC) assembly. The convention will take place in Phnom Penh on January 10–11, 2023. Cambodia exports textiles, milled rice, and travel goods to Turkey, and imports machinery, cotton, and assorted plastic & metal products.

The preparatory discussions focused on how to best benefit from Cambodia–Turkey bilateral relations, considering the post-pandemic recovery of both nations. Throughout 2017–2021 the trade volume between countries equaled USD 462.63 million. Trade volume increased over January–November 2022 period. [Phnom Penh Post

Marcos and Xi set to resolve tensions over South China Sea

(ms) At the invitation of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. visited China from January 3 to 5.

High on the agenda during the three-day visit were differences over territorial claims over areas in the

South China Sea, with both parties agreeing to advocate for a settlement "through peaceful means", including the establishment of a hotline between China and the Philippines to facilitate direct communication and prevent miscommunication.

Regarding oil and gas development in waters claimed by both countries, agreement was reached to revisit the 2018 memorandum of understanding on oil and gas development cooperation and to resume discussions on oil and gas development in the near future.

Since taking office, Marcos has repeatedly accused the Chinese government of using Chinese fishermen and the Chinese coast guard to harass Filipino fishermen and unlawfully expel them from Philippine waters.

Marcos's visit also saw the signing of 14 bilateral agreements and investment pledges by Chinese companies totaling USD 22.8 billion. In addition, the two sides announced to explore cooperation in areas such as solar energy, wind energy, electric vehicles, and nuclear energy for power generation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [CNN] [Radio Free Asia]

China partially relaxes import ban on Australian coal

(ms) According to reports, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has allowed four Chinese companies to import coal from Australia again. This would be the first relaxation of the ban after it was imposed by China in 2020.

The move comes less than two weeks after Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong met with her Chinese counterpart Wang Yi during the Sixth Australia-China Foreign and Strategic Dialogue [see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4]. [ABC News] [Bloomberg]

Relations between China and Australia deteriorated under the former Morrison government, following Canberra's ban of 5G broadband by Chinese tech company Huawei in 2018 and its call for an international investigation into the origin of COVID-19, to which Beijing reacted with the imposition of a series of economic sanctions, including the one on coal. [South China Morning Post]

Under the government of Prime Minister Anthony, however, relations between China and Australia are showing signs of improvement, as reflected in the meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and

Albanese during the G20 meeting in Bali, the first meeting between the leaders of the two countries [see AiR No. 46, November/2022, 3].

US warship crosses Taiwan strait

(ms) On January 5, the U.S. Navy Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer Chung-Hoon sailed through the Taiwan Strait, putting the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) on alert.

According to the U.S. Navy, the maneuver was a routine transit within the framework of the high-seas freedoms of navigation and overflight in accordance with international law and demonstrated the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. [Deutsche Welle] [VOA News]

Meanwhile, China continued its daily military drills around Taiwan. 15 fighter jets, including the latest generation of J-20 stealth jets, were spotted entering Taiwan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) on January 2 in night drills, some of which came within 45 kilometers of the Taiwanese coast. [Taiwan News]

China and Ecuador close to signing FTA

(ms) Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso on January 3 announced an agreement between China and Ecuador regarding a free trade agreement (FTA) and that it was ready for signature.

Negotiations on the FTA began in early 2022 and, if signed, the deal would ensure Ecuadorian exports preferential access to China, making Ecuadorian exports more competitive with those of ASEAN countries, and in general significantly increase the volume of trade.

At previous meetings Lasso spoke of an extra volume worth USD 1 billion that would be secured by the FTA, with the main export products being shrimp, bananas, flowers, cocoa and coffee.

After Chile, Costa Rica and Peru, Ecuador would be China's fourth FTA with a Latin American country and would further expand China's influence on the continent. This will allow China to diversify its sources of strategic minerals and to position itself in a more crisis-proof way.

The U.S., in particular, expressed concern about China's growing footprint in Latin America and advocated for an intensification of U.S.-Ecuador relations. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [VOA News]

US citizen sentenced for spying for China

(ms) On January 3, U.S. citizen Zheng Xiaoqing was sentenced to two years in prison after he was found guilty of conspiring in economic espionage benefitting China.

Zheng was with GE Power, a U.S. company specializing primarily in gas power technology and services, from 2008 to 2018. During that time he stole GE's trade secrets related to the company's ground- and air-based turbine technologies in order to further research in China in this field. [Al Jazeera] [VOA News]

Already in mid-November of last year, a Chinese intelligence official was sentenced to 20 years in prison for espionage in the U.S [see AiR No. 47, November/2022, 4].

EU recommends mandatory testing for entry from China - China imposes travel restriction on South Korea

(ms) After the first European countries already imposed travel restrictions and introduced a pre-flight testing requirement for travelers from China [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1], the EU "strongly encouraged" all member countries to follow suit.

As of time or writing, Spain, Italy, France and the UK, as well as Germany, Austria and Greece have introduced mandatory testing.

Outside Europe, Canada, the US, Qatar, India, South Korea, Japan and Australia have also introduced such a requirement. As the only country in the world so far, Morocco has imposed a complete ban on people from China entering the country. [Africa News] [Deutsche Welle] [VOA News]

Like last week, China voiced dissatisfaction with these measures, accusing those countries of political manipulation and discrimination. [FMPRC]

In a latest development, the Chinese Embassy in South Korea announced on December 10 that China will

suspend the issuance of short-term visas for South Koreans who want to enter China for business, tourism, medical treatment, transit and general private affairs. The move comes in response to South Korea's decision to suspend issuing short-term visas to Chinese travelers until January 31. The decision came into effect on January 5 [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1]. [South China Morning Post]

China plans expansion of natural gas import from Turkmenistan

(ms) After the state visit of the Turkmen President Serdar Berdymukhamedov to China from January 5 to 6, he and Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke in favor of intensifying bilateral relations. During the meeting, Xi Jinping called especially for an increase of natural gas imports from the Central Asian country, describing natural gas cooperation "the cornerstone of the China-Turkmenistan relationship."

Turkmenistan is China's largest supplier of piped natural gas. From January to November 2022, China imported Turkmen gas for USD 9.3 billion, compared with USD 6.79 billion in the whole of 2021. [Global Times] [Reuters]

Chinese Coast Guard patrols waters around emerging Indonesian gas field

(ms) Following the Indonesian government's recent approval of initial plans to develop a gas field in the South China Sea, the CCG 5901, the flagship of the Chinese Coast Guard and the world's largest coast guard vessel, has been spotted patrolling the waters.

Indonesia's plan involves an investment of about USD 3 billion and the gas field is expected to reach a peak production of 115 million standard cubic feet per day in 2027.

The Tuna Block, where the gas field is to be built, is geographically located between Vietnam and Indonesia and lies within Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ), but this area also falls within the nine-dash line, a line drawn by China to show its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The Chinese government has not yet commented on the Indonesian construction project, but the constant patrolling of CCG 5901 can be interpreted as a threat or at least a sign of dissent. [Radio Free Asia] [Reuters]

Taliban government in Afghanistan signs oil extraction deal with Chinese company

(ms) The current Taliban-led Afghan government on January 6 signed a contract with a Chinese company to extract oil from the Amu-Darya basin and develop an oil deposit in the northern province of Sar-e Pul, the first major resource extraction contract under the Taliban government since it came to power in 2021.

Under the contract, the Central Asia Petroleum and Gas Co (CAPEIC), the Chinese firm in question, would invest USD 150 million annually in Afghanistan, the investment would rise to USD 540 million in three years under the 25-year contract.

The Taliban government will, according to their own statements, have a 20 percent stake in the project, which can be increased to 75 percent.

The company selected by China caused confusion over the deal, because unlike Sinopec, for example, CAPEIC is not an oil company, but an oilfield service provider, which in itself only offers technical support and does not build such oilfields.

Although Chinese oilfield service providers work in Saudi Arabia, for example, the Saudi government provides the infrastructure itself on the basis of its monetary resources and is not dependent on investments like the Taliban government. Regarding the investment itself, the amount of the investment seems to be too low for the emerging dimension of the construction project. Accordingly, there is still uncertainty about the actual circumstances and details of the project. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters]

New Chinese foreign minister holds first talks with counterparts

(ms) After Qin Gang officially replaced Wang Yi as China's oreign minister last week [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1], he held his first talks via telephone with the foreign ministers of Russia, South Korea and Pakistan respectively on January 9.

So far, few details are known about the content of the respective phone calls. Via Twitter, state broadcaster Global Times said that during the conversation between Qin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, both ministers were committed to continuing close cooperation and would together "seek new

achievements in the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership." [Global Times 1via Twitter]

During the conversation with Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, both parties also underlined their will to continue working closely together. The conversation matched an interview of Pakistani Navy Admiral, who announced that two more Chinese 054A/P warships will be delivered to Pakistan in 2023. [Global Times 2]

The conversation with South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin was about, among other things, the sanctions imposed by South Korea on people entering the country from China, which China had already responded to the day after the phone call (see entry above). During the conversation, Qin was said to be committed to improving the relationship between the two countries and promoting steady and long-term development of China-South Korea relations. [Xinhua]

India wants to invest in constructing new airports, aviation facilities in Bangladesh

(az/lm) India's newly appointed High Commissioner to Dhaka, Pranay Verma, has said his country is interested in financing the construction and operation of new airports in Bangladesh. Besides, New Delhi also wants to train the personnel engaged in the aviation sector of Bangladesh, increase the capacity of existing airports, build and operate new airports with Indian financing, increase mutual cooperation in the aviation sector, and develop skilled manpower.

The country also plans to increase aviation connectivity with Bangladesh. Therefore, a bilateral discussion also took place to add new flight destinations in Bangladesh and the eastern parts of India. During the meeting, a proposal was raised to sign a memorandum of understanding to increase cooperation between the Civil Aviation Training Academy of the two countries. [The Daily Star]

Separately, an international oil pipeline that will be carrying fuel from India's West Bengal state to the Parbatipur depot of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is likely to be commissioned next month. The mechanical works of the bilateral project, fully funded by India, was completed last December. [Energyworld.com]

US President Biden renominates former Los Angeles mayor to be ambassador to India

(lm) United States President Biden has renominated former Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti to be Washington's ambassador to India after Garcetti's confirmation failed to advance through the US Senate last year. [Los Angeles Times]

Garcetti was announced as the White House pick for India in July 2021, but a vote on the appointment has never been scheduled following some Democratic senators' concerns over sexual harassment allegations leveled against a former Garcetti aide. Biden's support for Garcetti, who was also renominated for the position last year, is notable given how long the nomination has lingered in Washington.

In his comment for Project Syndicate, Indian former diplomat and senior opposition politician Shashi Tharoor argues that the Biden administration's lack of progress on confirming its nominee highlights the peculiar state of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. [Project Syndicate]

Indian Prime Minister Modi, King Charles III hold phone call

(wr) Prior to the seventh round of negotiating the Free Trade Agreement between India and the United Kingdom, Prime Minister Modi held a telephone conversation with King Charles III on January 3. The two sides discussed subjects of mutual interest ranging from climate action, and conservation of biodiversity to innovative solutions for financing the energy transition. Additionally. Both sides highlighted ways to strengthen the functional capacity of Commonwealth Nations. [Mint] [Business World] [The Hindu]

Diplomatic advisor to French president meets India's Narendra Modi

(wr) In his meeting on January 5 with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic advisor to the French President, PM Modi expressed hope to strengthen bilateral strategic cooperation including defence and security in the Indo-Pacific region. He accepted France's support for India's G20 Presidency. [Outlook India] [PMIndia]

India, Israel foreign ministers discuss 'strategic partnership'

(wr) India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar held a telephone conversation with his newly appointed Israeli counterpart Eli Cohen on January 5. Both sides discussed ways to deepen the "strategic partnership" between their countries, touching on promoting a free trade agreement and projects in the field of innovation, food, and water security. [ThePrint] [Business Standard]

Australia's High Commissioner applauds India's economic growth

(wr) In an interview, Australia's High Commissioner to India has highlighted the potential bilateral cooperation amid India's rising economic posture. He looks forward to coping with the economic crisis under India's G20 Presidency which India formally assumed in December 2022 for one year. He also confirmed Australian PM Albanese's visit in March to India as an opportunity to advance mutual cooperation on issues such as clean energy, technology, digital trade and procurements. His arrival is intended to formally lock India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), a free trade agreement that came into force in December 2022. [ANI]

Border killings at Indo-Bangladeshi border embarrass us, Dhaka's state minister says

(az/lm) Border killings along the India-Bangladesh border embarrass Bangladesh, Dhaka's state minister for foreign affairs said during an event on January 4. The top official pointed to the killing intent of the Border Security Force (BSF) – India's border guarding organization on its borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh –, arguing that the shots could be fired at hand and leg instead of killing the victim. [The Business Standard]

In related developments, it was reported that troops of the BSF's North Bengal Frontier caught 444 people, including 237 Bangladeshi nationals, from the Indo-Bangladesh border in 2022. [The Indian Express]

Malaysian prime minister makes first trip to Indonesia

(os) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim visited Indonesia on his first overseas trip after his inauguration in November 2022. In particular, cooperation in countering discrimination against palm oil, as well as Malaysian investments in the development of Indonesia's new capital was discussed. [Antara News 1] [Antara News 2] [Antara News 3] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [The Jakarta Post]

Malaysia and Indonesia are the world's largest palm oil producers. Recently, the European Union announced its plans to end the import of unsustainable palm oil-based fuels by 2030. The EU puts this measure down to deforestation that is fuelled by palm oil plantations. However, Malaysia and Indonesia argue that the move is solely discrimination against palm oil. They expressed their plans to combat this discrimination via increased cooperation through the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries (CPOPC).

One of the substantial points on the agenda during the two-day visit of Anwar was also the handover of eleven letters of intent (LoI) from Malaysian companies that plan to invest in the development of Indonesia's new capital Nusantara. The capital is planned to be located on the island of Kalimantan, where Indonesia shares a border with Malaysia. According to Anwar, the development of Nusantara could also be beneficial for the Malaysian provinces on the island.

Several memoranda of understanding (MoU) have been signed between both countries. These cover the areas of shipping, export-import financing, green energy, and the development of the battery industry. Indonesian President Joko Widodo also vaunted Malaysia's efforts in protecting Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Furthermore, the countries agreed on signing an MoU regarding land and sea borders between both countries. This was already discussed during a recent preparation visit of Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir to Indonesia [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1].

The first overseas visit of new Malaysian prime ministers usually has its Southeast Asian neighbor as a destination. Malaysia represents the fifth-largest export market for Indonesia and is the host country for most Indonesian migrant workers. As member countries of ASEAN, during the visit, both countries also agreed to strengthen the association.

Indonesia criticizes Israeli minister's visit to Al-Aqsa Mosque

(os) Indonesia has condemned Israel National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir's visit to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. According to the Indonesian Foreign Ministry, the visit could elicit tensions and new violence in Palestine. Indonesia also stresses the importance of retaining the status quo and avoiding any provocations. The ministry called on the international community, particularly the United Nations, to urge Israel to refrain from actions that could harm security and stability in the region. Additionally, the ministry highlighted the significance of the Palestine-Israel peace process, predicated on the Two-State solution.

The Al-Aqsa Mosque is one of the holiest places for Muslims. For Jews, the place represents the most important holy site. In general, it is allowed for non-Muslims to visit the place but not to pray there. Indonesia is the country with the largest number of Muslims in the world. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia] [The Jakarta Post]

Japan's Prime Minister visits France

(dql) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida arrived in France on January 9 to kick off a weeklong trip to Europe and North America which will also see visits to Italy, the U.K., Canada and the U.S.

In Paris, Kishida and French President Emmanuel Macron discussed North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, with the latter reaffirming France's "unfailing support to face" Pyongyang's "flagrant breaches to international law." Kishida, for his part, called France a top partner in the creation of a free and open Indo-Pacific and announced that Tokyo would intensify joint military drills with Paris.

The two leaders, further, pledged to deepen bilateral cooperation in various fields, such as nuclear and renewable energy, care manufacturing and defense. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [AP]

During the tour the Prime Minister is expected to emphasize security concerns and present Japan's new security and defense strategies, adopted in December including a counter strike capability that makes a break from the country's exclusively self-defense-only postwar principle [see AiR No. 51, December/2022, 3].

The visits also come as Japan just assumed the post as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council [see AiR No. 1, January/2023, 1] and prepares to host a Group of Seven summit that is slated for May 19 to 21 in Hiroshima. [VoA]

Japanese foreign minister of Latin America, US tour

(dql) Earlier last week, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi began his tour of four Latin American nations, including Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil and Argentina, and the United States that will run until January 15.

In Mexico, Hayashi met with his Mexican counterpart Marcelo Ebrard to discuss ways to further deepen exchanges between the two countries. Both agreed to remain committed to maintaining the high standards of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) as some countries, including China, filed applications to join the accord. Both Japan and Mexico belong to the signatories to the CPTPP. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1] [Nippon.com 1]

In Ecuador, Hayashi and Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Juan Carlos Holguin reached agreement that both countries - new non-permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2023-2024 - will work together to implement a rules-based, free and open global order and to push for a reform of the UNSC. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2] [Kyodo News]

In the meeting with Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, Hayashi expressed opposition to the storming of the Congress, Supreme Court and presidential palace by supporters of former President Jair Bolsonaro who continue to refuse to acknowledge his defeat in the presidential election last October. He further added that Japan is willing to strengthen its cooperation with Brazil in the area of environment while Vieira expressed hope for increases in investment from Japanese companies and bilateral trade. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3] [Nippon.com 2]

Hayashi, along with Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada, is scheduled to meet their counterparts Antony Blinken and Lloyd Austin on January 11 for the 2023 U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee. [Reuters]

Japan, US sign MoU on labor standard cooperation

(dql) Japan's Industry Minister Nishimura Yasutoshi and US Trade Representative Katherine Tai have signed a memorandum of cooperation to set up a task force aimed at eradicating forced labor from supply chains.

The new task force will consist of officials from the Japanese Trade and Industry Ministry and Foreign Ministry. As well as from the U.S. Office of the Trade Representative, the Department of Commerce and other agencies. Under the agreement, both sides will cooperate in clarifying labor standards and in information sharing on reporting, best practices, and enforcement practices, as well as dialogue with stakeholders, including businesses. [Reuters]

Rapid reaction unit of U.S. Marines to be set up in Okinawa prefecture

(dql) The U.S. is reportedly about to set up a rapid reaction unit of the Marine Corps in Okinawa prefecture, in a bid to bolster the defense of remote islands in southwestern Japan.

According to both Japanese and US diplomatic sources, a Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR) - to be armed with missiles and lighter gear - will be established within a few years. The move is part of a realignment of the Marine Corps in the prefecture and comes amid China's intensifying military activities in the East China Sea. [Kyodo News]

China-Laos railway handles over 9 million passenger trips since opening

(fj) As of January 5, the China-Laos railway connecting Kunming, the capital of Yunnan province in Southwest China and Vientiane, the capital of Laos, has seen over 9 million passenger trips in little more than a year since its completion in December 2021, according to an announcement by its operator, the China Railway Kunming Group.

While cross-border travel was inhibited by China's Zero Covid Policy, the Chinese section of the railway logged 7.54 million passenger trips and the Laotian section 1.46 million passenger trips. [China Daily]

China-Laos border crossing at Boten-Bohan reopens

(fj) The governments of Laos and China have agreed to reopen the international border crossing between the towns of Boten (Laos) and Bohan (China) as of January 8.

While it remains unclear whether this implies that cross-border travel with the China-Laos railway which also crosses the border at Boten, will be possible immediately, the opening stands to facilitate the return of Chinese tourists into Laos. [Lao News Agency]

New Laotian Prime Minister to receive Vietnamese Counterpart

(fj) Following an invitation extended by Laos's new Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Phạm Minh Chinh, is to visit Laos to attend the 45th meeting of the Laos-Vietnam Intergovernmental Committee scheduled from January 11-12. [Vientiane Times]

For newly appointed PM Sonexay Siphandone, it will be the first time to host a foreign head of state. The two neighboring nations, which share their nominal commitment to communism, have long-standing bilateral relations spanning many fields of cooperation.

Saudi Arabia to study increasing investments in Pakistan to USD 10 billion

(lm) Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has ordered his administration to explore increasing the Kingdom's investments in Pakistan to reach USD 10 billion, in an effort to further relief to the South Asian nation reeling from last year's devastating floods. He also directed the Saudi Fund for Development to study increasing the Saudi deposit to Pakistan's Central Bank to reach USD 5 billion from USD 3 billion earlier. [Arab News]

The investments in Pakistan were previously announced in August. The Saudi deposit to the central bank was extended in December.

Pakistan sends back hundreds of Afghan refugees to face Taliban repression

(lm/tj) In recent days, more than 600 Afghans have been deported from Pakistan, and a further 800 are expected to be deported soon in a renewed crackdown on migrants, British newspaper *The Guardian* reported on January 10. [The Guardian]

About 250,000 Afghans have arrived in Pakistan since the Taliban seized power in August 2021. Last summer, authorities began deporting Afghans for illegally entering the country, but arrests and detentions have increased since October. Nearly 1,400 Afghans, including 129 women and 178 children, have been detained in Karachi and Hyderabad alone, the largest number of arrests made to date in Pakistan, lawyers say.

Pakistan has not adopted the UN Refugee Convention 1951, which confers a legal duty on countries to protect people fleeing serious harm.

China clashes with South Korea over its delegation's visit to Taiwan

(sm) On January 5, the Chinese embassy in Seoul lodged a strong protest over the visit of a South Korean parliamentary delegation to Taiwan, calling it a serious violation of the One China policy and a previous joint statement on diplomatic relations between China and South Korea.

The protest came after a South Korean delegation, led by ruling People Power Party (PPP) representative Cho Kyung-Tae and including several other lawmakers, traveled to Taipei on the occasion of the South Korea-Taiwan inter-parliamentary friendship group between December 28 and 31. It was the group's first visit to Taiwan since 2019.

The South Korean Foreign Ministry responded that Seoul maintains its position of respect towards the One China policy, explaining the delegation had not discussed any official governmental business with its Taiwanese counterpart. It expressed strong opposition over the Chinese accusations, stating on Facebook that the Chinese behavior constituted an interference into domestic affairs and demanding the Chinese ambassador to Seoul apologize. [Yonhap News Agency_1]

In fact, the visit of the delegation included a meeting with the Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and lawmaker You Si-kun, as well as a visit to the Mainland Affairs Council, which plans Taiwan's policy stance towards China. Topics addressed included tensions on

the Korean peninsula and recent North Korean missile and drone threats. The visit had been officially disclosed by the Taiwanese foreign ministry only. [KBS World] [Yonhap News Agency_2]

South Korean president considers voiding 2018 inter-Korean military declaration

(sm) On January 4, South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol declared he was considering suspending the 2018 Pyongyang Joint Declaration and its annexed military agreement, should North Korea violate the agreement again.

The 2018 declaration had been signed by Yoon's predecessor Moon Jae-in and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and states that both Korea's will respect the attached military agreement. The latter calls for the immediate cessation of all hostile acts, including the removal of mines and guard posts along the demilitarized zone on the border and creating a no fly zone around the border.

The voiding of the declaration could lead to increased military activity and propaganda broadcasts across the border area again.

Yoon's announcement comes after the incursion of five North Korean drones into South Korean territory in late December, de facto violating the 2018 military agreement. This is not the first time that both sides have not complied with the declaration, as both sides have engaged in live-fire drills near the border in the last months and North Korea sent a short range ballistic missile into de facto South Korean maritime territory.

Relations have grown tenser since Yoon took office in May 2022, promising to take a tougher stance against North Korean threats. In the wake of the North Korean drone incident, the South Korean defense ministry announced it would create a budget of KRW 560 billion (USD 440 million) over the next five years to develop anti-drone technology. [KBS World] [see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4] [Reuters]

South Korea, US military cooperate over advanced air mobility following North Korean drone threats

(sm) On January 7, the Korea Office of Civil Aviation (KOCA) and US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) agreed to cooperate on advanced air mobility in the future through joint projects and information sharing.

The cooperation aims at developing the safety, efficiency, and sustainability of air mobility projects as fast as possible, amid a global race to develop and put the first low-altitude air taxis on the market. These taxis will work with an electrical vertical takeoff and landing technology known as eVTOL and are expected to be used for short distance intercity trips to avoid traffic jams.

The FAA has already concluded similar agreements with Japan, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, in an effort to standardize regulations across countries and expand the potential aircraft taxi market. The project is becoming more concrete as the US administration released the airworthiness criteria for eVTOL taxis last month. [Reuters]

Considering North Korea's recent drone threats towards South Korea, Seoul is interested in developing its aerial capabilities in a broad spectrum to strengthen its anti-drone capabilities. South Korean president Yoon Suk-yeol has further announced last week that nuclear cooperation with the US was again on the table in terms of the extended deterrence guaranteed by the US against North Korean threats. The US followed up with a statement denying cooperation with South Korea on the use of nuclear weapons. Rather, the armies are jointly working on contingency plans in the case of a North Korean nuclear threat. [see AiR No. 52, December/2022, 4] [Yonhap News Agency_1] [Yonhap News Agency_2]

Malaysia, South Korea discuss infrastructure and defense

(sm) On January 6, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin had a phone call with his Malaysian counterpart Zambry Abdul Kadir to discuss ways to strengthen their cooperation in defense and infrastructure.

Both sides agreed on the need for a strong and united response of the international community in regards to North Korea's recurring missile launches. Park furthermore explained Seoul's Indo-Pacific strategy and its vision for future ASEAN cooperation, according to the South Korean foreign ministry.

South Korea is one of Malaysia's major foreign direct investment sources and its 14th largest business

partner. [South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea, Iran to boost economic cooperation

(sm) On January 5, South Korean Trade Minister Anh Duk-geun met with Iranian Ambassador to Seoul Saeed Shabestari to discuss increased cooperation on humanitarian and economic affairs.

According to the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry, and Energy, Ahn and Shabestari exchanged on potential partnerships and trade in medicine and medical technology, as well as trade of humanitarian commodities exempted from UN sanctions. Ahn furthermore asked for Iran's support in its project to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan.

The two countries had previously signed a memorandum of understanding in 2007 to boost their economic relationship and Iran remains South Korea's fourth largest source of crude oil. [Yonhap News Agency]

Sri Lankan farmers receive 10.6 million liters of diesel from China

(sn) Sri Lanka's agriculture's ministry on January 9 began distributing parts of a 10.6-million-liters-diesel donation by China. Previously, parts of the stock had been shared with fishermen. The farmers received donations upon cultivating 1 hectare for harvesting, with 15 liters of diesel issued per hectare. [Colombo Page]

Sri Lankan prime minister meets with Australian High Commissioner to discuss maritime security

(sn) Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena has met the Australian High Commissioner to Colombo, Paul Stephens, in his office. The prime minister thanked Canberra for help in strengthening maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. He also asked the state representative to provide GPS technology to fishing vessels, improving communication networks.

Dinesh Gunawardena also welcomed Australia to open more affiliated university campuses in Sri Lanka to attract more students from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. The High Commissioner assured the PM of support in the negotiations with International Monetary Fund and Paris Club meetings. [Colombo Page]

Taiwan widens sanctions against Russia

(dql) Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs has announced that it has put additional items on the list of goods under export controls to Russia and Belarus.

The 52 new items are largely related to nuclear energy substances, miscellaneous goods and materials, chemicals, and machine tools, including finger cuffs, spiked batons, explosive and chemical agents, and explosive detection equipment using X-ray, "nuclear, or electromagnetic techniques, according to the ministry.

The move reflects efforts to align with U.S. and EU sanctions. [Politico]

German parliamentary delegation visits Taiwan

(dql) A parliamentary delegation, consisting of members of the Free Democratic Party and led by the chair of the parliamentary defense committee, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, arrived on January 9 in Taiwan for a four day visit.

The group is scheduled to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen and Premier Su Tseng-chang, National Security Council Secretary-General Wellington Koo as well as with Legislative Speaker You Si-kun and Foreign Minister Joseph Wu. [Focus Taiwan]

A day before the arrival of the delegation, China carried out military exercises around Taiwan involving nearly 60 aircraft and four vessels. [DW]

Spies for China detained in Taiwan

(dql) Three active-duty officers and a retired Air Force officer have been arrested in Taiwan on suspicion of spying for China by establishing an espionage ring and leaking sensitive information to China. [Republic World]

Thailand and Sri Lanka to resume FTA talks

(fj) Following a four-year hiatus due to Covid and the restructuring of Sri Lanka's government, Thailand and Sri Lanka are to resume free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with the expectation to conclude the process in the next one to two years.

Dealing with issues such as standards of service, customs and trade facilitation, the FTA will set the future framework for trade between the two nations. Trade between Thailand and Sri Lanka amounted to around USD 334 million, with a clear bilateral surplus for Thailand (exports worth USD 253 million) and a deficit for Sri Lanka (exports amounting to USD 81 million). [Bangkok Post]

Thai Cabinet endorses Plan of Action on educational cooperation with Russia

(td) The Thai Cabinet has approved the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Russian Federation Plan of Action on Education (2022-2026) to implement bilateral cooperation on education between Thailand and Russia. In this connection, the two parties will co-chair the joint committee meeting reportedly in 2024 to supervise the action plan which encompasses several strategic projects. According to the Ministry of Education of Thailand, the cooperation with Russia in this regard aims to advance human resources development through mutual knowledge sharing, educational networks and exchange programmes – to name a few – specifically for students at the primary level. Also, Russia can build on this cooperation to strengthen its relations with ASEAN. [Bangkok Post] [Ministry of Education of Thailand, in Thai]

Thailand and Czech Republic ensure multi-dimensional cooperation

(ts) The Ambassador of the Czech Republic, H.E. Mr Pavel Pitel, met Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha for courtesy and promotion of bilateral cooperation. As last year saw successful commitments between the two countries, they will encourage greater cooperation in all dimensions.

Both have agreed to propel cooperative actions and support through a number of official dialogs which, from the Czech side, mostly take the form of inter-regional EU commitments. One of the successes was the EU-ASEAN Commemorative Summit the PM himself attended last year and the Czech Republic operated as an EU Chair signing EU-Thailand Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. This agreement is believed to foster negotiations pertaining to the existing FTA. Expected is the 3rd Thailand-Czech Republic Joint Commission on Economic Cooperation where further potential areas of cooperation can be set up on the table. In light of this, special attention will be paid to automotive, public health, space diplomacy, and security.

The PM, also, realized this occasion as an invitation to capture more Czech investors and tourists to Thailand while seeking Czech Republic's vote support for Thailand to host the Specialized Expo 2028, on which the final host destination will be decided later this year in Paris. [Royal Thai Government]

Announcements

Upcoming Events

11 January 2023 @ 8:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Disrupted Global Order: Implications for U.S.-Japan Cooperation

The webcast event will feature a discussion between Japanese and American experts about a wide range of disruptions to the global economic order, with a focus on the question of how to enhance U.S.-Japan

cooperation to cope with these challenges. For more information, visit [CSIS].

11 January 2023 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Book discussion: “Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology”

This online book presentation will discuss “Chip War: The Fight for the World’s Most Critical Technology", the latest book of Associate Professor of International History at The Fletcher School at Tufts University. Event details are available at [CSIS].

11 January 2023 @ 12:00-12:45 p.m. (GMT-5), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Big Tech’s War on Free Speech

This online event introduces the book “Crushed: Big Tech’s War on Free Speech” by Congressman Ken Buck in which he explains how Big Tech censors U.S. citizens, warps the free market, and stymies the true engines of innovation in the tech world. He also provides ways to counter this development.

More information can be found at [The Heritage Foundation].

11 January 2023 @ 4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Institution, USA

Reflections on US defense policy from Rep. Adam Smith

At this webcast Congressman Adam Smith will discuss the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2023, that President Joe Biden signed into law on December 23 and that allocates USD 858 billion to resilience, innovation, and military readiness to implement the National Defense Strategy.

For further event details, see [Brookings Institution].

12 January 2023 @ 8:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Indo-Pacific Forecast 2023

At the hybrid preview event CSIS experts will explore questions about political, security, and economic developments across the Indo-Pacific region in the year ahead, including: What is the outlook for U.S.-China relations? Which of the U.S. alliance networks in the Indo-Pacific is most promising? Will IPEF thrive? If you are interested, find more about the event at [CSIS].

11 January 2023 @ 2:30-3:15 p.m. (GMT-5), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Technologies of Tomorrow: A Conversation with Eric Schmidt

At the online talk, Dr. Eric Schmidt, co-founder of Schmidt Futures and former CEO and chairman of Google, will present his ideas and vision of the technologies of tomorrow and how they intersect with the geopolitics of today. Go to [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace] for further event details.

12 January 2023 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel, Belgium

Global cooperation in times of geopolitical strife

This online panel will explore ways that help the international economic and legal system to survive today's fractured geopolitics as democracies are facing a drawn-out contest with authoritarian states that is entangling much of public policy with global security issues. For more information, see [Bruegel].

12 January 2023 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), USA

A Conversation with His Excellency Jose Manuel G. Romualdez, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines to the U.S.

At this online talk, Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Manuel G. Romualdez will present The Philippines' foreign policy and national security priorities, bilateral relations with the US, and the geopolitical and geo-

economic dynamics impacting the Southeast Asian country and the region.

If you want to attend the event, you can register at [IISS].

13 January 2023 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Vietnam's Economy in 2023: Navigating Domestic Challenges and Global Headwinds

This webinar will offer an in-depth analysis of Vietnam's economic challenges and opportunities in 2023. It will further explore the measures that the country's leadership should take to deal with the global headwinds and domestic challenges in the new year.

To find more details, visit [ISEAS].

13 January 2023 @ 10:30-11:45 a.m. (GMT-5), Brookings Institution, USA

The ghost at the feast: America and the collapse of world order, 1900-1941

This webcast features the book "The Ghost at the Feast: America and the Collapse of World Order, 1900-1941", the latest publication of Stephen & Barbara Friedman Senior Fellow Robert Kagan that provides a thorough account of the U.S.'s rise to global superpower — from the Spanish-American War to World War II.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings Institution].

Recent Book Releases

The I**nternational Institute for Strategic Studies**, ***The Strategic Survey 2022: The Annual Assessment of Geopolitics***, Routledge, 400 pages, published on December 5, 2022. For more details, see [IISS].

Toshi Yoshihara, *Mao's Army Goes to Sea: The Island Campaigns and the Founding of China's Navy*, Georgetown University Press, 173

pages, published on January 3, 2023, reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Toake Endoh (ed.), *Open Borders, Open Society? Immigration and Social Integration in Japan*, Barbara Budrich, 210 pages, published on May 16, 2022. For a brief review, see [Foreign Affairs].

Jacques Bertrand, Alexandre Pelletier, and Ardeth Maung Thawnghmung, ***Winning by Process: The State and Neutralization of Ethnic Minorities in Myanmar***, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 270 pages, published on August 15, 2022, with a short review in [Foreign Affairs].

Jarrod Shanahan, and Zhandarka Kurti, ***States of Incarceration: Rebellion, Reform, and America's Punishment System***, Reaktion Books, 240 pages, published on November 9, 2022. A review is available at [Los Angeles Review of books].

Calls for Papers

The **Centre for International Studies at Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa** invites paper proposal for the i***nternational Conference "Europe as a Global Actor"***, to be held on May 11-12, 2023. Deadline for abstract submission is January 31, 2023. For more details, visit [Europe Global Actor].

Darshikā: Journal of Integrative and Innovative Humanities published by Chiang Mai University, Thailand, welcomes manuscript for its May issue that is dedicated to the theme ***"Postcapitalism and the Humanities"***. Submission deadline is February 15, 2023. Learn more about the call at [Darshikā].

Jobs and positions

Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs welcomes applications for a ***tenure-track (assistant professor) or tenured position (associate or full professor)*** in Latino politics with a focus on U.S. policies towards migration from Latin America. Review of applications started October 26. For more information, see [Princeton University].

The **Department of Politics at the University of San Francisco** seeks applications for a ***full-time term Assistant Professor***, preferably from scholars specializing in comparative or international politics. To be fully considered, applications are to be submitted

by February 15, 2023. Find more details of the position at [University of San Francisco].

Oslo Metropolitan University is offering EU-funded two-year ***Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action Postdoctoral Fellowships*** to support its Department of Social Work, Child Welfare and Social Policy in high-impact research on a broad range of topics within national, European and international social policy.Application deadline is January 31, 2023. If you are interested, go to [Oslo Metropolitan University].

The **Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at Ghent University** invites applications for a ***full time position of Assistant Professor (tenure track)*** in the field of International Security. The closing date for application is January 30, 2023. Learn more about the job offer at [Ghent University].

Radboud University welcomes applications for a ***PhD researcher position*** with thematic and conceptual emphasis on return migration governance. Applications are accepted until January 22, 2023. More details are available at [Radboud University].

The **Faculty of Humanities at Leiden Universit**y is offering a ***University Lectureship*** in the Religious Traditions of Japan. Application deadline is January 31, 2023. See [Leiden University] for further information.

The **German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA)** invites applications for ***Doctoral Researcher positions*** in the GIGA Doctoral Program. Review of applications will begin on February 1, 2023. More information is accessible via [GIGA].

The **Department of Criminal Law and Criminology at KU Leuven** is offering the position of ***Research Fellow in Criminal Procedure***. Application deadline is January 15, 2023. Find more about the open position at [KU Leuven].

The **Brussels School of Governance at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel** is accepting applications for a ***Postdoctoral Scientific Assistant position***. The successful candidate will support the research of the School's Center for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy in the framework of the project "Sino American Competition and European Strategic Autonomy". The closing date of application is January 31, 2023. If you are interested, go to [Vrije Universiteit Brussel] to find further details.

The **Department of Legal Studies at the Central European University (CEU)** welcomes applications for the position of ***Assistant Professor in human rights***.

Applications are accepted until January 31, 2023. Visit [CEU] to find more information.

International IDEA is looking for a ***Senior Programme Officer*** with core duties lying in leading the implementation of peer-to-peer partnerships strengthening activities, while assuming primary responsibility for development and implementation of several country-specific EU Member State Parliaments – partner parliament strengthening partnerships. Application closing date is January 17, 2023. For more details, see [International IDEA].

The **Academy of European Law (ERA)** is seeking a ***Project Lawyer in European Public Law*** with specialization in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, the European Convention on Human Rights, in litigation before the Court of Justice of the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights as well as in European institutional law. Application deadline is January 25, 2023. Follow [ERA] to find further details.

The **College of Europe**, Bruges campus, is offering the position of ***Director*** to lead the College's restructured Communications, Events and External Relations Office. Applications can be submitted until January 23, 2023. More information is provided at [College of Europe].

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University invites applications for a ***faculty position*** in the Department of China Studies. Candidates should specialize in Chinese political economy. Closing date of application is January 9, 2023. Learn more about the open position at [Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University].

The **Department of History at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK**) seeks to fill a f***ull-time academic position(s) in Asian History***. The positions of Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor are open for application. The Department is particularly looking for a scholar of Japanese, Korean, or Southeast Asian history. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position(s) is filled. You can find more information at [CUHK].

Team:

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