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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

No. 27, July/2023, 1

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Algeria's, Argentina's, Cape Verde's, Comoros', Guinea Bissau's, Malawi's, the Solomon Islands', South Sudan's, the US', and Venezuela's Independence Day as well as the Philippines' Republic 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: New Foreign Relations Law comes into effect

(ms) On July 1, the new Foreign Relations Law, approved by the National People's Congress, China's legislative body, took effect [full legal text in Chinese]. The law serves as a revised framework for future legislation and aims to protect China's national security and development interests.

The law largely refrains from introducing new tools or mechanisms, but rather strengthens the existing ones. It functions as a kind of umbrella law that regulates China's foreign relations across the board.

A familiar theme in the law is China's commitment to a multipolar system and against U.S. hegemony; the

state news channel Global Times, for example, calls the law a "key step to enrich legal toolbox against Western hegemony.

China commits itself in several passages to the UN and its charter as the principal global authority, the same applies to China's commitment to the UN Security Council. Regarding the Human Rights Charter, which China persistently fails to comply with, especially in its treatment of the country's ethnic minorities, according to various reports, including the Xinjiang Report from August 2022 [see AiR No. 36, September/2022, 1], the law states that China "adheres to the principle of universality of human rights in combination with its own reality," a recurring rhetoric of the Chinese government that does not indicate any improvement in China's treatment of ethnic minorities in the country.

With regard to China's protection of national security and development interests, Articles 32 and 33 of the law in particular caused a great uproar. Although these two articles do not call for or present any specific measures, the text states that "China has the right to take corresponding countermeasures and restrictive measures against acts that violate international law and basic norms of international relations and endanger the sovereignty, security, and development interests of the People's Republic of China." Western observers in particular see this as another measure by China to crack down on sanctions and prevent future provocations from abroad.

According to conjecture, among other things, the U.S. led economic sanctions against the Chinese semiconductor industry could be seen as violations of the new law. Although the law does not explain the details of possible measures, the China Foreign Investment Law of 2019, for example, introduced the possibility of expropriation of foreign investments as a potential measure, although only under exceptional circumstances in the public interest, a limitation that could be extended by the new law.

In light of this bold wording, as well as the expansion of the Counter Espionage Law in late April, which significantly increased the scope of criminal security authorities' powers over foreign companies [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1], observers speculate that it is possible that foreign companies may find it attractive to move their offices out of China. [Asia Times] [BBC] [Bloomberg] [China Briefing] [Global Times] [South China Morning Post] [Xinhua]

China: Reshuffle in central bank's leadership ranks

(ms) The Peoples Bank of China (PBC), China's central bank, announced on July 1 in a short statement via its official website that in the future Pan Gongsheng will take the position of Secretary of the Party Committee of the PBC.

Pan thereby replaces Guo Shuqing as Party Secretary of the PBC, also in the memo it was announced that Yi Gang the governor of the PBC since 2018 will also give up his post and retire. So far, it has not been announced who will be the successor, but it is assumed that Pan, will take over the role of both party secretary and governor.

Actually, this reshuffle was already expected during the Two-Sessions in mid-March [see AiR No. 11, March/2023, 2], during which Xi Jinping started an unprecedented third term as president, but Guo and Yi were confirmed in office for the time being. Even then, it was assumed that Yi, in particular, would be entrusted with the post-COVID recovery due to his experience, but in the face of declining economic growth, the personnel change was now executed.

In addition to his new duties, Pan continues to be the party secretary and director of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE), China's foreign exchange regulator. Although there is no information on what plans or system changes are foreseen under Pan compared to his predecessors, based on his position at SAFE, it can be reasonably expected that Pan will focus on the internationalization of the renminbi as well as the stability of the Chinese currency, which is currently stumbling somewhat [see entry below]. [Caixin Global] [Peoples Bank of China] [South China Morning Post]

China: Renminbi on downward trend

(ms) The People Bank of China, the Chinese central bank announced "comprehensive measures" to restabilize the Chinese currency, which is currently on a downward trend.

With a current exchange rate of 1 USD to about 7.25 Yuan, the Renminbi is currently on course to surpass the record low of about 7.3 Yuan to 1 USD from November last year and thereby reach the worst rate in the last 15 years.

As recently as mid-June, the PBC lowered the interest rates on its three-year and five-year deposits as well as the annualized interest rates on demand deposits and the seven-day reverse repo, all with rather muted success [see AiR No. 24, June/2023, 2]. What kind of new measures the PBC understands by "comprehensive measures" has not been defined yet, but there are hints that among other things homebuyers as well as housing projects will be supported.

To what extent this will actually be enough to stabilize the renminbi again remains to be seen, but economists emphasize the need for sustained and significant action on the part of the PBC. [Bloomberg] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

China: Greater Bay Area, including SARs, agree on data flow agreement

(ms) The Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), the Internet security agency of mainland China, has reached an agreement with Hong Kong's Innovation, Technology and Industry Bureau on an initial draft regarding cross-border data flow.

The draft covers the 9 cities of Guandong and the two Special Administrative Regions (SARs) of Hong Kong and Macao. Although detailed information about the draft has not been released, according to officials, the planned regulation aims to establish data cross-border flow security rules within the framework of the national data cross-border security management system.

The background for the need for such an agreement are various regulations in the past years cross-border data transfer on the part of the Chinese central government. In the middle of last year, a security check became mandatory for all companies with at least 1 million Chinese users who transfer data abroad. This security check is also mandatory for companies that transfer data of at least 100,000 persons or sensitive data of 10,000 persons abroad [see AiR No. 28, July/2022, 2].

Not specifically included in the regulation introduced at that time was the handling of companies in SARs, this will now presumably be made up for with the envisaged agreement. Even if more details are not known, it can be assumed that a special regulation will be found for the two SARs, since the area is in close cooperation and such security checks would be a hurdle both in terms of time and financially and would

therefore not be in the interest of the respective authorities. [China Daily 1] [China Daily 2] [South China Morning Post]

China: New laser technology increases satellite-to-ground communication speed ten-fold

(ms) A team from the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS) successfully completed a test on June 28 in which new laser technology was used to transfer data via satellites.

Until now, satellite-to-ground communication has been based on microwave technology, but since the range of microwave frequencies is limited, so is the speed of data transmission, lasers on the other hand have a much broader spectrum. Therefore, using lasers as data carriers can help pack more data into each transmission, with bandwidth potentially reaching several hundred gigahertz, making data transfers of 10 gigabytes per second possible. [South China Morning Post]

China: CCP tightens selection process for new members

(ms) Although the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) reported a new record of more than 98 million members in 2022, there has been a decline in the age group under 30, the reason for which is said to be stricter controls in the screening of new applicants.

While 4.4 million Chinese citizens joined the CCP in 2021, only 2.5 million did so last year. This, however, is not due to a decline in interest; last year, nearly 21 million people applied to join the party, about 300,000 more than in the previous year. The reason for this discrepancy is said to be tighter controls on the screening of applicants, with officials saying they want "quality people" and that applicants with "western values, indulge in extravagance, avoid tough duties, or have doubts with the party's directions" must be weeded out.

One of the triggers for this is the anti-corruption campaign that has been running since 2012. "Many corrupt officials had wrong motives when they joined the party," which is why it is necessary to start at this stage in order to eliminate these individuals.

Despite the generally weaker growth of new candidates, an increase in the proportion of women in the party was evident in 2022; with 29 million female party members, they now make up nearly 30 percent of the total membership. Historically, women play a much smaller role than their male counterparts, and even with the noted increase, no improvement is expected in the coming years; the CCP's newly composed Politburo does not have one woman for the first time in decades, and the Politburo Standing Committee, the CCP's highest body, has never had a woman in its ranks throughout its history. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

China: Comprehensive bonded zone in Xiong'an gets approved

(ms) The State Council has approved on June 30 the creation of a comprehensive bonded zone in addition to other policies, this is another measure to accelerate the completion of the new city.

The Xiong'an New Area is a district 50 kilometers west of Beijing introduced in 2017, which, in the face of overcrowding in Beijing, the capital of China, is designed to relieve noncapital city functions from Beijing while promoting the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Regarding the latter, approval has now been given for the establishment of a new comprehensive duty-free zone. Comprehensive duty-free zones are special trade zones administered by customs officials with favorable tax policies.

While so far the construction within the city is running at full speed, especially the population is still somewhat reluctant to move from Beijing to Xiong'an, because the citizens do not want to give up the good medical care and good educational opportunities of the capital. The same applies to companies as well as state institutions, where the relocation process is not as fast as the Chinese government had hoped. Against this background, President Xi Jinping in May personally called for an acceleration and pressure was put on both companies and party members to heed Xi's call [see AiR No. 20, May/2023, 3]. The new economic incentives provided by the comprehensive bonded zone could be another tool to achieve the demanded acceleration. [China Daily] [China.org] [Chinese State Council] [Global Times]

China: Hong Kong Chief Executive indicates backing away from plans for fake news law

(ms) Hong Kong's Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu signaled in an interview that he no longer considers a "fake news" law that has been in the planning stages since 2021 to be absolutely necessary, which could possibly mean a small success for independent journalism in the city.

Plans for the fake news law date back to the previous government and came in response to, among other things, the alleged exaggeration by various Hong Kong media of injuries sustained by a first responder during the 2019 anti-government protests. Since the original plans, there has been relative silence around this legislative proposal. However, independent journalists feared that such a law would only further curtail press freedom, which has already deteriorated significantly since the introduction of the National Security Law 2020, by placing even more concentrated interpretive authority over facts with the pro-Beijing Hong Kong government.

According to Lee, the government's current focus would rather be on passing its own security law, which he had promised for no later than next year [see AiR No. 26, June/2023, 4], and added that he believes there are other ways to fight fake news.

What exactly he has in mind, however, was not disclosed by Lee, so it remains to be seen to what extent this will actually be a win for the city's Free Press, or whether it is only temporary. [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Hong Kong puts bounty on self-exiled activists

(ms) The Hong Kong National Security Police on July 3 placed a bounty of approximately USD 130,000 each on the heads of 8 activists who have self-exiled in the wake of the introduction of the National Security Law 2020 in response to the 2019 anti-government protests.

The 8 individuals are namely former member of the Hong Kong Legislative Council Dennis Kwok and Ted Hui Chi-fung, former lawyer and activist Kevin Yam, and activists Nathan Law, Anna Kwok, Elmer Yuen, Mung Siu-tat and Finn Law.

The charges filed against the 8 include collusion, subversion and incitement to secession.

The Hong Kong National Security Police urged the activists to turn themselves in to receive a reduced sentence, stressing in the same breath that the bounties were not a form of self-incarceration but "was enforcement of the law." [Hong Kong Free Press] [Xinqi Su via Twitter]

China: PLA considers "total war" scenarios

(ms) The People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Chinese military, has begun testing the performance and readiness of new weapons in "total war" scenarios.

So far, at least to the public, computer war simulations have been limited to use in China's immediate neighborhood, the South China Sea, and Taiwan in particular. In a newly published paper in the Chinese Journal of Ship Research, it has been revealed that a new scenario called "Z" has been run during the testing of new warships.

The scenario Z is based on a regional conflict that develops into an all-out war. The imaginary enemy is an undefined entity, but under the "blue alliance" the US Navy Arleigh Burke-class destroyer is said to have been part of the arsenal.

The publication of the paper comes at a time when the situation between China and the United States has been tense for several years. While even without the publication of the paper it could be assumed that the PLA is simulating war scenarios with the U.S. as an adversary, it can be assumed that the publication is an intentional sign, since the simulation that has taken place must first be de-classified by a state authority before this information can be published in a paper.

Since China has proclaimed the annexation of Taiwan as one of the fundamental goals of the "Chinese Dream", especially since Xi Jinping took office, and the U.S. government under Joe Biden has repeatedly emphasized that it will defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion, this scenario is currently the most likely starting point for a military conflict between the two superpowers. Against this background, the publication of the report could be a kind of provocation or commitment to Chinese objectives, despite the potential consequences it would imply. [South China Morning Post]

Japan: UN to assess safety of releasing Fukushima wastewater into the Pacific

(eg) The head of the UN's nuclear agency is set to visit Japan this week ahead of the release of Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant's treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean.

The Japanese government hopes that the visit by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to assess Japan's preparations for the release will relax fears surrounding the discharge of the nuclear wastewater into the ocean. The plan has attracted strong opposition from local fishing groups, environmental activists, as well as South Korea and China over safety concerns.

Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant currently has 1,000 tanks of wastewater, which officials say must be removed to avoid accidental leaks and to proceed with the plant's decommissioning. The water has been treated, making it than international standards, though it is still slightly radioactive. The water will subsequently be released into the Pacific over decades, and according to the government, will be harmless to humans and sea life.

The operator of the power plant has finished the construction of equipment needed for the release, and regulators have completed their final inspections. The operator is expected to receive a permit in around a week to begin the discharge.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has instructed his ministers to publicize the safety of the project and to mollify the concerns of local fishermen. The IAEA is expected to confirm the safety of the plan during the visit of its leader to Japan on July 4. [Asahi Shimbun 1] [Asahi Shimbun 2]

Japan: Ruling coalition set to expand number of nations allowed to purchase defense technology

(eg) Lawmakers in Japan's ruling coalition are compiling a report which is expected to revise and expand the country's three principles on defense exports.

Currently, military equipment can only be exported to contribute to peace or co-operation with allied nations. Countries engaged in military conflict are restricted from receiving or purchasing Japanese defense technology.

However, the report compiled by officials in the ruling LDP-Komeito coalition seeks to loosen these restrictions by including nations that have been invaded or threatened with force within the principles of defense exports. This revision is specifically targeted at exporting equipment to Ukraine, which was invaded by Russia in February 2022.

The report will also include the export of technology jointly developed by Japan and its partners to third nations. This policy is intended to make the next-gen fighter jet developed between Japan, Italy and the UK more marketable in the global arms trade.

The report also discusses amending or removing the categories of equipment allowed to be exported. Further specific measures are set to be implemented during discussions in the autumn. [Asahi Shimbun]

Japan: LDP faction prepares to choose new leader

(eg) The largest faction of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which was once led by assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, is moving towards picking a new leader, a position that has remained vacant since Abe's death.

The faction still calls itself the Abe faction. Fearing the loss of influence within the LDP, members are calling for a leadership race to begin on July 8, the anniversary of Abe's death. Faction members' anxieties have intensified since a member of the Prime Minister's faction was selected as the LDP candidate for a new constituency rather than a member of the Abe faction.

Proposals to institute collective leadership or name an acting leader have both failed due to internal opposition. At the same time, the size of the faction has passed 100, which increases the likelihood that the group will split into smaller factions, a possibility made likelier by the lack of a leader.

The faction is set to meet on July 6 to discuss its future leadership. [Japan Times]

Japan: Finance minister warns against weak yen

(eg) Japan's Finance Minister has stated that the government will take appropriate steps to prevent the

country's currency depreciating excessively after its value hit a seven-month low against the US dollar.

When the Japanese yen last depreciated so much in value, the authorities intervened to support the currency's value for the first time in 24 years.

While a devalued currency would make Japanese exports more marketable, it would have a negative effect on the government's efforts to dampen inflation by driving up the cost of imports. The government said it would watch the currency market with "a great sense of urgency". [Reuters]

Japan: Use of nuclear bunkers promoted amid rising threat of conflict

(eg) Charities and lawmakers have been promoting the construction of nuclear shelters in Japan amid growing fears of nuclear conflict from Russia or North Korea.

Talks among lawmakers regarding the construction of nuclear bunkers have grown more frequent following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the increasing potential of a conflict between China and Taiwan. Moreover, North Korea launched missiles on a record 37 occasions last year, which triggered emergency alerts in some parts of Japan for people to seek shelter.

A group of lawmakers in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) submitted their proposals to fund the construction of shelters in municipalities hosting military bases to the Prime Minister in June. [Kyodo News]

North Korea: Cabinet meeting held to discuss grain output

(tms) A cabinet meeting was conducted earlier last week to address the implementation of policy objectives outlined in a recent important party gathering to discuss strategies for enhancing agricultural output and other related measures, in what is seen as latest sign of efforts to tackle the country's chronic food shortage.

Held two weeks after a plenary meeting of the 8th Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea, that was leader Kim Jong-un and discussed economic policy goals, the two-day meeting reviewed the activities carried out in the first half of the

year while also deliberating on the policy objectives outlined by the party, including the target for grain production and the enhancement of North Korea's agricultural sector. Additionally, the meeting addressed the promotion of production in various sectors of the economy, ensuring the provision of dairy products to children, and creating a cleaner living environment for the residents of Pyongyang. [Yonhap] [Korea Herald]

North Korea: Two females publicly executed for watching South Korean programs

(tms) Two female farm workers in Chongdam County, South Hwanghae Province, were publicly executed for breaking the channel lock on their television and secretly watching South Korean programs.

The women were arrested, and their homes were raided by the Ministry of State Security in December after it was notified by a neighbor. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Two political officials arrested for leaking state secrets

(tms) Two political officials with North Korea's Panmunjom mission were recently arrested on spot and turned over to the military's security department for allegedly leaking "Class 1 secrets" state secrets.

The incident occurred as a soldier, assigned duties at the residence of one of the political officials, lodged a written complaint with the General Political Bureau (GPB). This soldier was reportedly a relative of a GPB cadre and was serving his military duty at the Panmunjom mission.

The GPB descended on the scene with the military's security department and searched the two officials' homes after receiving the latter where they found photocopies of secret documents and foreign newspaper articles that criticized North Korea along with many mobile storage devices with South Korean news, singing programs, TV shows in which defectors appear, and other videos. [Daily NK]

South Korea: A new unification minister and an Olympic gold medalist named for vice culture minister

(tms) President Yoon Suk Yeol announced a reshuffle that included the appointment of a new unification minister and an Olympic weightlifting gold medalist as vice culture minister along with one other ministerial post and 11 vice minister positions, his chief of staff reported.

During a press briefing, Kim Dae-ki announced that Kim Yung-ho, a professor of political science and diplomacy at Sungshin Women's University, has been selected to take charge of the Unification Ministry. Jang Mi-ran, the gold medalist in the women's over 75-kilogram category at the 2008 Olympics, has been appointed as the second vice minister of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism.

The ministerial position of chief of the Anti-Corruption and Civil Rights Commission, a ministerial post, has been named for Kim Hong-il. Kim Hong-il, a lawyer and previously served as the head of the Busan High Prosecutors Office. Ambassador to Vietnam Oh Young-ju was named second vice foreign minister, while Ambassador to Thailand Moon Seoung-hyun was named vice unification minister.

The other reshuffled positions were vice ministers of the ministries of finance, science, agriculture, environment, labor, land, oceans and SMEs. [Yonhap] [Korea Times]

South Korea: Forum highlights S. Korea-U.S. alliance amid geopolitical tension

(tms) A forum held in Seoul brought together high-ranking government officials and experts to discuss and identify strategies to address security challenges on the Korean Peninsula while commemorating the 70th anniversary of South Korea and the United States alliance. The forum came as the two countries bolstering cooperation amid North Korea's evolving nuclear and missile threats.

The symposium, organized jointly by Yonhap News Agency and Seoul's unification ministry and titled "70 Years of the ROK-U.S. Alliance: the Present and Future of the Korean Peninsula," discussed President Yoon Suk-yeol's strategy and effective approaches to maintaining peace and promoting prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region and explored way to inter-Korean relations amidst the prolonged impasse in denuclearization negotiations.

Deputy Commander of the U.S. Forces Korea Lt. Gen. Scott L. Pleus, meanwhile, announced that the US

plans to send a nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea in the coming years to reinforce the U.S. commitment to defending its ally, marking the first time in many decades that such a submarine will be deployed.

Seoul and Washington signed a mutual defense treaty in October 1953 following the conclusion of the Korean War which is considered as a foundational document for their alliance. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2] [Korea Times]

South Korea: New law adopts international method of determining age

(tms) South Korea has adopted a new law to align the age-counting methods with international standards, making South Koreans one or two years younger.

The law eliminates the traditional system in which individuals were considered one year old at birth, including the time spent in the womb.

The government intends to alleviate confusion through this change, particularly in situations where older South Koreans may mistakenly believe they are eligible for pensions and other benefits related to age. [Al Jazeera] [BBC]

The law also requires workers at medical institutions to register newborns starting a year from now.

Previously, only parents were authorized to register their child's birth. Unregistered children face challenges in accessing social services like health insurance, immunization, and education.

The legislation was introduced by Rep. Kang Min-kuk from the ruling People Power Party over two years ago and has now been passed to address this issue and ensure that all children are properly registered and provided with their basic rights. [Korea Herald]

South Korea: Arrest warrant sought for Park Young-soo denied by court

(tms) The Seoul Central District Court has rejected an arrest warrant request for former special counsel Park Young-soo over corruption allegations in connection with a high-profile land development scandal citing dispute regarding the bribery allegations and the importance of safeguarding the suspect's right to a defense.

Park is suspected of accepting 800 million won (USD 611,000) from private developers in exchange for facilitating their project to develop the Daejang-dong district in Seongnam into apartment complexes back in 2014, during his tenure as the chair of the Woori Bank board of directors.

Prosecutors also believe that Park conspired with his former assistant, Yang Jae-sik, and both were promised profits of 20 billion won and two properties. However, the promised profits reportedly decreased to 5 billion won after the bank's involvement in the project was reduced.

The court also denied the arrest warrant sought for Yang, Park's former assistant. The Seoul Central District Prosecutors Office, which is investigating the case, stated that it will review whether to pursue arrest warrants again after further investigations.

Park gained prominence for leading the investigation into the corruption scandal involving former President Park Geun-hye as a special counsel in 2017 and was eventually impeached.

Park Young-soo is among the notable individuals involved in the so-called "5 billion club," who were each promised 5 billion won by the asset management firm Hwacheon Daeyu, which allegedly reaped substantial profits from the project. Other figures reportedly associated with the club include former ruling People Power Party lawmaker Kwak Sang-do and former Prosecutor General Kim Soo-nam. [Korea Herald] [Korea Times]

South Korea: Supreme Court upholds acquittal of ex-presidential aide over Sewol ferry case

(tms) The Supreme Court has upheld the acquittal of former presidential chief of staff Kim Ki-choon over charges of falsifying a public document on the 2014 Sewol ferry sinking.

This final ruling follows the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Kim’s guilty verdict in August of the previous year, as well as the Seoul High Court's acquittal of him for lying in a Sewol-related document submitted to the National Assembly in a retrial held in November of the same year.

Kim was indicted in 2018 on allegations of altering the time at which President Park Geun-hye was briefed

about the tragic accident, to deflect criticism of the government's handling of the incident.

The Sewol ferry sank on April 16, 2014, resulting in the loss of 304 lives, predominantly high school students who were on a school trip. [Korea Herald] [Korea Times]

South Korea: PPP seeks legislation to allow giving birth anonymously

(tms) South Korea's ruling People Power Party (PPP) is pushing for legislation allowing women to give birth anonymously at hospitals to reduce the number of unregistered children and promote safe maternal care.

The proposed "anonymous birth" system would grant women the option to give birth without disclosing their identity, ensuring access to medical assistance and welfare support. Currently, women are required to provide their identity when giving birth at medical institutions.

The proposal is currently pending at the National Assembly's health and welfare committee.

Democratic Party lawmakers oppose the legislation, expressing concerns that it may encourage more women to give up their children. Children's rights groups have also protested the legislation, arguing that anonymous births are not a solution to the issue of unregistered children.

The proposal for anonymous birth comes after a report by the Board of Audit and Inspection revealed that at least 2,236 children born between 2015 and 2022 were not registered with the government.

In a separate legislative proposal, Democratic Party lawmaker So Byung-chul has suggested allowing non-citizens residing illegally in the country to register a child born in South Korea without facing deportation. [Korea Herald]

South Korea: Probe uncovers additional W582.4b used illegally under former government

(tms) Government officials announced on July 3 that an investigation has uncovered an additional 582.4 billion

won (USD 442.2 million) of government funds that were illegally used in renewable energy projects, including solar panel installations, during the previous Moon Jae-in administration in South Korea.

The Office for Government Policy Coordination, under the Prime Minister's Office, conducted a nationwide investigation that identified 5,359 cases of irregularities in the spending of government energy funds between 2019 and 2021.

In response to corruption allegations surrounding the subsidies for renewable energy, a task force has been established to further investigate the matter following a previous sample investigation, which was limited to a specific region and revealed 2,267 cases of illegal fund management totaling 261.6 billion won.

The investigations uncovered a total of 7,626 irregularities over the five-year period of the previous administration, resulting in 844 billion won of government funds being illegally or improperly used. Park Ku-yeon, the first deputy chief of the Office for Government Policy Coordination, highlighted the lack of sufficient checks on fund management despite significant investments in related projects.

The investigation also revealed that a significant portion of the misused funds – 489.8 billion won – were illegally loaned to solar energy projects through fraudulent tax invoices and other means between 2019 and 2021.

The investigation further discovered that 26.6 billion won was improperly used in 172 research and development (R&D) projects in the energy sector between 2018 and 2022, utilizing various methods.

The government has initiated efforts to redeem 40.4 billion won and investigate 626 cases. [Korea Herald]

South Korea: Government to amend ordinance to guarantee learning rights of university students on military reserve training

(tms) South Korean government plans to revise the ordinance of the Higher Education Act to guarantee the right to learn for students on military reserve training amid criticism regarding the treatment of university students who are reservists and face disadvantages due to their absence from classes for military training.

During a policy consultation meeting with lawmakers from the ruling People Power Party (PPP) at the National Assembly, Education Minister Lee Ju-ho stated that the government would closely examine any instances of disadvantage in cooperation with the Ministry of Defense. The minister also mentioned that schools would be advised to revise their regulations accordingly.

PPP's chief policymaker, Rep. Park Dae-chul, expressed his commitment to ensuring that measures are implemented before the start of the fall semester. [Korea Herald] [Korea Times]

South Korea: Resolution passed against Fukushima water release

(tms) The main opposition Democratic Party of Korea passed a resolution unilaterally in the parliament, urging the Japanese government to cancel its plan of discharging treated wastewater from the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant into the sea.

Currently, more than 1.3 million cubic meters of wastewater used to cool the plant's reactors are stored in tanks on the site.

The resolution calls for the immediate cessation of the planned discharge and requests the South Korean government to take action to prevent it. It also proposes increased testing of marine products for radioactivity and urges the South Korean government to file a complaint with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea regarding the planned discharge.

The safety of the wastewater treatment plan is being evaluated by the International Atomic Energy Agency and a South Korean team of experts, as agreed upon during a summit meeting between President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida.

The Democratic Party, which commands the majority of seats in the parliament, initially proposed the resolution in the parliamentary committee for oceans and fisheries, where it was passed due to their majority. It was later brought to a vote in the plenary session on June 30.

Lawmakers of the ruling party People Power Party criticized the unilateral passage of the resolution, referring to it as a "one-sided sneak attack" and accusing the Democratic Party of repeatedly abusing their majority power in the Assembly. [Korea Herald]

Taiwan: Government considers attracting more Filipino workers and offering them permanent residency

(eg) Taiwan's Foreign Minister suggested on June 29 that the government is considering hiring more Filipino workers, while also granting them longer stays and the potential for permanent residency.

The Foreign Minister stressed the importance of Filipino workers to Taiwan's society and economy. Government figures show that at the end of April this year, Taiwan was home to 154,027 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). OFWs represent 21 percent of foreign workers in industry and social welfare.

Taiwan is increasingly recruiting migrant workers to cover crippling labor shortages, which have been exacerbated by an ageing population. Also, last week, the government increased the number of eligible migrant workers to work for the construction industry to 8,000, and potentially to 15,000 in a second phase. [Taiwan News 1]

However, the Foreign Minister criticized the lack of reciprocal treatment for Taiwanese citizens by the Philippine government. He suggested that the Taiwanese government will be more inclined to consider visa extensions for OFWs if Taiwanese tourists gain visa-free access to the Philippines.

The current visa waiver is set to expire on July 31, after which Taiwan will reassess its visa policy towards the Philippines. [Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan: Air force decommissions old missile system

(eg) On June 29 Taiwan's Air Force held a ceremony commemorating the decommissioning of the Hawk missile system, which had served as Taiwan's air defense missile system for 63 years.

The Hawk missiles acted as low to medium-altitude air defense and helped to defend the country's airspace in the Taiwan Strait. The system began to be phased out in 2015 and will be replaced by domestically manufactured Sky Bow missiles. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Defense ministry to speed up anti-ship missile production

(eg) According to a recent report, Taiwan's military is seeking to boost the production of anti-ship missiles to combat the growing threat posed by the Chinese navy.

The defense ministry will increase its missile budget from NTD 15.5 billion (USD 497m) this year to NTD 22 billion in 2025. The changes will cover the production of subsonic Hsiung Feng II and supersonic Hsiung Feng III missiles. The military describes these upgraded missiles as on par with anti-ship missiles produced in the USA and Europe. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Vice President warns against renegotiating trade agreement with China

(eg) Taiwan's Vice President and current frontrunner for the presidency Lai Ching-te described a renegotiation of trade with China "a backward and erroneous path" at a campaign event on July 2.

Lai highlighted China's unstable policies and flagging economic growth as reasons for Taiwanese businesses to reduce their investments in China. Instead, the Vice President urged Taiwanese businesspeople to invest in the global market.

The current trade framework in place is the Cross-Strait Service Trade Agreement (CSSTA), which was designed to loosen restrictions between China and Taiwan in service industries. The implementation of this legislation in 2014 led to the eruption of the student protest movement, the Sunflower Movement.

Investments in China from Taiwanese entrepreneurs have declined over the last decade. In 2011, Taiwanese businesses invested NTD 4.54 trillion (USD 14.6 billion) in China, which declined to NTD 5 billion in 2021.

The Vice President suggests the decline in investment in China is evidence that Taiwan has successfully entered the global market. More and more investments are being made in the Indo-Pacific region rather than China, and Taiwan exports technological products, especially semiconductors, across the globe.

As the candidate of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) for the presidency in the elections of January 2024, Lai has continued his predecessor Tsai Ing-wen's emphasis of Taiwanese democracy and

sovereignty against Chinese assertiveness. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Foreign Minister says threat of Chinese invasion increasing amid live-fire invasion drills

(eg) Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu stated in an interview on June 2 that a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan is not imminent but "apparent and increasing".

The foreign minister cited the increasing incursions of Chinese military aircraft and navy vessels into the area around Taiwan as flashpoints of potential conflict. Taiwan has said it will "strike back in self-defense" if any Chinese air or seacraft enter Taiwan's airspace or territorial waters without heeding its warnings.

Taiwan's military is holding frequent live drills to increase its combat readiness in the event of an invasion. On July 3, the military undertook a live fire exercise on the islands strategic southern coast to simulate repelling an invading force. The combatants fired US-made anti-tank missiles to destroy targets near the shoreline. [Taiwan News] [Reuters]

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

Bangladesh: Supreme Court petition seeks restrictions on political activities of largest Islamic Party

(na) A petition filed with the Appellate Division of Bangladesh's Supreme Court seeks to restrain Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat), the largest Islamic party in the country, from participating in political activities such as meetings, rallies, and processions using its name or banner. A separate petition has also been filed bringing a contempt of court charge as the party recently demanded registration at a gathering while the case regarding the registration is still under judicial consideration. The hearing on these petitions has been scheduled for July 31. [Dhaka Tribune]

For years, Jamaat was a major ally of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and their coalition ruled the country between 2001-2006. But in the years after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina came to power in 2009, five of Jamaat's top leaders were hanged after they were tried for war crimes dating back to the country's 1971 independence war against Pakistan.

In 2013, then, Bangladesh's High Court declared Jamaat's registration illegal, banning it from contesting elections. However, the cancellation of the registration remains under review by the Supreme Court through ongoing appeal.

Notably, Jamaat-e-Islami held its first public rally on June 11 in over a decade, but government officials made it clear that this did not indicate a change in the ruling Awami League's policy towards Jamaat [see AiR No. 25, June/2023, 3]. Against this backdrop, a contempt of court petition has also been lodged against five Jamaat leaders for organizing public gatherings despite their pending appeal in the apex court.

Bangladesh: Labor leader beaten to death while trying to resolve dispute

(na) Police in Bangladesh are investigating the murder of Shahidul Islam, a prominent trade union leader who was fatally beaten while trying to settle a dispute between a garment factory owner and workers over unpaid wages. Islam, who served as president in the Gazipur district of the Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation (BGIWF), was attacked on July 2 after intervening on behalf of workers who had gathered to demand back pay. [The Guardian]

In the aftermath, a significant number of workers, union activists, and human rights organizations staged protests in the capital city and Gazipur and strongly denounced the incident. Notably, BGIFW leaders have

alleged that police didn't let them include the name of the alleged mastermind behind the killing of Islam. [Prothom Alo] [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh: Suspended local politician confessed his involvement in journalist's murder

(na) Mahmudul Alam Babu, a suspended Bangladeshi politician, has confessed his involvement in masterminding the murder of journalist Golam Rabbani Nadim, following five days of remand. Consequently, the court issued an order for his detention in jail. [The Business Standard]

Babu, the general secretary of ruling party, was arrested near the Indian border in mid-June after a nationwide manhunt over his believed involvement in the murder of Nadim. The journalist died on June 15, a day after he had been ambushed by a group of men; Nadim's family said he was targeted in retaliation for his May 2023 series of reports on Babu. [AiR No. 25, June/2023, 3]

Bangladesh elected member of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Executive Council

(na) Bangladesh has been elected a member of the Executive Council of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) for the 2023-2025 term, receiving the highest number of votes. The election at the 32nd IOC Assembly recognizes Bangladesh's efforts in maintaining maritime safety and governance.

Bangladesh's growing engagement in maritime issues led to its candidature in the IOC Executive Council, aiming to contribute to critical needs, global presence, and technology-based oceanographic initiatives. Bangladesh also seeks to change the status of the IOC Sub-Committee for Central Indian Ocean to IOC Sub-Commission (IOCINDIO) during the 32nd IOC Assembly. [News Age]

India: Supreme Court seeks detailed ground report; Manipur state government insists situation is 'improving'

(lm) The government of India's northeastern Manipur state told the Supreme Court on July 3 that the situation in the state was "improving, though slowly", a day after fresh violence erupted with at least four people being killed.

Over the past two months, Manipur's largely Hindu Meitei community, which constitute a little over half of the state's population, and the Christian-majority Kuki tribal group, which makes up about 16 percent of the population, have violently attacked each other over fears of demographic displacement and the protection of minority privileges. Over 100 people have been killed and more than 50,000 displaced.

Against this backdrop, India's central government last month set up a committee to encourage peace talks between the communities, but the process has failed to get off the ground [see AiR No. 23, June/2023, 1]. The latest clashes occurred on July 2, during which at least four men were killed. [The Hindu 1]

In light of this, the Supreme Court has ordered the Manipur government to file an updated status report detailing the actual situation on the ground before July 10 – the next day of the hearing. [The Hindu 2]

India: Supreme Court to take up petitions challenging abrogation of Kashmir's special status on July 11

(lm) India's Supreme Court on July 11 will take up a series of petitions challenging the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution in 2019, which stripped the state of Jammu and Kashmir of autonomy after seven decades and led to region's bifurcation. [The Hindu]

Article 370 allowed the state of Jammu and Kashmir a certain amount of autonomy - its own constitution, a separate flag and freedom to make laws. As a result, the state could make its own rules relating to permanent residency, ownership of property and fundamental rights. It could also bar Indians from outside the state from purchasing property or settling there. However, foreign affairs, defence and communications remained the preserve of India's central government.

Upon the scrapping of Article 370, India's government broke up the state into two smaller, federally administered territories. One region combines Muslim-majority Kashmir and Hindu-majority Jammu. The other is Buddhist-majority Ladakh, which is culturally and historically close to Tibet.

India: Law Ministry awaits Law Commission report to proceed with Uniform Civil Code

(lm) Officials from India's Law Ministry on July 3 told a parliamentary standing committee that they are awaiting th 22nd Law Commission report to proceed with the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). [The Hindu]

Currently, India follows a system where different laws are in place for different religions to regulate matters, such as marriage, divorce, adoption, inheritance based on their respective practices and beliefs. Adding to the complexity of this legal landscape is India's intricate caste structure, sub-sects within religions, and regional customs that has landed the country with a myriad of laws, often varying from state to state. As a single set of laws for the entire country, the UCC would cover personal matters for all citizens of India - irrespective of religion, caste or creed.

Prime Minister Modi and his BJP argue that Article 44 of the Constitution envisions a uniform set of laws that would replace the personal laws of every religion. Furthermore, the Supreme Court in various judgements too has called for the implementation of the UCC. However, successive governments have stayed away from implementing a UCC for fear it will anger voters belonging to the Hindu majority as well as the minority Christians and Muslims because of the perceived clash with their fundamental right to practice their faith.

It was against this backdrop that the Law Commission, an executive body that advises India's central government on legal reform, on June 14 published a public notice inviting feedback on the subject [see AiR No. 25, June/2023, 3]. The process of public consultations will end on July 13, following which the commission may call upon individuals or organizations for a personal hearing.

Notably, opposition members during this week's meeting with the law ministry pointed out that the UCC might not be acceptable to the tribal communities, especially those in India's northeast. Addressing their concerns, the panel chairman asked the law ministry officials to explain if such communities could be exempted from it while bringing in a "common civil code" for the rest of the country.

India: Prime Minister Modi meets Council of Ministers, speaks of 'Vision 2047'

(lm) Prime Minister Narendra Modi on July 3 addressed the Union Council of Ministers, the principal executive organ of the Indian government, to urge his colleagues to keep the focus on infrastructure development and its impact, as part of the country's road to 2047, the year India will mark the centenary of independence. Modi also spoke at length about the issues that will be presented before leaders of the Group of Twenty, who will be meeting in New Delhi this September. [The Hindu]

India: Ajit Pawar splits Nationalist Congress Party, becomes Maharashtra's deputy chief minister

(lm) Ajit Pawar, the leader of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), an Indian state-level political party, has led a vertical split in the party and joined hands in Maharashtra state with the ruling National Democratic Alliance led by Prime Minister Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Following the split, Pawar took oath as the Deputy Chief Minister of Maharashtra for the fifth time; he will share the post with a BJP lawmaker.

Explaining his decision, Pawar said that it was evident that a single party alone could form the government in Maharashtra, a situation that has existed since the 1990s. Just as the NCP had previously aligned with the Indian National Congress and then the Shiv Sena, as well, now it was aligned with the BJP, he said.

Notably, although Pawar claimed to have the support of all NCP lawmakers, his uncle, four-time chief minister and NCP party chief Sharad Pawar, made it clear that he is not supporting his nephew's decision. Furthermore, NCP President Jayant Patil claimed on July 4 that all party lawmakers are with party chief Pawar. [Times of India]

A day earlier, the Ajit Pawar camp appointed Sunil Tatkare as the Maharashtra NCP president in place of Patil. It also asked the Maharashtra assembly speaker to disqualify Patil and Jitendra Awhad from membership of the House.

India: Central government announces scheme for minor rape victims

(lm) India's Women and Child Development Ministry on July 3 announced a special scheme that will provide medical, financial and infrastructural support to victims of sexual assault in cases which resulted in pregnancies. Roughly USD 9 million have been allocated for the scheme, which will operate under the aegis of the Nirbhaya Fund, which was set up in the wake of a rape and fatal assault in December 2012 in New Delhi. [The Hindu]

Maldives: Political landscape shaken as former President Nasheed quits ruling party, joins new party

(lm) Against the larger backdrop of a deepening political struggle with Maldives President Mohamed Solih, the country's House Speaker and former President Mohamed Nasheed has joined a breakaway political party formed by dissidents from the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP). [Newsdrum]

In January, Solih was challenged by Nasheed in the MDP primary, but became the party's candidate for presidential elections scheduled for September. Refusing reconciliation, Nasheed launched his own campaign, mobilizing supporters to "reclaim" the party that, he said, was violating democratic principles.

Anticipating potential expulsion by the party's leaders, a dozen lawmakers from the MDP, now supporting Nasheed, launched a new party called The Democrats in May. The party is yet to be officially registered but is in the process of doing so. If approved, with 12 members in parliament, The Democrats will become the main opposition in parliament.

It is against this backdrop that Nasheed late last month announced his resignation from the MDP and joined The Democrats. Furthermore, the MDP held meetings with two other opposition parties to explore the formation of a coalition – including the Progressive Party of Maldives of former President Abdulla Yameen, who was sentenced to 11 years in prison and fined USD 5 million over corruption and money laundering charges last December. Yameen has appealed his case to the Maldivian High Court.

Sri Lanka: Central bank announces debt restructuring plan, asks foreign investors for a 30 percent haircut

(lm) Sri Lanka's central bank unveiled a much-anticipated restructuring plan for the country's USD 42 billion domestic debt on June 29 in an effort to meet targets set by the International Monetary Fund. Colombo is asking foreign investors in its international sovereign bonds to take a 30 percent haircut and is seeking similar concessions from holders of its other dollar-denominated bonds. [Reuters 1]

On July 1, Sri Lanka's parliament approved the restructuring plan, which is crucial to to continue a USD 2.9 billion bailout from the IMF which Colombo had secured in March. The plan passed with a majority of 122 votes in the 225-member parliament, but opposition parties called for more transparency in implementing the plan and stronger protection for pension fund holders. [Reuters 2]

Meanwhile, the World Bank on June 29 announced that its directors have approved a USD 700 million financing agreement for Sri Lanka's projects on economic stability and support for the poor and vulnerable. Out of the approved fund, USD 500 million will support reforms that help improve economic governance and enhance growth and competitiveness. The other USD 200 million seeks to support Colombo in providing better-targeted income and livelihood opportunities to the poor and vulnerable and improving the social protection system. [Reuters 2]

Pakistan: PTI leader Khan accuses army of crackdown, slams government in address to nation

(lm) Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan in a speech to the nation has criticized the country's powerful military for the harsh crackdown on his main opposition PTI party in the aftermath of violent mob attacks on military facilities following his arrest from the premises of the Islamabad High Court on May 9. Khan also alleged that the government had "made a plan" to imprison him and that the entire incident surrounding his detention had been "pre-planned." [YouTube]

Khan was detained on May 9 on suspicion of corruption in connection with the Al-Qadir Trust, which he and his wife jointly own [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2]. Although the Supreme Court outlawed Khan's arrest three days later, thousands of PTI supporters tore through military buildings across the country, setting them on fire, including the house of an army general [see AiR No. 20, May/2023, 3]. At least eight people died in the protests, and more than 5,000

people were arrested - although most were later released.

Speaking against this backdrop, in his address to the nation, Khan accused the government of destroying all the institutions in the country and said that if he is put in an open court, he can prove that all his arrest was “pre-planned”. Notably, Khan contrasted the situation in Pakistan with the violent protests in France over the police shooting of a teenager: “While numerous innocent civilians were targeted and subjected to gunfire without much attention, in France, a single shooting incident has ignited widespread consequences. This stark disparity reflects the true essence of a nation that upholds freedom.” [NewsX] [FirstPost]

Khan, 72, argued that Pakistan needs to transition from a state dominated by security institutions into a democratic state focused on looking after the welfare of its 231 million people.

Pakistan: Army sacks three officers over May protests; more than 100 PTI supporters on trial in military courts

(lm) Pakistan’s army has fired three senior officers, including a lieutenant general, for their conduct during the protests following the May arrest of former prime minister and the leader of the country’s main opposition party, Imran Khan.

Major General Ahmad Sharif Chaudry told a told a nationally televised news conference on June 26 that fifteen other officials, including three major generals and seven brigadiers, had been punished; several relatives of former army generals were among those facing trials for allegedly aiding and abetting the violence. He did not say how many of those on trial were civilian or military officials, only that they "have the right of access to civil lawyers" as well as the right of appeal. [BBC]

Kahn was arrested on the premises of an Islamabad court on May 9, sparking nationwide unrest [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2]. Although the Supreme Court outlawed Khan's arrest after three days, thousands of PTI supporters tore through military buildings across the country, setting them on fire, including the house of an army general [see AiR No. 20, May/2023, 3]. At least eight people died in the protests, and more than 5,000 people were arrested - although most were later released.

It was against this backdrop that Chaudry also revealed that more than 100 people are being prosecuted in military tribunals for their alleged roles in the violent protests, adding that civilian courts had transferred the cases after examining the proofs against the suspects. [Voice of America]

Pakistan: Government reaches staff-level agreement with IMF over USD 3 billion funding

(tj/lm) Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have reached a crucial staff-level agreement over USD 3 billion of funding, a long-awaited bailout for the South Asian nation's ailing economy. The nine-month Stand-by-Arrangement (SDA) is subject to approval by the IMF's Executive Board, which is expected to make a final decision by mid-July.

Talks between Pakistan and the IMF had stalled in December after the multilateral lender delayed the release of a crucial tranche of USD 1.1 billion from a USD 6.5 billion Extended Financing Facility originally signed in 2019. Late last month, Islamabad changed its budget for the financial year starting July 1, in a final effort to clinch the stalled EFF, which expired on June 30. [AiR No. 26, June/2023, 4]

The deal between the IMF and Pakistan comes days after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif spoke with Kristalina Georgieva, the managing director of the IMF, on June 27. The two also met on June 22 on the sidelines of a global finance meeting in Paris.

Notably, the proposed SDA is higher than what Pakistan was expecting: Islamabad was awaiting the release of the remaining USD 2.5 billion from the 2019 EFF program. The South Asian nation will become the IMF's fourth largest debtor in the world by amount, only second to Argentina, Egypt and Ukraine. [International Monetary Fund] [Reuters] [The Straits Times]

Pakistan: TTP commander arrested in Punjab province

(lm) Security forces in Pakistan's Punjab province have arrested an alleged main commander of the Tehrik-i-Taliban, the largest militant organization in the country that operates under the larger umbrella of the Pakistani Taliban. [SAMAA]

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

Cambodia: Prime Minister's election campaign kicks off

(dql) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen begun his election campaign on July 1 Saturday, three weeks ahead of the general elections which his Cambodian People's Party is set win after the biggest rival, the Candlelight Party, was disqualified from the poll [see AiR No. 22, May/2023, 5].

Around 9.7 million citizens will vote on July 23 to elect 125 members of the National Assembly from eighteen parties. [AP News]

Cambodia: Government sanctions members of Meta Oversight Board

(dql) Cambodia issued on July 4 a ban on 22 members of the Oversight Board of Meta Platforms. Inc. – the company which runs Facebook – prohibiting them from entering Cambodia.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cited for the decision the board's recommnedation to suspend of Prime Minister Hun Sen's Facebook account that deprived Cambodian citizens of their "right to receive credible news from a leader whom they support and admire." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Cambodia]

In an earlier move last week, the board recommended the immediate suspension of Hun Sen's Facebook and Instagram accounts for six months, arguing that the Prime Minister's "use of the platforms to incite violence against his political opposition, taken in the context of his history, his government's human rights abuses, and the upcoming election combine to require immediate action." [Al Jazeera]

Indonesia: President launches reparations program

(ys) Indonesian President Joko Widodo has launched the reparation program for past human rights violations victims.

The non-judicial program is establised after the President expressed deep regret last January over 12 deadly events from 1965-2003. During that time, over 500,000 people were killed and more than a million were jailed, which included suspects of communists and their sympathizers purged by the military under the rule of former President Suharto.

The program will provide health care, scholarship, house renovation, etc., though the number of people eligible for the program has not been disclosed.

The President is hoping that the country will start the healing process from its bloody past. Several victims and activists have refused the program and are hoping for the judicial process to be implemented for the perpetrators. [BBC, in Bahasa Indonesia] [Reuters]

Indonesia: Corruption cases found within KPK

(ys) The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) faces a new allegation of embezzlement.

At a press conference this week, the KPK exposed an ongoing investigation of misconduct within its ranks and found an indication that its own administrative workers embezzled travel budgets for KPK employees between 2021 and 2022, amounting to IDR 550 million (USD 36,600).

This case adds another allegation of misconduct within KPK after recent cases of bribe-taking and sexual assault dragged KPK's name into the mud. The new finding raises concerns about public trust in KPK, the

only institution established to combat corruption in the country.

Activists and a lawmaker have urged the KPK to take firm action against employee misconduct to save the institution's reputation. [Kompas, in Bahasa Indonesia] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Safety concern over incidents at nickel smelters

(ys) Another fire at a Gunbuster Nickel Industry (GNI) plant in Central Sulawesi has raised concern over its security after an incident occurred at the same facility a month earlier. Police reported one worker died and six were injured in the latest incident.

GNI is owned by China's Jiangsu Delong Nickel Industry and started its operation in 2021. Five months earlier a clash broke out between local workers and Chinese workers over salary and safety concerns, where it turned deadly, and two workers were killed. One of them was a Chinese national. Investigation into the recent incident is underway. [Reuters]

Indonesia: Second C-130J Super Hercules arrived in Jakarta

(ys) The second C-130J Super Hercules tactical aircraft ordered by Indonesia has arrived in Jakarta. The Minister of Defense is planning the handover to the Indonesian Air Force (TNI AU) within several days.

Indonesia is acquiring five units of Super Hercules from Lockheed Martin. The first one arrived in Jakarta in March, the third is predicted to be in Jakarta in July, the fourth one in October, and the fifth one in January 2024.

All five aircraft will be assigned to the Squadron 31 of Halim Perdana Kusuma Airbase in Jakarta to support both war military operations (Operasi Militer Perang) and military operations in environments other than war (Operasi Militer Selain Perang). [Indonesian Ministry of Defense, in Bahasa Indonesia]

Indonesia: Quran burning in Sweden condemned

(ys) The Indonesian government expressed condemnation over the burning of the Quran in Sweden.

As one of the largest Muslim populations, Indonesia finds the act has deeply hurt the feelings of Muslims and it cannot be justified.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also reiterated that freedom of expression must also respect the values and beliefs of other religions. Meanwhile, the deputy chairman for foreign affairs of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) called on the Swedish Embassy in Jakarta to explain the situation and to guarantee that Sweden will arrest those that express hatred for religion. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Education and Cultural Ministry maintains an unqualified opinion

(ys) The Indonesian Education, Cultural, Research and Technology Ministry (Kemendikbudristek) maintains an Unqualified Opinion (Wajar Tanpa Pengecualian) for its 2022 financial report during the Audit Board of the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK RI) Examination Results Submission, marking the 10th consecutive year receiving this achievement. The financial report is a form of accountability to the public, where last year the Education and Cultural Ministry had realized a budget of IDR 81,34 trillion (USD 5,4 billion) out of the IDR 84,92 trillion budget ceiling. A percentage of the remainder of the funds have already been deposited, and the rest is being processed in accordance with the recommendations of BPK RI. [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Lack of climate agenda in 2024 election

(ys) Despite Indonesia's goal to reach net-zero emissions by 2060 and many voters' wishes for climate commitments, no candidates for the 2024 election seem to show a meaningful climate pledge for their policies.

Speaking at the 2023 Indonesia Net Zero Summit, the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs and Golkar Chairman, Airlangga Hartanto, places his bet on technology to reach net zero. He believes that nuclear energy, carbon capture and storage technology and

the carbon market could be utilized to address climate change and economic development.

At the same event, presidential nominees Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan spoke through pre-recorded messages about their beliefs on the climate agenda. However, many voters see such pledge as a mere lip service as no concrete agenda has ever been put forward by any candidate. [The Jakarta Post]

Lao PDR: Prime Minister urges collaborative efforts in combating drug issues

(ws) Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone of Laos emphasized the urgent need for collective action across all sectors to combat drug trafficking.

On the occasion of the 36th anniversary of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, the Prime Minister called for collaborative action, recognizing that effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by the drug problem requires consistent cooperation and joint initiatives.

The prevalence of drug abuse in Laos is a significant concern, affecting not only cities but also rural and remote regions. The consequences of drug abuse extend beyond social problems, such as violence and crime, posing a direct threat to national security, socio-economic development, and the well-being of Lao citizens. This is particularly critical for the youth population, who play a vital role in the country's labor force and contribute to the future of the national economy. [Vientiane Times]

Lao PDR: Prime Minister vows to lead economic recovery as National Assembly urges action

(ws) Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone pledged to tackle economic downturn after the National Assembly urged the government to respond to the rampant inflation.

During the opening day of the 5th ordinary session of the National Assembly's 9th legislature, the Vice President of the parliamentary body, Mr Sommad Pholsena, called upon the government to address the concerning social and economic challenges faced by the people currently. [Vientiane Times]

Responding to this, the Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone pledged to the National Assembly members that Laos would not default on its debts, and that the Laotian government would impose measures to stabilize currency exchange rates, curb inflation, and regulate prices of goods in local markets.

He also pledged to repay 8,000 billion kip (420,000 USD) of debts owed to private enterprises by transferring the amounts to commercial banks, in a bid to support the financial liquidity of private companies and help them overcome economic challenges.

Furthermore, the government plans to enhance the availability of foreign currency for fuel importers, modernize foreign currency trading services, regulate import-export transactions, expand foreign exchange units, and combat currency manipulation. The government's efforts will also focus on improving the investment climate, expediting project approvals, advancing mega projects, implementing reforms in state-owned enterprises, and promoting both domestic and export-oriented production. [Vientiane Times 2]

Malaysia: Preparation underway for upcoming state elections

(jl) Preparations are in full swing for the upcoming state elections in Malaysia, signaling a new chapter in the country's fragile political landscape. The dissolution of previous state assemblies has prompted state leaders to gear up for the upcoming elections in Penang, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan. Although the

The previous political scene saw Pakatan Harapan, led by Anwar Ibrahim, holding control over three of the six assemblies including Penang and Selangor, two of the wealthiest states in Malaysia, as well as Negeri Sembilan. On the other hand, the opposition coalition, Perikatan Nasional (PN) held control over Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah. These upcoming state elections will play a pivotal role in shaping the perception of solidarity and confidence in Anwar Ibrahim's leadership as Prime Minister and his coalition government.

In anticipation of the elections, certain states such as Kedah are implementing heightened policing measures. This involves closely monitoring "hotspots" where public provocations are likely to occur. According to the State police chief, there are over 20 locations that fall within this category. [The Star,1]

Meanwhile, leaders from UMNO in Johor have committed to supporting election preparations by providing resources to 20 areas in Terengganu, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. [The Star,2]

At present, the dates of the upcoming election have not been announced.

Malaysia: Probe into ex-US Navy Seal completed

(jl) Ryan Bates, a former US Navy SEAL, was barred from leaving the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) after officers found empty ammunition magazines in his luggage. Ryan argued that the items were used for the filming of a Netflix series 'The World's Toughest Forces' about Malaysia's elite forces called Gerak Khas.

At present, the Selangor police chief has concluded the investigation into his case and will be referring it to the Deputy Public Prosecutor for any charges they may file. [Malay Mail]

Myanmar: Garment workers arrested after demanding higher wages in Myanmar

(ha) At a garment factory in Yangon, five workers, who demanded an increase of daily basic salary of 800 kyat (38 US cents) from the current 4800 kyat, were arrested and sent to interrogation centers. In another garment factory, eight workers were arrested for making a similar demand.

The Federation of Myanmar Construction and Timber Industry Trade Unions submitted a report on these cases to the International Labor Organization (ILO), while the European Union's Delegation to Myanmar issued a letter of concern over the detention and welfare of workers working in the garment industry and those who claim labor rights. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta cuts internet and phone connection in Kayah state

(ha) During these months, fighting between Myanmar junta army and resistance forces has been going on all over Kayah state. Due to these battles, the Myanmar

junta has cut the phone lines and internet connection in Kayah state. According to the locals, Ooredoo and Atom phone and internet services are no longer available and even though Mpt and Mytel are available, most locals do not use these cards. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Important bridge blown up

(ha) On June 28, the Karen National Union (KNU) blew up a bridge on Yangon's Mawlamyaing highway and on June 29, they attacked junta officials' inspectors who came to inspect the damage with a drone.

The bridge is an important bridge for the flow of trade, but also served as important support route for the Myanmar junta. It is believed that the bridge was blown up with the intention of delaying the military junta's plans because the junta was supplying weapons and supplies through this route. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Central Bank plans to allow Russia Mir Cards in by December

(wn) The Central Bank of Myanmar (CBM) has announced plans to incorporate Russia's Mir card into their banking system once technical issues have been resolved and local payment systems have been connected.

CBM Governor Daw Than Than Swe announced at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum that Myanmar hopes to start using Mir cards in December of this year, while also allowing for Myanmar's local bank cards to be used in Russia.

The collaboration between Russia's Mir cards and Myanmar's banking system was announced by the Myanmar junta in August 2020 in response to increasing US and Western financial sanctions and decreasing foreign reserves. A memorandum of understanding was signed to integrate payment systems between the two countries' central banks.

However, there has not been much usage of Mir cards by locals in Myanmar as they cannot be used in Thailand and Singapore. Therefore, CBM plans to promote the use of Mir cards in Myanmar, especially among Russian tourists. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Military court sentences male LGBTQ activist to ten years in prison

(wn) According to activist Saw Han Nway Oo, Justin Min Hein, the president of the LGBTQ Union in Mandalay and a supporter of anti-junta movements, has been given a 10-year sentence by the military for violating the Anti-Terrorism law.

Saw Han Nway Oo expressed concern for Justin's health, as he has a history of stomach problems and the food in prison is reportedly poor.

Justin was arrested by military troops in September 2022 and spent almost a year at the Yay Kyi Ai Interrogation Center awaiting his trial. [RFA-Burmese]

Myanmar: Resistance forces shoots down junta aircraft in Kayah state

(ha) On June 30, Karenni National People's Liberation Front (KNPLF) camps near Baw La Kae, Kayah state, were attacked by junta airstrikes while a junta aircraft was shot down by resistance forces.

Although the KNPLF forces were not equipped with air defence systems and anti-aircraft weapons, they were able to shoot down the junta aircraft. According to a member of the KNPLF, the military aircraft flew low and crashed near the Ywar Thit township due to their firing. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: NUG interrogates former NLD lawmaker

(wn) According to the National Unity Government (NUG), former NLD lawmaker U Win Myint Aung is currently questioned over allegations of working with the military.

U Win Myint Aung was arrested by the local People's Defense Force in Sagaing Division on June 8 and was later handed over to the People's Security Force (PSF) of NUG's Ministry of Defense.

U Nay Phone Latt stated that complaints were made against U Win Myint Aung, and he had signed a document promising not to participate in anti-junta activities but had acted against this promise according to the regime's wishes.

The public reported his actions, and he was arrested by resistance forces and handed over to the PSF on June 7. NUG Home Affairs Ministry is currently interrogating him.

In late March, U Win Myint Aung and three other NLD members were expelled by the NLD's central executive committee for collaborating with the junta and misusing the party's name for their activities. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Number of IDPs above 1.8 million

(wn) Myanmar's number of internally displaced people (IDPs) has increased to over 1.8 million population, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Prior to the February 2021 military coup, it the number stood at 328,000.

The UNHCR reports that Sagaing Region has become the place with the highest number of IDPs, with around 41 per cent (765,2000) being from there. Additionally, another 1.5 million people from seven states and four regions were also displaced due to fighting between local resistance groups and military troops.

13 percent of the country's IDPs are from Rakhine State, 11 percent from Magwe Region, 6 percent each are from Kachin and Karen states, 5 percent each are from Bago Region, and Kayah and Shan states, 3 percent each are from Chin State and Tanintharyi Region, and 2 percent from Mon State. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Ex-publisher of The Irrawaddy jailed for five years

(wn) The military junta sentenced U Thaung Win, the former publisher of The Irrawaddy, to five years in prison for sedition. He was arrested in September 2022 for violating the Publishing and Distribution Act by reporting news that "negatively affected national security, rule of law and public peace."

In 2012, U Thaung Win sought a publishing license for The Irrawaddy following democratic reforms in Myanmar. However, he did not participate in the editorial department or its decision-making.

A year and a half later, he was arrested after the regime filed a lawsuit against The Irrawaddy. This led

to the journalists going into hiding to evade arrest by the junta, and the organization now operates offshore. U Thaung Win departed the organization during its move offshore.

The situation in Myanmar continues to grow more concerning as the military regime takes steps to silence the press. The latest move against The Irrawaddy, with the jailing of the online news agency's publisher, is just the most recent example of this trend.

Back in March of this year, the military regime sued the news outlet for "disregarding" the armed forces in its reporting on the anti-regime protests. Since then, The Irrawaddy has faced a series of raids and other forms of harassment. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: National Unity Government appoints a Rohingya activist as Deputy Minister

(ha) The Myanmar National Unity Government (NUG) has appointed U Aung Kyaw Moe, a Rohingya activist, as the deputy minister of human rights. He served as an advisor to the ministry of human rights for two years.

Rohingya activists say that they welcome the appointment as a way for the Rohingya minority to get equal opportunities.

U Aung Kyaw Moe is a graduate of the George W Bush and Barack Obama's leadership programs, the United States Institute of Peace and Dalai Lama Fellowship. He has more than 15 years' work experience in iUN agencies and NGOs and has won four international awards for his human rights activities.

His brother was assassinated by unknown assailants for serving in the NUG. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Ongoing trend of forced demolition of residential areas

(cho) On June 23 more than 100 residents of Malamyinegyun town in Ayeyarwady Region faced the distressing situation of being forcibly evicted from their homes by the General Administration Department (GAD) of the township.

The eviction was prompted by influential rice dealers in the town who sent a letter to Lieutenant-General Aung Lin Dwe requesting the removal of what they referred to as 'squatters' living on the disputed land. The rice dealers proposed utilizing the land for public infrastructure development, such as constructing fresh markets and parks, while also expressing concerns about the potential hazards posed by the narrowing Yazudaing river near the disputed land.

However, the affected residents countered these claims by asserting that they had legally purchased the land after the year 2012 when senior staff members of the Malamyinegyun township GAD sold plots of the disputed land. They believed in the legality of their ownership and had placed their trust in the government's administrative processes. However, ever since 2012, these residents were constantly threatened with eviction unless they paid bribes to GAD staff and other authorities [Mizzima]

Another similar incident happened in Nan Oo Lwin village in Patheingyi township, Mandalay Region. On June 27, the State Administration Council's (SAC) farming land management committee at the township level issued a statement mandating the demolition of houses by July 6. These houses were allegedly constructed without proper building permission on farming land. Copies of the statement were distributed to all houses and buildings in the area, signaling the imminent threat of demolition.

The committee cited Article 17(d) of the farming land regulations, which strictly prohibits the construction of houses on agricultural land. Failure to comply with this regulation may result in legal consequences for the individuals involved.

Interestingly, when these plots of land were originally sold, the authorities remained silent on the matter. Therefore, those who purchased the land went on to build cement and brick structures, including two or three-story buildings.

Since the coup, more than 3,000 houses in Chanmyatharsi and Phyigyitagon townships have already faced forced demolitions, with the occupants labeled as 'squatters'. [Mizzima]

This trend of forced demolitions highlights the widespread vulnerability faced by residents and the increasing threat to their homes and livelihoods. It also raises questions about fairness and consistency of land management policy in Myanmar.

Philippines: Supreme Court acquits former president in misconduct case

(dql) The Supreme Court has acquitted former president Rodrigo Duterte of charges of misconduct in the context of the demolition of a canal project in Davao City in 2010 when he served as the city's mayo.

The case was filed before the Office of the Ombudsman by former Davao City first district representative Prospero Nograles, who initiated the project in 2006.

In its ruling on June 29, the court upheld the 2011 decision of the Court of Appeals (CA) that overturned the ombudsman's order to suspend Duterte for half a year. [The Phil Star]

Philippines: Police accused of brutality and gender-based violence against transgender actor

(dql) The police are facing accusations of brutality and gender-based violence committed against transgender actor Awra Briguela who was arrested on June 29.

The accusations have been by LGBTQIA+ groups Bahaghari and University of the Philippines (UP) Bahaghari, referring to videos circulated online showing Awra in a physical confrontation with some men who allegedly harassed Awra's female companions. Upon their arrival on the scene, Makati City police placed handcuffs on the exclaiming and struggling actor who was then put into a vehicle.

Bahaghari, a nationwide coalition of various LGBT+ affiliates, member organizations, and advocates that take a stand on issues such as discrimination, homophobia, transphobia, among other social issues, demanded the immediate release of Awra, with UP Bahaghari calling the police a "macho-feudal institution borne of patriarchy." [The Phil Star]

Philippines: Police raid premise offshore gaming service provider in human trafficking investigation

(dql) The Philippine National Police (PNP) deployed on July 1 nearly 300 police officers to raid seven buildings of a Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (Pogo) firm in Las Piñas City in an ongoing investigation into the

background of the rescued foreign workers suspected to be victims of human trafficking.

Late last month, more than 2,700 Philippine nationals and foreign workers of offshore gaming service provider Xinchuang Network Technology Inc. were rescued. [AP News]

The latest raid aimed at obtaining the personal profiles of the remaining 1,284 rescued foreign nationals.

The firm was ordered to halt all offshore gaming activities until the completion of the investigation. [Inquirer.Net]

Philippines: Criminal gang members with links to militant Islamic organization arrested

(dql) Security forces arrested four criminal gang members believed to connected to Abu Sayyaf, the militant Islamic organization based on Basilan Island, one of the southern islands in the Philippines, on June 29 in Zamboanga Sibugay province.

Among the arrested are Abral Abdusalam, ranked third on the list of most wanted persons in the province, and three of his followers. Abdusalam is accused of kidnapping, serious illegal detention and murder. [The Phil Star 1]

Meanwhile, the police arrested earlier last week Edgar Manlapaz who is suspected of being high-ranking leader of the New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

According to the police, Manlapaz served as an information and planning officer of the Guerilla Front 88 of Northeastern Mindanao Regional Committee of the NPA and faces over ten criminal cases pending in different courts, including accusation of executing villagers who refused to pay "protection money." [The Phil Star 2]

Philippines: New missile systems to be procured

(dql) According to Philippine Army Chief Romeo Brawner, the Philippines seeks to purchase new missile systems – among them US HIMARS MLRS and Indian BrahMos supersonic anti-ship cruise missiles – as part

of efforts to modernize the Army's capabilities as the country's military shifts to a territorial defense posture.

Brawner disclosed this plan at a ceremony held to mark the Army Artillery Regiment's 125th Anniversary on June 29 1 and as the Philippines has entered the final phase of the Armed Forces' 15-year-long Horizon 3 modernization program. [Naval News]

In an interview, given on the same day during the the celebration of Philippine Navy's 125th anniversary, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. revealed plans of his administration to purchase the the country's first-ever submarine.

This reflects the country's attempt to catch up with other Southeast Asian countries who already possess submarines, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Singapore. [Inquirer.Net]

Singapore: Integration of new migrations needs improvement - President Halimah

(tb) Singaporean President Halimah states that it is necessary to evaluate existing systems and determine their efficacy in accommodating and assimilating new migrants.

Singapore is trying to strengthen multiracialism and create a national identity in Singapore. However, she sees growing concern that new migrants in the city exclude themselves from the Singaporean society which composes a threat to the concept of multiracialism. Therefore, she invited the state to take on action to deeper integrate new migrations into the Singaporean society. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Law and home, foreign affairs ministers cleared after probe into plush properties

(tb) Singapore's government on June 28 announced that the law and home affairs minister, K Shanmugam, and the foreign minister, Vivian Balakrishnan, have been cleared of wrongdoing following an investigation into their rental of state-owned bungalows located in an upscale area. [Yahoo! News] [CNA] [Reuters]

The two cabinet heavyweights have been under public scrutiny in recent weeks for living in expensive colonial-era bungalows. Some lawmakers have asked

them to explain their choices and accused them of paying lower rent than the fair market value. However, both ministers denied wrongdoing.

Against this backdrop, the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) investigated the case for potential corruption or criminal wrongdoing. The findings published last week said there was no preferential treatment given to the ministers in securing the rental contracts and no further action should be taken.

Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on July 3 said he retained "full confidence" in the two senior ministers, adding the handling of the matter put on display the ruling party's unwavering stance against corruption. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore: Deputy Prime Minister Wong appointed chairman of central bank

(tb/lm) The Monetary Authority of Singapore, the city-state's financial regulator and central bank, has named Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong as chairman of its board of directors effective July 8. Wong will replace Tharman Shanmugaratnam, who held the role for 12 years since May 2011 but announced last month that he will be running in presidential elections to be held by mid-September. [Bloomberg] [CNBC]

In April of last year, Wong, who also serves as Singapore's finance minister, was elected to be the leader of the ruling People's Action Party's (PAP) fourth-generation (4G) team, paving the way for him to be the city state's next prime minister.

Singapore: Suicide rate rises to 22-year high; 476 suicides reported in 2022

(tb) Suicides in Singapore rose by 26 percent in 2022 compared to the year prior, with 476 reported suicides, the highest number in 22 years. Notably, the rates of suicide among young people aged 10-29 and elderly individuals aged 70-79 were especially worrisome, according to Non-profit suicide prevention center Samaritans of Singapore (SOS). [Japan Times] [TOC]

Singapore: Country shows its will to pay price for peace, defence minister says

(tb) Singapore's Defense Minister Ng Eng Hen has stated that the city state has shown that it is willing to pay the price peace when it created a strong military that protects the economy and security of the state. He said that as the Russian invasion of Ukraine shows, stability is not given. Thanks to the founders of Singapore in the past, the country now has a strong military like the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). [The Straits Times]

Thailand: Opposition parties settle house speaker dispute; Prachachat party leader runs unopposed

(aj/nk) A day before voting in the new Speaker of the House on July 4, the Move Forward Party (MFP) and Pheu Thai Party (PTP) reached an agreement to nominate Prachachat party leader Wan Muhamad Noor Matha as the sole candidate for the House Speaker, who ran unopposed.

The last-minute nomination ended weeks of political dispute over the position. The decision was announced by MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat, who stated that the first deputy House speaker will be MFP Phitsanulok MP, Padipat Santipada, and PTP Chiang Rai MP, Pichet Chuamuangphan for second. Both MPs were successfully elected into their respective deputy speaker roles.

In the vote for the first deputy House speaker, Padipat ran against the United Thai Nation Party's (UTNP) list-MP Vittaya Kaewparadai and won 312 votes to Vittaya's 188. Unlike the position of Prime Minister, which requires a joint vote of the two houses, voting for the key positions in the House of Representatives is voted within the house. This allows the 312 votes of the coalition to beat out the 188 votes of conservative opposition in the 500-seat lower house of parliament. Pichet ran uncontested in the election for second deputy House speaker.

The coalition parties have expressed their support for this arrangement, and Pita emphasized that they will adhere to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and provide their utmost support for his bid to become the next prime minister. With Wan Muhamad as the Speaker of the House and both parties holding deputy speaker positions, they plan to focus on passing legislation for amnesty and military reform. Move Forward's endorsement of Wan Muhamad as House speaker signifies a concession from their earlier insistence on having their own candidate for the position.

The gradual process of transitioning to the new government began on July 3, which commenced with an official opening ceremony, presided over by King Maha Vajiralongkorn at the parliament building, the King emphasized that the country's prosperity hinges on MPs prioritizing the nation and its people. At the first meeting of the new assembly, the King urged parliamentary members to govern and enact laws with intelligence, competence, and honesty while considering the benefit of the nation as their utmost priority. Accompanied by Queen Suthida Bajrasudhabimalalakshana, the King's message was delivered to caretaker Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha, his cabinet, and the newly elected MPs in attendance.

After the key positions of parliament are voted in on July 4, the next step in forming the next government is the election of the Prime Minister role, who will be voted in by both houses of the National Assembly on August 3, followed by the new cabinet, a week later. On August 11, the new Thai government will pledge their allegiance to the King. [AiR No. 26, June/2023, 4] [Thai Enquirer] [Thai PBS 1] [Thai PBS 2] [The Diplomat]

Thailand: Court acquits charges against protestors for allegedly obstructing royal procession in 2020

(aj) The Thai government dropped all charges against five pro-democracy protestors for allegedly obstructing the royal procession of Her Majesty Queen Suthida Bajrasudhabimalalakshana.

On October 14, 2020, amid the 2020-2021 anti-government protests, Queen Suthida and heir apparent Prince Dipangkorn Rasmijoti were traveling through a crowd on a street close to the Government House in Bangkok, the focal point of the youth-led demonstrations that day. Of the dozens of protestors demanding democratic reforms that the royal entourage passed by, five protestors were accused of threatening the Queen's liberty and an emergency decree was enacted that forbade the gathering of five or more people.

Under Section 110 of the Thai criminal code, members of the royal family cannot be threatened or physically harmed; violators may be sentenced to life or face the death penalty if found in transgression of the law.

The court found insufficient evidence to charge the five defendants with Section 110. According to the decision, protestors were unaware that the queen's

motorcade was passing through the crowd nor did the police officers themselves know which members of the royal family were traveling that day, and thus, did not communicate the matter with the public. In the decision, it was also mentioned that the protestors did not have access to confidential information on the queen's travel route and once the protestors realized the motorcade was a royal procession, they tried to clear off the streets.

Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, a legal advocacy group that represented the five defendants charged with Section 110, commented that the outcome of the case was 'a first of its kind.' Those found guilty of Section 110 may face a minimum of 16 years in prison, be sentenced life, or receive the death penalty. A number of political analysts found the acquittal of all charges to be rather surprising, as the courts have often shown a lack of tolerance for any action that legally harms or alters the image and power of the monarchy, as evidenced by cases involving Section 112, the provision on lèse-majesté.

Many protestors involved in the 2020-2021 demonstrations, including minors, have been charged with Section 112. Since the widespread anti-government protests, over 200 cases involving this charge have been filed, from rubber ducks that depict reigning King Rama X to social media posts that criticize the crown. [CNN] [The Diplomat] [The New York Times]

Thailand: Election Commission concludes probe into MFP leader Pita

(nk) The Election Commission (EC) is reaching the final stages of its investigation into Move Forward Party (MFP) leader Pita Limjaroenrat's alleged violation of the organic law on the election of MPs. The EC's fact-finding committee had a 20-day deadline to examine claims that Pita ran in the election while knowing he was unqualified, contravening Section 151 of the law.

The committee, empowered to summon Pita as the accusation carries criminal penalties, is close to completing the inquiry. If evidence supports the violation, the case may proceed to court, potentially resulting in imprisonment, fines, and a 20-year ban from running in elections.

The focus of the alleged violation revolves around Pita's ownership of iTV shares at the time of registering his candidacy. The EC clarified that establishing a separate panel to address the Constitutional Court's

involvement concerning Pita's MP status is unnecessary. Instead, the election commissioners will base their decision on the ongoing investigation into the alleged Section 151 violation. The EC emphasized the decision-making process is independent of the imminent parliamentary vote for a new prime minister. Additionally, the EC is reviewing the MFP's potential involvement in other offenses related to its proposed amendment of the lese majeste law.

Parallel to the EC's probe, political activist Ruangkrai Leekitwattana called on Pita to provide details regarding the recent sale of his land plot, following media reports of a substantial discrepancy between the sale price and the declared value in Pita's assets and debts declaration. Moreover, the Senate committee on political development and public participation initiated a separate investigation into Pita's qualifications and eligibility, requesting information pertaining to his financial records.

However, the EC secretary-general Sawang Boonmee confirmed that the probe is nearing completion, and the inquiry committee does not currently foresee the need for an extension beyond the July 3 deadline. However, if a formal request is made, the deadline could potentially be extended by up to 15 days, further prolonging the resolution of the case. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4] “

Thailand: Prime minister candidate Pita challenged by senate opposition and disregard for popular mandate

(nk) Pita Limjaroenrat, the candidate for prime minister from the Move Forward party, faces a formidable obstacle in the 250-member Senate, appointed by the royalist military establishment after the 2014 coup. A significant number of senators oppose Pita's proposal to ease penalties for criticizing the royal family, seemingly indifferent to his victory in the popular vote.

Senator Kittisak Ratanawaha expressed confidence that Pita would receive support from fewer than five senators. He anticipated that most senators would abstain from voting, complicating the Move Forward-led coalition's need for support from other parties to secure the required 376 votes. Senator Kittisak also indicated that if Pita fails to secure the position, senators would likely support the prime minister candidate from the second-largest party, Pheu Thai. However, he emphasized that multiple parties would seek the prime minister post, emphasizing the need

for the country to progress regardless of the outcome. [The Nation]

Senator Prapanth Koonmee, reflecting the sentiment among many lawmakers in the upper house, declared, "It's not our job to listen to the people." He asserted that lawmakers had already made up their minds, stating that personal preferences and suitability outweighed popular support. This entrenched opposition within the Senate presents a significant challenge for Pita's aspirations to assume the role of prime minister. [The Japan Times]

Thailand: Move Forward's proposal to change Thailand's national day sparks debate

(nk) Move Forward MP Rangsiman Rome recently proposed to former parliament president Chuan Leekpai that June 24 become a national holiday, but the proposal was not realized. Historically, June 24th was recognized as Thailand's national day. The day commemorates the pivotal event when the Khana Ratsadon (People's Party) orchestrated a peaceful revolution to shift Thailand from an absolute to a constitutional monarchy during the reign of King Prajadhipok. Nevertheless, in 1963, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, a military strongman, changed the national day to December 5th, coinciding with the birthday of the late King Bhumibol Adulyadej, also known as King Rama IX.

However, Srettha Thavisin, chief advisor to the Pheu Thai party's head, emphasized that December 5th is a significant day symbolizing Thailand's democratic nature with the King as the head of state. He warned that altering the national day could increase social friction and urged the party to focus on improving people's livelihoods, suggesting that reverting to June 24th as the national day could potentially escalate societal tensions. He emphasized that the Move Forward party's focus should be on democratic principles and addressing the pressing concerns of the people instead of advocating for a change in Thailand's national day. [Bangkok Post] [ThaiPBS]

Thailand: UTNP leader resigns as list-MP to 'focus' on duties as prime minister's secretary-general

(aj) United Thai Nation Party (UTNP) leader Pirapan Salirathavibhaga announced his resignation as a list-MP to 'focus' on his duties as caretaker Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's secretary-general. The move by Pirapan, announced in a Facebook post on June 30, surprised many UTNP supporters and political observers. Although list-MPs may not hold public office while serving their house term, the newly-elected lower house of parliament have not been sworn in yet. The caretaker Prayuth government ends in late July and the incoming prime minister – to be voted on either July 13 or 14 by the National Assembly – will be sworn into office on August 3. [Bangkok Post] [Facebook, Pirapan Salirathavibhaga, in Thai]

Thailand: Royal family member apologizes for accusing Thai volleyball team of worsening social conflict

(nk) Chulcherm Yugala, a staunch royalist, has issued an apology to Ajcharaporn Kongyot, a Thai national team volleyball player, for mistakenly criticizing her use of the three-finger gesture, which is a sign of protest in Thailand. Chulcherm questioned Ajcharaporn's actions on Facebook, suggesting that she should keep her sentiments to herself while performing her national duties. However, it was revealed that the gesture was simply a volleyball tactic used by all teams to indicate three hitters on the front line. The Volleyball Association of Thailand clarified that Ajcharaporn was not engaged in politics but was communicating with her teammates during a game. The association emphasized its dedication to the country's pillars of Nation, Religion, and Monarchy, urging support for the team without political involvement. [Facebook 1, in Thai] [Facebook 2, in Thai] [Thai PBS]

Thailand: Ministry of Finance looks to restructure household debt

(aj) In the face of increasing household debt, the Thai Ministry of Finance is bringing together all relevant financial institutions – the Bank of Thailand (BoT), the Fiscal Policy Office (FPO), commercial banks and other related agencies – to collectively restructure debt repayments and cap national household debt. Government agencies and onlookers have warned that rising household debt will drag economic growth and is a threat to financial stability. Thailand's financial situation can largely be attributed to populist measures enacted by former Prime Minister Yingluck

Shinawatra in 2011, such as tax rebates for first-time car buyers, which was a trend continued by the nearly decade long rule of caretaker Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha's military-backed government and exacerbated by the loss of jobs in the tourism sector during the pandemic.

Thai household debt has been increasing for over a decade from 59.3 percent of the GDP and reached USD 460 billion, or 90.6 percent of Thailand's GDP at the end of the first quarter this year. BoT, Thailand's central bank, is looking to reduce personal debt to less than 80 percent of the GDP. Under the BoT's definition of household debt, personal borrowing includes real estate purchases, student loans, agricultural cooperative agreements, microfinance, and automotive loans.

Although Thailand is recovering from the economic impacts of the pandemic, like many other countries, it has been steadily increasing interest rates to reign in rising inflation, which subsequently increases the cost of living. The most vulnerable group among personal borrowers are low-income earners with high debt, primarily housing or automotive loans, but low ability to pay it back. According to business analysts, the plight of Thai borrowers is also compounded by a competitive credit market that essentially makes credit more easily accessible.

According to FPO Director-General Pornchai Thiraveja, extending the debt repayment deadline has not been a sustainable solution, only prolonging the debt problem and, instead, urges financial institutions to consider the debtor's repayment capabilities and contractual obligations to more effectively reduce the burden of debt repayment. Some measures by public agencies to address household debt have been taken. The FPO drafted a royal decree to cap interest rates for purchases of new and used vehicles, which the FPO expects will better protect consumers and reduce household debt risk. The Ministry of Finance is also organizing public awareness campaigns to inform consumers and promote responsible borrowing. The BoT has also been documenting household debt extensively to help design solutions that more effectively address the debt problem. [Bloomberg] [National News Bureau of Thailand] [Thailand Business News]

Thailand bans crypto exchanges from offering lending services

(aj) Against a backdrop of increasing wariness on the security of cryptocurrency, Thailand's Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) banned digital asset service providers from lending to crypto investors. SEC's stricter stance on crypto exchanges follows the 2022 crypto liquidity crisis, including Celsius and FTX, which prompted international scrutiny on regulations in the digital asset sector. To increase protection measures for crypto investors, the Thai SEC now prohibits crypto exchanges from using customer funds for investments and bans depository services that offers returns to investors. [Cryptopolitan]

Timor-Leste: Independence hero Xanana Gusmão sworn in as Prime Minister

(nk) Xanana Gusmão, a former Timor-Leste independence fighter and former president, has officially taken office as the country's new prime minister in a ceremony held in the capital city of Dili.

Gusmao became the nation's first president between 2002 and 2007, and served as prime minister between 2007 and 2015. Last week, he was sworn in following his party's victory in the parliamentary elections held in May. At the time, the National Congress of the Reconstruction of East Timor (CNRT), led by Gusmão, emerged as the winning party but formed a coalition government with the Democratic Party (DP) due to not securing an outright majority.

As a leader deeply connected to the nation's struggle for independence, Gusmão emphasized the importance of national reconciliation and unity in achieving the country's development goals. With Timor-Leste's bid for ASEAN membership in progress, Gusmão highlighted the need to work closely with the association to prepare the nation fully. [TATOLI] [NHK World] [AP News]

Vietnam: Prime Minister chairs law building discussion

(km) Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chin chaired the government 's monthly specialized section on law building on June 29. The cabinet members discussed four draft laws: Law for Teachers, Archives, Chemicals and regulating on investment budget to public projects. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: State level funeral for former Deputy Prime Minister

(km) A state-level funeral was held in the Vietnamese capital Hanoi on June 27 for former Secretary of the Party Central Committee and former Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan, who passed away on June 21. [Nhan Dan]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

US releases 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report

(aj) The United States Department of State recently released the 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report). Under its Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), promulgated in 2000, the US is mandated to form a comprehensive annual report on the global state of human trafficking. The TIP Report is often used by the US, its allies, and multinational companies to determine levels of foreign aid assistance and to make investment decisions. In the East, South, and Southeast Asian regions, only four countries – the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, and the Seychelles -- are identified by the TIP Report as fully complying with US recommendations to combat human trafficking, while the countries of Cambodia, Myanmar, China, and North Korea are a cause for concern. Two of most common problems cited in the report among these three regions are the low conviction rates of traffickers, especially public officials complicit in the crime, and failing to use standard of procedures (SOPs) to identify trafficked victims.

From high to low levels of compliance with anti-trafficking protocols as outlined by the TVPA, Tier 1 countries fully implement necessary protocols recommended by the TVPA, Tier 2 countries have administered some protocols but not all, and Tier 3 countries are of high concern to the US State Department for making little to no efforts in stamping out human trafficking.

East Asia

The TIP Report recognizes that South Korea and Japan, both at Tier 2, are making significant strides in addressing human trafficking, but calls upon South Korea to collect better data and offer more protective services for trafficked victims, while urging Japan to tackle its exploitation of children in the commercial sex industry. Mongolia is also in the Tier 2. The US cites Mongolia's conflicting criminal codes as a source for complicating legal efforts to convict traffickers.

China and North Korea are in the Tier 3 bracket. According to the anti-trafficking report, China is targeting ethnic minorities, such as Tibetans and Uyghurs, for 'reeducation' in poor working conditions. At the same time, Chinese nationals are also working as forced labor on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) international infrastructure project. North Korea is also using forced labor to fund its state operations.

South Asia

Migrant workers, especially from South Asia, are particularly vulnerable to labor exploitation when employers confiscate the identity documents of workers, like passports, upon arrival, according to the TIP Report. All South Asian countries, besides the Seychelles, are in Tier 2.

India, Pakistan, and Nepal do not criminalize all forms of trafficking and the former two countries are bereft of identification procedures for bonded labor victims. Child sex trafficking is the most salient problem in Bhutan, according to the TIP Report, further stating that Bhutan does not use its SOPs to identify victims. Both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have lenient sentences for traffickers, which weakens deterrence for trafficking. The US notes that the Maldives is making efforts to convict officials involved in trafficking crimes but neglects to properly identify labor migrant victims.

Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia (SEA), one of the key themes identified by the TIP Report is the growing prevalence of cyber scam operations. Many East African and Asian

workers with English language skills are recruited to work in SEA. Upon arrival, the migrants' passports are confiscated and physical and sexual violence is used to coerce victims to defraud strangers, such as buying fake cryptocurrency and illegal gambling networks. The TIP Report also points out that survivors of these cyber scam operations are often penalized by officials for violating immigration laws when, instead, the government should be providing protective care services for victims.

Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, and Timor-Leste are grouped together in Tier 2. Laos is acknowledged by the TIP for increasing its investigations and disproportionately does not provide protective services to male victims. Indonesia is also taking proper legal action on traffickers, but does not always include victims in legal procedures to convict traffickers.

Malaysia, Brunei, and Vietnam are in the Tier 2 Watchlist, which is a half-step below Tier 2. All three of these countries are without formal victim identification procedures. Malaysia's trafficking problems primarily lie in palm oil plantations and the disposable glove manufacturing industry, while Vietnam is urged by the TIP Report to be more proactive in trafficking investigations.

Cambodia and Myanmar fall under Tier 3. No significant effort has been made by either country to reduce trafficking within their borders as Cambodia fails to convict complicit high-level officials involved in trafficking crimes and Myanmar's civil war, and thus, lack of administrative authority in certain parts of the country, places ethnic minorities at a higher risk of being trafficked. [US Department of State]

India hosts SCO leaders' summit on July 4 virtually; add Iran, opens membership path for Belarus

(lm) Leaders of the eight-member Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on July 4 held an online summit hosted by India, which holds the rotating presidency of the SCO and the Group of Twenty this year. China's President Xi Jinping, Russian leader Vladimir Putin, and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shebaz Sharif were among the leaders that participated in the virtual summit.

Defence and foreign ministers of SCO member states attended in-person meetings in India earlier this year. One major storyline ahead of the foreign ministers' gathering was the attendance of Pakistani Foreign

Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, which marked the first visit to India by a Pakistani foreign minister since 2011 [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2]. Also notably, bilateral friction points and regional complexities prevented the defense ministers from signing a joint statement, with differences in remarks highlighting a notable divergence in policy priorities of SCO member states [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1].

Crucially, the SCO is seeking to expand its influence by including Iran and opening a path to membership for Belarus. While Tehran is expected to be accepted as a member, Belarus will sign a memorandum of obligations which will lead to its membership later. When both countries, which have observer status and enjoy close ties to Russia, are accepted as members of the SCO it will expand the grouping's western flank in both Europe and Asia.

India will hand over the presidency of the bloc to Kazakhstan at the summit. [The Hindu] [Reuters]

Indian refiners start Chinese yuan payments for Russian oil imports

(lm) Indian refiners have begun paying for some oil imports from Russia in Chinese yuan, as Western sanctions force Moscow and its main buyers of oil – New Delhi and Beijing – to find alternatives to the US dollar for settling payments. Indian Oil Corp (IOC), the country's biggest buyer of Russian crude oil, in June became the first state refiner to pay for some Russian purchases in yuan. At least two of India's three private refiners are also paying for some Russian imports in Chinese currency. [Reuters] [The Hindu]

This potential policy change comes after India in March had asked banks and traders to avoid using the yuan to pay for Russian imports because of long-running political differences with neighboring China. Furthermore, in May, the State Bank of India, the country's top lender and a key banker for state refiners, rejected a plan by IOC to pay in dollars for a cargo delivered by Russian oil company Rosneft.

Asian Development Bank grants USD 50 million loan to Nepal's customs, logistics sector

(na) The Asian Development Bank has granted a USD 50 million loan to Nepal for implementing customs

reform and modernization plans. The program will introduce digital technologies to improve customs processes, including electronic payments and export document submission. It aims to boost trade development, enhance competitiveness, and drive sustainable economic growth.

Additionally, the initiative will expand trade facilitation efforts to the logistics sector, integrating infrastructure and harmonizing standards to facilitate efficient movement of goods and enhance trade with key partners. [The Kathmandu Post]

Sri Lanka will stay neutral in China-India rivalry, foreign minister says after meeting Chinese counterpart

(lm) Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Ali Sabry told the *South China Morning Post* that his country will not take sides between China and India, adding that it would be better for the two Asian powers and the world if they could resolve their differences. Sabry, who was finance minister at the start of Sri Lanka's economic crisis last year, also said he was confident the government would be able to finalize its debt restructure negotiations by September. [South China Morning Post]

Sabry's interview followed on his meeting with China's State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Beijing on June 25. Qin assured the visiting Sri Lankan top diplomat that his country would continue to help Colombo deal with the debt problem. [Chinese Embassy in Finland]

130th Mekong Joint Patrol

(nyb) Chinese law-enforcement authorities joined Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand in the 130th Mekong River joint patrol exercise. [Xinhua 1]

Xinhua reports seven vessels taking part in the exercise departing from three ports in China and Laos. Anti-drug-trafficking awareness activities will also be conducted as a part of the exercise.

The joint patrol has been taking place every month since 2011 agreement following the hijack of two Chinese cargos where a gang killed 13 Chinese sailors in the Golden Triangle region. The main aim of the patrol is to boost trade security. [Xinhua 2]

Report shows Chinese debt relief slows down

(nyb) A report of research provider Rhodium Group showed that Chinese debt relief decreased by over 50 percent between 2021 and 2022.

The report shows sovereign debt negotiations and zero-interest loan write offs involving Chinese creditors fell from USD 19 billion in 2021 to USD 9 billion in 2022, and just USD 1.7 billion in 2023. [Reuters]

China is the world's largest bilateral creditor. [Reuters]

First-ever Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Ulaanbaatar

(tb) On June 29-30 Mongolia hosted the first-ever Female Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Ulaanbaatar.

An initiative of Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh, the meeting brought together female foreign ministers of France, Germany, Indonesia, Liechtenstein, and South Africa. Representatives from international organizations also attended the gathering.

The issues discussed at the meeting included empowering women in global decision-making, international cooperation for gender equality, addressing key global challenges through female leadership, among others.

In the ministers' joint statement, Afghanistan was singled out and the Taliban was urged to "swiftly reverse the policies and practices that restrict the enjoyment by women and girls of their human rights and fundamental freedoms including related to their access to education, employment, freedom of movement, and women's full, equal and meaningful participation in public life." The international community was called on to take measures to reverse these policies and practices. [Montsame 1] [Montsame 2] [Aki Press]

Mongolia recently joined the "Feminist Foreign Policy Plus Group" at the United Nations, a group of currently 16 of countries engaging promoting feminist and gender transformative approaches to multilateralism and foreign policy. [The Diplomat]

World Export Development Forum held in Ulaanbaatar

(tb) On June 26-29 the 20th World Export Development Forum (WEDF) was held in Ulaanbaatar.

The WEDF is the annual flagship event of the International Trade Center (ITC), a multilateral agency which has a joint mandate with the World Trade Organization and the United Nations through the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. It serves as a platform for significant conversations and collaborations addressing the pressing challenges faced by the global trade community. Mongolia is holding the WEDF presidency.

Titled “Diversify with Green Trade,” the forum brought together more than 600 delegates from 70 countries representing a wide range of stakeholders. It saw closed-door business consultations, roundtable discussions on business and trade development, and business-to-business meetings. Business agreements worth USD 4.5 million were and partnerships agreement between some 20 companies were concluded.

Among these agreements was a memorandum of understanding between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the ITC on enhancing the participation of women entrepreneurs in the economy and facilitate their access to international markets as well as another between Nepal and Mongolia on collaboration of quality testing and analysis of wool fibres and exchange of knowledge and research works in the sector.

Furthermore, the Mongolian SheTrades Hub was opened. It is a center of the ITC initiative ‘SheTrades Hub’. These centers aim to empower women in international trade and foster a more inclusive and equitable business environment. The forthcoming SheTrades Hub in Mongolia is expected to offer Mongolian businesswomen opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills and subsequently apply them within the domestic market.

In her opening remarks Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh she reaffirmed her country’s commitment to the implementation course of the Convention on Transit Trade of Land-locked States, a multilateral treaty that addresses international rules allowing for land-locked countries to transport goods to and from seaports. She also expressed her intention to actively cooperate with partnership countries, development partners, and participants to enhance

and expand the operation of the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries (ITTLLDC) at the United Nations.

The first ever international intergovernmental institution headquartered in Mongolia, the ITTLLDC aims at using top-quality research and advocacy to improve the ability of landlocked developing countries to build capacity with a view to benefiting from the international trade including WTO negotiations. [Montsame 1] [Montsame 2] [Montsame 3] [The Kathmandu Post] [Aki Press]

Mongolia-South Korea-US: First-ever U.S.-Mongolia-Republic of Korea (ROK) Critical Minerals Dialogue

(tb) On June 27,2023, the first-ever US-Mongolia-ROK Critical Minderals Dialogue was held in Ulaanbaatar.

The dialogue helped the three governments to make progress in sharing information and collaborating on the supply chains of critical minerals. Both public-private and government-to-government sessions were held.

Information about the status and prospects of Mongolia's mineral resource sector, along with global commodity market trends and investment were shared. Additionally, Mongolia's role in meeting the world's critical mineral needs was highlighted. [US Department of State]

President of Mongolia meets the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

(tb) On June 30, President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa of Mongolia held a meeting with Helga Schmid, the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

During the meeting, the two parties discussed the expansion of relations and cooperation between Mongolia and the OSCE, with a particular focus on economic and environmental collaboration. They also explored the potential for joint projects and programs.

Helga Schmid expressed the OSCE's commitment to supporting Mongolia's national tree planting

movement, One Billion Trees, which was initiated by the President.

Mongolia became a participating state of the OSCE in 2012. [Aki Press]

Mongolia submits ratification of protocols to the Convention on International Civil Aviation ratified

(tb) Mongolia submitted on June 27, 2023, the instruments of ratification of the protocols to two amendments of the protocols on the Convention of International Civil Aviation at the International Civil Aviation Organization at the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Headquarters in Montréal

The proposed amendment to Article 50(a) aims to facilitate an increase in the membership of the Council from 36 to 40 States. Similarly, the amendment to Article 56 seeks to enable an increase in the membership of the Air Navigation Commission from 19 to 21 technical experts.

Mongolia is the 85th country to ratify the amendments. [Montsame]

World Bank approves loan for energy transition in Indonesia

(ys) The World Bank has approved a USD 1,14 billion loan to Indonesia.

Around USD 500 million will fund the electricity project that will connect about 2 million people to the electrical grid in eastern Indonesia, increase solar panel investment and help Indonesia's state utility Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN) improve its capacity to manage the energy transition.

The decision was made to help Indonesia transition to clean renewable energy, where currently Indonesia's main energy source is coal.

The World Bank also provides Indonesia with USD 600 million in loans to improve childhood nutrition and alleviate stunting. [Reuters]

IMF recommend that Indonesia should phase out mineral export bans

(ys) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) published a statement in a report calling on Indonesia to phase out its mineral export ban, such as the nickel export ban.

The IMF also suggested the withdrawal of subsidies, stating that it could spark a disorderly subsidy race and discriminatory trade provisions that could lead to costly countermeasures and harm efficiency by driving a wedge between supply and demand.

The Indonesian Coordinating Economic Minister Airlangga Hartanto responded to the report by stating that any international organization trying to regulate other countries' export policies is not just a recommendation but a form of modern-day colonialism.

Indonesia has imposed export bans on several minerals to increase investment in domestic processing so that it would not just be a raw material exporter and further increase capital income. [The Jakarta Post]

Singapore top Asian country in Global Peace Index

(tb/lm) Singapore has been rated the sixth most peaceful country in the world in the Global Peace Index, the highest-placed Asian country in the measure of global peacefulness produced by the Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IPI).

In its 17th edition, the index assessed and ranked 163 independent states and territories based on their respective levels of peacefulness. The IPI utilizes statistical and analytical work to gain a deeper understanding of the core attitudes, institutions, and structures that contribute to the creation and maintenance of peace worldwide.

Notably, the analysis shows that the gap between the most and least peaceful countries is growing. Additionally, with the advancement of technology, conflict dynamics have changed, and a systemic response is needed to come closer to the goal of global peace. [CNA]

Bangladesh to evacuate stranded nationals from Sudan

(na) Approximately 100 Bangladeshi nationals stranded in war-torn Sudan will be evacuated in a renewed effort by the government. The rescue operation was previously closed due to a lack of registrations. Due to the deteriorating situation in Khartoum, many Bangladeshis were facing hardships and gathering in Port Sudan.

To address the situation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted permission to renew evacuation efforts upon the consulate's request. So far, 104 individuals have registered for return, with an expectation of over 150 registrations by the deadline of June 27. In earlier evacuation rounds, approximately 680 out of 1,500 Bangladeshi nationals living in Sudan were brought back to Bangladesh through phases, with Saudi Arabia serving as a crucial partner in the process. [News Age]

China imposes export restrictions on metals essential for semiconductor production

(ms) Trade relations between the U.S. and China, particularly in the area of advanced semiconductor manufacturing, continue to tense. After the U.S. announced at the end of June that it would both expand existing export restrictions on AI semiconductors and, together with the Netherlands, restrict exports of equipment for semiconductor production, China responded with an announcement that it would impose strict export restrictions on two metals essential for semiconductor manufacturing starting August 1.

Following ongoing strained relations between China and the U.S., the U.S. imposed restrictions on the export of U.S. technology to China under the Foreign Direct Product Rule, expanding existing domestic export restrictions globally [see AiR No. 41, October/2022, 2]. These measures took a good hit especially on China's high-advanced semiconductor production, which was still very dependent on imports from abroad.

The U.S. government is now considering expanding these export restrictions, according to reports in the World Street Journal. As early as July, the U.S. Department of Commerce is expected to begin halting semiconductor shipments from technology companies such as Nvidia, AMD and Micron to China.

Besides the national restrictions, the U.S. formed the Chip4 Alliance, consisting of the U.S., Taiwan, the Netherlands and Japan, all important countries in the production of semiconductors or for the production of relevant technologies and products, with the goal to further control the export of the mentioned products to China [see AiR No. 5, January/2023, 5]. The Netherlands, home to ASML, one of the world's leading companies in the manufacture of technologies relevant to semiconductor production, is also expected to join the U.S. in further restricting the sale of chip-making equipment to China, but the Dutch government has not yet commented on the plans. [Bloomberg 1] [Forbes] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

To what extent the restrictions now imposed by China are to be seen as a reaction to the new plans of the USA or still to the already existing restrictions is not apparent, nevertheless they could mean consequences not only for the USA but globally.

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced that it will impose controls on the export of gallium and germanium as well as their chemical compounds beginning August 1. The controls are intended to protect China's national security, according to the Ministry of Commerce. From August 1, exporters will have to apply for licenses from the Chinese ministry and provide information on the recipients and the planned use of the metals. By basing this on national security, it can be assumed that the Chinese government has a relatively free hand in deciding which licenses to issue and which not and can adjust this over time in the face of possible new sanctions from abroad.

It is difficult to predict to which degree these controls will actually restrict exports, but curbing the export of these metals would have a major impact on the global production of semiconductors. China produces about two-thirds of the world's germanium and 95 percent of the world's gallium, making it difficult or impossible to find alternatives to Chinese exporters.

Japan, as a major producer of advanced technologies and a member of the Chip 4 Alliance, has already announced, in the form of its Trade Minister Yasutoshi Nishimura, that "if measures against Japan are unfair in terms of international rules such as those of the WTO, we will act accordingly." It can be assumed that, if necessary, other countries will join in this warning. [Bloomberg 2] [Nikkei Asia] [Reuters 3]

Wang Yi meets UN Deputy Secretary-General

(nyb) Director of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee Foreign Affairs Commission Office Wang Yi met with UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohamed in Beijing on June 29.

During the meeting, the two sides reaffirmed the importance of multilateral partnership and China stands by its commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda.

Mohamed also said the UN supports China's multilateral initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and the Global Development Initiative. [Xinhua]

China-Israel: Netanyahu plans trip to Beijing

(ms) Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed to two Israeli newspapers that he will travel to China. Information regarding the planned timing has not yet been released, but according to rumors, the trip will take place this July.

Netanyahu stressed that the U.S. remains Israel's key ally and disclosed that the U.S. government was informed about the planned trip to China about a month ago. Nevertheless, the relations between the U.S. and Israel are currently relatively distant, the reason for this being, among other things, the criticism of the U.S. on the controversial judicial reform in Israel, which would significantly limit the competence of the Supreme Court and put more power on the government.

For China, a visit by Netanyahu would further strengthen its role in the Middle East, coming after with its role as mediator in the resumption of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. [Reuters] [The Times of Israel]

China and US officials hold follow-up talks on Blinken visit

(ms) On June 26, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and China's Ambassador Xie Feng held a follow-up talk on U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to China in mid-June [see AiR No. 25, June/2023, 3].

The conversation was described by the U.S. side as "substantive" and, according to its information, served primarily as a follow-up discussion. Sherman is said to have stressed during the conversation the importance of information exchange between the two superpowers, since during Blinken's stay in China the two sides failed to reach an agreement on the resumption of a high-level defense dialogue.

The phone call with Xie is expected to be one of the last major tasks of Sherman, who will leave office at the end of the month. Sherman has come under criticism for allegedly obstructing various U.S. actions against China, as well as against Chinese tech company Huawei, in order to ensure Blinken's visit to China. [National Review]

Xie used the call to repeatedly criticize the U.S. treatment of China and urged the U.S. to "properly handle" important and sensitive issues, highlighting Taiwan in particular. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Pentagon says Chinese “spy ballon’ did not collect information over US

(nyb) Following an examination of debris from the ‘spy balloon,’ Pentagon officials announced on June 29 that it did not collect information while it was flying over US territory, adding that he US said its effort to mitigate intelligence gathering “contributed” to the balloon’s failure to gather sensitive information. [BBC] [Reuters]

The balloon was shot down off the coast of South Carolina on February 4, after it was tracked crossing the continental US on a course that took it over sensitive military sites [see AiR No. 6, February/2023, 1].

China-New Zealand: New Zealand endorses China's CPTPP and DEPA-Membership

(ms) In the course of New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins' first state visit to China and his associated meetings with China's President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, Hipkins not only emphasized the importance of the China-New Zealand relationship, but also spoke in favor of China's membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific

Partnership (CPTPP) and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA).

China applied for both of the above-mentioned agreements as early as 2021, but has not yet been unanimously confirmed since then. In particular, the participation in the CPTPP has so far proved to be difficult for China. Members of the economy agreement are Canada, Mexico, Peru, Chile, New Zealand, Australia, Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and Japan and the United Kingdom will officially join later this year.

While in May this year, the endorsement of Australia has not been received, it can be assumed that after the rapprochement of relations in recent months and the presumed lifting of remaining Chinese sanctions on some Australian products, an agreement can be found there, which would represent an important step in Chinese accession efforts, which would be further promoted by active support from New Zealand.

In addition to the endorsement, China and New Zealand agreed during the meeting to strengthen bilateral economic cooperation in the areas of food security, agriculture, tariff facilitation for trade and implementation of laws and new technologies, and to jointly develop e-commerce, international trade in services and the green economy, in this regard, the first agreements were signed. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2] [Xinhua]

China offers Vietnam closer military partnership

(ms) During a meeting between Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu and Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Giang in China's capital Beijing on June 26, Li advocated strengthening high-level communication and cooperation between their armed forces.

The conversation took place almost simultaneously with the arrival of the USS aircraft carrier Ronald Reagon in Da Nang, a coastal city of Vietnam, which puts Vietnam in an interesting position between the two superpowers.

A newly published article in the interpreter, a journal of the Lowy Institute, describes how China has been trying to limit U.S. influence in Vietnam over the past 10 years. On the one hand, through political and economic incentives and partnership with Vietnam, China is trying to strengthen its own influence in the

relatively small country in the South China Sea and thereby be in competition with that of the United States.

On the other hand, China also resorted to military and geopolitical warnings and threats against Vietnam not to cooperate further with the United States. China has been able to keep Vietnam as a relative neutral between the two great powers. This neutrality manifests itself in these currently very contradictory events on one side a US aircraft carrier sets anchor in Vietnam for only the third time on the other side the Vietnamese Prime Minister visits China and discussions are held about closer cooperation. [Alarabiya News] [Peoples Daily Online] [Reuters] [The Interpreter]

China-EU: EU leaders agree on de-risking of China

(ms) During a meeting of the heads of state of the 27 EU member states at a summit in Brussels on June 30, they agreed on a de-risking approach towards China, although there is still a lack of consensus on the question of how.

The formal policy postion agreed upon by the heads of state reads, among other things, that "[t]he EU will continue to reduce critical dependencies and vulnerabilities, including the supply chain and will de-risk and diversify where necessary and appropriate."

The concept of "de-risking rather than de-coupling" originated primarily from the pen of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who introduced and called for the implementation of the concept shortly before and during her visit to China [see AiR No. 15, April/2023, 2]. In particular, the dependence on Russian fossil fuels and the inherent risk for the European economy could no longer be ignored due to Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine and sparked discussions within the EU to prevent similar dependencies on China.

In addition to economic interdependencies, the position paper highlights in particular the dependence on China for some critical raw materials in various technologies as problematic. A risk which currently manifests itself in view of China's announced introduction of export controls on two metals important for semiconductor production only shortly after the meeting (see entry above).

How this de-risking is to take place has not yet been finally decided, as there are very different approaches

among the EU member states. While countries with intensive economic relations with China, such as Germany and France, see the task primarily with companies, other countries advocate a more governmental approach. [Euro News] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [The Guardian]

Britain to maintain anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel

(nyb) Britain is to continue to take measures against Chinese steel imports following the recommendation from the Trade Remedies Authority (TRA), the non-departmental public body of the Department for Business and Trade in the Government of the United Kingdom. [Reuters]

The measure, alongside other duties on Chinese reinforcement steel and cold rolled flat steel, aims to protect British industries from 'unfair' competition from cheap imports, according to the TRA, assessing that without such anti-dumping duties, British steel industries will incur severe damage to the point that its two main steel producers in England and Scotland would be forced to close.

The EU in April also put in place similar measures against stainless steel tubes and pipe butt wielding fittings import duties of 30.7 percent to 64.9 percent for products coming from China. [European Commission]

India for the first time gifts active warship to Vietnam

(lm) In the latest indication of deepening defense ties between India and Vietnam, New Delhi has gifted an active-duty missile corvette to Hanoi, marking the first time India has given a warship to a neighbor of China with a coast on the South China Sea.

The announcement that New Delhi would deliver the Indian Missile Corvette INS Kirpan to the Vietnamese Navy was made following a meeting between Indian Defense minister Rajnath Singh and his Vietnamese counterpart, General Phan Van Gang, in New Delhi on June 18. The ship left India's east coast on June 28. [The Straits Times]

Although the two countries had upgraded bilateral ties to a "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" in 2016, the relationship gained significant momentum last

June, when both sides signed a mutual logistics support pact that enables their militaries to use each other's bases for repair and replenishment of supplies and make it easier to arrange visits of warships, military aircraft and personnel to each other's shores [see AiR No. 24, June/2022, 2]. At that time, India also gave 12 high-speed guard boats to Vietnam under a USD 100 million line of credit.

United States expects growing role of India in South China Sea; greater collaboration among Quad members

(lm) The United States Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian And Pacific Affairs, Daniel Kritenbrink, said on June 28 Washington expects a growing role of India in the South China Sea, where China has been at the centre of numerous territorial disputes with regional countries. He also said that there would be greater collaboration between member states of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue – the US, India, Japan, and Australia. [The Straits Times] [Reuters]

Kritenbrink's remarks come after the US and India declared hailed a new era in bilateral relations lastt month, during a state visit to Washington by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and touted deals on defense and commerce aimed at countering China's global influence. [AiR No. 26, June/2023, 4]

Against this backdrop, China's *Global Times* on June 29 cited analysts who voiced concern over a direct or indirect involvement by India – an "external force"– in the South China Sea issues. The observers noted that a direct involvement by New Delhi might result in an overstretch given the South Asian country's "insufficient military strength and its limited number of warships", adding that arms sales and military assistance to the regional countries are also "concerning." [Global Times]

Australian Air Force patrol aircraft lands in India's Tamil Nadu state for anti-submarine warfare drills

(lm) The Australian Air Force's long-range maritime patrol aircraft P-8A landed at an air station in India's Tamil Nadu state for a joint anti-submarine warfare exercise, which is being held from June 30-July 6. The drills are part of ongoing exercises aimed at promoting

interoperability especially in the subsurface domain. [The Hindu]

Japan and South Korea agree on currency swap in times of emergency

(eg) Japan and South Korea have revived a currency swap deal to supply one another with US dollars in periods of crisis, such as during a sharp devaluation e their own currencies.

The agreement was active eight years ago, but diplomatic tensions between the two countries had prevented the deal from being restored.

However, under the new agreement of June 29, the two countries will have a mutual supply of USD 10 billion. If a request for the currency swap is made, the country will trade its own currency for the US dollars.

Both countries have an ample supply of foreign exchange, which makes the deal more symbolic of improved relations between the two countries. Relations have especially improved under South Korea's Yoon Suk-yeol, who brokered a solution to South Korea's wartime labor dispute with Japan. [Asahi Shimbun]

Japan and EU to co-operate in semiconductor production

(eg) The European Union (EU) has stated it will deepen its co-operation with Japan in the semiconductor industry, in order to strengthen control over the strategically sensitive technology.

The EU industry chief announced that the EU and Japan will co-operate in monitoring the supply chain of semiconductors and ease the movement of researchers and engineers. The EU will also support Japanese semiconductor manufacturers that wish to operate in Europe.

Japan's semiconductor industry is advanced in the global market with regards to its materials and equipment, but its share in the global market has declined. The government is now offering subsidies to revitalize the industry. The agreement comes as the EU aims to "de-risk" its dependency on China and its technologies. [Reuters]

Japan and North Korea reportedly meet to discuss abduction of Japanese nationals

(eg) A South Korean newspaper has reported that Japanese and North Korean officials have met over the past month to discuss North Korea's abduction of Japanese nationals in the 1970s and 1980s. Japan has since denied the claim.

Five abductees were repatriated to Japan in 2002, but there are twelve more abductees officially recognized to still be in North Korea.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida promised in May to hold a summit with North Korea and set up bilateral talks. The report suggested that officials met in third countries like China and Singapore to resolve the issue, but the government has dismissed the reports as false.

Talks with North Korea risk Japan's recently improved relations with South Korea, according to the report. It was suggested that North Korea views the dialogue as driving a wedge between Japan, South Korea and the USA. [Kyodo News]

Japan and Pakistan Foreign Ministers meet

(eg) Japan's foreign minister met with his Pakistani counterpart on July 3, marking the first visit by a Pakistani foreign minister in four years.

Pakistan thanked Japan for its support, particularly in the deadly floods of last year, and promised further develop ties between the countries. Japan expressed hope that Pakistan will fulfil its economic potential and discussed Japan welcoming more skilled workers from Pakistan. The foreign ministers also discussed Japan's advocating for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", as well as the outcome of the G7 summit held in Hiroshima. [MoFA of Japan]

Japan and USA discuss deterrence strategy

(eg) On June 26-27, the USA hosted a Japanese visit to an air force base in Missouri where discussions were held over the extended deterrence strategy within the Japan-USA alliance.

Leaders of both countries have pledged to strengthen the extended deterrence strategy. During the meeting, both countries discussed the security situation of the Indo-Pacific as well as measures to increase the effectiveness of deterrence. Both partners committed to deepening their alliance and improving their co-ordination to counter enemy missile threats and reduce nuclear risk. [MoFA of Japan]

Meeting between Japanese and Benin officials

(eg) On June 29 a meeting was held between Japan's State Minister and Benin's Minister of Economy and Finance.

Japan thanked Benin for its visit to the funeral of the late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and stated Japan was becoming a more active partner in Africa. The two officials committed to further develop bilateral ties and increase co-operation in the development and the security of sub-Saharan Africa. [MoFA of Japan]

Lao, Malaysia strengthen ties following Malaysian Prime Minister's visit

(ws) Following the official visit of Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim to Laos on June 26-27, Malaysia and Laos agree to enhance their cooperation in various sectors including energy, tourism, agriculture, education, health, security, labor, banking, and defense.

The two countries agreed to resume direct flights and promote rail transport connectivity to facilitate the transportation of goods. Additionally, they will collaborate in areas such as education, socio-cultural exchanges, public health, human resource development, and technical cooperation.

Both sides expressed satisfaction with their current economic collaboration and agreed to explore further areas of cooperation while promoting people-to-people exchanges through improved transport connectivity.

The bilateral trade value between Laos and Malaysia witnessed a significant surge from USD 75.78 million in 2021 to USD 241.7 million in 2022, driven largely by the increased demand for Malaysian electronic products. The two countries also agreed to create favorable conditions to boost bilateral trade, particularly in the

export of agricultural produce, facilitated by enhanced regional connectivity. [Vientiane Times 1]

Moreover, the two prime ministers also discussed Laos' preparations to assume the chairmanship of Asean in 2024, which further led the pledge from Malaysian side to assist Laos in preparing for ASEAN chairmanship [Vientiane Times 2]

Currently, Malaysia stands as the fifth-largest contributor of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Laos, with 46 reported investment projects worth USD 924 million. These projects mainly cover hydropower, mining, agriculture, construction, finance, banking, hotel services, and the wood processing industry. [Vientiane Times 1]

Malaysian foreign minister visits Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

(jl) Malaysia's Foreign Minister Zambry paid an official visit to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on July 3 and 4. I

n Kyrgyzstan, he held meetings with President Sadyr Zhaparov, Speaker of Parliament Nurlanbek Shakiyev, and Chairman of the Cabinet Masters and Prime Minister Akylbek Zhaparov. During the visit, the two counterparts discussed ways to build bilateral relations and signed a letter of intent on bilateral cooperation.

Following the Kyrgyzstan visit, Zambry made a trip to Uzbekistan where he was received by Foreign Minister Bakhtiyor Saidov to discuss trade, investment, education, tourism and technical cooperation. The foreign ministers also signed the cooperation program between the foreign ministries of Malaysia and Uzbekistan.

The visits signify Malaysia's ongoing efforts to build stronger relations with countries in Central Asia.

Mongolia welcomes Chinese enterprises to invest and do business

(tb) Mongolian Prime Minister Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene reaffirmed at the China-Mongolia Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum in Beijing on June 29 that Mongolia welcomes Chinese enterprises to invest and do business.

Cooperation between the governments and enterprises was promoted on the forum. Additionally,

Mongolia introduced its investment policies, with the Prime Minister hoping to achieve concrete results in the collaboration between enterprises from the two countries in the fields of energy, science and technology, infrastructure, and green development.

The attendance of the Forum was part of his visit to China, during which also met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on June 27.

During their meeting Xi reaffirmed China's commitment to advancing the construction of the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor and to promoting high-quality Belt and Road cooperation. He added that China was willing to work with Mongolia in the prevention and control of desertification and pledged continued support for Mongolia's plan to plant one billion trees.

Oyun-Erdene, for his part, affirmed his country's support for China's position on issues related to Taiwan, Xizang, and Xinjiang, among others, as well as for the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative, according to the readout of the Chinese foreign ministry.

He also requested support in finalizing agreements on projects to connect border ports under China's "Belt and Road" initiative at the government level. [Global Times] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Montsame]

Visit of Mongolian president and foreign minister to Indonesia

(tb) President of Mongolia Khurelsukh Ukhnaa and Foreign Affairs Minister of Mongolia B. Battsetseg met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Retno L. P. Marsudi Indonesia in Ulaanbaatar.

In the talks with the president, various topics of shared interest were covered, including global peace, security, and other matters of mutual concern. In the discussion between the two Foreign Affairs Ministers, they shared their perspectives on expanding bilateral relations and cooperation, particularly in fields such as tourism, culture, and agriculture. Additionally, they assessed the existing state of collaboration in trade and economic sectors.

Indonesia and Mongolia reached an agreement to enhance trade facilitation and reduce trade barriers. The President stated that they are preparing for the

opening of the embassy in Jakarta. [Aki Press1] [Montsame]

Additionally, an investment deal worth USD 22 million for a distribution channel was signed between the Indonesian home appliance firm Modena and Mongolian Nomin Holding. [Aki Press 2] [The Jakarta Post]

Mongolia-India: Governments discuss two possible routes for transporting coking coal

(tb) India and Mongolia are said to hold talks on two coking coal shipping routes.

The first route is the Far East corridor, which involves the Vladivostok-Chennai shipping path. The second route being discussed is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) through the utilization of Chabahar port.

However, it has been reported that a third route, the Russia-Mongolia-China economic corridor, has been rejected.

Coking coal is a material that is crucial for steelmaking. India, as the second-largest producer of crude steel globally, relies significantly on imports of coking coal. [MyIndMakers]

Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister Shrestha concludes China visit

(na) Nepal's Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Shrestha has wrapped up a five-day visit to China from June 27 to July 2, where he engaged in fruitful discussions on trade, investment, tourism, connectivity, and other bilateral concerns.

During a bilateral meeting with China's Vice Premier He Lifeng, the two officials explored ways to enhance Beijing's cooperation with Kathmandu and improve trade and transit points on the Nepal-China border. The Nepalese side promoted investment policies and encouraged Chinese investors at the West China International Fair in Chengdu. [Nepal News]

Furthermore, Shrestha emphasized the importance of increased investment in Nepal during a speech at Sichuan University. Meetings with the Sichuan

Provincial Investment Group and Sichuan Airlines focused on expanding opportunities and flights. [My Republica]

UN Report shows that more Junta war crimes are occurring in Myanmar

(ha) In a statement on June 28, the united national's independent investigative mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) stated that airstrikes against civilians in Myanmar have increased, with civilians' being the most affected by violence.

The IIMM has collected documents, photographs, videos and interviews with witnesses for war crimes and has revealed that it has received more than 135 files.

According to a local monitoring group, the junta has left more than 3700 civilians killed and it has increased mass killing, air strikes and arson attack on the civilians.

The head of IIMM said that our agency is collecting evidence of war crimes and will try to give the perpetrators a fair shot in international courts. The final findings will be released in August and will be presented by IIMM to the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar desperately needs humanitarian aid after military restrictions

(wn) According to a United Nations Human Rights Commissioner, the situation in Myanmar has worsened due to the military's control over humanitarian aid. This has prevented the most vulnerable communities, including those affected by conflict, from receiving life-saving assistance. Additionally, the military's strict rule has limited the ability of humanitarian workers to provide aid.

The situation has been made even worse by the military's restrictions on aid following Cyclone Mocha in May. This has caused suffering and misery for many people in the west and northwest of the country.

It's important to note that intentionally obstructing or denying humanitarian assistance is a serious violation

of international human rights and humanitarian laws. People in need have the right to receive assistance to ensure their basic needs are met. All parties involved must allow and facilitate the delivery of life-saving aid to those who need it. [UNHR]

World Bank reports Myanmar's struggling economic recovery under the military regime

(wn) According to a report from the World Bank, Myanmar's economic growth is slowing down compared to other economies in the region, and policy failures under the military regime are hindering its struggling economic recovery.

This is negatively affecting local people's purchasing power and earning capacity, causing short-term hardships.

Mariam Sherman, the World Bank Country Director for Myanmar, Cambodia, and the Lao PDFR, expressed concern that the poorest people are being hit hardest by consecutive shocks, and progress against malnutrition has either stopped or reversed.

The report also highlighted the challenges faced by microfinance institutions (MFIs) due to Myanmar's macroeconomic conditions and the military's restrictions on foreign currency conversion.

In addition, many families have had to move domestically or internationally in search of ways to earn money for daily expenses, as they are facing rising prices and falling incomes in Myanmar. [Myanmar Now]

Myanmar and Russia boost nuclear energy cooperation

(wn) Myanmar's Deputy Minister of Science and Technology, U Aung Zeya, and Deputy Director General of Rosatom, Nikolai Sapssky, recently met to discuss the construction of a nuclear power plant and the development of nuclear infrastructure in Myanmar. They also talked about the regulatory framework for bilateral cooperation, including personnel training, and signed a protocol.

Sapssky also met with Myanmar's Minister of Science and Technology, Myo Thein Kyaw, and Minister of

Electrification, Taung Khan, to discuss cooperation on the construction of Russian-designed power units and the establishment of nuclear infrastructure in Myanmar according to the International Atomic Energy Agency's requirements.

In February of last year, Myanmar and Russia signed an agreement to collaborate on the peaceful use of nuclear technology. Both sides supported cooperation in this area, and expert consultations will continue according to the agreed schedules to quickly put their joint work into practice. [World Nuclear News]

North Korea completes renovation tower symbolizing friendship with China

(tms) North Korea completed renovating a tower that represents its friendship with China ahead of the upcoming 70th anniversary of the armistice that brought an end to the Korean War from 1950 to 1953.

The renovation project was initiated on the order of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and a ceremony commemorating its completion was held in Pyongyang on Wednesday, reported North's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA).

The ceremony was attended by Choe Ryong-hae, chairman of the standing committee of the Supreme People's Assembly, and Chinese Ambassador Wang Yajun, who highlighted their history of friendship and vowed to bolster this relationship going forward.

The armistice was signed on July 27, 1953, following a period of over three years since North Korean forces, led by tanks, invaded South Korea. The United States and 20 other allied nations supported South Korea under the United Nations (U.N.) banner during the conflict. North Korea refers to the war as the Great Fatherland Liberation War and designates the anniversary of the armistice as Victory Day to commemorate the event. [Yonhap] [Korea Herald]

Pakistan strongly condemns desecration of Holy Quran in Sweden

(tj) The Foreign Office (FO) of Pakistan strongly condemned the desecration of the Holy Quran outside a mosque in Sweden. This came a day after a man burned the Holy Quran outside Stockholm’s central mosque. Afterward, Swedish police charged the man

with agitation against an ethnic or national group, and with a violation of a ban on fires.

According to the FO statement, such wilful incitement to discrimination, hatred and violence cannot be justified under the pretext of freedom of expression and protest. Under international law, states are duty-bound to prohibit any advocacy of religious hatred, leading to the incitement of violence. The right to freedom of expression and opinion does not provide a license to stoke hatred and sabotage interfaith harmony.

The FO further stated that Pakistan's concern about the incident was conveyed to Sweden. The FO urged the international community and national governments to undertake credible and concrete measures to prevent xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. [Dawn]

Pakistan's education minister to visit Azerbaijan for coordination meeting of Non-Aligned Movement

(lm) Pakistan's education minister will visit Azerbaijan on July 5-6 to attend a meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at the ministerial level. The NAM is a forum of 120 countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc. After the United Nations, it is the largest grouping of states worldwide. [Trend]

Philippines-Thailand: Military cooperation to be deepened

(dql) The Philippines and Thailand reaffirmed during the fourth Joint Committee on Military Cooperation (JCMC), meeting held in Bangkok on June 27, their commitment to deepen their military relations in the framework of bilateral security collaborations and expressed their intention to finalize the necessary arrangements for revitalizing their long-standing defense relations.

This includes the proposed Philippines-Thailand Defense Engagement Plan for 2023-2024, that "will outline the list of activities to be conducted by both countries with short-, medium- and long-term goals, according to the Philippine Defense Ministry. [Ministry of Defense, The Philippines] [The Manila Times]

Singapore, United Kingdom sign agreement on use of data and new technologies, launch negotiations on new investment treaty

(tb/lm) Singapore and the United Kingdom have signed two memoranda of understanding on government use of data and emerging technologies to deepen research and regulatory regulation in these areas. The MoU were signed during British Deputy Prime Minister Oliver Dowden's visit to the city state, his first international visit since his appointment last year. [GOV.UK]

In separate developments, Singapore has launched negotiations with the UK on an updated bilateral investment treaty (BIT) as part of the UK-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, which entered into force in February 2021. The negotiations, first announced in March, seek to modernize the existing BIT to bring the bilateral investment relationship into step with the current international investment environment and rules. [ASEAN Briefing]

South Korea seeks US expansion of key minerals supplier list under IRA

(tms) South Korea sought expansion of the list of nations that provide electric vehicle (EV) battery makers with critical minerals affecting eligibility for credits under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) from the US, reported the industry ministry.

The request was made in its public remarks to the U.S. earlier this month as the U.S. Treasury Department announced new guidelines on tax credits for EVs under the act in March.

Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), the US provides tax credits of up to USD 7,500 to purchasers of new electric vehicles assembled in North America and equipped with batteries containing a specified quantity of critical minerals sourced from there. The new guidelines state that critical minerals from 21 nations, which have free trade agreements with the U.S., will meet the requirements outlined in the IEEPA.

However, South Korea has pointed out that the current supply capacity of these critical minerals from the designated nations is insufficient to meet the

requirements. Certain minerals are only available in specific regions, making it challenging to comply with the existing list.

The issue was a key agenda item during a meeting between Joo Young-jun, South Korea's Director General for Industrial Policy of the industry ministry, and Sarah Bianchi, Deputy United States Trade Representative. South Korea also mentioned its objective to have Indonesia, Argentina and several other nations be recognized as minerals suppliers under the IRA. [Yonhap] [Korea Times]

South Korea-US: Annual defense ICT talks

(tms) South Korean and US defense officials recently convened in Hawaii for their annual meeting on bilateral security cooperation in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT), reported Seoul's defense ministry.

The third session of the South Korea-US ICT Cooperation Committee took place on June 29. During the meeting, both parties shared their evaluations of the latest trends in 5G wireless networks and other ICT technologies.

They also reached an agreement to enhance collaboration in applying these technologies to the defense sector. The importance of cooperation in areas such as cybersecurity, interoperability, and defense ICT policies was also acknowledged by both sides. [Korea Times] [Korea Herald]

South Korea-Slovenia: Cooperation in nuclear power plants and science technology discussed

(tms) Foreign ministers of South Korea and Slovenia held discussions on ways of enhancing bilateral relations in the fields of nuclear power plants and science technology.

During their meeting in Seoul, Foreign Minister Park Jin and his Slovenian counterpart, Tanja Fajon, agreed to expand cooperation in shipping and logistics, emphasizing a recent agreement between the port city of Busan in South Korea and the Slovenian port of Koper.

Foreign Minister Park also sought Slovenia's support for South Korean companies' business ventures in

Slovenia, including their involvement in the construction of a new unit at the Krsko nuclear power plant in Slovenia.

Park highlighted South Korea's recent election as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for the 2024-25 term and requested Slovenia's participation in international efforts to address North Korea's evolving missile and nuclear threats.

Fajon expressed optimism regarding strengthened bilateral cooperation in the areas of digital technology, automobiles, and advanced technologies, according to the foreign ministry. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, South Korea] [Korea Herald] [Korea Times]

USA approves two potential arms deals with Taiwan

(eg) The US State Department greenlit Taiwan's potential purchase of ammunition and logistics support on 29 June, comprising of two deals with a combined worth of USD 440 million.

The arms deal includes 30mm ammunition, high-explosive incendiary tracer rounds and other multipurpose rounds. The deal on logistics support includes the purchase of repair parts for vehicles and other equipment. The government stated the sale would strengthen the country's resilience and national security.

The sale comes amid increasing tensions with China, which claims Taiwan as its own territory, and has not ruled out the use of force to assert its authority.

On the same day as the deal, 24 People's Liberation Army aircraft were detected by the Taiwanese defense ministry. 11 of them crossed China and Taiwan's unofficial border in the Taiwan Strait. [Taipei Times] [Ministry of Defense, Taiwan, twitter]

Taiwan commits to working with USA to uphold stability in the Indo-Pacific

(eg) Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen has promised to work closely with the USA to uphold peace in the Indo-Pacific region, describing Taiwan as being on the "frontline of defense of democratic values".

Addressing a bipartisan congressional committee on June 28 during its visit to Taiwan, the Taiwanese President thanked the USA for its recent legislation aiming to improve Taiwan's self-defense and to deepen co-operation between the two countries. In response, the chairman of the committee promised "unwavering" support of Taiwan on behalf of the USA.

The congressional committee is one of the largest delegations to visit Taiwan in recent times. Although the USA is currently trying to cool relations with China, the visit may anger Beijing, which claims Taiwan as a renegade province. [Kyodo News]

Taiwanese Vice Premier visits Japan

(eg) Taiwan's Vice Premier Cheng Wen-tsan led a delegation of officials to Japan last week, marking the first visit by a Taiwanese vice premier in 29 years.

The Vice Premier has met with his counterpart in Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party, as well as other officials and business leaders. The visit involved discussions regarding the semiconductor industry, as Taiwan experiences a decline in demand for its technological exports.

The visit may provoke China, which regards Taiwan as its own territory and protests against Taiwan having diplomatic relations. Last year, when Taiwan's Vice President visited the late Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's funeral, China filed a diplomatic protest. [Executive Yuan, Taiwan, in Chinese] [Bloomberg]

Russia sails warships near Taiwanese waters

(eg) Taiwan reported a sighting of two Russian warships sailing near its waters on 29 June. Taiwan's military frequently publicizes incursions made by Chinese warships, but movements of Russian warships near Taiwan are relatively rare.

Russia's state news stated that the warships were undertaking a long-range sea crossing to simulate naval attack by an enemy force. Taiwan has sanctioned Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. [Taipei Times]

US ambassador denies claims of interference in Thailand's elections

(aj) The United States Ambassador to Thailand, Robert Godec, rebuts claims of American interference in Thailand's general election this past May. According to political analysts, the victory of reformist opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) in the May poll was a surprising one, considering that main opposition Pheu Thai Party (PTP) has been a longtime favorite in Thai politics for over two decades. Due to MFP's association with the 2020-2021 pro-democracy movement, platform to curb the power of conservatives, and policies to reassert Thailand's presence on the international stage, the party is considered by political analysts to be more pro-American compared to caretaker Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha's government, which has strong ties with the military and monarchy.

Most of the claims of American interference comes from members of the conservative camp, says political observers. Ambassador Godec reaffirms that the US has been working with the current Prayuth government for years and will work with Thailand regardless of the administration.

Notably, the US has been re-engaging with Thailand following Prayuth's military takeover of the elected civilian government in 2014. According to analysts, Thai-American military exercises and high-level visits are often an indicator of relations between the two nations, citing the record number of American troops sent to the Cobra Gold war games earlier in February unseen since 2014 [see AiR No. 8, February/2023, 3]. [AP News]

China vows support for Timor-Leste's development, ASEAN membership

(nk) China's Embassy in Dili has affirmed its commitment to backing Timor-Leste's national development efforts, including the establishment of a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and attracting investment. During a meeting with House Speaker Maria Fernanda Lay, Chargé d'Affaires Xu Danyang emphasized the strong bilateral ties and China's longstanding support for Timor-Leste's development since gaining independence. Discussions also revolved around Timor-Leste's plans for an SEZ, with China offering to share its expertise to facilitate its implementation and create employment opportunities.

Notably, China pledged full support for Timor-Leste's accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), citing its close relations with ASEAN member states and expressing confidence in Timor-Leste becoming a full-fledged member. Danyang reiterated China's commitment as a reliable partner and expressed a willingness to share experiences that would contribute to Timor-Leste's pursuit of progress and a better future.

With China's backing, Timor-Leste can anticipate strengthened collaboration and progress in its national development agenda, including its aspirations for ASEAN membership. The commitment from China's Embassy in Dili underscores the significance of the bilateral relationship and China's willingness to contribute to Timor-Leste's growth. [TATOLI]

China, Vietnam reaffirm pledge to work together on South China Sea 'effective code of conduct'

(km/lm) During a high-profile visit to China by Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, the two countries agreed to cooperate on an "effective code of conduct in the South China Sea" and "low sensitivity" marine areas that is consistent with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

Chinh, who took office in April 2021, was the first Vietnamese prime minister to visit China in seven years. During his visit, he had series of meetings with top Chinese officials, including President Xi Jinping, Premier Li Qiang, legislative head Zhao Leji and top political adviser Wang Huning. He also addressed the World Economic Forum or "Summer Davos" in Tianjin on June 27. [South China Morning Post] [vietnamnews.vn]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

5 July 2023 @6:00-7:30 p.m. (GMT+5.30), Asia Society (Mumbai), India

The Role of Host Nations

Against the backdrop of heightened debate of burden sharing of refugees, this webinar will address the role of host nations, taking especially the following questions into account: How can host economies reskill refugees and harness their talents for mutual livelihood benefits? What strategies and interventions can prove effective in promoting economic integration and addressing the specific challenges faced by refugees in low- and middle-income countries like in South Asia? How can global and regional policy cooperation be established to respond to surges in humanitarian migration?

For event details, follow [Asia Society].

5 July 2023 @ 1:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

After Prigozhin, what's next for Belarus?

Against the backdrop of Belarus' role in negotiating a settlement that halted Wagner Group leader Yevgeniy Prigozhin's attempted mutiny and march on Moscow, this online event will explore what effect does Prigozhin and the Wagner Group's presence have in Belarus. It will also address the following question: How should Ukraine and Western regional allies respond to Lukashenka's ever-closer relations with Moscow, including the reported deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus? With Russian nuclear weapons in Belarus, how does Prigozhin and Wagner's presence increase the risk of nuclear instability?

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

5 July 2023 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Measurement Problems: China's GDP Growth Data and Potential Proxies

It is widely believed that proper analysis of China's economic growth trajectory requires consideration of both the official data and a wide range of other metrics. This webcast will discuss the efficacy of China's official GDP growth data and explore potential alternative proxies.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

6 July 2023 @10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Russia and Eastern Europe Knowledge Alliance (REKA), The Netherlands

From new reality to new policy

This livestream conference will bring together experts, policy makers, entrepreneurs and journalists to analyze the Dutch Eastern Europe policy and the opportunities it offers.

For information, visit [REKA].

6 July 2023 @ 9:30-11:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

"Repel, Don't Expel": Strengthening NATO's Defense and Deterrence in the Baltic States

This webcast will feature the launch of the report "Repel, Don't Expel: Strengthening NATO's Defense and Deterrence in the Baltic States". The report's authors will introduce the report and discuss Baltic security.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

6 July 2023 @ 1:00-2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

The European Union's Enlargement Conundrum

This webcast will address the European Union's enlargement policy and explore the prospect of Ukraine's accession.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

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

Empowering Women as Peace Advocates against Political Violence

This hybrid event will discuss the roles women play in preventing political violence in the Bangsamoro, Southern Philippines, with a focus on gender, terrorism, and peacebuilding.

Learn more about the event at [AIIA].

6 July 2023 @ 10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Putin's Prigozhin problems: How has power shifted in Russia?

Against the backdrop of Yevgeny's Prigozhin's mutiny, that in the eyes of many observers has left the Kremlin at its weakest point in decades, this webinar will ask what might Putin do to reassert his authority? Other questions to be discussed include: What is the future of Prigozhin and Wagner? How much will Russia's war on Ukraine change?

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

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

How Factions Lost but Patronage Politics Persists: Lessons from Thailand's 2023 General Elections

Against the backdrop of the stunning victory of the Move Forward Party (MFP) in Thailand's 2023 general elections that has sparked a potential paradigm shift in the country's political landscape, this webinar will examine the nature and scope of this transformative shift and its potential implications for the future of Thai politics.

More event details can be found at [ISEAS].

7 July 2023 @ 11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Beyond adequacy: What is the future for international data flows?

This in-person and webcast will gather transatlantic policymakers and experts to discuss the importance of the US-EU Data Privacy Framework and the future of other global mechanisms for international data transfers.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

7 July 2023 @ 8:15-9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Assessing the Hiroshima Summit: A Conversation with Keiichi Ono

This webcast features a talk with Keiichi Ono, Senior Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, on key results and achievements of the G7 Summit held in May in Hiroshima.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

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

Education Disrupted? Legacies and Prospective Transformations in Myanmar's Education Landscape

This webinar will discuss past, present and future challenges in Myanmar's education landscape, with a view to answer the question of how pro-democracy stakeholders can potentially develop a new inclusive tertiary education system that corresponds with the needs of the youth.

More event details can be found at [ISEAS].

10 July 2023 @ 4:15-6:00 p.m. (GMT+2), German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA),

Germany

Latin America in the Global Sixties: When Periphery Became the Centre

This hybrid event will explore the trajectories and global influences of certain ideas, as well as political and intellectual projects, that emerged in Latin America.

For more information, visit [GIGA].

11 July 2023 @ 10:30-11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

The Future of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance in the Indo-Pacific

This hybrid event will feature the 2023 B.C. Lee Lecture. Hyundong Cho, South Korea's Ambassador to the United States, and Young Kim, Chair of the Subcommittee on the Indo-Pacific, House Foreign Affairs will discuss future challenges and opportunities in the South Korea-US relationship and the Indo-Pacific region.

For more information, visit [Heritage].

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

Thunder from the Silent Zone: Rethinking China

This hybrid event will feature the launch of the new edition of the 2005 published book "Thunder from the Silent Zone: Rethinking China," by former intelligence analyst Dr Paul Monk who has updated the book to cover the trajectory of China's foreign policy under Xi Jinping.

Learn more about the event at [AIIA].

12-13 July 2023 @ 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Critical Minerals in the Arctic: Forging the Path Forward

This two-day online conference will address critical minerals in the North American Arctic and provide a platform for dialogue to develop policy recommendations for development of critical mineral resources in the Arctic, in the context of US national security, energy, climate, and technology goals.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

Recent and upcoming book releases

Adam B. Lerner**, **From the Ashes of History: Collective Trauma and the Making of International Politics, OUP USA, 272 pages, July 7, 2022. A review is available at [LSE].

Patrick J. Deneen**, **Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future, Sentinel, 288 pages, published June 6, 2023, reviewed in [The New York Times].

Klaus Hoeyer**, **Data Paradoxes: The Politics of Intensified Data Sourcing in Contemporary Healthcare, MIT Press, 328 pages, published April 18, 2023. For a review, see [LSE].

Koen Slootmaeckers**, **Coming in: Sexual Politics and Eu Accession in Serbia, published February 21, 2023. Visit [LSE] for a review.

Ben Judah**, **This is Europe: The Way We Live Now, Picador, 512 pages, published June 15, 2023, reviewed in [The Guardian].

Tania Branigan**, **Red Memory: The Afterlives of China's Cultural Revolution, W. W. Norton, 309 pages, published

May 9, 2023. For a review, see [NPR].

Calls

The **Telos-Paul Piccone Institute** invites paper proposals for its ***2024 Annual Conference*** to be held on March 22-23, 2024, at Queens College/CUNY, New York. The ***conference theme is "Democracy Today?"***. Abstract submission deadline is October 15, 2023. For more information, see [Telos Institute].

The **Global Information Technology Management Association (GITMA)** invites paper proposals for its ***Annual Conference 2023*** to be held on September 20, 2023, in Boston, MA. The closing date for abstract

submission is July 31, 2023. Details are available at [GITMA].

The **European Society of International Law (ESIL)** invites paper proposals for its ***Research Forum 2024 on "Revisiting Interactions between Legal Orders"*** scheduled for April 18-19, 2024, at theDepartment of Law of the University of Cyprus. Abstract submission deadline is September 30, 2023. For more information, see [ESIL].

Jobs and Positions

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks a ***Project Associate*** to be based in Sri Lanka. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks a ***Technical Specialist*** to be based in Lusaka, Zambia. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks a ***Project Analyst*** to be based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks a ***Driver*** to be based in Maputo, Mozambique. Applications are accepted until Jul 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks a ***Public Policy Analyst*** to be based in Dehra Dun, India. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seeks a ***Regional Security Advisor*** to be based in Cairo, Egypt. Applications are accepted until Jul 12, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The World Food Programme (WFP) seeks a ***Coordinator*** to be based in Nigeria. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The World Food Programme (WFP) seeks an ***Intern*** to be based in Italy. Applications are accepted until Jul 17, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The World Food Programme (WFP) seeks a ***Business Support Assistant*** to be based in Madagascar.

Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The World Food Programme (WFP) seeks a ***Logistics Associate*** to be based in Dnipro, Ukraine. Applications are accepted until Jul 16, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The World Food Programme (WFP) seeks an ***Investigations Officer,*** to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until Jul 31, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) seeks a ***Consultant***, to be based in Kenya. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) seeks a ***Nutrition Specialist***, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until Jul 17, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) seeks a ***Consultant***, to be based in Switzerland and Remote Work. Applications are accepted until Jul 13, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) seeks an ***Emergency Specialist***, to be based in Maiduguri, Nigeria. Applications are accepted until Jul 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) seeks an ***International Consultant***, to be based in Abuja, Nigeria. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The World Health Organization (WHO) seeks a ***National Professional Officer***, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The World Health Organization (WHO) seeks a ***Clerk***, to be based in Brazzaville, Republic of the Congo. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The World Health Organization (WHO) seeks a ***Scientist***, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until Jul 20, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The World Health Organization (WHO) seeks a ***Data Entry Assistant***, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until Jul 19, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The World Health Organization (WHO) seeks an ***Administrative Assistant***, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until Jul 19, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The United Nations Secretariate (UN) seeks a ***Digital Communications Specialist*** to be based in Bogota, Colombia. Applications are accepted until Jul 15, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The United Nations Secretariate (UN) seeks a ***Senior Political Affairs Officer*** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until Jul 5, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The United Nations Secretariate (UN) seeks an ***Intern*** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until Jul 28, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The United Nations Secretariate (UN) seeks a ***Public Information Assistant*** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until Jul 12, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The United Nations Secretariate (UN) seeks a ***Photographer*** to be based in Windhoek, Namibia. Applications are accepted until Jul 7, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) seeks a ***Program Officer***, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until Aug 29, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) seeks a ***Caseworker***, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until Aug 29, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) seeks a ***Director***, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until Aug 29, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) seeks a ***Digital Equity Specialist***, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until Aug 29, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) seeks a ***Program Associate***, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until Sep 1, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) seeks a ***Specialist***, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications

are accepted until Jul 20, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) seeks a ***Programme Officer***, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until Jul 21, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) seeks an ***Information Technology Assistant***, to be based in Budapest, Hungary. Applications are accepted until Jul 12, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) seeks a ***Food Systems Specialist***, to be based in Jakarta, Indonesia. Applications are accepted until Jul 12, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) seeks a ***National Communication Specialist***, to be based in Indonesia. Applications are accepted until Jul 11, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The Action contre la Faim (ACF) seeks an ***Administrator***, to be based in France. Applications are accepted until Jul 29, 2023. More information is provided as [ACF].

The Action contre la Faim (ACF) seeks an ***Assistant***, to be based in France. Applications are accepted until Jul 28, 2023. More information is provided as [ACF].

The Action contre la Faim (ACF) seeks a ***Head of Finance***, to be based in Romania. Applications are accepted until Jul 27, 2023. More information is provided as [ACF].

The Action contre la Faim (ACF) seeks a ***Coordinator***, to be based in France. Applications are accepted until Jul 27, 2023. More information is provided as [ACF].

The Action contre la Faim (ACF) seeks a ***Nutrition Coordinator***, to be based in Ukraine. Applications are accepted until Jul 29, 2023. More information is provided as [ACF].

The World Bank (WB) seeks a ***Social Protection Specialist***, to be based in Accra, Ghana. Applications are accepted until Jul 18, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The World Bank (WB) seeks an ***Economist***, to be based in Cotonou, Benin. Applications are accepted until Jul 18, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The World Bank (WB) seeks a ***Senior Insurance and Risk Officer,*** to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until Jul 16, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The World Bank (WB) seeks a ***Senior Energy Specialist***, to be based in Pretoria, South Africa. Applications are accepted until Jul 19, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The World Bank (WB) seeks an ***Investor***, to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until Jul 20, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) seeks a ***Student Worker,*** to be based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Applications are accepted until Aug 10, 2023. More information is provided as [DRC].

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) seeks a ***Protection Specialist,*** to be based in Sittwe, Myanmar. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [DRC].

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) seeks a ***Country Director,*** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya and Sudan. Applications are accepted until Jul 21, 2023. More information is provided as [DRC].

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) seeks a ***Head of Operations,*** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya and Sudan. Applications are accepted until Jul 14, 2023. More information is provided as [DRC].

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) seeks an ***Executive Support Officer,*** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until Jul 7, 2023. More information is provided as [DRC].

Danish Refugee Council (DRC) seeks a ***Programme Manager,*** to be based in Meiganga, Cameroon. Applications are accepted until Jul 12, 2023. More information is provided as [DRC].

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks a ***Project Assistant,*** to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until Jul 11, 2023. More information is provided as [UNESCO].

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks a ***Consultant,*** to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until Jul 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNESCO].

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks a ***Consultant***, to be based in Mexico City, Mexico. Applications are accepted until Jul 10, 2023. More information is provided as [UNESCO].

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks a ***Programme Specialist***, to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until Jul 28, 2023. More information is provided as [UNESCO].

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) seeks a ***Technician***, to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until Jul 31, 2023. More information is provided as [UNESCO].

The **Center for the Study of Complex Systems at the University of Michigan** in Ann Arbor, Michigan is inviting applications for a ***tenure-track faculty position*** in complex systems science. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Michigan].

Johns Hopkins University in District of Columbia, United States is inviting applications for a ***Senior Lecturer and Director for the Master of Arts in Global Policy***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Johns Hopkins University].

The ***Department of Public Administration and Policy in the School of Public Affairs at American University,*** United States is inviting applications for a ***Professorial Lecturer***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [American University].

The Master of Public Administration program at **San José State University** in California, United States is inviting applications for a ***part time lecturer instructional position***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [San José State University].

The **University of Houston Law Center** in Texas, United States is inviting applications for a ***Lecturer***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Houston].

The **School of Science at Marist College in New York**, United States is inviting applications for a ***Visiting Lecturer of Environmental Science***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Marist College].

The Program of Social Sciences at **California State University San Marcos** in California, United States is inviting applications for a ***Lecturer***. Application submission deadline is May 31, 2024. For more details, see [California State University San Marcos].

The **Department of Political Science, Trinity College** in Connecticut, United States is inviting applications for a ***Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Trinity College].

The **Department of Human Development and Family Science in Auburn University** in Alabama, United States is inviting applications for an ***Associate Professor in Family Science***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Auburn University].

The **Political Science Department at Williams College** in Massachusetts, United States is inviting applications for an ***Assistant Professor of Political Science***. Application submission deadline is September 15, 2023. For more details, see [Williams College].

The **Sociology Department in the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University** in New York, United States is inviting applications for an ***Assistant Professor***. Application submission deadline is September 1, 2023. For more details, see [Syracuse University].

The **University of Wisconsin-Madison** in Wisconsin, United States is inviting applications for a ***Teaching Faculty*** in Personal Finance. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Wisconsin-Madison].

Syracuse University in New York, United States is inviting applications for a ***Senior Director Government Affairs***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Syracuse University].

The **Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Texas Christian University** in Texas, United States is inviting applications for an ***Assistant Professor in Criminal Justice***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Texas Christian University].

California State University, Bakersfield in California, United States is inviting applications for an ***Assistant Professor of Political Science***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [California State University].

The **Department of Political Science at Rollins College** in Florida, United States is inviting applications for an ***Assistant Professor***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Rollins College].

The **University of Texas**, Rio Grande Valley in Texas, United States is inviting applications for a ***Lecturer in Political Science***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Texas].

The **S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University** in District of Columbia, United States is inviting applications for a ***Specialized Reporting***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Syracuse University].

The **Department of Justice Studies, San Jose State University** in California, United States is inviting applications for a ***Lecturer***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [San Jose State University].

Brown University in Rhode Island, United States is inviting applications for a ***Curator for Military & Society***. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Brown University].

Team:

Amanda Jaroen (aj), Cho Zin Thet (cho), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Edward Green (ed), Hanzaw Aung (ha), Jamie Leong (jl), Kanokphong Visetvoharn, Khin Ohnmar Moe (km), Lucas Meier (lm), Morten Strantzen (ms), Nath Kusolsong (nk), Noor Afrose (na), Tatjana Buehring (tb), Tarazi Mohammed Sheikh (tms), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn), Worrawit Sirijintana (ws), Yves Nunticha Bowonnaowarux (ynb)

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