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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Independence Day of Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, and Papua New Guinea as well as the Malaysia 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: Proposed law calls for ban on clothing and speech that "hurt" China

(ms) The Chinese government introduced a bill to amend the public security law to ban certain language and clothing that "undermine the spirit" of country and harm the “feelings of the Chinese nation.”

The draft is currently in a mandatory public review phase, which is why adjustments can still be made to the draft law. However, as it currently stands, the law foresees prison sentences of up to 15 days and fines of up to about USD 700 for individuals who either wear or force people to wear clothing or disseminate articles or speeches that "undermine the spirit or hurt the feelings of the Chinese nation.”

The draft law does not further define what clothing or content in texts or speeches is referred to. This vague wording has been the main source of criticism online, starting with harsh criticism from legal experts who successfully encouraged other Chinese online users to submit existing questions and concerns about the draft online.

More than 40,000 people are said to have responded to this call so far, submitting their feedback via the official website of the National People's Congress, China's highest legislative body, responsible for drafting the law. [BBC] [Global Times] [Reuters] [The Guardian]

China: Slowdown in export decline in August

(ms) Although China's export volume continued to fall in August compared to the previous year, with a decline of 8.8 percent, compared to July and the measured decline of about 14.5 percent, a relaxation of China's ongoing export weakness can be seen, leading to cautious forecasts that the Chinese economy has the worst behind it.

A similar trend is also evident in the country's imports, which fell 7.3 in August compared to a year earlier, which is still an improvement in light of July's reported 12.5 percent decline.

These figures, which exceeded forecasts for August, could be the first signs of a stabilization in the Chinese economy, according to economic experts. This optimistic forecast is based not only on the improved economic data in China, but also on other economic data that suggest that global demand is beginning to pick up again, which would also benefit China's economy.

However, despite this more positive development, strong incentives and support from the Chinese government are still needed. According to current forecasts, without major changes China is still on course to miss its economic growth target for 2023 of around 5 percent. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China: Ban of Apple products for government and state employees

(ms) According to various reports, the Chinese government has banned government officials as well

as employees of state-owned companies from taking Apple products to work with in the future. Potentially more than 55 million Chinese employees, will be affected by the ban.

The move is seen as another step in the US-China tech war, a retaliation for similar bans imposed in the U.S. on products from the Chinese tech giant Huawei, as well as the ban of the social media platform TikTok, owned by Chinese company ByteDance.

Apple as a company holds a special role. Foxconn, an offshoot of a Taiwanese technology company that has so far largely produced in China, is one of the most important suppliers for the US company. Although Foxconn already hinted at moving parts of their production from China to India, it is to be seen to what extent the newly imposed ban will accelerate this development, or how in general Apple will react to it. [Al Jazeera] [CNN] [The Guardian]

China: Xi visits flood-hit province

(ms) During a visit to the northeastern Heilongjiang Province, which was hit hard by the severe flooding in early August, the Chinese president called for improving local industry and safeguarding the agriculture sector.

Heilongjiang province was once one of the driving forces of the Chinese economy, but over time lost its importance and became part of the so-called rust bell. Currently, the province is one of the country's main suppliers of grain, a role Xi continues to prioritize and demand from the local government in light of his focus on food security. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post 1] [South China Morning Post 2]

China: Research team announces breakthrough in quantum computing

(ms) A Chinese research team consisting of scientists from Tsinghua and Fudan University has claimed a breakthrough in the development of a processor for a quantum computer that would potentially revolutionize computational capabilities and underpin future innovations in technology.

According to a paper the team published in Physical Review Letters in August, it succeeded in developing new experimental devices and methods for linking eight and ten atoms in two-dimensional blocks and

one-dimensional chains. [South China Morning Post] [Diplo]

China: Successful "CT scan" of deep seabed in South China Sea

(ms) According to the Chinese Academy of Science-affiliated South China Sea Institute of Oceanology (SCSIO), they have succeeded in scanning an approximately 4000-meter-deep seabed using Chinese-made technology.

The scan to create a seabed profile of the more than 100-kilometer-long region in the South China Sea basin, by using both artificial-source electromagnetism and natural-source electromagnetism, is said to have taken place between July and August, representing a breakthrough in Chinese-made technology, according to the research team.

Until now, the technology needed for this endeavor has been "monopolized" mainly by Western countries, but by developing their own devices, the researchers have now managed to break away from dependence on the West, states the report. [Global Times]

China: Launch of another classified satellite

(ms) On September 10, China launched the Yaogan-40 satellite from its Taiyuan Satellite Launch Center in North China's Shanxi Province.

Little is officially known about the exact mission of the satellite. According to the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), which is responsible for the satellite, the satellite is intended to collect data on the electromagnetic environment and conduct related technological tests. According to foreign experts, however, the Yaogan satellites will be used for reconnaissance for the Chinese military.

The Long March 6A rocket used is said to have put the satellite into sun-synchronous orbit (SSO), which allows it to scout the same points on Earth at the same time every day, making it well suited for conducting monitoring. [Space.com] [Xinhua]

China: Defense minister not seen for two weeks in public

(dql) Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu, who assumed his post in March, has been absent from public view for two weeks, triggering rumors about his whereabouts and political fate.

He was last seen on August 29 speaking at the China-Africa forum in Beijing. [WION]

His absence comes on the heels of the case of former Foreign Minister Qin Gang who went for a month before being removed in July [see AiR No. 30, July/2023, 4].

Japan: Domestic opposition against Fukushima nuclear wastewater release

(dql) Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures' residents have filed a suit seeking a halt of the release of treated radioactive wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant that began on August 24 [see AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5]

The suit filed with the Fukushima District Court against the central government and plant operator Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. is the first lawsuit of its kind in which the plaintiffs argue that the water discharge poses a threat to the right to live safely and to the local fishermen's businesses.

In addition, the lawsuit also seeks to nullify nuclear regulators' approval of facilities installed for the water discharge and a ban to be placed on the release.

Another lawsuit is being planned to be filed in October. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Cabinet to be reshuffled

(dql) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will reshuffle his Cabinet and the leadership of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP).

The reshuffle will not see the opposition Democratic Party for the People joining the current ruling collation between LDP and its junior coalition partner Komeito as they intend to maintain their alliance after the reshuffle, dispelling speculation of an expansion of the coalition. [Kyodo News]

The upcoming reshuffle is widely seen as an attempt to boost the image of the Kishida administration as approval ratings for his Cabinet fell to record lows in July, partly due to errors related to the My Number national identification system [see AiR No. 32, August/2023, 2].

Meanhwile, former parliamentary vice foreign minister and member of the lower house Masatoshi Akimoto of the LDP, was arrested on September 7.

He is suspected of accepting USD 410,000 in bribes from a wind power company in return for raising questions in parliament that benefit the firm's bids for offshore wind projects. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Record high number of child abuse cases

(dql) Government data release on September 7, revealed a new record number of child abuse cases in Japan, with a rise of 11,510 cases to 219,170 in fiscal year 2022 compared to the previous.

The latest number of cases handled by child consultation centers across the country hit its highest for the 32nd straight year since authorities began compiling statistics in fiscal 1990.

By category, psychological abuse cases, including verbal threat and children witnessing domestic violence, accounted for nearly 60 percent of all cases, while physical abuse cases made up more than 40 percent. [Nippon.com]

Japan: Damages claim over denied same-sex benefits rejected by court

(dql) The Sapporo District Court dismissed on September 11 a lawsuit filed by a former Hokkaido prefectural government employee who demanded damages of USD 32,000 over being denied benefits, such as dependent allowance, for the petitioner's same-sex partner.

In its ruling the court argued that a person in a same-sex relationship is not entitled to spousal benefits that are provided to a person in marriage or in a common-law marital relationship.

The ruling, the first in Japan over whether to give dependent status to a same-sex partner, draws attention to the Japan's gender legislation.

As the country does not legally recognize same-sex partnerships, LGBT people are excluded from the benefits accorded to heterosexual couples. Among those are, for example, medical visitation rights and the ability to make medical decisions for their partners, along with co-parenting rights and spousal income tax deductions.

However, in recent developments local governments have begun to recognize same-sex partnerships by issuing certificates. While not legally binding, they allow same-sex couples to apply for municipal housing, among other benefits. [Kyodo News] [Nippon.com]

Japan: Spacecraft moon landing expected after succcesful rocket launch

(dql) With its successful launch of rocket and the release of a lunar lander on September 7, Japan is expected to become the fifth country to land on the Moon, after the US, Russia, China and India, with the moon landing of the spacecraft expected for February.

The launch came after failed landing and rocket launch attempts last year and this year. [BBC]

It also came two weeks shortly after India's Chandrayaan-3 rocket landed on the lunar south pole on August 23 [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1]

Mongolia: Cabinet backs reform of judiciary

(dql) Mongolia's Cabinet has decided to back a draft resolution of the parliament on the reform of the country's judiciary.

The Draft Resolution reflects the goals such as the guaranteed enjoyment of citizens' rights to file in court, improvement of the openness and transparency of operations, ensuring the independence of judges and the independence of the courts, shaping responsible courts, ensuring compliance of the administrative management of the judiciary with modern requirements, continuous development of human resource capacity of the courts, increasing the quality and availability of court services, developing the infrastructure of court services, and creating a stable system suitable for handling cases. [Montsame]

North Korea: Production of ammunition accelerated for new rifles amid resource challenges

(tms) North Korea is ramping up its production of automatic rifle ammunition, with a focus on tailoring it to the specifications of newly developed rifles.

Recent reports reveal various calibers are being produced to suit different rifle types, with plans to distribute them to various military units. However, resource shortages, including funds, manpower, and electricity, pose challenges.

Kim Jong Un's push for increased weapons production prompted factories to mobilize resources. North Korea plans to export surplus old ammunition, with the rest allocated for militia units and training, highlighting its efforts to export both weapons and ammunition for strategic purposes. [Daily NK 1]

Recent displays of North Korean weaponry and Kim Jong Un's interactions with a Russian military delegation have sparked speculation about arms exports to Russia amid the Ukraine conflict [see AiR No. 33, August/2023, 3].

Notably, multiple sources inside the country report that North Korea is actively engaged in smuggling weapons to Russia and other nations. [Daily NK 2]

North Korea: Defense ministry criticizes military units for failing to meet salt collection quotas

(tms) North Korea's Ministry of Defense has strongly criticized military units for falling short of their salt collection targets for this year.

The review, conducted in mid-August, revealed that despite receiving additional fuel support from the ministry to aid in salt collection due to low fuel oil reserves, certain units failed to meet their required salt quotas.

The review exposed corruption among logistics officers selling collected salt for personal gain, prompting the ministry to suspend salt rations for the year, necessitating military units to manage salt shortages on their own. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Passenger train brings back workers amid mental health concerns

(tms) North Korea's passenger train service resumed after a three-year and seven-month hiatus, with the recent arrival of a train carrying hundreds of North Korean workers in Sinuiju, according to a Chinese source.

Departing from Dandong city of China, the train carried 300 North Korean laborers in six passenger cars and one cargo car, with many facing mental health issues due to extended confinement amid tightening COVID-19 measures.

A suicide attempt at a factory resulted in some workers being sent to Chinese hospitals, but ongoing care was impeded by financial constraints and societal stigma.

In response, North Korean authorities have initiated the repatriation of workers from China, with plans to continue throughout the year. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Government bolsters ministry of social security's armed unit amid fears of internal unrest

(tms) North Korea increased the troop strength of the armed mobile unit affiliated with the Ministry of Social Security to counter potential anti-state activities in the early months of this year.

This move includes expanding manpower and weaponry. Each province, city, and county now have regular companies with 80 to 120 personnel, supplemented by mixed tactical units with specialized personnel and helicopters.

While authorities claim this reinforcement is for disaster response and protection, the true aim appears to be quelling anti-state actions by "impure elements."

The Ministry of Social Security's expanding role, joint operations with the military, and appointments of former KPA generals is seen by observers as a signal of growing concerns about internal rebellions. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Persistent rumors of Hyesan customs house reopening leave locals skeptical and frustrated

(tms) Rumors are circulating once again about the potential reopening of the Hyesan Customs House, but many residents are indifferent due to past unfounded rumors.

While there have been claims that trading companies received notifications about its reopening and preparations for the return of North Koreans stranded in China due to COVID-19, most locals remain skeptical, having experienced repeated disappointments. [Daily NK]

Traders who believed in previous rumors suffered financial losses, leading to growing frustration as the customs house remains closed despite promises of reopening [see AiR No. 30, July/2023, 4].

North Korea: Tactical nuclear submarine launched, regional security concerns arise

(tms) North Korea has unveiled its first operational "tactical nuclear attack submarine," assigning it to the fleet responsible for patrolling the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, according to state media reports.

The submarine has been declared a key component of North Korea's naval offensive capabilities, as stated by leader Kim Jong Un during the launch ceremony. [KCNA]

The submarine is likely a modified Soviet-era Romeo-class one, potentially armed with missiles, but its noise, speed, and range limitations may not greatly enhance North Korea's land-based nuclear forces. South Korea doubts its readiness, but detecting and countering submerged subs poses challenges for both South Korea and the US. [Yonhap]

Kim Jong Un called for equipping the navy with nuclear weapons, expanding nuclear-capable vessels, converting submarines, and accelerating nuclear-powered submarine development, citing perceived US and South Korean aggression. [Reuters]

Notably, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs breach UN resolutions, sparking condemnation from South Korea and Japan, heightening security concerns [see AiR No. 23, June/2023, 1].

South Korea: Nuclear watchdog approves new nuclear reactor, reversing previous energy policy

(tms) South Korea has granted final approval for the operation of a new nuclear reactor, marking the first such authorization during President Yoon Suk Yeol's administration.

The Nuclear Safety and Security Commission (NSSC) greenlit the Shin Hanul No. 2 reactor, located in the coastal county of Uljin, approximately 218 kilometers southeast of Seoul.

Completed in August of the previous year, this reactor boasts a power generation capacity of 1,400 megawatts and employs APR1400 technology.

The NSSC anticipates the reactor will commence commercial operation following six months of testing. President Yoon has consistently voiced his commitment to reversing the previous government's nuclear phase-out policy and revitalizing South Korea's nuclear energy industry.

The Shin Hanul 1 nuclear reactor achieved full operation in December of the prior year after receiving approval in July 2021. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2]

South Korea: Team set up to investigate manipulated media interview targeting presidential candidate

(tms) A special prosecution team is probing a manipulated media interview that sought to implicate the then opposition candidate and current President Yoon Suk Yeol just before the previous year's presidential election, connecting him to a development scandal involving his rival, Lee Jae-myung.

A team of about 10 prosecutors from the Seoul Central District Prosecutors' Office is investigating the spread of false information aimed at a major candidate just before the election, highlighting the gravity of attempting to manipulate the democratic election system.

The case revolves around allegations of collaboration between Kim Man-bae, linked to a development scandal, and journalist Shin Hak-lim, who conducted an interview suggesting the candidate's involvement in corruption.

Kim, released from detention, denied manipulating the interview for election influence, citing a private conversation with Shin, while defending his purchase of Shin's books for their value.

Prosecutors have also summoned Shin for questioning on bribery charges as part of the investigation into the motives and potential collaboration behind the controversial interview. [Yonhap]

South Korea: National human rights commission recommends legislative changes on solitary confinement

(tms) The National Human Rights Commission has recommended legislative changes to prevent inmates from being subjected to prolonged disciplinary solitary confinement.

This recommendation came in response to a petition filed by an inmate who endured 114 days of solitary confinement at a Seoul correctional facility for misconduct, including assaulting cellmates and using offensive language with prison staff.

The petitioner, who suffers from epilepsy and bipolar disorder, argued that the disciplinary measure infringed on his personal freedom.

Solitary confinement, a severe punishment for unruly prisoners, entails isolation from communal activities, TV access, and visits. The current law allows up to 45 days in solitary, but the facility in question used it four times consecutively. [Yonhap]

South Korea: President Yoon approves dismissal of left-leaning media regulator for conflict of interest

(tms) President Yoon Suk Yeol has approved the removal of Choung Min-young, a left-leaning commissioner from the Korea Communications Standards Commission (KCSC) due to a violation of conflict-of-interest regulations.

Choung, one of nine KCSC commissioners recommended by the opposition bloc, was found to have breached laws prohibiting commissioners from engaging in personal activities related to their official duties.

Choung, also a lawyer, had previously represented TV broadcaster MBC in a lawsuit involving the broadcasting of a subtitled video featuring President Yoon, which led to the perception that he had used inappropriate language regarding US President Joe Biden. Despite a clear conflict of interest, Choung did not report or abstain from such activities as required by legislation, participating in the KCSC's deliberations and votes on disciplinary actions involving MBC broadcasting personnel on 56 occasions.

Following his dismissal, the composition of the KCSC will now consist of four commissioners recommended by the ruling party and three by the opposition bloc, with one position remaining vacant.

Subsequently, the KCSC selected Ryu Hee-lim, a former journalist proposed by the ruling party, as the new chairman. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Prosecutors raid national election commission amidst excessive political donations allegations

(tms) The Suwon District Prosecutors Office raided the National Election Commission (NEC) in an investigation into suspicions that Democratic Party (DP) leader Lee Jae-myung received excessive political donations during the 2021 DP presidential primary, seeking relevant documents including donor lists for primary DP candidates.

The investigation was initiated following disclosures made by Kim Seong-tae, the former chairman of Ssangbangwool Group, an underwear manufacturer. Kim admitted during a court hearing on August 22 that he had donated around KRW 150 million won (approximately USD 112,500) to Lee's campaign during the Democratic Party (DP) presidential primary.

Kim Seong-tae, who has been in custody since early this year on embezzlement and other charges, claimed that he made similar donations totaling several tens of millions of won to Lee during the Gyeonggi Province gubernatorial primary in 2018.

These allegations emerged just one day before Democratic Party (DP) chairman Lee was set to be questioned by Suwon prosecutors regarding claims that Kim had illegally transferred USD 8 million to North Korea on his behalf. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Opposition leader faces prosecution over illegal money transfers to North Korea

(tms) Lee Jae-myung, the leader of the opposition Democratic Party in South Korea, appeared before prosecutors for the fifth time, where he was questioned about allegations of involvement in illegal money transfers to North Korea.

The investigation focuses on allegations that Ssangbangwool Group, an underwear manufacturer, illegally transferred USD 8 million to North Korea between January 2019 and January 2020, with USD 3 million possibly meant for Lee's Pyongyang visit and the rest for Gyeonggi's North Korean smart farm support program.

Lee, who denied all allegations as fabricated and decrying "political prosecution," arrived at the Suwon District Prosecutors Office, expressing faith in the truth's revelation.

In a social media statement after his questioning, Lee reiterated innocence, emphasizing that his North Korea engagement during his Gyeonggi governorship complied with South Korean laws and UN sanctions.

His ongoing hunger strike, initiated on August 31, seeks an apology from the president, opposition to Japan's radioactive water release, and a Cabinet overhaul. Medical support was on standby at the Suwon prosecution office due to health concerns [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1].

Notably, Lee faced earlier indictments in March for corruption cases related to a Seongnam apartment project and alleged third-party bribery during his tenure as Seongnam mayor from 2010 to 2018. [Yonhap]

South Korea: President Yoon contemplates cabinet reshuffle of gender equality, defense minister

(tms) President Yoon Suk Yeol is reportedly considering a cabinet reshuffle, affecting three to four ministers, including those responsible for gender equality, defense, culture, and information and communication technology (ICT) as an effort to maintain policy momentum ahead of the general elections scheduled for April next year.

Gender equality and defense ministers, Kim Hyun-sook and Lee Jong-sup, face mounting public criticism, with Kim's handling of the World Scout Jamboree leading to international scrutiny and President Yoon considering Kim Haeng as her potential successor, while Lee is likely to be replaced due to controversies including allegations of obstructing a military investigation into a marine's death [see AiR No. 32, August/2023, 2] [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1].

Park Bo-gyoon, the Minister of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, might be replaced by Yoo In-chon, a former culture minister, and Minister of Science and ICT Lee Jong-ho is under consideration for replacement.

President Yoon is also contemplating changes in senior defense officials, though the presidential office denies any direct link to recent controversies, citing a broader personnel plan prepared in advance. [Korea Times]

Taiwan: KMT refuses to enter alliance with anti-China parties

(ed) On September 6, the opposition Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT) stated that it would not co-operate with anti-China parties for the presidential election scheduled to be held in January 2024.

Speaking at a KMT leadership meeting, the party's chairman Eric Chu said a consensus on both China and constitutional reform was required before the KMT could consider allying itself with other parties. He expressed the KMT's opposition to parties that want to "desinify" Taiwan, preferring instead to work with parties that will prioritize improving living standards.

Chu also expressed his criticisms on the current presidential system, instead advocating for Taiwan's premier to be approved by the Legislative Yuan, and for the president to deliver routine state-of-the-nation reports to the legislature.

The KMT's candidate for the upcoming presidential election, Hou You-yi, is currently sitting in third place in opinion polls, while the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate and sitting vice president, Lai Ching-te, holds a steady lead. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Growth forecasted for September as exports fall less than expected

(ed) According to figures released by Taiwan's finance ministry, the country's exports declined for the twelfth consecutive month in August. However, the drop was less steep than expected, with analysts suggesting exports may grow again in September.

The 7.3 percent decline in export value is the smallest drop since last October. For comparison in the previous month of July, the value of exports declined by 10.4 percent.

Despite being trade-oriented and a crucial exporter of technologies such as semiconductors, the slump in Taiwan's exports has not been particularly damaging to the wider economy. Taiwan's gross domestic product returned to growth in the second quarter on the back of strong domestic consumption.

The finance ministry expects September's figures to range from a 2 percent contraction to a two percent growth in exports. [Reuters]

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

Bangladesh: Deputy Attorney General dismissed over disagreement on public statement

(ps) Deputy Attorney General Imran Ahmed Bhuiyan has been dismissed after expressing his disagreement with a statement prepared by the Attorney General's office regarding the recent international public letter concerning Muhammad Yunus. The Attorney General

responded by stating that his office had not issued any directive to release such a statement. [Dhaka Tribune]

Earlier this month, more than 170 global leaders and Nobel laureates signed an open letter urging Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to suspend the legal proceedings against Yunus, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, who has faced legal pressure in Bangladesh despite his international recognition for his social development work. [AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1]. [United News Bangladesh] [Deutsche Welle]

In related developments, more than 300 Supreme Court lawyers have criticized the trials against Dr. Muhammad Yunus, labeling them as politically motivated judicial harassment. They are demanding the suspension of these trials. [Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Parliament advances Cyber Security Act with key amendments

(ps) The Cyber Security Act (CSA), a piece of legislation that is supposed to replace the contentious Digital Security Act, has progressed to the parliamentary standing committee for deliberation. Following the committee's recommendations, the CSA now includes a provision penalizing the filing of false cases with the same severity as the originally filed case.

Additionally, the committee advised the removal of a section in the CSA that criminalized the leaking of official or government secrets. They also proposed various clarifications and limitations for contentious sections. However, the committee did not suggest altering a provision allowing arrests without a warrant.

The CSA has faced criticism for potentially encroaching on individual and journalistic rights from various quarters. The Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFJU) has called for the elimination or clarification of sections that criminalize propaganda against national symbols, the dissemination of false or threatening information, and actions that hurt religious sentiments. [Daily Star 1] [Daily Star 2] [Daily Star 3]

Bangladesh reports record Dengue infections amid global trends

(ps) Dengue, a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes, has surged in Bangladesh this year, recording more than 140,000 infections and 700

deaths. Nearly half of these cases occurred in August alone, marking a significant increase from the 10,000 cases and 26 deaths reported in the entire year of 2018. Globally, Dengue cases have risen eight-fold from 2000 to 2022, reaching 4.2 million infections.

Dengue is endemic to more than 100 countries worldwide in the WHO Regions of Africa, the Americas, the Eastern Mediterranean, South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. This year southeast Asia and South America have reported more severe outbreaks and sub-Saharan Africa also saw outbreaks.

The outbreak in Bangladesh has been exacerbated by favorable weather conditions for mosquito breeding, characterized by unusually hot and wet weather this year. Climate change is predicted to further contribute to Dengue outbreaks by creating weather patterns that are increasingly suitable for mosquito populations. [CNN] [Daily Star] [WHO 1] [WHO 2]

Bangladesh: Alleged torture of two Bangladesh Chhatra League leaders leads to suspension of police officer

(ps) Two senior members of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student political organization affiliated with the ruling Awami League, were reportedly subjected to torture after being taken to a police station on September 9. Two days later, a BCL leader met with the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Headquarters to address the issue with the DMP leader. As a result of these allegations, the police officer in charge during the alleged torture was subsequently suspended from duty. [Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Expanding arsenal with 200,000 rubber bullets, tear gas shells

(ps) Bangladesh is taking measures to enhance its inventory of crowd control tools, as it has recently placed an order for an additional 200,000 rubber bullets from Turkey. This procurement supplements a prior order of 10,000 rubber bullets and 90,000 long-range tear gas shells from the same source. According to the *Dhaka Tribune*, the government's decision to bolster these supplies is driven by concerns that pre-election protests may escalate into violent incidents. [Dhaka Tribune]

India: Supreme Court reserves verdict in Article 370 abrogation challenge

(hp) Following a sixteen-day-long series of hearings concerning the abrogation of Article 370 in the former state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and the subsequent division of the region into two separate union territories, the Supreme Court reached a decision on September 5: it opted to reserve its verdict. [Kashmir Observer] [Greater Kashmir]

The petitioners encompassed a spectrum of individuals, including members of the National Conference party, former government officials and bureaucrats, as well as Kashmiri citizens. These petitioners contested the revocation of the special status accorded by Article 370 in the former state of J&K. They raised concerns about the validity of the President's rule, which they viewed as an assault on federalism and a violation of the Constitution. Additionally, they challenged the requirement for consent from the constituent assembly for the repeal of the article. Furthermore, certain petitioners even raised objections to the 2018 Supreme Court decision that asserted the permanence of J&K's status. [Hindustan Times 1]

In response, representatives of the central government argued that the abrogation was essential to fully integrate J&K into the Union of India. They asserted that the Kashmir Valley had experienced growth over the past four-and-a-half years following the repeal of Article 370 in August 2019. The representatives also stated that elections were scheduled for J&K, and once the ground situation normalized, the region would regain full statehood. [CNBCTV18 1]

After carefully considering arguments from both sides, the court concluded that it required additional time to deliberate on the intricacies before delivering a final verdict. During this announcement, the court also granted both parties an opportunity to submit written statements, limited to a maximum of two pages, within the next two to three days. [CNBCTV18 2]

The hearing was initiated on August 2, and included the five senior-most judges of the Supreme Court. The previous hearing was in March 2020 when a panel of five judges decided not to refer the case to a larger panel. The reason for seeking the referral was because two previous judgments of the highest court contradicted each other, but the panel disagreed with this argument. [Hindustan Times 2]

India: Supreme Court instructs Manipur government to crack down on illegal arms usage

(lf) India's Supreme Court requested on September 6 that the Manipur government, as well as the appropriate state authorities, work to end illegal arms imports reaching the state. The apex court also requested that action be taken against the stockpiling and theft of arms from police forces and local militias, with the Manipur government asked to formulate a plan for the recovery of looted arms. It was recommended that authorities take stock of their munitions supply to understand what weapons had been stolen and how large the issue of arms usage throughout the state is. [Hindustan Times] [The Indian Express]

The Court also demanded the Manipur government issue a report on the status of weapons stolen from police and state armories, with Chief Justice Dhananjaya Chandrachud maintaining that the state government should "at least tell us what steps have been taken" to recover the weapons. The chief justice also maintained that there was no concern over one ethnic group having arms, but that the Supreme Court has approached the topic unbiased and "objectively", considering the safety of the state overall rather than the interests of a given tribe.

Since violence broke out within the state along ethnic lines in May, Manipur has seen an increase in the presence of weapons amongst local tribal groups. Respective mobs of Kuki and Meitei peoples have individually stormed and raided police and state armories, looting weapons to be used in acts of violence against each other. There have also been rumors of potential arms reaching the state from neighboring Myanmar, but these supplies are believed to be significantly smaller than the amount of weapons taken from local stockpiles.

India: Supreme Court nullifies Ladakh Hill Council poll notification, grants National Conference plough symbol

(hp) The Supreme Court on September 6 overturned the election department's August 5 notification for the Ladakh Hill Development Council elections and ordered the administration of the union territory of Ladakh a new notification to be issued within a period of seven days. [Deccan Herald]

While setting aside the council elections, the Supreme Court also decided to allow plough symbol to be used during the upcoming Ladakh Hill Council polls in India's Union Territory of Ladakh. The decision came as a response to a plea filed by the National Conference (NC) party, which had challenged the decision of the State Election Commission to deny the use of the symbol in the elections. The State Election Commission claimed that using political symbols would create confusion in the voting procedure. Therefore, Ladakh Hill Council polls were initially planned to be held without political symbols due to the absence of political parties in the region. However, the NC argued that as a recognized political party, they should be allowed to use their traditional symbol in the elections. [Times of India] [Indian Express 1]

The plough symbol, historically associated with the NC, holds significant political importance in the region. The court noted that denying the use of the symbol could undermine the democratic ethos and principles of free and fair elections. However, it also emphasized that the use of the symbol should not be misused to propagate any separatist ideologies in the region. [Indian Express 2]

The date and schedule for the fresh elections will be notified within a week as claimed by the Supreme Court.

India: Use of 'President of Bharat' sparks speculation on whether government is rebranding country

(hp/lm) On September 5, the dinner invitations sent to guests regarding the G20 Summit addressed Droupadi Murmu as 'President of Bharat' instead of the convention of using 'President of India'. This incident has sparked speculation on whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government is rebranding the country as Bharat ahead of next year's general elections. [Al Jazeera] [Voice of America]

The preamble of India states, "India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States". Bharat is one of three names often used synonymously in India, apart from India, and Hindustan. In places outside the country, India is used most often. This difference in the usage of different words is attributed to the language spoken in the peninsula nation. In Hindi, lingua franca of the Northern part of India, the constitution exchanges India for Bharat except in defining the country's name. [Independent] [Reuters 1]

Notably, speculations suggest that the Indian government has convened the special session of Parliament on September 18-22 with regard to this change in the name of Republic of India. However, some government officials have dismissed the renaming of the country as the focus of the assembly. While the National Democratic Alliance, with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) occupying the lead front, hailed the usage of Bharat, the newly formed Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance or INDIA bloc, criticized the move and claimed it as an 'assault' on the Union of States. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi expressed the whole controversy of changing the name to be 'diversion tactics.' [Mint] [India Today]

Prime Minister Modi belongs to the BJP, a nationalist party which advocates the Hindutva ideology and reprimands anything that has its roots in the western culture or thought process. Over Modi's nine-year tenure, the government has tried to enforce many of the concepts provided in the Hindutva ideology or India's identity such as the push of Hindi as the national language of the country. The Modi-led government has also frequently changed the names of cities imposed by the British during the colonial rule in undivided India (comprising India and Pakistan). The BJP has also campaigned against the use of the word 'India' as it alleges it has western roots to it. [The Guardian]

While Bharat is another official name of India, it is practiced and referred to only in the South Asian subcontinent. To change India's name to Bharat would require a major constitutional change in the form of an amendment. The amendment will have to be passed by two-thirds of the majority in both the houses of the parliament. [Reuters 2]

India: By-Poll elections in six states; BJP faces INDIA bloc for the first time

(hp) On September 5, by-poll elections were held for seven assembly seats in six Indian states, featuring a contest between the opposition alliance known as the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). This marked the INDIA bloc's first-ever electoral challenge against the NDA, with the All India Trinamool Congress, primarily influential in West Bengal, also participating. [Times of India]

The by-polls covered diverse regions of India, including constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Tripura,

Uttarakhand, West Bengal, and Kerala. The results, announced on September 8, revealed that the opposition Congress party secured victory in four out of seven seats, triumphing in Ghosi (Uttar Pradesh), Dumri (Jharkhand), Puthuppally (Kerala), and Bageshwar (Uttarakhand). Prime Minister Modi's BJP emerged victorious in Tripura's Dhanpur and Boxanagar constituencies, while Trinamool Congress won in Dhupguri, West Bengal. [Mint] [CNBCTV18] [Hindustan Times]

These by-poll elections were seen as a significant test for the INDIA bloc, given the upcoming assembly elections in five states and Parliament elections scheduled for April and May 2024.

India: Congress holds a meeting of the Parliamentary Strategy Group before the special session

(hp) The Indian National Congress, one of the two major political parties in India, held a meeting of the Parliamentary strategy group before the special session of the Parliament, announced to be held on September 18. [NDTV]

The meeting was held at the residence of the chairperson of Congress Parliamentary Party, Sonia Gandhi with attendees including Congress president and the Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge to deliberate upon the agenda of the special session of parliament announced by the central government [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1]. Moreover, they came together to discuss their strategy during the newly convened session of parliament. [Telangana Today] [ANI News]

India: Former Congress chief writes letter to Prime Minister Modi highlighting nine issues

(hp) As a response to the BJP-led government's decision to convene a special session of Parliament on September 18, Sonia Gandhi, chairperson of the Indian National Congress parliamentary party, wrote an extensive letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The letter addressed various issues, which the INDIA opposition alliance, of which the Congress constitutes an important part, believes to be of utmost importance and require urgent attention. [The Wire]

Touching on matters of concern, Gandhi highlighted nine major issues for the session. The first and foremost was the current economic situation prevailing in the country. Substantiating on it, she wrote on the unimpressive functioning of MSMEs (medium, small and micro enterprises), apart from inflation of food prices and unemployment. Other concerns of the Congress focused on having a joint parliament committee on the Adani Group controversy, getting a resolution on the China front, and having a caste census. She also mentioned the Manipur violence and demanded the center to speak up on the issue. [Hindustan Times]

Apart from listing down the possible agendas for the session, Gandhi pointed out the lack of transparency of the union government in informing the purpose of the meeting. In her letter, Sonia mentioned, “I must point out that this special session has been convened without any consultation with other political parties. None of us have any idea of its agenda. All we have been communicated is that all five days have been allocated for government business.” [Indian Express]

While a day after writing the letter, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs responded to Sonia Gandhi, no announcement regarding the agenda of the special session has been made. The Congress hopes to raise the issues and questions penned down in the letter on September 18. [Times of India]

India: Editors' body charged over Manipur report raises press freedom concerns

(hp) Two cases had been filed against the Editors Guild of India (EGI) by the police of Manipur, accusing the EGI of aggravating and inciting the people to indulge in ethnic violence in the state. The complaints were based on First Information Reports (FIRs) which accused the members of the EGI of spreading false information. [Al Jazeera]

The Indian Penal Code, among other provisions, was the subject of the FIRs. The FIRs were filed under sections 153-A (promoting enmity), 298 (uttering any word with the deliberate intention of wounding religious feelings), 505 (statement to incite violence against any class or community of persons), 499 (criminal defamation), and 120-B (criminal conspiracy). [Hindustan Times 1]

On the release of the report the EGI said, “The Guild is extremely disturbed that rather than respond to the concerns raised in the report in a meaningful way, the

State government has registered FIRs invoking multiple provisions of the Indian Penal Code. The Guild has already acknowledged and corrected an error that was pointed out regarding a photo caption, and we remain open to further discussion." [The Hindu]

Over the rising concerns regarding press freedom, the Supreme Court of India protected the EGI and the three journalists against whom criminal charges were pressed. The issue was addressed by a bench of senior judges of the Court, headed by the Chief Justice of India. In addition to doing so, the Supreme Court has asked the Manipur government to transfer the case to Delhi High Court. [Hindustan Times 2] [CNBCTV18]

India: Protests in various parts of Maharashtra over Maratha quotas

(hp) Protests over the demand of reservations for Marathas took a violent turn as a clash between the police and the agitators broke out in Jalna district. The police made use of baton charges to control the worsening situation which further got tense in the western peninsular state of Maharashtra. [Indian Express] [Outlook]

The roots of the protests date back to 1997, when an agitation was arranged by Maratha Sangh and Maratha Seva Sangh, organizations primarily formed to protect and preserve the interests of the Maratha community. The protest was for the reservation of seats in educational institutions and government jobs. According to the Sanghs, Marathas did not belong to the upper caste but rather to the agrarian community.

In 2018, the Maharashtra Assembly passed a bill that granted sixteen percent reservation to the Maratha community. The bill, however, was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, the highest court in India. It stated that the bill breached the fundamental rights written in the Constitution, especially Article 14 which provides right to equality and Article 21 which provides personal liberty.

In 2019, the High Court of Maharashtra upheld the decision of the reservation. However, as suggested by the State Backward Classes Commission, the court asked the government to reduce the reservation percentage from sixteen percent to twelve to thirteen percent. In 2021, however, the Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. [Mint] [Times of India]

The protestors along with the support of many opposition leaders had called for a 'bandh' or strike on

September 11 to condemn the act of violence seen in Jalna. [NDTV]

India: Religious activities get banned in public spaces as Section 144 gets imposed in Noida

(hp) In order to avoid any violence and maintain 'peace and harmony' in Noida and Greater Noida, cities of India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh, section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) was imposed on September 6 and will continue till September 15. During this period, religious activities such as namaz, puja, or any socio-religious ritual action in public space are banned.[NDTV] [English Jagran]

The ban had been imposed in view of some important festivals such as Janmashtami, an important religious festival for Hindus, on September 6-7, and Chehallum, a day significant for Muslims, on September 7. Apart from these two major holy days clashing, Dronacharya Mela to be held in Greater Noida on September 12 was also a serious threat to the communal harmony in the region. [India TV News]

According to the police, the prohibitory orders issued under CrPC section 144 limit unlawful assemblies of five or more individuals, as well as unauthorized public activities such as religious and political processions. Apart from restrictions on gathering in a public domain, shooting with drone cameras in and above a one-kilometer radius of the premises of government offices would be strictly disallowed. The police officials did, however, mention certain relaxations. These included the use of loudspeakers at places of worship such as temples, mosques and gurudwaras but only with limited sound levels.[India Today]

Apart from these activities, some competitive exams and meetings of farmers have also been put on hold. They will be held after September 15.

India: Curfew reimposed in five valley districts of Manipur

(hp) As a preventive measure, curfew was reimposed in five valley districts of Manipur on September 5. The districts were Bishnupur, Kakching, Thoubal, Imphal West and Imphal East. Before the reimposition of the curfew, there was a curfew relaxation from 5 am to 6 pm every day.

The decision was taken in a haste, as a response to a plan to remove an army of barricades arranged by the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) and its women wing on September 6. The COCOMI had urged the people to remove the blockades in Phougakchao Ikhai in the Bishnupur district. The COCOMI media coordinator had requested the government authorities to lift the curfew on August 30.

According to officials, individuals who work in sectors of vital importance such as healthcare, electricity, water supply, fuel stations, educational institutions, local government, media, court operations, and flight passengers will be allowed to move freely without being affected by the curfew. India Today] [DNA India]

India: Government close to finishing letter of request for 31 MQ-9B drones

(lf) India is in the final stages of purchasing 31 MQ-9B drones for its military, top defense officials reported on September 7. The remotely piloted drones will be a significant addition to the Indian Defense Forces' capabilities, as the nation will be able to patrol its skies and initiate targeted strikes from the ground. The drones come with associated technology required for their operation, which will bolster the capability of the Indian Defense Forces to expand their capabilities with further drone acquisitions.

The drones will be purchased from General Atomics (GA), an American defense corporation headquartered in California. India is reportedly in the final stages of drafting a letter of request for the drones, which if successfully received, will be responded to with a letter of acceptance from GA. Subject to the progress of negotiations, the drones are expected to be purchased for USD 3.07 billion, although the Indian government is attempting to negotiate for a higher rate of technology transfer, from the proposed 9 percent to somewhere within the range of 15-20 percent.

The Indian government has previously purchased a number of items from GA, in what is a growing relationship between the South Asian nation and America's rich defense industry. It is expected that the Indian Navy will receive 15 of the purchased drones, whilst 8 will be given to the Indian Army and Air Force respectively. In the short term, the drones will be used for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, but hold the potential to inflict significant damage upon targets should they be weaponized within the field of conflict. [Hindustan Times] [Indian Express]

Maldives: Presidential election advances to runoff on September 30

(na/lm) The Maldives presidential election that took place on August 9 is now poised for a second round as none of the eight contestants managed to secure more than 50 percent of the vote for an outright win. In an unexpected turn of events, the main opposition candidate, Mohamed Muiz, emerged with a surprising lead, garnering over 46 percent of the votes. Meanwhile, the incumbent President, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, secured 39 percent of the votes. [Al Jazeera] [AP News] [The Hindu]

The remaining candidates lagged significantly in the race, with Ilyas Labeeb, the candidate from The Democrats, receiving a mere seven percent of the vote. Former Home Minister Umar Naseer and Qasim Ibrahim, the leader of the JP party, both secured 2.8 percent of the vote. Independent candidate Ahmed Faris Maumoon garnered one percent of the votes, while the candidates from the Maldives National Party (MNP), Colonel (Retired) Mohamed Nazim and Hassan Zameel, fell short of even the one percent threshold.

Indeed, what was initially seen as a clear frontrunner position for President Solih has now evolved into a head-to-head contest between him and the opposition candidate, Dr. Muizzu. The eagerly awaited runoff election is set to take place on September 30th and carries immense significance for the future leadership and direction of the Maldives.

This election has transcended its local context and turned into a virtual referendum, underlining the ongoing rivalry between two major regional powers, India and China. Their competition for influence in the Indian Ocean archipelago state has been a prominent theme throughout the electoral process, adding an extra layer of global interest and significance to the outcome.

Maldives: Opposition The Democrats party alleges unauthorized data gathering by ruling party

(na/lm) The opposition party The Democrats has accused the ruling party Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) of acquiring citizens' personal data unlawfully for President Solih's re-election campaign. As of now,

there has been no official response or statement from the ruling party addressing these accusations. [Avas]

According to The Democrats, the MDP obtained this data from various state institutions to develop campaign software known as "Vote Viuga," which reportedly contained personal information sourced from government databases such as the Department of National Registration and the Election Commission. The opposition alleges that the data leak was a result of negligence on the part of these entities responsible for maintaining these databases and is calling for an independent investigation into the matter.

It's worth noting that these allegations come amid a backdrop of internal divisions within the MDP. In January, former President Nasheed, who is currently the parliament speaker, lost in the MDP's presidential primary against President Solih. This led to Nasheed forming a separate faction within the MDP, which eventually culminated in the establishment of a new political party called The Democrats in June. [AiR No. 27, July/2023, 1]

Maldives: Speaker Nasheed, former First Lady advocate former President Yameen's release

(na) Parliament Speaker Nasheed and former First Lady Madam Ibrahim have made a joint call for the release of former President Yameen, who leads the main opposition party, the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM).

This unexpected collaboration took place when Madam Ibrahim was returning from a campaign event at Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's campaign center, who is the Presidential Candidate for PPM- People's National Congress (PNC). During this encounter, Nasheed and Madam Ibrahim convened at the House of Democrats, garnering support from both Democrats and PPM-PNC supporters. [Avas]

Yameen had been sentenced to an 11-year prison term in December of the previous year on charges of money laundering and bribery, accompanied by a substantial USD 5 million fine. Furthermore, on August 6, the Supreme Court issued a ruling that barred the incarcerated former President from participating in the upcoming presidential election due to his conviction and the outstanding USD 5 million fine. [AiR No. 32, August/2023, 2]

Nepal: Supreme Court orders lead to appointment of new chief minister in Koshi province

(na/lm) Nepal's Supreme Court has issued an order instructing the Provincial Head of Koshi to appoint Hikmat Karki, the provincial assembly leader of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML), as the chief minister of Koshi Province. This decision follows the Court's declaration that the vote of confidence obtained by the former chief minister of Koshi Province, Uddhav Thapa of the Nepali Congress, was unconstitutional.

The controversy began on August 21 when Chief Thapa secured a vote of approval in the provincial assembly with 47 lawmakers in favor and 30 against. In response, Hikmat Karki, the UML parliamentary leader and former chief minister, took the case to the Supreme Court on August 23, arguing that Thapa's vote was in violation of the Constitution. On August 25, the Supreme Court issued an interim order, deeming the vote of confidence unconstitutional due to the involvement of the assembly's chairperson, and directed Thapa's Cabinet not to make any decisions with long-term consequences [see AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5].

In July, the Supreme Court had previously issued an order invalidating the Speaker's role in forming the government of Koshi Province. On July 27, the court instructed various authorities, including the Koshi Province head and the provincial assembly's Speaker, to establish a new government within seven days, citing Speaker Gautam's support as the reason for deeming the Thapa-led Cabinet unconstitutional [see AiR No. 31, August/2023, 1]. Following these developments, Chief Minister Thapa took office after the resignation of Speaker Gautam [see AiR No. 32, August/2023, 2].

In light of these developments, the Court clarified that the individual presiding over the Assembly meeting cannot cast their vote. Moreover, if a government formed under one provision fails to gain confidence, it should be replaced under another provision. The Court further elaborated that if the Chief Minister appointed under one provision fails to garner confidence, any member with majority support can assume the role of the new Chief Minister. [The Kathmandu Post]

Following the court's decision, CPN-UML, with 40 seats, is set to establish a new government, given that it is the predominant party in the 93-member assembly.

Nepal: Release ordered for 18 arrested in Nepalese Lalita Niwas land scam

(na) On September 10, the Kathmandu District Court ordered the release of all 18 people arrested in connection with the so-called Lalita Niwas land grab scam. Of these, 17 were granted bail, while one was released on a later date. Prior to this decision, the court had previously granted the police three extensions of custody for the arrestees, ranging from five to seven days [see AiR No. 30, July/2023, 4]. [The Kathmandu Post]

At the center of this controversy is the fraudulent transfer of ownership of the Lalita Niwas complex to various individuals, including political leaders and influential figures. The corruption cases related to this scandal were filed in February 2020, and legal proceedings were initiated two years later against a total of 300 individuals, including the 18 who were arrested. Among the notable figures implicated in the forgery case are a former Deputy Prime Minister, former ministers, government secretaries, and key individuals identified as the masterminds behind the land scam.[AiR No. 28, July/2023, 2]

Many of the defendants in the case are also facing corruption charges that were filed by the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority. A majority of these defendants have already been released on bail by the Special Court. The court has emphasized the importance of setting reasonable bail amounts that are within the financial means of the defendants while also ensuring their presence in court.

Pakistan: President Arif Alvi meets caretaker law minister, discusses election

(lm) Pakistan President Arif Alvi on September 11 met the country's caretaker Law Minister Ahmed Irfan Aslam to discuss the elections amid speculations that he may announce the date unilaterally. This meeting marked a continuation of the ongoing consultation process between the president and the interim government, coming a week after their initial discussion on the matter. [Devdiscourse]

President Alvi has consistently maintained that the elections should take place within 90 days of the National Assembly's dissolution, which occurred on August 9. However, his opponents argue that recent amendments in the law, enacted by the previous government, grant the exclusive authority to proclaim

an election date to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The ECP has already announced its plan to complete delimitation by November 30, with subsequent elections to follow. Although a specific timeframe has not yet been confirmed, it is conceivable that elections may occur in January. Nevertheless, President Alvi was expected to announce the election date at any moment, despite the ongoing debate regarding the entity empowered to set such a date.

Against this backdrop, President Alvi extended an invitation to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikandar Sultan Raja last month for a meeting to determine an appropriate date for the general elections. However, the CEC declined the invitation for a meeting.

It is worth highlighting that Interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has also aligned with the stance of the ECP, asserting that, in accordance with the law, the authority to decide the general election date rests with the ECP.

Pakistan: Roadside bombing in Peshawar; clashes near border with Afghanistan

(lm) A roadside bombing targeted Pakistani security forces in the northwestern city of Peshawar on September 11, resulting in the death of at least one security officer and injuring nine individuals, including three civilians. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack. [abc News]

The outlawed Pakistani Taliban, also known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP, has escalated attacks on Pakistani security forces since withdrawing from a unilateral cease-fire agreement with the government in November last year. The TTP is a distinct group but maintains an alliance with the Afghan Taliban, who assumed control of Afghanistan in August 2021 following the departure of U.S. and NATO forces, bolstering the TTP's activities near the Afghan border and throughout Pakistan.

In separate incidents near the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, clashes between security forces and militants from the TTP have led to the deaths of at least four Pakistani soldiers and 12 armed fighters. The Pakistani army reported that a substantial group of well-armed militants conducted coordinated attacks on two military checkpoints in the Chitral district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. These attacks were allegedly

coordinated from Afghanistan's Kunar and Nuristan provinces. As a response to the incident, a combing operation is currently in progress. [Al Jazeera]

Sri Lanka: President announces probe into allegations of intelligence complicity in Easter Sunday bombings

(lf/lm) Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe has announced the formation of a new committee to investigate allegations made by a British documentary regarding the potential complicity of Sri Lankan intelligence officials in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. These bombings resulted in the deaths of at least 269 people, including 45 foreigners, in three churches and three hotels. [The Independent]

The committee will be chaired by a retired Supreme Court judge and will be tasked with investigating the claims raised in the documentary. Additionally, a Parliamentary Select Committee will also look into the allegations against the country's intelligence agency. The findings from both investigations will be presented to the parliament for further consideration.

The allegations, aired in a documentary on the British television station *Channel 4* on September 4, maintained that Suresh Sallay, the current Director General of the State Intelligence Service, was tasked with creating an unsafe environment in Sri Lanka ahead of the 2019 presidential elections that could empower Gotabaya Rajapaksa to unite the nation under his campaign. [AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1]

Rajapaksa, in his first public statement following his dramatic resignation as president in July 2022 following wide-spread protests in Sri Lanka spurned on by the nation's economic crisis, categorically denied the accusations. The former president maintained the claim "that a group of Islamic extremists launched suicide attacks in order to make me president is absurd", whilst asserting that the documentary was "mostly an anti-Rajapaksa tirade aimed at blackening the Rajapaksa legacy" and alleged that *Channel 4* held a bias against himself and his family. [AP News]

In related developments, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, the Archbishop of Colombo, lead calls from Sri Lanka's Catholic community for an international investigation into the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings. The archbishop asserted that only an international investigation could achieve justice and truth regarding what had occurred in the months leading up to attacks. [Daily Mirror] [Barron's] [UCA News]

Calls for this type of inquiry into the bombings have been consistently put forward by members of the Catholic Church, particularly as rumours of Rajapaksa involvement in the attacks circulated throughout Sri Lankan civil society.

Cardinal Ranjith further requested that senior police and intelligence officials should be investigated, citing the whistleblower's claims in Channel 4's documentary that authorities had been hindered in their attempts to investigate reports of a potential attack in the month prior to the bombings.

Sri Lanka: President Wickremesinghe promises opposition 2024 budget will contain 'surprises'

(lf) Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe promised that the nation's 2024 budget would contain "surprises", while addressing Opposition leader Sajith Premadasa in parliament on September 6. Key among the promised 'surprises' will be a tax on primary bond dealers, which will see money lenders have their rates raised in an attempt to bring in more revenue for the government. This policy will align with the IMF requirements of Sri Lanka's USD 2.9 billion bailout from March 2023, which is set for review from September 14-27.

Discussions were also held on a proposed policy to charge a 30 percent tax on the nation's Employees Provident fund (EPF), a social security scheme which aims to put aside money for workers to use upon retirement. President Wickremesinghe maintained that the proposal was a necessary part of the Inland Revenue Amendment Bill, which the 30 percent tax is outline within, as banks alone "cannot participate in the domestic debt optimisation process given their position." President Wickremesinghe freighter asserted that the tax had been presented to the parliament before he became Prime Minister in 2022, the position he held before becoming president, and that the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka had approved the move. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Finance Ministry aims to drop import restrictions on vehicles by end of 2023

(lf) Sri Lanka's Ministry of Finance (MOF) stated on September 5 that the nation would aim to end all

import restrictions on vehicles, aside from private cars, by the end of 2023. The information was released at a sitting of the Committee of Public Finance, when ministry personnel were asked if the restrictions would be lifted to end the inadvertent monopolies which has arisen within the country surrounding the purchase of heavy vehicles, such as trucks. State Minister for Finance Shehan Semasinghe asserted that "import restrictions will be removed", excepting private cars, which act a large source of tax revenue for the nation.

Cars in Sri Lanka are subject to heavy taxes, which return an average of three dollars to the government on every dollar an individual spent paying for the car. This high rate of income explains why import restrictions remain on private vehicles within the nation, whilst trucks and other heavy modes of transport are necessary for the moving resources, goods and workers throughout the country, especially as Sri Lanka aims to relaunch a number of construction privet which had been paused in light of the country's economic woes beginning in mid-2022 [see AiR, No. 35, August/2023, 5]. These projects are expected to take some time before they can commence, especially due to materials shortages globally. It is hoped that the easing of heavy vehicle import restrictions will allow for more resources to be moved across the island and contribute to the completion of these projects quicker. [Economy Next] [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government moves on privatizing Sri Lankan Airlines

(lf) The Sri Lankan government is actively working to privatise the flag carrier Sri Lankan Airlines and is in talks with companies and airlines to negotiate a deal. The three leading potential investors with whom discussions are being held are UAE airlines Emirates, Indian conglomerate Tata Sons and Indian multinational Adana Group.

Whilst prime minister in May 2022, President Wickremesinghe pledged to privatise SriLankan airlines, which has consistently failed to turn a profit. The current government maintained that it planned to have the restructuring plan for the airline finalised by the end of 2023, meaning potential deals have been in active consideration for some time. The airline has seen a rise in traffic in the last seven months, aligning with the steady increase in tourists visiting Sri Lanka as new traffic routes to India, Israel and other destinations were introduces [see AiR, No. 32, August/2023, 2]

Emirates and SriLankan Airlines share a history, as the UAE flag carrier previously held a 46 percent share of the latter company beginning in 1998. The relationship fell through in 2008 however, as the Mahinda Rajapaksa government decided against extending their contract following disagreements between cabinet officials and Emirates executives. Tata Sons, which owns a number of Indian airlines including Air India and AirAsia India, has long been rumoured to have an interest in investing in SriLankan airlines, expanding their monopoly over air travel in the subcontinent's region. Adani is a new contender in the mix to invest in the airline, although the company had indicated an interest to develop and expansion a number of infrastructure projects across the country, including works on Colombo's Bandaranaike International Airport.

It remains to be seen what approach the government will take towards the privatising of SriLankan Airlines, but a deal is expected to be reached soon in order to meet the government's promised pledge to have a plan by the year's end. It is likely that the state will maintain a share in the airline, possibly a majority, whilst a private company is invited to lift some of the financial burden which the flag carrier has proven to be. But with an increasingly growing tourism industry within Sri Lanka and the expansion of international destinations, it could be that the right deal results a profit for the struggling airline and rehabilitates its image within the nation's economic atmosphere. [Daily Mirror] [Ch-aviation] [Business Standard]

Sri Lanka: Ransomware attack wipes out four months of government data

(lm) A significant ransomware attack has targeted Sri Lanka's government cloud system, Lanka Government Cloud (LGC), prompting investigations by the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team and Coordination Center (CERT|CC). The attack, confirmed by Sri Lanka's Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) on September 11, is believed to have initiated around August 26. Although the system and its backup were restored within 12 hours, data spanning May 17 to August 26 was permanently lost due to the absence of available backups for that period. [Infosecurity Magazine]

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

Cambodia: Prime Minister vows to prioritize fight against drugs

(dql) The Cambodian government has issued a sub-decree that expands the scope of the National Authority for Combatting Drugs to fight against illegal drugs in the country.

The move is to be seen in line of Prime Minister Hun Manet's announcement to prioritize eradicating drug-related problems in the country, which has seen an increase of illegal drugs flowing into the nation in recent years.

According to data of the Ministry of Interior, police cracked down on more than 5,000 cases, while over 12,300 suspects related to drug trafficking in Cambodia have been arrested during the first eight months of this year.

2,624 kilograms of drugs have been seized, along with hundreds of kilograms of chemicals used for manufacturing drugs. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: 2023 civil servant recruitment examination suspended

(dql) Prime Minister Hun Manet has ordered the suspension of the suspend the 2023 Civil Service Examination, pending the introduction of new mechanism that ensures accuracy, transparency, and justice for new officials.

The order was made in response to a request to three ministries to prepare for the 2023 civil service examination procedure. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Violent protest over village relocation

(dql) A mass demonstration staged to protest the relocation of the Malay villages on Rempang Island on September 11 turned violent as protestors and police clashed.

Police arrested 14 people were arrested after tear gas was fired to disperse the protesters.

The demonstration was staged in response to the government's decision to clear the land to prepare the development of the Rempang Eco-City. [Tempo]

Malaysia: Controversy surrounding Zahid graft charges drop raises questions about AGC, government

(ic/lm) Amidst ongoing outrage and public criticism, Malaysia finds itself in a state of chaos characterized by uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of the dropped graft charges against Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, a key ally of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, and the individuals responsible for this decision.

Bar Council President Karen Cheah suggested that this move had caused the Attorney-General's Chambers (AGC) to tarnish its own reputation. The AGC responded that the discharge not amounting to acquittal (DNAA) may be ordered at any moment so long as judgment had not been passed. [New Straits Times] [Yahoo! News]

Prime Minister Anwar, for his part, has accepted the public backlash, stating that the desire for answers was understandable. He also stated that this DNAA was requested by the former AG, Idrus Harun, who allegedly did not want the case to be passed over to his successor. [Free Malaysia Today] [Today Online]

These developments have fueled speculation that the DNAAs may be an attempt by Anwar to placate his coalition partners in the government. Zahid, who leads the former ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, played a pivotal role in securing the backing of the coalition's 30

parliamentary seats for Anwar, facilitating the formation of a unity government following the November general election, which had yielded a hung parliament.

Furthermore, there is speculation that the next individual to benefit from such a decision could be former Prime Minister Najib Razak, who was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment in August 2022 due to his involvement in the 1MDB scandal. [South China Morning Post]

Malaysia: Prime Minister Anwar loses junior partner in protest against Ahmad Zahid walking free

(lm) A junior partner within Malaysia's ruling alliance has withdrawn from the government in protest against the prosecutor's decision to drop corruption charges against Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, a key ally of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. [South China Morning Post] [Free Malaysia Today 2] [The Star]

Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, the sole representative of the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA) party in Parliament, made this move following a court decision to discharge Zahid from facing charges of money laundering, criminal breach of trust, and corruption at the request of the prosecution team [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1].

Despite MUDA's withdrawal, Anwar still has a comfortable parliamentary majority to remain as prime minister, and his cabinet remains intact. Still, MUDA's decision to exit the ruling coalition underscores the premier's challenge of balancing the need for support from Zahid's UMNO party to maintain a parliamentary majority while facing criticism from his long-time supporters who were displeased with the alliance with Zahid.

Malaysia: Special Select Committee to call Attorney General to explain dropping of Zahid's graft charges

(ic/lm) The Special Select Committee on Human Rights, Election, and Institutional Reform plans to summon the current and former Attorneys General to explain the decision to drop all corruption charges against Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, a key ally of Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. The move comes

after a court earlier this month discharged Zahid from facing money laundering, criminal breach of trust and corruption charges on the request of the prosecution team [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1]. [The Edge Malaysia]

Malaysia: Unity government retains seats in Johor by-elections

(ic) On September 9, Johor held elections for two seats that had been left vacant by the late Salahuddin Ayub. Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's ruling coalition, Pakatan Harapan, successfully retained both the Simpang Jeram state assembly seat and the Pulai parliamentary ward. [The Straits Times]

Analysts see the triumph as a validation of the late Salahuddin's appeal and legacy, particularly his anti-inflation Rahmah Menu initiative for lower-income groups. It also underscored Johorean voters' support for the state government led by Chief Minister Onn Hafiz Ghazi from the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).

Furthermore, the election results indicated that the "green wave" momentum, which favored the opposition Perikatan Nasional (PN) alliance in previous elections, had not fully reached the southern peninsula, despite Johor being the home state of PN Chairman Muhyiddin Yassin and a stronghold for his party, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia. [Free Malaysia Today] [The Star]

Malaysia: 2023 DAP National Congress; UMNO chairman Zahid in attendance

(ic) On September 10, the Democratic Action Party (DAP), one of four component parties of Malaysia's ruling Pakatan Harapan coalition held its annual National Congress. The event was attended by unity government leaders, including Deputy Prime Minister Zahid; this was viewed as notable by analysts, as the DAP has traditionally been opposed to the United Malays National Organization (UMNO)-led Barisan Nasional (BN) of which Zahid is the chairman. [The Straits Times]

The DAP passed nine resolutions at the National Congress on the party's platform moving forward. Notable among these was a resolution reiterating the Shah Alam Declaration of 2012, which states the

party's conciliatory position on the Bumiputera system of special rights for Malays, as well as the position of Islam in the nation's constitutional order. [New Straits Times]

These have been seen as moves to appease UMNO and drive continued commitment towards cooperation despite past and existing political/ideological differences. [The Star]

Malaysia: Ex-Premier Mahathir's defamation hearing against Deputy leader Zahid rescheduled for next year

(lm) The defamation trial involving former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and current Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, centered on Zahid's alleged derogatory use of the name "Kutty" to refer to Mahathir, has been rescheduled to next year. This postponement is due to the transfer of the presiding judge to Penang, and the new hearing dates are now slated for February 13-16 of 2024. [Free Malaysia Today]

Mahathir initiated the lawsuit in July of the previous year, alleging that Zahid had defamed him during a UMNO divisional meeting in 2017. The alleged defamation implied that Mahathir was not of Malay or Muslim origin and denigrated Malaysians of Indian-Muslim descent. In response, Mahathir is seeking damages and an injunction. On the other hand, Zahid denies any malicious intent behind the statement and disclaims control over its subsequent republication.

Myanmar: NUG advises migrant workers to disregard Military Council's bank transfer instruction

(wn) The National Unity Government (NUG) announced on September 8 that Myanmar expatriate workers should avoid transferring remittances to their families through banks, as directed by the military council.

This comes after the Military Council ordered Burmese expatriate workers to remit 25 percent of their monthly salary or a maximum 25 percent of their three-year salary in August. Furthermore, starting September 1, foreign employment agencies will require workers going abroad to sign a contract with a specified rate of remittance.

According to Myanmar workers abroad, most prefer not to transfer money through banks and instead opt for other convenient methods to send money to their families. Over two million Burmese are working outside their country. [DVB Burmese]

Myanmar: Rising medicine prices

(sk) Rising medicine prices in Myanmar are affecting the working class's access to essential medications, potentially impacting their right to health.

The depreciation of the Myanmar Kyat and inflation have compounded the issue, highlighting concerns related to domestic laws regarding healthcare access. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Political prisoners go on hunger strike

(dql) A hunger strike has been staged by political prisoners, triggered by the seizure of their food, clothes, books and other possessions by military and police intelligence personnel.

The number of strikers has increased from originally 14 on September 8 to currently more than 50. [Irrawaddy]

Philippines: Vice President Sara Duterte's budget request sparks fund transfer questions

(lb) The Philippines Vice President Sara Duterte recently appeared before the Senate to defend the 2024 budget, for her office and the Department of Education (DepEd), which included confidential and intelligence funds (CIF). The budget hearing for her office (OVP) lasted about 1.5 hours, while the DepEd hearing lasted roughly 4 hours. [Rappler]

Questions have arisen regarding the size of Duterte's budget, particularly the inclusion of CIF. In 2022, the Commission on Audit revealed that the OVP had spent USD 2.5 million in CIF, despite it not being part of the budget during the previous vice president's tenure, Leni Robredo.

Critics argue that the transfer of funds from the Office of the President (OP) to the OVP may potentially violate the Constitution since only Congress holds the authority to allocate funds. However, the OP and Malacañang assert that the transfer was legally sound, citing Special Provision No. 1 under the FY 2022 Contingent Fund.

Philippines: Human Rights Commission is seeking additional funds

(lb) The Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in the Philippines is urging for increased funding to enhance financial support for victims of human rights violations, particularly those impacted by the government's anti-drug campaign during Rodrigo Duterte's presidency. The National Expenditure Program (NEP) for 2024, presented to Congress by the Department of Budget and Management, allocates USD 19.5 million to the CHR. This amount falls significantly short of the CHR's initial request for USD 38.6 million and is USD 0.7 million less than the 2023 budget allocation. [Rappler]

Singapore: Court hands rapper six-week jail term for violating racial harmony laws

(lm) A Singaporean rapper has been sentenced to six weeks in jail for his social media posts, including a video criticizing an actor for using brownface and comments alleging unequal treatment among the city-state's races. Subhas Nair, an outspoken musician of Indian descent, was found guilty of attempting to promote ill will between different ethnic and religious groups. He has appealed both his guilty verdict and sentence and has been granted bail pending the appeal. [TIME] [MalayMail]

Singapore: Information ministry warns *The Economist's* Bureau Chief of foreign interference

(lm) Singapore's Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) has issued a warning to Dominic Ziegler, *The Economist*'s Singapore bureau chief, for "actions that constituted interference in our domestic politics." The warning was prompted by Ziegler's public endorsement of a local online publication, *Jom*, in which he compared Singapore to an illiberal state and

encouraged Singaporeans to embrace an alternative vision.

The MCI stated that Ziegler's actions crossed the line from reporting to participating in Singapore's domestic affairs. Foreign correspondents are allowed to report and comment on Singapore, but the government insists on the right of reply to correct reports it considers inaccurate or biased. [The Times of India] [Bloomberg]

Thailand: Srettha emphasizes economic recovery in his government policy statement

(ak) Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin presented the new government's policy to Parliament stressing the need to tackle the economic crisis, stimulate spending, expand investment and digitalize the economy.

The policies presented to ensure the country's economic recovery include debt relief involving agricultural, business and personal debt, reduction of energy costs and reform of the country's energy consumption structure, increase in tourism revenue, and promoting support democracy, civic engagement and rule of law through consitutional amendments.

Srettha also addressed other policies such as transition to a voluntary military service system, improving healthcare and create fair and equitable society. [The Nation]

In response, the Move Forward Party has criticized the prime minister's policy as being vague and missing goals, indicators and timeframes. The party especially questioned how to ensure the financing of the THB 560 billion (USD 16 billion) digital money handout under which 55 million Thai adults are to receive 10,000 baht (USD 282), in a bid to spur domestic demand and investment. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Pheu Thai to elect new party leader on October 16

(ws) The Pheu Thai Party has announced its plans to convene a general assembly on October 16 to elect a new executive committee.

The necessity for this election arose following the resignation of Cholnan Srikaew from his position as the

party leader on August 30. Cholnan cited his commitment to honoring his word to step done as party chief in case the coalition government would include two military-affiliated parties from the previous government

The positions within the executive committee, encompassing positions such as the leader, deputy leaders, secretary-general, deputies, and other key party posts, will be determined during the forthcoming assembly meeting. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Move Forward Party candidate wins Rayong by-election

(ak) Move Forward Party candidate Pongsathorn Sornpetnarin won the Rayong by-election. With 39,296 votes he was far ahead of Banyat Jetnajan from Democrat Party and Ruengchai Sombatphuthorn of the Nation Building Labor Party. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Protests erupt in Lampang over new national park

(nk) Indigenous groups in Lampang rallied against the proposed Tham Pa Thai National Park, fearing land loss.

With support from the Northern Peasant Federation (NPF) and the People's Movement for a Just Society (P-Move) activists, they marched to the Ngao District Office during a public forum on the park's declaration.

False accusations of illegal logging and encroachment were retracted, but tensions remained. The forum, set for September 4-8, is now indefinitely postponed pending further land surveys.

Community leaders seek protection of their land rights, exclusion of their lands from the park, and amendments to forestry laws in line with international declarations that Thailand signed, referring especially to UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. They demand a public apology for past violations.

The forum will be rescheduled to involve all stakeholders, following instructions from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment's permanent secretary, Jatuporn Buruspat. [Prachatai]

Thailand: New digital economy and society minister drops threats to block Facebook

(ws) Newe Digital Economy and Society Minister Prasert Chanthararuangthong has reversed his predecessor's decision to block access to Facebook due to serious scams affecting Thai citizens.

Previously, the ministry had unsuccessfully requested Facebook to remove scam advertisements. In response, former Minister of Digital Economy and Society Chaiwut Thanakamanusorn instructed officials to compile evidence of wrongdoing by the platform for presentation in court, along with a request to block access. [See AiR, No. 34, August/2023, 4]

However, the new minister adopted a different approach, stating that blocking Facebook access would have widespread ramifications, affecting approximately 45 million users and millions of businesses that rely on the social media platform.

Instead, he has decided to negotiate with Facebook executives in Singapore and Thailand to find ways to block scam advertisements. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Couple sentenced to 18 months in jail for anti-government protest

(ws) The criminal court has sentenced a man and his wife to serve 18 months in jail and fined them 1,000 baht each for their participation in an unauthorized anti-government protest in 2021.

In August 2021, the couple was apprehended after leaving the protest in a car with license plates obscured by face masks. During a search of their vehicle, the police discovered gasoline-filled bottles, gas masks, and a bulletproof vest.

They were subsequently charged with multiple violations, including violating the War Materials Control Act of 1987, the Criminal Code, the Disease Control Act of 2015, and the Emergency Decree of 2005. [Bangkok Post] [TLHR, in Thai]

Thailand: Student activist sentenced to two years for royal defamation

(nk) Student activist Phimchanok Jaihong has been sentenced to two years in prison for royal defamation by the Chiang Mai Provincial Court, which ruled that her Facebook post, stating, "The government sucks. The institution also sucks," was in violation of the law protecting the monarchy as a whole.

Phimchanok, arrested in March 2022, argued that she was referring to an educational institution, not the monarchy, in her post. However, the court cited witness testimonies that she had previously advocated for monarchy reform, suggesting her post referred to the monarchy. [Prachatai]

Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City opened Long Kieng Bridge after 20 years of construction

(km) The Department of Transport and the Ho Chi Minh City Traffic Works Investment Project Management Board officially opened Long Kieng Bridge in Nha Be district, connecting traffic in the south of Ho Chi Minh City. The bridge, which has a length of 317m and a width of 15m, has a total investment of VND 589 billion, including construction, compensation, and resettlement support. The project, approved in 2001, started construction in 2018 and was halted in 2019 due to limited space. Despite adjustments and delays, the project was completed in 2022, a month earlier than planned, enhancing traffic connectivity between Ho Chi Minh City and Long An province. The Department of Transport plans to continue handing over sites and completing halted traffic works, including Ong Nhieu Bridge, Tang Long Bridge, Ba Hom Bridge, Tan Ky Tan Quy, Luong Dinh Cua, Duong Quang Ham, and Provincial Highway 8. [VietnamPlus]

Vietnam: Country achieved general goal of macroeconomic stability in August

(km) The Vietnamese government held a regular session on September 9, under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, to discuss the socio-economic situation in August and eight months of 2023, the implementation of socio-economic rehabilitation and development programs, allocation and disbursement of public investment capital, and the improvement of the investment and business environment.

The government will consider reports on the implementation of the Socio-Economic Development Plan in 2023, expected 2024, and the mid-term assessment of the 5-year Socio-Economic Development Plan (2021-2025). The government emphasized that the international and regional situation continues to develop rapidly and complicatedly, with difficulties and challenges outweighing opportunities and advantages. The socio-economic situation in August continued to improve, with many sectors achieving better results than in July. However, there are still many difficulties, such as inflationary pressure, real estate and corporate bond markets, loss-making projects, long backlogs, weak banks, and difficulties in fiscal and monetary policies. The Prime Minister requested that the government members focus on identifying and forecasting the context and situation in the coming time. [VietnamPlus]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

ASEAN signals determination to become epicenter for economic growth at summit

(dql) At the ASEAN summit, hosted by ASEAN chair Indonesia on September 5-7, Southeast Asian heads of state and government adopted the “Jakarta Declaration on ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth (ASEAN Concord IV),” among many other documents, that signals an intention to deepen economic integration with ASEAN and add strategic heft to bloc.

The Jakarta Declaration calls the ASEAN community an “epicenter of growth in ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific

region and beyond," and commits to continuing "efforts to build strategic trust and mutual confidence among countries through continued dialogue, win-win cooperation and practical confidence building measures to create a peaceful environment conducive for sustainable growth," as well as to strengthening "ASEAN's capacity and institutional effectiveness," in a bid "to navigate geostrategic and geopolitical dynamics in the region while maintaining its unity and Centrality." [ASEAN] [Fulcrum]

Reflecting ASEAN's wish to avoid exposure to great power competition to pursue the goal of ASEAN becoming an epicenter for growth, Indonesian President Joko Widodo called on the participants of the East Asia Summit (EAS) to "to maintain stability and peace to create prosperity in the region," and to "strengthen collaboration and avoid exacerbating rivalry."

The EAS was held on the sidelines of ASEAN leader's summit and attended also by U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. [Cabinet Secretariat, Indonesia] [Reuters]

On Myanmar, a topic high on the summit's agenda, the Southeast Asian leaders reached agreement to introduce a new mechanism and establish a troika, an informal consultation mechanism that consists of the current, previous, and incoming ASEAN chairs. The troika which would currently be made of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Laos, will reportedly focus on addressing the Myanmar crisis in line with the five-point consensus. [Nikkei Asia 1] [Jakarta Globe]

With regards to the South China issue, ASEAN's position remained vague. Indonesia's statement only said that the bloc was seeking an early conclusion of an effective and substantive agreement in accordance with international law, while ASEAN members reaffirmed their "shared commitment to safeguarding and promoting peace, security, and stability in the South China Sea, particularly given the recent development," an apparent reference to China's recent release of a new map, that includes the controversial "nine-dash line," that covers almost the entire South China Sea, as well as India's northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin region as part of China's domain. [Nikkei 2] [See also AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5]

ASEAN becomes China's largest export market

(ms) According to data collected by HSBC Holdings, China's export volume to the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has overtaken that to the previous leaders, the US and the EU, in 2023, making it China's largest export market.

According to the data, the trade volume to ASEAN has increased to nearly USD 600 billion per month in recent months. Hitherto, both the U.S. and the EU were ahead of ASEAN in these figures. However, a sharp drop in export volumes to these two regions in 2023 ensured that ASEAN could take the lead.

The sustained growth, while resilient, is in line with the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a trade agreement that includes Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea in addition to China and ASEAN, which highlights China's stronger focus on the region. [Bloomberg]

European Union, United States back trade corridor linking Europe, Middle East, India

(lm) The United States and the European Union have endorsed an ambitious initiative to establish an economic corridor connecting Europe to the Middle East and India through rail and sea routes, a project described by US President Joe Biden as a “really big deal”. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unveiled the plan during a session at the Group of Twenty leaders' summit in New Delhi.

The planned corridor seeks to connect India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Israel, and the European Union via maritime ports and rail networks. Its primary objectives are to accelerate trade, lower expenses, and promote economic cooperation and digital connectivity in the region. These discussions commenced in July of the prior year during President Biden's trip to Saudi Arabia. Subsequent meetings occurred between Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and India earlier this year, with the participation of Israel and Jordan, even though they do not have formal diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia.

The initiative could accelerate trade between India and Europe by 40 percent and contribute to normalizing relations between Israel and the Gulf states, a goal pursued by the Biden administration. Additionally, this project serves as a counterbalance to China's expansive Belt and Road initiative, which spans Asia, Africa, and Latin America and has granted Beijing considerable influence over struggling economies.

The leaders did not specify the funding sources for the project but announced that a working group would provide comprehensive plans, including a construction timeline, within the next 60 days. [The Straits Times] [The Guardian]

UN Assistant Secretary-General visits Bangladesh

(ps/lm) The United Nations Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Kanni Wignaraja, has visited Bangladesh. Her schedule included trips to Bhasan Char and Cox's Bazar to meet with Rohingya communities and observe the impact of UN-supported interventions in the Rohingya refugee camps. In addition, she engaged in high-level discussions with key government officials, including the Foreign Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament, and the Principal Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office, to strengthen cooperation between UNDP and the government of Bangladesh and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda in the region. [The Daily Star] [UNDP]

India explores judicial strengthening initiatives with other SCO member nations

(hp) During the tenth meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), India was represented by Minister of State for Law and Justice, Arjun Ram Meghwal, who emphasized New Delhi’s dedication to the SCO and informed fellow members about several significant measures taken by the Indian government to fortify its judicial system.

Minister Meghwal highlighted India's commitment to reform its legal procedures through various initiatives, including the simplification of laws and the revision of outdated, obsolete legal frameworks, ultimately reducing the complexity of its legal landscape. Beyond discussing legal reforms, Meghwal underscored the Indian government's proactive promotion of the 'Alternative Dispute Resolution' initiative, enabling citizens to embrace mediation as a means of conflict resolution.

Furthermore, Minister Meghwal delved into discussions regarding newly introduced bills in the Indian Parliament aimed at replacing colonial-era statutes such as the Indian Penal Code (1860), Indian

Evidence Act (1872), and Criminal Procedure. In recognition of changing times, Meghwal emphasized the importance of modernizing these laws to align with the contemporary needs of India.

In closing, the Minister stressed the critical importance of digital data protection and affirmed India's commitment to this cause. He encouraged SCO members to collaborate in establishing a secure global digital data network. [Legal World] [News On Air]

India rejects UN expert's statements on Manipur, calls them 'unwarranted and misleading'

(hp) A statement given by a group of United Nations (UN) experts on the ethnic violence in Manipur was rejected by the Permanent Mission of India on grounds of being misleading and unwarranted. India commented that the report reflected a complete lack of understanding of the current scenario in the northeastern state. The experts had argued against the inhuman conditions, especially for women and children in the state, which the Indian mission bluntly denied. [NDTV]

The Special Procedure Mandate Holders (SPMH) released 'India: UN experts alarmed by continuing abuses in Manipur' which gave an overview of the plight of religious and ethnic minorities in India. The experts expressed concerned and stated, "We have serious concerns about the apparent slow and inadequate response by the Government of India, including law enforcement, to stem physical and sexual violence and hate speech in Manipur." [Hindustan Times] [News Bharati]

The Indian mission expressed its disappointment in the SPMH report and said, "(the SPMH should) refrain from commenting on the developments, which have no relevance to the mandate given to them by the Council and abide by the established procedure for issuing news releases and wait for inputs sought from the Government of India before doing so." The Indian mission stressed on the democratic nature of India and stressed that the governmental bodies were fully committed to work according to the laws written in the constitution. [India Today]

UN Human Rights Commissioner urges for transparency from Sri Lanka to reconcile

with past abuses

(lf) United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk asserted that more must be done by Sri Lanka to account for its past war crimes and human rights violations in a report put forward by the body on September 6. Türk maintained that Sri Lanka had an "accountability deficit" regarding atrocities committed during the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, including the Sri Lankan Civil War and ethnic based violent events, such as the Black July race riots of 1983. The report went on to state that "Truth-seeking alone will not suffice", but that transparency from the nation's authorities was required to achieve justice for victims and punish those responsible.

The high commissioner's report presented a number of recommendations to improve Sri Lanka's transparency regarding its human rights record. Targeted sanctions and travel bans "against those credibly alleged to have perpetrated gross international human rights violations or serious humanitarian law violations" were heavily encouraged, in order to prevent said accused from fleeing the nation to avoid prosecution. It also called on authorities to speed up and increase the scope of investigations into cases of potential or suspected human rights violations, including the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which are the subject of renewed attention following whistleblower allegations that senior officials of then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's cabinet were complicit in facilitating the attacks [see AiR, No. 36, September/2023, 1]. Mr. Türk has previously voiced his support for an independent investigation into the bombings, citing concerns around corruption and the suppression of information.

The report does note that President Wickremesinghe has changed the tone of the nation's discussion surrounding matters of tribal or ethnic conflict, has made improvements from the previous government's approach to tensions. However, it is noted that further action is required to bring perpetrators to justice and end land disputes and ethnic violence, particularly in the country's North and East. The high commissioner asked for international support to hold Sri Lanka accountable for its previous failures and to encourage further reconciliation efforts. [Daily Mirror] [The Citizen]

The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is set to meet beginning on September 11 in Geneva, where Sri Lanka's impunity on human rights will be raised for discussion. The UNHRC maintains that Sri Lankan officials have tried to avoid confronting their

responsibility within the organization but emphasizes the importance of discussion and international consensus on human rights violations and related atrocities. [Colombo Gazette]

United Nations pledges support to development programs in Sri Lanka

(lf) The United Nations expects to give Sri Lanka USD 300 million in funding for development efforts, with the commitment conveyed in a meeting between United Nations Resident Coordinator in Sri Lanka Marc-André Franche and the nation's Speaker of Parliament Mahinda Yapa Abeywardana on September 4. The UN resident expressed his congratulations on behalf of the organization to Sri Lanka's for its efforts to create transparency and restore trust between the government and its citizens. Mr. Franche specifically noted the nation's recently Anti-Corruption Bill and the establishment of a Parliamentary Budget Office as significant achievements that had not gone unnoticed.

The funding for development initiatives will be undertaken in line with the commitments made by the UN and Sri Lanka in the Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (SDCF), which aims to see Sri Lanka tackle a number of pressing issues by 2030, outlining action to be taken on poverty, food supply, education and sustainability. Little detail has been provided on what form the UN funding will take, but it is expected to be staggered out across a 5-year period, providing Sri Lanka with a firm base of funding until 2028.

Mr Franche and Speaker Abeywardana also spoke on matters of national importance, including Sri Lanka's political structure, electoral process and peace-building activities. Mr Franche expressed satisfaction on Sri Lanka's progress since its economic crisis of 2022, but indicated there was more work to be done before the nation could emerge as a developed nation on the global stage. Speaker Abeywardana his gratitude to the UN for supporting Sri Lanka consistently throughout their development efforts over the decades. [Daily Mirror] [Business Standard]

Sri Lankan climate minister meets with Commonwealth secretary-general in Kenya

(lf) Senior advisor to President Wickremesinghe on climate change Ruwan Wijewardene met with Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Patricia Scotland KC on the sidelines of the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi. A small Sri Lanka delegation attended the event as observers to support the efforts and met with Ms Scotland on September 6. The discussion, which was said to be highly productive, was also attended by High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to Kenya Kana Kananathan.

The meeting focused on the bilateral relationship between Sri Lanka and the Commonwealth, which is an international institution of 56 member states made up of mostly former British Colonies. Sri Lanka has been a member of the organization since 1948, when it achieved Dominion status from the British Empire as a self-governing nation. Climate change was a key topic of discussion, as Sri Lanka's commitment to reducing emissions and efforts of working towards Net Zero were outlined by Wijewardene. Ms. Scotland also praised President Wickremesinghe's leadership on the front of climate goals, noting the countries commitments to creating a greener world.

Both parties further expressed their desires to collaborate on climate action, sustainability and development going forward, especially in light of Sri Lanka's current economic recovery following the IMF's USD 2.9 billion bailout granted in May. A meeting between Sri Lankan and Commonwealth officials is likely to occur once more before next year's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Apia, Samoa, where it is expected that President Wickremesinghe will attend. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka to hold chair of Indian Ocean Rim Association from 2023-2025

(lf) Sri Lanka is set to hold the chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) for the period of 2023-2025, officially being handed the position during the organization's Council of Ministers Meeting in Colombo on September 11. Sri Lanka had previously held the chair of the organization during 2003-2004 and will be handed the position by current chair Bangladesh. The organization is made up 23 member states who create the continental rim that surrounds the Indian Ocean. Member states include major states such as Australia, France, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as a number of developing African and Arab states to collaborate on matters that relate to the health, safety and stability of the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lanka has also established a theme for its chairmanship, 'Strengthening Regional Architecture: Reinforcing Indian Ocean Identity'. It is expected that cultural matters will be given a greater platform during Sri Lanka's chair period, as well as the regular security and climate maritime concerns which the organization has consistently discussed for years. The organization also stands as a platform which facilitates economic diversification and cooperation between its members, and a useful tool which Sri Lanka can use to achieve its goals of increasing its FTAs and becoming party to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Program (RCEP) [see AiR, No. 33, August/2023, 3].

The IORA has not been a very vocal organization in recent years, as the diversity of its member states economically and militarily makes it difficult for coordinated action to be undertaken. The region's significance in international matters, however, has seen an increased attention placed upon the waters, particularly in Southeast and South Asia. The organization may see an increased relevancy in years to come, particularly as its 11 official dialogue partners, including China, the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia see to increase their presence within the Indian Ocean. [Sri Lanka Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

TikTok opens Dublin data center to assuage EU fears of espionage

(ga) TikTok has opened a new data center in Dublin, its first in Europe, which will reportedly store all European users' TikTok data, a response to concerns in Europe that this data could be used by the Chinese government for spying.

TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company. There has been recurrent concern raised in the EU and US that TikTok's data could be requested and used by the Chinese government. [BBC]

The data center's development was announced in March and is being called "Project Clover", a reference to the Irish location, and is a counterpart to "Project Texas", a promised data center in Texas to assuage US concerns on data privacy. British cybersecurity company NCC Group is going to audit the center to ensure data security.

In addition to the new center in Dublin, another center is being planned in Ireland and a third in Norway, all expected to be completed by the end of 2024. [BBC] [The Irish Times] [The Guardian]

Early in 2023 the British government, European Parliament, European Commission, and European Union Council officially banned TikTok from being installed on government devices as part of their concern over Chinese espionage by way of TikTok. [BBC]

Chinese President Xi Jinping skips G20 in India

(ga) Chinese President Xi Jinping skipped this year's G20 leaders' summit, which took place on September 9 and 10 in India. Xi has been to every other G20 summit since becoming President.

Beijing did not provide a reason for Xi's absence, only stating that Premier Li Qiang would lead the Chinese delegation to the summit. [BBC] [The Guardian]

There has been much speculation over why Xi decided to stay away from the summit. Most prominently, India and China have had a long-standing dispute over their border in the Himalayas, which has been particularly acute since 2020 and had a flare up on August 29, following the publishing of an official Chinese map claiming disputed territory [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1].

Reflecting the heightened tensions, India held military exercises near its disputed border with China during the summit. [Al Jazeera]

Despite the speculation that these tensions caused Xi Jinping's absence, the Chinese foreign ministry said last week that China has "always supported India's hosting of this year's summit". [The Guardian]

US President Biden expressed disappointment over Xi's decision to skip the summit. US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan raised concern that China could "play the role of a spoiler" at the summit given its ongoing disputes with the US and India. [BBC] [Reuters]

China likewise raised concerns at the summit about the US's presidency of the G20 in 2026, looking to delete a reference to US presidency of the summit from the G20 declaration. [Financial Times]

Espionage allegations between China and Western nations

(ic) On September 9, two men with extensive ties to senior members of the Conservatives in the United Kingdom were arrested under allegations of espionage on behalf of China, one of them being a parliamentary researcher. [The Guardian] In a statement through lawyers, he has defended his innocence, arguing that he had in fact spent his "career to date trying to educate others about the challenge and threats presented by the Chinese Communist Party". [BBC]

The Sunday Times has identified the researcher is Chris Cash, a 28-year-old history graduate living in Edinburgh who is alleged to have been recruited as a sleeper agent during time spent working in China. [WION News]

This move has rippled throughout a country increasingly wary of Chinese infiltration into democratic institutions and where groups of parliamentarians, led by Mr. Tom Tugendhat who helms the China Research Group, call for a harder line to be taken against China. The accused parliamentary researcher had contacted Mr. Tugendhat in the past. [The New York Times] China has responded by referring to allegations that they had spies in British Parliament as slanderous. [Al Jazeera]

Over the G20 meetings, as a result, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak would raise concerns over Chinese interference with Premier Li Qiang. [Reuters]

On September 11 as well, China would claim that 78-year-old John Shing-Wan Leung, a US citizen and permanent resident in Hong Kong, had posed as a patriotic philanthropist in order to spy on Chinese institutions on behalf of an unnamed US intelligence agency. [South China Morning Post]

It was claimed in Chinese media that he moved to the US in 1983 to run a restaurant, where he was approached by US agents in 1986 and would later be fully recruited in 1989, to be sent back with false credentials to build fake trust amongst Chinese officials and government. [The Standard (HK)]

John Leung was arrested in April 2021 and sentenced to life imprisonment in May 2023. [Bloomberg]

Japan, Gulf Cooperation Council to resume talks on FTA

(dql) Japan and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreed to begin talks about the resumption of negotiations on a free trade agreement between the

two sides. The negotiations have been suspended since 2009.

The agreement was reached the First Japan-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, at which Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi and his six counterparts from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman also agreed on closely working together in a wide range of areas in line with the "Japan-GCC Action Plan 2024-2028," a 5-year action plan drawn up the two sides. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1] [NHK] [Reuters]

On the sidelines of the meeting, Hayashi held separate bilateral talks with Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem Abdullah AlJaber Al-Sabah, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, and Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidi.

During the meetings, all ministers agreed to work to together to expand relations and cooperation in the frame of the comprehensive partnerships between Japan and the other three countries. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 4]

Japan-Arab Political Dialogue held

(dql) Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi along with foreign ministers and senior officials from the 22 Arab League member states attended on September 5 the third iteration of the Japan-Arab Political Dialogue in Cairo.

Hayashi called for unity between Japan and the Arab countries in upholding the free and open international order based on the rule of law challenged by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. In addition, he announced that Japan plans to provide support to make navigation on the Suez Canal safe while continuing to conduct anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia as part of efforts to realize a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Hayashi also called for expanding economic cooperation, reaffirming the Japanese government's continued efforts to assist Arab countries in diversifying their economies by encouraging Japanese firms to start business there. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1] [Nippon.com] [NHK]

While in Cairo, Hayashi held separate bilateral talks with his counterparts from Egypt, Tunisia, and Marocco to reaffirm Tokyo's readiness to expand ties and

deepen cooperation with the three countries. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 4]

At his meeting with Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki, Hayashi reiterated Japan's backing of a "two-state solution" as basis for realizing peace in the Middle East, adding Japan's continued support for Palestine and Palestine refugees. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5]

Meanwhile, at the inaugural Japan-Egypt-Jordan Trilateral Ministerial Consultations on the Middle East, held on the same day, Hayashi and Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, and Ayman Al Safadi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Jordan reaffirmed their commitment continue to work together in current joint projects in Palestine, Lebanon, and Iraq, and agreed on expanding trilateral cooperation to more countries and areas.

With regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the ministers emphasized that they support "the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people," and underscored "the illegality of Israeli settlement activities," that Israel "must fully stop," adding that Israel must also "comply with relevant UN resolutions." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 6] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 7] [Egypt Today] [The International]

North Korea expanding weapons smuggling network to multiple countries, including Russia

(tms) Despite international sanctions and ongoing denuclearization efforts, North Korea is actively smuggling weapons to multiple countries, with Russia being a prominent buyer, according to multiple sources within the secretive nation.

According to sources, the government's weapons exports have seen a recent increase, which are not limited to Russia alone; other countries, including Iran, Syria, Egypt, and Qatar, are reportedly seeking North Korean weaponry.

Ammunition, artillery shells, and rifles are major exports, with an unusual payment method involving wheat, gas, and oil. Despite not selling new weapon systems, North Korea is offloading older stockpiles. [Daily NK]

North Korea celebrates founding anniversary, deepens ties with China, Russia

(tms) North Korean leader Kim Jong Un marked his country's founding anniversary with a parade of paramilitary units and diplomatic engagements, where he pledged to strengthen relations with China and Russia. [KCNA]

During the parade, concealed rocket launchers within delivery trucks and troops with weaponry towed by tractors highlighted the militia's guerrilla fighter role.

Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed a desire for enhanced strategic communication with Kim, while Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized their commitment to expanding bilateral ties to ensure security in the Northeast Asian region in letters to Kim.

Kim plans to meet Putin later this month to discuss weapons support for Russia's Ukraine invasion. [Reuters]

Japan, South Korea, US defense chiefs discuss security cooperation

(tms) The defense ministers of South Korea, the United States, and Japan held a phone conversation to discuss the implementation of security cooperation agreements made during a recent summit between the countries' leaders at Camp David, that is widely seen as marking a new chapter in trilateral cooperation, as the three countries established an institutional basis to cement trilateral cooperation [see AiR No. 34, August/2023, 4].

During the talks, South Korean Defense Minister Lee Jong-sup and his US and Japanese counterparts, Lloyd Austin and Yasukazu Hamada, also condemned North Korea's missile provocations, including its launch of what it claimed was a space rocket last month.

They committed to sustaining and strengthening three-way security cooperation established through last month's summit amid speculation of North Korea seeking closer ties with China and Russia in response to growing security cooperation among Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo. [Yonhap]

South Korea seeks regional support for 2030 World Expo bid and expands bilateral cooperation

(tms) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol engaged in a series of bilateral meetings with the leaders of Cambodia, Laos, the Philippines, and Singapore on the sidelines of the ASEAN summits.

Discussions focused on strengthening cooperation and garnering support for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan.

In his meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, Yoon emphasized the importance of leveraging the South Korea-Cambodia free trade agreement and customs agreement to boost bilateral trade, which reached a record USD 1.05 billion last year. Yoon also sought support for addressing North Korea's nuclear and missile activities.

With Laotian Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, Yoon pledged South Korea's continued partnership in Laos' economic development, with a focus on advanced technology and digital transitions.

During the meeting with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Yoon committed to expanding cooperation in digital and green technology. Both leaders agreed on the importance of a unified response to North Korea's provocations on the international stage.

Yoon and Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr., meanwhile, discussed practical collaboration in supply chains, defense, and nuclear energy, culminating in the signing of a free trade agreement between their countries. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2]

Ruling parties of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam to strengthen traditional friendship

(pm) The leaders of the ruling parties of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam met to discuss the cooperation between the nations.

They intend to collaborate in both economic and institutional cooperation between the three countries' parties, states, fronts, mass organizations and at the sub-national level. [Khmer Times]

Laos receives EUR 18.4 million from EU to develop education and health sectors

(ws) Laos has received an 18.4 million Euro grant from the European Union to support two education and health programs

The first program, which spanned from 2018 to 2021, aimed to enhance the education sector by facilitating the implementation of key policies outlined in the education sector's development plan. The primary focus was on ensuring universal access to basic education, improving education quality, enhancing government management in the sector, and achieving targeted goals.

Meanwhile, the second program is the Nutrition Support Programme that aims at combating food insecurity, with particular attention given to women and disadvantaged groups. [Vientiane Times]

Representatives of China, India, Thailand and Myanmar junta discuss cooperation

(ha) Although the Myanmar junta was not allowed to attend the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit, it had a meeting in Nay Pyi Taw with representatives from neighboring countries China, India and Thailand.

A military leader at the rank of lieutenant general and an intelligence leader at the rank of general from China visited Nay Pyi Taw separately and met with top leaders of the Myanmar military junta. The ambassador of India met with the ministers of foreign affairs, electricity and transport and communication of the Myanmar military junta.

During the meetings, they discussed the implementation of mutual projects to increase the border trade between their countries, to invest in electricity projects and to build bilateral electricity grids.

The groups of ministers also met with the ambassador of Thailand and discussed the development of electricity production and cooperation between two countries and the construction of cross border power lines. [The Irrawaddy]

At least three ASEAN Air Force Chiefs to stay away from ASEAN Air Chiefs conference

(wn) According to ASEAN officials, at least three Air Force Chiefs from the ten ASEAN countries will not attend the annual ASEAN Air Chiefs conference to be held in Myanmar this week and to be chaired by the country.

The three are the Air Force Chiefs from the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, as confirmed by the AFP report.

The ASEAN Air Force Chiefs will convene to discuss cooperation in combatting terrorism and responding to natural disasters. [Bangkokpost] [VOA Burmese]

The Philippines accepts request to chair ASEAN in 2026

(lb/lm) The Philippines will host the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in 2026, a year earlier than initially scheduled, as announced by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. during the 43rd ASEAN Summit in Jakarta. This change in the rotation of ASEAN chairmanships means that Myanmar will not chair the bloc in 2026, as originally planned. [Rappler]

The ASEAN chair is responsible for hosting two summits each year: one for ASEAN leaders and another for key dialogue partners.

Norway's sovereign wealth fund to close its office in Shanghai whilst maintaining its Singapore office

(lb) Norway's sovereign wealth fund, the world's largest, is closing its Shanghai representative office. This move will not affect the fund's investments in China, valued at around USD 42 billion in approximately 850 Chinese companies. The decision is due to operational considerations and won't change the fund's investment strategy in China. Instead, the Singapore office will take on a more significant role in overseeing operations for the entire Asian region. [The Straits Times]

This comes as China faces economic challenges like slow growth, declining exports, and concerns over the property sector's debt. Norway's sovereign wealth

fund, funded by state-owned oil and gas firms, supports the country's extensive welfare programs. After the closure, the fund will still have offices in Oslo, London, New York, and Singapore.

Bangladesh, India prime minister meet ahead of Group of Twenty Summit

(ps/lm) The Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh, Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina, held a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the Group of Twenty (G20) Summit in New Delhi. The two South Asian leaders discussed various areas of cooperation and signed three memorandums of understanding (MoUs), including one on cooperation in digital payment mechanisms between the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and Bangladesh Bank. [The Hindu] [Anadolu Ajansı]

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov visits Bangladesh, says Moscow will complete nuclear power plant on time

(ps/lm) Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov became the first Russian top diplomat to visit Bangladesh since the South Asian nation’s independence in 1971. While in Dhaka, Lavrov assured his counterpart Abdul Momen that Moscow remains committed to completing the Rooppur nuclear power plant project on schedule, despite challenges arising from Western sanctions related to the Ukraine war. Other topics covered pertained to bilateral trade matters, and the potential export of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to meet Bangladesh's energy needs.

The Rooppur nuclear power plant project is a joint initiative between Bangladesh and Russian state-owned company Rosatom, valued at USD 12.65 billion. It is primarily financed through a Russian loan with a repayment period of 28 years and a 10-year grace period. Delays in construction, including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and war-related sanctions, have impacted the project's timeline. [Daily Star 1] [Daily Star 2] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

French President Macron visits Bangladesh to ‘consolidate’ Paris’ Indo-Pacific push

(ps/lm) French President Emmanuel Macron has visited Bangladesh with the aim of bolstering Paris' Indo-Pacific strategy and providing an alternative to the influence of China in the region. During talks with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Macron emphasized the importance of democratic principles and the rule of law in the face of what he referred to as "new imperialism," while also expressing support for Dhaka's foreign policy of strategic autonomy.

During his visit two-day visit, Macron oversaw the signing of a deal to facilitate loans for infrastructure development in Bangladesh and a letter of intent for the provision of an earth observation satellite system. The agreement between Bangladesh's Economic Relations Division and the French Development Agency aims to support infrastructure development projects in the South Asian nation.

Additionally, a letter of intent was signed to provide Bangladesh with an earth observation satellite system, with cooperation between Bangladesh Satellite Company Limited (BSCL) and Airbus Defense and Space SAS, France. The satellite system is expected to be used for monitoring crops and sea conditions.

Furthermore, Bangladesh committed to ordering 10 Airbus aircraft, marking the country's first deal with the European aircraft maker and a shift away from its Boeing-dominated fleet.

Notably, Macron's visit to Bangladesh follows a Pacific trip in July to the French overseas territories of New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea as well as a stopover in Sri Lanka, in which he outlined his Indo-Pacific strategy, aimed at "recommitting" France to the region. On September 10, Macron met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G20 summit in New Delhi – a meeting that followed Modi's visit to Paris in July. [Al Jazeera] [Associated Press] [Daily Star] [Prothomalo] [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh, United Kingdom hold 5th Strategic Dialogue; London to provide USD 3.7 million for Rohingya

(lm) Bangladesh and the United Kingdom on September 12 held their fifth strategic dialogue in Dhaka. The dialogue covered various aspects, including political and diplomatic relations, economic, trade, and development partnerships, as well as global, regional, and security issues, including the Rohingya crisis. Sir Philip Barton, the UK Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office,

led the British side, while Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen led the Bangladesh delegation.

Barton announced that London will provide approximately USD 3.75 million in new funding through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to support Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char. [GOV.UK]

Brunei-Cambodia: Cooperation to be expanded

(dgl) During a meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta last week, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Muse Izadin Wadullah and Cambodian Prime Minister Dr Hun Manet agreed to widen cooperation in the prevention of cross-border crime and in private sector integration as well as in mutual support in implementing bilateral dialogue mechanisms between the countries' foreign ministers. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia-Japan: Prime ministers discuss security cooperation

(pm) On the sidelines of the ASEAN leaders' summit last week in Jakarta, Prime Minister Hun Manet met with his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida.

During the meeting, the two leaders expressed their wish to deepen cooperation in security as well as in economic and social development. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Cambodia-Cook Islands: Diplomatic ties to be established

(pm) Cambodia and the Cook Islands are set to establish diplomatic ties, following an agreement between Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Mark Stephen Brown, Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, reached during bilateral talks on the sidelines of the ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta last week.

The two prime ministers also agreed to boost cooperation and working together towards a partnership between the Pacific Islands Forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). [Khmer Times]

South Korea to support Cambodia national development strategy

(dql) South Korea has vowed to assist Cambodia in realizing its new Pentagon Strategy for the development of agricultural, technology, carbon neutrality and tourism, introduced by Prime Minister Hun Manet, after he assumed power last month [see AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5]. Seoul will also provide support for Cambodia plan of transforming the Cambodia into a high-income country by 2050.

The pledge was made during a visit to Cambodia of a South Korean parliamentary delegation led by Kim Jin-pyo, the speaker of South Korea's national assembly.

During the visit, both sides agreed to deepen military cooperation and to work together to boost cultural and economic exchanges. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the Mekong-South Korea Cooperation Fund,that was signed in 2010 between South Korea and the nations bordering the Mekong. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia-Cuba: Ties to be strengthened

(dql) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez reaffirmed their commitment to continuing mutual support in multilateral forums and to further strengthen bilateral ties.

The reassurances were made during a telephone call on September 9. [Khmer Times]

China-Australia: Prime Minister Albanese to visit Beijing soon

(ga) Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese met Chinese Premier Li Qiang on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit in Indonesia on September 7, where he confirmed that he would be visiting China before the end of 2023.

Albanese discussed tariffs on Australian wine, Australian human rights concerns, Australians imprisoned in China, and international security issues in his September 7 meeting with Li. [ABC Australia 1] [Reuters] [Yahoo! Life]

Due to tensions over the last few years, an Australian leader hasn't visited China since 2016. Albanese's planned trip represents an improvement in the Sino-Australian relationship.

Improvements in the relationship are coming as the two sides begin to lift restrictions on trade and investment while increasing dialogue, largely under the leadership of Albanese. In 2022, Albanese met with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 summit in Bali. The Sino-Australian relationship has steadily improved since that point, with trade flows increasing and more high-level dialogue. In August, trade between China and Australia totaled roughly USD 18.6 billion. [ABC Australia 1] [Reuters]

Former Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose government took a more adversarial approach to China, warned that Albanese shouldn't be "too keen" to visit China, lest Australia come across as "concessional and acquiescent". [ABC Australia 2]

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met an Australian delegation led by Craig Emerson, former Australian trade minister during the China-Australia High-Level Dialogue, the first in three years, held on September 7 in Beijing.

During the meeting, Wang called for an independent advancement of China-Australia relations, "without any influence or interference from third parties."

According to a release of the Chinese foreign ministry, Emerson reaffirmed Australia's willingness "to engage in constructive and candid dialogue with China to understand each other, manage differences, and develop long-term and stable Australia-China relations." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in Chinese]

Italy likely to leave Chinese Belt and Road Initiative this year

(ga) On September 10, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said that it was not yet decided whether Italy would leave the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which it joined in 2019, while stressing that there is more to Italy's relationship with China than its membership in the BRI.

There has been speculation over the last months in the Italian media that Italy will leave the BRI and return to an economic partnership arrangement dating back to 2004. [Reuters 1]

Meloni hinted at leaving the BRI at last week's G20 summit, saying that "there are European nations which in recent years haven't been part of the Belt and Road but have been able to forge more favourable relations (with China) than we have sometimes managed".

Meloni and Chinese Premier Li Qiang met on September 9 on the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit, reportedly discussing the Chinese-Italian diplomatic partnership. [Reuters 1]

Meloni has been invited to visit China and Italy has been invited to attend the BRI forum taking place in October, although both are currently unconfirmed. [Reuters 1]

Opposition from Italian politicians

Meloni herself originally voiced opposition to the BRI when Italy first joined the BRI; now that she is Prime Minister, many of her ministers have continued to criticize the BRI. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on September 2 shortly before a trip to Beijing that "we haven't obtained great results" from the BRI, while emphasizing that Italy is still keen to engage in trade. Italy's Minister of Defense Guido Crosetto, on the other hand, took a blunter approach, saying in a pre-recorded interview that Italy joining the BRI was an "improvised and atrocious" decision because it didn't boost exports. [Associated Press] [Reuters 2] [Reuters 3]

Chinese comments on Italy's potential exit

In encouraging Italy to renew the BRI partnership, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on September 4 that trade between China and Italy had grown from USD 50 billion to almost USD 80 billion, with Italy's exports to China increasing around 30 percent since Italy joined the BRI. To that end, China's Foreign Ministry said that Italy's accession to the BRI led to a 42 percent increase in bilateral trade between Italy and China, reaching nearly USD 80 billion. It also highlighted Chinese interest in visiting Italy, in Italian culture, and the joint projects China and Italy have taken on. [Al Jazeera] [Xinhua]

Italy's involvement in the BRI expires in March 2024 and will be automatically renewed for five years unless Italy withdraws by December of this year. Since Italy signed the BRI deal in 2019, its trade deficit with China has grown by USD 23.9 billion. [Reuters 2] [Reuters 4]

Zambian President Hichilema visiting China to confirm debt restructuring

(ga) Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema began a visit to China on September 10 and will stay until September 16.

Hichilema and Chinese President Xi Jinping met at a welcome ceremony and banquet to sign agreements on economic cooperation and investment, and discussed investment in Zambian energy, mining, and infrastructure.

While in China, Hichilema will also meet with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee Zhao Leji, and visit Jiangxi and Fujian provinces, as well as Shenzhen. [Reuters] [Xinhua]

Hichilema said on September 11 that his visit was focused on deepening trade and investment between the two countries and that Zambians should 'get ready to exploit opportunities that will be created' as a result of his visit.

Zambia is currently working on restructuring USD 6.3 billion of debt, roughly two-thirds of which is owed to the Export-Import Bank of China. The two sides reached an agreement on this restructuring on June 23.

Zambia defaulted on its sovereign debt in 2020 and has been working on restructuring deals with creditors since. The new debt payments have been rescheduled over more than 20 years and there is a three-year period of interest-only payments at the start. Hichilema's visit entails the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with China to formalize the agreement.

China has started 30 investment projects in Zambia through its Belt and Road Initiative, worth approximately USD 11.3 billion. China is also one of Zambia's largest trading partners, purchasing roughly one-fifth of Zambia's exports such as copper, of which Zambia is the second-largest African producer.

Zambia's agreement with China gives hope for restructuring deals to other African countries which have significant sovereign debts to China such as Ghana and Ethiopia. [Times of Zambia] [Financial Times] [Reuters] [Xinhua]

Venezuela's President Maduro visits China

(ic) President of Venezuela Nicolas Maduro began his visit to China on September 8, 2023. This visit will last for seven days, until September 14. [Global Times]

It is expected that the visit will revolve around the themes of energy trade, developmental financing/debt repayment, and Chinese support for Venezuelan admission into the BRICS bloc. [Barron] [Reuters]

Maduro noted the latter goal in an interview conducted with Xinhua on September 10. [Bloomberg]

China-Grenada: Foreign ministers meet

(ic) On September 6, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Foreign Minister of Grenada, Joseph Andall, in Beijing. Discussions largely revolved around developmental themes, with Wang reaffirming China's readiness to "open up new prospects for cooperation between the two countries." [**Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China**, in Chinese] [**CGTN**]

Diplomatic relations between China and Grenada were established in 1985, severed in 1989, when Grenada switched ties to Taiwan, and resumed in 2005. The Caribbean country joined the Belt and Road Initiative in 2018.

India enacts anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel for five years

(ic) On September 11, the Indian government released a notification indicating that they would enact anti-dumping measures on Chinese steel for the next 5 years. This has been seen as a response to a 62% increase in steel imports over April-July this year. [Reuters]

Indian news agencies have stated that the Global Arrangement on Sustainable Steel and Aluminum, a framework being designed by the European Union and United States, will aim to achieve something similar, and that the world is concerned about Chinese steel. [The Mint]

Pakistani militants found to have been dropping weapons over Kashmir border, Indian army claims

(lf) Indian army sources have alleged that Pakistani militant have been dropping arms and ammunitions over the Line of Control (LoC) border for their associates on the Indian side to pick up and use. The LoC border in Jammu and Kashmir has long been the site of skirmishes between Indian and Pakistani military personnel, but the latest accusation suggests that Pakistani personnel have been smuggling weapons over the border or dropping them over the line without physically crossing into India, in order to support separatist efforts within the country.

The accusation follows an operation undertaken by the Indian army in Machil in the week of September 4, where a large cache of weapons, including 5 AK-47 rifles, were found stockpiled in the base of what India alleges to be a terrorist hideout. The operation was the latest of 13 that have been undertaken in 2023, which routinely uncover stocks of weapons, bombs and currency being stockpiled by separatist, terrorist organizations.

Military sources have alleged that the Pakistani militants communicate with their allies on the Indian side through online messaging, where GPS locations are forwarded for drop points, where physical materials that will aid the separatist movement can be found. The allegations have led to an increase in assertive comments from Indian military officials, including Lieutenant General Upendra Dwivedi, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Northern Command, who maintained that the “Indian Army stands prepared for any challenge”, citing the LoC as a theatre where the country was willing to take a stand.

The Jammu and Kashmir border remains a flashpoint of tension between India and Pakistan, as the territory is disputed between the two. The LoC remains heavily militarized by both nations, although visitors are theoretically free to pass through. It remains to be seen if these allegations of cross-border arms drops will result in an increased Indian military presence in response. [Indian Express] [Republic World]

Indian Prime Minister Modi, UAE President hold bilateral talks ahead of G20 summit

(hp) United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ahead of the G20 Summit to deliberate and discuss the future relation of UAE and India.

Both the leaders indulged in discussing the scope of improved economic cooperation. For doing so, they thoroughly discussed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and other “promising opportunities” to enhance their financial partnerships. India and UAE had signed CEPA in February 2022 over non-oil trade.

During their discussion, Sheikh Mohamed and Modi discussed the need to strengthen collaboration between their countries, particularly in various sectors such as investments, development, renewable energy, and food security, to achieve the common goal of sustainable growth. Additionally, they emphasized the urgency of taking concerted efforts in promoting mutual benefits in areas like sustainability, environmental preservation, and mitigating climate change. Furthermore, they also delved into regional and international matters that are of shared interest to both nations.

Currently, the UAE is not a member of the G20. The UAE’s participation in the G20 Summit is a result of India’s invitation, which has assumed the presidency of the G20 for the year 2023. [Khaleej Times] [The National]

India’s Prime Minister expresses ‘strong concerns’ to Canada’s Trudeau

(lm) On the sidelines of the Group of Twenty (G20) summit in New Delhi, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his serious concerns to his Canadian counterpart Justin Trudeau regarding ongoing “anti-India activities" by extremist elements in Canada. [The Straits Times] [Anadolu Ajansı]

Trudeau, addressing the issues of extremism and foreign interference, emphasized Canada's commitment to defending freedom of expression, conscience, and peaceful protest. He stressed the importance of preventing violence and countering hatred.

In June, India had criticized Canada for allowing a parade float depicting the 1984 assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, which was seen as glorifying violence by Sikh separatists [see AiR No. 24, June/2023, 2]. This issue has been a longstanding sensitivity for India, given Canada's significant Sikh population. Since then, the relationship between the two countries has remained strained, with Canada in September pausing talks on a proposed trade treaty with India.

India, United States leaders pledge to deepen ties in talks ahead of Group of Twenty summit

(lf/lm) United States President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met in New Delhi to strengthen their defense and technology cooperation, highlighting the growing strategic partnership between the two nations. Their discussions on the eve of the Group of Twenty summit emphasized their "close and enduring partnership" and shared concerns about Chinese power and influence. [The Straits Times] [Financial Times]

While the joint statement issued after the meeting did not introduce significant new initiatives, the positive tone was emphasized by US officials. Kurt Campbell, the White House coordinator for Indo-Pacific affairs, noted an "undeniable warmth and confidence" between Modi and Biden, signaling a significant shift in US-India relations. Campbell also stated that he believed the US-India relationship would be the most important of the 21st century for the United States.

In the joint statement, India and the US welcomed the approval of negotiations for a commercial agreement between GE Aerospace and India's state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) to produce GE F-414 jet engines in India. They also announced a second ship repair agreement, with India maintaining US navy vessels.

India requested the procurement of 31 General Atomics MQ-9B drones, which would enhance its armed forces' intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, a significant move as India seeks to bolster its military preparedness and technological capabilities, particularly in light of its border dispute with China.

The two countries pledged to enhance their cooperation in the nuclear energy sector and resolved their last trade dispute at the WTO concerning poultry. Biden praised India's leadership in the G20, supported its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and agreed to attend a meeting of the leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic alliance including Japan and Australia, in 2024.

Prime Minister Modi has been vocal on the need for international institutions and systems to alter their approach to diplomacy in order to accommodate the nations of the global South, and welcomed President

Biden's comments as a reflection of the change required to create a holistic global world order.

The growing economic ties between the USA and India were also discussed, as well as India's recent achievements on the front of space exploration. President Biden congratulated Prime Minister Modi in person for his nation's success in the Chandrayaan-3 mission, which facilitated the first soft landing of a craft on the moon's south pole in history [see AiR, No. 35, August/2023, 5].

However, despite growing ties, Biden later revealed that he had raised concerns about human rights and the importance of a free press with Modi, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues within their bilateral relationship. [BBC]

Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi makes week-long trip to Europe, meets with EU lawyers

(lf) Indian opposition leader Rahul Gandhi arrived in Brussels, Belgium, on September 7 for a week-long European tour. The politician, who leads the big tent political alliance INDIA and will contest the 2024 general election against incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also visited Paris, France and will travel to Oslo, Norway before reportedly returning to India on September 12. The visit, which is mostly intended to be a goodwill tour more than an official diplomatic exchange, saw Gandhi meet with members of the European Indian diaspora and students, with whom he discussed the state of India and his pitch for the 2024 elections.

Gandhi did meet with European Union lawyers and politicians in The Hague during his trip, where he discussed Narendra Modi's policies and addressed concerns of democratic backsliding and a decrease in human rights standards within India. Gandhi maintained that the incumbent "BJP believes that power should be centralized" and that "conversation between the people of India should be suppressed", whilst his INDIA alliance would "fight for democracy."

Gandhi also discussed the increasing global influence of China, maintaining that the western world and its allies had not put forward an "alternative vision" of the global order that could be sold to developing nations or plan that could rival the Belt and Road initiative. Gandhi also criticized Prime Minister Modi for the speculated name change of India to Bharat, which he claimed was a "diversion" on behalf of the government

to district their political failings with nationalist debates.

This is Gandhi's third foreign visit in 2023, following trips to the United States and United Kingdom earlier in the year. Gandhi has made efforts to firmly align his party with the broad western world on a political front, claiming to champion ideals of democracy and freedom and painting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) as a more nationalist, authoritarian bloc in contrast. It remains to be seen whether Gandhi's pitch for an INDIA government will receive popular support from European institutions, which are certain to be receptive to his western-friendly rhetoric. [NDTV] [Times of India]

Indonesia-China: Premier Li seeks deepening trade in meeting with President Widodo

(dql) In a bilateral meeting between Indonesian President Joko Widodo with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, held on the sidelines of last week's ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta, the two sides discussed ways to boost bilateral trade.

Li affirmed that China was ready to work together with Indonesia to prepare for the official operation of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, the USD 7,3 billion, largely China-funded rail project. Further, he stressed China's determination to make Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and "Two Countries, Twin Parks" - a bilateral trade arrangement between China and Indonesia - key projects within the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation with Indonesia.

Widodo, for his part, said that his country will cooperate with China to promote regional cooperation while ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. [Anadolu Agency] [Global Times]

Following the meeting, Indonesia's foreign minister disclosed that Li made a pledge of USD 21.7 billion in new Chinese investment in Indonesia to strengthen the countries' economic and political ties. [AP News]

Indonesia-Japan: Ties upgraded to comprehensive strategic partnership

(dql) Indonesia and Japan have agreed to upgrade their relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership.

The agreement was reached during a meeting between Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, held on the sidelines of last week's ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [Antara]

Indonesia-US: Jakarta seeks talks on critical minerals trade deal

(dql) Indonesian President Joko Widodo has requested the US to start talks on a trade deal for critical minerals to enable exports from the Southeast Asian country under the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act.

The request was made during his meeting with US Vice President Kamala Harris, held on the sidelines of ASEAN summits last week in Jakarta.

Under the law, enacted in March, a certain amount of critical minerals in electric vehicle (EV) batteries must be produced or assembled in North America or a free trade partner, so that EVs sold in the US are eligible for tax credits.

Indonesia and the US, so far, have no free trade agreement. However, resource-rich Indonesia has ambitions to become a major player in the manufacturing of EVs and their batteries, given the Southeast Asian country's vast nickel reserves.

Widodo also expressed his hope for Indonesia's inclusion in the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) that would allow its mineral exports to be recognized for "green subsidies" under the inflation act.

Harris, for her part, reassured that the US will continue to cooperate with Indonesia to establish supply chains that included "critical minerals required to expand our clean energy economies" and to boost trade between the two countries in the framework of the IPEF. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, a de-dollarization task force has been introduced in Indonesia to promote the use of the Rupiah in bilateral transactions. The move aims at diversifying payments on the international stage through local currency transactions (LCT).

Local currency transactions are currently undertaken with China, Japan, Malaysia, and Thailand. Jakarta wants to launch a cross-border payment system to encourage LCS transactions with Singapore by the end of this year. [ASEAN Briefing]

Indonesia-Netherlands: President Widodo hold talks with Prime Minister Rutte

(dql) On the sidelines on the G20 summit, held past weekend in India, Indonesian President Joko Widodo held bilateral talks with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, during which he requested the Netherlands' support for the development of low-carbon technology in Indonesia and the abolition of the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR).

The EUDR requires companies trading in cattle, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, rubber, soya and wood, as well as products derived from these commodities, to conduct extensive diligence on the value chain to ensure the goods do not result from recent (post 31 December 2020) deforestation, forest degradation or breaches of local environmental and social laws.

Indonesia, which together with Malaysia, account for 85 percent of global palm oil exports, views the regulation as discriminatory, arguing the saying its requirements are too strict for producers, particularly small farmers, to comply with.

Widodo also asked Rutte to support Indonesia's bid to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia] [Antara]

Indonesia-Oman: Labor cooperation discussed

(dql) Indonesia and Oman are exploring labor cooperation, as Indonesian Minister of Manpower Ida Fauziyah held bilateral talks with the head of the legal department of the Omani Foreign Ministry, Sulaiman Saud Al Jabri to discuss cooperation in labor laws and regulations, human resource capacity-building, occupational health and safety, and combating human trafficking. [Antara News]

Japanese Prime Minister Kishida holds bilateral talks on sidelines of G20 leaders' summit

(dql) On the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit held in India on September 9-10, Japanese Prime Minister held several bilateral talks.

In the meeting between Kashida and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two leaders agreed to work together to maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law and to advance cooperation in advanced technology, including space.

Kishida, for his part, called for cooperation to improve the investment environment in India, with a view to achieve the JPY 5 trillion (USD 34 billion) target of public and private investment and financing from Japan to India in the next five years. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1] [Kyodo News]

Kishida and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese, meanwhile, expressed satisfaction about to progress made in defense cooperation, including the joint exercises that saw F-35 fighter jets visiting each country under the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) that entered into force last month [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1].

The two prime ministers further reaffirmed their commitment to cooperation in resources and energy and agreed concurred to work together especially on decarbonization in Asia and in the hydrogen and ammonia sectors. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2]

In a third bilateral talk with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, Kishida affirmed his intention to deepen cooperation in security and other the Netherlands. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3]

Meeting with South Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol, Kishida reaffirmed that Tokyo is supportive Seoul's efforts to advance trilateral Japan-South Korea-China talks, which South Korea currently chairs.

Kishida and Yoon, furthermore, agreed on continuing to work together to deepen and to expand cooperation between their countries, and on frequent communication with one another at all levels including between the leaders. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 4] [The Japan Times]

Japan-Taiwan: Japanese government official appointed defence attaché in Taipei

(dql) In a move like to anger China, Japan has elevated security ties with Taiwan after appointing a serving government official as de facto defence attaché in Taiwan.

In absence of any formal diplomatic representation in Taiwan, Japan handles bilateral relations through the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association in Taipei, which is largely staffed by reassigned officials from the foreign and trade ministry officials.

The defence attaché post, however, has so far been held by a retired Japan Self Defence Force officer to avoid antagonizing Beijing. [Reuters]

Japan-Ukraine: Surprise visit of Japanese foreign minister after Middle East tour

(dql) During an unannounced visit to Kyiv on September 9, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

At the meeting Hayashi reaffirmed Japan's commitment to backing Ukraine, confirming that Tokyo was ready for the launch of negotiations on security cooperation between the two countries, with reference to the G7 pledge to boost Ukraine's defense against Russia unveiled made in July during the NATO summit in Vilnius.

Accompanied by executives of Japanese firms, Hayashi also promised support from both the Japanese public and private sectors for Ukraine's economy. A meeting on the economic reconstruction of Ukraine, hosted by Japan, is scheduled for early next year. [AP News] [Reuters]

The visit to Kyiv followed Hayashi' attendance of the First Japan-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Foreign Ministers' Meeting on September 7 (see article in this edition).

Laos, China strengthen vocational training

(ws) In a joint effort, authorities from Laos and China inaugurated a vocational training center in Vientiane. The center's primary objective is to impart professional e-commerce skills to vocational trainers, enhancing their capacity.

This collaboration aims to bridge vocational education with industry, resulting in upgraded curriculums, enhanced teaching methods, and heightened skill levels among teachers in Laos. Associate Prof. Dr. Phout Simmalavong, the Minister of Education and

Sports, highlighted that this training center fosters closer educational ties between the two nations.

Moreover, he added that the training programs offered at this facility will produce skilled personnel, poised to contribute to projects aligned with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is expected to significantly bolster cooperation between Laos and China in the realm of vocational education. [Vientiane Times]

Malaysia lifts ban on Australian cattle imports

(ga) Malaysia lifted an August 10 ban on cattle and buffalo imports from Australia on September 6, after an Australian investigation into their cattle exports confirmed that the cattle did not have lumpy skin disease (LSD). A small number of cattle transiting from Australia to Indonesia from May to August had LSD, which prompted the ban. [Al Jazeera] [Barron's] [Yahoo! Finance]

Malaysia imports about AUD 5.5 million worth of cattle from Australia each year, constituting Australia's sixth-largest partner for purchasing cattle. [Al Jazeera] [Barron's] [Yahoo! Finance]

Malaysia requests extradition of banker from 1MDB embezzlement scandal

(ga) Malaysia has formally requested the extradition of Ng "Roger" Chong Hwa, who was convicted in New York for his involvement in embezzling billions of USD from Malaysia's 1Malaysia Development Bhd (1MDB) sovereign wealth fund. The request seeks to bring Ng to Kuala Lumpur for trial on Malaysian charges related to the same case. Negotiations between the United States and Malaysia are underway to facilitate Ng's return to Malaysia for sentencing. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

It is estimated that out of the USD 6.5 billion in bonds sold by 1MDB in 2012 and 2013, approximately USD 4.5 billion was embezzled, with Ng being a participant in this wrongdoing.

Ng was convicted in March 2022 on specific charges of bribery and money laundering. Additionally, Singapore's central bank announced on September 5 that Ng has been banned for life from pursuing careers in securities-related fields regulated under Singapore's Securities and Futures Act, providing financial advisory

services under the Financial Advisers Act, or managing a capital market firm. Furthermore, he is prohibited from serving as the director or a substantial shareholder of such firms [see AiR No. 36, September/2023, 1].

Malaysian student detained in Norway on suspicion of spying on government

(lm) In Norway, a Malaysian student is currently under detention on suspicion of espionage. The Norwegian police have labeled this case as "serious and complex" due to an attempt to eavesdrop on the prime minister's office in Oslo. The young man was apprehended on September 8 and subsequently ordered by an Oslo court to remain in pre-trial custody for four weeks, all on the grounds of suspected espionage.

Authorities have refrained from disclosing the nature of the allegedly stolen data or speculating about the motives of the suspect. However, according to local media reports, authorities suspect that the individual was not acting alone and have imposed restrictions on his ability to receive letters and visits. [South China Morning Post] [Free Malaysia Today]

Mongolia-Laos: Inter-parliamentary cooperation to be strengthened

(dql) The Mongolian parliament and its Laotian counterpart have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on September 8.

The MoU further consolidates the legal basis for the cooperation between the two legislatures and facilitates favorable conditions for expanding the cooperation.

It was signed by Chairman of the State Great Khural of Mongolia Zandanshatar Gombojav and President of the National Assembly of the Lao People's Democratic Republic Xaysomphone Phomvihane. [Montsame 1]

The signing of the MoU was part of Xaysomphone's visit to Mongolia, during which he also met with Mongolian President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa to discuss ways to boost cooperation between the two countries in a wide range of areas, such as trade, economy, investment, agriculture, education, health, tourism, transport and logistics, and environment. [Montsame 2]

Myanmar-Bangladesh: Talks on bilateral cooperation

(sk) On September 6, Myanmar's State Administration Council Chairman, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, met with the Ambassador-designate of Bangladesh to Myanmar, Monwar Hossain.

Discussions covered diplomatic relations, trade promotion, border issues, drug trafficking prevention, displaced persons' repatriation, defense sector cooperation, Cyclone Mocha impact, and Myanmar's political developments. [Eleven Myanmar]

Myanmar-Saudi Arabia: Bilateral cooperation discussed

(sk) On September 6, Deputy Prime Minister and Union Minister for Foreign Affairs U Than Swe of Myanmar received Saud bin Abdullah Alsubaie, Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Myanmar.

They discussed ways to strengthen friendly bilateral relations and cooperation, including trade, investment, energy, labor, tourism, and cultural exchanges.

They also discussed ongoing negotiations for further cooperation agreements and the process of repatriating verified displaced persons from Rakhine State.

Both countries expressed support for each other in regional and international affairs. [Eleven Myanmar]

Plight of 1,000 Nepali youths in Kuwait sparks urgent government appeal for assistance

(na) Approximately 1,000 Nepali youths in Kuwait are currently facing dire circumstances, including unpaid wages and unemployment, which have prompted the Nepali government to appeal for assistance on their behalf. [My Republica]

These young individuals embarked on their journey to Kuwait around 11 months ago with the intention of working as cleaners for a Kuwait-based company. They revealed that they had arrived in Kuwait through various manpower agencies in Kathmandu, and the

challenges they are now facing are primarily attributed to certain irresponsible manpower companies.

The affected youths disclosed that the manpower agency had initially enticed them with the promise of earning between USD 380 to 480. However, upon their arrival in Kuwait, they found themselves without any employment opportunities.

In response to their predicament, the stranded Nepali youths have urgently appealed to the Nepali government for assistance. However, they have expressed frustration with the perceived lack of effective intervention by the Nepali Embassy and have alleged preferential treatment towards employers and manpower agencies.

South Korean spy agency suggests Kim Jong-un may take an unanticipated route for Russia visit

(tms) According to South Korea's intelligence agency, there is speculation that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un may choose an unexpected route when traveling to Russia for a meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

Recent reports suggested Kim's plans to visit Vladivostok, possibly by armored train, for discussions on potential military cooperation, including the supply of weaponry for Russia's conflict in Ukraine. [The New York Times]

The National Intelligence Service (NIS) is closely monitoring the situation and sharing intelligence with international spy agencies due to the significant implications of a summit between North Korea and Russia.

A recent delegation of North Korean officials traveling to Vladivostok further hints at an upcoming visit by Kim Jong-un. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2] [Yonhap 3]

North Korea-Russia: North Korean hackers target Russian entities, Microsoft claims

(tms) North Korean hackers are suspected of targeting Russian entities, with a focus on intelligence gathering, possibly linked to Russia's involvement in the war in Ukraine, according to a Microsoft report.

The victims' identities remain undisclosed, and North Korea's UN mission and the Russian embassy in Washington have remained silent.

North Korea's alleged espionage activities targeting its ally, Russia, comes amid war in Ukraine that has raised concerns about their relationship. A previous breach of a Russian missile developer by North Korean agents potentially exposed advanced missile technology data.

Microsoft's report also delves into cyber espionage in East Asia, including Chinese hackers targeting US infrastructure.

It introduces new claims of China's propaganda expansion through artificial intelligence and influencers, with the Chinese embassy yet to respond, maintaining its customary denial of cyber subterfuge allegations. [Microsoft Blog] [Reuters]

Pakistan: Army chief seeks enhanced military cooperation during Uzbekistan visit

(kr) Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir conducted a series of meetings during his two-day official visit to the Republic of Uzbekistan. He met with President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Defence Minister, and the Chairman and Secretary of the State Security Service of Uzbekistan. The primary focus of the visit was to enhance military-to-military cooperation and defense collaboration between the two countries. [Arab News]

During these meetings, General Munir emphasized the importance of strengthening mutual training cooperation and intelligence sharing. He also expressed his appreciation for the high standards of training and readiness exhibited by the Uzbekistan military forces and their understanding of regional security issues.

Upon his arrival at the Ministry of Defence, General Munir received a warm welcome and was honored with a guard of honor by a well-presented contingent. He also paid his respects by laying a floral wreath at the Memorial Complex of Martyrs in Tashkent.

Pakistan says Afghanistan building 'unlawful structures' along tense border

(lm) Pakistan has accused the Taliban government in neighboring Afghanistan of constructing "unlawful structures" at the Torkham border crossing, calling it a violation of territorial sovereignty. In response, the Taliban government accused Pakistani security forces of firing on its troops while repairing an "old security post." [Al Jazeera]

The Torkham border crossing in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was closed September 6 after security forces from both sides exchanged fire. The incident forced hundreds of trucks carrying essential goods to be stranded on both sides. [Republic World]

The region has experienced a surge in armed attacks since the Taliban assumed power in Afghanistan in 2021, with a significant number of these attacks claimed by the banned Pakistani Taliban (TTP). The TTP shares ideological alignment with the Afghan Taliban. Consequently, tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been escalating, with Pakistan repeatedly urging Afghanistan to exercise control over the movement of armed attackers from its territory. Afghanistan denies these allegations, further complicating the security situation in the region.

On the day of the Torkham firing, the TTP claimed responsibility for attacking two military checkposts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killing four Pakistani soldiers and 12 TTP fighters. [see entry in this edition]

Washington does not support any one political party in Pakistan, says US State Department

(lm) The United States has declared that it maintains a neutral stance regarding the outcome of elections in Pakistan and does not endorse any particular political party or candidate. The State Department made this statement in response to questions about US Ambassador Donald Blome's meeting with Chief Election Commissioner Sikander Sultan Raja in late August. [Business Recorder]

In separate developments, US Senator Chris Van Hollen has rejected the notion that Washington is interfering in Pakistani politics, emphasizing that the US seeks a strong bilateral relationship with Islamabad and supports free and fair elections. Van Hollen, a Democratic senator from Maryland, during an event organized by the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America in Washington highlighted that it is the Pakistani people's power and will to choose their leadership. [Daily Times]

The Philippines, Vietnam to sign rice deal; Manila mulls cut in rice tariffs to curb retail prices

(lb/lm) Vietnam and the Philippines are preparing to sign a rice trade agreement aimed at ensuring food security. During the recent ASEAN summit in Jakarta, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. discussed this matter. [Rappler]

Vietnam, the world's third-largest rice exporter, plays a crucial role in meeting the Philippines' rice import needs, which make up nearly 90% of its total imports. Although specific details of the deal have yet to be disclosed, Marcos expressed his appreciation for Vietnam's offer of a five-year supply agreement, highlighting the importance of regional stability.

Simultaneously, the Philippines is mulling a series of measures, including a cut in tariffs on imported rice, to curb surging retail prices that are fueling inflation. Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno has proposed reducing the current 35 percent rice import tariff rates to a range between zero and 10 percent. Additionally, the government is encouraging prompt rice imports by private-sector entities and expediting shipment clearance for qualified importers. [CNA]

These measures are in response to rising inflation in the country, with rice inflation reaching 4.2 percent in July and the overall inflation rate increasing to 5.3 percent in August, primarily driven by higher food and transportation costs.

Philippines accuses Chinese vessels of ‘dangerous maneuvers’ in disputed South China Sea

(lb) The Philippines has accused Chinese vessels of conducting "dangerous maneuvers" in a disputed area of the South China Sea. The Philippine coast guard reported that its vessels were approached by eight Chinese boats near Ayungin Shoal (known as Ren'ai Reef in China), endangering the safety of crew members on the Philippine vessels. The incident involved four Chinese coast guard vessels and four Chinese "maritime militia" boats. [CNN]

This comes after a recent incident where the Philippines accused Chinese coast guard ships of firing

water cannons at its vessels during a resupply mission to troops stationed on the same shoal. [AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5]

China, The Philippines to sign ten university partnership agreements

(lb) Ten Philippine higher education institutions (HEIs) have entered into partnerships with Chinese HEIs to enhance collaboration through student and faculty exchanges, as well as resource mobilization. The memorandum of understanding (MOU) was signed during the Philippines-China University President Cooperation Dialogue and Networking Session. [Inquirer.net]

The Philippines, South Korea sign Free Trade Agreement

(lb) The Philippines and South Korea have successfully concluded four years of negotiations by signing a free trade deal. Manila's President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced the agreement during the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Jakarta, emphasizing the opportunities for economic collaboration and complementation between the two nations. [Gov.ph] [Reuters]

While specific details of the agreement were not provided in the announcement, it is expected to enhance market access for various goods, including agricultural products like bananas. In 2022, the Philippines exported USD 3.12 billion worth of goods to South Korea, making it the nation's seventh-largest export market.

Australia, Philippines upgrade ties to strategic partnership

(lb/lm) Australia and the Philippines have elevated their bilateral relationship to a strategic partnership, with Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese signing the agreement during his visit to Manila, marking the first visit by an Australian leader to the Philippines in two decades. The two nations have also agreed to hold annual defense ministers' meetings to address rising security challenges in the region, particularly in the South China Sea. [Sheparton News] [Reuters]

Prime Minister Albanese's visit to Manila aimed to strengthen defense and security ties in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in response to rising tensions in the South China Sea. Canberra seeks closer collaboration, including joint military patrols, with the Philippines to address territorial disputes in the area. Moreover, the Philippines is significant to Australia due to robust economic relations and a substantial Filipino diaspora.

India, Singapore supreme courts sign agreement for judicial cooperation

(lm) During an official visit to Singapore, the chief justice of India's Supreme Court met with his Singaporean counterpart, and both sides signed an agreement of their institutions in the field of judicial cooperation. [LiveLaw]

Money laundering probe wasn't opened on China's request, Singapore says

(lb/lm) Investigation in a money laundering and forgery case involving about USD 737 million of cash, properties, luxury cars and other assets, had been initiated in response to various suspicious transaction reports filed with authorities and not due to a request from the Chinese government, according to a city-state official. [Bloomberg]

Home Affairs and Law Minister K Shanmugam emphasized that the probe had been ongoing for months and wasn't hastily conducted in response to external pressure. He stated that Singapore takes action based on whether activities are illegal in Singapore, regardless of other countries' requests.

The arrest of 10 foreigners in Singapore on August 16, suspected of involvement in money laundering and other financial crimes, has raised speculation about potential links to the visit of China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi just six days prior.

Singapore to send humanitarian assistance to Ukraine

(lb) Singapore is sending a humanitarian assistance package consisting of 22 ambulances to Ukraine in response to a request from the country. This aid is aimed at supporting international efforts to address

the humanitarian crisis and needs arising from the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Singapore had previously provided aid to Ukraine in June 2022, which included ambulances, fire engines, firefighting gear, rescue equipment, mine detectors, and medical supplies. Additionally, the Singapore Red Cross has been actively supporting Ukrainian refugees with various aid packages, totaling millions of Singapore dollars, including medical supplies, equipment, and housing support. [CNA]

Singapore, Canada reaffirm bilateral ties during Prime Minister Trudeau's visit to city-state

(lb) Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau concluded a two-day visit to Singapore by meeting with the city-state's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. Both leaders reaffirmed the strong bilateral ties between their countries, highlighting their shared commitment to multilateralism, the rule of law, and free trade. Joined by Canadian Trade Minister Mary Ng, both sides discussed various areas of cooperation, including cyberspace, science, technology, and innovation. [CNA] [The Straits Times]

Additionally, talks will begin on a security agreement for defense exchanges and collaborations, and both nations plan to establish a Canada-Singapore Youth Mobility Agreement to facilitate travel and work opportunities for young people.

Notably, Singapore was Canada's largest destination in Southeast Asia for Canadian direct investment abroad in 2022 and the second-largest source of foreign direct investment from Southeast Asia.

Singapore, United Kingdom elevate ties to 'strategic partnership'

(lb/lm) Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and his British counterparty Rishi Sunak have announced that their countries' relations will be elevated to a strategic partnership, the first such treaty for London since the UK's departure from the European Union. [GOV.UK] [Reuters]

The agreement is expected to enhance confidence for both Singaporean and British companies to invest in each other's countries, contributing to job creation.

Furthermore, the partnership will focus on reinforcing security cooperation, advancements in science and technology, and research and development, particularly in countering cyber threats, through collaboration between Singapore's Digital and Intelligence Service and the UK.

South Korea-Japan: Bilateral customs talks resumed after seven years

(tms) South Korea's customs agency has announced that it held its first bilateral meeting with its Japanese counterpart in seven years, signaling a potential improvement in economic relations.

Commissioner Ko Kwang-hyo met with his Japanese counterpart in Seoul to discuss various issues, including global protectionism and concerns related to trade-related crimes such as drug trafficking.

Both customs agencies expressed their commitment to addressing cross-border crimes and trade violations, agreeing to exchange information and implement joint crackdown measures.

The meeting aims to normalize relations and reinstate a USD 10 billion currency swap deal, which had been disrupted due to Japan's export restrictions. Tensions had arisen from South Korean court rulings demanding Japanese companies compensate victims of forced labor during Japan's colonial rule in the early 20th century.

This year, relations began to improve when South Korea proposed addressing the forced labor issue independently without financial contributions from Japan [see AiR No. 10, March/2023, 1].

Additionally, South Korea's customs agency plans to engage in talks with Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, and Mongolia to enhance exports by year-end. [Yonhap]

South Korea-China: No official ban on urea shipments in effect, stable fertilizer supply ensured

(tms) South Korea's finance ministry has confirmed that China has not imposed an official ban on urea shipments by fertilizer companies.

Reports had suggested that Beijing had asked Chinese fertilizer firms to suspend outbound urea shipments.

The ministry clarified that while one Chinese chemical fertilizer company plans to reduce exports, it does not foresee a comprehensive export ban as seen in the past.

South Korea expects its domestic supply of urea for fertilizer to remain stable, even with potential export restrictions, due to diversified imports and stabilizing prices.

Qatar and Saudi Arabia are significant sources of urea imports for South Korea, reducing reliance on Chinese imports.

As of early September, South Korea has secured a substantial portion of its domestic urea demand, with adequate reserves to maintain stability through January. The government and related organizations will closely monitor the situation and market supply. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Ukraine: USD 2.3 billion additional aid pledged for peace and reconstruction

(tms) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has announced a commitment of USD 2.3 billion in aid for Ukraine to support its post-war recovery efforts.

This pledge was made during the G20 summit in New Delhi, with South Korea planning to provide USD 300 million in humanitarian aid in 2024 and USD 2 billion in the form of long-term, low-interest loans through the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) starting in 2025.

Yoon highlighted South Korea's commitment to aiding Ukraine's recovery and reinforcing multilateral development banks to tackle global challenges. He also stressed the importance of a rules-based digital order to foster innovation while addressing digital disparities. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Serbia: Prime ministers discuss bilateral relations and investment treaty

(tms) South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo held talks with Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic to explore avenues for bolstering bilateral ties.

Both leaders welcomed the signing of a bilateral investment treaty aimed at facilitating mutual investments and safeguarding South Korean investments in Serbia from non-commercial risks. Han anticipated increased bilateral exchanges following this visit, which marks the first visit by a Serbian prime minister in 13 years.

Brnabic expressed Serbia's commitment to enhancing its relationship with South Korea, recognizing it as a crucial economic partner. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Indonesia: Multiple agreements signed to strengthen bilateral cooperation

(tms) South Korea and Indonesia have inked 14 initial agreements and two contracts to bolster cooperation across various sectors, including nuclear power generation, mobility, and major minerals.

These agreements were signed during a business roundtable held in Jakarta while President Yoon Suk Yeol attended the East Asia Summit.

Key highlights include an MOU between the nuclear power associations of both countries for exchanging information and nurturing talent in the field of small modular reactors (SMRs).

Additionally, the mobility sector saw two MOUs, and agreements related to key minerals, electricity, clean energy, machinery, and healthcare industries were also signed. [Yonhap]

South Korea-US: Enhanced cooperation in hydrogen and clean energy discussed

(tms) A senior South Korean trade official held discussions with Nebraska's Governor, Jim Pillen, in Seoul, focusing on ways to strengthen bilateral collaboration in areas such as hydrogen, clean energy, and overall economic and trade relations.

Deputy Trade Minister Jeong Dae-jin emphasized the importance of enhancing ties, particularly in the field of hydrogen vehicles, given Nebraska's clean hydrogen production facilities.

Jeong also sought the state government's support for South Korean businesses operating in Nebraska amid

the impact of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) on the eco-friendly car sector.

The cooperation in the clean energy sector is seen as a significant contribution to deepening the South Korea-US alliance and enhancing overall economic and industrial relations. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Uzbekistan: Agreement reached on USD 1 billion outstanding payment for joint gas project

(tms) South Korea's finance ministry has announced that it has reached an agreement with Uzbekistan to settle an outstanding payment of approximately USD 1 billion related to a joint gas project during during the visit of South Korea's Finance Minister, Choo Kyung-ho, to Uzbekistan, where he held discussions with his Uzbek counterpart.

The joint gas project, initiated in 2008 with the joint venture Uz-Kor Gas Chemical, had faced payment delays due to foreign exchange issues. The agreement's details were not disclosed.

Minister Choo expressed hope for strengthened economic ties between the two countries amid global economic changes and emphasized the potential for collaboration in cutting-edge sectors leveraging South Korea's technology and Uzbekistan's natural resources.

The trade between South Korea and Uzbekistan reached USD 2.21 billion in 2022, significantly increasing from USD 3 million in 1992.

During his visit, Minister Choo also discussed expanding bilateral ties with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and sought Uzbekistan's support for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan. [Ministry of Economy and Finance, South Korea] [Yonhap]

New British High Commissioner voices desire for closer Sri Lanka-UK ties

(lf) New British High Commissioner in Colombo Andrew Patrick visited Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena at Temple Trees on September 8 to discuss the bilateral relations between both countries. Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom maintain a long-

standing diplomatic relationship, with Sri Lanka being a former British colony, known as Ceylon, until 1948 and a Commonwealth Dominion with the late Queen Elizabeth II as head of state until 1972. High Commissioner Patrick voiced his desire to see both nations collaborate on economic and security matters in the near future, noting pharmaceutical, tourism and hospitality as key sectors for growth.

The increasing presence of British universities within Sri Lanka was also discussed, as both men voiced their approval of the increasing tertiary education opportunities that institutions from the UK offer to young people within the island nation. Both men voiced their interest in exploring the potential to increase English lessons across the country through the British Council, the UK's cultural exchange institution. English is considered a business language within Sri Lanka, where Tamil and Sinhala are the official languages.

Although the meeting between the High Commissioner and Prime Minister was constructive, UK-Sri Lankan relations have run into a complication following the British Television station Channel 4 airing a documentary which alleged connections between the cabinet of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings, which left 269 people dead, including 5 British citizens. It remains to be seen if there will be any diplomatic action taken against the United Kingdom by Rajapaksa loyalists, however since the former Presidents resignation amongst wide-spread public outrage and riots in 2022, it is believed his influence within the country has significantly shrunken and lacks the ability to impact the bilateral ties between both countries. [Daily Mirror]

Chinese naval formation passes Taiwan's southeast for training in Western Pacific

(dql) A Chinese naval formation led by the aircraft carrier Shandong reportedly passed 60 nautical miles (111km) to Taiwan's southeast on September 11 and entered the western Pacific for training.

Furthermore, 11 Chinese military aircraft, including J-16 fighters, were spotted in Taiwan's air defence identification zone. [Reuters]

In an earlier move, the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson (DDG 114) and Royal Canadian Navy Halifax-class frigate HMCS Ottawa (FFH 341) transited the Taiwan Strait on September 9.

While China objected the transit, U.S. 7th Fleet said it was routine Taiwan Strait transit through waters where high-seas freedoms of navigation and overflight apply in accordance with international law. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan lays down safety requirements for Japan's release of Fukushima wastewater

(ed) Taiwan has informed Japan to stop releasing Fukushima nuclear power plant's treated wastewater into the Pacific Ocean if radiation levels in the waters around Taiwan reach unsafe levels.

Taiwan also requested that the wastewater issue be a regular topic of discussion in the annual Taiwan-Japan dialogue on oceanic affairs, and the discussions between the two countries' atomic energy agencies. Taiwan hopes this will make sure that the safety of the wastewater release is continually under watch.

The proposal, submitted by a Taiwanese diplomat to a Japanese representative, was only acknowledged by the Japanese government. [Focus Taiwan]

This week on September 6, several environmental NGOs protested outside the offices of the Japan-Taiwan Exchange Association (JTEA) to show their opposition to the Fukushima wastewater release, calling for its complete suspension.

The release of nuclear wastewater has stirred up much criticism, especially in East Asia, mainly over safety fears. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan's President Tsai visits Eswatini to celebrate 55th anniversary of independence

From September 5 to 8, Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen conducted a four-day trip to Eswatini, Taiwan's last remaining diplomatic ally in Africa.

President Tsai arrived in time to celebrate Eswatini's 55th anniversary of independence, as well as the 55th birthday of Eswatini's absolute monarch, King Mswati III. She was accompanied by a delegation including the mayor of Kaohsiung, which is the sister city of Eswatini's capital Mbabane. Other guests at the ceremony included the presidents of Botswana and South Africa.

Addressing the anniversary celebrations, President Tsai celebrated the longstanding ties between Taiwan and Eswatini, describing it as the “epitome of progress and development”. Tsai highlighted Eswatini’s second highest internet penetration rate in Africa, the large numbers of students from Eswatini studying in Taiwan and cooperation in women’s empowerment as areas of achievement between the two countries.

On returning to Taiwan, the president lauded the visit as a success and thanked Eswatini for its support of Taiwan’s international participation amid a difficult period, as China asserts its claims over Taiwan’s sovereignty. [Office of the President Republic of China (Taiwan)] [Reuters] [Taipei Times]

Thailand-US: Congressional delegation visits Thailand

(dql) During a meeting between Busadee Santipitaks, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and a US Congressional delegation, led by Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, both sides discussed ways to deepen cooperation on trade and investment, while stressing the existing close cooperation on defense and human trafficking.

The meeting was part of the delegation’s visit to Thailand from September 6-8. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand]

United States, Vietnam sign ‘comprehensive strategic partnership’ during President Biden visit

(km/lm) United States President Joe Biden's state visit to Vietnam marked a significant milestone as both countries celebrated an agreement to elevate their relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership." This elevation represents a new and more profound stage in the bilateral ties between Washington and Hanoi, former adversaries that only resumed diplomatic ties in 1995, signifying a shared commitment to strengthening cooperation on various fronts.

This elevation of the U.S.-Vietnam relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" aligns Vietnam with a select group of nations, including China, Russia, India, and South Korea, that share this upper-tier diplomatic status.

During his visit to Hanoi, President Biden engaged in discussions with Vietnamese President Vo Van Thuong and Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh. These conversations revolved around the deepening collaboration between the two nations and addressing key challenges that are of paramount importance to their respective populations.

One of the highlights of President Biden's visit was their attendance at a business forum, where discussions revolved around enhancing cooperation in cutting-edge fields such as cloud computing, semiconductors, and artificial intelligence. Executives from leading U.S. and Vietnamese semiconductor, tech, and aviation firms participated in the forum, underscoring the private sector's role in driving innovation and fostering economic ties between the two nations.

Furthermore, the White House announced a significant deal between Boeing and Vietnam Airways worth USD 7.8 billion. Boeing has also been in talks with Vietnamese authorities, together with other U.S. defense companies, for the possible sale of military equipment, including drones and helicopters. [VnExpress International]

Notably, however, Vietnam is reportedly making clandestine plans to buy an arsenal of weapons from Russia, in violation of American sanctions. The move is seen as an attempt to modernize Vietnam's military and counter Chinese encroachment in the South China Sea. [The New York Times]

An internal Vietnamese government document from March 2023 reveals a plan to secretly pay for defense purchases through transfers at a joint Vietnamese and Russian oil venture in Siberia. The document describes talks for a credit facility that Russia would extend to Vietnam to buy heavy weaponry, including anti-ship missiles, antisubmarine aircraft, helicopters, antiaircraft missile systems, and fighter jets. [Reuters]

Vietnam’s Prime Minister meets with US climate envoy

(km) Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and the United States Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry held discussions in Hanoi. [VietnamPlus]

Prime Minister Chinh expressed Vietnam's desire to collaborate with Washington on climate change initiatives tailored to its socio-economic context. Kerry

affirmed the US's commitment to Vietnam and climate cooperation, emphasizing support for Hanoi's net-zero emissions goal. The US pledged support for clean energy, sustainable infrastructure, and resource management in Vietnam.

Vietnam's vice president on official visit to Mozambique

(km/lm) Vietnamese Vice President Vo Thi Anh Xuan on September 11 began a four-day official visit to Mozambique. During her visit, she is scheduled to hold talks with Prime Minister Adriano Afonso Maleiane, pay courtesy visits to President Filipe Nyusi and President of the Assembly of Mozambique Esperanca Bias, and meet with other Mozambican officials and business representatives. [VietnamPlus]

The visit aims to strengthen the traditional relations between Vietnam and Mozambique and explore opportunities for cooperation in various areas, especially in the economy and trade. The two countries have complementary economies and have seen an increase in trade and investment cooperation in recent years.

Vietnam’s National Assembly chairman meets French legislators in Hanoi

(km) Vietnam's National Assembly Chairman Vương Đình Huệ met with a delegation from the France-Việt Nam Friendship Parliamentarians' Group, led by Chairwoman Catherine Deroche.

Chairman Huệ praised the group's contributions to the bilateral relationship and proposed increased collaboration in various areas. He suggested strengthening connections between French regions and Vietnamese localities, fostering business ties, and focusing on climate change adaptation, environmental protection, and economic connectivity. Additionally, he welcomed France's initiative to organize the ASEAN Market Forum and invited French parliamentarians to the ninth Global Conference of Young Parliamentarians hosted by Vietnam.

Deroche emphasized the group's commitment to enhancing mutual understanding and cooperation. Further, she expressed the hope for continued cooperation between France and Vietnam, particularly in addressing global challenges like environment

protection and climate change and emphasized France's role as Việt Nam's top trade partner in the EU. [vietnamnews.vn]

Announcements

Upcoming Online Events

13 September 2023 @ 8:00 – 9.00 a.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), USA

Coalition Building: Current Dynamics in Japanese Politics

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio is up against political challenges as a new session of parliament approaches after a hectic summer of diplomacy, which included the recent trilateral meeting at Camp David. This online conversation will focus on the political environment in Japan, including the condition of the ruling coalition, the likelihood of a cabinet reshuffle, and the likelihood of an impending snap election.

Visit [CSIS] for more information.

13 September 2023 @ 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Two Years After Moïse Assassination: The Impact of Gang Violence in Haiti

The security situation in Haiti has gotten worse two years after President Jovenel Mose's murder, with gangs apparently in charge of more than 80% of the capital. Kidnappings and violence are at all-time highs.

Additionally, Haitians continue to take dangerous journeys to the United States. The Haitian issue, prospective remedies, and ramifications for Haiti, its neighbors, and the United States will be discussed at this event.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

13 September 2023 @ 2:30 – 4:00 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Scenarios for Post-Putin Russia

A meaningful resolution to the conflict will require a significant shift in Russian administration, as will be discussed at this event concerning Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine, which shows that the Putin government is not interested in long-lasting peace between Russia and its neighbors. What is the most ideal scenario for Russia's future, given this? Participants in this roundtable discussion will talk about political opposition in Russia, economic transition, and human rights concerns in the context of many future scenarios, as well as concrete methods to encourage change.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

13 September 2023 @ 12:00 - 1:00 p.m. (GMT-5), The Brookings Institution (Brookings)

Navigating a challenging and uncertain global economic climate

The current state of the world economy will be discussed, as well as the significant role that organizations like the IFC may play in resolving these issues. As The long-lasting impacts of numerous shocks, including as the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the disruption of the energy and food markets, the rise in inflation, and the severe tightening of monetary policy, continue to cast doubt on the future of the world economy.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

13 September 2023 @ 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. (GMT+0), Chatham House (CHATHAM)

Making sense of coups and democratic renewal in Africa

The results of the UNDP paper, the causes and effects of coups, and efficient engagement strategies will all be covered at this session. Additionally, pay close attention to how to integrate development into long-term plans for boosting social stability and coup resilience, as well as how to make sure that regional and global reactions to coups go beyond military involvement and sanctions.

Learn more about the event at [CHATHAM].

13 September 2023 @ 12:30 - 14:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Bruegel Institution, Brussel

Carnegie Connects: The Ukrainian Counter-Offensive: Implications for U.S. Policy

The panelists at this event, which will examine the 2040 targets and how modeling might assist policymaking in this area, will feature European policymakers and modelers participating in leading research initiatives on modeling climate mitigation. The discussion of new difficulties in the field of climate policy will include possible model creation in response to the evolving demands of policymaking. The event will also serve as the introduction of a first policy brief that will discuss the difficulties and potential of meeting the EU's climate targets for the year 2040 and, more broadly, provide guidance for international climate discussions leading up to the global stock take process.

Learn more about the event at [Bruegel].

13 September 2023 @ 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (GMT+1), German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA),

Can Germany’s Feminist Foreign Policy Work in Afghanistan, Iran, and Ukraine?

This session will examine opportunities and constraints regarding Germany's Feminist Foreign Policy.

Learn more about the event at [GIGA].

14 September 2023 @ 1:00 - 1:45 p.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Carnegie),

Carnegie Connects: The Ukrainian Counter-Offensive: Implications for U.S. Policy

There will be debate at this session about how Ukraine's current counteroffensive has maybe unfairly disappointed some Western policy circles. Despite this, the fight seems to be going on forever. What are the best chances for Kiev to advance against Russia? What types of cutting-edge weaponry systems delivered to Ukraine might make a substantial difference on the battlefield, and has the Biden administration been overly risk-averse in its provision of military assistance? What can we infer about Russian and Ukrainian tactics from the last few months? Do the fundamental tenets of Western policy in response to Russia's attack on Ukraine need to be reevaluated?

Learn more about the event at [Carnegie].

14 September 2023 @ 1:30 - 2:45 p.m. (GMT-5), The Brookings Institution (Brookings)

Frontier AI regulation: Preparing for the future beyond ChatGPT

A rising number of specialists are worried about the threats posed by cutting-edge AI systems. This event will assess these concerns, talk about proactive frontier AI system governance, and look at potential hazards. A panel of experts will follow the opening conversation between Congressman Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) and Nonresident Fellow Anton Korinek of Brookings.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

15 September 2023 @ 9:30 a.m. - 14:30 p.m. (GMT+2), The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

30 years of the Single Market: A look into the future

This event will be a discussion on the Single Market between the institutions, the Spanish government, the private sector, and the people. The discussion will

focus on the future of the Single Market and the crucial role that European citizens play in it after taking a look back at its first 30 years.

Learn more about the event at [ECFR].

15 September 2023 @ 6:00 - 7:30 p.m. (GMT+5.3), Asia Society India Centre, INDIA

Women in Governance: Hina Jilani & Karuna Nundy

Since India has never had a female Chief Justice, South Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) ranked exceedingly poorly in the index created by the World Economic Forum in 2023. Understanding the personal, political, and professional paths set out for women in South Asia is the goal of this event. which will concentrate on women in law.

Learn more about the event at [INDIA].

14 September 2023 @ 10:30 – 11:45 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

China's Clean Energy Partnerships in the Global South

This program will talk about how China and the Global South have developed extensive fossil fuel infrastructure and extremely polluting mineral extraction during the previous ten years. The Belt and Road Initiative has begun to change since 2021 as the Chinese government places more emphasis on sustainable energy projects and investments. In 2021, the Xi administration outlawed the development of coal-fired power plants along the Belt and Road and released new guidelines and requirements for enhancing the environmental performance of international projects.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

18 September 2023 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Nuclear Energy Policy Summit 2023: Accelerating Net Zero Nuclear

With nuclear energy expected to be essential in achieving net-zero by 2050, this event is about positioning nuclear energy at the forefront of the discourse about climate change and how to finance the energy transition.

For more information, see [Atlantic Council].

18 September 2023 @ 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Understanding the Fentanyl and Opioid Crisis: US-Mexico Solutions

The flow of fentanyl into the United States is still growing, despite the López Obrador administration's increased attempts to intercept precursor chemicals arriving primarily from China, discover and dismantle underground labs, and assign the navy to monitor ports. The purpose of this conference is to examine the causes of the opioid epidemic, ways to strengthen US-Mexico cooperation in the fight against transnational organized crime and drug trafficking, as well as viable preventive and therapeutic approaches.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

18 September 2023 @ 2.00 – 3.15 p.m. (GMT+8), ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore

Thailand-Myanmar Relations in Regional Perspective: Issues and Challenges

Since the coup in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, discussions on bilateral and regional responses to the Myanmar issue have focused on Thailand's position as a close neighbor and founding member of ASEAN. Thailand maintained a policy of interacting largely with the State Administration Council throughout the term of the Prayut government (SAC). At this hybrid event, a renowned expert on foreign policy will explain the potential and challenges for advancing this policy.

Learn more event details can be found at [ISEAS].

19 September 2023 @ 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Wilson Center, USA

Combating Green Corruption: Fighting Financial Crime as a Driver of Environmental Degradation

This event will highlight efforts made by governments, civil society organizations, and international players to combat nature crime, including the "Green Corruption" strategy. In the run-up to the Conference of the States Parties of the UN Convention against Corruption, which the United States will host in Atlanta, Georgia from December 11 to 15, 2023, the speakers will examine best practices and real-world examples in combating green corruption as well as ways to strengthen the normative framework.

For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

19 September 2023 @ 18:00 - 19:30 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), Australia

Intern Debate: " That Australia is a suitable host for COP31"

The main topic of discussion in this student debate is whether Australia ought to be selected to lead COP31. Australia might be considered to be a more qualified host in terms of climate policy than the United Arab Emirates, which will be hosting COP28 in Dubai this year. Will diplomatic skill or climate credentials be more important in identifying who is a qualified host for COP31?

Learn more about the event at [AIIA].

Recent and Upcoming Book Releases

Danny Dorling, ***Shattered Nation: Inequality and the Geography of a Failing State***, Verso Books, 288 pages, to be published September 19, 2023. For a review, see [LSE].

Roluah Puia, ***Nationalism in the Vernacular: State, Tribes, and Politics of Peace in Northeast India***, Cambridge University Press, 260 pages, published June 30, 2023, reviewed in [LSE]

Kerry Brown, ***China Incorporated: The Politics of a World Where China is Number One***, Bloomsbury Academic, 208 pages, published September 7, 2023. The book is reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Romit Chowdhury, ***City of Men: Masculinities and Everyday Morality on Public Transport***, Rutgers University Press, 216 pages, published August 11, 2023. Visit [Asian Review of Books] to read a review.

Hans Kundnani, ***Eurowhiteness: Culture, Empire and Race in the European Project***, C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 248 pages, published August 17, 2023, with a review in [Financial Times].

Robert P. Jones, ***The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy: and the Path to a Shared American Future***, Simon & Schuster, 400 pages, published September 5, 2023, reviewed in [Publishers Weekly].

John Gray, ***The New Leviathans: Thoughts After Liberalism***, Allen Lane, 192 pages, published September 7, 2023. For a review, see [The New Statesman].

Calls

The **Japan Studies Association** invites paper proposals for its ***30th Japan Studies Association Conference*** to be held on January 3-5, 2024, in Honolulu, Hawai'i. The conference theme is "What's Next for Japan?". The deadline for abstract submission is December 1, 2023. For more information, see [Japan Studies Association]

The **International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT)** has opened application for its ***2024 Scholarship, Internship and Research Programme*** which grants a limited number of research scholarships (1000€ per month) to outstanding post-graduate (doctoral) law students, lawyers, academics, and government officials to undertake two months of research. The deadline for application submission is September 30, 2023. For more information, see [UNIDROIT].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Communications Analyst** to be based in Kyiv, Ukraine. Applications are accepted until September 18, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Project Officer** to be based in Cairo,

Egypt. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Common Services Associate** to be based in Bonn, Germany. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks an **UN Coordination Specialist** to be based in Belgium. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Copy Editor** to be based in Remote Work. Applications are accepted until September 18, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks an **IT Operations Assistant** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until September 28, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Project Manager Engineer** to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until October 2, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Programme Policy Officer** to be based in Niamey, Niger. Applications are accepted until September 28, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks an **Operational Information Management & Performance Reporting Officer** to be based in Egypt. Applications are accepted until September 20, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Monitoring Assistant** to be based in Ethiopia. Applications are accepted until September 22, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Wash Officer**, to be based in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **National consultant**, to be based in Zimbabwe. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks an **International consultant**, to be based in Zimbabwe. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Chief Health and Nutrition**, to be based in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea. Applications are accepted until October 5, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Programme Assistant**, to be based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks an a **Consultant**, to be based in Suva, Fiji. Applications are accepted until September 20, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks an **Executive Assistant**, to be based in New Delhi and Delhi, India. Applications are accepted until September 27, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Technical Officer**, to be based in New Delhi and Delhi, India. Applications are accepted until September 20, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Technical Associate**, to be based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Pharmacy**, to be based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks an **Ethics Officer** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until October 19, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Team Assistant** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until October 6, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Legal Officer** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until October 20, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks an **Associate Public Information Officer** to be based in not specified. Applications are accepted until October 4, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Senior Information Systems Officer** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until September 18, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Family Support Caseworker**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until November 6, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Technical Advisor**, to be based in Kenya and Jordan. Applications are accepted until October 7, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Global Surge Team Roster**, to be based in not specified. Applications are accepted until October 7, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Case Aide**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until November 6, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Resettlement Manager**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until November 6, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **HR Support**, to be based in Islamabad, Pakistan. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Legal Expert**, to be based in Gaborone, Botswana. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Contracts Officer**, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until September 28, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Procurement Officer**, to be based in Harare, Zimbabwe. Applications are accepted until September 28, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Technical Adviser**, to be based in Suva, Fiji. Applications are accepted until October 5, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Resource Mobilisation Expert**, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Monitoring and Reporting Policy and Framework Development Consultant**, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Program Management Officer**, to be based in Jakarta, Indonesia. Applications are accepted until October 6, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks an **Executive Assistant**, to be based in Beirut, Lebanon. Applications are accepted until October 6, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Finance and Budget Assistant**, to be based in Bonn, Germany. Applications are accepted until October 5, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks an **Electrical Engineer**, to be based in Bangui, Central African Republic. Applications are accepted until September 18, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Project Manager**, to be based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Communications Specialist**, to be based in Yangon, Myanmar. Applications are accepted until September 28, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Communications Associate**, to be

based in Kyiv, Ukraine. Applications are accepted until September 20, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Procurement Senior Associate**, to be based in Tbilisi, Georgia. Applications are accepted until September 19, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks an **Accounting Policy Officer**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until September 29, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Communications Officer**, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until September 22, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Financial Analyst**, to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until October 6, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Senior Partnership Specialist**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until September 19, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks an **Enterprise Risk Data Analyst**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until September 19, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Chief Nurse**, to be based in Abuja, Nigeria. Applications are accepted until September 18, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Programme Officer**, to be based in Accra, Ghana. Applications are accepted until September 20, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks an **Administrative Assistant**, to be based in Philippines. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Database and Power BI Analyst**, to be based in Philippines. Applications are accepted until September 21, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Project Officer**, to be based in Bujumbura, Burundi. Applications are accepted until September 19, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

Morgan State University in Maryland, United States is inviting applications for a **Tenured Associate or Professor & Program Director**. Application submission deadline is September 30, 2023. For more details, see [Morgan State University].

University of Oregon in Oregon, United States is inviting applications for a **Pro Tem Instructor in Political Science**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Oregon].

Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin in Texas, United States is inviting applications for a **tenure-track Assistant Professor of Latin American Comparative Policy and Politics**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [University of Texas at Austin].

The **Department of Political Science and Sociology in Murray State University** in Kentucky, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in Public Administration**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Murray State University].

The **Political Science Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison** in Wisconsin, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Wisconsin-Madison].

The **Department of Chemical Sciences at California Baptist University** in California, United States is inviting applications for an **adjunct instructor positions in physical science**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [California Baptist University].

James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia is inviting applications for a **Tenure Track Assistant Professor of Political Science**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [James Madison University].

The **Department of Marine Science in Coastal Carolina University** in South Carolina, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Physical Oceanography**. Application submission

deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Coastal Carolina University].

The **Department of Environment, Development & Health in the School of International Service at American University** in District of Columbia, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [American University].

The **Department of Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies in California State University** in California, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor**. Application submission deadline is Mar 31, 2023. For more details, see [California State University].

Durham University in United Kingdom is inviting applications for a **Teaching Fellow in International Relations and Security**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Durham University].

The **Department of Religion at Rice University** in Texas, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Religion and Science**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Rice University].

The **Department of Physics and Astronomy at Rice University** in Texas, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in Quantum Experiment**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Rice University].

The **Department of Information Science in University at Buffalo** in New York, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor**. Application submission deadline is October 15, 2023. For more details, see [University at Buffalo].

Drexel University in Pennsylvania, United States is inviting applications for an **Adjunct**. Application submission deadline is September 30, 2023. For more details, see [Drexel University].

The **Office of Global and Immersive Studies at American University** in District of Columbia, United States is inviting applications for an **Adjunct Faculty at Office of Global & Immersive Studies: Washington Semester Program**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [American University].

Chatham University's Department of Social Sciences in Pennsylvania, United States is inviting

applications for an **Adjunct Faculty of Social Sciences**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Chatham University].

Auburn University in Alabama, United States is inviting applications for a **Coordinator**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Auburn University].

Eastern Michigan University in Michigan, United States is inviting applications for a **Lecturer in Political Science**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Eastern Michigan University].

Team:

Aimpavee Kiratiakkrasak (ak), Dan Kristian Rivera (kr), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Griffin Allan (ga), Hanzaw Aung (ha), Harshita Prashar (ph), Isabelle Chua (ic), Kanokphong Visetvoharn, Khin Ohnmar Moe (km), Lachlan Foster (lf), Lawrence Brenner (lb), Lucas Meier (lm), Morten Strantzen (ms), Nath Kusolsong (nk), Philipp Schüßler (ps), Phoo Wai Yan Myint (pm), Sai Laung Kam (slk), Tarazi Mohammed Sheikh (tms), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn), Worrawit Sirijintana (ws)

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

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