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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Cameroon's National Day, Norway's Constitution Day and Montenegro's, Paraguay's and Somaliland's Independence day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: Xi calls for acceleration in relocation of state institutions to newly built city

(ms) During a visit to the Xiongan New Area, a city under development south of the Chinese capital Beijing, Chinese President Xi Jinping on March 11 praised the progress being made while taking state institutions to task for accelerating relocation efforts.

The project behind the construction of the city, which is projected to be capable of housing nearly 7 million residents in the future, began in 2017 and is designed to counter Beijing's overgrown population of 21.5 million.

The visit by Xi, who was accompanied by three other members of the Politburo Standing Committee, including China's Premier Li Qiang, along with other high-ranking officials, serves primarily as a sign of the importance Xi and the Chinese government attach to the project. Xi envisioned to make Xiongan a "fertile ground for innovation and business ventures" and therefore calls on various state institutions from the economy, in the form of state-owned enterprises, but also ministries and institutes from science, finance and education to accelerate their transfers to the city.

In April, according to Chinese state news, more than 140 branches of national-level state-owned enterprises have already moved to the city. However, observers fear that the population lacks incentives to move away from Beijing. The capital, along with the other tier-one cities namely Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen, has the best medical and academic facilities in the country, which is why residents of the cities are reluctant to leave.

Despite these doubts from observers, the Chinese government is already beginning to apply pressure, at least within the party, on those responsible to promote moving to the new city. The personnel chief of the Chinese Communist Party, who was also present during the visit, publicly suggested that officials "who supported Xiongan's development and relocation from Beijing would be rewarded while those who did not would be removed." Based on the publicity of the "proposal," it can be assumed that such mechanisms may be used or are already being used in whatever form. [South China Morning Post]

China: Li Yunze appointed top financial regulator

(ms) China appoints little-known Liu Yunze, until now vice governor of Sichuan province, as party secretary of the newly established national financial supervision and management bureau, which is responsible for supervising banking and insurance institutions in China.

Little is known about Li, making it difficult for observers to make predictions about the impact of his appointment on the Chinese economy. In addition to the name, the timing of the appointment is also a source of confusion. A major reshuffle of economic institutions was expected in the course of the "two-session" in mid-March, but this failed to materialize, and Liu Kun and Yi Gang were confirmed in their posts as finance minister and governor of the People's Bank

of China (PBC), which was seen as a sign of the economy's stability [see AiR No. 11, March/2023, 2].

However, Li is said to have repeatedly advocated close support for the economy and at the same time a risk-preventing fiscal policy, which is in line with that of President Xi Jinping, who, in the wake of the end of the zero-COVID pandemic and the aim to boost China's economy, has emphasized greater integration of the private economy and a shift away from risky industries such as finance and real estate to the country's existing safe manufacturing industries and their modernization [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2].

A potential driver of Li's appointment could be his experience at the provincial level, as provincial governments are projected to have accumulated USD 23 trillion in debt as a result of the pandemic. The debt burden of the provinces has repeatedly led to financial shortages in individual provinces in recent months, and they have asked for help from Beijing, in addition Xi has highlighted the high debt of the provinces as a key challenge for 2023. However, this is merely speculation, and it remains to be seen what Li's economic policy will be. [Bloomberg] [Business Times] [China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission] [Radio Free Asia]

China: Doubling down on crackdown against foreign consulting firms

(ms) An editorial in the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), proclaims "zero tolerance" in the control of sensitive data after several police raids on at least three high-profile international consulting firms within a few weeks.

The latest raids took place on May 8 against the international consulting firm Capvision Partners for allegedly violating the National Security Law [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2]. The People's Daily provides more detailed insight into the exact allegations against Capvision, which to date have been based primarily on rumors. Capvision is said to have targeted many projects from companies that are related to China's sensitive industries, and some of the firm's clients are said to have had "close links with foreign governments, militaries and intelligence units". However, even the article falls short in clarifying whether the allegations or suspicions could be proven during the investigation, it leaves open the assumption that no grave violations were found.

Nevertheless, People's Daily warns that the Chinese government and security agencies will tighten their crackdown on the possible leaking and mishandling of "sensitive information".

The article as well as the investigations came shortly before and after the announcement of plans to tighten the Counter Espionage Law at the end of April, which expands the power of the security authorities and places "documents, data, materials, and items related to national security and interests" on the same level as state secrets [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1]. [South China Morning Post]

China: U.S. Citizen sentenced to life in prison for espionage

(ms) On May 15, 78-year-old U.S. citizen John Shing-Wan Leung was sentenced to life in prison for espionage in the Chinese city of Suzhou, located west of Shanghai.

Neither information on the details of the charges, nor on the background of the convict was disclosed. Leung has permanent residency in Hong Kong in addition to his U.S. citizenship. Leung was arrested in Suzhou in April 2021.

According to the South China Morning Post, Leung is a businessman, or has been in the past, who has had good contacts with both the U.S. and Chinese governments and has promoted closer cooperation and cultural exchanges, including being one of the people responsible for the city-friendship between Oklahoma and Guangzhou in 1985.

Leung's sentence, like the increased raids against U.S. consulting firms (see entry above), comes in the context of the revision of the Counter Espionage Law in late April, which expands the power of the security authorities and places "documents, data, materials, and items related to national security and interests" on the same level as state secrets [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1]. [CGTN] [South China Morning Post] [The Washington Post]

China: Former high-ranking judge pleads guilty to corruption charges

(ms) Shen Deyong, a former vice president of the Supreme Peoples Court of China, pleaded guilty on

May 12 of accepting the equivalent of USD 9.3 million in bribes during his career.

Shen's case represents one of the largest corruption cases in China's law enforcement and security system after China's President Xi Jinping expanded his 2021 anti-corruption campaign, which began with his administration, to include law enforcement agencies as an area of concern.

The court in charge of the case, located in Ningbo in the eastern Zhejiang province, postponed the verdict to a later date. [South China Morning Post]

China: Youth unemployment reaches new high

(ms) According to the newly released monthly economic report of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China, youth unemployment reached a new record high of 20.4 percent in April, and this is only part of the country's economic recovery, which is lagging behind expectations.

While cross-age unemployment has remained steady for years, even falling 0.1 percentage points in April to 5.2 percent from March, youth unemployment has been growing for several years now, suggesting that despite a shrinking labor force due to an aging population, the Chinese economy is unable to adequately absorb the new workers coming in. With an expected 11.6 million new students graduating this year alone, there is no end in sight to the problem, and according to the NBS, "[m]ore efforts need to be made to stabilize and expand employment for young people."

In addition to the ongoing problem of youth unemployment, the generally presented economic data for April were on the whole rather disappointing. While growth in the key measures such as retail sales at 18.4 percent and industrial production at 5.6 percent can be observed, the increases are mainly a result of the low comparative value from April last year due to the zero-COVID pandemic, and in addition, both values, especially industrial production with a predicted 9.7 percent growth, are lagging behind the expectations.

Investment in the real estate sector, China's problem child, continued to fall, while investment fell 5.8 percent in the first three months combined, it fell 6.2 percent in the first four months.

The NBS concludes the monthly report by stating that "in April, the national economy sustained the momentum of recovery with increasing positive factors. However, we should be aware that the international environment is still complicated and severe while the domestic demand remains insufficient and the endogenous driving force for economic recovery is not strong yet." [Bloomberg] [National Bureau of Statistics of China] [South China Morning Post]

China: Resumption of fast-lane services

(ms) The Chinese government has reintroduced fast-lane services at all airports and seaports as of May 15 to facilitate inter-regional travel and boost the economy after these were suspended in the wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Chinese citizens can use the fast lanes if they have the following travel documents: Chinese ordinary passports, exit-entry permits for traveling to and from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, mainland travel permits for Hong Kong and Macao residents, five-year mainland travel permits for Taiwan residents, and permits of multiple entries valid for one year.

For non-Chinese citizens who have China-issued foreign permanent resident ID cards or residence permits with a validity period of more than six months in addition to their passport. [Caixin Global] [Xinhua]

China: Hong Kong comic suspended after criticizing government reform

(ms) The comic strip of prominent Hong Kong cartoonist is suspended, after 40 years of running, following criticism against government reform.

The starting point for the suspension was the comic strip of the well-known cartoonist Wong Kei-kwan, also known as "Zunzi", published on May 9 in the newspaper Ming Pao, in which he criticizes the planned reform of the LegCo, which intends to reduce the number of elected seats of the Hong Kong parliament from 452 to 88 [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2].

The publication was followed by criticism from the Hong Kong government in the form of the Home and Youth Affairs Bureau, which accused the cartoonist of "deceiving the public" and the comic of being "twisted and slandered." As a result of the criticism, the comic

was temporarily suspended from the newspaper without giving more specific information about its duration.

While Wong's works have often drawn criticism from the government in the past, since the introduction of the National Security Law, and the revival of the colonial-era Sedition Law in response to the 2019 anti-government protests, satire has become more dangerous for writers as well as publishing media outlets. [Hong Kong Free Press 1] [Hong Kong Free Press 2] [Hong Kong Free Press 3]

China: New article exposes forced labor practices in Xinjiang

(ms) A newly published peer-reviewed article by Adrian Lenz [see full article], one of the best-known Western critics of China who focuses on the human rights situation in Xinjiang and parts of Tibet, aims to present the practices of the Chinese government, which forces Uyghurs into forced labor under the guise of "poverty alleviation".

The article compares the structure behind forced labor in the Xinjiang region, in northwestern China, with that in Uzbekistan. Zenz concludes that in both regions, forced labor is run by a centralized authoritarian state apparatus. But the program analyzed in Uzbekistan was driven primarily by economic considerations, while in Xinjiang these also played a role but the main intention behind the program was primarily ethnopolitical.

The article is based on a 2019 document from local governments, who were asked by the local Poverty Alleviation Work Group to compile a list of "unmotivated" individuals and to initiate measures to address this “missing motivation”. According to the documents, people up to 77 years old were included on the list, and one of the measures presented to combat this is cotton harvesting.

An important finding, according to Lenz, is that at least in Xinjiang, poverty alleviation has become a political task, rather than an exclusively economic one. This connection allows the Chinese government to tie forced labor to the eradication of terrorism, making ethnicity a determining factor in the enforcement of forced labor. [Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC) via Twitter] [Politico] [Radio Free Asia]

Japan: Sharp drop in current account surplus

(dql) The finance ministry has released preliminary data on the balance of payments, according to which Japan's current account surplus saw a sharp drop in fiscal 2022 shrinking by 54 percent from the previous year.

The current account posted a surplus of JPY 9.23 trillion (USD 68.59 billion) in the year through March, JPY 10.93 trillion yen lower than in fiscal 2021.

The drop is attributed to a record deficit of 18.06 trillion yen as the value of imports rised surged due to the yen's sharp depreciation, along with higher costs for oil, gas and other resources.

It marks the second-largest margin on record and the first time for the surplus to fall below the 10-trillion-yen mark in eight years. [The Asahi Shimbun]

Japan: Government called for better LGBT rights protection

(dql) In a video compilation of the messages, the Japanese government has been urged by 15 diplomatic missions in Japan, including those of the United States, ten European countries, Canada, Australia and Argentina, to take concrete action to improve the protection of LGBT rights in the country.

The move comes ahead of the G7 leaders' summit this week, hosted by Japan in Hiroshima.

It also comes amid the ruling Liberal Democratic Party plans to submit a bill to parliament aimed at introducing legislation to promote understanding of the LGBT community but faces resistance among conservative party members who uphold traditional family values. [Kyodo News]

Japan: High number of child maltreatment reported

(dql) Government data released last week revealed worrying conditions for children in Japan's nurseries, as a high number of cases of child maltreatment were recorded at nurseries across the country between April and December last year.

A survey by the Children and Families Agency, an external organ of the Cabinet Office established in 2022 under the Act Establishing the Children and Families Agency, showed 914 child maltreatment cases in the mentioned period, with 90 of them considered as abuse involving children being shaken or hurt in other ways.

Furthermore, less than 10 percent of the municipal governments reported maltreatment cases to the prefectural governments and less than 30 percent of them did so regarding incidents of abuse.

The results of the survey adds pressure on authorities on the local level to take action. [Kyodo News]

South Korea: President's veto against controversial Nursing Act

(dql) President Yoon Suk-yeol has vetoed the Nursing Act which the parliament passed on April 27 with the votes of the main opposition Democratic Party (DP). The vote on the bill was boycotted by the ruling People Power Party (PPP).

Yoon cited for his decision "excessive conflicts between related occupations," to which the bill would lead.

The act is contested between nurses and physicians. On the one hand, the former argue that the new law would improve their working environments, which often led to overwork as their roles were not clearly specified in the current Medical Service Act, that only states that nurses must provide medical assistance under the guidance of a medical doctor, without identifying specific roles.

On the other hand, doctors reject the bill saying that permitting nurses to visit patients and provide services independently would cause great confusion in the country's health care system [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1]. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

The DP heavily criticized Yoon for his veto calling it an act of "arrogance" disregarding the legislative right of the parliament. It announced that it will push for a revote of the act. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Opposition party lawmaker to face investigation into ethical misconduct

(dql) Opposition Democratic Party leader Lee Jae-myung ordered an ethics inspection of party member and lawmaker Kim Nam-kuk on May 12 to determine whether he has compromised the dignity of an elected public official. The move is widely seen as an attempt to minimize damage for the party.

Kim is suspected of trading cryptocurrency coins while attending parliamentary meetings in May and November last year.

He has also come under fire in the wake of media reports about him owing some 800,000 Wemix coins in 2021, valued USD 4.5 million, an amount contradicting his frugal image.

The ethics inspection is separate from an ongoing DP investigation into potential wrongdoing in the context of Kim's coin trading. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Ruling party expels two members over contentious remarks

(dql) The ruling People Power Party (PPP) has suspended the party membership of two prominent members over controversial historical statements.

Party Supreme Council member Kim Jae-won received and North Korean defector-turned-lawmaker Tae Yong-ho were handed down one year and three months respectively.

Kim's membership was suspended due to remarks viewed as slighting victims of two historical events, the bloody suppression of a civilian uprising on Jeju Island 1948/49 by the government and the 1980 pro-democracy uprising in the southwestern city of Gwangju.

Tae, for his part, made statements considered as distorting history after he insisted in February that the Jeju uprising was obviously triggered at the behest of North Korea's late founder, Kim Il-sung. [Yonhap News Agency]

Tae was formerly North Korean deputy ambassador to Britain who defected to South Korea in 2016 and was elected as a member of the parliament four years later [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2].

South Korea: President Yoon eyes structural upgrades for military

(dql) President Yoon Suk Yeol has announced that the establishment of a Strategic Command in the military to more effectively operate the three branches of the armed forces is under consideration by his administration, citing rising concerns over North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

He further added that he pursues a "large-scale change" in military hardware and software to create a "strong combat-type army".

Yoon made the statements at the inaugural meeting of the presidential Defense Innovation Committee on May 11, created under a presidential decree in December and tasked with leading the implementation of new technologies and cyber security protocols in the armed forces.

Chaired by Yoon chairs, the 11-member committee consists of the national security adviser, defense minister and experts from the private sector. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

Taiwan: Law amendment allows adoption by same-sex couples

(dql) Taiwan's parliament has passed on May 16 an amendment to the law that legally recognizes the adoption of children by same-sex couples.

This comes four years after same-sex marriage was legalized in 2019, making Taiwan the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage.

The latest law amendment solidifies Taiwan's position as a pioneer in LGBT rights in Asia. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: New patrol vessel for Coast Guard

(dql) Taiwan's sixth Anping-class patrol vessel, the Chi An, and the 25th 35-ton patrol boat, was handed over to the Taiwan Coast Guard in a ceremony of May 15.

The Chi An is result of the ongoing implementation of a national defense shipbuilding policy for which more than USD 1.38 billion have been allocated, in a bid to fully support the plan for more coast guard vessels.

141 new-generation coast guard ships are supposed to be built over a period of ten years from 2018 to 2027 to establish a new fleet. [Taiwan News]

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

Bangladesh: Domination of syndicate causes small business to collapse, state minister says

(az) Bangladesh's state minister for industries has expressed his frustration that syndicates will take over the country's small businesses and market if the government does not take urgent measures. He also fears that the syndicates are gaining so much power that they will one day topple the ministry-level powers by controlling the country's economy.

The state minister further expresses his fear that these syndicates are one of the biggest challenges to the country's development. Despite the government's effort to reduce the cost of daily necessary items, the syndicates are causing even the price of basic food items to rise. Because of the syndicates, people from a certain sector are getting rich soon, as they are easily using their opportunities to loot money. The state minister further added that if syndicates continue, the poor people will no longer be able to buy their daily necessary food items, and the ministers will soon lose their power. [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh: Cyclone Mocha hits Rohingya refugee camps in Cox's Bazar district

(az/lm) The United Nations on May 15 called for urgent aid and support after a powerful cyclone moving inland from the Bay of Bengal hit the low-lying Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox Bazar district on May 14.

Some 400,000 people were evacuated in Bangladesh and neighboring Myanmar ahead of Cyclone Mocha making landfall, as authorities and aid agencies scrambled to avert heavy casualties from one of the strongest storms to hit the region in recent years. [The Guardian]

Although the cyclone's effect was lesser than predicted, the vulnerable settlements in Cox's Bazar have been seriously damaged, leaving hundreds in dire need of aid. According to preliminary estimates, thousands of people have been impacted, and houses and critical infrastructure have been damaged, particularly in the Rohingya camps in the Teknaf region and neighboring Bangladeshi communities. [Prothom Alo]

Bangladesh: United Nations expert to assess impact of poverty on human rights

(lm) The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, will visit Bangladesh from May 17-29 to examine the government's efforts to eradicate poverty. During his visit, De Schutter will travel to the Rangpur Division of the capital, Dhaka, and Cox's Bazar, where he will meet with national and local government officials, individuals and communities affected by poverty, and representatives from civil society. [Mirage]

De Schutter will present his preliminary observations and recommendations at a press conference on May 29; the final report will be presented on a visit to the UN Human Rights Council in June 2024.

Bangladesh: Dwindling aid leaves Rohingya women exposed to rising violence

(lm) Services provided to women, as well as other support activities, in the refugee camps in Bangladesh's Cox Bazar district - the world's largest refugee settlement - are under crisis, as donations have slowed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022. The lack of international support makes it even more difficult for local authorities to fight high levels of gender-based violence and increasing criminality in the sprawling camps. [The New Humanitarian]

Sexual abuse and forced marriages have long been common in the overcrowded refugee settlements, and there have been regular reports of Rohingya girls and women being kidnapped. But more recent reporting suggests that gender-base violence against women is on the rise.

Adding to this is a rise in gang violence in the camps. A February report by Bangladesh's defense ministry said there were 64 killings in the camps between 2021 and 2022, citing 11 armed groups, including the insurgent Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization.

Bangladesh: Climate disasters are the major obstacles to LDC graduation, premier tells UN commission

(az) During the 79th Annual Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that the country's smooth transition to LDC status is facing obstacles due to climate disasters.

As per the current situation, Bangladesh will graduate to LDC status by 2026. The Bangladeshi prime minister also held the millions of Rohingya refugees living in the country's Cox's Bazar district responsible, saying the overcrowded camps would lead to environmental degradation. Prime

Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Hasina submitted some proposals to the UNSCAP, including adequate financing to implement their NAP and achieve NDC targets, international Support Measures of knowledge sharing, trade facilitation measures, and strengthening of Sub-regional cooperation. She also mentioned the National Adaptation Plan-NAP submitted to UNFCCC that will cost 230 billion USD up to the year 2050 for successful implementation. She also blamed that although Bangladesh has a low emission record, the nation faces natural calamities due to the developed nations' high emission rate. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: World Bank expresses concerns over project delays

(az) The World Bank has recently expressed concerns over Bangladesh's slow project implementation process. As per a recently published report, the current progress of project implementation in the South Asian nation has been very complex and slow. It showed that it takes more than two years for a project to get approved in Bangladesh. The World Bank specifically identified the planning Commission as responsible throughout the procedures.

Against the situation, the World Bank has demanded that the Project Evaluation Committee (PEC) set specific timeframes to make the decision-making process more effective and implement the projects smoothly. Although the World Bank views the problems as solvable, several other problems like incipient institutional arrangements, limited financial allocation for project readiness, low execution for funds, and misalignment of policies and regulations are making it difficult to start up, let alone finish the projects. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Government orders power cuts due to gas shortage

(az/lm) Authorities in Bangladesh were forced to shed 2,000 MW of electricity across the country as the gas supply from two floating terminals was suspended due to a cyclone, leading to the shutdown of a number of gas-fired power plants. Alone in the capital area, the load-shedding was around 347 MW against the demand of 1,157 MW. [The Daily Star]

Nepal: Officials arrested in 'refugee scam' probe that could impact ties with neighbors China, India

(lm) Police in Nepal on May 10 arrested ex-Home Minister Bal Krishna Khand as they widened their investigation into a human trafficking scam involving several former senior government officials and politicians in the Himalayan nation. More than 800 people say they were defrauded of millions of rupees by a political-bureaucratic network that promised to issue them fake documents for the United States in the name of Bhutanese asylum seekers eligible for resettlement in third countries.

The South Asian nation is home to thousands of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese nationals who were forced to flee the neighboring Himalayan kingdom after an ethnic cleansing campaign in the 1990s. The displaced were later sent to refugee camps in Nepal as the two countries held several repatriation talks. When negotiations failed to yield any result, refugees began settling in other countries, including the US and Europe, under a United Nations-backed deal.

At least a dozen people, including former and current officials from the home ministry and middlemen, have been arrested in connection to the scam, which has been going on for years but only came to light only a few months ago when victims began coming forward. The scam has also turned into a headache for Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal as Khand's Nepali Congress is one of the main parties propping up his fragile ruling coalition after the Communist Party Nepal - Unified Marxist Leninist withdrew from the government over the choice of an opposition party candidate for the presidency [see AiR No. 9, February/2023, 4]. [South China Morning Post] [The Hindu] [The Indian Express]

India: Opposition Congress party set for big win in Karnataka state, defeating Prime Minister Modi's ruling BJP

(lm) India's main opposition Congress party (INC) was set to win elections in the country's southern state of Karnataka on May 13, defeating the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which was in power. The INC managed to secure 136 of the 224 seats in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, according to data released by the Election Commission. The BJP, which had won 104 seats in 2018, had to settle for 66 this time. The Janata Dal (Secular), the third major party in the state, got 19 seats. [Al Jazeera] [The Straits Times]

The clear majority allows the INC to form a government on its own, as it did in 2013. A fractured mandate in 2018 — when the BJP was the single-largest party but short of the majority mark of 113 — led to four chief ministers under two governments sworn in over five years.

The election was the first of five crucial state polls this year that are seen as setting the tone for parliamentary elections due in April and May 2024. It was also the first big electoral face-off between Prime Minister Modi's BJP and the INC since Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was convicted of defamation in March

and lost his seat in Parliament [see AiR No. 13, March/2023, 4].

It is worth recalling that before last week's Karnataka elections, the INC had only won one of 24 state or federal territory elections since 2019, when Modi swept national elections for a second term. In contrast, the BJP won 15 states or federal territories, either on its own or in alliance with regional parties, in the same period. But with its exit from Karnataka, the Hindu-nationalist party no longer holds power in any of India's five southern states.

In light of this, the Karnataka election results could serve as a morale boost for the otherwise beleaguered opposition in India as it tries to devise a strategy to unseat Modi nationally, ahead of the country's elections likely in April and May 2024. [Bloomberg]

India: If a law is drafted well, judiciary cannot overstep it, home minister says

(lm) India's home minister saud on May 15 that if a law was drafted well, the judiciary would not get an opportunity to overstep it, adding that laws should always be drafted using a simple and clear language as difficult words always created controversy. [The Hindu]

Nepal: Bill giving impunity to political criminals registered

(lm) A bill seeking impunity to political perpetrators of criminal offenses has been registered in Nepal's Parliament. It is widely believed that the purpose of the bill is to legitimize the withdrawal of cases against the main perpetrators in the 2015 Tikapur massacre. [The Himalayan Times]

In August 2015, armed protestors from the Tharu, an ethnic group indigenous to the Terai in southern Nepal and northern India, attacked security forces in the western city Tikapur, killing eight, including seven police officers and a two-year-old baby. In March 2019, then, a court sentenced 11 people including Resham Lal Chaudhary, a lawmaker from the Rastriya Janata Party Nepal, to life in prison for their roles in orchestrating and carrying out the massacre.

If the proposed bill is passed by Parliament, the cases against Chaudhary, and another lawmaker charged with the murder of a police officer during the attacks, could be withdrawn.

Pakistan: Ex-Premier Khan returns home after arrest, riots and calls for nationwide protests

(lm) Pakistan's former Prime Minister called for countrywide "freedom" protests on March 14, after his arrest and detention last week triggered violent protests. [South China Morning Post] [The Straits Times 1]

The leader of Pakistan's main opposition PTI party, who has been tied up in growing raft of legal cases since being ousted from power in April last year, had been arrested by paramilitary troops on multiple corruption charges during a routine court appearance on May 9 [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2]. In the two days that followed, authorities also arrested Shah Mahmood Qureshi, who served as foreign minister in Khan's Cabinet during his four-year premiership, as well as two other senior leaders of the PTI, Asad Umar and Fawad Chaudhry. [The Straits Times 2]

The arrests triggered violent clashes in several cities between PTI supporters and security forces. Demonstrators set fire to government buildings, blocked roads and damaged property belonging to the military, which they blame for Khan's downfall. In light of the violence, caretaker governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces, where the PTI party enjoys the most support, requested assistance from the military to restore public order. [The Straits Times 3].

After protesters ransacked the house of a top army general in Khan's hometown, the eastern city of Lahore, the military warned it will respond firmly if there are further attacks on its assets, saying in a statement on May 10 that during the violence it showed "restraint, patience and tolerance".

The following day, then, the Supreme Court ordered the country's anti-graft agency to release Khan from its custody, calling the arrest "invalid". But on May 16, the Lahore High Court reserved the verdict on Khan's bail petition seeking bail in all cases registered against him in Punjab. [The Straits Times 4] [The Hindu]

In separate developments, Khan was indicted by a Pakistani court in an unrelated case on May 10 for unlawfully selling state gifts during his premiership between 2018 and 2022. He has denied any wrongdoing.

Pakistan: Unrest, violence concern for human rights, press freedom watchdogs

(lm/tj) Against the larger backdrop of widespread protest and political instability following the arrest of former Prime Minister Imran Khan on corruption charges on May 9, the country's Human Rights Commission (HRCP) has expressed concerns over reports of arrests and cases filed against opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers across the country. According to news reports, at least 564 workers have been arrested, and more arrests are being made - a development the HRCP termed against all "democratic norms". [FirstPost]

Human rights watchdog Human Rights Watch, in turn, has called on the government to uphold the right to peaceful protest while responding to violence with the minimum force needed, after police fired on and used excessive force against protesters. [Human Rights Watch]

Separately, digital rights groups have condemned the government's decision to impose an internet shutdown in several regions, including the capital Islamabad, and blocking social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, just hours after Khan's arrest last week. [BBC]

Furthermore, many reporters and news outlets have been the targets of violence following Khan's arrest, according to the press freedom non-profit *Reporters Without Borders*. On May 10, about 200 demonstrators stormed the building housing the state-owned radio station in Peshawar, the capital of the northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province [see Reporters Without Borders]. The day before, reporters trying to cover the protests in Peshawar were attacked by demonstrators [see Voice of America].

Against this backdrop, the United States, United Kingdom and United Nations, among others, in separate announcements called for adherence to the rule of law in Pakistan. [Dawn]

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court clears path to decriminalize homosexuality

(ns/lm) The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has greenlighted a bill seeking to decriminalize homosexuality, the speaker of parliament said on May 9, in a move hailed as a "historic development" by campaigners. [The Supreme Court – Sri Lanka]

At present, Sections 365 and 365A of the Sri Lankan penal code criminalize consensual same-sex sexual relations, threatening both men and women with a 10 year prison sentence. This led to a private member's bill presented in parliament last month [see AiR No. 17 April/2023, 4].

However, activists will still have to lobby for support from the 225 lawmakers to push forward the proposed legislation through Parliament. Neither the government nor the opposition have made any comment on whether they support the bill, proposed for consideration by an individual member of parliament, so the next steps for it to eventually become legislation, or not, are not yet clear. [CNN] [Reuters]

Sri Lanka: *Transparency International* files petition with Supreme Court on planned anti-corruption bill

(ns/lm) The local branch of international corruption watchdog *Transparency International* has filed a petition with the Supreme Court, challenging the Anti-Corruption Bill that the regulators have recently aimed to table in Parliament. The statement proposes that the regulation in its current form violates various constitutional provisions. The court took the case on May 12 and scheduled a hearing on May 15. [The Island]

The anti-corruption legislation, which is proposed as part of Sri Lanka's commitments to the International Monetary Fund, includes a clause - Section 119 - that will allow for the prosecution of individuals making an allegation that they know to be false. Various parties have criticized the inclusion of this clause over concerns that it could discourage potential whistleblowers, while a few defenders argue that it would prevent the weaponization of corruption charges that they say can often be politically motivated.

Sri Lankan President announces launching of welfare benefit payments on July 1

(ns) Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe has announced that the government will launch the Aswesuma welfare benefit payments on July 1. Legal authorities identified four groups eligible for the

Aswesuma financial assistance in line with the transitional, vulnerable, poor, and extremely poor social categories. The groups will receive monthly welfare benefits from LKR 2,500 to LKR 15,000 accordingly. Extremely poor beneficiaries will receive assistance for up to three years, while the former social groups will receive Aswesuma benefits for 6–9 months. [Colombo Page]

Ranil Wickremesinghe has obtained approval from the Cabinet of Ministers to gain support from the World Bank Development Policy Financing Program after announcing plans to allocate a record budget for the national social welfare program at the beginning of April [see AiR No. 17 April/2023, 4, AiR No. 18 May/2023, 1].

Sri Lanka: Government postpones central bank bill voting in light of protests

(ns) Sri Lanka's prime minister told Parliament on May 9 that the government decided to postpone the vote on the Central Bank of Sri Lanka Bill (CBSL), which was originally scheduled on May 11. According to the government official, Uthara Lanka Sabhagaya (ULS) party lawmakers had signed a petition to examine the Bill again before subjecting it to the vote.

The ULS members argue that the Supreme Court ruled out that nearly one-third of the statute doesn't comply with the Constitution, which is why the bill has to be passed by a two-third majority vote. In light of this, the petitioners urge the prime minister to resubmit the CBSL according to amendments advised by the Attorney General.

The Bill carries less controversy to the parliamentary dispute and can be passed by a simple majority with recommendations included in the act. Since the Committee of Public Finance has not yet conducted a meeting on the Supreme Court statement, it was essential to reschedule the CBSL debate. [The Island]

Sri Lanka: Parliament to hold debate on X-Pearl case before legal proceedings in Singapore

(ns) On March 12, the Parliament approved a 15-member Parliamentary Select Committee (PSC) to investigate the X-Press Pearl maritime disaster case upon the request of 21 lawmakers. The Speaker will

soon appoint the Chair and members for the probe. The Parliament will reconvene to debate the X-Press Pearl case again on May 23.

Initially, the Sri Lankan Parliament debate concerning the hearing on the environmental damage caused by the sinkage of the cargo ship with hazardous materials in the X-Press Pearl case was rescheduled from May 10 to May 15. The Department of Attorney General reports that the case will be heard in a Singaporean court since the carrier company is registered in Singapore. On the contrary, some national representatives wanted the government to file the case in Sri Lanka since the disaster occurred in its waters. Some Parliamentarians argue that fishing communities require proper compensation.

The week before the debate, Sri Lankan Justice Minister Wijeyadasa Rajapakshe insisted that the Parliament should not hold the debate because it contradicts its standing orders. The Minister has pointed out that the Attorney General has already filed a case in Singapore seeking compensation amounting to USD 6.4 billion from the operator. During this proposal, the opposition urged to hold the rescheduled 2-day debates. The Speaker asked the parties to abstain from talking on the matter until the Parliamentary debate. The Justice Minister has announced that he will also participate in the discussions. [News First], [AiR No. 18 May/2023, 1], [Sunday Times]

Sri Lanka: International Monetary Fund delegation visits; economy expected to resume growth in 2024

(ns/lm) On May 11, an International Monetary Fund delegation arrived in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo to prepare for the first review of the Washington-based lender's loan program this September. The IMF representatives will stay in the island nation until May 23 to hold various regular consultations on this matter. [Reuters]

In related developments, the IMF's director for Asia and Pacific, Krishna Srinivasan, told reporters on May that the multilateral lender expected Sri Lanka's crisis-hit economy to resume growing in 2024 after contracting 3 percent this year. He also said the expected economic growth of 1.5 percent next year hinges critically on the economic reform program Colombo has agreed to undertake, including challenging reforms in five identified areas. [abc News]

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

Cambodia: CL's leader application to contest in July elections rejected

(ns) On May 9, the Cambodian National Election Committee (NEC) announced its decision to reject the application of the Candlelight Party (CP) vice president Rong Chhun to run as a candidate for Kandal Province in the national elections. The Justice Ministry cited for its decision that the opposition leader wasn't legally rehabilitated by a court from his 2021 incitement conviction.

The registration for the elections, scheduled on July 23, ended on May 8. The NEC has received 20 applications in total, but 9 of them did not receive approval or remain pending.

The Candlelight Party reports that the NEC requires the original copy of its registration from the Interior Ministry that was lost following the raid on the party's office in 2017. Self-exiled Cambodian National Rescue Party opposition leader Sam Rainsy notes that the Committee has accepted photocopies instead of the original documents in the past.

Concurrently, the Vice President of the Ratanakkiri province CP department and his wife announced their resignation from the CP and published a video statement asking the Prime Minister to join the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP). On March 8, Hun Sen responded that he would welcome the former CP leader and his spouse. [The Diplomat], [CamboDIA News], [AiR. 19, May/2023, 2], [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Prime Minister responds to main CP opposition as CP anticipates rejection in polls registration from NEC

(ns) On March 13, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen announced on his social media that Candlelight Party (CP) leaders requested him to meet and discuss the parliamentary election on July 23. On March 12, the CP issued a public statement declaring that the party members plan to organize peaceful protests if the National Election Committee (NEC) rejects registering any of their candidates.

Hun Sen responded that he will only be able to meet with the CP leaders on July 30 due to a busy schedule and proposed that if CP members chose to protest, it could show their intention to disrupt the election process by defaming the NEC and the Constitutional Council. He urged the opposition to avoid demonstrations convened by CP supporters, specifically while the Kingdom is holding SEA Games until May 17.

The NEC reportedly demands the Candlelight Party to provide the original registration certificate from the Interior Ministry. Indeed, the Prime Minister and the ruling party spokesmen argue that CP members have incomplete paperwork to contest in national elections. Even so, the official NEC website statement indicates that the Copy of the Political Party Registration Certificate at the Ministry of Interior should be sufficient to support the registration. [Phnom Penh Post], [China.org], [The Diplomat], [National Election Committee – Cambodia]

Indonesia: Former police chief of West Sumatra gets life in prison, dodging death sentence

(ys) A district court on May 9 found the former police chief of Indonesia's West Sumatra, Inspector General Teddy Minahasa, guilty of stealing five kilograms crystal methamphetamine from the evidence locker, swapping it with alum, and then selling the drug for personal gain.

The court sentenced Teddy to life in prison, a sentence lighter than the death sentence demanded by the prosecutors. The defendant's lawyer said that they will appeal the sentence.

This case is another high-level case involving a high-ranking police officer in Indonesia after previously a star-ranked general ordered the murder of his subordinate and then attempted to erase the evidence, which further eradicates public trust in law enforcement. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Army plans to revise Military Law

(ys) Indonesia's army is planning to revise the country's Military Law, including additional ministerial or government institution posts that could be assigned to military officers. The current Law No. 34/2004 stipulates there are ten ministerial or government institutions that could be assigned to military officers, but the plan is to add eight more posts.

Another point that would be revised is retirement age, currently set at the age of 58 for officers and 53 for Non-commissioned officers (NCO). The proposed revision would adjust both officers' and NCOs' retirement age to 58 extendable to 60 years old if they wish it so.

Indonesia's defense minister, Prabowo Subianto, questioned the urgency to revise the law and stated that the current military law has been successful in preventing corruption and leak. [Antara News, in Bahasa Indonesia] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Construction workers abducted by Papuan separatists

(ys) Four workers involved in the construction of a base transceiver station in Indonesia's Papua province were abducted by a local separatist group, while two other workers were injured. The abducted were released on May 15, after local police and government officials conducted negotiations with a local religious leader. [The Jakarta Post]

Such incidents are not uncommon, and Indonesia is currently trying to rescue a New Zealand pilot who was abducted by the military wing of Papua's main separatist group. Since a failed attempt to rescue the pilot left at least five military soldiers dead, the army has raised the government operation in Papua to Operation Battle Standby [see AiR No. 17, April/2023, 4]. [Tempo 1] [Tempo 2]

Indonesia: Defining poverty in Indonesia

(ys) The World Bank recently urged Indonesia to change its poverty standard to the new global standard of USD 3,2 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) per day, from USD 1,9 per day.

The Minister of Finance, Sri Mulyani, stated that if this new standard is to be implemented, around 40 percent of Indonesians will fall back into the poverty line. Less than 1,5 percent of Indonesians were living under the World Bank's extreme poverty line of USD 1,9 per day as of 2022, according to the development lender's data, far below 19 percent recorded two decades ago.

The Minister also said that such a global standard cannot be implemented in Indonesia, since the price of goods and services in Indonesia is not the same as in any other country. Hence, the PPP should be adjusted to the domestic situation of a country.

The World Bank itself is hoping that Indonesia will be able to eradicate poverty along the USD 3,2 PPP standard, as previously it has succeeded in pushing poverty to USD 1,9 standard. [CNBC Indonesia, in Bahasa Indonesia] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Bid to reach net-zero emission

(ys) Indonesia is keen to reach its 2060 Net-Zero Emission (NZE) target through its state-owned electricity company PT PLN.

In order to achieve this target, Indonesia is planning to cancel 13,3 gigawatts (GW) worth of new coal-fired power plants and expand more in renewable energy. Based on the company's 2021-2030 long-term electricity procurement plan (RUPTL), the renewable energy projects will consist of hydro, geothermal and variable renewable energy (VRE) power plants in addition to bioenergy.

However, early stopping of coal power plants would require around USD 4,2 billion in funding, a sum Indonesia is hoping international partners will help provide. Other than an early retreat from coal power plants, Indonesia is also implementing short-term initiatives, including de-dieselization projects, biomass co-firing and gas expansion, while other initiatives include hydrogen co-firing and carbon capture utilization and storage (CCUS), as well as investing in electric vehicles (EVs) and solar rooftops. The plan would require a total amount of USD 724 billion. [The Jakarta Post]

Malaysia: Muslim groups slam Prime Minister Anwar's government for dropping appeal on the use of 'Allah'

(lm) A decision by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's administration to drop an appeal in a decades-long battle over whether non-Muslims can use the word "Allah" to refer to God has sparked a furious response from Islamic groups, including the two largest Muslim political parties in Malaysia.

Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail confirmed on May 15 that the government withdrew its appeal against a 2021 High Court verdict which overturned a three-decade old policy banning Non-Muslims from using the word "Allah" to refer to God in publications for educational purposes. The appeal was filed when the current opposition coalition Perikatan Nasional (PN) was in power. [Benar News]

The notice to withdraw the appeal has been panned by Islamic civil society groups, which said that the decision to withdraw the appeal "can affect the harmony of the multiethnic and religious community" in Malaysia. PN's two main components, former Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin's Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia and Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) accused the Anwar administration of failing to safeguard Islam. [The Straits Times]

In light of this, Prime Minister Anwar on May 16 insisted that the 2021 verdict only applied to the eastern state of Sarawak, one of two Malaysian states with a strong Christian community - despite the high court deciding on the matter on the basis of the federal constitution's safeguards of freedom of religion.

Malaysia: Ombudsman bill to be tabled in October 2023

(ldm) The Ombudsman Malaysia 2023 Bill, which proposes the creation of an independent body to replace the Public Complaints Bureau (PCB), is set to be tabled in the Malaysian Parliament in October.

The bill is intended to improve the effectiveness of addressing complaints relating to government ministries, departments and agencies. The government is currently engaging stakeholders to fine-tune several matters to enhance integrity and governance in

addressing public complaints. Minister in the Prime Minister's Department (Law and Institutional Reform) Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said said one of the elements of an accountable government is that complaints must be allowed, for the public to gain further trust in the government. [Mkini][The Malaysian Reserve]

Malaysia: Democratic Action Party chairman receives forensic document linked to USD 450,000 bribe

(ldm) Malaysia's former finance minister and chairman of the Democratic Action Party, Lim Guan Eng, has received the forensic digital analysis of a WhatsApp conversation between two businessmen linked to his corruption trial.

Lim is facing four charges of using his position to solicit gratification in connection with a USD 1.5 billion undersea tunnel project in the state of Penang, which he led as chief minister from 2008 until his appointment as finance minister in 2018.

The chat was between Consortium Zenith Construction Sdn Bhd director Datuk Zarul Ahmad Mohd Zulkifli and G. Gnanaraja, involving USD 500,000 in bribes. Lim's counsel claimed that the prosecution had suppressed evidence relating to his corruption charges by not providing the defense with the document. [FMT] [Malay Mail][NST] [The Edge]

Malaysia: Jho Low the 'higher authority' behind 1MDB offshore investment

(ldm) In the ongoing 1MDB trial involving former Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak, Kevin Michael Swampillai, a former BSI Bank executive, testified that fugitive businessman Low Taek Jho was the higher authority in transactions involving Brazen Sky Ltd, a company set up to repatriate money belonging to 1MDB.

Swampillai observed that Low had approved 1MDB's USD 2.3 billion offshore investment into Brazen Sky, which was above the position of then Prime Minister and Finance Minister Najib. Swampillai also said that the only reason a promissory note structure was used was to produce a false valuation report and avoid detection by auditors. Najib is facing four charges of abusing his position and 21 counts of money

laundering involving USD 506 million of 1MDB funds. [MalaysiaNow][NST][The Star]

Malaysia: Lim Guan Eng negates Yaysan Albukhary's tax exemption status

(ldm) Former finance minister Lim Guan Eng has denied allegations that he canceled the tax-exempt status of Yayasan Albukhary, a Muslim charitable organization, during the time when Pakatan Harapan was in power.

Lim said that neither he nor his ministry instructed the cancellation of the foundation's tax-exempt status. [Malay Mail][The Edge] He added that the burden of proof lies with Muhyiddin Yassin, Malaysia's former prime minister who made the allegations [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1].

Lim filed a defamation suit against Muhyiddin in March over the remarks. [FMT]

Malaysia: Human Resources Minister Sivakumar confirms five officers sacked following corruption probe

(ldm) Five officers from Malaysia's Human Resource Ministry have been sacked over a corruption and power abuse probe regarding the recruitment of foreign workers.

Human Resources Minister V. Sivakumar confirmed the terminations, but did not provide any further details on the matter or who ordered the dismissals. The probe began in April when an aide to Sivakumar and a recruitment agent were arrested by Malaysia's anti-graft agency.

The minister was later called in for questioning about alleged cash kickbacks from a detained businessman. Despite calls for his resignation, Sivakumar has remained in his post. [FMT][Malay Mail][The Star]

Malaysia: Plans to divest Digital Nasional Berhad's shares are underway

(ldm) Following the government's decision to shift to a dual 5G network model, Telekom Malaysia (TM) has terminated its Share Subscription Agreement (SSA)

with Digital Nasional Berhad (DNB), the company tasked with rolling out the country's 5G network.

However, existing Unifi customers will still be able to access 5G services through an existing agreement with DNB. TM is committed to participating in 5G implementation and will leverage its infrastructure, platforms, and rollout experience. CelcomDigi has also terminated its SSA with DNB, but DNB is still mandated to continue rolling out 5G until it achieves 80% population coverage by year-end before a second 5G network is introduced. [Malay Mail]

An economist has praised this move of the Malaysian government for giving up its stake in Digital Nasional Bhd (DNB), since there was no reason for the government to own the network when it was viable from a commercial perspective. Once DNB has achieved its 5G target of 80 percent coverage of populated areas (CoPA), a private entity will take over, with the provision of 5G services coming under two private entities, A and B. The government currently holds 35% of shares in DNB and a golden share in the company. [FMT]

The country's plan to roll out 5G, which is currently on track, is targeted to cover 80 percent of the population by the end of year. [The Star]

Malaysia: Bans of renewable energy (RE) exports lifted

(ldm) The Malaysian government has lifted its ban on renewable energy (RE) exports as part of a policy review aimed at stimulating growth in the energy sector, growing the country's clean power industry and boosting non-fossil fuel power generation.

Alongside raising its 2050 RE generation capacity target from 40 percent to 70percent of the nation's total, the government is also aiming to introduce more RE programmes on a willing buyer, willing seller basis to induce private sector participation.

Malaysia will conduct cross-border RE sales via an electricity exchange system, and the policy update aims to take advantage of rising demand for RE in the region. [Malay Mail][The Edge Markets][The Star]

The International Renewable Energy Agency said the country would need to double investment in renewable power capacity, infrastructure and energy efficiency to achieve this. [The Straits Times]

Following the announcement, solar energy-related companies' stocks rose [The Edge Markets 2] as both domestic clean energy players [NST][The Star] and Singapore welcomed the move warmly. [Eco-Business]

Malaysia's electricity expansion in state Sarawak

(jl) The construction of a solar hybrid station in Long San exemplifies the efforts made to expand electricity access in Sarawak, a state with approximately 48 percent rural population. The station generates enough energy to cater to more than 104 households and over 16 community-based properties.

In a statement by Johari Tun Openg, he emphasized that Sarawak will continue to take measures to bridge the gap between rural and urban communities. Existing initiatives like the Rural Electrification Scheme and Sarawak Alternative Rural Electrictification Scheme will be leveraged to provide affordable electricity. [Sarawak Energy]

This initiative reflects Malaysia's commitment to transition its energy supply towards sustainable renewable energy and reduce the country's dependence on fossil fuels. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Drastic impacts of climate emergency calls for government action

(ldm) Malaysia is projected to be hit by the impacts of the southwest monsoon and El Nino phenomenon, which is a naturally occurring phenomenon accompanied with significantly raised temperatures. The southwest monsoon is expected by May 15 and will last until September. [FMT]

The Malaysian Environment Ministry is monitoring areas for potential water supply problems and open burning as some states experience hot and dry weather. The National Water Services Commission (SPAN) and the sewerage industry are holding discussions with water operators across the country to ensure sufficient water supply for each state. The Malaysian Meteorological Department expects lower rainfall in most places during the upcoming southwest monsoon from May 15 until September 2023, which may lead to more days without rain than days with rain, and warns that uncontrolled open burning may lead to haze during the monsoon. [CNA] The Fire and

Rescue Department will also utilize the Fire Danger Rating System to monitor hotspot areas nationwide. [The Star]

The Climate Emergency Coalition of Malaysia is urging the government to treat the recent heatwave, which has led to temperatures of up to 36 degrees Celsius and the death of two young children, as a visible impact of the climate emergency.

The coalition has called on the government to create heatwave action plans, vulnerability assessments and establish an official National Statistics Database to record climate change-related impacts on health. The coalition's statement was endorsed by 12 organizations and 15 people, including Klima Action Malaysia and Sahabat Alam Malaysia. [MKini][NST]

Malaysia: Anwar reiterates need to establish Asian Monetary Fund

(ldm) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has called for the establishment of an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) to enhance the region's economic independence and safety net.

Speaking at the 42nd ASEAN Summit on May 10, Anwar also welcomed ASEAN leaders' declaration on advancing regional payment connectivity and promoting local currency transactions. He said a regional mechanism would provide a better understanding of the realities and needs of ASEAN member countries. Anwar also stressed that ASEAN must demonstrate greater confidence and readiness to seize opportunities to bring favorable changes to its people and region. [Vietnam+][NST] Anwar's call to action was supported by the governor of Malaysia's Central Bank, who stated that the AMF was promising in buttressing regional financial cooperation. [FMT]

During the summit, Anwar Ibrahim has also met with the President of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Masatsugu Asakawa, to discuss potential cooperation between Malaysia and ADB in energy and climate change, with a focus on capacity building, technical assistance, and green economy, as well as cooperation agreements with the ADB involving the private sector and SMEs. [The Sun]

Analysts opine that the shift of economic gravity to the east makes the AMF plausible, especially since China wants to assert its leadership in the region and provide a lifeline to countries in economic distress. Anwar sees a role for himself in stabilizing the region and future-

proofing it from the fluctuations that have their origins in the US. However, the path to establishing an AMF may be challenging due to prevalent notions of leadership, and dedollarization may be a more attainable goal. [The Interpreter]

Malaysia: Hearing date for Terengganu Sultanah's appeal against Sarawak Editor is confirmed

(ldm) The appeal by the Sultanah of Terengganu, Sultanah Nur Zahirah, against the High Court's dismissal of her defamation lawsuit against Sarawak Report editor Clare Rewcastle-Brown and two others, will be heard on September 22, 2023.

The Judicial Commissioner had ruled that there were no defamatory statements in the book written by Rewcastle-Brown.

The Sultanah is seeking USD 25 million in general damages and for the book to be withdrawn, whereas the defendants denied making allegations of corruption against the Terengganu Sultanah. [FMT]] [The Star]

Deputy public prosecutor Noor Haslinda Che Seman has assured that Sarawak Report editor and founder Clare Rewcastle-Brown will receive a fair trial in the Magistrate's Court in Kuala Terengganu. [MKini]

Malaysia: Upholding the Malaysian Agreement 1963

(jl) Once again, the issue of autonomy for the states of Sabah and Sarawak under the Malaysian Agreement 1963 (MA63) has resurfaced during the Unity Government National Convention which took place on May 14. The convention brought together over 19 political parties with the aim of fostering stronger cooperation and stability in the Malaysian political landscape. [The Sun Daily]

During the convention, Jeffrey Kitingan, the Deputy Chief Minister of Sabah and Deputy Chairman of Gabungan Rakyat Sabah (GRS), the current ruling political party in the state, raised the need to address the MA63 issues. [The Star]

The MA63 was a legal agreement signed in July 1963, bringing together Sabah (formerly known as North

Borneo), Sarawak, the Federation of Malaya (which initially included Singapore before its departure in 1965) to form the present-day Malaysia.

The MA63 played a crucial role in granting autonomy to Sarawak and Sabah within the new Federation and safeguarding the rights of the residents in these regions. However, over the past few decades, the autonomy granted under the MA63 has gradually been eroded due to various factors resulting in unresolved issues, including authority over health matters, remaining legislative powers on the environment, and control over the labor force in Sabah and Sarawak. These unresolved issues have strained the relationship between the states and the federal government. [Free Malaysia Today]

Since assuming office, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has pledged to continue the efforts of amending to address the MA63 issues, building on the progress made by previous Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Sarawak. [Malay Mail] This commitment was reinforced during the convention, where Anwar emphasized that it is the responsibility of current leaders to uphold the agreement and ensure that Sabah and Sarawak are equal partners to Peninsular Malaysia. [The Star]

Malaysia: Breach of human rights allegation by migrants

(jl) Hundreds of South Asian migrants have come forward, alleging that recruitment agencies are taking advantage of their lack of legal status to exploit them for money, while failing to fulfill their promise of providing legitimate employment.

In many cases, migrants from Nepal and Bangladesh had to pay the agencies exorbitant amounts, often exceeding 300,000 Nepali rupees, in exchange for a job. Upon arrival in Malaysia, these workers are placed in dormitory facilities and are left to financially support themselves whilst awaiting employment.

Earlier this year, Malaysia relaxed its recruitment processes for migrant workers, aiming to stimulate job opportunities in industries such as plantation, manufacturing and construction. However, human rights activists argue that this move has exposed the workers to greater risks, as they find themselves burdened with debt from high recruitment fees. [Reuters]

A migrant rights group called North South Initiative claims to have received over 1,200 reports of worker exploitation. While the Director General of Malaysia's Labour Department, Asri Rahman, has initiated an investigation, no official reports have been released thus far. [BFM, Twitter] [The Strait Times]

Malaysia: Three armed suspects arrested during pre-dawn raid

(jl) On the morning of May 10, three individuals were apprehended by police officers for the possession of illegal firearms and ammunition. The arrests occurred during raids conducted at a residence and a mosque located in Kota Tinggi, the capital district of Johor Bahru.

The seized items included a homemade shotgun, live bullets, and drugs. Notably, two of the three suspects had prior criminal records related to crimes and drug offenses, while the third individual was listed as a wanted person by the police. Additionally, all three suspects tested positive for methamphetamine and cannabis during the arrest.

The suspects are currently in custody as the police investigation continues. [The Star] [Bernama]

Myanmar: Military junta invites resistance fighters to return to 'legal fold', offers cash rewards

(ha) Myanmar's military junta has invited resistance fighters to return to the "legal fold" and offered cash rewards to those who brought back weapons along with the possibility of reduced sentences if they broke the law.

The announcement in the May 10 edition of the junta-controlled *Global New Light of Myanmar* newspaper marks the first announcement of its kind addressing the People's Defense Forces, the armed wing of the pro-democracy movement that was organized after the army's 2021 takeover. [Associated Press] [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Military criticized KNU-Karen National Union Congress's announcement

(ha/wn) Myanmar military's "National Solidarity and Peacemaking Negotiation Committee" issued a statement regarding the KNU-Karen National Union Congress's announcement on May 9, 2023. [The New Light of Myanmar]

The committee cited the KNU saying "coup d'état of the military together with the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent challenges" in paragraph 2; "fighting against the chauvinism and military dictatorship, establishing a federal democratic system, ensuring national equality Karen nationals deserve, and enjoying the rights of self-administration" in paragraph 5; "Emergence of a federal democratic Union after Fighting against Chauvinism and military dictatorship, national equality and Self-administration" in paragraph 6.

The military Peacemaking Committee criticized that all these above statements are against the current processes of the military's State Administration Council and Peace efforts in the country. The Committee also condemned that those announcements deviate from the agreements of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-NCA. [The New Light of Myanmar]

KNU held its 17th Congress from April 24 to May 1, 2023, and elected a new Chairman and Central Executive members of KNU. Through the KNU conference, they decided to stand together with the entire Karen nation according to the primary path and forward processes to get the national equality and self-determination rights that the Karen people deserve. [RFA, in Burmese]

In addition, KNU decided to collaborate with Ethnic revolutionary forces, Democracy activists, and every layer of communities to gain democracy, the right to self-determination, and national equality in the future. [Myanmar Now, in Burmese]

The KNU-Karen National Union organization is one of the oldest ethnic armed organizations in Myanmar and actively participated in the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement-NCA in 2014. [KNU]

Philippines: Former senator released after six years in prison for criticizing ex-President Duterte's 'war on drugs'

(fb) A Philippine court has thrown out a drug case against Leila De Lima, a former senator who has been imprisoned for the past six years and is one of the

most outspoken opponents of former President Rodrigo Duterte's violent "war on drugs". On May 12, the court cleared De Lima of one of the two outstanding criminal counts against her, citing “reasonable doubt”. [Amnesty International] [Al Jazeera]

The former president had claimed that De Lima had received bribes from jailed drug lords to finance her 2016 Senate campaign.

Philippines: Central bank to to pause interest rate hikes as inflation rate is falling

(fb) After April's inflation declined for a third consecutive month, the governor of the Philippine central bank suggested on May 15 that interest rate increases might be put on hold at this week's monetary policy meeting. The annual inflation in the Philippines dropped to 6.6 percent in April for the third consecutive month, and the economic planning ministry stated last week that it appeared to have peaked and was on track to decline toward the government's 2–4 percent target by the fourth quarter. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

Singapore: 50 public-service positions fulfil criteria to run for president; 1,200 firms meet shareholder equity bar

(lm) Singapore’s next presidential election is due by September 13, and Chang Chin Sing, the minister-in-charge of Public Service, recently informed Parliament about the number of possible candidates.

To qualify for the presidential race, a candidate not only has to be a Singapore citizen, but also has to have lived in the Republic for at least a decade in the lead-up to Nomination Day. Furthermore, candidates must be 45 years of age or older, and meet the Presidential Elections Committee (PEC)’s public- or private-sector service requirements within the past two decades, among other criteria.

According to Minister Sing, about 50 public-service positions meet the public-sector service requirement to contest Singapore’s next presidential election. Within the private sector, the pool of candidates who qualify to be elected as president grows dramatically: A person who seeks to qualify by meeting the private-

sector requirement has to have served as chief executive of a company with average shareholders' equity at or exceeding USD 500 million for at least three years; there are currently more than 1,200 such companies in Singapore. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Lawyer of late Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew fined USD 13,000 for breaching confidentiality, misleading executors

(lm) A disciplinary tribunal has ordered the lawyer of Singapore's first prime minister Lee Kuan Yew to pay a penalty of USD 13,000 after finding her guilty of misconduct unbefitting of an advocate and solicitor in relation to several emails she sent to his children about his wills. [The Straits Times]

The lawyer, Kwa Kim Li, was referred to the tribunal after the late Prime Minister Lee's two younger children, executors of his estate, complained that Kaw had breached their father's confidentiality, and also misled them. Specifically, the two complainants had taken issue with two separate emails that Kwa sent to them and their older brother, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, that contained information on the late Lee's deliberations and instructions over his wills.

Singapore: 'Neither should the police be made a victim of politicking,' home and law minister says

(sfa) Singapore's Home Affairs and Law Minister K. Shanmugam recently gave a speech at a seminar about the role of police, especially in politics. He argued that the police should not be used for political purposes to address societal issues. As such, it should be a neutral and independent party and that their role is to enforce the law. [The Straits Times]

His reasons were based on two examples: one during the United States presidential election between former President Donald Trump and incumbent President Joe Biden, and the other during the Hong Kong protests in 2019.

He also highlighted policing is a job that involves risks which also influences how the public perceives the officers. He recalled invoking the fake news law to instruct several online citizens to correct their online reports on a police officer bullying an elderly woman.

However, he reassured that firm action will be taken on police officers who commit any wrongdoing to the public. This is to ensure that the public continues to trust the police force so that crime rates can be kept low in Singapore.

Singapore: Ruling party dismisses changes to parliamentary processes, structures proposed by opposition

(sfa/lm) The Leader of Singapore's Parliament, Indranee Rajah, on May 10 rejected proposed changes to parliamentary processes and structures by opposition lawmakers, saying the current rules of the legislature give its members enough opportunity to hold the government to account, raise queries and debate matters. [The Straits Times]

Indranee's comments came after a non-constituency member of the opposition Progress Singapore Party used an adjournment motion to propose changes to the current parliamentary processes and structures, which he said were hampering the development of a "serious opposition".

Specifically, the opposition lawmaker suggested that Parliament set up a research department to help its members in their research, raise the allowance that lawmakers get to hire legislative and secretarial assistants – currently at USD 1,300 and USD 500 respectively – and extend this allowance to Non-Constituency and Nominated lawmakers.

Singapore: More police powers with the passing of new laws to prosecute money mules

(sfa) Amendments to Singapore's Corruption, Drug, Trafficking and Other Serious Crimes (Confiscation of Benefits) Act (CDSA) and the Computer Misuse Act [see AiR No. 17, April/2023, 4] were passed in Parliament on May 9. The new laws cover offences of rash and negligent money laundering, and disclosing and using Singpass credentials for criminal activities. Offenders can be jailed up for up to three years and fined up to USD 10,000. [Channel News Asia] [The Straits Times]

Singapore: New anti-money laundering platform to detect scams, money

laundering, terrorism financing

(sfa/lm) A new anti-money laundering platform called Cosmic will be rolled out for banks to share information on potentially risky clients. The purpose of this digital information-sharing system is to curb illicit flows of funds. As such, banks may request clients' information, or alert or escalate information with one another so as to prevent the use of shell companies for money laundering purposes. The system will be rolled out in the second half of next year. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore: Family Justice Reform Bill passed in parliament

(sfa) Following the recent news on new laws to address non-compliance with maintenance orders [see AiR No. 17, April/2023, 4], Singapore's parliament passed the Family Justice Reform Bill on May 8. The Family Justice Courts can now enforce on parties to make maintenance parents to wives, children, including parents. This will be done through a new Maintenance Enforcement Process carried out by Maintenance Enforcement Officers (MEOs). The Bill will also allow the Court to request for proof from the respondent that maintenance payments have been made by specified dates. Should they fail to show the proof, the Court will specify a jail-term. [The Straits Times] [Channel News Asia]

Singapore: Better protection family violence victims under proposed changes to bill

(sfa) The Women's Charter (Family Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill was introduced in Singapore's Parliament May 9 with the goal to add three new provisions to personal protection orders (PPO). These provisions would restrain a person from committing violence against a family member.

The Bill also protects younger survivors of abuse as it lowers the minimum age to apply for the PPO to 18 years of age. Issuing emergency order will also be allowed under this Bill, should there be any imminent danger to victims of abuse. [The Straits Times 1] [The Straits Times 2] [Channel News Asia]

Singapore: Home rental scams role fivefold in 2022

(jl) In the Jurong district of Singapore, a landlord has been accused of defrauding multiple victims, allegedly amassing over USD 30,000. This news follows the disclosure by Sun Xueling, the country's state minister for home affairs, that there were 979 cases of home rental scams in the past year. This marks a significant increase from the 192 cases reported in 2021. [The Straits Times] [CNA]

The surge in rental scams can be attributed to the utilisation of online rental platforms, coupled with the tightening property market. Most scammers operate by impersonating property agents, soliciting deposits from unsuspecting victims in exchange for property viewings. [CNA]

To combat this issue, the Council for Estate Agencies (CEA) and police departments are collaborating to remove potential scammer accounts from online platforms. Additionally, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has introduced an anti-scam rating system to assess the security of online and social media platforms. [MHA, Singapore]

Thailand: Opposition wins landslide in elections, but uncertainty looms

(aj/lm) Thailand's two main opposition parties – the Move Forward Party (MFP) and the Pheu Thai Party (PTP) – have secured a clear victory in national elections. The MFP won 151 seats in the 500-seat lower house, beating pre-election favorite Pheu Thai, which took 141 seats. Jointly, both pro-democracy parties crushed the military-backed politicians - an election result that represents a significant shift in public opinion.

Under its party leader and sole nominee for the prime minister role, Pita Limjaroenrat, political analysts believe that the MFP's principle-driven campaign and uncompromising ideals — which seek to not only change the government, but also to radically reform Thailand's political structure – were key in securing the party's victory.

Other factors observers cite include a slowing economy, rising cost of living and deepening inequality, as well as Prime Minister Prayuth's perceived mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, MFP's strong association with its

predecessor, the Future Forward Party, its commitment to repudiate the royal defamation law, and a promise to scrap mandatory military enlistment attracted many young voters that came of age to vote in this election.

Notably, however, according to analysts, the MFP's victory, though widely owed to its political appeal, is also due to the faults of PTP. The party, under its lead premier candidate, Paetongtarn 'Ung-Ing' Shinawatra, originally polled ahead of MFP in the pre-election surveys until rumors of a potential PTP coalition with PPRP hurt its reputation. Observers note that the PTP did not outright deny these rumors and the party's leadership hesitated to properly address this issue, likely impacting their approval ratings. Furthermore, a commentator for the Thai Enquirer says that some candidates on the party-list include unpopular figures, citing as Chalerm Yubamrung, as well as former PPRP stalwarts and ministers such as Suriya Juangroongruangkit.

Unlike the MFP who ran on a progressive platform, PTP did not espouse any new ideas, running on the same populist platform, engaging with the same voter bloc, and relying on the appeal of the political Shinwatra family. Analysts also compared the lack of PTP's social media presence to MFP's social media capabilities, which attracted new and young voters.

In light of the rather surprising election results, observers say that Thailand's political divide is not about "red-shirts" versus "yellow-shirts," the populist Pheu Thai Party and rural north against the royalist-urban elite, but is now split along generational lines. [Bangkok Post] [New York Times] [Thai Enquirer 1] [Thai Enquirer 2] [Thai PBS World 1] [Thai PBS World 2] [Thai PBS World, Twitter] [The Diplomat]

Thailand: Election winner Move Forward Party captures Bangkok

(aj) On election day, May 14, Thailand witnessed a 39.3 million voter turnout, or 75.2 percent of all registered voters. Thailand's 500-seat House of Representatives allocates 400 seats to constituencies and 100 seats to the party-list. Between the two opposition parties, Move Forward Party (MFP) and Pheu Thai Party (PTP), the opposition altogether holds 292 seats in the lower house.

Election winner and reformist MFP won 24 percent of constituency seats and over 35 percent of the votes for the party-list seats in the lower house, translating into

113 constituency seats and 39 party-list seats — scoring a total of 151 seats in the house. Notably, the party captured Bangkok, securing 32 out of 33 seats in the capital, and many districts in Thailand's north, traditionally a stronghold of the heavyweight opposition Pheu Thai Party (PTP)

The election results defied opinion polls, which predicted a strong victory for the election's favorite, the populist opposition PTP, who won a total of 141 seats, or 112 constituencies and 29 party-list seats. Analysts note that although PTP won the majority of Thailand's north – 24 of its 68 constituency seats – PTP seems to be falling out of favor with the region, with both MFP and PPRP at PTP's heels. Despite the changes in the north, PTP remains at the helm in its other support base, the northeast by winning 73 of the 133 constituency seats in the region.

Widely considered among observers to play kingmaker in the next election, the moderate conservative Bhumjaithai Party (BJT) gained 1.1 million votes and 70 total seats in the house, which is around the number of seats that academics predicted BJT to win. BJT made a substantial showing in Thailand's four regions – north, northeast, south, and central – consistently coming in top three of the votes in each region.

The ruling Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP) won half a million votes, allowing the military-affiliated party to take 41 seats in the house. After defecting from the PPRP earlier this year, 4.7 million votes were in support of Prayuth's United Thai Nation Party (UTNP). It is interesting to note that of the 36 house seats UTNP won, 13 are from the party-list. After MFP and PTP, UTNP won the third most seats off the party-list.

Although the long-lived, royalist Democrat Party failed to fulfill its goal of securing some seats in Bangkok, the party's nearly 900,000 votes secured 24 seats in the house for Democrats, mostly due to its southern base of supporters. [ABC News] [Ch7, in Thai] [Nikkei Asia]

Thailand: Senate holds key in election of prime minister

(lm) The two opposition parties that won the largest share of the vote in Thailand's general election over the weekend agreed on May 15 to form a ruling coalition. But the progressive Move Forward party and opposition heavyweight Pheu Thai could face challenges in mustering enough support for their prime ministerial candidates, with the Senate holding the key. [Reuters 1]

Specifically, to be elected prime minister, any candidate must command a majority in a joint sitting of the bicameral legislature, which includes the 500-member House and the unelected 250-seat Senate, whose members were appointed by the military junta. The six-party alliance that was proposed on May 15 would command 310 seats; nearly 70 seats short of the 376 needed to ensure the coalition's candidate will be elected despite opposition from the Senate.

In fact, there is good reason to question whether the Senate will tolerate any election results that threaten the status quo. The Move Forward party has targeted institutions and policies once considered sacrosanct in Thai society, including abolishing mandatory military conscription and reducing the punishments for the royal defamation law.

At this stage, it is difficult to gauge the mood of Parliament's upper house. But already some of the members have suggested they would not necessarily vote with the majority of the lower house and other senators stated that they will abstain from voting. A case in point, Senator Khamoon Sitthisamarn told the *Bangkok Post* that Parliament's upper house has "a special role" by "screening" each prime minister candidate. At the same time, he also said that members of the Senate cannot afford to discard the fact that the government should have majority support in the lower house or it cannot pass key bills. [Bangkok Post] [Reuters 2]

Thailand: Complaint against progressive Move Forward party leader filed with Election Commission

(lm) A political activist on May 10 filed a complaint with the country's Election Commission claiming that Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat was not qualified to run in the then-upcoming general election and should be removed from the polls. Specifically, the complainant alleged that Pita broke electoral rules because he owns shares in a now-defunct media company, in violation of the Constitution. [Thai PBS]

Pita, for his part, said he was ready to explain that there was no wrongdoing, adding that he owned the shares only as an executor of his late father's will.

Still, as per Thailand's election law, the Election Commission is obliged to conduct an investigation into a complaint after a general election or before the election results are officially announced - a process that could take up to two months. If the probe

concludes that Pita was indeed guilty, he could be disqualified from being elected to premiership by the incoming government.

Thailand: Official election results to be announced in July, says Election Commission

(aj) Although 99 percent of the vote is accounted for, as of May 15, Thailand's Election Commission (EC) has yet to make the results official. The Move Forward Party (MFP) may have been declared the election's winner by the EC, but the votes are still in the preliminary stage. Under the 2017 Constitution, the EC has 60 days before it can certify the election's votes, which analysts say gives the poll agency ample time to potentially disqualify candidates, including MFP leader, Pita. The EC will announce the finalized results by July 13.

In the meantime, the caretaker government will stay in office for three months until the new government is formed. Any objections to the election results must be filed to the EC within the next 30 days. Under Thai law, the first parliamentary meeting must elect the new house speaker within 15 days of the EC officiating the results in July. Then, the next bicameral assembly will vote for Thailand's next prime minister who, once voted in, must also be endorsed by Thai King Rama X. Upon royal endorsement, the new premier may form a cabinet.

The incoming government should be formed by August, according to this timeline given by the EC, but political analysts warn that the Thai public should remain wary and that the road to building a new government may be a challenging one for the MFP. There are both structural and legal obstacles that await Pita and his party. A petition was filed with the EC against Pita for holding shares in his late father's media company and, if the EC finds Pita guilty, then the MFP leader may be disqualified from running for the prime ministerial post. The 250-member senate appointed by Prayuth in 2014 may also impede the opposition's legislation and, more importantly, block Pita from becoming premier. Both of these obstacles are further explained in the stories below.

In addition to these structural issues, rumors of the opposition's dissolution – either MFP or PTP – are still mounting and the possibility of a future coup is not out of the question. Observers of Thai affairs say the big question is whether the conservative establishment will accept and uphold the election's results. [Bangkok Post] [Thai Enquirer 1] [Thai Enquirer 2]

Thailand: Democrat Party leader resigns for party's poor election performance

(aj) After failing to deliver on its performance promises in Thailand's recent general election, Jurin Laksanawisit resigned as the Democrat Party's leader on May 15. Although Jurin has resigned as party leader, he stated that he intends to remain with the Democrat Party. [Thai PBS World]

The Democrat Party, 'Prachathipat' in Thai, is Thailand's oldest party who is known for its conservative and royalist stance. In the most recent tally of the unofficial voting results, the party won a total of 25 seats in Parliament's lower house, 22 constituency seats and three party-list seats. Notably, the party failed to win a single constituency in Bangkok, where all but two were secured by the opposition Move Forward Party.

The resignation of Jurin as party leader has triggered the dissolution of the party's executive board. A plenary party meeting will be called to elect a new board within 60 days, as per the party's rules. The meeting could see the return of former Prime Minister Abbhisit Vejjajiva, who headed the Democrats from March 2005 to March 2019, party sources told the *Bangkok Post*. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Army chief promises no coup after election in lead-up to vote

(kv/lm) Thailand's army chief, General Narongpan Jitkaewthae has pledged not to stage a coup in the event of a post-election turmoil. Gen. Nraongpan, whose term as head of the Royal Thai Army ends in five months, told reporters on May 12 that the coups of the past were "very negative", adding that the word "should be deleted from the dictionary". [Bangkok Post] [Bloomberg] [Le Monde] [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Election results have mixed economic impact

(aj) In response to the election results, indicators of Thailand's economic performance varied in their impact. The country's shares in the telecommunication and energy sectors dropped, decreasing by 1.28 percent by the end of May 15, after the Move Forward Party was announced as the election winner. In

previous Thai elections, markets typically rise after the polls, not falling in value. Additionally, as the votes came in, pushing MFP to the top of the popular vote count, Thailand's currency also strengthened against the US Dollar. [CNBC]

Thailand: King greenlights special Senate sessions to endorse members of three agencies

(lm) Thailand's king has issued a royal command allowing Parliament's upper house, the Senate, to convene a special session to deliberate the qualifications of members of the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC), the State Audit Commission, and the Election Commission. The special session will begin on May 23. [The Nation]

Attendees of a meeting of the Senate coordination committee on April 26 realized that the NAAC currently has six commissioners, three short of its full bench. Furthermore, the meeting was told that two of the six existing commissioners will complete their term this coming September, and when that happens, the NACC will not have a minimum of five members required to continue working.

Thailand: Central bank to relax rules on use of Chinese yuan for trade

(aj) Thailand's central bank has announced that it will ease the rules on the usage of Chinese yuan this year to facilitate trade between the two countries.

China accounted for 12 percent of Thailand's trade value in 2022 but trade payments are primarily done in USD, not payments in the local currencies, which hover around 2 percent. Relaxing the rules on the yuan reduces exchange rate risks and transaction costs for Thai exporters and importers, or in other words, protects Thailand and China from currency volatility. The two trade partners are looking to a swap line agreement of up to THB 370 billion, or USD 11 million.

In response to rising Western concerns about Thailand's deepening of ties with China, central bank officials said that the yuan will not displace the role of the USD in Thailand's trade transactions. This financial move by Thailand is part of the country's larger ongoing effort to lower trade costs with its Southeast

Asian and East Asian neighbors. [Thailand Business News 1] [Thailand Business News 2]

Thailand: Supreme Administrative Court dismisses petition challenging redrawn electoral map

(lm) Thailand's Supreme Administrative Court in the lead-up to the country's general election dismissed a petition challenging the electoral map redrawn and published by the Election Commission (EC) two months ago. The revised electoral map was based on a calculation of constituency boundaries that excluded non-Thais, as per a ruling by the Constitutional Court [see AiR No. 12, March/2023, 3]. [iLaw]

Thailand: Activists arrested after alleged rampage through police station

(kv/lm) At least nine pro-democracy activists were arrested on May 10 after they allegedly went on a rampage through a police station in the capital Bangkok, breaking windows, pouring paint and spray-painting two vehicles on the station walls. The group, which included two former hunger strikers, went to the police station to seek justice for a 15-year hold protesters currently held at a remand home on royal defamation charges. [DailyNews] [ThaiPBS]

Thailand: Army ranger killed, three wounded in bombing in southernmost Yala province

(kv/lm) An army ranger was killed and three other ranger volunteers wounded in a roadside bomb attack in Thailand's southern Yala province. The bomb blast, which authorities suspect might be the work of insurgents, followed a string of arson attacks in three southernmost border provinces earlier his month. [Bangkok Post]

Israel drone company signs MoU with Thai technology incubator to develop drone ecosystem

(lm) HevenDrones, an Israeli drone technology provider and early adopter of hydrogen technology, has signed a memorandum of understanding with Thai technology incubator RV Connex to jointly develop a national smart drone technology ecosystem in the Southeast Asian nation. [Hydrogen Central]

Thai senator decries United States Senate's draft resolution on Thailand

(lm) A member of Thailand's upper House has alleged that there is a conspiracy involving members of Thai non-governmental organizations (NGOs) behind a draft resolution in the United States Senate which calls for an abrogation of the country's royal defamation law and opposes possible military intervention in Thailand's politics. [Thai PBS]

The draft resolution, co-sponsored by two Democrat senators and submitted to the Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations ahead of Thailand's national election, says that "direct or indirect military or royal intervention" in the polls would undermine US-Thai relations and endanger US economic and security assistance to the Southeast Asian nation. It also calls on the Thai government to protect and uphold democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and rights to freedom of peaceful assembly, and freedom of expression.

Against this backdrop, Senator Somchai Sawangkarn, a staunch royalist, has accused some Thai NGOs funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, a US grant-making foundation promoting democracy abroad, for allegedly conspiring with US politicians and officials to undermine Thailand's political stability and sow discord among Thai people. Senator Somchai also raised his concerns with US Ambassador Robert Godec during a meeting with members of Thailand's Senate committees on foreign affairs and human rights earlier this month.

Vietnam: Activist sentenced to eight years in prison

(km) Vietnamese rights activist Tran Van Bang has been sentenced to eight years in prison and three years of probation for "spreading anti-government propaganda."

Tran participated in pro-environment and human rights protests. He openly criticized the country's 2018 cybersecurity law - seen by observers as repressive - and publicly expressed support for many political prisoners and detainees. [VietNamNet] [Human Rights Watch]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

EU faces pushback from some Indo-Pacific countries on Ukraine at forum; China, Taiwan not in attendance

(lm) Divisions among Indo-Pacific countries over issues including China's growing assertiveness in the region and Russia's invasion of Ukraine came into sharper focus on May 13 at the second EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum held in the Swedish capital Stockholm on May 13. [South China Morning Post]

Public statements and remarks to journalists made it clear that when it came to geopolitical flashpoints, most notably Ukraine and Taiwan, the invitees from the Indo-Pacific were not on the same page, although the hosting EU officials insisted that visiting delegations were not asked to align with their view on Ukraine.

Crucially, however, the hosts invited Kyiv's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba as a last minute surprise attendee of the forum. And while several Asian ministers from the likes of Fiji, Japan and South Korea pledged strong support for Ukraine, others said they supported an immediate peace.

Significantly, the forum was billed as a summit of around sixty ministers; but just 14 of the EU's 27 top diplomats showed up, despite almost all of them being in Stockholm a day earlier for crunch talks on China. What is even more, two of the biggest actors in the Indo-Pacific, mainland China and Taiwan, were not present.

Myanmar peace plan stalls as ASEAN sees no major progress

(lm) Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have called for an immediate end to hostilities in military-ruled Myanmar, pushing for urgent dialogue and aid delivery, as there are no signs of significant progress on a five-point consensus agreed upon months after the coup sparked widespread unrest. [Bloomberg]

The bloc's leaders meet on May 10-11 for a two-day summit on the Indonesian island of Flores, following talks between the member nation's foreign ministers on May 9. In the lead-up to the meeting with her counterparts, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi told reporters that her country had been working intensively behind the scenes to deescalate the crisis in Myanmar, highlighting for the first time Indonesia's attempts to try to bring to the table the key players in Myanmar's conflict [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2].

Both meetings were held amidst growing frustration within the ASEAN over Myanmar's perceived failure to implement the five-point peace consensus the junta agreed to two years ago [see AiR No. 17, April/2021, 4]. Furthermore, with just eight months left in office, Indonesia is being increasingly criticized for its handling of the situation in Myanmar, precisely because it will hand over the chairmanship next year to Laos, which is widely expected to steer ASEAN down the path of greater acceptance of Myanmar's military junta [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1].

In fact, Myanmar's shadow government on May 10 said the junta was trying to mislead the international community. In the same vein, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim publicly expressed his frustrations, telling his fellow leaders in videotaped remarks that "[ASEAN] is stuck with the principle of non-intervention." [Reuters]

Speaking against this backdrop, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo on May 11 said ASEAN must keep pushing for a peace plan to be implemented, adding that "the

issue of Myanmar must not hinder the accelerated development of the Asean community". [South China Morning Post]

Aside from Myanmar, the long-seething territorial disputes in the South China Sea which involve mainland China, Asean members Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam, along with Taiwan, were high on the summit agenda. The bloc urged restraint and peaceful resolution of disputes in the South China Sea and said a surge in missile tests by North Korea was a threat to regional peace.

A post-summit statement issued by chair Indonesia said the leaders welcomed efforts to conclude work on a maritime code of conduct with China and said some leaders were concerned about recent incidents in the South China Sea. [Bangkok Post]

Further, the summit adopted the Regional Electric Vehicle Ecosystem Development Declaration in which the ASEAN leaders committed to establishing a regional electric vehicle ecosystem, that involves all member countries, and in which they support the development of the electric vehicle industry in ASEAN countries. [Antara News]

India discusses massive rail project with UAE, United States

(lm) Earlier this month, national security advisors from India, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the United States met with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh to discuss a massive infrastructure project to link the Middle East to India through roads, rails, and seaports.

According to *Axios*, the idea for the ambitious connectivity project came up during talks that were held over the last 18 months in the so-called I2U2 forum, which since late 2021 joins the countries with Israel to discuss strategic infrastructure projects in the Middle East.

Observers consider the proposed initiative a clear signal that India and the United States are ready to take their joint efforts to counter China's growing Middle East footprint - driven by Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments and by a recent strategic agreement with Iran. [Axios] [The Times of Israel]

Sixth Indian Ocean Conference held in Bangladesh

(lm/ns) Around 150 delegates, including high-level government officials and think tank representatives, from over 25 countries convened in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka on May 12-13 for the sixth iteration of the Indian Ocean Conference (IOC).

In his keynote address, India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told the high-level audience that an effective and efficient connectivity between his South Asian nation and ASEAN member states would be a "game changer". He also stressed on the need for countries to take the long view of cooperation, saying that any nation disregarding legal obligations or violating long standing agreements would damage trust and confidence among the member nations. [The Indian Express]

The Sri Lankan representative, in turn, urged the attendees to create closer linkages between the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). The official also expressed interest in strengthening blue green and climate change economic initiatives through partnerships with the IOC members. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Sri Lanka]

Islamic Development Bank elects Bangladesh as the executive director

(az) Replacing Pakistan, which has been the executive director of Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) since 2020, Bangladesh has been elected the next executive director of the IsDB. After Pakistan wanted a longer stay as the executive director, Bangladeshi officials argued against the decision and got elected as the executive director, which will start from the year 2024.

Secretary Sharifa Khatun, the Bangladeshi official, stood against Pakistan's proposal, as the Article 31(3) mentions that no nation is allowed to represent the executive director position for more than three years. Besides, Bangladesh has shown its capability in repaying the loans from International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation (ITFC), a sister concern of IsDB. This has put Bangladesh in an advantageous position to represent as executive director of IsDB. [The Daily Star]

Japan-G7: Finance leaders vow to continue to support Ukraine, control inflation

(dql) Japan hosted on May 13 the meeting of the finance ministers and central bank chiefs of the G7 in Nigita during which they reaffirmed their unified position of supporting Ukraine and determination to enforce sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression.

They also vowed to bring inflation under control, while providing aid to those countries suffering the most from surging prices, and to work together to build more stable, diversified supply chains for developing clean energy sources and to "enhance economic resilience globally against various shocks."

The meeting came shortly ahead of the G7 leaders meeting this week in which US President Biden is expected to participate although he is facing a crisis over the U.S. debt ceiling at home that could result in a national default if it is not resolved in the coming weeks. [European Council] [NPR]

Meanwhile, Japan's finance ministry has announced that it will disclose a plan to mobilize USD 1 billion to support countries surrounding Ukraine who accept refugees from there.

Provided via the state-owned Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), the new funding will also be used to facilitate investment by Japanese firms in the receiver countries. [Japan Today]

Bangladesh, Vietnam plan to strengthen economic ties

(az) During a visit by outgoing Ambassador of Vietnam in Dhaka, Pham Viet Chien, Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheik Hasina demonstrated her interest to strengthen economic ties with Vietnam. [Dhaka Tribune]

Cambodian Prime Minister meets Senior Minister of Singapore

(ns) On May 8, Senior Minister of Singapore Teo Chee Hean Teo met with the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen in Phnom Penh. The meeting was part of Teo's four-day visit to Cambodia.

During their meeting, the two leaders reaffirmed the longstanding relations between their countries and welcomed emerging collaboration in renewable energy and carbon credits areas.

While in Cambodia Teo, who also serves as the Coordinating Minister for National Security, also met with Deputy Commander-in-chief General Hun Manet to discuss cooperation in defense and security.

He also discussed cooperation on cross-border electricity trading with the Secretary-General of the Council for the Development of Cambodia and the managing director of Electricite du Cambodge. [The Straits Times]

Cambodia participates in the 16th meeting of the parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm conventions

(ns) A Cambodian Ministry of Environment delegation attended the 16th meeting of the parties to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm conventions - multilateral agreements aimed at protecting human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes - in Switzerland on May 1–12.

Geneva hosted the international conference to protect the environment and public health this year under the theme “Accelerating action: Targets for the sound management of chemicals and waste.”

The delegation led by Secretary of State of the Environment Ministry Sabo Ojano discussed their work progress with the Secretariat of the conventions. Sabo reported that Cambodia has provided documentary evidence of fulfilling its obligations under multilateral environmental agreements. These contemporary obligations include capacity building for officials, public awareness programs on the topic of hazardous substances, and discreet delivery of relevant legal documents. [Asia News Network]

Cambodian foreign minister condemns foreign NGOs for the annual financial reports submission failure

(ns) On May 3, Cambodian Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn expressed concern that less than half of registered foreign non-governmental organizations

(NGOs) submitted their required annual financial reports.

He condemned those who failed to fulfill their obligations under the Law on Accounting and Auditing, despite Cambodia trying to boost anti-money laundering measures. Media reports that Prak Sokhonn said that the ministry is now conducting a national risk assessment to address remaining shortcomings in this area. [Cambodianess]

Cambodian Agriculture Cooperative Corporation and WFP launch support project for smallholder farmers

(ns) The Cambodian Agriculture Cooperative Corporation (CACC), in collaboration with the United Nations World Food Program (WFP), announced the launching of a project to support over 1,200 smallholder farmers on May 8.

The Global Agriculture and Food Security Program will fund USD 1.79 million, while the CACC will provide USD 1.1 million for the program. The funds should enhance the resilience and livelihoods of smallholder farmers by promoting organic agriculture and providing access to new markets.

The project seeks to promote improved nutrition and gender equity to the farm owners and their extended families in the Koh Nhek district of Mondulkiri province through social behavioral change. This plan of action was developed in the context of COVID–19 and adopted as an innovative public–private–producer partnership approach, – reports a WFP representative to Cambodia.

This approach should increase the income farmers derive from their production management. She suggests engaging women in this process is essential since they play a leading role in food management in Cambodian households. [Phnom Penh Post], [AiR, No. 49, December/2022, 1]

Cambodia receives USD 60 million from the World Bank for a waste management program

(ns) Cambodia will receive assistance from the World Bank (WB) to improve its solid and plastic waste management. The WB has approved a USD 60 million

International Development Association credit on this project, and the PROBLUE Trust Fund will fund an additional USD 3 million.

The May 11 press release of WB highlighted the increase in the use of plastics and consequential waste following urbanization and economic growth in Cambodia.

Solid and plastic waste pollution substantially damages the Cambodian environment. The ruling government has established the Municipal Solid Waste Management Policy 2020-2030 to improve the effectiveness of waste management services.

The project proposed by the WB will support the goals of the government associated with this agenda. The WB release states that the program will enhance the performance of the private sector and increase penal fees to counter waste management issues. It should also provide better access to waste management collection for local households. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia and India hold negotiations during the 6th Indian Ocean Conference

(ns) The Cambodian Secretary of State of the Foreign Affairs Ministry met with the Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs during the 6th Indian Ocean Conference (IOC) on May 12–13 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The two sides agreed to strengthen cooperation in cultural and development projects, including the restoration of temples, demining, and exchanges between defense departments. [Dev Discourse]

Chinese Foreign Minister visits Germany, France, and Norway

(ms) Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang visited Germany, France, and Norway from May 8 to 12.

Germany

Qin met with both German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock during his visit to Germany. According to information, the visit with Scholz was mainly to prepare for the 7th round of Germany-China inter-governmental consultation held in Germany in mid-June. The main content of the visit, however, was the meeting with Foreign Minister Baerbock, with whom Qin, then in China, already met

in mid-April [see AiR No. 16, April/2023, 3]. [Chinese Foreign Ministry 1]

In addition to preparations for the June meeting, the main topics of discussion were Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the role of China. As she did in April, Baerbock again found clear words and actively took China into responsibility to positively influence an end to the war, especially on the part of Russia, adding that "as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China can play a significant role in ending the war, if it decides to do so."

Also, in connection with the war, the two foreign ministers are said to have discussed the possible sanctioning of Chinese companies if they are already or in the future guilty of supplying the Russian army with weapons or goods that can support Russia in its war of aggression or companies that enable the Russian economy to circumvent the sanctions imposed by the West.

The topic of discussion came up mainly because the European Commission has added eight Chinese companies to a draft of a new sanctions package, which are allegedly guilty of the above-mentioned offenses.

Qin in response addressed not only Germany, but the EU as a whole, that the Chinese government will rigorously retaliate any form of sanction. Baerbock attempted to contextualize the sanctions, emphasizing that the sanctions that may be implemented will not be directed at China as a whole, but will specifically target the goods or the company. [Chinese Foreign Ministry 2] [Deutsche Welle] [German Foreign Office via Twitter] [Politico 1] [Politico 2]

On March 11 just shortly after Qin's visit, Scholz's chancellery office announced that Germany would approve the sale of a 24.9 percent stake in a terminal at the Port of Hamburg, in northern Germany, despite a ruling by Germany's Federal Office for Information Security, which classified the terminal as "critical infrastructure [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1] and strong opposition from within its own coalition, particularly in the form of Vice Chancellor and Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection Robert Habeck. [Politico 3]

France

During his visit to France, Qin met with Catherine Colonna, the French Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs. As in the meeting with Baerbock, they also discussed Ukraine and Russia. Colonna echoed the

European position, albeit somewhat more cautiously than her German counterpart. She stressed that "China had an important role to play in convincing Russia to return to full compliance with the U.N. Charter, in particular the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine."

Qin reiterated the Chinese position that it is in favor of ending the war peacefully, but that Russia's position must also be taken into account when it comes to negotiations. Also when it was mentioned in the context of China and France's economic cooperation, Qin stressed that in both China's relations with France but also with the EU, the relations should not be influenced by third parties, by which the U.S. is meant. This can be interpreted as a reference to French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to China at the beginning of April, who said that Europe should not be a vassal state of the US and in case of a possible war between China and the US, Europe should not blindly follow the US, which caused a lot of criticism from the EU, the US but also Taiwan, and led to a backpedaling of the French government [see AiR No. 15, April/2023, 2].

However, the main topic of discussion was the intensification of economic cooperation between China and France, which they both advocated for. Qin called for both countries to find and develop new areas of cooperation and build a more resilient transnational supply chain. Colonna seconded this, but in addition to the goal of stronger relations, stressed that they should also be better balanced, but left open whether this was a call for diversification or the prevention of imbalances in the balance of power in the bilateral relationship. [Chinese Foreign Ministry 3] [French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs] [Global Times] [Reuters] [Xinhua]

Norway

The last stop of Qin's Europe trip was Norway. During his stay, Qin met with Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt and representatives from the Norwegian business community.

The content of the meeting was mainly economic in nature, Qin, referring to the far-receding economic relations, advocated expanding and intensifying them, especially in the context of the green economy, stressing the importance of working together "to liberalize and facilitate trade."

In addition to economic issues, Støre said in the statement following the meeting that the Norwegian

government "[is] concerned about the human rights situation in Xinjiang and the developments in Hong Kong" and that these issues also received attention in the talks. [Chinese Foreign Ministry 4] [Chinese Foreign Ministry 5] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

China and U.S. advocate maintaining communications

(ms) On May 12 and 13, China's director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Wang Yi and U.S. National Security adviser Jake Sullivan met in Austria's capital Vienna and discussed U.S.-China relations.

A few days before the meeting, China's Foreign Minister Qin Gang met with U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2], and the meeting followed on in substance.

Both sides showed willingness to put the spy balloon incident earlier this year behind them after that triggered a deterioration in relations between the world's two largest economies. The U.S. shot down a Chinese balloon over U.S. territory in early February, which the U.S. claimed was a surveillance balloon meant to spy on U.S. military bases, which the Chinese side denies. As a result of the shootdown U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken postponed his visit to China and no high-level meetings between U.S. and Chinese officials took place until the meeting of Qin and Burns [see AiR No. 6, February/2023, 1].

Both sides were tight-lipped about specific outcomes of the meeting but described the meeting as successful and as part of "ongoing efforts to maintain open lines of communication and responsibly manage competition."

Topics of the meeting are said to have included Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Taiwan, and general bilateral relations, in which both sides are interested in improving but did not provide more specific details. However, as during the meeting with Burns, the desire of Blinken to hold the postponed meeting in China before the end of the year was expressed, and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo are said to be open to a visit China too.

Regarding the war in Ukraine, Sullivan continued to express concern about the lack of "constructive engagement" on the part of China to use its influence

on Russia to end its military aggression and bring an end to the war. Wang replied that China has been neutral since the beginning of the war and is actively engaged in peace negotiations.

On Taiwan, Wang reiterated the importance of reunification of the islands with the mainland for China and that the Taiwan issue is the first red line that the U.S. should not cross if it is interested in maintaining bilateral relations. The U.S. remains committed to the "One-China Policy" but opposes forcible annexation of the island. [Associated Press] [Al Jazeera] [CNN] [Global Times]

China-UK: Wang Yi calls for promotion of bilateral cooperation

(ms) On May 8, Wang Yi, China's director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Tim Barrow, the national security advisor to UKs Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, had a telephone conversation.

Little precise information about the conversation has become public. Wang, however, took both countries to task for promoting bilateral relations after taking the right direction in the new situation. Wang also stressed that the development of the British position on China has been taken positively, presumably referring to the decline of the more aggressive rhetoric of Sunak, who during his election campaign called China the "single biggest threat to UK's economic security", from which position Sunak has deviated to a certain extent and is more willing to talk. To what extent the demanded right direction between the two countries should look like, or how it should be found was not disclosed.

Wang also underlined China's desire to reunify Taiwan with mainland China, saying "China is the only major country among the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that has not achieved complete reunification," adding, "It is both a historical fact and a global consensus that Taiwan is part of China." [China Daily] [Reuters] [The Times] [Zheng Zeguang via Twitter]

China-US: U.S. accounting oversight board has found huge deficiencies in audits of U.S.-listed Chinese companies

(ms) The U.S. Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) has found "unacceptable deficiencies" in audits of U.S.-listed Chinese companies by auditing firms KPMG in China and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Hong Kong.

The PCAOB last year obtained access to Chinese auditors' records for the first time as a result of longstanding negotiations between China and the U.S., which succeeded after the U.S. government issued an ultimatum to China threatening to expel approximately 200 China-based U.S.-listed companies if they did not disclose their records [see AiR No. 35, August/2022, 5; AiR No. 36, September/2022, 1].

The PCAOB report said deficiencies were so large that auditors did not obtain sufficient evidence to support the accuracy of the firms' financial statements. However, the PCAOB said that it is normal for audits to have large lists of deficiencies, but the report could weaken investor confidence.

Both PwC and KPMG Huazhen expressed a willingness to work with the PCAOB and are already in the early stages of addressing the issues highlighted. The PCAOB has given the two audit firms a one-year period to correct the issues identified and is keeping its options open to involve the agency's enforcement team if necessary. Failure to cooperate or lack of cooperation could result in fines or even disqualification of accounting firms from working for U.S.-listed companies. [CNN] [Financial Review] [Reuters]

China expels Canadian diplomat in act of retaliation

(ms) The Chinese government on May 9 declared Jennifer Lynn Lalonde, consul of the Consulate General of Canada in Shanghai, a "persona non grata" as a "reciprocal countermeasure", just hours after the Canadian government did the same to Chinese Ambassador Zhao Wei in Canada.

On May 8, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly announced the expulsion of Zhao, citing as the reason for the decision that he had planned to intimidate a Canadian parliamentarian for his outspoken criticism of China's treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority and to sanction him and his Hong Kong-based family [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2].

The Chinese Foreign Ministry rejected the Canadian government's accusations, calling the Chinese ambassador's expulsion an "ill-founded and erroneous

action seriously harming the lawful rights and interests of Chinese diplomatic and consular personnel" for which it felt compelled to respond with a "reciprocal countermeasure" in the form of the expulsion of Lalonde, who must leave the country no later than May 13. In addition, the Chinese Foreign Ministry added that "[i]f Canada decides to continue its wanton act, China will react firmly and all consequences arising therefrom must be borne by Canada." [Chinese Foreign Ministry]

Sino-Canadian relations deteriorated significantly in 2018 with the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the daughter of Huawei's founder, and chief financial officer (CFO) of the Chinese tech giant at the behest of U.S. authorities who accused her of fraud, and they have remained strained ever since. The Chinese government, in response to Meng's arrest, itself detained Canadian citizens Michael Spavor, a consultant working for an organization that dealt with investment with North Korea, and Michael Kovring, a Canadian diplomat in China at the time. [ABC News] [Associated Press] [Bloomberg] [France 24]

China-Taiwan: New "Taiwan Policy" signals more communicative approach to reunification

(ms) Wang Huning, chief political strategist of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and number four on the CCP Politburo Standing Committee, outlined initial details of the Chinese government's upcoming new "Taiwan Policy" at a political conference on Taiwan affairs.

Wang was assigned by China's President Xi Jinping to develop a new Taiwan policy in January this year [see AiR No. 43, October/2022, 4], following his confirmation in his role as the party's political theorist during the 20th National Congress of the CCP last October [see AiR No. 5, January/2023, 5].

Under the "Wang Huning Style," Wang acknowledged the need for a major overhaul of the previous approach to Taiwan and introduced the "four news", namely "new ideas, new thoughts, and new strategies, forming a new era for the party to solve Taiwan."

Wang's rhetoric clearly departs from the more confrontational "wolf-warrior" rhetoric even as he clearly emphasized that China will never accept or allow Taiwan independence. Wang's main goal is to strive for cultural exchange and communication with

the Taiwanese population in order to create a stronger Chinese national feeling on both sides of the strait.

In presenting the concept of the strategy, Wang refrained from mentioning the "one country, two systems" approach, which is used in the Special Administrated Regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macao, at least in theory, and was also suggested as a possible approach for Taiwan under the old policy. However, the Chinese government's crackdown in Hong Kong in response to the anti-government protests there in 2019 and the implementation of the National Security Law, which has consistently undermined Hong Kong's democracy since then, strengthened the feeling in Taiwan that it cannot rely on the preservation of its own system in the event of reunification.

According to observers, the presentation of the first elements of the new Taiwan policy is in line with China's somewhat defusing strategy in annexing Taiwan. While China's foreign policy, as seen most recently during large-scale military exercises around the island in response to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's visit to the United States, flaunts military capabilities [see AiR No. 15, April/2023, 2], the Chinese government domestically allows the state media to criticize or cast doubt on a military takeover of Taiwan. This suggests that China is trying to ease the cross-strait situation and present itself in a more friendly light. [Taiwan News] [The Christian Science Monitor] [UDN in Chinese]

China-Japan: Chinese Warships sail around Japanese main Island shortly before G7 Summit

(ms) On May 11, Japan's Maritime Self Defense Force reported sighting a Chinese four-ship flotilla and simultaneously released a map showing that the flotilla had been sailing around Japan's main island for the previous two weeks.

The maneuver of the flotilla consisting of the Type 055 large destroyer Lhasa, a Type 052D destroyer, a Type 054A frigate and a Type 903A comprehensive replenishment ship is probably a routine maneuver according to Chinese military experts, but at the same time also serves as a reaction to the, in China's view, problematic comments from Japan about Taiwan, the island whose reunification with mainland China is one of the most important priorities for the Chinese government.

Among other things, Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said on May 10 that the Taiwan issue is a matter of importance not just to Japan but to the entire world, and on another occasion he clearly rejected China's criticism of Japan's cooperation with Taiwan.

The timing of the maneuver adds explosiveness, as it was completed just a week before the start of the G7 summit in Japan, which, according to observers, may lead to a more tense atmosphere at the summit, not only regionally but internationally. [CNN] [Global Times]

China-Eritrea: Xi holds talk with Afwerki

(ms) On May 15, China's President XI Jinping met with Eritrea's President Isaias Afwerki in the Chinese capital Beijing. Xi assured Eritrea of Chinas continued interest in "deepening mutually beneficial win-win cooperation and continuously enriching their strategic partnership" with Eritrea despite the country's international isolation.

Eritrea's geographic location on the Horn of Africa and the Suez Canal, one of the most important sea routes for trade with Europe, among others, make it important for China and its economic efforts.

The government of Eritrea has been accused by the U.S. government as well as human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch of committing war crimes and possible crimes against humanity in the military clashes in the northern Ethiopian Tigray region [see Human Rights Watch], which is why U.S.-led financial and economic sanctions have been imposed.

Regarding these sanctions, Xi said during the meeting that China and Eritrea "jointly oppose unilateralism and bullying," adding that the cooperation of the two countries, in addition to benefiting the two countries, also contributes to the preservation of and has great significance for "regional peace and international fairness and justice." [Global Times] [Reuters] [VOA News] [Xinhua]

China-Laos: Start of 'Friendship Shield 2023' joint military drills

(ms) The militaries of China and Laos began military drills on May 9 titled "Friendship Shield 2023." The drills are scheduled to last until May 28 and are

designed to strengthen cooperation between the two militaries in combating armed criminal groups and terrorism.

The exercises are being held in Laos and are expected to be about 900 personnel strong, of which more than 200 have been sent by the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA). China is also providing more than 300 items of equipment, including assault vehicles, ordnance, and minesweeping and explosive disposal equipment for the exercises, according to the PLA.

Just last December, during a visit to Beijing by Lao President Thongloun Sisoulith, the two heads of state of the neighboring countries signed a joint statement in which they agreed on closer cooperation on national defense issues between the two countries as well as the holding of joint military exercises.

In addition to Laos, there are signs of a general increase in China's commitment to military cooperation with countries in the region. As recently as early May, the PLA Navy, together with the Republic of Singapore Navy, completed military exercises in the Malacca Strait which lies between Malaysia or Singapore and Indonesia [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1]. China is also said to be interested in developing bilateral defense cooperation mechanisms with Laos, Vietnam and Brunei, according to an official release from the Chinese Ministry of National Defense in February. [Chinese Central Military Commission] [Chinese Ministry of National Defense in Chinese] [Radio Free Asia] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

India, European Union high-profile politicians hold inaugural trade and technology summit in Brussels

(lm) Senior representatives of India and the European Union held the first meeting of a joint Trade and Technology Council (TTC) on May 16 in Brussels. The talks were co-chaired on the EU side by Executive Vice-Presidents Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis, and on the Indian side by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, and Electronics and Information Technology Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

The TTC was set up by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen during the latter's visit to New Delhi in April last year [see AiR No. 17, April/2022, 4]. Notably, *POLITICO* reported in the lead-up to the EU-India first-ever trade and technology summit that ongoing

tensions - particularly related to trade disputes and global telecommunication standards — would overshadow the talks. [POLITICO]

India's foreign affairs minister on three-nation tour in Bangladesh, Sweden, Belgium

(lm) India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar this week completed a three-nation tour covering stop-overs in Bangladesh, Sweden and Belgium.

Bangladesh

Jaishankar arrived in Dhaka on May 11 for talks with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on a range of issues of mutual interest. Topics included Bangladesh's participation in the Sixth Indian Ocean Conference earlier this month [see article in this edition], as well as the upcoming Group of Twenty summit in New Delhi. [NewsOnAIR]

Sweden

The Indian top diplomat traveled to Sweden to attend the second EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum on May 13 [see entry in this edition]. But he used his visit to Stockholm for separate meetings with Sweden's Defence Minister Pal Jonson and Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom, and to attend the India Trilateral Forum, a biannual forum that brings together senior representatives from India, Europe, and the United States. [Moneycontrol1] [ThePrint]

Belgium

From Sweden, Jaishankar headed to Brussels for the first meeting of the India-EU Trade and Technology Council , where he was joined by India's ministers for commerce and information technology [see entry in this edition]. While in Brussels, Jaishankar also called on Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo to discuss ways to deepen bilateral cooperation, especially in the fields of trade and technology. [Moneycontrol 2] [The Hindu]

India, Israel discuss deepening of cooperation in various fields during visit of Tel Aviv's foreign minister

(lm) Israel's Foreign Minister Eli Cohen arrived India on May 9 for talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other senior government officials. The Israeli top diplomat was accompanied by a 37-member business delegation and was supposed to stay in New Delhi for three days; but he announced his decision to cut short the trip in view of Tel Aviv's operation against a militant group in the Gaza strip. [The Hindu]

Notably, the meeting between Prime Minister Modi and Cohen centered on ways New Delhi can contribute to the Abraham Accords, a series of joint statements that normalized diplomatic relations between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain.

During a meeting with India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, the two sides exchanged two Letters of Intent for projects in the fields of agriculture and water management. Furthermore, an important agreement on mobility that allows 42,000 Indian workers to work in Israel in the fields of construction and nursing was also exchanged. [NewsOnAIR]

India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh told Cohen that his country would like to deepen cooperation with Israeli companies to manufacture defense equipment domestically. [PSU connect]

UN Special Envoy for Myanmar meets Indian Foreign Minister

(ha/wn) On May 9, UN Special Envoy for Myanmar Noeleen Heyzer met with government officials of India, including Minister for External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra and Joint Secretary (Bangladesh-Myanmar) Smita Pant, in Delhi.

During the meeting she stressed the importance of a unified regional approach supporting Myanmar-led solutions, in accordance with the will and needs of the people to make tangible progress on the ground.

The Indian officials, for their part, said that an immediate cessation of violence by all sides is needed, along with the fostering of dialogue for the return of peace, stability and democracy in Myanmar.

The meeting came shortly after Heyzer met with Chinese Foreign Minister Qinn Gang early May who stated that Myanmar should be supported by the international community and resume efforts for the political transition process. [The Irrawaddy]

Indonesia demands clarity over JETP funds

(ys) At the Group of 20 (G20) Summit in Bali last year, the leaders of the International Partners Group (IPG), co-led by the United States, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and the United Kingdom, launched a partnership in support of ambitious new targets for Indonesia's just energy sector transition, known as Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP).

This agreement pledged to help Indonesia with funding amounting to USD 20 billion in a five-year period. The amount consisted of loans and grants, where half of the funding will be provided by the private sector, under an entity called Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ).

However, the fate of the funding itself remains unclear. The Minister of Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment, Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, expressed his frustration with the United States' commitment, a frustration he conveyed to John Kerry, the US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, during their meeting in Washington D.C. last month. Luhut said that the US is still unable to give clarity. He also stated that if the interest rates given for JETP are as high as commercial loans, then Indonesia would prefer to go ahead with the energy transition without the loan, as it would disrupt the economy. [The Jakarta Post]

Japan-EU: Foreign Minister Hayashi meets European counterparts at EU-Indo Pacific Ministerial Forum

(dql) On the sidelines of the EU Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum, held on May 13 in Stockholm [see article in this edition], Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi met with a number of counterparts from European countries.

Meeting with Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto, Hayashi congratulated his country on the recent accession to NATO. Both ministers agreed to strengthen economic ties between their counties and to deepen cooperation between NATO and Japan which are in talks about establishing a NATO office in the East Asian country [see article below]. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1]

In the meeting with his Austrian counterpart Alexander Schallenberg, both sides reaffirmed their wish to further deepen bilateral relations and economic cooperation, with Hayashi welcoming the agreement in principle on the Japan-Austria Social Security Agreement. Hayashi requested Austria's support in lifting import measures imposed by the European Union on Japanese food products. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2]

In another meeting, Hayashi and Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs agreed to further strengthen security and defense cooperation and expand people-to-people exchanges. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3]

Meeting with Constantinos Kombos, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus, Hayashi reaffirmed Japan's wish to strengthen cooperation between the two island nations, while Kombos confirmed that he, too, expressed his expectations for bilateral relations, including economic ties and cooperation in maritime field, to be further developed. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4]

Finally, Hayashi met with Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias BILLSTRÖM on May 14. During the meeting he reaffirmed Japan's support for Sweden's bid to join NATO and agreed with his counterpart to deepen the security cooperation including economic security. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 5]

Foreign Minister Hayashi confirms talks on NATO office in Japan ongoing

(dql) In an interview with CNN on May 10, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashiis confirmed that Japan is holding talks to open a NATO liaison office, the first of its kind in Asia.

During the interview he cited Russia's war in Ukraine and the resulting global instability as reasons for the plan of a NATO office in Japan. [CNN]

The statement came a week after Nikkei Asia first reported about such a plan, referring to unnamed NATO and Japanese officials. [Nikkei Asia, Twitter]

China's foreign ministry was quick to criticize the plan, accusing the alliance of "going east," and "interfering in regional affairs and inciting bloc confrontation," while warning Japan to "avoid doing things that could dismantle trust and affect peace and stability in this region." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Japan-South Korea: Defense and economic cooperation to be deepened

(dql) Japanese and South Korean defense authorities are believed to reach an agreement very soon to link their radars via a U.S. system that allows for real-time information sharing on North Korea's ballistic missiles.

The agreement between the defense ministers from Japan, South Korea and the United States is supposed to be concluded on the sidelines of an Asian defense summit that is scheduled early next month in Singapore.

Meanwhile, top business leaders from the Japan Business Federation and its South Korean counterpart, the Federation of Korean Industry, a top business leaders announced on May 10 that they will make use of the so-called “Future Partnership Fund”, private sector fund that was established during the summit between South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo in March [see AiR No. 12, March/2023, 3] , to deepen their cooperation in energy, industry and other sectors.

The two parties agreed on selected areas of joint projects, with a focus on semiconductor supply chain resiliency, energy security, maintaining the free and open international order, and climate change, among others. [AP News]

Japan-South Korea: Agreement on inspection of Fukushima nuclear plant

(dql) Officials from the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministries held working-level consultations on May 12 during which they agreed on a four-day visit by a South Korean 20-member delegation to Japan later this month to inspect Tokyo's plan to discharge contaminated water from the crippled Fukushima nuclear power, including a visit to the Fukushima nuclear plant.

In 2011, a massive earthquake and tsunami destroyed the plant’s cooling systems, resulting in the melting of three reactors and the release of large amounts of radiation. Water used to cool the three damaged reactor cores, which remain highly radioactive, has been collected, treated and stored in some 1,000 tanks.

The Japanese government argues that the tanks must be removed to make room to build facilities for the plant's decommissioning and to minimize the risk of leaks in case of another major disaster. The tanks are expected to reach their capacity of 1.37 million tons in early 2024 after which the water will be released into the sea, according to the plans of the government. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [AP News]

Japan-Philippines: Foreign ministers meet

(dql) On May 16, Japan's Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi held a meeting with his Philippine counterpart Enrique A. Manalo. The meeting was part of Manalo's visit to Japan this week.

The two ministers agreed to steadily implement cooperation projects, bilaterally as well as trilaterally with the United States, with Manalo stressing especially security cooperation and welcoming progress in bilateral defense equipment transfer, while on economic cooperation, Hayashi reaffirmed Japan's commitment to active support for the Philippines' attainment of Upper Middle Income status. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Manalo's visit to Japan comes shortly after his visit to the US White House early this month following which Washington issued new guidelines to a 1951 defense treaty under which - among others - the US commitment to defending the Philippines would apply to the maritime area. Further, mutual defense agreements will be invoked in the event of an assault in the South China Sea against Philippine public ships, planes, or armed forces, which includes the coast guard. The guidelines also take into account the possibility of threats from asymmetric, hybrid, irregular, and gray-zone warfare as well as the use of non-naval vessels such as fishing boats as a type of marine militia [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2].

Japan-France: Strengthening security cooperation confirmed at "2plus2" meeting

(dql) On May 9, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada met with their French counterparts Catherine Colonna and Sébastien Lecornu via videoconference to reaffirm their countries' commitment to further promoting an open and free Indo-Pacific and strengthening security

cooperation amid the “the current severe security environment”.

The meeting was the Seventh Japan-France Foreign and Defense Ministers’ Meeting during which the discussion included cooperation in the areas of cyber, space, and economic security and plans for a bilateral reciprocal access agreement that allow the deployment of their forces to each other’s country for joint exercises or disaster relief efforts.

The two sides further reaffirmed their condemnation of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and agreed on close coordination on sanctions against Moscow as well as opposition to any attempts for unilateral changes by force or coercion of the status quo in the East and South China Seas and agreed on maintaining close coordination in responding to North Korea’s nuclear and missile tests as well as in the abduction issue.

The ministers also reassured that the basic positions of their countries on Taiwan remained unchanged, stressing the importance of the peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait for global security and prosperity. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [Kyodo News] [Nippon.com]

The meeting came weeks after the French Navy's frigate Prairial made a port visit at Yokosuka in Kanagawa Prefecture following a joint exercise with a frigate of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces in April [see AiR No. 17, April/2023, 4].

Japan-Poland: Meeting of foreign ministers

(dql) Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi met with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau on May 10.

The meeting was part of Rau’s visit to Japan during which the two ministers agreed to deepen cooperation in security and closely work together to bring an end to the war in Ukraine.

They also agreed on close coordination in responding to North Korean nuclear and missile threats and in dealing with issues of abductions. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [The Japan News]

The meeting came after Prime Minister Kishida’s unannounced visit to Poland in March during which he confirmed that Japan was willing to provide Poland with official development assistance aid as a show of

appreciation of Poland's commitment to the defense of Ukraine against the Russian aggression [see AiR No. 13, March/2023, 4].

Japan-Indonesia: Joint naval exercise

(dql) From May 9-11, the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Forces and the Indonesian Navy conducted a joint goodwill exercise after the Japanese frigate JS Kumano made a port call at Jakarta. [Ministry of Defense, Japan, Twitter]

Malaysia mulls agreement with UN agency on refugees, asylum seekers

(ldm/lm) The Malaysian government is considering entering into an agreement with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in order to resolve issues surrounding refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

According to Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, the government is concerned over the presence of a few groups of refugees and asylum seekers who carried out activities that were contrary to local norms, sensitivities and culture, causing uneasiness among the locals. He said the government was also very concerned about the increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers holding UNHCR cards in Malaysia, from 75,617 people in 2009 to 185,760 in March this year.

Malaysia currently hosts some 160,000 refugees and asylum seekers, according to the UNHCR, most of them from Myanmar.

Last November, Malaysia had made public its intentions to shutter the local office of the UNHCR, triggering concerns by rights watchdogs the agency's exit would see a spike in refoulement, the forced return of refugees to countries where they're likely to be persecuted. [MKini] [MalaysiaNow] [Voice of America]

Maldives, Slovenia hold first round of political consultations

(lm) The foreign affairs ministries of Maldives and Slovenia held their first round of political consultations

on May 11, with both sides discussing ways to boosting cooperation in tourism, health, education, economy, trade, environment, and climate change. [Raajjee]

Mongolia-Czech Republic: Foreign Ministers meet

(dql) During a meeting held on May 11 in Prague, Mongolian Foreign Minister B. Battsetseg and her Czech counterpart Jan Lipavsky discussed issues related to bilateral and international relations.

Both ministers agreed on the importance of trade, economy, and people-to-people relations in furthering the friendly cooperation between their countries and proposed expanding Czech investment and cooperation in large-scale development projects.

They also agreed to work together in the frame of bilateral and multilateral mechanisms to protect the environment and combat climate change. [Montsame 1]

The meeting was part of Battsetseg's visit to the Czech Republic last week during which Minister of Industry and Trade Jozef Síkela to discuss ways to expand cooperation in the fields of mining, construction, infrastructure, and agriculture and to support business communities. [Montsame 2]

Mongolia-Canada: Parliamentary friendship group re-established

(dql) Canadian lawmakers celebrated on May 10 in the Parliament of Canada the re-establishment of the Canada-Mongolia Parliamentary group.

The group was first established in 2003. [Montsame]

Myanmar, India open international jetty as a Part of Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project

(ha) The Sittway-Kaladan international jetty was opened on May 10, 2023, under the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, which was carried out with the support of India's Government. The Sittwe deep-sea port is an essential part of the project. [Myanma Alinn]

The Sittwe Deep Sea Port can operate vessels with a maximum capacity of 20,000 DWT (deadweight tonnage), and the old port can handle smaller ships up to 2000 DWT. As more goods flow through Sittwe, it could become a gateway for trade between India and Myanmar and other countries in South and East Asia. Through this port, Myanmar also can easily export goods, including rice, to India and Bangladesh. [The Print]

The project was approved by the Government of India in 2008 and is intended to assist in finding a new route for Myanmar-India bilateral transport and facilitate trade with Myanmar's northeastern regions through Rakhine and Chin states. Also, according to India's Look East Policy, it is an important project to connect with other countries and balance power with China in the ASEAN region. [India's Geo-Strategic Kaladan Mission in Western Burma]

North Korea warns Japan of joining US-South Korean Nuclear Consultative Group

(dql) North Korea's foreign ministry has issued a warning against Japan calling on it to abstain from joining the US-South Korean Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) saying that such a move "will plunge Northeast Asia into instability and finally turn it into a sea of flames, where it will perish." [Al Arabiya News]

The establishment of the NCG was agreed on between South Korea and the US during South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol's summit with US President Joe Biden. It allows for more strategic and nuclear planning between the two countries as part of their strategy of extended deterrence against Pyongyang [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1].

The warning came on the heels of Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's visit to South Korea on May 7 during which Yoon said that the NCG was open for Japan to join [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2] as well as amid reported plans for an agreement between Seoul and Tokyo to link their radars via a U.S. system that allows for real-time information sharing on North Korea's ballistic missiles [see article in this edition].

It also came after an announcement of Japan's Cabinet on May 8 that Japan will Japan Air Self-Defense Force's surface-to-air guided PAC-3 missiles at the base on Miyako Island in Okinawa Prefecture, in a bid to counter the threat of potential long-range ballistic missiles fired from North Korea. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan] [Taiwan News]

As Miyako Island is a strategically important node on the "first island chain" close to Taiwan - 362 km away from northeastern Yilan - Chinese observers insisted that the deployment “obviously has nothing to do with the Korean Peninsula,” but is aimed to “a very provocative move aimed at China.” [Global Times]

Ukraine received PAC-3 Patriot missile defense systems that can shoot down the super-maneuverable ballistic missiles in April, and earlier this month, it intercepted and shot down a Russian hypersonic missile. [The EurAsian Times]

Philippines seeks diplomatic solution after Kuwait suspends visa

(fb/lm) The Philippines said on May 12 it was seeking a diplomatic solution and “maximum protection” for its workers in Kuwait after the Arab state suspended the issuance of visas for Filipinos. Notably, the suspension on new visas overlaps with a decision by Manila to suspend the deployment of first-time workers to the Gulf state in February following multiple abuse cases and the murder of a Filipino maid. [ARAB NEWS] [Al Arabiya]

A Philippine delegation is expected to soon visit Kuwait to resolve the situation.

Construction of Malaysia-Singapore transit system to be concluded by December 2026, minister says

(jl) Singapore’s Transport Minister S. Iswaran told reporters on May 11 that the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS Link), an international cross-border rapid transit system connecting Malaysia and Singapore, is on track to be completed by December 2026. The RTS Link is a 4-kilometers rail shuttle service designed to accommodate 10,000 passengers, connecting Johor Bahru in Malaysia’s Johor province with Woodlands in Singapore. [CNA] [The Strait Times]

Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee leads high-level delegation to South Africa, Kenya

(jl) In further effort to strengthen diplomatic relations with African nations, Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee on May 14 embarked on a six-day official visit to South

Africa and Kenya. During his visit to Cape Town, Lee is scheduled to meet with South African President Cyril Ramaphsoa to discuss matters pertaining to business delegations. Additionally, in Nairobi, he will be received by Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto. [Singapore, PMO] [CNA]

During his trip, Prime Minister Lee will be accompanied by Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan; Senior Minister of State for Communications and Information and for Health Janil Puthucheary; Minister of State for Trade and Industry and for Culture, Community and Youth Alvin Tan, as well as MPs Vikram Nair and Mariam Jaafar. The delegation also includes officials from the Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Communications and Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Trade and Industry, and Enterprise Singapore. [The Straits Times]

The upcoming trip signifies the progress made in the three-year Singapore-Africa Partnership Package (Sapp) introduced in June 2022. As part of the Sapp, Singapore will provide training to government officials in the continent on sustainability and digitalisation, aiming to enhance the leaders' technical knowledge.

South Korean big chipmaker companies to continue to being exempted from US restrictions on exports to China

(dql) South Korea's Ministry of Trade, industry and Energy has announced that it expects the US to

extend a one-year waiver for South Korean giant chipmakers Samsung Electronics Co. and SK hynix Inc. from its restrictions on sending semiconductor-related tools to China "for a considerable period of time."

The announced in October a set of rules that restrict exports of certain advanced semiconductor manufacturing equipment and items to companies in China [see AiR No. 41, October/2022, 2].

According to Industry Minister Lee Chang-yang the current exemption would expire in October. However, Washington was told "that our companies should be able to maintain their current operations in China as long as their business activities do not disrupt global semiconductor supply chains," Lee said. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea-Caribbean nations: Foreign Minister Park proposes joint maritime research

(dql) Speaking at the 28th Ministerial Council Meeting of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) held on May 12 in Antigua, Guatemala South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin presented a proposal for the launching of joint maritime research projects between South Korea and Caribbean nations.

Participating in the meeting as an observer nation representative, Park called for the strengthening of ties between his country and the ACS based on cooperative relations between the two sides throughout the past 25 years.

He also held separate meetings with ACS Secretary-General Rodolfo Sabonge and other key representatives at the meeting to exchange ways to strengthen ties with their respective governments. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea-Mexico: Foreign ministers discuss resumption of FTA talks

(dql) In a meeting on May 9 in Mexico City, South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and his Mexican counterpart Marcelo Ebrard discussed ways to resume negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) as well as to deepen exchanges in other areas as well.

Park highlighted the importance of an FTA to promote strategic cooperative ties between the countries, requesting Ebrard's support to resume related talks. .

The meeting was part of Park's visit to Mexico during which he also discussed bilateral trade and other economic issues with Mexico's economy and energy ministers, Raquel Buenrostro and Rocio Nahle, respectively, in separate meetings. [The Korea Times]

South Korea-UK: Letter of intent of establishment of strategic development partnership signed

(dql) A letter of intent (LOI) to establish a bilateral strategic development partnership was signed by South Korea and Britain on May 12.

According to the letter, both parties agree to explore joint cooperation measures, especially in the areas of digital, climate, environment, public health, private sector collaboration and women. [Yonhap News Agency]

The LOI was signed during a meeting between South Korean Vice Foreign Minister Lee Do-hoon and Anne-Marie Trevelyan, Britain's Minister of State for the Indo-Pacific who visited South Korea from May 11 to 12. [The Korea Times]

South Korea-Zimbabwe: Economic ties to be deepened

(dql) In a meeting held on May 11, South Korea's Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun and Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa and the country's Foreign and Trade Minister Frederick Shava reached agreement on stepping up efforts to install on signing a Trade and Investment Framework (TIPF), in a bid to strengthen bilateral economic and industry ties.

According to Ahn, the pursued agreement would form the basis for establishing bilateral network channels for supply chains of minerals and industry cooperation.

If signed, it will be South Korea's first TIPF with an African country. So far, South Korea has such an agreement with the United Arab Emirates, Dominican Republic and Hungary.

The meeting with Zimbabwe's President was part of Ahn's three-day visit to the African country during which a memorandum of understanding that calls for exchanging information on markets, economic circumstances and facilitating business exchanges, was signed by state-run trade promotion agencies of the two countries. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea-Indonesia: Jakarta to provide new timetable for joint fighter jet project payments

(dql) South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) has announced that Indonesia will submit a new timetable for its payments for the joint KF-21 fighter project by late next month.

The DAPA added that Jakarta resumed payments for the project last November, after a hiatus of almost four years.

Indonesia, as a partner country, has agreed to shoulder about 20 percent of the project's total cost of USD 6.5 billion. However, payments were halted from January 2019, prompting questions over its commitment to the advanced warplane development project launched in 2015. [Yonhap News Agency]

Sri Lanka receives USD 1 billion credit line extension from India

(ns) On May 9, Sri Lankan authorities reported to an international media outlet that India agreed to extend USD 1 billion credit line for Sri Lanka by a year. The move seeks to help the country in a socio-economic crisis to back up the infusion of foreign currency for essential imports. The parties agreed to set a new credit line deadline on March 2024. Sri Lankan Deputy Treasury Secretary announced that USD 350 million is left from the credit line to date, which authorities can utilize for national needs. [Dev Discourse]

Sri Lanka, European Union hold 25th Joint Commission meeting

(ns) Sri Lanka and the European Union (EU) on May 9 held the 25th session of their Joint Commission in Colombo. The Secretary of the Sri Lankan Foreign Affairs Ministry and the EU Deputy Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific of the European Action Service co-chaired the talks. The previous session was held in February 2022 in the Belgian capital Brussels.

In former negotiations, the Commission established three working groups: on Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights, on Trade and Economic Cooperation, and on Developing Cooperation. This time the counterparts negotiated the common priorities under the Multi-Annual Indicative Program (MIP) of the EU.

The Sri Lankan delegation had representatives from most of the national ministries, while the EU delegation debriefed its members on the new cycle of the EU GSP Regulation set for 2024–2033. Parties agreed on the importance of empowering civil society and its functioning potential.

Notably, the Sri Lankan side informed that the country's justice ministry seeks observations from

public stakeholders on the new Anti-Terrorism Bill before submitting it to Parliament. The European officials recommend Colombo to continue engaging with the mechanism of the United Nations Human Rights Council in this regard. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Sri Lanka], [Lanka News Web]

Sri Lanka, Egypt discuss military cooperation

(ns) On May 12, Sri Lanka's defence secretary general met with the ambassador of Egypt to Colombo. The envoy visited the Sri Lankan official to discuss the bilateral cooperation enhancement between the two countries' militaries. [Ministry of Defence – Sri Lanka]

US Senator Rubio calls for beef up of air bases tasked with defending Taiwan

(dql) US Republican Senator Marco Rubio has reportedly submitted the "Deterring Chinese Preemptive Strikes Act of 2023" in Congress that directs the US Department of Defense Pentagon to fortify aircraft shelters for US warplanes in the Indo-Pacific aimed at better preparing for a possible Chinese invasion of Taiwan.

The bill calls on the U.S. Secretary of Defense to formulate a plan addressing the issue, requiring him/her to conduct a comprehensive inventory of all types of US aircraft shelters that are deployed in the first, second, and third island chains in the Indo-Pacific region and tasked with responding to assaults by Chinese forces against Taiwan. [Radio Free Asia] [Taiwan News]

Latvian parliamentary group supports Taiwan participation in World Health Organization

(dql) The Latvia-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group submitted a letter on May 11 to World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in which it called for Taiwan's participation in the global health body.

The group cited Taiwan's successful contribution to the tackling of the COVID-19 pandemic for its move, along with 55 million donated masks and other medical

supplies to more than 80 countries and international organizations. It also mentioned in the letter that Taiwan has delivered 27 tons of medical supplies and 700 tons of humanitarian relief to Ukraine since Russia's invasion in February 2022. [Taiwan News]

Thailand, United States conclude CARAT navy exercise

(aj) The Royal Thai Navy (RTN) and United States Navy concluded the bilateral maritime exercise Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) near the coast of Thailand's military town Sattahip on May 8. Several RTN frigates and US Destroyer Squadron 7 were used in the military exercise to train Thai-American military personnel in a variety of training, from anti-submarine warfare to air defense exercises and humanitarian assistance.

CARAT is a Thai-American military exercise that promotes the strategic maritime relationship between the two military partners. [Royal Thai Navy]

Thailand, United Arab Emirates launch CEPA negotiations

(aj) The United Arab Emirates and Thailand launched preliminary negotiations for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) on May 16. The two trade partners are looking to deepen and broaden economic cooperation beyond trade in non-oil trade, by focusing on tourism, food security, IT, and financial services.

These trade talks follow the formation of the first UAE-Thai Business Council earlier this February. Unlike an FTA, which only focuses on goods, CEPAs cover more areas of economic engagement, from invest and services to dispute mechanisms and bilateral regulation. The UAE is seeking to expand into high-growth and emerging economies, like Thailand, and has concluded a CEPA with another ASEAN country, Indonesia.

UAE's main exports to Thailand include adhesives, gold, delivery vehicles, construction material, and cosmetics, while Thailand's principal exports to UAE center on office machinery, automobile parts, and aluminum plating. [Gulf Business]

Vietnamese Prime Minister holds bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit

(km/dql) On the sidelines of last week's 42nd ASEAN in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia [see article in this edition] Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh held several bilateral talks.

In the meeting with Prime Minister of Timor Leste Taur Matan Ruak both leaders reaffirmed the potential for broader co-operation, with a focus on trade and investment, and agreed to create favorable conditions for their businesses to operate effectively in each other's countries. Chinh, further, reassured that Vietnam is willing to support Timor Leste to become the 11th member of the ASEAN. [VOV]

In his talk with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, the two leaders agreed to strengthen their maritime cooperation and establish hotlines for fishers. They also agree on intensifying cooperation in new areas such as digital transformation. [Vietnam Express]

With Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen, Phamm reached agreement on mutually providing opportunities to businesses in the two countries, with a focus on border trade. [Vietnam Express]

During the meeting with Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong, the two Prime Ministers agreed to intensify cooperation in new fields, including digital economy, green economy, and green energy, in a bid to fulfill their countries' net zero emissions commitments by 2050. They further consented on amending and upgrading the 2005 connectivity framework agreement between the two economies, and strengthening cooperation in the field of e-commerce. [VietNamNet]

With Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, meanwhile, Pham agreed to elevate cooperation, promote economic connectivity and integration, while assisting each other with socio-economic development. [Vietnam+]

Further, in the meeting between Pham and Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam, the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to boosting bilateral trade, especially through expanding collaboration in potential areas, with a focus put on oil and gas, chemicals, Halal products and tourism-people exchange. [Vietnam+2]

Vietnam-Australia: 8th diplomatic-defense strategic dialogue held

(km) The deputy ministerial level 8th diplomatic-defense strategic dialogue between Vietnam and Australia took place in Hanoi on May 11.

Major directions of their countries' cooperation were reviewed and agreed upon to strengthen the strategic partnership in a wide range of areas, including politics, security and defense, economy, trade and investment, science and technology, as well as emerging and potential fields of shared concern, including climate change response, energy transition and digital transformation. [Vietnam+]

Vietnam-Palestine: Prime Minister Pham meets Palestinian Minister of the Interior Ziad Hab Al-Reeh

(km) Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh held a meeting with Palestinian Minister of the Interior Ziad Hab Al-Reeh in Hanoi on May 9.

Besides confirming to strengthen the exchange of delegations at all levels, the two sides agreed to cooperate to enhance information exchange and promote professional coordination, and handle transnational crimes and crimes related to Vietnamese and Palestinian citizens.

They also discussed the issues of preventing organizations and individuals from taking advantage of the territory of one side to operate against the other. [Vietnam+]

Italian Navy ship visited Ho Chi Minh City port

(km) On May 9, Italian patrol vessel ITS Morosini docked at Ho Chi Minh City port, kicking off a four-day visit to the city.

The visit aims to strengthen the friendly cooperation between the navies of the two countries, according to Italian Ambassador to Vietnam Antonio Alessandro.

2023 marks the 10th anniversary of the strategic partnership between the two countries. [Vietnam+]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

17 May 2023 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m. (GMT+10), Asia Society (Sydney), Australia

The 2023 Quad Leaders' Summit: What to Expect

Ahead of the 5th Quad Leaders' Summit in Sydney in May 24, this hybrid event will discuss the Quad's ambition and ability to influence the Indo-Pacific region amid Japan's Presidency of the G7, India's Presidency of the G20, and the United States' hosting of APEC in 2023.

For more information, see [Asia Society].

17 May 2023 @ 8:30-9:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

A Conversation with Sir Angus Houston, Co-Lead of Australia's New Defence Strategic Review

This webcast will feature a conversation with Sir Angus Houston, Chief of Australia's Defence Forces (2005-2011) and co-lead of the new Defence Strategic Review about his view on the current challenges the Australian Defence Force faces.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

17 May 2023 @ 9:30 a.m., Atlantic Council, USA

Turkish elections: Takeaways and implications

This webinar will analyze results of the presidential election in Turkey on 14 May and what they mean for the future of Turkey in terms of politics, society, economics, and the orientation of Turkish foreign policy, particularly for US-Turkey relations.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

17 May 2023 @ 10:00 a.m., Atlantic Council, USA

Keeping the Internet open

This webinar will discuss what Russian and Chinese censorship cooperation means for the United States and other democracies, and what policymakers should know going forward.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

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

Allied Burden Sharing in Ukraine

This webcast will discuss the need for the United States and its European partners to collectively clarify and carry the burden of foreign aid and military assistance for Ukraine.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

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

Democratic Consolidation or Backsliding? Analysis and Implications of Thailand's 2023 General Election

This webinar will analyze the results of the May 14 general election in the Thailand and what they mean for the Southeast Asian country's political future and the region.

More event details can be found at [ISEAS].

17 May 2023 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Molding a More Effective UN Human Rights Council

This webinar will feature a talk on the UN Human Rights Council, with a focus on the following issues: What have been the Council's most impressive achievements and most disappointing failures when it comes to defending human rights? At a time when human dignity and liberty are under assault and in retreat in many parts of the world, what more can the United States and like-minded governments do to ensure that the Council lives up to its potential and advances the principles on which it was founded?

See [Carnegie] for more information.

17 May 2023 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Keeping the Lights on in America: Looking Ahead at Power Grid Reliability

This hybrid event will discuss power grid reliability in the US and address the questions what the impact of electricity policies will be in the near term (particularly the movements to decarbonize the grid and "electrify everything"), and what we can do to ensure grid reliability for decades to come.

For more information, visit [The Heritage Foundation].

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

Israel at Seventy-Five

This online event will feature a conversation with former Israeli Prime Minister and Defense Minister Ehud Barak as Israel turns seventy-five, protests opposing the Netanyahu government's effort to overhaul and weaken Israel's judiciary enter their twentieth week. Meanwhile, Israel confronts unprecedented internal challenges as Israeli-Palestinian clashes in Gaza and the West Bank intensify, and Iran's nuclear program continues unconstrained. What lies ahead for Israel and the Middle East at this critical moment?

See [Carnegie] for more information.

17 May 2023 @ 7:00-9:00 p.m. (GMT+7), International IDEA, Sweden & Foreign Correspondent's Club Thailand, Thailand

What happened in the 2023 Thai election?

This hybrid event will provide an opportunity to hear directly from those on the ground, including those involved in the country's first comprehensive nationwide independent vote tally, about findings about the local electoral environment.

More event details can be found at [IDEA].

18 May 2023 @ 9:00 a.m., Atlantic Council, USA

What can the world expect from Ukraine's counteroffensive?

Amid diplomatic shortfalls and strategic failures, Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine is in its second year. This webinar will address the following questions, among others: What should the world expect from Ukraine's spring counteroffensive? How can the US rally its partners to further support Ukraine and isolate Russia in 2023?

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

18 May 2023 @ 9:30 a.m., Atlantic Council, USA

In hot pursuit of sanctions evaders: Cracking down on Russia's global networks

At this online event, senior US government officials from the Departments of Treasury, Justice and Commerce will explore how the US is working with partners to target Russia's sanction evasion networks.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

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

Report Launch: Evolving Cyber Operations and Capabilities

This webcast will present a report on the war in Ukraine, with a view to the wider debate around the role and value of cyber capabilities.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

18 May 2023 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Pivotal States: The U.S. and Türkiye After the 2023 Elections

This webinar will discuss the elections on May 14, 2023, as opportune moment for the United States to assess its options and approach to Türkiye with clear eyes about the country's domestic politics, its national interests, and America's own.

See [Carnegie] for more information.

18 May 2023 @ 3:00-3:45 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Technology Race in Asia: The Capital Cable #71

Against the backdrop of rapid development of advanced technologies such as AI, robotics, semiconductors, space technology that were featured prominently in recent summit meetings between President Biden and his Korean and Japanese counterparts, and that are critical to the future of U.S.-China competition, this webcast will discuss the growing technology race in Asia?

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

18 May 2023 @ 5:00-6:15 p.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

Assessing Egypt's State Ownership Policy: Challenges and Requirements

This webinar will examine the Egyptian government's June 2022 draft State Ownership Policy that was designed as a roadmap for the state to exit a number

of economic sectors, reduce its role in some, and increase its role in yet others.

See [Carnegie] for more information.

22 May 2023 @ 9:00 am - 4:15 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Wilson China Fellowship Conference 2023

This year's hybrid Wilson China Fellowship Conference will address the following questions: How can the United States compete with China while cooperating on issues of mutual interest? What role will emerging technologies and a rising Global South play in U.S.-China relations? Is this a "cold war" or something else entirely?

For more information, see [Wilson Center].

22 May 2023 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m., Atlantic Council, USA

2023 Warsaw Week, Day 1: The US and Poland: A new agenda for a transatlantic future

This hybrid event will explore next steps of the US-Polish partnership, addressing the questions: How can Poland and the United States best work to secure a Ukrainian victory against Russia? What role does Poland want to play in Europe's future? And how can it live up to its full potential as a key voice in the European Union and NATO for security and prosperity?

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

22 May 2023 @ 2:00-3:15 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

The narcotics crisis in the Middle East

Against the backdrop of a spike in the supply of narcotics. In various Middle East countries, this webinar will explore the narcotics crisis in the region and the role of the Syrian regime.

For more information, see [Chatham House].

22 May 2023 @ 4:00 am – 5:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

The Other Great Game: The Opening of Korea and the Birth of Modern East Asia

This webinar will illuminate some key aspects of the struggle over the Korean peninsula to show how earlier conflicts and rivalries between regional powers set the course for the future of East Asia and the larger global order.

For more information, see [Wilson Center].

23 May 2023 @ 9:00 a.m., Atlantic Council, USA

Cybersecurity creates new horizons for Abraham Accords

This hybrid event will discuss both the shared regional challenges from criminal and state-sponsored cyberattacks as well as the political and economic benefits of improved trans-regional cybersecurity cooperation.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

23 May 2023 @ 410:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Policing the Religious Message in MENA: Has it Worked and What are the Outcomes?

This webinar will examine the meaning of religious freedom to societies in MENA and will address the question whether state authorities with vested interests in how religion is interpreted guarantee the rights of all citizens, even those at odds with their respective governments.

For more information, see [Wilson Center].

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

Hand-Off: The Evolution of U.S. Policy in Asia

This in-person event and webcast will discuss the foreign policy and national security perspective of the Bush administration from 2001-2009 and the landscape around key issues such as great power competition with China, nuclear proliferation in North Korea, and U.S. diplomatic strategy in Asia.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

23 May 2023 @ 4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Brookings Institution, USA

21st century soldiers of the sea: A conversation with General David Berger, 38th commandant of the US Marine Corps

At this webcast General David Berger, 38th commandant of the US Marine Corps, will share his view on the role of the U.S. Marine Corps in national security, integrated deterrence, and the maritime domain, and how Force Design 2030 and its associated concepts fit into the broader National Defense Strategy.

For more information, see [Brookings].

23 May 2023 @ 4:30-6:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

War in Sudan: Perspectives and prospects for resolution

The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that began in April has derailed Sudan's fragile transition towards civilian rule. The implications for the country's future governance trajectory and the region are deep. Against this backdrop, this hybrid event will explore perspectives on the war and discuss scenarios for its evolution and resolution.

For more information, see [Chatham House].

23 May 2023 @ 6:00-7:00p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), Australia

Humanitarian Response and Pacific Partnership

This hybrid event will explore how Humanitarian Logistics Capability supports the Australian Government in responding to humanitarian crises in the Indo-Pacific.

Learn more about the event at [AIIA].

Recent and Upcoming Book Releases

Shakuntala Banaji, and Ramnath Bhat, ***Social Media and Hate***, Routledge, 140 pages, published on December 31, 2021, reviewed in [LSE].

Andrea Riemenschnitter, Jessica Imbach, and Justyna Jaguscik (eds.), S***inophone Utopias: Exploring Futures Beyond the China Dream***,** Cambria Press, 484 pages, published on February 1, 2023. The book is reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Julia Lovell (eds.), ***Creators of Modern China: 100 Lives from Empire to Republic***, 1796-1912, Thames & Hudson, 368 pages, to be released on July 25, 2023. For a review, see [Asian Review of Books].

Zsuzsanna Szelényi, ***Tainted Democracy: Viktor Orbán and the Subversion of Hungary***, Hurst, 352 pages, published on January 1, 2023, reviewed in [Los Angeles Review of Books].

Quinn Slobodian, ***Crack-Up Capitalism: Market Radicals and the Dream of a World Without Democracy***, Metropolitan Books, 352 pages, published on April 4, 2023. Visit [Los Angeles Review of Books] to find a review.

Calls

The **University of Minho**, Portugal, invites paper proposals for its ***workshop "What is the Role Played by Regional and Local Authorities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism?"***, to be held on September 27-28, 2023. Submission deadline is July 1, 2023. For more information, see [Minho University].

The **Open University of the Netherlands** invites paper proposals for the ***international conference "Taboo in Cultural Heritage: Reverberations of Colonialism and National Socialism"***, to be held February 1-2, 2024. The closing date for abstract submission is August 1, 2023. Details are available at [NICA].

Maastricht University invites briefing proposals for its ***2024 Symposium on Cybersecurity and Data Protection***, tentatively scheduled for January 23-25, 2024. Abstract submission deadline is May 29, 2023. For more information, see [ICRC].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Project Analyst*** to be based in La Habana, Cuba. Applications are accepted until May 21, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Strategic Coordination Officer*** to be based in Juba, South Sudan. Applications are accepted until May 27, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***FAO Project Manager*** to be based in Gaza, Palestinian Territory. Applications are accepted until May 26, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks an ***International Consultant*** to conduct Training of Trainers on gender mainstreaming in sport. The position is based in Skopje, Macedonia. Applications are accepted until May 26, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Humanitarian Affairs Officer Assistant/Protection***. Applications are accepted until May 31, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Project Associate*** to be based in Windhoek, Namibia. Applications are accepted until May 28, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Communication and Social Media Intern*** to be based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Applications are accepted until May 23, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Communications Associate*** to be based on Baku, Azerbaijan. Applications are accepted until May 27, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***National Information Management Officer (Data Analyst)*** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until May 26, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a ***Task Manager on Capacity Building*** to be based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Applications are accepted until May 26, 2023. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Chief/Risk Analysis and Preparedness Section*** to be based in Istanbul, Türkiye. Applications are accepted until May 30, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Consultant*** to support the schools' connectivity to good quality internet (Giga) and DPG work in Kazakhstan. Applications are accepted until May 28, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Child Protection Specialist*** in Emergencies to be based in Kyiv, Ukraine. Applications are accepted until May 22, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Consultant*** for Situation Analysis on Alternative Pathways and Distance Learning in Nigeria. Applications are accepted until May 25, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Child Protection Specialist*** to be based in Kananga, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Applications are accepted until May 27, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Social Policy Officer*** to be based in Kaduna, Nigeria. Applications are accepted until May 25, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Chief Field Operations & Emergency*** to be based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.Applications are accepted until May 19, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a C***onsultant/Ad-hoc capacity building on UNICEF humanitarian action***. The position is based in Lacro,

Panama. Applications are accepted until May 25, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a ***Chief/Fund Raising*** to be based in Mexico City, Mexico. Applications are accepted until June 1, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** offers an ***Internship - Climate Change Innovation Portfolio - Design & Communication***, at the Office of Innovation in Stockholm, Sweden. Applications are accepted until May 28, 2023. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks an ***Ombudsman*** to be based at the Office of the Deputy Director in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until June 15, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Legal Officer*** to be based at the EU/BOS Division of Business Operations in Istanbul, Turkey. Applications are accepted until June 3, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Field Security Assistant*** to be based in Jijiga, Somali Region. Applications are accepted until June 3, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***National Consultant - Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Tools and Collaborations*** to join the Strategy and Innovation Team in Manila, Philippines. Applications are accepted until May 26, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Senior Executive Officer*** to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until May 31, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Project Assistant*** to be based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo. Applications are accepted until May 25, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Consultant on Health Information Systems*** to be based in Hanoi, Vietnam. Applications are accepted until May 24, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Programme Assistant*** to be based in Tunis, Tunisia. Applications are accepted until May 24, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Director - Coordinated Resource Mobilization (CRM)*** to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until May 30, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a ***Consultant - Rehabilitation and Emergency preparedness & response***. Applications are accepted until May 20, 2023. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Country Director/Yemen***. Applications are accepted until June 4, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks an ***Associate Director, Audience Analytics*** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until September 1, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Refugee Youth Summer Academy Lead Teacher***. The position is based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until July 12, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Youth Program Specialist*** to be based in Richmond, USA. Applications are accepted until July 10, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Project Manager, Research & Innovation*** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until September 1, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Strategic Initiatives Lead, Research & Innovation*** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until September 1, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Legal Assistant*** to be based in Richmond, USA. Applications are accepted until July 9, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Director, Cultural Orientation Resource Exchange*** to be based in Silver Spring, USA. Applications are accepted until July 10, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Deputy Director, International Program & Emergency Recruiting*** to be based in Jordan or Kenya. Applications are accepted until July 8, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** seeks a ***Chief Ethics and Compliance Officer (CECO)*** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until August 1, 2023. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***Chief, Risk Management, Compliance and Information Security*** to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until May 30, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks an ***Adviser on Civil Society Relations*** to be based in Warsaw, Poland. Applications are accepted until July 6, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***Consultant*** to conduct a National Referral Mechanisms visit to Germany and produce a country assessment report. Applications are accepted until May 17, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***Head, Human Dimension Department*** to be based in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Applications are accepted until June 8, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***Deputy Head, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination*** to be based in Warsaw, Poland. Applications are accepted until May 22, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks ***Director of Regional Centre*** for its mission in Kosovo. Applications are accepted until May 17, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***National Consultant*** to develop a ***Draft Law on Interagency Security Partnership***. This

position is based in Astana, Kazakhstan. Applications are accepted until May 25, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks an ***International consultant on preventing and combating illicit trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), ammunition and explosives***. This position is based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until May 31, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***Senior Police Affairs Adviser, Combating Trafficking of Illicit Drugs and Small Arms and Light Weapons*** to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until May 18, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** seeks a ***Deputy Head of Mission*** to be based in Belgrade, Serbia. Applications are accepted until May 19, 2023. More information is provided at [OSCE].

Team:

Amanda Jaroen (aj), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Fabian Beck (fb), Han Zaw Aung (ha), Henning Glaser (hg), Jamie Leong (jl), Khin Ohmmar Moe (km), Loong Dien Min (ldm), Lucas Meier (lm), Natalie Svinina (ns), Peer Morten Strantzen (ms), Sheikh Afif Bin Zaman (as), Syed Faizal Aljunied (sfa), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn), Yesi Riana Yusnita Sari (ys)

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German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance - CPG
Room 207, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

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