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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to this week's issue of the Asia in Review (AIR) covering the latest events, developments and trends in domestic politics, international relations and geopolitics in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Wishing you an informative read, I extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Iranian Islamic Republic Day this week.

Henning Glaser

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Main Sections

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

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

China: Corruption and technology breakthroughs in semiconductor sector

(ms) China's anti-corruption bodies have announced the investigation against a former high-ranking semiconductor entrepreneur, while reports of a breakthrough from Huawei have emerged.

In a press release, China's highest anti-corruption body, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), together with the National Supervisory Commission (NSC), accused Zhao Weiguo, former chairman of Tsinghua Unigroup, a major Chinese producer of semiconductors, of corruption. His case was handed over to the prosecution.

Under Zhao's leadership, the tech company became heavily indebted and defaulted on several bond payments, inevitably leading to a nearly two-year restructuring of the company that ended in mid-2022. [BBC] [Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, in Chinese]

Meanwhile, Chen Datong, head of Yuanhe Puhua (Suzhou) Investment Management, also known as Hua Capital, was released from his eight-month detention almost at the same time.

A major investor in the domestic progress of semiconductor development, Chen had been in custody since August last year as part of an intensification of anti-corruption efforts against the semiconductor industry that culminated in the investigation of three top executives with ties to China's Big Fund. The Big Fund is the National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, which was founded in 2014 and has since then raised a total of USD 50 billion from investors and served to promote the independence of the national semiconductor sector (see AiR No. 33, August/2022, 3).

Without official justification for the release, Financial Times quotes a Chinese government official as saying "[t]he dire situation of the US-China technology war has forced Beijing to decide to release him as soon as possible."

The quote confirms the damage the U.S.-led sanctions have done to China's technology industry, cutting it off or at least limiting the country's export of a variety of essential technologies. On the other hand, it emphasizes the resulting emphasis of the Chinese government on technological independence. [Financial Times] [Swarajya]

In another development the tech giant Huawei has reportedly achieved a breakthrough in the development of electronic design automation (EDA) tools for the production and design of semiconductors with processes of 14 nanometers or larger.

EDA tools are used to produce blueprints for semiconductors before they go into mass production, making them an essential part of semiconductor manufacturing.

Since 2019, Huawei has been on the US government's Entity List, which restricts its access to tools and technologies important to technology giants, such as the globally used EDA tools originating from the US. As a result, the development of made-in-China alternatives is critical to the tech company's survival.

Despite the added value of the new tools, Chinese tech companies are still lagging behind in the development of high-advanced semiconductors based mostly on 5nm technologies, for which the Chinese mainland is still dependent on imports from abroad, but which are also limited by the U.S.-led sanctions.

Huawei has not yet commented on the reports, but official verification of the tools is expected before the end of the year. [Reuters] [Yicai Global]

China: Another corruption case in Chinese football

(ms) The Chinese Ministry of Sports announced on March 24 the investigation against two high officials of the Chinese Football Association (CFA). Wang Xiaoping, director of the CFA's disciplinary committee, and Huang Song, head of the competition department, are being investigated for alleged "severe law violations," an often-used euphemism for corruption.

Wang and Huang are already the fifth and sixth cases of corruption investigations against individuals in connection with Chinese football in 2023 alone, with this year's investigation under the same allegation against Li Tie the former Premier League player for Everton and until last year national coach of the Chinese men's team and Chen Xuyuan the former president of the CFA. In addition, there were investigations against several board members of various Chinese football clubs and high-profile Chinese football players (see AiR No. 8, February/2023, 3). [Associated Press] [Caixin Global] [Reuters]

The investigation represents another setback in Chinese President Xi Jinping's once lofty ambitions for the development of Chinese football. Xi hedged on a plan to make China a world football power by 2050, with plans to build 70,000 football pitches nationwide by 2020 and get 50 million Chinese playing the game to achieve this goal. With currently only 27,000 built pitches, this plan is already far behind the expectations in this regard, but also sporting wise at least the Chinese men's national team are operation well below their expectations and are on the FIFA world rankings on a disappointing 80th place, in comparison, the women are on a good 14th place. [FIFA 1] [FIFA 2] [The Guardian]

China: Evergrande unveils billion-dollar restructuring plan

(ms) Heavily indebted real estate giant Evergrande unveiled plans to restructure its USD 22.7 billion in offshore debt on March 22, 15 months after the company first defaulted on its public dollar bonds.

The plans provide credit investors with two options to swap their debt for new bonds and equity-linked instruments. First, they can receive new bonds maturing in 10 to 12 years, or a combination of new bonds and instruments linked to the shares of Evergrande's real estate services division, its electric vehicle division or the construction company itself, or second, they can convert their debt into various combinations of new bonds maturing in five to nine years and equity-linked instruments.

Evergrande, with its default at the end of 2021, represented the starting point of China's real estate crisis and, with USD 300 billion, is the world's most indebted real estate company.

With regards to the aim of the plan, the company said that "[t]he proposed restructuring will alleviate the company's pressure of offshore indebtedness and facilitate the company's efforts to resume operations and resolve issues on shore." [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China: Tax cuts for smaller businesses

(ms) In a bid to boost confidence in the economy, the Chinese Ministry of Finance announced tax and fee cuts amounting to a total of USD 70 billion per year, which seek to benefit especially smaller businesses.

Between 2023 and 2024, taxable income for low-profit small businesses not exceeding USD 145,000 will be taxed at only one-fourth of the amount previously paid. For the self-employed, only half of the original tax will be due during the period.

For land used by logistics companies to store mass goods, the property tax rate will be halved from 2023 to 2027.

Also, retroactively for the beginning of the year, the pre-tax deduction of research and development expenses of companies will be further optimized, but more detailed information about this is not yet available. [Caixin Global] [Xinhua]

China: Five cooperation agreements between Hong Kong and Guangdong signed

(ms) Chief Executive of Hong Kong John Lee Ka-chiu and the governor of neighboring Guangdong Province

signed five cooperation agreements at a joint conference on March 23.

The cooperation agreements cover the areas of innovation and technology, finance, labor, smart cities, and regulation of pharmaceutical and medical devices, according to official channels without going into details. The two regions also plan to expand existing exchange programs and school trips for Hong Kong students.

The closer cooperation between the two regions is to be seen as a further step in the Chinese government's efforts to better integrate the two Special Administrative Regions with the mainland and to transform the Greater Bay Area as such into an economic powerhouse.

In line with Hong Kong's integration into mainland China, Lee completed a week-long trip to Beijing shortly before the start of the joint conference, during which he visited 11 central ministries and institutions in conjunction besides his participation at the Two Sessions. The focus was also on closer cooperation between Hong Kong and the mainland, but more detailed information about possible plans is missing as well. [China Business Now] [South China Morning Post]

China: Relaxation of the law to protect Hong Kong's Victoria Harbor

(ms) After it has been in the offing for the past few weeks, the Hong Kong government on March 21 issued a proposal to ease the current general ban on land reclamation in the Victoria Harbor and the exemptions under the Protection of the Harbor Ordinance.

So far, the Protection of the Harbor Ordinance reads: "The harbor is to be protected and preserved as a special public asset and a natural heritage of Hong Kong people, and for that purpose there shall be a presumption against reclamation in the harbor." According to this background, any form of land reclamation is only possible in case of an "overriding public need." [Hong Kong Legislation].

The government's justification for relaxing this law is according to them to simplify and accelerate the process of small construction projects, such as sidewalks, promenades, and seating facilities in the area, which are only possible to a limited extent due to the existing regulations.

Opponents of the proposal, however, counter this rationale by saying that it only serves to rob the public and its needs, which has been the deciding factor in the distribution of exemptions for land reclamation processes, of their decision-making authority.

The Society for the Protection of the Harbor, which has used the public's authority to block several development projects to protect the area, fears that if the proposal goes through, major land reclamation projects that have long been blocked will be approved over the heads of the public and the Victoria Harbor will disappear in the long run. [Radio Free Asia] [RTHK] [South China Morning Post]

China: Reports of rape and torture of Uyghur inmates in internment camps

(ms) In the course of the second meeting of the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party by the US House of Representatives, two former female inmates of what they called internment camps in Xinjiang, described the conditions there and reported on torture, rape, and forced sterilization.

Their reports reinforce accusations of mistreatment of the Chinese security authorities against prisoners in the camps.

According to the former inmates, under the goal of "re-education," inmates must attend daily eleven-hour classes that teach them not only Mandarin but also Chinese history and law, patriotic songs, and the like. In case of non-compliance, the inmates are reportedly subject to various forms of torture.

Methods used include the "tiger chair" and the use of electric batons, helmets, and gloves. In addition, especially women are said to be victims of sexualized violence; one of the women spoke of mass rapes by local prison guards. Female inmates are also said to be sterilized by regularly administered medication, and even nursing mothers are said to be affected.

The extent of the systematic oppression and persecution of the Uyghurs was also presented again by Adrian Zenz during the meeting. He estimates that two million Uyghurs are or have been in custody since 2017. [Radio Free Asia]

Zenz was the lead author of the Xinjiang Police Files, which claims to have evidence that reveal the crackdown on the Muslim minority already in May of last year, and that the underlying planning can be

traced back to Xi Jinping at the top of the chain of command (see AiR No. 21, May/2022, 4).

China: Tiananmen Vigil Group appeals against verdict

(ms) After three members of the now defunct Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, a group notable for organizing and carrying out annual vigils for the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, were found guilty of failing to comply with a national security police request for information and sentenced to 4.5 months in prison [see AiR No. 10, March/2023, 1], the convicts now appealed against the sentence.

During the trial, the three defendants were accused of working as agents for an unidentified foreign "Organization 4." The prosecutor's office did not disclose further details about the entity, citing ongoing investigation.

Information on whether the appeal will be granted, and a possible trial date is not yet available. [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Hong Kong Justice Department calls for tougher sentences against convicted protesters

(ms) Hong Kong's Justice Department on March 22 called for a sentence review aimed at imposing a longer prison term on five people already sentenced in January to 15 to 18 months' imprisonment who took part in anti-government protests in November 2019.

The offense of rioting for which the five Hong Kong citizens were convicted can be punished with up to 10 years imprisonment. The reason for the comparatively mild sentence was a deal between the convicts and the responsible prosecutor's office which reduced the sentencing object only to the participation in an eight-minute clash. [Hong Kong Free Press] [The Witness, in Chinese]

China: New equipment for Eastern Theater Command

(ms) According to reports from the Chinese Central Military Commission (CMC), the People's Liberation Army (PLA) 71st Group Army has been equipped with a variety of new military equipment.

The new equipment includes an HQ-17 short-range air defense system, two PGZ-95 self-propelled anti-aircraft systems and seven PHL-11 truck-mounted self-propelled 122 mm multiple rocket launchers, as well as a variety of ammunition and personnel transport vehicles. [Central Military Commission] [Jesus Roman, via Twitter]

The 71st Group Army is part of the Eastern Theater Command, which covers the Chinese provinces of Anhui, Fujian, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Zhejiang, and is responsible for monitoring the region around Taiwan.

China: Home-made engine for fifth generation in mass production

(ms) The Aero Engine Corporation of China (AECC), in a recent video posted on Twitter, has indicated that the domestically developed and produced WS-10 and WS-15 jet engines are in mass production, especially the WS-15 would represent a major step forward in the production of the Chinese fifth generation J-20 fighter jet.

While exact details about when and where the video was made are not known, it appears to show an AECC official answering questions presumably at an industry conference.

The mass production of the WS-10 was virtually confirmed even without public announcement due to the publicly known versatile use of the engine in various applications in different fighter jets.

The news of the mass production of the WS-15 engine, on the other hand, came as a surprise as the AECC and the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA) have been secretive about the progress of the development and have not shared any images of the engine in use with the public.

The WS-15 has been developed specifically for deployment on the J-20 and would be the most powerful engine on the most advanced Chinese fighter jet. Until now, the Russian AL-31 or different variations of the WS-10 have been used as engines. So besides increasing performance, mass production of the WS-15 would also represent another step in the Chinese

military's independence from foreign technologies. [David Wang via Twitter] [Flight Global]

China: Home-grown aircraft engine holds test flight

(ms) Newly released images and video footage show the People's Liberation Army (PLA) conducting first test flights with Chinese-made aircraft engines mounted on its Y-20 large military transport aircraft.

The footage of the test flight, which is said to have been held in early January, shows the Y-20 equipped with three conventional Il-76SK engines and one CJ1000A. The Il-76SK is a propulsion system originating from the Soviet Union, while the CJ1000A is a Chinese-made engine under development by the Aero Engine Corporation of China (AECC).

The test flights are an indication of the Chinese military's expanding efforts to become more independent and self-sufficient in the air space sector. In addition to the increased performance of the new engine, the production of a Chinese engine would make the military more independent of foreign actors, in this case Russia, which on the one hand creates planning security, but also crisis resistance.

In addition to the Y-20, the CJ1000A engine is also planned to be used for the C919 passenger jet, China's first own passenger aircraft. [Flight Global] [South China Morning Post] [お砂糖wsnbn via Twitter]

China: Military maneuvers test defense against US F-35 jets

(ms) The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) simulated combat against US F-35 fighter jets in recent military exercises.

The PLA 75th Group Army along with the PLA Air Force from the Southern Theater Command reportedly held military exercises in which Chinese J-20 fighter jets, China's own fifth-generation fighter jet, were to mimic the U.S. counterpart in the form of the F-35 to practice defense against these highly advanced aircraft, according to Chinese state broadcaster Global Times.

The exercise, according to the Chinese military, was organized in response to the deployment of a large number of F-35 fighter jets around China's territory

that "poses threats to China's national defense." [Global Times]

China: Type 055 destroyer receives operational capability

(ms) Following the completion of a full-scale operational test, the Type 055 large destroyer, named Wuxi, has received operational capability, effective immediately making it the fourth destroyer of the 10,000-ton class of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) North Sea Fleet.

The PLA North Sea Fleet is subordinate to the PLA Northern Theater and is responsible for military activities around China's northern maritime borders and in the Bohai and Yellow Sea. [Global Times]

Japan: Election season for nationwide local seats begins

(cc) March 23 marked the beginning of the official campaigning for Japan's quadrennial unified local elections.

The elections, which will determine the governors and local assembly seats of Japan's major cities and prefectures for the next four years, are planned to be held nationwide on April 9 simultaneously, while the second round of elections that concerns smaller cities and villages will be held on April 23.

The election result could also affect Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's decision on whether he should dissolve the parliament and call for a snap general election, considering that by doing so, he might be able to secure himself a second term as the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)despite the stagnated approval rating for his current administration, which currently stands at 38.1 percent. Without such a maneuver, Kishida's reign as the party leader is expected to end in September 2024.

The issues of tax raises, declining birth rates, and the rising costs of living are some of the key topics expected to be addressed in the ongoing electoral campaigns.

At the kickoff ceremony in Oita Prefecture on March 23, the ruling LDP's secretary general Toshimitsu Motegi promised that the party would seek to develop local areas and businesses. Meanwhile, in a speech

made near Tokyo, Kenta Izumi, the leader of the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, declared that the party would attempt to change Japanese politics by establishing local councils that could reflect voices from diverse backgrounds. [Japan Today]

Japan: New refugee status recognition introduces

(cc) On March 24, amid an increasing demand for transparency regarding the country's migration policy, Japan disclosed its guidelines on refugee recognition for the first time in the form of a handbook for immigration officers.

Composed by the Immigration Services Agency of Japan and based on international sources and court precedents relevant to the migration issue, the handbook will be used to determine whether the individual fits Japan's refugee status criteria.

Notably, the new rules allowed the authority to grant the applicant a refugee status if they are considered at risk of prosecution in their home country for their sexuality. They also suggested that the asylum seeker could still qualify for refugee status if they are shown to have faced several unfavorable circumstances at home, even if those issues do not directly correlate with persecution. Although, the handbook stated that the fear of persecution must be from a realistic threat, not an abstract one.

The Japan Lawyers Network for Refugees expressed doubts about the changes, asserting that the new guidelines do not assure that there will be an increase in refugee recognition and protection. Accordingly, the organization emphasized its demand for an introduction of an independent institution in the refugee recognition process.

Seventy-four people were granted refugee status in Japan in 2021, a record high number for the country but relatively low compared to the European nations or the United States. [Japan Today]

Japan: Top court dismisses appeal to close nuclear power plant in Ehime

(cc) On March 24, the Japanese Supreme Court dismissed Shikoku residents' appeal to stop the operation of a nuclear reactor in the area.

The ruling, which was the same as the one from the Hiroshima District Court from November 2021, stated that the Shikoku Electric Power Co. would be allowed to continue to operate the No. 3 reactor of the Ikata nuclear power plant in Ehime Prefecture.

Submitted by locals from Hiroshima and Ehime prefectures who reside near the reactor, the appeal pointed to the reactor's inadequacy to withstand the impacts of an earthquake.

Shikoku Electric Power Co., meanwhile, affirmed that the construction and operation of its reactor have already considered the conditions of the local area. [Japan Today]

Japan: Kishida calls for an end of harassment issue in the military

(cc) On March 26, in a speech given during the graduation ceremony at the National Defense Academy, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida called for the harassment issue in the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to be stopped and emphasized that such a problem has undermined the foundation of the country's armed forces.

The statement came following the indictment of three former SDF members earlier in March on the charge of indecent assault toward Rina Gonoi, a fellow SDF serviceperson.

As the number of female personnel in the SDF has been increasing, Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada also mentioned in his speech that there existed a need to foster a working environment within the military where people of all genders can thrive and fully participate in the service. [Japan Today]

Japan: Oppositions criticize Kishida’s gift to Ukrainian leader

(cc) On March 24, senior officials from opposition parties criticized Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's move to give a traditional Japanese rice paddle to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his visit to Ukraine (see entry below).

The rice paddle, called Shamoji in Japanese, has often been seen as a charm symbolizing victory and good luck during both peace and war times.

Kenta Izumi, the leader of the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, asserted that Kishida's action had sent an uncomfortable message of encouraging the Ukrainians to fight more or sacrifice everything to achieve victory. Later, in a press interview, he added that a rice paddle is not an appropriate gift for a country leader facing an intense wartime situation.

Nobuyuki Baba, head of the opposition Nippon Ishin, stated that Kishida did not understand the situation and that he would be furious if he were ever to receive such a gift.

The backlash also came from the Japanese people, with social media being flooded with disapproving comments after the gift was revealed to the public on March 23. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Number of foreign residents hits record high

(cc) On March 24, the Immigration Service Agency disclosed that the number of foreign residents in Japan increased by 11.4 percent in 2022, reaching a record high of 3,075,213.

Chinese, Vietnamese, and South Koreans were the top three nationalities of foreign residents.

According to the agency, it was due to the easing of Covid-19 travel restrictions that allowed the number of foreign students and workers coming to Japan to increase sharply.

Meanwhile, the number of individuals who applied for refugee status also rose by 1,359 to 3,772, and the number of individuals who received refugee status increased by 128 to 202. [Japan Times]

Japan: Trade secret theft rises to record high

(cc) Statistics by the National Police Agency (NPA) revealed that the Japanese police in 2022 had investigated a record 29 cases of corporate trade secret theft, an almost six-fold increase from the five cases documented in 2013.

Overall, in 2022, aside from 59 appeals for consultation on trade secret issues, 45 people were arrested or had

their cases sent to prosecutors on charges related to business secret theft.

The NPA assessed that the significant increase in the number of incidents was due to the rise in mid-career job changes. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Yakuza-related investigations decrease

(cc) Recently released data of Japa's police showed that the number of yakuza members that were investigated by the police in 2022 stood at 9,903, a 1,832 decrease from 2021. It was the first time since the country instituted the anti-organized crime legislation in 1991 that the number fell below 10,000.

Fraud and physical assault were two of the most prominent charges linked to the investigations of those individuals.

In total, a record low of approximately 22,400 people were believed to have ties with yakuza crime syndicates, down by around 1,700 from a year earlier.

Despite the declining number, the police remained cautious as there exists an ongoing conflict between rival gangs following the split of Yamaguchi-gumi, one of Japan's most prominent yakuza groups, in 2015. [Japan Times]

Japan: Inflation slows down

(cc) According to government data revealed on March 24, consumer prices in Japan increased by 3.1 percent in February compared to the same period in 2022. However, if the prices of fresh food and energy are removed from the equation, the inflation figures will be at 3.5 percent.

Overall, while the figure was still higher than the two-percent target that the Bank of Japan has been hoping for, it was in accordance with the market expectation and was considered relatively lower than months prior, which stood at 4.2 percent in January.

The deceleration was due to the government's measures that were aimed at combating inflation and rising energy prices. [Japan Today]

Japan: Aegis ships to be upgraded for Tomahawk missiles

(cc) On March 25, a government source reported that Japan aims to upgrade its Aegis destroyers by the fiscal year 2027 to allow those vessels to be equipped with the American-made Tomahawk cruise missiles.

The upgrade effort, which will start from fiscal 2024 onward, will focus on changing the ships' vertical launching system to allow the installation of Tomahawk missiles.

The move was made in order to strengthen Japan's capabilities to combat long-range targets, with the central focus being on China and North Korea. With Tomahawk missiles, Japan could extend its strike range to around 1,600 kilometers.

Additionally, aside from declaring its intent to spend USD 1.6 billion (JPY 211.3 billion) in fiscal 2023 to acquire 400 Tomahawks, Japan has planned to obtain two Aegis ships by fiscal 2032. [Japan Times]

Mongolia: Government enhances anti-corruption efforts

(sw) The Mongolian government strengthens anti-corruption activities by holding overseas escapers accountable according to international agreements and Mongolian laws. Moreover, their bank accounts will be frozen.

These measures are part of wider anti-corruption efforts by the government. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Child as the incarnation of spiritual leader revealed

(sw) On March 8, the Dalai Lama revealed a US-Mongolian child as the incarnation of the third most important Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader, the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, who represents the highest-ranking lama of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia and who will be important in recognizing the next Dalai Lama.

Beijing previously said that it would only recognize a spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, who was chosen by special government-approved appointees. Moreover, China wants to install its own Dalai Lama as

they view the current Dalai Lama as a dangerous separatist.

After the Dalai Lama visited Mongolia in 2016, China punished the country by imposing fees on commodity imports from Mongolia and charging additional transit costs on goods. Therefore, the new appointment causes fears of China's reaction.

Nevertheless, Buddhists in Mongolia celebrated their new spiritual leader, as the religion is part of the country's culture and history. [Republic World] [Daily Mail] [The Diplomat]

North Korea: Major websites go offline

(ge) On March 21 important North Korean websites, including those belonging to state media outlets and the foreign ministry, experienced an unknown issue causing them to go offline.

As of 9 a.m., connections to North Korean domain names ending in ".kp," such as the official Korean Central News Agency and Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party, were failing. The reason for the problem has not been confirmed yet.

This is not the first time North Korea has faced such an issue. In January 2022, the country's major websites were reportedly hit by a suspected distributed denial-of-service attack, causing the North's internet to go down for about six hours. [Yonhap]

North Korea: Government holds meeting to discuss natural disaster prevention, healthcare

(ge) North Korean state media Rodong Sinmun reported that on March 21, North Korea held a meeting of the National Emergency Response Committee to discuss measures to strengthen the country's ability to respond to natural disasters and other issues.

During the meeting disaster prevention and recovery from flood damage were discussed. Officials were urged to make swift progress in crisis management and to implement resolutions to strengthen national disaster prevention work, according to the media's report.

During the meeting duties were also assigned to members of the National Emergency Response Committee.[Rodong Sinmun 1]

On the same day another meeting of the Permanent Commission of the Standing Committee of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK was held to discuss the country's laws on public health, medical service and road traffic . Relevant decrees were approved. [Rodong Sinmun, 2]

The sessions came as North Korea has boosted its efforts to resolve the chronic food shortage that is affecting the country, reportedly made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Main opposition party leader to retain his position after corruption indictment

(ge) On March 22 opposition Democratic Party (DP) leader, Lee Jae-myung, was indicted on corruption charges related to real estate developments and a football club he oversaw when he had been mayor of the city of Seongnam. Despite the indictment, Lee was allowed to retain his chairmanship.

The charges include bribery, breach of duty, conflict of interest, and concealment of criminal proceeds. Prosecutors allege that Lee colluded with real estate developers to help them pocket USD 611.5 million, causing losses of nearly USD 490 million to the city.

Lee is also accused of soliciting bribes from companies to support the city's struggling football club. The DP leader, who denies any wrongdoing, lost last year's presidential election to current President Yoon Suk-yeol. Lee has lost popularity due to these allegations. [Aljazeera]

Nevertheless, the DP's party affairs committee decided on the same day to exempt Lee from suspension. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Tensions between government and labor unions

(ge) On March 25 thousands of members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) rallied in Seoul to protest against the Yoon Suk-yeol administration,

accusing it of promoting a "prosecution-backed dictatorship."

The protestors said that the country's civil livelihood, democracy and labor had worsened under Yoon's presidency in less than a year. The rallies caused traffic jams in several areas of the city, and the police deployed 240 officers to manage the situation. [Yonhap 1]

Prior to the rally, on March 24, the Seoul police raided the offices of the Korean Construction Workers' Union (KCWU), one of the major construction unions of the country and affiliated with the KCTU, over allegations that the union illegally funded a minor progressive party ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections.

The police raided eight locations to seize evidence. South Korea's law prohibits political entities from receiving funds from corporations or organizations. [Yonhap 2]

Tensions between the government and labor unions have been mounting during February and March (see AiR No. 8, February/2023, 3; AiR, No. 11, March/2023, 2).

South Korea: Constitutional Court rejects petition on Prosecution Reform Law

(ge) On March 23 South Korea's Constitutional Court rejected a petition filed by the ruling People Power Party to nullify law revisions that limit the prosecution's investigative powers. The revisions concerned the Prosecutors' Office Act and the Criminal Procedure Act.

The legislation was passed by the main opposition party, the Democratic Party, last year, and aimed to reduce the powers of prosecutors by restricting investigations to two categories of crime: corruption and economic crime.

Although the Court recognized flaws in the legislative process, acknowledging that the law's revisions were approved in the parliamentary committee division without sufficient debate, it ruled that the laws themselves are legit. [The Korea Times] [KBS]

South Korea: Government to prompt market stabilization measures

(ge) On March 23 South Korean Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho announced that the country's economic and financial policy authorities would closely monitor the market situation and take necessary measures to ensure stability, if necessary.

The minister made this statement during a meeting of top policy makers, which included the heads of the central bank and financial regulatory agencies, to review global market conditions after the US Federal Reserve's decision to raise its interest rate policy by 25 basis points to a range of 4.75 percent to 5 percent.

In light of such developments, Choo warned of the possibility of further instability in the global financial market. The Bank of Korea shared his view and stated that constant monitoring is required as volatility could increase anytime, domestically, and globally. [The Korea Times]

He added that the government and the Bank of Korea are ready to implement all necessary measures to ensure market and banking system stabilization, while continually assessing the financial system and companies' soundness. He stated that the financial sector is preparing for uncertainty through risk management and enhancing loss-absorbing capacity.

The minister also emphasized the need for financial companies to create more provisioning and capital buffers to prepare for future troubles. However, he did note that recent stability in domestic markets indicated the continued strength of the local financial system's fundamentals. [South Korea Ministry of Economy and Finance, in Korean] [Reuters 1]

According to a report by the Bank of Korea, South Korea's financial firms are not at significant risk of contagion from US and Swiss banks' recent troubles. The country's banks are under strict supervision, with their exposure to bonds and stocks at only 18 percent of total assets, compared to recently collapsed Silicon Valley Bank's 57 percent.

However, non-bank financial firms may face increased stress due to the sluggish property market. The report noted that some non-bank firms, such as credit card issuers, project financing loans, and payment guarantees, have experienced a sharp rise in exposure to property financing. [Reuters 2]

The government has also taken steps to tackle the fall in housing prices caused by monetary policy tightening, both locally and globally, to fight inflation.

The latest measures, announced on March 23, aim at reducing the tax burden on homeowners. In an effort to stabilize the steep decline of property prices, South Korea has significantly reduced its official reference housing prices for the year.

The finance ministry announced that the reference prices, which are used to calculate property taxes, have decreased by an average of 18.6 percent from last year. As a result, property taxes for homeowners are expected to decrease by 29 percent to 39 percent from last year. [Reuters 3]

South Korea: Democratic Party seeks parliamentary investigation on Yoon-Kishida Summit

(ge) The main opposition party in South Korea, the Democratic Party (DP), is considering a parliamentary investigation into last week's summit between President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (see AiR No.12, March/2023,3).

The DP has raised suspicions that Yoon made secret concessions during the meeting and criticized the government's decision to compensate local victims of Japan's wartime forced labor without asking for contributions from Japan's government or companies.

Reports from Japanese media that unannounced topics were also discussed during the meeting, such as the issue of Korea's easternmost islets of Dokdo, Japan's wartime sexual slavery, and Seoul's import ban on fisheries products from Japan's Fukushima, have added to the DP's criticism and to its call for the the probe. [The Korea Times 1]

President Yoon responded during a Cabinet meeting held on March 21, that South Korea-Japan relations “should be a win-win”, adding that the need for cooperation between the two countries has increased due to external factors, such as the global supply chain crisis and the North Korean nuclear threat.

The president also emphasized the importance of dialogue and resolving misunderstandings to improve the relationship, as well as the potential economic benefits of a stronger partnership. Yoon added that Japan has already recognized its past errors and the harm inflicted on the Korean population during the colonization of the peninsula, declaring that from this moment Japan should be trusted as a partner in cooperation with South Korea. [Office of the President Newsroom, in Korean]

Meanwhile DP leader Lee Jae-Myung has proposed a bill to legally designate “Dokdo Day”, as a sign to mark South Korea’s sovereignty over Japan on the contented islet. [The Korea Times 2]

South Korea: Overseas banking crisis hits national pension system

(ge) The National Pension Service (NPS) of South Korea is facing significant losses due to its investments in overseas financial institutions which have collapsed or were on the verge of collapsing..

The NPS, which holds stocks and bonds worth hundreds of billions of won in Credit Suisse, Silicon Valley Bank, and Signature Bank, among others, has recently reported its worst investment losses in 2022.

Concerns have risen that the NPS may continue to display negative performance in its investment returns unless global financial markets bounce back after the US Federal Reserve ends its monetary tightening cycle around the end of this year.

Market experts suggest reforming the governance structure of the NPS to ensure its autonomy in key decision-making regarding its investments. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Constitutional Court rules in favor of foreign construction workers’s families

(ge) On March 26 the Constitutional Court ruled that it is unconstitutional to exclude foreigners from receiving retirement funds for family members who died while working on Korean construction sites.

The Court found that clause 2 of article 14 on the Act of Employment Improvement of Construction Sites, which excluded foreign families who were not in Korea at the moment of their kin’s death, from receiving retirement paid after their death, as unconstitutional.

The decision came after a Vietnamese national filed a petition requesting payments from the Construction Workers mutual Aid Association following her husband’s death while working on a tunnel construction site in Korea in 2019. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: Mass production of fighter jets

(ge) South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) is pushing for "tentative" combat suitability of the KF-21 Boramae by May, six months earlier than planned, in order to start mass production of the domestically developed fighter jet next year.

Under the so-called KF-21 project, the country aims to manufacture a fighter plane with higher capabilities than a KF-16 fighter, and the Air Force eyes delivery of 120 advanced multi-role fighter jets by 2032 to replace its aging fleet of F-4s and F-5s. Four prototypes of the KF-21, developed by Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), have flown a total of 142 sorties as of March 10. [The Korea Times]

Taiwan: DPP to nominate vice president as presidential candidate

(sw) On April 12, Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) will officially approve the nomination of the current vice president Lai Ching-te as its presidential candidate. Moreover, the DPP Central Executive Committee approved the qualifications of Lai as a candidate on March 12.

Because there was no other candidate, the DPP did not organize primaries to decide on a candidate.

The Kuomintang (KMT), the main opposition party, will select its candidate by reaching a consensus within party ranks. The three most likely candidates are New Taipei City Mayor Hou Yu-ih, Foxconn Technology founder Terry Gou, and KMT Chairman Eric Chu.

The elections for president, vice president, and for the 113 members of the Legislative Yuan will take place on January 13, 2024. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Marine Corps simulates enemy landing

(sw) On March 23, Taiwanese Marine Corps simulated with amphibious vehicles an attempt by enemy forces to land its forces.

According to military experts, the lack of suitable landing sites is one of Taiwan's major advantages if

China decides to attack.

Thus, the drill was conducted at a 'red beach' where large-scale landing efforts would be possible and which is located close to Taoyuan International airport, Taiwan's largest airport. [Taiwan News]

Moreover, on March 25, soldiers of the 52nd Combat Engineer Group demonstrated their combat skills. This includes constructing barricades in the case of disasters. [Twitter]

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

Bangladesh: Ruling party Awami League stands firm against caretaker government

(az) During a conference, the Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader said that he informed the US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas about not allowing the next national election under the caretaker government.

During his speech, the Awami League leader described the opposition party BNP as an illegal party formed by an illegal man and stated that the opposition has become so weak that they have no other means to challenge the ruling party except for the caretaker government during the upcoming national election.

He also called the BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakkhul Islam Alamgir as an illegal secretary general and demanded he should resign from his post before

demanding the resignation of the ruling party from power. [UNB]

Bangladesh: Teesta river almost dead

(az) Due to the sharp decrease in water, the Teesta river has turned almost dead, and 90 percent of its fisheries have disappeared. As the upstream of the river is in India, the country withdraws water arbitrarily through channels into its territory, causing massive loss of water and fish species on the Bangladeshi side, according to the Bangladeshi Department of Fisheries.

Experts from Bangladesh informed that during the last few decades, the Teesta has lost more than 200 of its marine species. The water runs only during the months of October to December when India releases water from its side.

In West Bengal, India withdraws 10 percent of Teesta's water into the Mahananda river. India has recently announced withdrawing even more water from the river by digging two more canals.

The Water Development Board (WDB) fears that the northern region of Bangladesh, also known as the country's rice basket, will soon face a severe water crisis due to the loss of Teesta's water. [New Age]

Bangladesh: Recognition of the 25 March genocide demanded

(az) The Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the international community and the United Nations to recognize 25 March as International Genocide Day in memory of the genocide conducted by the Pakistani Army on 25 March 1971 on innocent Bangladeshi people. She accused the Pakistani military of attacking unarmed Bangladeshi people during the night in the name of operation searchlight.

Members from International Forum for Secular Bangladesh (IFSB) Switzerland chapter gathered in front of the United Nations building in Geneva at the Broken Chair square to demand the recognition of 25 March as Bangladesh Genocide Day. Awami League representatives from European countries were also present there during the demonstration. [UNB] [Hindustan Times]

Bangladesh: Female land employee dies in elite police force custody

(az) The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the elite anti-crime and anti-terrorism unit of the Bangladesh Police again faces criticisms from across the country and human rights organizations after Sultana Jasmine, a union-level land employee in Naogaon district, died in RAB custody.

Sultana was an office assistant of Naogaon Municipality-Chandipur Union Land Office. Two people were accused of hacking the Facebook ID of Enamul Haque, the local government director at the office of the Rajshahi divisional commissioner. A case was filed under Digital Security Act (DSA), and Sultana was the second suspect there.

The family of Sultana reported that after her arrest, Sultana was taken to some unknown location by RAB members. Later on, they received a call from a RAB member to visit Naogaon hospital, where Sultana was hospitalized. After Sultana was transferred to the Rajshahi Medical College (RMC) hospital, the doctors found evidence of injury on her head.

The RAB officer claimed that the injury was due to a fall. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government alerts against any misuse of the Digital Security Act

(az) During a meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, the Bangladeshi Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Anisul Huq said that the government is trying to uphold good practices of Digital Security Act and is alert against the misuse of the law.

Bangladesh has faced severe criticism from the national and international community because of the abuse of the law by the ruling party. Thousands were arrested, and several died in police custody.

Recently, the United Nations also raised concern about the brutal misuse of the law to suppress freedom of speech and media rights in Bangladesh.

The Bangladeshi Minister informed that the government has reduced the misuse of the law in recent times and vowed that Bangladesh is willing to promote the human rights of its citizens and work accordingly. [The Business Standard]

India: Supreme Court to hear pleas seeking criminalization of marital rape

(wr) India's Supreme Court on May 9 will hold a detailed hearing of petitions which pertain to the criminalization of marital rape and have been pending since 2015. Earlier this year, the apex court sought the central government's response on petitions related to marital rape criminalization case.

The Supreme Court's intervention came after Delhi High Court's split verdict last year on the petitions challenging the exception provided in Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, protecting men who commit marital rape from criminal prosecution on the ground that it discriminated against married women who are sexually assaulted by their husbands. At the time, a two- judge bench presented divergent orders; one said the given exception violates the constitution while the other one said it doesn't. The matter was subsequently passed on to larger bench consideration. [AiR No. 20, May/2022, 3]

Last September, then, the court defined marital rape as rape in a landmark decision - but stopped short of criminalizing forcible sex by a husband. The Supreme Court also stated that all women, regardless of their marital status, have the right to an abortion up until 24 weeks, as cases of forcible sex by a husband would be considered as sexual assault. [LiveLaw] [The Hindu] [Press Trust India]

India: Supreme Court overrules 2011 judgment over "criminality by association"

(wr) India's Supreme Court has overruled its 2011 judgments which had held that mere membership of a banned organization does not constitute a criminal offense under the country's anti-terrorism laws unless it is accompanied with violence or the incitement thereof.

The case was referred to a larger bench in 2014 by application filed by the central government, which sought the apex court's opinion on grounds that central legislations were interpreted without hearing the union. On March 24, then, a three-bench declared "mere" membership of an association as unlawful or offense but also noted that the 2011 judgment was

delivered without consideration of the constitutionality.

The court further held that in the previous judgment the bench relied on the United States Supreme Court judgements and made a mistake because as per the Indian constitution the freedom of speech and freedom of association is subject to reasonable restrictions. [ThePrint]

India: Supreme Court to hear pleas challenging the constitutional validity of polygamy among Muslims

(wr) India's Supreme Court considers the formation of a five-judge constitution bench on "an appropriate stage" for hearing of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of polygamy among Muslims. The petition upholds Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code which prohibits polygamy to be applied to all communities of India including Muslims, as it remains unconstitutional and illegal, the petitioner argues.

The plea has been under consideration since 2018. As per law, a polygamous Hindu marriage remains null and void however, Muslim men are given exclusion to marry up to four wives. [Deccan Herald] [Press Trust India]

India: Parliament disqualifies Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after district court convicts him in a defamation case

(wr) Top Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi on March 24 was disqualified as a member of parliament, a day after a magistrate's court jailed him for two years in a defamation case linked to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surname. Speaking against this backdrop, Gandhi on March 25 said his disqualification from Parliament was retribution for demanding a probe into Modi's relationship with the chairman of the Adani Group conglomerate. [The Straits Times]

Gandhi made the remark during a political campaign in April 2019. The court has sentenced him to two years in jail and imposed a fine after finding him guilty under sections 499 and 500 of Indian Penal Code. BLP legislator and former Gujarat Minister filed this complaint against Gandhi for his alleged remarks stating that it has defamed all people with "Modi" surname. [The Hindu]

As of now Rahul Gandhi has secured bail in the court case; on plea his sentence has been suspended and bail has been granted to enable him to move an appeal against his conviction within 30 days. He maintains that there was no malafide intention on his part when he made the statement, his team will be appealing the matter in higher court. [The Hindu]

Congress criticizes this as an intimidation tactic, "politically motivated" move by the ruling BJP, as the general elections arrive and Gandhi's party keeps challenging Modi's government on the Adani matter in parliament. It also held a brief protest demanding an appointment with BJP. [Hindustan Times]

The Congress has drawn support from across the board including TMC, SP, BRS, Shiv Sena, Left parties, among others as they conducted a collective rally in condemnation of disqualification, an "undemocratic" move and murder of democracy, they asserted. [The Wire]

India: Opposition to approach Election Commission over Electronic Voting concern

(wr) Opposition parties decided to move to the Election Commission (EC) to raise concerns over Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) deployment and usage in upcoming polls. The EC's plan to provide migrant voters with a remote facility, has been rejected unanimously by the opposition parties including Congress, BRS, Shiv Sena, NCP, Samajwadi Party who seek Commission's response. Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister in a presser highlighted "they used to say EVM is a stand-alone machine, but now they are saying the names of candidates can be added through the internet". The Commission has not yet responded to their concerns, if not addressed, an independent legislator said will take political action. [Times of India] [Press Trust India]

India: Delhi presents budget, focuses education, sanitation and infrastructure development

(wr) The Delhi government led by Aam Aadmi Party tabled the budget for fiscal year 2023-2024 as per schedule on March 22. The budget was expected to get delayed as former Finance Minister Manish Sisodia resigned after getting arrested in Delhi excise policy

scam by Investigation agencies. Kailash Gahlot who is newly elected as finance minister, presented the budget. The budget of Rs 78,800 crore provides nine schemes ranging from sectors of health, education, environment, transport and infrastructure targeting the G20 Summit to be held this year. [The Print] [The Hindu]

India: Amritpal remains elusive, Punjab Police continues with search

(wr) A week into a state-wide arrest search launched against controversial Sikh preacher, Amritpal Singh continues to evade the authorities. With deployment of 80,000 police personnel for his trial along with mobile service and internet cuts extension in Tarn Taran, Ferozepur districts, hundreds of his supporters have been arrested but Singh remains elusive. Officials believe that he had already crossed Punjab's borders hence, the search was extended into Maharashtra, Haryana and Uttarakhand states. He has accusations of spreading anti-national sentiments, inflicting civil unrest and provoking people for separate states in northern Punjab regions. [The Hindu]

In a parallel development, Punjab-based primarily Sikh journalists, activists and lawyers have blamed the government of silencing "anti-establishment voices", for suspending their social media accounts and targeted investigation. [The Wire]

Nepal: New Cabinet to be announced to end power-sharing talks within ruling coalition

(dql) Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is reportedly set to expand his Cabinet ending week-long negotiations between him and top leaders of the major ruling coalition partners about a power-sharing deal.

The announcement of the new Cabinet is expected for March 29.

Presently, Dahal is running the government which consists of 16 ministries, supported by five ministers and a minister of state. Five of them are from his own party, the rulingCommunist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC), while one belongs to the Janamat Party. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Human Rights Watch warns against transitional justice bill

(dql) Human Rights Watch has warned against the Bill for the Amendment of the Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act (2014), widely known as the transitional justice bill, that was submitted to parliament on March 19.

The international non-governmental organization argues that the bill in its current form would fail to "adequately provide for the effective prosecution of serious crimes under international law," as "[k]ey provisions of this bill appear to be designed to shield alleged perpetrators from prosecution."

During 1996 and 2006, serious human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law amounting to crimes under international law were committed by both the Maoist armed group and government security forces.

The 2016 Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended the war and included a commitment to establish a truth and reconciliation commission for investigating truth about people seriously violating human rights and involved in crimes against humanity. Successive governments, however, have blocked efforts to bring about truth and justice, according to the human rights watchdog. [HRW]

Pakistan: Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan holds massive rally to press for early elections

(lm) Pakistan's former Prime Minister and leader of the country's main oppositions PTI party, Imran Khan, addressed tens of thousands of his supporters in the PTI's eastern stronghold of Lahore late on March 25, renewing calls for early elections. [Voice of America]

In his speech, Khan alleged that the country's powerful military is behind a crackdown on the PTI and trying to get him disqualified from politics, fearing he would sweep national elections scheduled for later this year. He also reiterated his demand for early national elections, saying they would lead to political stability in Pakistan.

The turnout was massive despite attempts by authorities to block access to the venue by placing shipping containers at crucial entry and exit routes of

the city. The provincial government cited terrorism threats for beefing security and blocking "certain routes" in Lahore, the current residence of Imran Khan. The PTI leader spoke from a bulletproof container, the first time he has done so since he survived a gun attack – which supporters say was an attempted assassination – last November [see AiR No. 45, November/2022, 2].

Pakistan: 'Either Ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan exists or we do', home minister says

(lm) Pakistan's main opposition party PTI has slammed "incendiary remarks" by the country's home minister against party leader and former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who since his removal from office last April has held several rallies to demand immediate national elections.

In an interview on March 26 with a local news channel, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah issued what many say are thinly veiled threats to Khan, saying that "he has brought the nation's politics to a point where only one of us can exist,". The minister also said that the government would "go to a point where we will not bother whether a move is democratic or not" in the event that it felt its "existence is being threatened". [Al Jazeera]

Pakistan: Women protesters in Gwadar demand release of local leader amid anti-China sentiments

(lm) Hundreds of women in Pakistan's southern port city of Gwadar have taken to the streets to protest the arrest of a local rights movement, which since 2021 has been demanding a reduction in security checkpoints in the area, an end to deep-sea fish trawling, and an easing of curbs on informal border trading with Iran. [News Drum]

The politically ascendant Maulana Hidayat ur Rehman last year vowed to completely stop work on all local projects linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the biggest project under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative. His arrest in mid-January led to violence and the imposition of a curfew.

Pakistan: Samarbagh residents protest excessive power cuts

(lm) Residents in the city of Samarbagh, located in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on March 26 held demonstrations against local authorities for excessive power outages and a shortage of staff at the offices of the country's income support program, BISP. [India Blooms]

Sri Lanka: President urges opposition on the occasion of the bailout success

(sn) On March 22, Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe gave a speech to the Parliament concerning the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) grant reception from the International Monetary Fund, acknowledging social pressure against the reforms and discussed how future legislation amendments should benefit the country's economy.

The President urged the opposition to understand these factors and support the development of forthcoming restructuring. Following the speech, the Kalutara District MP expressed his support of the President's agenda to the Parliament. He agreed that it is essential for the opposition to support the acquisition of the EFF to revive Sri Lanka. [Daily News], [Government Official News Portal]

Sri Lanka: Education Minister announces affiliation of new teachers with school system in April

(sn) On March 22, Sri Lankan Education Minister announced in the Parliament that 33,000 new teachers will join national schools in April.

Due to the shortage of teachers in provincial schools, 7,500 teachers, who passed out from the National College of Education, will take the essential positions. An additional 26,000 government-employed graduates for national and provincial schools will join the school system following the examination scheduled on March 25. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Central bank chief expects to restore foreign currency reserves in 4

years after the bailout

(sn) On March 23, Central Bank of Sri Lanka Governor Nandalal Weerasinghe said that in 4 years after the bailout reception, Sri Lanka should be able to restore its foreign exchange reserve volume to pre-crisis levels of approximately USD 8-9 billion.

He added that this target will be achieved through the upcoming debt restructuring program required by the International Monetary Fund for accessing the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) and expects it to enhance a more disciplined fiscal regime.

Sri Lanka owes its external creditors around USD 51 billion in total, and its foreign exchange reserves had USD 10 billion at most. The program would aim to reduce annual debt service payments that were suspended for a former year due to the declared bankruptcy of the State. Following the reception of the EFF by the Sri Lankan government, President Ranil Wickremesinghe announced that forthcoming years of adhering to the debt restructuring program would be difficult for the country.

n this sense, he proposed that in the nearest future, more taxes and tougher anti-corruption legislation will be applied. Likewise, the government plans to sell off some state companies, including Sri Lankan Airlines, to reduce the national capital drain. [The Straits Times 1], [The Straits Times 2]

Sri Lanka: Treasury plans to lift import restrictions on 100–150 products

(sn) Senior officials of the Sri Lankan Treasury Department announced that in the upcoming four months, the government plans to lift the import ban on approximately 100-150 products, such as electronic devices, household, and agricultural equipment.

While the vehicle import prohibition will be upheld to preserve foreign exchange reserves, the upcoming lifting of import restrictions will significantly depend upon its impact on exchange rates, inflation, and foreign currency supply. [News Wire]

Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights

and National Security in Southeast Asia

Cambodia: Former opposition activists arrested

(ns) On March 21, the Phnom Penh Municipal Police arrested two opposition activists who posted critical remarks on social media about the government's relationship with King Norodom Sihamoni, pointing to Prime Minister Hun Sen's tight control over the King.

The activists, Yim Sinorn and Hun Kosal, are reportedly associated with Kem Sokha, former president of the 2017 dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party and opposition leader who was recently sentenced to 27 years of house arrest after being found guilty of treason.

Prime Minister Hun Sen commented on the case, proposing that the court will make the final decision. The activists argue that the King holds no legal or political authority in national matters, and that Hun Sen is abusing his power.

The situation has been interpreted as a move by the ruling party to silence opponents before the July national elections. [KhmerTimes], [The Diplomat]

Cambodia: Licenses of three media outlets revoked

(ns) On March 16, Cambodia's Information Ministry revoked the licenses of three media outlets for publishing reports about a senior state official's alleged involvement in a land fraud.

The Ministry of Information argued that the outlets, including the Federation of Cambodia-ASEAN

Journalists, Raksmey Kampong Cham, and Dumnong Knong Srok, violated journalistic ethics and published misinformation for third parties' potential benefits.

The president of the Federation of Cambodia-ASEAN Journalists expressed disappointment with the Ministry's actions and requested the exact issue and mistake. The Cambodian People's Party National Assembly member, Sar Chamrong, allegedly filed a complaint against the media outlets, but he could not be reached for comment. The outlets reportedly received orders from the Ministry to remove the articles, but the Ministry denied the allegations. [Camboja News]

Cambodia: National Election Committee prepares for upcoming election

(ns) On March 25, Cambodia's National Election Committee (NEC) announced the Dissemination Meeting with Stakeholders on the Election Campaign Launching scheduled for March 30.

The Committee will cover the electoral campaign launching and the processing of complaints throughout the promotions period. The NEC also confirmed that the Ambassador of Japan visited the NEC office on March 27 to discuss the upcoming elections.

The NEC announced plans to hire 600 people as public relations officers, guards, compliance department specialists, and logistics officers, with 814 officials required to conduct the national elections. The announcement urged indigenous people and people with disabilities to apply, but monks, clergymen, courts, and state officials should abstain.

Earlier this month, the NEC delegation visited France to exchange experiences in conducting national polls and to receive insights on democratic elections management. [Phnom Penh Post 1], [Phnom Penh Post 2], [National Election Committee – Cambodia, 1], [National Election Committee – Cambodia, 2]

Indonesia: State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) Minister gains in election popularity

(fb) A recent election survey revealed a surge in popularity for State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) Minister Erick Thohir as a potential vice-presidential candidate.

While trailing behind other candidates, Thohir's electability rating increased from 10.3 percent in December 2022 to 14.5 percent in February, following his election as chairman of the Soccer Association of Indonesia (PSSI) with the support of young football fans. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Parliamentarians seek to sack Constitutional Court judge

(dql) Members of Indonesia's House of Representatives have decided to request to revoke a 2017 presidential decree on the appointment of Constitutional Court judge Gazalba Saleh. [The Jakarta Post 1]

Gazalba is accused of gratification and money laundering. He has been detained since December last year. [The Jakarta Post 2]

Malaysia: Government proposes amendments to law on sexual offences against children

(pa) The Malaysian Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform), Datuk Seri Azalina Othman, has announced in parliament that the government would be proposing amendments to the Sexual Offences Against Children (SOAC) Act 2017 and the Evidence of Child Witness Act 2007. [TRP]

This comes as the government tries to combat the increase in online threats to children that have come with the development of technology in the nation, with a recent report saying about 100,000 children in the country were exposed to some form of online sexual abuse. [Malay Mail]

The amendments include criminalising live stream sex, threatening and extorting children by using sexual photos, amending legal definitions of child pornography, changing the legal age of a child from 16 to 18 years old and making it easier for children to testify in court.

Individuals who use a sexual image of a child as leverage to blackmail and threaten a child for more images or video, pay money or have sex, may face a maximum 10-year jail term upon conviction, regardless of age. The proposed new offence for live streaming sex, including participating, promoting, organizing or

receiving money, would be 20 years' jail or an RM50,000 fine. [The Star]

In another move, Othman, also announced that the government will no longer view lifelong imprisonment as an alternative to the mandatory death penalty. [NST]

This is to be replaced with a new alternative of a jail sentence between 30 and 40 years and whipping of no fewer than 12 strokes. Lifelong imprisonment is also to be abolished permanently as a form of punishment. [Malay Mail]

The mandatory death sentence would be abolished for offenses which do not cause death, except for three offenses namely Sections 212 and 121A of the Penal Code, as well as Section 39B of the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952. [Malaysia Now]

These new amendments are to impact the 957 death sentence and life-term prisoners who have completed their appeal process prior to this.

Malaysia: Ministry of the Economy to focus on fiscal strengthening and identifying new sources of growth

(pa) Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli has stated that the government will focus on strengthening the country's fiscal position by expanding revenue and rationalizing expenditure, through growth and implementing structural reforms aimed to encourage competitiveness and productivity in all sectors. [Malaysia Reserve]

There is to be a focus on strategic sectors that can expedite new investments. This includes the energy transition, expediting the digital economy, agriculture, biomass, and tourism and addressing the skills gap in the job market. This is to be done through the People Income Initiative (IPR), which focuses on the nation's economic structure. [Malay Mail]

Rafizi adds that Malaysia's current economic situation is expected to continue to be stable based on data retrieved by the government, with GDPs from all sectors besides agriculture having recovered from the previous administration. He also notes that the nationwide gain a double-digit revenue increase in the third quarter of 2022 due to domestic demand. [NST]

Myanmar: Only a third of parties registered under new election law with deadline looming

(ih) In Myanmar, only 33 of over 90 political parties have registered with the Union Election Commission under the new Political Parties Registration Law before the March 28 deadline.

Most registered parties have military ties, with eight running nationally and 25 running limited campaigns. The National League for Democracy (NLD) and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) refuse to register under the new law. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Alleged junta money launderer assassinated in Yangon

(ih) Yangon-based guerrilla group Urban Owls assassinated alleged junta money-laundering aide Minn Tayzar Nyunt Tin on March 24.

Operating firms in Thailand, India, Vietnam, Singapore and Cambodia, Minn has been accused of money laundering for the junta and its generals, while his companies provided assistance in purchasing condos, land and establishing companies, according to an Urban Owls statement.

The group warned it would continue targeting those providing economic support to the junta. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: Acts of violence against politicians on the rise

(fb) Acts of violence against politicians have been increasing in the Philippines, as highlighted by the recent assassination of Negros Oriental province governor Roel Degamo.

Degamo is the first governor to be assassinated since 2007, and the 17th politician killed in 2023.

The attack occurred during a charity event at his residence in Pamplona when armed individuals entered the premises and fired at Degamo and his colleagues. The assailants escaped in multiple vehicles. [La Prensa Latina]

Singapore: Strengthening employment resilience

(gp) In a recent speech, Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) Wong emphasized the importance of protecting workers rather than jobs to achieve employment resilience.

He explained that technological disruptions and economic uncertainties make it impossible to safeguard every job. Instead, Singapore should focus on equipping workers with the necessary skills and knowledge to adapt to new industries, as well as providing support for those facing retrenchment.

The government aims to invest in the future economy by prioritizing training and education, promoting digitalization, and fostering partnerships with employers to help workers transition between jobs. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Core inflation in February unchanged

(gp) Singapore's core inflation rate remained unchanged at 1.5 percent in February 2023, according to a joint release by the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI).

This figure aligns with market expectations, as the rate is the same as in January 2023. The unchanged core inflation rate is mainly attributed to the stabilizing cost of oil-related items and the offsetting increase in food prices. The overall Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose by 3.3 percent year-on-year in February, primarily due to higher private transportation and food prices. [CNA]

Singapore: Leadership transition at Progress Singapore Party

(gp) Singapore's opposition Progress Singapore Party (PSP) elected its new Central Executive Committee (CEC) at the party conference on March 26, 2023.

Secretary-General Francis Yuen was among three office-holders who stepped down. Party founder and chairman Dr. Tan Cheng Bock, led the 12-member CEC list released by PSP on Sunday afternoon. Vice-chairman Wang Swee Chuang and youth wing leader

Jess Chua also stepped down in what appears to be a significant leadership overhaul.

The PSP stated that Yuen has been appointed as executive chairman of an overseas public-listed company, making it challenging for him to continue leading the party due to his new commitments. As a result, Yuen decided to step down as secretary-general but will remain a member of the party.

Yuen acknowledged the difficulty of the decision, but deemed it necessary for the party's well-being as he is expected to spend an extended period overseas. He emphasized the importance of having full-time leadership, particularly as the party approaches the next election. Yuen expressed pride in the party's progress thus far and confidence in the new CEC's ability to elevate the party to new heights.

The new CEC, including business consultant Abas Kasmani, technologist Harish Pillay, psychiatrist Ang Yong Guan, and Non-constituency MPs Leong Mun Wai and Hazel Poa, will serve until March 2025. The CEC is scheduled to meet on March 29 to determine members' roles. [ST]

Singapore: Drug laws tightened

(gp) Singapore's Parliament has passed new legislation aimed at strengthening the country's drug laws. The amendments include higher penalties for possession of certain Class A controlled drugs, such as cocaine or cannabis, and better strategies to combat psychoactive substances. [CNA]

Singapore: New agency for communicable disease management to be established

(gp) Singapore’s health ministry has announced the establishment of the Communicable Diseases Agency (CDA) to bolster its capacity to tackle infectious diseases and enhance preparedness for future pandemics.

The CDA will integrate surveillance, research, and response efforts in the nation. In addition, a White Paper on pandemic readiness has been released, aimed at fostering parliamentary debate and refining future strategies. [CNA]

Singapore: Fourth military service's role to foster co-existence between Armed Forces and commercial sector

(gp) Singapore's Defense Innovation and Science (DIS) chief, Lieutenant-Colonel Lim Wee Tee, has outlined the role of the country's fourth military service in fostering co-existence between the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) and the commercial sector.

The new division, called the Digital and Intelligence Service (DIS), is aimed at integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and robotics into the military's operations.

Lt-Col Lim emphasized the need for the DIS to collaborate with the commercial sector to develop and acquire new technologies while ensuring that military requirements are met. The DIS will also focus on talent development, nurturing in-house experts, and forming partnerships with academic institutions and local companies to build a strong ecosystem for defense innovation. [The Straits Times]

Thailand: Election date set for May 14

(aj) On March 21, the Election Commission (EC) of Thailand scheduled the general elections for May 14, following King Rama X's endorsement of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's decree to dissolve parliament (see AiR No. 12, March/2023, 3).

Analysts suggest that the choice of May 14, rather than May 7, aims to limit the impact of younger voters, as it coincides with a nationwide exam day. This demographic group has been instrumental in the 2020-2021 pro-democracy protests against Prayuth and the military-affiliated parties.

Some experts caution against dismissing the potential for a coup, as Prayuth's recent call to "move beyond conflict" echoes the justification for the 2014 military takeover he led. [Council on Foreign Relations] [The Diplomat] [The Nation Thailand]

Thailand: Poll preparations

(aj) With the poll date finalized on May 14, government agencies, political parties, and interested groups prepare for the event ahead. The cabinet approved a USD 174 million budget for the EC to organize the

election, and independent groups - television broadcasting networks and non-governmental organizations - have taken it upon themselves to organize volunteers to monitor election results in real-time, like the Association of Digital Television Broadcasting and its enlistment of 100,000 volunteers. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also taking measures to ensure a smooth process for Thai citizens abroad to cast their votes in the upcoming election.

Under EC rules, the agency must follow a strict schedule to prepare the country for elections. The EC calls for parties to register their constituency and party-list candidates during the first week of April and the Commission will announce the location of 95,000 polling stations across the country a week after registration. [Bangkok Post] [Pattaya Mail]

Thailand: Parties begin to nominate candidates for premiership

(aj) Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha has been nominated as the United Thai Nation Party's (UTN) first candidate for the premiership. According to a party source, the main opposition party, Pheu Thai, has chosen three individuals for the prime ministerial race: party leader and daughter of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, Paetongtarn Shinawatra; real estate magnate and party advisor, Srettha Thavisin; and the party's Chief Strategist, Chaikasem Nitisiri.

Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), Prawit Wongsuwon, has been designated as the PPRP's first party-list candidate. Insiders claim that Prayuth will not run as a list-MP candidate for the UTN; instead, UTN party leader Pirapan Salirathavibhaga is expected to occupy the first position on the list of party candidates. Neither Paetongtarn nor Srettha appeared on the Pheu Thai's released list of party candidates. However, the opposition party's list did feature former PPRP members who recently defected to Pheu Thai, including ex-Minister of Justice, Somsak Thepsutin, and former Minister of Industry, Suriya Juangroongruangkit.

According to the regulations of Thailand's Election Commission, parties must register their selections for party-list and constituency candidates by the first week of April in order to participate in the May election. To contend for the 500-seat House of Representatives, parties are required to choose 100 party-list candidates and 400 constituency-list candidates.

A minimum of 25 Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House is necessary for a party to nominate three candidates for the prime minister position. [Bangkok Post] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3] [Thai PBS World] [The Nation Thailand] [The Nation Thailand 2]

Thailand: Parties step up their economic campaign promises

(aj) With the election date set for May 14, political parties step up their election campaigns. In efforts to alleviate public concern about Thailand's economic outlook and to lure in broadband support, many parties have substantiated their promises to boost the country's economy. This is a developing story on the progression of pledges that parties have made as the election draws near (see AiR No. 7, February/2023, 2, AiR No. 9, February/2023, 4, AiR No. 10, March/2023, 1, AiR No. 11, March/2023, 2, and AiR No. 12, March/2023, 3).

The Move Forward Party promises to support business policies for small and medium-sized enterprises, break up big business monopolies, and provide financial support to small farmers.

The Pheu Thai Party vows to boost Thailand's GDP growth to 5 percent, increase tax on private corporations, and broker deals for more free trade agreements.

The Democrat Party made commitments to broaden loan accessibility for small-businesses and those in the lower-income brackets. Democrats plan to drive Thailand's economic growth by prioritizing the country's entertainment sector, exporting Thai culture and goods.

Additionally, the United Thai Nation Party gathered a group of experts from academia, real-estate, and other economic pundits to advise the party on its economic platform and be a source for policymakers to reference. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [The Nation Thailand 1] [The Nation Thailand 2]

Thailand: Petition to suspend House dissolution

(aj) A member from the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) petitioned the Administrative Court to overturn Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's royal decree–successfully

approved under royal purview - that dissolved parliament to call for elections.

PPRP member Ruangkrai Leekitwattana submitted the petition on March 21, a day after Thailand's monarch endorsed the decree. The PPRP member views the premier's move as a way to buy time for his own party, the United Thai Nation Party (UTN), to garner support and recruit more members to give the PM a better chance at re-election, making the decree unsound and unnecessary.

If the tenure of House MPs is allowed to naturally expire, which in this case was March 23, charter rules specify that elections must be held within 45 days. However, if the ruling Thai PM dissolves the House before the stipulated tenure, then elections are held in 45-60 days. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Supreme Administrative Court accepts complaint contesting Bangkok's constituency boundaries

(aj) The Supreme Administrative Court accepted a complaint filed by Chart Pattana Kla Party's secretary-general, Atavit Suwanpakdee, to look into the Election Commission's (EC) remapping of Bangkok. The Court is currently awaiting an explanation from the EC on the issue before deliberating on the matter.

The EC is responsible for drawing constituency boundaries across Thailand in anticipation of the country's upcoming general elections. When the EC published the electoral map earlier this March, political parties disagreed with the remapping of Bangkok. The EC combined unrelated sub-districts into a single constituency, which complainants say violate EC rules that stipulate only entire districts can be merged into one electoral entity. [AiR No. 12, March/2023, 3] [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Demonstrators protest against the rule of 'military parties'

(aj) The day after Parliament was dissolved, over 20 pro-democracy activists rallied outside the Parliament Complex with buckets, mops, water, and cleaning agents to "wash-off" authoritarianism. Demonstrators threw water on themselves and on photos of Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha and Deputy PM Prawit

Wongsuwon. The protest lasted for less than an hour and police were on standby observing the situation.

Although the premier did not directly comment on the rally, PM Prayuth discussed his general stance on protests at a press conference on March 24, two days after the fact. The premier stated that protestors should refrain from holding demonstrations in the lead-up to the elections, or else it may cause civil unrest. [The Nation Thailand] [The Nation Thailand 2]

Thailand: Amnesty International petitions Thai government to release activists

(aj) Amnesty International has joined over 8,000 signatures on a petition to drop all accusations made against thousands of pro-democracy protestors connected to Thailand's 2020-2021 anti-government protests.

The watchdog group urges Thailand to abide by international human rights standards, emphasizing freedom of expression and assembly. The prime minister's office accepted the petition, but has not commented on the request. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Alleged members of Myanmar resistance group detained

(aj) In Tak province, situated on Thailand's western border, authorities conducted a raid on a residential complex, detaining 83 undocumented migrants from Myanmar who are suspected members of the People's Defense Forces (PDF), an opposition group resisting Myanmar's ruling junta.

Amnesty International reported that the Myanmar military regime provided Thai police with a list of names and photographs to identify individuals. Over 200 Myanmar nationals resided in the complex, including children who were among the 83 apprehended for interrogation. Authorities confiscated military equipment and medical supplies during the operation. The previously abandoned building was purchased and refurbished a few years prior, allegedly with the backing of international organizations and donors.

Since the Myanmar military seized power in February 2021, it is estimated that over 20,000 Myanmar nationals have sought refuge in Thailand. Amnesty International urges Thailand to safeguard Myanmar

migrants fleeing their country's civil war, emphasizing that returning them could lead to imprisonment, death, or torture at the hands of the junta. [Amnesty International] [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Police crackdown on scam call centers based in Thailand targeting Americans

(aj) Thai authorities arrested 20 people involved in scam call centers duping victims - primarily elderly Americans - into transferring their money, altogether amounting to over USD 80 million in assets.

Thailand's Cyber Crime Investigation Bureau received a tip last year from the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the US Secret Service to investigate the transnational crime.

The five Indian nationals and 15 Thai nationals posed as US law enforcement officials to persuade victims to hand over their money. Deputy National Police Chief Torsak Sukwimol said that over 75,000 scam call cases were filed between 2020–2021. The US requested Thai authorities to look into 365 of those cases. The deputy police chief stated that the Indian nationals headed the international operation, which extends to other countries, such as Cambodia, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Poland, and Peru. [Bangkok Post] [South China Morning Post]

Vietnam: Inspection Commission Convenes 27th Meeting to Address Party Violations

(gp) On March 21-22, the Party Central Committee's Inspection Commission convened its 27th meeting in Hanoi to address various breaches of Party regulations and State laws.

The commission issued warnings and recommended disciplinary actions against numerous Party officials and committees, particularly from Dak Lak and Dong Nai provinces, for neglecting their responsibilities.

These infractions led to severe consequences and tarnished the Party's reputation, generating negative public sentiment towards local authorities.

According to the Commission, the officials in question exhibited a decline in political thought, moral virtue,

and lifestyle, further damaging the credibility of Party organizations and local authorities. Additionally, the Commission examined other Party disciplinary grievances during the meeting. [Vietnam+]

Vietnam: Government to regulate OTT messaging services

(gp) The Vietnamese government has proposed amendments to the Law on Telecommunications to manage over-the-top (OTT) media services such as Telegram, Zalo, Viber and WhatsApp.

While currently there are no provisions in the law to manage these services, the Ministry of Information and Communications said that OTT services can be considered as direct substitutes for traditional communications like calling and texting, and as such should be treated comparably under the law.

The proposed amendments would require all OTT service providers, including those that do not have fees, to register with the information ministry, and for domestic and international providers with fees to have commercial agreements or representatives in Vietnam to comply with local law. The government believes that managing OTT services will ensure users' protection and information security. [VN Express]

Vietnam: PM chairs law building meeting

(gp) The Prime Minister of Vietnam, Pham Minh Chinh, chaired a meeting in Hanoi on March 27, to discuss various legal matters, including proposed changes to laws related to transport infrastructure, citizen identification, credit institutions, and entry, exit, transit, and residence policies for foreigners in Vietnam.

The Government has prioritized the development of institutions as one of three strategic breakthroughs, and has convened three meetings on law building in the first quarter of this year. The Prime Minister emphasized the importance of obtaining feedback from experts and affected parties to ensure the progress and quality of the draft legal documents.

He also assigned press and media agencies to raise public awareness of the policies and build a consensus on law building and enforcement. [Vietnam+]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Bangladesh opens its ports to facilitate trade with Bhutan

(az) On March 23, Bhutan's government disclosed that Bangladesh is set to open up three of its ports for landlocked Bhutan - to facilitate trade with other countries.

The disclosure came a day after Bhutan signed an agreement with Bangladesh to use three Bangladeshi ports to trade with other countries, including Mongla, Payra, and Chittagong ports.

Bhutanese officials applauded Bangladesh's support because using Bangladeshi ports will decrease transportation costs as well as the country's dependency on India. [Reuters]

Bangladesh calls US State Department's report on human rights practice biased

(az) On 20 March, the US State Department released the '2022 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, which contains an assessment of Bangladesh's current human rights situation.

Bangladesh Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud rejected the report as biased and one-sided.

The report mainly highlighted the regime's recent crackdown on freedom of speech, forced

disappearances, unlawful killings, and crushing the opposition through mass arrests and torture. Moreover, it drew attention to the ruling party's discriminatory regulations and irregularities in the 2018 national election.

The minister rejected most of the claims of the report alleging that the report is based on the information gathered from anti-government NGOs. He also criticized the US government saying that the US should not interfere in the governance of other countries as thousands of people in the US are killed by the US police every year. [Anadolu Agency]

US secretary of state praises Bangladesh, expects it to be a regional leader soon

(az) As Bangladesh has shown rapid growth in the economic sector, the US Secretary of State Antony J Blinken has praised Bangladesh's development and stated the country is becoming a regional leader soon. He also conveyed the message that the US is looking forward to deepening its partnership with the South Asian country.

During his speech, Blinken also stressed his country's will to cooperate for a free and fair national election that is going to be held next year. Blinken also applauded Bangladesh's leadership role in the environment and climate resilience. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh-Mauritania: Agreement on contract farming

(az) During a bilateral meeting between Mauritania's Agriculture Minister Yahya Ahmed El Waghef and Bangladesh's non-resident Ambassador Muhammad Zulqar Nain, Bangladesh's proposal of contract farming in Mauritanian arable lands was welcomed by the West African country. The proposal was made by Nain during his recent visit to the African country.

Under the proposal, by April 2023, Mauritania will privatize large parts of its southern arable lands, from where it will offer opportunities to Bangladeshi businessmen and entrepreneurs.

Mauritania has also agreed to cooperate with Bangladesh for food security in the future. [New Age]

Cambodia conducts naval drills with Chinese defense forces

(ns) On March 19, the Chinese Ministry of National Defense announced the “China-Cambodia Golden Dragon” drills in the South China Sea, involving the People’s Liberation Army Southern Military Command and two Royal Cambodian Navy patrol boats.

The Chinese Navy ship carried out an exercise with the Cambodian Navy, establishing communication for coordinated navigation.

Cambodia dismantled facilities funded by the US to renovate the Ream naval base, arousing concern from the US and Australia about Cambodia’s changing national security interests (see AiR No. 48, November/2022, 5). [Aljazeera]

Cambodian Minister of Foreign Affairs visits Vietnam

(ns) The Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Vietnam from March 20-22 at the invitation of the Vietnamese Foreign Affairs Minister.

The ministers co-chaired the 20th Meeting of the Cambodia-Vietnam Joint Commission on Economic, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation in Hanoi, where they expressed satisfaction with the current relationship and emphasized bilateral socio-economic achievements of recent years.

The parties agreed to prioritize the growing trade volume and expedite the completion of the Master Plan on Cambodia-Vietnam Economic Connectivity 2030 within the current year. They also plan to create a Special Economic Zone in Cambodia along the border with Vietnam and to simplify cross-border procedures for their nationals.

Vietnam,for its part, plans to provide more scholarships to Cambodian students as the partners develop cooperation mechanisms on science, technology, and innovation.[Voice of Vietnam], [Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs § International Cooperation]

Cambodia welcomes Commonwealth of Dominica's Minister of Foreign Affairs

(ns) On March 22-24, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, International Business, Trade, and Energy of the Commonwealth of Dominica Vince Henderson visited Cambodia for the first time.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen met him on March 24 and welcomed cooperation from the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The two sides signed a visa exemption agreement for diplomats from both countries during the visit, and the visiting guest also met with the Cambodian Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs.[Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs § International Cooperation], [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia-United Arab Emirates: Trade to be enhanced

(ns) On March 16, the Cambodian Ministry of Commerce announced the final round of negotiations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to develop the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the two countries.

The ministry reports that the agreement should help strengthen their economies and increase cooperation between the Association for Southeast Asian Nations and the Middle East.

Trade volume between Cambodia and the UAE has increased by 30 percent during 2021-2022. The CEPA is expected to help Cambodia export more agricultural and industrial goods, such as rice, fruits, peppers, garments, and electronic components. It should also facilitate bilateral investment and services market engagement between counterparties. [Cambodianess]

Cambodia-Japan: Defense and security cooperation to be strengthened

(sn) On March 24, Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) Deputy Commander and Army Commander Hun Manet made a phone call with his counterpart from the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), Chief of Staff General Yoshihide Yoshida, with both sides vowing to improve cooperation between their via a regional framework to promote peace, stability, and development.

In February, Cambodian and Japanese forces signed terms of reference to enhance the collaboration of

national armies. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodian Foreign Ministry responds to the US Department of State's 2022 Human Right Report

(sn) On 22 March the Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed strong opposition to the US Department of State's "2022 Human Rights Report on Cambodia", arguing that the report was based on prejudice and was politically biased.

It further insisted that major achievements of the country had been ignored in the report, reassuring that Cambodian independent media enjoy freedom of expression and the country's commitment to "consolidate our young democracy" and protect human rights after the Khmer Rouge genocide. [Office of the Council of Ministers]

China-Russia: Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow

(vp) On March 22, Chinese President Xi Jinping concluded his three-day visit to Russia, in a latest demonstration of close relations between Beijing and Moscow amid the arrest warrant of the International Criminal Court against Russian President Vladimir Putin. It was Xi's first visit to Moscow in four years.

In their joint statement of March 21, Xi and Putin reaffirmed their countries' alignment on multiple issues and commitment to deepening the Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic partnership "which is in line with the fundamental interests of the two countries and their peoples, in line with the development trend of the times, and is not subject to external influence."

Calling relations between China and Russia a "model of state relations," that is based on "non-alignment, non-confrontation, and non-targeting of third countries," the joint statement further calls for the building of a multipolar world that recognizes "more and more regional powers that are strong and determined to defend their legitimate rights and interests." In an apparent reference to the US, it expressed opposition to "all forms of hegemony, unilateralism, and power politics," as well as "Cold War mentality," and "small circles targeting specific countries."

On the war in Ukraine - called Ukraine issue - China reiterated its "objective and impartial" position, with both leaders referring to China's 12-point peace

proposal and making clear that “to resolve the Ukrainian crisis, the legitimate security concerns of all countries must be respected and the formation of confrontation between camps must be avoided,” and expressed rejection of “unilateral sanctions not authorized by the UN Security Council.” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in Chinese]

Summarizing Beijing’s position in the war in Ukraine, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang remarked in a briefing on Xi's visit, titled “A Journey of Friendship, Cooperation and Peace that Attracts Worldwide Attention”: “Who is fanning the flames and fueling the fight? Who is promoting peace talks? These are all facts witnessed by the whole world,” adding that “China’s position is clear-cut and consistent. Between peace and war, we choose peace. Between dialogue and sanctions, we choose dialogue. Between lowering the temperature and fanning the flames, we choose the former. China does not have selfish political interests or engage in geopolitical manipulation.” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2]

A number of agreements were signed at the end of the visit focused on deepening China-Russia cooperation, in areas such as trade, technology and state propaganda. Regarding the energy sector and trade, a further growth of Russian gas exports to China was discussed, as well as the increasing reliance on China as an import market, amid Western sanctions directed at crippling Moscow and its economy.

In particular, both parties agreed on a new pipeline in Siberia, dubbed the Power of Siberia 2, passing through Mongolia that would deliver gas from Russia to China. Results of sanctions against Moscow and the rising in trade between China and Russia led the yuan to become the regional reserve currency, amid Washington-led restrictions on the use of the US dollar. [Al Jazeera] [BBC] [CNN] [South China Morning Post]

Testifying on March 22 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken affirmed that Xi's visit contradicted U.S. interests “in bringing this war to an end," citing Beijing’s diplomatic, political and “to some extent material support for Russia.” [Radio Free Europe]

While Xi was in Moscow, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida visited Ukraine and Poland (see entry below), reflecting Japan’s assertive stance towards China over the war in Ukraine.

China/Russia-US: Washington says Beijing has not provided military support to Russia

(vp) On March 22, the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken affirmed at a Senate subcommittee hearing that China has not yet crossed the “red line” of providing lethal and military support to Moscow.

Russian President Vladimir Putin himself stated some days after Xi’s visit that Russia and China have not been planning a military alliance, but admitted a “transparent “ cooperation in the sphere of military technical interaction (see entry above).

However, the US still dismisses China’s “political solution” to the war in Ukraine, affirming that a ceasefire without a complete withdrawal of the Russian troops "would effectively be supporting the ratification of Russian conquest" and fail to condemn the invasion.

Blinken also built on the effects that the war in Ukraine may have in Asia, raising concerns over the Taiwan issue and how China’s growing military buildup may produce claims from Beijing over Taipei. He stated that if Russia would get away with the invasion of a sovereign state, it would “open a Pandora’s box” for other aggressors and lead to “a world of conflict”.

Blinken, therefore, urged all the members of the International Criminal Court to respect and comply with the warrant of arrest issued against Russian President Vladimir Putin, stating that “the stakes in Ukraine go well beyond Ukraine”. [AA] [BBC] [Radio Free Europe -Radio Liberty] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Chinese military warns US of entering territorial waters

(vp) On March 23, a US guided-missile destroyer illegally entered China’s territorial waters near the Paracel Islands, known in China as Xisha Islands, in the northwestern part of the South China Sea.

China’s military and naval forces managed to track the US destroyer down and deter it from proceeding. The US Navy denied being chased off by Beijing.

China is reportedly resolute to “take all necessary measures” to safeguard its own “national sovereignty and security, as well as peace and stability in the South China Sea”.

A day after, the US challenged Beijing anew when the same warship sailed near the islands in an attempt to "assert navigational rights and freedoms in the South China Sea" , abiding by international law.

China built military bases on the disputed islands and claims in particular the waters between them, outlining the "straight baseline enclosing the islands" and the South China Sea as its own territorial waters.

Beijing demanded the US to "immediately stop such provocative acts" or there will be "serious consequences"[CNN] [DW] [Ministry of National Defense, China] [The Guardian]

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to visit China

(vp) From March 30 to 31, Spain Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has been invited by President Xi Jinping for a state visit to China in the context of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Spain.

The main issued discussed during the meeting will expectedly be the war in Ukraine and China's peace proposal, as well as the "sound and stable development" of China-Spain relations throughout the years, as the Chinese Foreign Ministry reported.

In the context of a EU Summit in Brussels, Sánchez commented on the imminent visit recognizing the importance of China as a "top-tier global actor" and reiterating the importance of understanding Beijing's position on the war and peace plans. At the same time, he stressed that "it is the Ukrainians themselves who will lay down the conditions for the beginning of this peace, when it arrives" and emphasized the need for respecting the UN Charter's principles and each country's territorial integrity.

Even though China's peace proposal was rejected by the US, European countries and Ukraine left a space open for further discussion to guarantee necessary conditions for the restoration of Ukrainian territorial integrity.

Amid concerns of China's closer ties with Moscow, many European leaders expressed the wish to visit China to engage in talks on the war in Ukraine. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron will also pay a visit to China on April 4. [The Guardian] [AP News]

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Politico 1] [Politico 2]

ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn to visit China

(vp) From March 24 to 29, ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn will visit China and attend the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2023 on March 28 to 31.

The Conference includes discussions on global as well as regional development, security and cooperation.

China-ASEAN relations have been expanding in terms of economic interdependence because of the geographical and diplomatic proximity. As of 2009, the Southeast regional association became China's largest trading partner and retained the position since then. During the last decade, trade more than doubled from USD 235.5 billion to USD 507.9 billion.

However, China's projects to expand cooperation in the region through the Belt and Road Project in particular may face some difficulties as countries in Southeast Asia are increasingly concerned over debt risks, China's growing influence and territorial disputes in the region. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [ASEAN] [China Daily] [South China Morning Post]

China-Canada: Canadian parliamentarian steps down over Chinese political interference allegations

(vp) On March 22, Canadian Member of Parliament Han Dong stepped down following allegations of his involvement with Chinese political interference in Canada's affairs, exacerbating the deterioration of ties and fuelign the belief of alleged external interference.

A Canadian media report accused Han Dong of advising China's consul general of Toronto to delay the release of two Canadians imprisoned in Beijing, citing anonymous national sources.

The two Canadians, Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, the "Two Michaels", were imprisoned for three years under the charge of espionage, despite American and Canadian efforts to let them free.

Han Dong denied the accusations, stating they were only “untrue claims”, and stepped down from the Canadian governing Liberal Party.

The accusations and Han’s resignation come as Canada’s House of Commons voted on March 23 for a public inquiry into foreign election’s interference. [Amnesty International] [BBC] [CBC] [Global News] [The Guardian]

China-Australia: Eighth defense coordination dialogue

(vp) On March 22, the working group of both China’s and Australia’s Ministry of National Defense held the eighth defense coordination dialogue in the first formal meeting since 2019.

The two parties discussed international and regional security issues and shared the wish to promote stable development and cooperation between the two militaries.

The talks come as the two countries started the restoration of dialogue after their diplomatic and economic ties had deteriorated in the recent years amid Chinese sanctions imposed on Australian exports as a consequence of Canberra urging for an international inquiry on the origins of Covid-19 in China’s territory.

Tensions grew again in the Indo-Pacific region as the alliance between US, UK and Australia approved an AUKUS deal planning to provide Canberra with nuclear-powered submarines by 2030. China stressed the potential danger of the deal and the disregard for previous agreements on nuclear energy and non-proliferation. [see AiR N.11 March/2023, 2] [Ministry of National Defense, China] [Reuters]

China-Brazil: President Lula’s visit to be postponed

(vp) Due to medical conditions, Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva postponed his trip to China which was planned for March 26 (see AiR N. 12, March/2023, 3).

Lula’s health conditions have been of concern since 2011. During his earlier presidential terms from 2003 to 2011, he visited Beijing twice, drawing Brazil closer to China.

During the current term he is believed to seek to continue on the path of building closer ties with China, contrary to the tendency to protectionism of former President Jair Bolsonaro.

The visit will be rescheduled, the Brazilian government announced. [Al Jazeera] [Global Times] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

China-Honduras: Formal ties established

(vp) On March 26 China established diplomatic ties with Honduras which ended its relationship with Taiwan.

Foreign Ministers from both parties signed the deal over the diplomatic recognition in Beijing and consequently affirmed the One-China policy recognising Taiwan as “an inseparable part of Chinese territory”.

The decision comes as Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen is about to visit Guatemala and Belize on March 29, with stopovers in the U.S.

Taiwan affirms the lure for China comes from the huge assistance programmes which Beijing could provide, compared to the assistance provided by Taipei. However, Tsai dismissed Chinese “meaningless dollar diplomacy”.

The US watches with concern as China expands its influence near its borders in Central America and after Honduras had been fostering stable relations with Taiwan since 1941.

Taiwan now holds formal ties with only 13 countries, of which most are poor and developing countries of Central America, the Caribbean and the Pacific region. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 3] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 4] [Reuters]

China-Saudi Arabia: Energy cooperation deepened

(dql) Saudi Aramco, Saudi Arabia’s public petroleum and natural gas giant as of 2022, one of the world’s largest companies by revenue, has revealed that it has raised its multi-billion dollar investment in China by concluding and upgrading a planned joint venture with

Chinese partners for an oil refinery and petrochemical project in northeast China.

The USD 3.6 billion investment with privately controlled Rongsheng Petrochemical group includes to two agreements, under which Aramco will supply two Chinese companies with a combined 690,000 barrels a day of crude oil for the next 20 years, bolstering its rank as China's top provider of the commodity and strengthening China's long-term energy security. [Reuters]

China-Japan relations strained over the arrest of Japanese national for espionage

(cc) On March 27, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno called for China to release a Japanese citizen who was arrested in Beijing earlier in March.

According to Matsuno, the Japanese government has demanded an early release of the Japanese national and has provided support to him as much as possible.

On the same day, during the press briefing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mai Ning stated that the Japanese man was detained by the Chinese authority for violating China's counterespionage law. Though, she did not provide further detail on the charge. When asked about the judicial process that he will face, Ma affirmed that China would handle the case in accordance with its law and that any individual participating in unlawful activities should know what they have done. She also said that Japan should do more to stop its citizens from engaging in such spying activities.

The arrested Japanese man, who is in his 50s, is an employee of Astellas Pharma Inc., a Japanese pharmaceutical company. According to a source close to the subject, he planned to return to Japan sometime in March but was arrested by the Chinese authorities.

In a bid to protect its national security, China has increased its scrutiny of foreign entities in the country and passed several laws related to the counterespionage effort.

Since 2014, China has arrested 17 Japanese nationals, some Astellas employees, over the charge of allegedly participating in spying activities. According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, five of them are still in Chinese custody. [Kyodo News] [Japan Today]

Indian External Affairs Minister holds telephone conversation with Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan

(mk) Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday held a telephone conversation with the Foreign Minister of Uzbekistan Bakhtiyor Saidov.

Jaishankar congratulated Saidov on his appointment as Foreign Minister, and the two discussed issues pertaining to the bilateral cooperation between India and Uzbekistan, as well as the India-Central Asia partnership. [Subramanyam Jaishankar, Twitter] [uniindia]

India-UK relations nosedive as India removes barricades outside UK embassy

(mk) The relations between India and the United Kingdom took a turn for the worse as India removed security barricades from outside the U.K. embassy in New Delhi. This was in response to the recent attempts by pro-Khalistan protestors to take the tricolour down from the Indian High Commission in London.

In light of the complaint lodged by India at the “lax” security measures outside the High Commission, security was stepped up considerably during the protest on Wednesday. At least a hundred police officers were stationed at Aldwych, the site of the High Commission of India, and a multitude of police vehicles could be witnessed on either side of the road.

U.K. Foreign Secretary James Cleverly in a statement reasserted the strength of India-U.K. relations in saying that the U.K. would always take “extremely seriously” the security of the High Commission and other missions. He also said that the U.K. -India relations were “thriving” and would hopefully continue to deepen.

Protests organised by the Federation of Sikh Organisations and the Sikh Youth Jathebandia have continued due to the demand for the release of Pro-Khalistan leader Amritpal Singh in Punjab, India. [The Hindu] [The Hindu 2][The Wire]

Russia fails to deliver on its weapons commitments to India

(mk)Russia has failed to deliver on its defence supplies commitment to India due to the war in Ukraine, according to a statement by the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Russia is India's largest arms supplier, in addition to being a close ally with ties between the two nations dating back to the Cold War. The strength of their partnership has been apparent in India's continued stance of neutrality in the Ukraine war and a refusal to outrightly condemn Russia for its actions.

The statement, presented in front of a parliamentary committee by the IAF, said that Russia had scheduled a "major delivery" this year which would no longer take place. Even though India has in the recent past sought to divert its reliance on Russian arms by favouring locally manufactured supplies as well as seeking Western support in its defence ambitions, New Delhi remains heavily dependent on Russian military equipment.

According to analysts, this statement signals a recalibration in India-Russia relations, and may even force India to rethink its relationship with Moscow. Additionally, Russia's inability to deliver on its weapons commitment comes at a time when India is facing increased border tensions with China.

The Russian embassy has not yet confirmed this information. [Reuters] [The Independent]

China reaffirms the bilateral nature of its border dispute with India; refuses the prospect of a third-party involvement

(mk)The Chinese Chargé d'Affaires for India Ma Jia on Wednesday emphasised on the purely bilateral nature of the border conflict between India and China, and said that both the countries were wise enough to deal with it without inviting a third party to mediate.

The topmost Chinese envoy addressed a media briefing and stressed on the need for both sides to talk in order to settle the conflict. She also expressed China's stance on regional groupings, clarifying that it has a marked problem with groups like the Quad that were aimed at "containing" China, and not against regional groupings in general.

According to Ma Jia, despite the tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the shared border between India and China, the overall progress in recent relations between the two nations has been positive, with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime

Minister Narendra Modi having exchanged greeting at the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali. Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also met his Chinese counterpart three times last year, and held bilateral talks with the new Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang during the latter's visit to India for the G20 Foreign Minister's Meet earlier this month. [The Hindu] [The Economic Times]

First India-GCC Senior Officers Meeting takes place in Riyadh

(mk) Officials from India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) met at Riyadh for the first round of India-GCC Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on Monday, 20 March.

The India-GCC SOM was held following the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed on India-GCC Mechanism of Consultation during Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Riyadh in September last year.

The Indian delegation, led by Ausaf Sayeed Secretary (Consular, Passport, Visa & Overseas Indian Affairs) gave nod to the prospect of more collaboration between the two sides in sectors such as renewable energy, food security, health, information technology, and counter-terrorism. It was mutually agreed that Joint Working Groups dedicated to each of these particular areas would ensure the interests and aims of the parties involved.

Both parties expressed happiness over the progress between India and the GCC in trade and investment and expressed their desire for an early finalisation of the India-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA). They also appreciated the continuance of ties built on their shared history, and agreed that there was a need to further enhance people-to-people ties.

The GCC, as a trade bloc, is India's largest trade partner, and the two are set to meet for early convention of India-GCC TROIKA meeting at Foreign Minister Level in the near future. [MEAIndia] [Arabian Business]

India lodges complaint with Canada over extremist protests in Vancouver; summons Canadian High Commissioner in New Delhi

(mk) Following complaints lodged by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to the United States and the United Kingdom over pro-Khalistan protests at the Indian embassies and consulate generals in both regions, another complaint has been lodged with Canada over the matter.

On Saturday, India summoned the Canadian High Commissioner in New Delhi to express its discontent with the security handling of these protests outside its missions in Vancouver. The Ministry of External Affairs released a press statement urging the Canadian Government to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of its diplomats, and recalled the Vienna Convention in demanding the arrest and prosecution of people involved in the protests.

Indian authorities have been on a chase for Amritpal Singh, pro-Khalistan preacher, for a week now, and multiple instances of extremist activities in retaliation to his purported arrest have since come to light from other countries. [Reuters] [Deutsche Welle] [MEAIndia]

Indonesia-US: Memorandum of Understanding on clean energy

(fb) The Indonesian Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (ESDM) and the United States have concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish a working group for the development of clean energy in Indonesia and for the promotion of bilateral cooperation in the field of clean and renewable energy in the Southeast Asian country. [Solar Quarter]

Meanwhile, the Indonesia Investment Authority (INA) and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under which the two parties will cooperate in identifying opportunities in the Southeast Asian country. [U.S. Embassy Jakarta]

Japan's policy paper to brand the Chinese military as 'the greatest strategic challenge'

(cc) According to Japan's annual foreign policy report draft revealed on March 22, Japan has changed its perception of the Chinese military from 'strong security concerns' to 'the greatest strategic challenge.'

Aside from emphasizing that the growing ties between China and Russia were a troubling development, the draft also suggested that China's diplomatic stance and military actions, especially on the Taiwan issue, have worried Japan and the world.

The new outlook toward China in the draft of Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for 2023 resonated with the government's long-term policy that was stated in the recently revised National Security Strategy, which focused on China's increasing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region.

The draft also addressed other international issues. Notably, it stated that Japan would continue to impose sanctions on Russia and provide support to Ukraine. [Kyodo News]

Japanese and Polish leaders meet

(cc) On March 22, during his visit to Poland, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met with Mateusz Morawiecki and Andrzej Duda, the Prime Minister and the President of the Republic of Poland, respectively.

In his discussion with Morawiecki, aside from expressing his welcome for the increased Japan-Poland strategic and cultural ties, Kishida stated that he was willing to provide Poland with official development assistance aid directly as a show of gratitude for Poland's commitment to the defense of Ukraine against Russian aggression. In response, Morawiecki voiced his satisfaction with the progress made in improving the relations between the two countries and expressed his anticipation for further investment from Japan.

Later, in the meeting between Kishida and Duda, aside from discussing Poland's contribution to support Ukraine and the potential for further Japan-Poland partnerships, they collectively affirmed that the attempt to change the global status quo through forceful means must not be tolerated by anyone.

Just a day earlier, on March 21, Kishida made a surprise visit to Ukraine and met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy [See AiR No. 12, March/2023, 3]. There, Kishida expressed grievance toward the victims of the conflict and promised Japan would continue to support Ukraine in its effort to counter Russian aggression.

While Kishida was in Ukraine and Poland, the Chinese leader Xi Jinping was also visiting Russia in an effort to

emphasize the close ties and shared visions between the two countries. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2] [Reuters] [CNN]

Japan's space agency bars Chinese and Russians from joining the organization

(cc) A source close to the matter revealed on March 24 that Japan's Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS) issued a new rule in September 2022 which stops Chinese and Russian researchers from joining the organization.

The new application standard also barred individuals from countries such as North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and Belarus from entering the ISAS.

Though, the new rule did not affect those who joined the organization prior to its authorization.

The move came following ISAS's effort to protect its technological information, which can be used to develop weapons of mass destruction, from foreign espionage.

Meanwhile, the new measure also suggested that professionals from the United States, Britain, France, and Germany can join the ISAS in all departments.

Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, ISAS's parent organization, declined to comment on the matter. [Kyodo News]

Japan and New Zealand hold Defense Dialogue

(cc) On March 22, Japan and New Zealand participated in their 15th Defense Dialogue.

During the event, the representatives exchanged views on issues related to regional situations and defense policies and discussed their country's interactions in the Pacific Islands region. [Ministry of Defense, Japan] [Ministry of Defense, Japan, Twitter]

Malaysia-Saudi Arabia: Anwar Ibrahim's unannounced visit to Riyadh

(dql) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim went on a formerly unannounced three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia last week, marking his first official visit outside the ASEAN region since he became Malaysia's 10th prime minister in November last year. The visit aimed to enhance ties with the Kingdom and focused on improving and cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

It came on the heels of the announcement in February, that the two countries reached an agreement to finalize negotiations on the establishment of a Saudi Arabian-Malaysian Coordination Council to take the bilateral relationship to the next level.

Accompanied by Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir and Minister of Communications and Digital Fahmi Fadzil, among others, Anwar held a meeting with the Saudi Arabian business community at the headquarters of the Islamic Development Bank. Meanwhile, the Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Hissein Brahim Taha, and the Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL), Sheikh Dr Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, called on Anwar.

A scheduled meeting with King Salman and the Crown Prince/prime minister failed to appear, prompting speculations about sabotage. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malaysia] [The Edge Markets] [Eurasia Review]

Malaysia-UK: Digital Innovation Programme showcases Malaysian growth opportunities

(pa) The UK-Malaysia Digital Innovation Programme Demo Day in Sunway City featured 10 UK net-zero startups pitching their technologies, with investments totaling up to USD1 million.

The event was attended by Malaysian Minister of Economy Rafizi Ramli, His Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Asia Pacific Natalie Black, and Deputy British High Commissioner David Wallace.

The Demo Day marked the conclusion of the inaugural UK-Southeast Asia Tech Week and highlighted opportunities for tech collaboration. [Bernama] [UK GOV]

Malaysia ready to cooperate with Afghanistan

(pa) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has announced Malaysia's readiness to cooperate with and improve ties with Afghanistan, currently under Taliban administration. At the same time, he stressed that Malaysia would uphold its firm stance against the Taliban's positions on women's rights and education.

The Malaysian government has conveyed its views to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). [Malay Mail]

Malaysia-Cambodia: Agreements on Cambodian workers signed

(pa) During his inaugural visit to Phnom Penh, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim met with Cambodian leaders and signed two separate agreements related to the recruitment, employment, and repatriation of Cambodian workers in Malaysia.

Cambodia is Malaysia's 58th largest trading partner, with trade totaling USD 683.6 million in 2022. Approximately 5,000 Malaysians currently reside in Cambodia. [Malay Mail] [FMT] [The Independent]

Malaysia-China: Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim to announce major investment during visit to Beijing

(pa) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim plans to announce a major investment during his upcoming three-day visit to China, scheduled for this week.

The investment will align with the nation's goal of attracting investors, particularly in infrastructure industries focused on digitization. [FMT] [Malay Mail]

Myanmar-Russia: Junta chief meets Russian legal delegation

(ih) A Russian legal delegation, led by Prosecutor General Igor Krasnov, met with Myanmar junta chief Min Aung Hlaing on March 22.

Discussions included military officer training in Russian military law, legal training in Myanmar, and further legal cooperation. The delegation also signed a memorandum of understanding on legal cooperation with the junta-appointed legal affairs minister. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar-US: Washington imposes new sanctions targeting aviation fuel supply

(ih) On March 24, the U.S. announced that it was imposing sanctions on two individuals and six entities, including three firms involved in Myanmar's defense sector, for their involvement in enabling the military regime's atrocities in the country.

The sanctioned firms include companies that import, store and distribute aviation fuel for Myanmar's military.

The US Treasury Department has stated that the military has continued to commit atrocities and violence against Myanmar's people since the coup, with an increasing reliance on air strikes in civilian populated areas. [Reuters][Al Jazeera]

Myanmar-China: Chinese ambassador proposes deepened security cooperation

(ih) China's Ambassador to Myanmar Chen Hai has urged increased security cooperation between the two countries during a meeting with Myanmar's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Affairs Minister Soe Htut.

Topics discussed included combating cross-border crime, online fraud, and gambling. Observers suggest the meeting aimed to ensure the security of China's investments in Myanmar. [The Irrawaddy] [The Global New Light of Myanmar]

Nepal-India: Indian embassy requests preventing Indian separatist from traveling via Nepal

(dql) The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has reached out to two Nepal government agencies to request them not to allow Khalistan movement leader Amritpal Singh to travel to a third country via Nepal.

The request comes as it is speculated that Singh might have sneaked into Nepal in disguise. [The Kathmandu Post]

The Khalistan movement is a separatist movement seeking to create a homeland for Sikhs by establishing a sovereign state called Khalistan in the Punjab region.

North Korea fires multiple missiles towards the East Sea

(ge) On March 22 North Korea conducted a launch drill firing multiple cruise missiles from its South Hamgyong province off the East Sea (Sea of Japan). The launch was detected by the Seoul military and the US intelligence authorities, which were analyzing details of the missiles.

The launch was also confirmed by state media Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) which reported that the drill was held to familiarize the strategic missile units with the technical nuclear attack procedures and processes. The report added that the cruise missiles were equipped with a test combat unit that simulated a nuclear combat unit. The number of missiles launched was not specified. [KCNA 1, in Korean] [Reuters] [Aljazeera]

On March 24 state media further reported that North Korea has tested a new nuclear-capable underwater attack drone, which cruised underwater at a depth of 80 meters to 150 meters for over 59 hours and detonated a non-nuclear payload in waters off its South Hamgyong Province. The test was conducted from March 21 to March 24 and was presided over by North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

The test confirmed the reliability and safety of the weapon system and its strike capability, according to the North Korean news agency.

The report also stated that North Korea will further enhance its nuclear counterattack position, pledging to deter war and preserve peace and stability in the peninsula, reiterating that the US and its South Korean ally with their confrontational attitude, are jeopardizing the security of the region. [KCNA 2]

The drone system named “Haeil '' is intended to make surprise attacks in enemy waters and to destroy critical military infrastructures by making a super-scale radioactive wave through an underwater explosion. Analysts argue that, although North Korea’s force

show-off, it is unlikely that the underwater weapon is ready for deployment.

North Korea has consistently objected to military drills conducted by the US and South Korea, viewing them as a preparation for an invasion of the North. However, South Korea and the US claim that these exercises are solely for defensive purposes and have condemned North Korea's recent tests as breaching United Nations sanctions and causing instability.

South Korea and the US have recently completed their 11-day large-scale exercises, known as "Freedom Shield", but are continuing with other field training exercises. [The Straits Times]

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol commented on the launches during a commemorative speech remembering the veterans of the Korean war, declaring that North Korea's "reckless provocations will pay a price" and that the South Korean government stands against the North's provocations. He also underscored the need to strengthen the trilateral security cooperation with the US and Japan. [Office of the President Newsroom, in Korean]

On March 27 North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles towards the East Sea, marking the 11th missile launch event since the beginning of the year. According to the South Korean military, the launch took place just hours before a US nuclear-powered aircraft carrier staged joint military drills in the waters near Jeju Island, South Korea.

The launch, which was detected both from the South Korean military and from the Japanese Defense Ministry, occurred from the Junghwa area in the North Hwanghae Province. The missile flew around 370 kilometers before impacting waters in the East Sea(Sea of Japan). [NK News 1] [Yonhap 1]

As with the previous launches, also this latest came as a warning to South Korea and US's joint military exercises. US aircraft carrier USS Nimitz, which arrived on the same day near the Korean peninsula, will participate in trilateral maritime drills involving Japan, following the improvement of Seoul-Tokyo ties. [NK News 2][Yonhap 2]

North Korea-US: Report claims impunity of human rights abuses in North Korea

(ge) The US annual report on human rights practices stated that North Korea showed no respect for basic

human rights and freedoms of its people in 2022, and impunity for corruption continued to be widespread.

The country had dozens of other human rights issues, including: unlawful or arbitrary killings; forced disappearances; torture and cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment and punishment by government authorities; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions, including in political prison camps; arbitrary arrests and detentions; political prisoners and detainees; total state control of expression and media through censorship and repression; serious restrictions on internet freedom.

The report also noted that the most recent national elections in North Korea, held in 2019, were neither free nor fair.

The report states that as of July 2022, due to the travel restrictions imposed by North Korea to counter the spread of Covid-19, there was no indication that the government took action to prosecute officials who committed human rights abuses. Moreover, reports continued to indicate that corruption at all levels is still widespread. [Yonhap 1] [US Department of State]

In response, North Korea issued a strong warning to the US,criticizing the US representative to the UN for raising concerns about North Korea's exercise of self-defense and for talking about what he dubbed as “outdated terms” in reference to the human rights situation in the North Korea report.

Pyongyang claimed that the US’s actions reveal the failure of its diplomacy and administration, warning that pressure on North Korea to disarm its nuclear weapons would be considered a declaration of war. [KCNA, in Korean] [Yonhap 2]

North Korea—Russia: Russian ambassador expresses support for North Korea

(ge) On March 23 Russian Ambassador to North Korea Alexandr Matsegora expressed support for North Korea's opposition to the US and its followers' provocative acts during a reception on March 17.

He stated that Russia stands with North Korea in their struggle to establish a new and fair world order free from US policy of coercion, and acknowledged North Korea’s need to take counteractions against the US and its allies’ aggressive actions. [KCNA Watch]

North Korea-Germany-South Korea: German and South Korean agencies warn against KIMSUKY cyber attacks

(ge) The German and South Korean Intelligence Services issued on March 20 a Joint Cyber Security Advisory to warn against the expansion of cyber attack tactics of the North Korean threat actor KYMSUKY (also known as Thallium, Velvet Chollima etc.).

The North Korean cyber actor is affiliated with North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau. It is known for its cyber campaigns against Google's browser and app store services targeting experts on the Korean Peninsula and North Korea issues, says the report.

The joint advisory also says that German and South Korean entities have been attacked during the last two years by the North Korean cyber entity using spear phishing emails.

German and South Korean intelligence authorities added that it is likely that the group will continue to target global think tanks of diplomacy and security to steal information.

The report identified two main tactics used by the North Korean cyber group to carry out its attacks: stealing information by using chromium-based web browser extensions; and installing malicious apps on mobile devices by exploiting Google Play's synchronization feature. [Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz]

Pakistan's participation in SCO seminar blocked by India

(tj) India has blocked Pakistan's participation in a seminar of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), marking an unprecedented move in the context of the forum.

The seminar, 'SCO Armed Forces Contribution in Military Medicine, Healthcare and Pandemics', was organized by India's Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses on March 21.

India claimed Pakistan skipped the event after it raised objections to incorrect depiction of held Kashmir on the map, while Pakistan rejected the reasoning and said that the region is an internationally-recognized

disputed territory, the final disposition of which will be made in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions through a fair and impartial plebiscite under the UN auspices. [Dawn]

Pakistan felicitates Saudi Arabia and Iran on historic deal

(tj) Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari held phone talks with Saudi and Iranian counterparts to congratulate them on their rapprochement brokered by China.

Saudi Arabia and Iran recently agreed to restore their diplomatic ties that were severed in 2016 after a series of events. The deal was signed by the national security advisers of the two countries in Beijing recently., with China being the mediator.

Under the agreement, brokered by China, Saudi Arabia and Iran will reopen their respective diplomatic missions within two months and revive the 2001 security pact. The Saudi king invited the Iranian president to visit the kingdom.

Pakistan views the development as positive as it often had to tread carefully in its ties with both countries. [The Express Tribune]

Philippines-US: Deployment of US fighter jets

(fb) The U.S. has deployed F-22 Raptor fighter jets to the Philippines for the first time as part of its efforts to increase military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. These low-level flights aim to familiarize U.S. pilots with the country's geography. The U.S. hopes to deepen its cooperation with the Philippines under the 1951 mutual defense pact and operate from additional military locations in the future. [Al Jazeera]

Philippines-China: Maritime cooperation opportunities discussed

(fb) The Philippines and China finalized a bilateral consultation mechanism last week, vowing to uphold international law and explore maritime cooperation opportunities despite issues in the Western Philippine Sea.

The two countries discussed potential collaboration, such as maritime exercises, capacity building for Filipino personnel, and mutual visits.

Another meeting with various agencies is scheduled to implement existing bilateral cooperation mechanisms. [Philstar Global]

South Korea-North Korea: Seoul adopts export controls against Pyongyang

(ge) On March 21 South Korea announced a "watch list" to prevent export of materials related to satellite development projects, as part of its control exports measures against North Korea.

The government said that the ban was imposed in response to North Korea's development of a military reconnaissance satellite which Pyongyang announced at the 8th Party Congress in January 2021 as a key task of its Five-Year Plan for National Defence Development and promised to complete preparations by April this year (see AiR, No. 3, January/2021, 3).

The list includes seventy-seven items covering the entire satellite production system, such as focal plane assemblies, attitude control equipment, low-precision solar sensors, magnetic talkers, solar panels, antennas, and global positioning systems (GPS).

Export of the banned items to North Korea through third countries is prohibited under the Special Notice on Trade for the Fulfillment of Obligations to Maintain International Peace and Security, said the Seoul Ministry.

The newly announced export ban is expected to enhance export controls and trade embargoes on North Korea as stipulated by UN Security Council resolutions. The intention is to improve compliance with international sanctions against North Korea.

South Korea also approved additional independent sanctions on four additional individuals and six entities for their involvement in North Korea's nuclear and missile weapons development and for sanction evasion. [South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Korean] [Anadolu Agency]

South Korea-Japan: South Korean Ministry of Unification seeks cooperation with

Japan

(ge) South Korean Unification Minister Kwon Young-se visited Japan to discuss ways to cooperate with Japan on unification and North Korea policy.

On March 23, Kwon met with Japan's Foreign Minister to discuss North Korea's threats and other issues. The discussions included the security situation on the Korean Peninsula, cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo on North Korea's threats, and the issue of abductions by North Korea. The meeting comes amid South Korea's efforts to improve relations with Japan and enhance trilateral cooperation with the US and Japan to strengthen response to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

The two ministers discussed the serious and pressing threat posed by North Korea's repeated ballistic missile launches and confirmed their cooperation to counter the North with Kwon emphasizing the need for further efforts by both governments to bolster their relations and address North Korea's nuclear and human rights issues.

He proposed the establishment of a consultation channel between his ministry and the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve urgent human rights issues, such as abductees and separated families.

Both sides recognised that bilateral cooperation between South Korea and Japan, as well as with the international community, is necessary to resolve the Korean Peninsula issue. The parties agreed to work on enhancing bilateral ties after the normalization of relations realized through the recent Yoon-Kishida Summit.

On the evening of March 23, Kwon held a meeting with members of the Korean diaspora, including members of the Advisory Committee on Democratic Unification and the Committee on Unification Education, to explain the government's policies on unification and North Korea.

He also asked for the support and cooperation of the Korean diaspora for the development of Japan-Korea relations.The Korean diaspora appreciated the efforts to normalize relations between the two countries and pledged its support.

South Korea-US: US State Department raises concerns over freedom of press in

South Korea

(ge) The US State Department's report on Human Rights practices in South Korea, published on March 21, has listed violence and harassment towards media professionals as a significant challenge to human rights in South Korea.

The report cites as an example of freedom expression oppression, an incident which took place last September and in which President Yoon Suk-Yeol reportedly accused Korean broadcaster MBC of damaging the country's security by releasing a tape of him criticizing a foreign legislature. A ruling party lawmaker also filed a complaint against MBC for defamation and disrupting presidential duties.

Moreover, it cites another incident that happened on November 10, in which the presidential office barred MBC media broadcaster from boarding the presidential aircraft to cover an overseas trip due to its "distorted and biased coverage of foreign policy issues," prompting criticism from media workers' organizations.

The report also highlights that, though the country's laws guarantee freedom of expression, the government's interpretation and implementation of the laws restrict freedom of speech and expression, as well as internet access.

The report also criticized the use of libel and slander laws to restrict public discussion and harass, intimidate, or censor private and media expression.

Another point of criticism concerned corruption of high-profile personalities, such as conglomerates heads and politicians, citing among others the bribery and corruption scandal that hit Democratic Party chairman Lee Jae-Myung (see AiR No. 9, February/2023, 4).

This is the first time the Biden administration has called out the South Korean government over harassment and violence towards the media. [The Korea Times] [US Department of State]

South Korea, US, UK: Joint military exercises

(ge) On March 23 the South Korean Army announced that a joint military exercise with the United States was conducted near the inter-Korean border to showcase

the allies' strong military capability against North Korea's increasing threats.

The four-day drill involved more than 800 troops, 100 howitzers, armored vehicles, and equipment. [The Korea Times 1]

Meanwhile, on the same day, South Korean and US troops started conducting their largest amphibious landing drills in years, involving a U.S. amphibious assault ship, the USS Makin Island, and over 12,000 sailors and marines from both countries. The drills, which began on March 20 and will last until April 3, aim at building crisis response capabilities.

Pyongyang fired four cruise missiles off its east coast just hours before the Makin Island docked in South Korea, in apparent protest of ongoing drills by the US and South Korea. [Reuters]

In addition, South Korea, the US, and British Marines participated in "high-intensity" airborne and maritime infiltration drills in Pohang as part of the ongoing South Korea-US amphibious landing exercise that runs through April 3.

The exercise mobilized reconnaissance units from the South's 1st Marine Division and the US Marine Corps, as well as troops from Britain's Royal Marines Commandos, marking their first participation in the exercise. The drills allowed the combined troops to infiltrate a target area for amphibious landing operations by sea and air, scout the area, and direct precision fire strikes at enemy targets.[The Korea Times 2]

South Korea, US complete first THAAD training

(ge) On March 24 the United States Forces in Korea (USFK) communicated that they conducted the first training of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) remote launcher as part of the “Freedom Shield”exercise.

The military authorities said that the training is part of the strategy to enhance the military units’ preparedness in the event of advanced missile threats by North Korea.

The USFK said that both they and the South Korea Ministry of National Defense maintain their commitment to close coordination in order to defend

the country against the North Korean threat. [United States Forces Korea]

South Korea–Japan: Government holds Economic Security Diplomacy Advisory Meeting

(ge) On March 23, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held an "Economic Security Diplomacy Advisory Meeting" with 11 advisors from academia, government and private research institutes, industry, and the legal community to discuss the recent Korea-Japan summit and the normalization of bilateral relations.

Discussions centered on the restoration of existing channels of economic and diplomatic cooperation between the two countries, the promotion of new economic and security dialogues, and the identification of new areas of cooperation.

The advisors called for continued efforts to build mutual trust and suggested exploring cooperation in various fields such as supply chain and energy, as well as high-tech industries such as semiconductors and batteries.

Overall the meeting served as an opportunity to identify areas of economic and security cooperation between Korea and Japan. [South Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Korean]

On March 24 during a meeting on trade issues held in Seoul, the South Korean Finance minister said that South Korea and Japan's efforts to improve ties will have a positive effect on the South Korean economy.

The restoration of exports between the two countries is expected to boost South Korea's exports and domestic consumption, added the Minister.

The two countries will also collaborate on shared global issues and increase the number of flights between the two countries.

However, the Finance Minister warned of greater uncertainties in the real economy due to aggressive monetary tightening measures and emphasized the need to enhance monitoring and plan necessary countermeasures. [Yonhap]

South Korea–African nations: South Korea to expand trade and investment with Africa

(ge) On March 20 the South Korean Minister for Trade attended the Korea-Africa Trade and Industry Cooperation Forum 2023, which aimed to expand trade and investment between Korea and African nations.

The forum included representatives from the government, institutions and companies who discussed strategic industries and supply chain cooperation.

Minister Ahn Minister Ahn noted the potential for cooperation with Africa and proposed four measures to accelerate investment and expand trade including: establishing trade cooperation in supply chain, climate change and healthcare; installing and activating an economic cooperation platform; pushing for official development assistance in industry and energy; requesting African nations support for South Korea's 2030 World Expo bid.

The Minister of Trade Industry and Energy said that it will continue to work for the further development of Korea–Africa trade and industry cooperation and to support Korean companies operating in the continent. [South Korea Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy]

South Korea, Israel cooperation in smart mobility

(ge) On March 21 the South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and Israel's Innovation Authority met in Tel Aviv to discuss technological cooperation and kick-start cooperation in the field of smart mobility.

The countries signed the Memorandum of Understanding to concretize technical cooperation. The two countries plan to invest USD 10 million over three years to develop smart mobility core technologies through international R&D.

During talks it was highlighted that Korea is the 5th largest automobile manufacturer and the world's largest order of eco-friendly ships, and Israel has more than 500 R&D centers and start-ups in future vehicles, as well as 97 unicorn companies.

The South Korean Minister of Trade expressed confidence in the future of this cooperation. [South Korea Minister of Trade, Industry and Energy, in Korean]

Sri Lanka hosts the 3rd Maritime Safety and Security meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association Working Group

(sn) On March 20, Sri Lanka hosted the 3rd meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association's (IORA) Working Group on Maritime Safety and Security (WGMSS) in Colombo with the participation of 23 IORA member states. IORA Secretariat representatives led by the Secretary-General virtually attended the event.

The WGMSS's discussion focused on the safety and security problems of human smuggling, drug trafficking, armed robberies, and exploitation of sea resources that occur in the Indian Ocean territories. These practices not only disadvantage people but also significantly damage the ocean itself. In addition, a lack of action against these activities leads to climate change and biodiversity reduction.

The United Nations drug department's Global Maritime Crime Program and Max Planck Foundation representatives presided over the inauguration ceremony of the following 3-day workshop "Cooperation for Maritime Security" on March 21-23. The institutions launched the sessions to promote International Peace and the Rule of Law. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka]

Sri Lanka: International Monetary Fund urges the government to present a banking system recapitalization plan

(sn) Following the reception of the Extended Fund Facility (EFF) by Sri Lanka from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the financial agency requested the island state government to devise a plan for the recapitalization of the banks across the country.

The deadline for a plan presentation is scheduled to be July of the current year. As anticipated by policymakers and experts, local banks oppose the sovereign Domestic Debt Restructuring (DDR) agenda due to the diminishing effects of such amendments on their capital.

The IMF estimates that the minimum requirement for the DDR plan should approximate six percent of the 2022 GDP but suggest that this evaluation is sensitive to the design of banking system recapitalization. Nine major banks currently undergo the asset quality review as a part of the DDR plan development. The authorities plan to provide some data on the expected impact of the DDR on local banks. The IMF also informed that it plans to establish a coordination committee on financial stability as a part of amendments required by EFF to manage current and future risks to the economy.

In the 3rd week of April, Sri Lankan government will begin the next round of negotiations with its creditors. The success of the authorities in receiving the EFF should also foster additional support from such agencies as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and others. [Daily Mirror], [Reuters]

Sri Lankan High Commissioner presents the Sinhalese Quran copy to the Ambassador of Bahrain to India

(sn) Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India met with the Ambassador of Bahrain to India in New Delhi on March 21. The High Commissioner promoted dialogue with the Heads of Mission of Islamic countries and presented a copy of the Sinhalese translation of the Holy Quran to the Ambassador.

He has already presented the Holy Quran copies of Sinhala to the Council of Muslim Theologians of India and the Ambassador of Morocco to India. As a part of the mission, the High Commissioner advocates the "Integrated Country Strategy for Sri Lanka Diplomatic Missions in India" by enhancing discourse with all major religions in the South Asian State.

After a congregation in the Colombo Grand Mosque, national Muslim religious leaders announced the beginning of Ramadan fasting on March 24 for the Muslim community of the Island State. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka], [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: UN assessment and advisory team arrives to examine the Island's Combat Convoy Company contingent

(sn) A United Nations (UN) Assessment and Advisory Unit (AVV) team arrived in Sri Lanka to ensure the

quality standards and their adherence for the Combat Convoy Equipment and evaluate the Operational Readiness Preparations of the UN's Combat Convoy Company B-1 (CCC) designated for Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali. The AVV team met the Commander of the Army at the Sri Jayawardenepura Army's headquarters on March 21.

The visit is a part of the UN's peacekeeping operations, and the team made a request for an additional Sri Lankan CCC.

The Ministry of Defence expressed regard for the request from the AVV as an appreciative gesture for the CCC currently deployed in Mali and for recognition of the professional standards maintained by Sri Lankan defense forces.

The deployment of the proposed Combat Convoy Company B-1 is supposed to return USD 9 million annually to the national economy of Sri Lanka. [Ministry of Defence – Sri Lanka]

Sri Lanka: Liberal Canadian MP, a Tamil descendant, calls Sri Lanka "a failed state" following bailout settlement

(sn) A Canadian Liberal Member of Parliament, Gary Anandasangaree, who has Tamil descendants, said that Sri Lanka is "a failed bankrupt state" during a press conference he called on March 21. The response came following the reception of the bailout from the International Monetary Fund by the Island State.

He explained his critique further by proposing that the IMF should have focused "on gross and serious violation of international human rights and humanitarian law" implying a lack of accountability from current leadership for the oppressive policies directed against Sri Lankan Tamils with the preceding government. It is concurrent with the fact that the current governor and various authorities had jobs in the former state leadership. Sri Lanka's Deputy High Commissioner in Canada abstained from commenting on the remarks made by Gary Anandasangaree but said that the Canadian department recognizes the confidence of Sri Lanka's creditors and keeps monitoring the human rights situation in the Island State. [The Canadian Press], [AiR, Archive, SA Sri Lanka: 31 August 2021]

Sri Lanka uses the Extended Fund Facility from IMF to pay the debt to India

(sn) On March 24, the Ministry of Finance of Sri Lanka announced that it completed a loan settlement of USD 121 million with the Indian Credit Line.

It was the first disbursement of USD 333 million credit received from the International Monetary Fund by Sri Lanka on March 20. [News Wire]

Taiwan-Honduras diplomatic ties end

(sw) On March 26, Taiwan officially terminated diplomatic relations with Honduras since the Latin American country seeks to establish diplomatic ties with China. It is the ninth diplomatic ally that Taiwan loses since President Tsai Ing-wen from the Democratic Progressive Party took office. [Taiwan News] [Twitter] [Focus Taiwan]

As a consequence, the Taiwan embassy in Honduras closes and technical missions and health center personnel are recalled.

On March 23, the Taiwanese government recalled its ambassador to Honduras after the Central American country sent its foreign minister to China, indicating that it would cut diplomatic ties between the two countries. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan]

Honduras Minister of Foreign Affairs, Eduardo Enrique Reina, traveled to China on March 22 to enhance the establishment of diplomatic ties after Honduran President Xiomara Castro wrote on Twitter on March 14 that her country would launch diplomatic relations with China.

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the amounts of money that Honduras requested were beyond Taiwan's capacities, and that it would not engage in 'dollar diplomacy'. China allegedly spent USD 1.46 billion to 2.95 billion to establish diplomatic ties with Honduras. [Taipei Times]

Furthermore on March 23, Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu accused China of bribing legislators to switch diplomatic ties from Taipei to Beijing, which would not promote the wellbeing of the country's citizens. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan's President to visit Guatemala, Belize

(sw) Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen is to visit Guatemala and Belize from March 29-April 7 to talk with government officials and members of the overseas Taiwanese community.

The visit illustrates how important the two countries are for Taiwan, since they are among Taipei's 14 diplomatic allies. Moreover, the countries can strengthen cooperation and exchanges while enhancing global peace and stability.

Tsai will meet the Guatemalan President Alejando Giammattei, and the Belizan Prime Minister John Briceno. Furthermore, in Guatemala she will witness the signing of a bilateral cooperation agreement whereas in Belize she will witness the signing of a bilateral technical cooperation agreement. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan-Czech Republic: Speaker of Parliament visits Taipei

(sw) Marketa Pekarova Adamova, the speaker of the Czech Parliament, arrived with 160 delegates in Taiwan on March 25, which is the largest visiting delegation in the history of Taiwan-Czechia relations. [Twitter 1]

As the first female legislator speaker from a country without official ties with Taiwan, she held a speech in the Taiwanese Parliament on March 28. She emphasized that the Czech Republic will always support Taiwan since the countries are connected by freedom and democracy. [Reuters]

Moreover, she met with President Tsai Ing-wen and other Cabinet ministers. [Taiwan News 1] [Twitter 2]

Adamova stressed that the aim of the visit was to strengthen cooperation on semiconductors, and security and cultural exchanges. Therefore, the Chair of Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council Wu Tsung-tsong said during a meeting on March 27, that Taiwan will share its semiconductor experience to improve the Czech Republic's chip design research. [Taiwan News 2]

China objects to this visit, like it does to most official trips to Taiwan. [Focus Taiwan]

Cross-strait relations: Former Taiwanese president visits China

(sw) As the first former Taiwanese President, Ma Ying-jeou of the main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), is visiting China from March 27 to April 7. On his arrival he pledged for peace and improved relations.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party criticized Ma, who was in office from 2008-2016, for visiting China arguing that it was inappropriate considering former long-time Taiwan ally Honduras's move to severe ties with Taipei in favor of Beijing just the day before.

The KMT, for its part, insists that outreach to China is needed now more than ever in light of the current tensions across the Taiwan Strait and as Beijing continues to reject repeated calls for talks by President Tsai Ing-wen, believing that she is a separatist.

A senior KTM member, who met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Singapore, is not expected to meet any senior Chinese officials. [Reuters] [Deutsche Welle]

Chinese diplomat titles 'Taiwan will be ours'

(sw) On March 23, the Chinese Ambassador to Australia, Xiao Qian, published an opinion piece in the Sydney Morning Herald with the headline 'Taiwan will be ours, but war with Australia is a fallacy'. However, by March 24, the headline was changed to 'Taiwan is always part of China, but war with Australia is a fallacy'.

The original headline, which indicated that Taiwan would be annexed by China, contradicted the article which argued that Taiwan had been governed by China since the Song and Yuan Dynasties. However, direct Chinese governance of Taiwan can only be verified after the Qing Dynasty.

Moreover, Xiao warned that China will not accept any form of Taiwan independent separatist activities. [Taiwan News] [The Sydney Morning Herald]

Chinese helicopter enters Taiwan's ADIZ

(sw) On March 25, a Chinese helicopter entered the southeast of Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). This is unusual because Chinese warplanes

normally fly close to the median line or the southwest corner of the ADIZ.

As a response, the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense monitors the situation and sends combat patrol aircrafts. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan-UK: British legislator demands more support for Taipei

(sw) The Chair of the British-Taiwanese All-Party Parliamentary Group, Bob Stewart, urged on March 22 the United Kingdom (UK) to increase support for Taiwan especially in defense matters. [Twitter]

Furthermore, he encouraged more legislators from Western countries to visit Taiwan since this will increase the understanding of the country. During the visit, which lasted until March 24, the delegation discussed with Taiwanese government officials Taiwan-UK relations, developments in the region and economic resilience.

On March 13, Reuters stated that the UK government granted licenses valued USD 201.29 million to companies for the export of submarine-related components and technology during the first nine months of 2022. This is more than the previous six years combined. [Taiwan News] [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan, Japan ruling parties discuss diplomacy, defense

(sw) On March 21, the representatives from Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and Japan's governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) discussed diplomatic and national defense policies and bilateral cooperation in Taipei.

This was the first face-to-face meeting between legislators of the two parties, and Konosuke Kokuba, LDP's national defense director, urged increased cooperation in the areas of semiconductors and tourism. Moreover, they discussed Taiwan potentially joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, but no details were provided.

In December, 2022, Japan called Taiwan an "extremely important partner" in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. [Focus Taiwan] [Taipei Times]

Taiwan to receive 460 tank engines from the US

(sw) Taiwan has ordered 460 engines for its M60A3 tanks with a value of USD 238.92 million.

It has been the most used tank model in Taiwan's military for the past 30 years, and to receive new engines, the military signed a contract with RENK America. The agreement remains valid until March 2028.

During an armed conflict, the main task for the tanks would be to prevent amphibious vehicles from landing. [Taiwan News] [see AiR, No. 11, March/ 2023, 2]

Russia elevates backing of China on Taiwan issue

(sw) After Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Russian President Putin between March 20-22, the two countries published a joint statement that says that Russia 'firmly supports' Chinese actions to protect its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

With the statement, Russia expands its previous support to China, since it now recognizes that Taiwan is an indispensable part of China's territory. Before Moscow only observed the 'one China' principle and opposed Taiwan independence.

Chinese officials were upset and demanded clarity because Russia was vague about its response in the case of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

In response, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the joint statement since it would damage Taiwan's sovereignty. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act passed in US House

(sw) On March 22, the United States (US) House of Representatives passed the Taiwan Assurance Implementation Act which would require the State Department to regularly review its guidelines for American engagement with Taiwan at least every two years.

The bill has bipartisan support as it was passed with a 404-7 vote. However, in order to become effective, the bill needs to be passed by the Senate and signed by President Joe Biden. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan, Germany sign mutual legal assistance pact

(sw) On March 23, Taiwan and Germany signed an agreement that ensures mutual legal assistance on criminal matters which strengthens bilateral cooperation in judicial investigations and extradition proceedings. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan]

The prisoner transfer treaty guarantees the rights and interests of their citizens and was signed by the German Institute Taipei and Taiwan's representative office in Germany.

Moreover, the two countries can request mutual legal assistance for example for freezing assets, sharing information, or forming joint investigation teams by writing or electronic transmission. The agreement is based on the principles of humane treatment, security, speed, simplicity, transparency, and reciprocity.

Taiwan already signed a similar agreement with Poland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Switzerland. [Focus Taiwan]

US Virgin Islands Governor makes historic visit to Taiwan

(sw) The United States Virgin Islands Governor Albert Bryan Jr. visits Taiwan from March 27 to April 1 to discuss bilateral cooperation. It is the first time that a governor from the Virgin Islands visits Taipei.

Bryan's delegation will meet with representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and attend the Net Zero City Expo. [Focus Taiwan]

Vietnamese foreign ministry responds to US accusations of human rights abuses

(gp) The Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded to the U.S. State Department's 2022 Country Reports

on Human Rights Practices, calling it inaccurate and lacking objectivity.

They affirmed Vietnam's commitment to promoting human rights and willingness to have constructive talks with the U.S. on any differences. Despite the accusations, the bilateral relationship between the two countries has grown in various fields. Vietnam wishes to deepen the partnership with the Biden administration for peace, stability, and development in the region and the world. Vietnam was also elected to the U.N. Human Rights Council for 2023-2025. [VN Express][Vietnamnet]

Vietnamese and Chinese vessels nearly crash in confrontation in Vietnamese EEZ

A Vietnamese fisheries patrol boat and the Chinese coast guard vessel it was monitor came dangerously close to crashing into each other on March 26. The Chinese ship had entered a Russian-operated gas field in Vietnam's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for the third time, after sailing into Malaysia's EEZ. The Vietnamese ship had been following the Chinese vessel closely since it left base. The ships came within 10 meters of each other during their confrontation on March 26, a distance at which there is a high risk of collision. The Chinese vessel left Vietnam's EEZ 90 minutes after the confrontation.

Chinese Coast Guard vessels have been observed sailing into energy exploration blocks operated or owned by Russian firms in Vietnam's South China Sea EEZ about 40 times since January 2022, according to vessel-tracking data from Vietnamese research organization South China Sea Chronicle Initiative. Vietnam has asked China to avoid these areas, but the zones are not territorial waters and do not have sailing restrictions under international law. [Reuters] [Radio Free Asia]

Announcements

Upcoming Events

29 March 2023 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

The State of Myanmar's Economy

This webinar will offer insights on the state of Myanmar's economy since the 2021 coup and discuss the impact and implications of regional and international responses and the country's overall economic trajectory for the foreseeable future.

Learn more about the event at [ISEAS].

29 March 2023 @ 9:30-10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Assessing the Economic and Financial Dynamics of a Cross-Strait Crisis

This webcast will examine the international economic and financial dimensions of a possible crisis in and around the Taiwan Strait.

You will find event details at [CSIS].

29 March 2023 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Strategic Japan 2023: Japan's Realism Diplomacy

This webcast will explore core issues of Japan's "realism diplomacy" agenda, including the regional security strategy, the path toward nuclear disarmament, upholding universal values, and expanding official development assistance.

If you are interested, find more information at [CSIS].

29 March 2023 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN), USA

How to keep the UN Environmental Agenda in Times of Crisis

This hybrid event will discuss the question how United Nations actors uphold the UN environmental agenda in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Visit [CIESIN] to find more about the event.

29 March 2023 @ 2:30-3:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

America's Energy Future

This hybrid event will present the outlook for US and global energy markets in the face of the transition to a less carbon-intensive energy matrix.

Learn more about the event at [Wilson Center].

29 March 2023 @ 5:00-6:30 p.m. (GMT+1), European Council on Foreign Affairs (ECFR), Germany

Georgia's fight for its future: Understanding recent protests in Tbilisi and the rift between the government and the wider population

Against the backdrop of the recent protests that led to the withdrawal of the draft NGO law by Georgia's ruling party, this webinar will feature a discussion on the chances for the people of Georgia to influence the country's path to the desired European Union membership.

In you want to know more about the event, go to [ECFR].

29 March 2023 @ 7:00-8:30 p.m. (GMT+1), German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA), Germany

Iraq 20 Years after the US Invasion: Domestic Politics and the Role of Civil Society

20 years after the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, this hybrid event will explore the often-overlooked domestic transitions that has occurred since the invasion. It will also address the role of Iraqi civil society in shaping them.

For more information, see [GIGA].

30 March 2023 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

The Future of AUKUS with Admiral Harry Harris Jr., USN (Ret.)

At this webcast Admiral Harry Harris Jr., USN (Ret.), former Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command will present the latest developments with AUKUS and implications for the maritime industrial base.

Visit [CSIS] to find further information.

30 March 2023 @ 1:30-2:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

White Sun War: The Campaign for Taiwan (book event)

This webcast will introduce “White Sun War: The Campaign for Taiwan,” the upcoming book of Mick Ryan, retired Australian Army major general and address the following questions: How might a war for Taiwan break out? How would it be fought? Who would win? And, what would its aftermath mean for the Taiwan, for China, for the United States, and for the world?

For more details, see [CSIS].

30 March 2023 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Putin’s Concept of International Law

This webcast and in-person event will discuss the thesis that changes to Russia’s constitution in 2020

along with Russian President Vladimir Putin's personal preoccupation with questions of historical memory support the conclusion that Putin's interpretation of international law is imperialist.

For further information, visit [Wilson Center].

30 March 2023 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

APEC 2023: Creating a Resilient and Sustainable Future for All

Against the backdrop of projections of significant weakening of the APEC region in the near term following strong growth in 2021 as downside risks dominate, this hybrid event will discuss the economic outlook in the region and policy priorities for APEC in 2023.

If you are interested and want to register, go to [ISEAS].

30 March 2023 @ 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Brookings Institution, USA

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the international legal order

This in-person event and webcast will discuss Russia's war of aggression and the international response. It will also address lessons learned for international law and the future of the international legal order.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

30 March 2023 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Accelerating U.S.-Japan Tech Innovation

As top US and Japanese leaders uphold their commitments to make innovation a core pillar of the bilateral relationship, this online event will explore possibilities to link the two countries through technological innovation.

For more information, see [Carnegie Endowment].

31 March 2023 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Thailand's 2023 General Election

Ahead of the general election in Thailand scheduled for May 2023, this webinar will discuss the legacies of the 2014 coup d'état that shape the playing field of the election and recent reforms of the electoral system, as well as internal strife within the military regime, and shifts in the political landscape.

Further event details are provided at [ISEAS].

3 April 2023 @ 4:00-5:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Cold War Liberation: The Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Portuguese Empire in Africa, 1961-1975

This webinar will analyze Soviet support for African revolutionaries who led armed struggles in the three Portuguese colonies Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau.

Find further event details at [Wilson Center].

4-5 April 2023 @ 10:00-11:30 a.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Malaysia's GE-15: Capturing Hearts, Cobbling Alliances, Crafting Power

This hybrid two-day conference will address Malaysia's 2022 general election from multiple perspectives and issues, including coalitional politics, institutional reforms, and economic conditions that shaped the election. It will also analyze the impact of the millions of first-time young voters and unpack the roles of track records and party platforms, election manifestos, and mainstream and social media in influencing the vote.

Find more about the event at [ISEAS].

Recent Book Releases

Matthew Desmond, ***Poverty, by America***, Crown, 304 pages, published on March 21, 2023, reviewed in [The

Guardian].

Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, ***A Stranger in Your Own City: Travels in the Middle East's Long War***, Knopf, 432 pages, published on March 14, 2023. For a review, see [Kirkus].

Grant Newsham, ***When China Attacks: A Warning to America***, Regnery Publishing, 256 pages, published on March 28, 2023. The book is reviewed in [Japan Forward].

Calls for Papers

The **University of Southern Denmark (SDU)** invites paper proposals for the ***international conference "Frontiers and Wastelands: Redefining the Nation in US Popular Culture"*** to be held on November 27-28, 2023, in Madrid. Abstract submission deadline is June 30, 2023. For more information, see [SDU].

The **Australian Centre for China in the World (CIW) at the Australian National University (ANU)** invites paper proposals for its ***conference "Breaking boundaries - Chinese companies abroad,"*** scheduled for June 29-30, 2023, in Canberra. The closing date for abstract submission is March 30, 2023. Details are available at [ANU].

Jobs and positions

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks an **International Operations Manager** to be based in Turkey. Core responsibility is to contribute to the implementation of related activities and organize knowledge management practices in the office. Applications are accepted until 11 April 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a **Programme Specialist on Sexual and Reproductive Health** to be based in Turkey. Core responsibility is to provide leadership and technical support on the development and implementation of reproductive health programmes. Applications are accepted until 11 April 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a **Spatial Database Consultant** to be based in Saudi

Arabia. Core responsibility is to develop and execute projects related to the geospatial aspect of the organization's operations. Applications are accepted until 9 April 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a **Data and Analytics Specialist**. Core responsibility is to provide technical support to the organization and ensure that UNDP's programmes are appropriate to the situation of the target country. Applications are accepted until 11 April 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme** seeks a **Horizon Technologies and Innovation Analyst** to be based in Singapore. Core responsibility is to provide relevant research and analysis to the organization. Applications are accepted until 9 April 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **World Food Programme** seeks a **Programme Policy Officer** to be based in Lebanon. Core responsibility is to lead and develop NGO partnership teams and develop technical guidance for related personnel. Applications are accepted until 10 April 2023. More information is provided at [WFP].

The **World Food Programme** seeks a **Programme Policy Officer** to be based in Togo. Core responsibility is to lead and inspire the professionals and provide advice and support to the field officers. Applications are accepted until 9 April 2023. More information is provided at [WFP].

The **World Food Programme** seeks a **Monitoring aand Evaluation Officer** to be based in Togo. Core responsibility is to lead the information management efforts and produce progress reports. Applications are accepted until 9 April 2023. More information is provided at [WFP].

The **World Food Programme** seeks a **Head of Change and Operational Excellence** to be based in Italy. Core responsibility is to lead efforts for organizational redesign and change and facilitate data collection process. Applications are accepted until 10 April 2023. More information is provided at [WFP].

The **World Food Programme** seeks a **Reporting and Compliance Officer** to be based in Italy. Core responsibility is to provide advice to the organization and provide management-related inputs to the office. Applications are accepted until 10 April 2023. More information is provided at [WFP].

The **World Health Organization** seeks an **Administrative Service Officer** to be based in France. Core responsibility is to manage the management team and provide engineering and project management services. Applications are accepted until 19 April 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization** seeks a **Medical Officer** to be based in Egypt. Core responsibility is to partner with national authorities to develop health projects in the rural areas. Applications are accepted until 17 April 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization** seeks a **Publications Content Development Advisor** to be based in the United States. Core responsibility is to provide technical guidance and oversee the content for the organization's publication. Applications are accepted until 15 April 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization** seeks a **Communication Officer** to be based in Switzerland. Core responsibility is to coordinate and facilitate implementation of the communications strategy. Applications are accepted until 15 April 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization** seeks an **Epidemiologist** to be based in Libya. Core responsibility is to provide techical expertise on the development and implementation of new health policies that can prevent the spreading of diseases. Applications are accepted until 8 April 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

Team:

Amanda Jaroen (aj) , Chanon Atom (ca), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Fabian Beck (fb), Gaia Esposito (ge); Giovanni Puglisi (gp), Henning Glaser (hg), Ian Hollinger (ih), Lucas Meier (lm), Manmehak Kaur (mk), Natalie Svinina (ns), Peer Morten Strantzen (ms), Priyankka Araasu (pa), Sheikh Afif Bin Zaman (as), Sophia Wesenberg (sw), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Valentina Pellegrino (vp); Venus Phuangkom, Waheed Mansoor (wm), Wardah Rehman (wr)

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