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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates Azerbaijan's Independence Restoration 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: General rumored as successor to missing defense minister

(ms) Three-star general and currently Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission Liu Zheni is said to become the successor of the Chinese Defense Minister Li Shangfu, who has not been seen in public for almost two months.

Although nothing has been officially announced by the Chinese government in this regard, Liu is expected to be appointed to the post of defense minister over the next two weeks so that he can fully represent China at the Xiangshan Forum later this month.

The forum serves to resume high-level military communications, which stalled after then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August 2022

[see AiR No. 31, August/2022, 1] and have not yet been fully resumed since.

If successful, the forum could lay the groundwork for a meeting between US President Joe Biden and China's Xi Jinping during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in November, experts said. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Following the dismissal of former Foreign Minister Qin Gang after only a few months in office [see AiR No. 30, July/2023, 4], Li's absence, together with the replacement of the leadership of the Peoples Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF), marked a significant change in China's military leadership [see AiR No. 32, August/2023, 2], which may not be over yet.

According to former PLA Navy Lieutenant Colonel Yao Cheng, four high-ranking PLARF and two PLA Navy officials have been taken into detention. Namely PLARF Chief of Staff Sun Jinming and Deputy Commander Li Chuanguang, Li Jun, who has been transferred to the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Joint Staff, and Chief of Staff Zhang Junxiang are said to have been detained on the side of the PLARF.

Additionally, PLA Navy Vice Commander Feng Danyu and Southern Theater Command Navy Commander Ju Xinchun were arrested, according to Yao's social media account. Yao is currently based in the U.S. and has already been the source behind the news of PLARF's initial personnel changes, giving some form of credibility to the as-yet-unconfirmed rumors. [Yao Cheng via Twitter in Chinese]

For a discussion of President Xi's military "purge", with focus on the replacement in China's Rocket Force, see [Breaking Defense].

China: Former President of Bank of China arrested

(ms) Liu Lian'ge, the president of the Bank of China from 2018 to 2019, was arrested by Chinese security authorities on corruption charges, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI), the country's top anti-corruption body, announced publicly on January 16.

The arrest was ordered by the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), the highest national body in charge of law enforcement and prosecutorial investigations in China and follows an investigation into Liu that began in March this year.

Liu was chairman of the board of the Bank of China after his time as president until the start of the investigation and is the latest case of a high-ranking official in China's financial sector who has fallen into the clutches of President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption campaign. [The Guardian] [Xinhua]

China: New number two of police force appointed

(ms) After the role was vacant for nearly a year and a half, Qi Yanjun has been appointed to the dual position of deputy party secretary and deputy minister of the Ministry of Public Security.

Qi is the number two within the ministry, making him “in charge of daily operations” of the ministry, which oversees much of China’s police force as well as being responsible for the political security of the party and its officials as well as the country's counterintelligence, thereby giving him a full ministerial rank.

His predecessor in the post was Wang Xiaohong, who was appointed public security minister in June 2022 and who, in addition to working closely with Qi in the past, is also considered President Xi Jinping's closest confidant within China's security apparatus. [South China Morning Post]

China: Begin of new anti-corruption crackdown

(ms) Li Xi, number seven of the Politburo Standing Committee and secretary of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, China’s top anti-corruption body, ushered in a new phase of the decade-long anti-corruption campaign after a meeting on October 10, focusing this time particularly on the country's tech sector.

As part of the announcement, Li unveiled a list of five government departments and 26 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) that will be targeted during the investigation. The departments in question are the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, the State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense, and additionally the State Tobacco Monopoly Administration.

The selected departments indicate a focus on the country's technology sector. In addition to the tech sector, however, companies from other production sectors such as the car, steel, rail and aircraft industries as well as the publishing sector are also represented on the list.

The first anti-corruption round since the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) National Congress last October, focused primarily on China's financial, healthcare and sports sectors. Without assuming that the crackdown on these sectors is now complete, this new round is in line with the Chinese government's new priorities unveiled during the Politburo group study session earlier in October.

The group, led by President Xi Jinping, called for a stronger focus on the "real economy," in other words, a shift away from speculative investments in the financial and real estate sectors in favor of greater investment in the country's industrial and technological sectors [see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1].

It is precisely this focus on the country's "real economy" that is reflected in the new list of entities undergoing investigations. Li can be quoted as saying "China's high-quality development can only be achieved when the bottom line of security is ensured," thereby explaining the new crackdown. [South China Morning Post]

China: Didi Global plans listing for 2024

(ms) According to information available to Bloomberg, China's largest ride-hailing company, Didi Global, is planning a listing on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange (HKEX) in 2024, after the company was delisted from the US stock exchange in 2022.

Didi's USD 4.4 billion listing on the New York Stock Exchange in mid-2021 came to a rapid end. Just days after the listing, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) began an investigation into the company amid alleged data privacy violations, which resulted in a USD 1.2 billion fine in 2022, the delisting of the company in mid-2022, and restrictions on its usage capabilities between mid-2021 and early 2023.

The investigation against Didi was the starting signal for a campaign of the Chinese government against companies that work with personal data. During this campaign, a multitude of new guidelines were adopted, which introduced high standards, especially for possible data transfers with foreign actors, which

also had to be adhered to for an international Initial Public Offering (IPO). This led to a stop of the ambitions of other Chinese companies to follow the example and further international IPO plans were abandoned.

The now emerging reports about Didi plans for a listing on the HKEX highlight two things. First, it signals a definitive end to the investigation against Didi. Second, and more importantly, it confirms a discernible trend that the HKEX is increasingly becoming the place for IPOs of Chinese companies, and that the Chinese government's efforts to stop listing efforts in the U.S. and the accompanying adherence to U.S. standards and insight into corporate data have been successful. [Bloomberg] [Reuters]

China: Economy on the verge of deflation

(ms) The first economic data released for September in the form of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) continues to paint a rather disappointing picture of the Chinese economy.

The September CPI reported a 0.2 percent increase from August, but was flat year-on-year, showing that "deflationary pressures in China continue to pose a real risk to the economy," according to economic experts. [National Bureau of Statistics 1]

China's producer price index also caused disillusionment, falling 2.5 percent from a year earlier, below expectations of 2.4 percent, after falling 3 percent in August. [National Bureau of Statistics 2]

In the face of the economic data, the need for Chinese government support remains. According to sources exclusive to Bloomberg, the government is said to be considering raising at least USD 137 billion in additional debt. [Bloomberg] [CNBC]

China: On track for highest annual wheat imports

(ms) In the face of crop failures triggered by heavy rains and a greater focus on food security under President Xi Jinping, China is increasing imports of wheat and is on track to import the most wheat in the country's history in 2023.

Already in August, China reached a wheat import volume of 9.56 million tons, only slightly below the

volume for the entire calendar year 2022 with a total of 9.96 million tons.

The main source of wheat at the beginning of the year was Australia, but China began to diversify its sources, including imports from the U.S., Canada and France, after buying up all easy-to-export supplies from Australia.

Wheat imports in China, like other basic food commodities, are centrally regulated through quotas. For wheat, only a 1 percent tariff is imposed annually on the first 9.636 million tons of imported wheat; for all further imports, the tariff increases to 65 percent.

While China has never exceeded these quotas in recent years, in 2020 China dramatically increased exports as part of a trade deal with the U.S. on agricultural products and became the largest importer of wheat in marketing year 2022-2023 and could reach imports of over 12 million tons this year, thereby maybe surpassing the existing peak of 12.5 million tons from 1995-1996.

However, experts believe that this year's record imports will not be an exception, but that China will continue to significantly exceed the quota in future years. One argument cited is Xi's focus on food security, which has increased significantly in recent years. In addition, wheat became the main source of feed for Chinese livestock on a large scale in 2022, and there is also a general increase in the consumption of wheat products among the Chinese population. [Bloomberg] [World Grain]

China: Maintenance for Liaoning Aircraft Carrier to end soon

(ms) The Liaoning, China's first operational aircraft carrier launched in 2012, is expected to complete its seven-month maintenance work and return to active service by the end of this year.

According to reports from the Chinese state broadcaster Global Times, as well as various images appearing in Chinese social media, the Liaoning is said to have left the dry dock and is nearing completion of equipment installation. Upon completion, the carrier will undergo an estimated one-month lasting test voyage, after which it may return to active service as early as the end of the year. [EurAsian Times] [Global Times]

Japan: Falling confidence in government

(ic) A poll conducted on October 14 showed a further decline in confidence in Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's government, with only 32.3 percentin support. Notably, 58.6% expect the upcoming economic package to tackle inflation will be ineffective, and 61.1% suspect that the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) continues to have ties with the Unification Church. [Japan Times] This belief in ties between the LDP leadership and Unification church were a key motivator for the assassination of Abe Shinzo by Yamagami Tetsuya in 2022; Yamagami believed the party leadership was complicit in the activities of the Church which exerted significant influence over his mother.

It is amidst this atmosphere of low support that PM Kishida has travelled to Shikoku to campaign for an Upper House by-election candidate. Notably, security at the campaign event was extremely tight for a Japanese electoral speech, reflecting worries on politicians' safety after the 2022 assassination of former PM Abe Shinzo and the throwing of a pipe bomb at PM Kishida earlier this year. [Asahi Shinbun]

Japan: Government moves to dissolve Unification Church

(ic) Following a government investigation, Education Minister Moriyama Masahito announced on October 12 that the government would be seeking to dissolve the Unification Church, otherwise known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification. The activities of the Unification Church, a religious movement originating in South Korea, were the impetus for the assassination of former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. [NPR]

Subject to the Religious Corporations Law, courts can order the dissolution of a religious corporation when "in violation of laws and regulations, [it] commits an act which is clearly found to harm public welfare substantially." It is likely that the Unification Church will fight this order in court. [Asahi Shinbun]

Opposition parties Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan and Nippon Ishin no Kai have moved to submit a bill to the October 20 extraordinary Diet session that seeks to ensure the resources to be seized in this dissolution will be used to aid victims. [Japan Times]

Japan: New economic security plan due this month

(ic) On October 12, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry held its first panel meeting on economic security, where they unveiled a draft plan to protect key economic sectors through three primary mechanisms: supporting industry, protecting industry, and promoting international coordination.

This will be accompanied by a stimulus package to be finalized by the end of October. The plan will be used as a reference for all government initiatives involving these industries and the economy in the future. [Japan News] [Nikkei Asian Review]

Japan: Surgery requirement for gender change ruled unconstitutional

(ic) On October 11, the Shizuoka Family Court ruled that a provision requiring transgender individuals to undergo gender confirmation surgery in order to alter their gender marker, a practice that has been branded by activists as essentially forced sterilization, violates article 13 of the Japanese Constitution guaranteeing the right to the pursuit of happiness.

This issue was raised through an appeal regarding a gender change submitted by transgender man Suzuki Gen. [Asahi Shinbun]

The proviso, as noted by the court, existed in order to "prevent social confusion" that would arise if a transgender man gave birth after altering his gender marker to male; however, the court noted that this requirement had "reached a stage of lacking a need or rationality".

While Japanese society is still adapting to the place of transgender people in society, moves in support of their rights have typically been from the judicial domain, as evidenced by a July ruling in the Supreme Court that restricting transgender employees from using bathrooms according to their identified gender is illegal. [Time]

Japan: Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki readies to fight government in court

(ic) Okinawa Governor Denny Tamaki stated on October 11 that he plans to fight Minister of Land,

Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism Saito Tetsuo in court regarding the relocation of a key US military base in Okinawa. According to Tamaki: "I thought it was necessary to deeply accept the fact that the desire of people in Okinawa to live peacefully and quietly with a sense of security has been expressed in elections." [Japan Times]

Saito had filed a lawsuit against Tamaki on October 5, in a bid to override Tamaki's authority and approve a modified plan for landfill work for the relocation of a key US base in Okinawa Prefecture from the residential district of Ginowan to the coastal region of Henoko. The struggle over this plan has lasted for decades. [AiR No. 41, October/2023, 2] [Kyodo News]

Japan: Government to curb child sexual abuse in institutions

(ic) On October 16, PM Kishida held the Joint Session of the 9th Inter-Ministerial Meeting to Strengthen Action against Sexual Crimes and Violence, the 14th Inter-Ministerial Liaison Meeting on Measures against Child Sexual Exploitation, and the 3rd Meeting of the Measures against Absenteeism to Secure Education that Leaves No One Behind. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan]

Here, Kishida would address both the problem of child sexual abuse in Japan as well as the issue of absenteeism in schools that were previously discussed last week at the ministerial level. [AiR No. 41, October/2023, 2]

While the government has postponed a proposed bill for the October 20 special Diet session that would block convicted sex offenders from taking up jobs involving contact with children, Kishida has noted that kindergartens and nurseries would be assisted in installing partitions for children's privacy and security cameras for the monitoring of staff behavior. [Kyodo News 1]

The proposed bill, referred to as the "Japanese DBS" bill due to its similarities with the UK's Disclosure and Barring Service, will undergo a period of review to expand the range of occupations covered within it and aim for a vote at an ordinary Diet session in 2024 instead. [Kyodo News 2]

Child sexual abuse has been a pervasive problem in Japan for a long time, with cases rising to 219,000 in 2022 from 219,170 in 2021. [Japan Times] The

attention accorded to child sexual abuse at the moment is a result of an ongoing high-profile scandal surrounding the late Japanese pop culture mogul Johnny Kitagawa, who took advantage of his position at the head of a boyband agency to sexually abuse young aspiring talents from as far back as the 1950s. [Channel News Asia]

Japan: More than 400 scrambles of fighter aircraft in first half of 2023

(ic) On October 13, the Joint Staff Office (JSO) released data indicating that the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) conducted 424 scrambles in total over the first half of 2023: 304 against Chinese aircraft and 110 against Russian aircraft. [Joint Staff Office, Japan, in Japanese] [USNI News]

The report also listed 20 notable intrusions. On April 22, two Chinese Xian H-6 bombers flew towards the Pacific in between Iwo Jima and Miyako Island. On May 25, two Russian Ilyushin IL-20 surveillance craft flew around Japan, across the Sea of Japan and the waters surrounding Okhotsk into the Pacific Ocean. On June 6, two Chinese Xian H-6 and two Russian Tupolev Tu-95 bombers grouped up over the Sea of Japan and from there flew towards the South China Sea, as a part of a joint patrol that alarmed both Japan and South Korea. [Reuters]

Law of Child Protection: A new draft has been submitted

(ap) A revised draft of the law on child protection has been submitted to the Chairman of the State Parliament, Gombojavyn Zandanshatar.

The new draft aims to tighten sentencing crimes against minors, with – among other changes – the s[DL1] tatute of limitations for crimes committed against minors to be raised from 20 to 30 years, except for life sentence crimes where the statute of limitations period is not considered. Further, murder, rape, and sexual exploitation of a minor and human trafficking not to be subject to pardon or early release from prison on parole, while the maximum term of imprisonment is to be increased from 20 years to 25 years.

In addition, a new function of national and local councils for children has been added for advocating for

children's rights. [Montsame] [unuudur]

North Korea: Military commander faces criticism over handling of female recruits and contraceptive devices

(tms) North Korea's 8th Corps Reserve Forces Commander faced backlash for causing delays in the fall military enlistment process due to objections to female recruits using contraceptive devices.

A review by the Reserve Forces Division (RFD) criticized the commander for making the enlistment process needlessly complicated. The commander called for a postponement, stating that female recruits with intrauterine devices (IUDs) would fail their physical exams.

This move was met with resistance, as it is customary for women entering the military to have IUDs due to concerns about rape. The RFD urged the commander to focus on organizing and transporting recruits instead.

The incident has sparked criticism, highlighting concerns about sexual assault in the military. In response, the RFD questioned the commander's understanding of enlistment realities and criticized the delay as trivial.

The majority of this year's recruits in North Pyongan Province were male, with female enlistees mainly recent school graduates entering the workforce. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Kim Jong Un orders severe punishments for violators of anti-reactionary thought law

(tms) North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has issued a directive to severely punish those who violate the anti-reactionary thought law, with potential exile to rural areas for both the offenders and their families, according to sources.

The order, delivered in late September, emphasized a merciless approach to punish individuals, irrespective of their status, age, or occupation.

Previously, families were only penalized if a relative was sent to a political prison camp. However, the new

directive expands the scope to include those sent to reeducation camps, depending on the nature and seriousness of the offense.

The directive also calls for strict punishment for individuals connected to the ruling party or in the military. Violations related to impure South Korean videos are singled out for particularly harsh penalties. [Daily NK]

North Korea: Government establishes emergency trade system to secure food imports amid sanctions

(tms) North Korea's Ministry of External Economic Relations has directed central government-affiliated trade enterprises to establish an "emergency trade system" by year-end.

This system aims to create a "safety net" for foreign currency conversions and payments for international trade.

The move is part of efforts to secure significant food imports from friendly nations like China and Russia due to concerns about a potential shortfall in North Korea's agricultural production this year.

In the past, North Korean trade enterprises struggled to receive payments for exports and convert earnings into foreign currency due to international sanctions.

This directive seeks to overcome these challenges, increase the number of North Korean-held foreign bank accounts, and ensure reliable and convenient foreign currency transactions for food imports, ultimately bypassing sanctions to address chronic food shortages. [Daily NK]

South Korea: Ruling party vows extraordinary measures after by-election defeat

(tms) Following a significant defeat in the recent by-election for Seoul's Gangseo Ward office, leaders of South Korea's ruling People Power Party (PPP) have pledged to listen to the public's concerns and implement extraordinary measures to regain their trust.

In the election, Jin Kyo-hoon of the main opposition Democratic Party (DP) secured 56.52 percent of the vote, defeating PPP's Kim Tae-woo, who received 39.37 percent.

The 17.15 percent margin underscored dissatisfaction with President Yoon Suk Yeol's administration and raised concerns for the upcoming parliamentary elections in six months.

PPP leaders expressed their commitment to analyzing the election results, addressing policy shortcomings, and focusing on economic recovery and people's well-being.

They also plan to restructure the party in preparation for the general elections (see article below). [Yonhap]

South Korea: Ruling party's leadership shake-up after by-election defeat

(tms) Key officials within the ruling People Power Party (PPP) have offered their resignations in the wake of a recent by-election loss, potentially triggering a shift in party leadership ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections in April.

In the by-election for Seoul's Gangseo Ward, the PPP's candidate, Kim Tae-woo, secured 39.37 percent of the vote, while the main opposition Democratic Party's Jin Kyo-hoon won with 56.52 percent. In response to this defeat, the PPP's leadership pledged to take corrective actions and regain public trust.

PPP Secretary General Lee Chul-gyu, alongside other high-ranking party members, offered their resignations to facilitate party stability and progress.

PPP leader Kim Gi-hyeon accepted these resignations and vowed to prioritize people's livelihoods in reforming the party. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2] [Yonhap 3]

South Korea: Gender equality minister nominee withdraws amid controversy

(tms) Gender Equality and Family Minister nominee Kim Haeng has withdrawn her nomination following intense scrutiny and controversies during her parliamentary confirmation hearing.

Kim faced allegations related to her involvement with the online news outlet Wikitree, co-founded by her.

The decision to withdraw came amid concerns raised within the ruling People Power Party (PPP), who feared that her nomination could negatively impact the party, especially following their recent by-election defeat (se article above).

Kim expressed her commitment to putting the party's interests first and apologized for becoming a burden to President Yoon Suk Yeol.

Her nomination was marred by various allegations, including issues related to her stock ownership in Wikitree and accusations of permitting gender-discriminatory articles on sexual abuse cases.

This marks the fifth Cabinet nominee to resign since President Yoon took office in May of the previous year [see AiR No. 38, September/2023, 3]. [Yonhap]

South Korea: High-level meeting to address medical school quota increase, pension reform

(tms) Senior officials from South Korea's ruling party, government, and the presidential office will convene to discuss plans for expanding the number of medical students and overhauling the nation's pension system.

The government is expected to decide regarding the increase in medical school enrollment quotas, potentially raising it by 1,000 from the current fixed figure of 3,058 since 2006, with the changes impacting medical schools in 2025.

Medical associations have publicly opposed this move, insisting that the government should prioritize doctor allocation strategies before increasing quotas.

A similar standoff occurred in 2020, leading to a nationwide doctors' strike. In addition to medical education, the meeting will also address pension reform.

Key figures attending the meeting include Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the leader of the ruling People Power Party Kim Gi-hyeon, Education Minister Lee Ju-ho, and presidential chief of staff Kim Dae-ki. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Opposition leader indicted on corruption charges amidst controversy

(tms) Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung, from South Korea's Democratic Party (DP), has been formally indicted without detention on corruption charges, two weeks after a court rejected a request for his arrest.

Lee faces accusations of breach of trust, bribery, and other charges stemming from his time as the mayor of Seongnam, south of Seoul, between 2014 and 2018, related to a controversial land development project in the Bundang district.

Prosecutors allege that Lee granted favorable treatment to a private developer, resulting in a breach of trust worth USD 15 million. This indictment follows the National Assembly's vote to lift Lee's immunity from arrest, a move criticized by him and his party as politically motivated persecution.

Lee is already facing trial in two other cases, involving election law violations and corruption charges from his mayoral term [see AiR No. 39, September/2023, 4].

Further indictments are expected on two additional cases, one involving an alleged illegal fund transfer to North Korea [see AiR No. 37, September/2023, 2]. [Yonhap]

South Korea: President Yoon commits to strengthening cybersecurity for national security

(tms) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has expressed a commitment to enhance the nation's cybersecurity workforce and industry, recognizing their vital role in national security.

President Yoon met with a group of young white hat hackers, individuals skilled in identifying and mitigating security vulnerabilities in computer systems.

He commended their achievements in various hacking competitions, including DEF CON.

During the meeting at the former presidential compound, Yoon emphasized the direct link between cybersecurity and national security and hailed each member as a strategic asset in the field. He pledged to intensify efforts to nurture cyber talent and boost the capabilities of the cybersecurity industry.

Yoon also observed a demonstration of emergency measures that white hat hackers would employ in response to a cyberattack on critical infrastructure in a smart city. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Government prepares for annual military exercise amidst regional tensions

(tms) South Korea is set to commence its annual large-scale military exercise next week to bolster its defense preparedness, as announced by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).

The Hoguk field training exercise, involving all branches of the military, will take place from Monday to November 22 with a primary focus on enhancing interoperability.

This year's drills will simulate potential threats arising from North Korea's nuclear weapons, missiles, and unmanned assets. The JCS also mentioned the involvement of some US troops to enhance cooperation.

This exercise occurs against a backdrop of increased regional tensions, with North Korea issuing threats in response to the recent presence of the USS Ronald Reagan aircraft carrier in the port of Busan.

The Hoguk exercise, initiated in 1996, is a regular event held in the latter half of each year. [Yonhap]

Taiwan: No agreement between opposition parties on joint presidential ticket

(dql) Three months ahead of the presidential election, the Taiwan People's Party (TPP) and the the Kuomintang (KMT), Taiwan's two main opposition parties, have failed to reach an agreement on who would lead a joint presidential ticket after a meeting on October 14 held to discuss this matter concluded with results.

A KMT proposal suggesting that primaries should be held to decide the leader was rejected by TPP presidential candidate Ko Wen-je, although he enjoys more support than Kuomintang candidate Hou Yu-ih in most election polls. [Taiwan News 1]

This comes as according to a latest poll, respondents are favoring a combination of Ko and Hou, over Lai, with either candidate at the top of the ticket.

While the poll's results showed that while Vice President Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Propgressive Party (DPP) is currently leading in the presidential race, a Ko-Hou ticket received nearly 49.8 percent support, compared with the paring between Lai and Hsiao Bi-khim, Taiwan's Representative to the US, as Vice-President, with only received 38 percent. [Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan: First-ever children's picture book on national defense published

(dql) The first-ever national defense-themed picture book for children has been released.

Titled "Children's First Picture Book to Learn About Soldiers: The Sea and Air Heroes Who Protect Taiwan's Territory, " the book tells the story of a military family, including a third-grader in elementary school, his cousin who is an air force pilot and his father who serves as a navy captain operating a missile patrol ship.

The book reflects the government's policies on all-out national defense and comes amid heightened Cross-Strait relation. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: New confidentiality rules for secret meetings on the way

(dql) The parliamentary Foreign and National Defense Committee has adopted a resolution to introduce new measures that seek to protect the confidentiality of information provided to lawmakers.

According to the resolution rules, government officials, lawmakers and legislative staff attending a secret meeting will be prohibited from bringing into meetings mobile phones, recording devices, and electronic communication equipment that could be used to copy classified content. Furthermore, participants will be Legislature security guards will carry out security scanning and a confidentiality declaration must be signed before attending such meetings. [Focus Taiwan]

The move comes on the heels of an alleged data breach in the context of Taiwan's Indigenous Defense Submarine (IDS) program.

The allegations refer to statements of IDS program convener Huang Shu-kuang who is cited by local media as accusing a lawmaker of persisting sabotage of the

construction of "Narwhal," a submarine prototype with a price tag of USD 1.53 billion, and arms dealers, who lost the bid, of leaked information about the submarine to a Chinese embassy [see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1].

It turned out that the accused lawmaker is Ma Wen-chun of the main opposition party, the Kuomintang (KMT), who also serves as a member of the Foreign and National Defense Committee.

In response to demands from lawmakers of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Taiwan's Supreme Prosecutor's Office has unveiled on October 3 that an investigation has been launched into the allegations [see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1].

In a related development, Taiwan's Foreign Ministry has threatened to sue Ma after she accused the ministry of leaking classified information about Taiwan's submarine program to the South Korean government.

Ma claimed she had contacted the Korean Mission in Taipei through the ministry after she was told by the ministry to send information about the submarine to the South Korean side by registered mail. [Taiwan News]

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

Bangladesh: 500 sued, two arrested over attack on NGO procession

(ps) The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (BHBCUC), an NGO established to protect the human rights of the religious and ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, has sued at least 500 people from the Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League after its protest march on October 13 came under attack. [The Daily Star]

The BHBCUC was demonstrating against recent religious violence and derogatory statements about Hindus made by a Member of Parliament from the ruling Awami League when it was subjected to an attack, resulting in injuries to approximately 20 to 30 individuals.

Bangladesh: New political party founded

(ps) Progotishil Gonotrantic Forum, a new political party, was founded on October 15. The chairman of PGF is a former local leader of the oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party. It remains uncertain whether Progotishil Gonotrantic Forum can be registered in time for the upcoming national elections. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Home minister denies torture allegations following the arrest of BNP official

(ps) Bangladesh's Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal has denied allegations of torture after the arrest of the Publicity Secretary of the oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie, who is currently facing charges in two cases. According to Kamal, Annie did not seek bail, resulting in his lawful arrest by law enforcement authorities. [The Daily Star 1]

Annie, who is accused of assaulting policemen and throwing crude bombs in May, was taken into custody on October 10 and subsequently placed on a four-day remand by the court. During the court hearing, Annie had accused the police of acting like robbers when apprehending him and claimed to have been physically and mentally mistreated. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Padma Bridge inaugurated by Prime Minister

(ps) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the rail line across Padma bridge on October 10. The bridge is of critical importance to Bangladesh's infrastructure and will be part of a railway line that cuts the travel time between Dhaka and the country's third-largest city Khulna from ten down to four hours. [The Business Standard] [Prothom Alo]

Bhutan: Parliament approves measures to enhance national cybersecurity

(na) In response to growing concerns about national cybersecurity, Bhutan's Parliament held a joint session to strengthen the country's institutional and regulatory framework for cybersecurity. [Kuensel]

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) presented a Performance Audit Report on Preparedness for Cybersecurity, which assessed the government's efforts to ensure a secure and resilient cyberspace in Bhutan. The report highlighted deficiencies in the legal framework and mechanisms to address cybercrime, inadequate capacity-building and awareness, and a lack of proper monitoring mechanisms for cybersecurity measures.

The joint session unanimously adopted five recommendations to enhance cybersecurity preparedness, including the establishment of coordinating leadership and the implementation of a National Cybersecurity Strategy with a budget and monitoring framework.

Bhutan: Government launches maternity allowance program

(na) Bhutan's government has announced the launch of a maternity allowance program aimed at aiding a child's crucial first 1,000 days of life. The initiative called "Accelerating the Mother and Child Health Programme" (AMCHP), will provide financial support to eligible mothers, starting from conception until the child turns two years old. This effort aims to enhance health-seeking behavior, promote financial empowerment for women, and improve overall maternal and child health services. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: National digital identity system introduced

(na) Recently, Bhutan launched its pioneering Bhutan National Digital Identity (NDI) based on the Self-Sovereign Identity (SSI) system, granting individuals control over their digital credentials through a secure digital wallet. [Kuensel]

The NDI app offers 12 government services and facilitates secure transactions, emphasizing data privacy and empowerment. Plans include expanding services, engaging innovators, and exploring digital currencies like NFTs and cryptocurrencies, with collaborations underway with Bhutan Telecom.

India: Supreme Court refuses to legalize same-sex marriages

(lm) India's Supreme Court on October 17 rejected a plea to allow same-sex marriages in the country, stating that the court lacks jurisdiction and that changes to marriage laws should be handled by parliament – a move that will likely allow the country's current limits on marriage to stand for the foreseeable future. However, the court called on the government to establish a committee to assess LGBTQ rights and entitlements, including issues related to medical, financial, and inheritance benefits. [South China Morning Post]

The petitioners, a group of same-sex couples, argued that India's constitution guarantees equality and urged recognition under the Special Marriage Act. India's government opposed same-sex marriage, citing cultural reasons and advocating for legislative action.

The decision comes after India decriminalized homosexuality in 2018 and expanded legal definitions for same-sex couples in 2022, marking a historic shift in LGBTQ rights.

India: Supreme Court denies abortion plea, sticks to letter of law

(hp) India's Supreme Court has rejected a plea from a married woman seeking immediate termination of her 27-week pregnancy. The court relied on her latest medical report, which showed no fetal abnormalities and no risk to the woman's health, to conclude that terminating the pregnancy beyond the 24-week legal

cutoff was not permissible under the 2021 Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act. The Act permits abortions beyond 24 weeks only in cases of substantial fetal abnormalities or when there are serious threats to the pregnant woman's life or well-being. The woman had claimed she was unaware of her pregnancy due to a condition called lactational amenorrhea and cited postpartum depression and poor financial conditions.

A three-judge bench stated that it was averse to directing the stopping of the fetal heartbeat, which would result in a pre-term delivery with significant risks of physical and mental disabilities for the child. The court also emphasized that the woman herself did not want the fetal heart to be stopped. It noted that international literature or jurisprudence should not have an overriding effect on Indian law, which is regulated through the MTP Act.

The court's decision followed a series of proceedings that involved conflicting opinions among judges, ultimately leading to the rejection of the woman's plea for immediate abortion. The MTP Act, initially enacted in 1971 and amended in 2021, allows for abortion up to 20 weeks for both married and unmarried women and permits terminations between 20 and 24 weeks under various circumstances. This case highlighted complex legal issues and competing interests that the Indian Supreme Court must consider in individual cases to reach a final decision. [Hindustan Times] [Times Now] [Outlook India]

India: Booker Prize-winning novelist faces prosecution for 2010 speech about Kashmir

(lm) Arundhati Roy, a renowned Indian novelist and activist, may face prosecution for a 2010 speech on Kashmir, following approval from the top official in the administration governing the capital New Delhi. The criminal complaint, which accuses Roy and others of advocating for the secession of Kashmir from India during a public function, had been pending in India's slow-moving criminal justice system since 2010. [The Straits Times]

India: Manipur extends suspension of internet, bans circulation of videos promoting violence

(hp) The government of India's Manipur state has banned the circulation of videos promoting violence. Claiming the spread of such images as a 'misuse of technology', such cases will be dealt with under provisions of the Information Technology Act and the Indian Penal Code. [Mint] [Indian Express]

Social media has been active in spreading videos of victims since the commencement of the Meitei-Kuki conflict in May 2023. In September, two photographs showing two youths getting murdered were circulated which enraged the public of Manipur [see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1]. During the same period, another video of a dead man set ablaze was spread on social media.

India: Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi makes visit to state of Mizoram, attacks BJP, ruling MNF party

(lf/lm) Rahul Gandhi, the leader of India's main opposition Indian National Congress (INC) party, visited the state of Mizoram for a two-day visit on October 16, ahead of state elections, which are scheduled to take place on November 7.

During his visit, Gandhi criticized the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mizoram's ruling Mizo National Front (MNF) and urged voters to support the INC in order to unseat the ruling parties at both the central and state levels. He promised to protect Mizoram's culture, tradition, and religion if the INC wins the election. Gandhi also criticized the MNF's policies, particularly regarding drug issues, and claimed that the state was in a state of disarray under their leadership.

Gandhi's campaign efforts are expected to intensify across the country as the 2024 national elections draw closer. If the INC wins in Mizoram, it will strengthen their position to contest the BJP, which enjoys significant popularity among the Hindu population in India. Mizoram's diverse population makes it a potential battleground for the opposition to attract voters who may have reservations about Modi's policies. [Hindustan Times 1] [Hindustan Times 2] [Live Mint]

India: Citing deepfakes, government looks at IT rules to make social media companies disclose source ID

(lf) The Indian government is considering invoking a section of the contentious Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021, that would require platforms like WhatsApp to disclose information about the first originator of a message due to the proliferation of deepfake videos of politicians on the platform. The move comes as India prepares for the 2024 parliamentary elections, and concerns about the spread of artificial intelligence (AI)-led misinformation have risen.

The government plans to send an order to WhatsApp under the (IT) Rules requesting the identity of the individuals who initially shared the deepfake videos on the platform. But such orders can only be issued for specific purposes related to national security, public order, and more.

The provision in the IT law that the government aims to use has been a subject of debate, as WhatsApp – the most widely used messaging platform in India – has expressed concerns about how it could compromise its end-to-end encryption system. The government argues that the measure will not affect normal users of WhatsApp and aims to create accountability in addressing fake videos and audio spreading anonymously on messaging platforms.

WhatsApp and Facebook previously challenged this provision in the Delhi High Court in 2021, and the case is ongoing. [The Indian Express] [Live Mint]

Maldives: Parliament Secretariat accepts MDP's motion to oust Speaker Nasheed

(na/lm) In a significant development, the Secretariat of Parliament has accepted a motion of no-confidence initiated by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) against Speaker Mohamed Nasheed and has notified parliament members. This motion, initiated by the MDP on October 9 of this year, mirrors a previous attempt in June, which was temporarily withdrawn to gain support from Nasheed's The Democrats party during the presidential elections. [MENAFN]

The motion cites concerns about Nasheed's alleged prioritization of personal interests over vital citizen-focused legislation, accusing him of partiality and breaching parliamentary regulations. Additionally, it accuses him of suspending parliamentary proceedings for extended periods and, upon resumption, giving undue priority to matters concerning The Democrats and his personal interests.

Nasheed contends that it would be difficult to entertain another no-confidence motion in the same term, an assertion partly based on Article 89(c) of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, which states that a rejected bill cannot be reintroduced in the same term. However, some legal experts point out that no-confidence motions are different from bills.

In January of this year, Mohamed Nasheed experienced a defeat in the presidential primary of the MDP against President Solih. Subsequently, Nasheed established a distinct faction within the MDP, which later opted to separate from the MDP in June, forming a new political entity known as The Democrats [see AiR No. 27, July/2023, 1].

Maldives: Former Supreme Court secretary general wins wrongful dismissal case

(na) In a recent ruling, the Employment Tribunal determined that the former Secretary General of the Supreme Court, Dr. Faiz, former Secretary General of the Supreme Court, was wrongfully dismissed from his position. [Avas]

Faiz had been suspended and subsequently removed from his post, with the Department of Judicial Administration (DJA) citing reasons such as the installation of CCTV cameras in the Supreme Court and alleged violations of financial policies. The Employment Tribunal determined that Faiz's dismissal was in violation of the Employment Act and his employment agreement.

Consequently, the tribunal has ordered the Supreme Court to pay Faiz's salary and allowances for the duration of his dismissal within 30 days. However, the ruling did not address his reinstatement, as Faiz had not applied for such a remedy.

Maldives: Government's appointment of ambassador amid transition period criticized

(na/lm) The President’s Office has rejected criticism and emphasized that state functioning should not come to a halt during the transition period after it sent an ambassador nomination to parliament for approval. Earlier, President-elect Dr. Mohamed Muizzu had requested that certain actions such as new

investments by state institutions and changes in the salary structure of public institutions be avoided during the ongoing transitional period. [Atoll Times]

Maldives: President-elect's inauguration ceremony gets rescheduled to November 17

(na) The President-elect's office has recently confirmed the rescheduling of President-elect Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's inauguration ceremony to November 17. [The Edition]

The origins of this adjustment can be traced back to the Supreme Court's decision in 2013. At that time, the court extended then-President Mohamed Waheed's term until new elections were held, ultimately leading to former President Abdulla Yameen officially assuming office on November 17, 2013. This delay caused a six-day shift in the term's commencement, aligning it with November 17, which coincides with Republic Day.

Nepal: New Chief Minister appointed in Koshi province following majority support

(na/lm) On October 14, the Head of Koshi Province, appointed Kedar Karki, a lawmaker from the Nepali Congress, as the new Chief Minister of the province. [The Kathmandu Post]

This development came after the previous Chief Minister, Hikmat Karki, resigned from his position on October 7, choosing not to undergo a crucial floor test in the provincial assembly. Following his resignation, the province head swiftly announced the need for the formation of a new government [see AiR No. 41, October/2023, 2]. Both Kedar Karki and Indra Bahadur Angbo of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) had claimed to be the rightful chief of the 93-member assembly, each with the support of 47 lawmakers.

The province head conducted the verification of these claims early on October 14. However, Angbo did not appear for the verification, while Karki arrived with the support of 47 lawmakers, including eight from the Congress and 39 from the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist), the largest party in the provincial assembly.

In related news, Uddhav Thapa, the Congress provincial assembly leader and president of the Congress Koshi chapter, resigned from his post on moral grounds. Thapa, who had aspired for the chief ministerial position, had previously led the government twice but failed to secure a vote of confidence.

Nepal: Former speaker's son and three others are charged with organized crime

(na) The Kathmandu District Attorney's Office has taken legal action against four individuals, including Rahul Mahara, the son of former Speaker Krishna Bahadur Mahara, on charges related to organized crime. The case has been initiated based on a recommendation from Nepal Police's Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) to prosecute the accused involved in smuggling nine kilograms of gold concealed within electronic cigarettes in December of the previous year. [The Kathmandu Post]

During their inquiry, the police found close connections between the Mahara family members and a Chinese national involved in gold smuggling within electronic cigarettes. Earlier, senior Mahara, who is also a vice-chair of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), had been questioned by the police regarding his contacts with Chinese smugglers. However, similar to previous cases involving former prime ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Baburam Bhattarai in the so-called Lalita Niwas land grab scandal, senior Mahara was not interrogated in the presence of the government attorney, and no charges have been filed against him.

Nepal: Parliament introduces Anti-Money Laundering Bill

(na) In response to the need for legal reforms, the Parliament tabled a report concerning amendments to various acts related to the Prevention of Money Laundering and Promotion of Business Environment. [The Himalayan Times]

This initiative was sparked by a proposal presented by the Minister for Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs in a meeting on May 22, subsequently leading to focused deliberations within an 11-member sub-committee. After thorough discussions with stakeholders, the sub-committee's findings were

discussed and approved during the meeting held on October 11.

The proposed amendments, aimed at enhancing laws related to money laundering prevention and business environment promotion, are set to bring about positive changes in Nepal's legal framework. These reforms, encompassing 19 existing laws, are anticipated to align Nepal's regulations with international standards.

Pakistan: Supreme Court upholds Practice and Procedure Act as constitutional

(mha) The Supreme Court of Pakistan, by a majority of 10-5, upheld the Practice and Procedure Act, 2023, as constitutional and dismissed the petitions filed against it in a majority verdict. However, the sub-section (2) of Section 5 of the Act, which grants a right of appeal retrospectively, was declared to be ultra vires the Constitution by a majority of eight to seven.

The Act, passed by Parliament in April, devolves the power of the Chief Justice to take suo moto decisions or appoint a roster of judges to the three senior-most judges, including the chief justice, the senior puisne judge and the third senior-most judge, in the Supreme Court.

With the right of retrospective appeal denied, it means that a prospective applicant such as former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif cannot appeal against his lifetime disqualification from participating in politics. [Business Recorder] [DAWN]

Pakistan: Ex-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif begins journey home

(mha) Pakistan’s three-time former Prime Minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party supremo Nawaz Sharif has begun his journey back to the South Asian country after four years of self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom. [The Diplomat]

Sharif’s third term as prime minister ran from 2013 to 2017, when he was removed by the Supreme Court amid revelations over his personal wealth and subsequently convicted of corruption. He left Pakistan November 2019 to seek medical treatment in London, a month after he was released on bail from a seven-year prison sentence for corruption. For years, Sharif has consistently denied the accusations, claiming they

were politically motivated and blaming the country's generals for directing the judges to bring him down. The military denies interfering in politics.

On October 21, Sharif is expected to present a road map to address Pakistan's economic challenges during a gathering in Lahore. [The Business Standard]

Pakistan: Khan, Qureshi indictment in Cipher case adjourned until October 23

(lm) The indictments of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his party's Vice Chairman, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, in the so-called Cipher case has been postponed. A special court, established under the Official Secrets Act, adjourned the hearing until next week after Khan's defense team argued that they needed copies of the charge sheet before the indictment could proceed. [Geo News] [Arab News]

Khan has been in jail since August 5, following his conviction in a separate case related to the sale of state gifts he received during his nearly four-year stint as the prime minister from 2018-2022. Initially, he was held at the high-security Attock prison, but he was later transferred to Adiala jail. The Cipher case revolves around allegations that Khan leaked diplomatic correspondence between the United States and Pakistan, claiming it was evidence of a US conspiracy to remove him from power – a charge denied by all parties involved.

In a recent message conveyed through his family, Khan again alleged that the case accusing him of exposing state secrets is aimed at protecting former Army Chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa and US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu. [Anadolu Ajansı]

Pakistan: JUI-F leader Fazl vows to foil attempts to keep him away from electoral politics

(lm) Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islami-Fazl (JUI-F), a prominent political party with a strong emphasis on Islamic principles and values, has stated his determination to resist any attempts to exclude his party from electoral politics through rigged elections. [Geo News]

While addressing the Mufti Mahmud Conference in Peshawar on October 14, Fazl emphasized the importance of fair politics and political stability in Pakistan, blaming the current inflation on the main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party of former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Notably, the conference included addresses from various political figures and representatives of Palestine, including Hamas leader Khaled Mashal.

Sri Lanka: Proposed Anti-Terrorism Bill faces further challenges in Supreme Court

(lf) Sri Lanka's proposed Anti-Terrorism Bill has been faced with another petition, with its constitutionality once again being put before the nation's Supreme Court, this time by the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) party's Youth Wing. The filing, which was presented on October 10, is the latest of a number of legal challenges against the proposed legislation which critics allege places human and political rights at risk, in order to give the government greater authority to crack down on protests and demonstrations.

A number of domestic and international organizations have voiced their concerns over the provisions and articles of the bill, especially in light of revelations of widespread corruption following the ousting of former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Since the demonstrations which lead to his resignation, protests and political discourse have taken on a greater relevance within Sri Lankan civil society [see AiR No. 38, September/2023, 3].

The concerns of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya's Youth Wing match those voiced by the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) of the United Nations (UN) on October 13. A statement released by the high commissioner cited proposed "Restrictions to the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly" as the organization's primary issues with the legislation, as well as the "broad definition of terrorism" which could be skewered to include political protestors and unnecessarily grant "wide powers to the police - and to the military - to stop, question and search, and to arrest and detain people, with inadequate judicial oversight". [OHCHR]

Tamil and Muslim advocacy groups have also joined the chorus of concerned parties, as the minority ethnicity and religion are constantly worried about the government taking liberties with their authority to suppress separatist or political dialogues. This creates

a wide and diverse group of voices from across Sri Lanka's civil society that have expressed dissatisfaction with the proposed anti-terror legislation.

Most Sri Lankan citizens agree that there needs to be greater precautions taken to ensure that terrorism is suppressed within the nation, especially in light of the nation's long civil war (1983-2009), which saw a number of attacks target innocents, as well as the 2019 Easter Sunday Bombings. However, in light of allegations that former governments have employed terror for their own political means [AiR, No. 36, September/2023, 1], trust in government has severely declined across Sri Lanka. [Daily Mirror] [Tamil Guardian]

Sri Lanka: President takes over Environment Ministry following former minister's disqualification

(lf) Sri Lanka's Ministry of Environment has been placed under the authority of President Ranil Wickremesinghe following discussions with the nation's Prime Minister on October 12. This decision comes in the wake of the disqualification of the former Environment Minister, Ahamed Naseer, who was expelled from his own party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), and subsequently lost his parliamentary seat due to political disagreements with other party MPs. Naseer contested his expulsion from the party in the nation's Supreme Court, but on October 6, the court ruled that the move was legal, leaving the government without an environment minister. [Newswire] [Common LII]

There has been no indication as to how long the Ministry will fall under the authority of President Wickremesinghe. The president has formerly held a number of ministerial portfolios, including Prime Minister, Defense Minister and Finance Minister.[Daily Mirror] [News First]

Sri Lanka: Country could lose 6,110 hectares by 2025 due to rising sea levels

(lf) Concerns have arisen within Sri Lanka as one of the nation's leading climate scientists has warned the nation over concerning figures of rising sea levels and weather emergencies. Dr. P.G. Hemantha Kumara, who is the Vice President of Association of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation's Food operations, warned that Sri Lanka was ranked second

on the United Nations' Global Climate Risk Index, due to severe weather which had caused significant damage to the nation's infrastructure and environment. He also warned that rising sea levels would deprive Sri Lanka of 6,110 hectares of land by 2025, and an estimated 25,000 hectares by 2100.

Dr. Kumara issued these warnings at a workshop addressing the theme 'Climate Changes Impact on Health', hosted in Kalutara in Sri Lanka's west. He also addressed health related issues associated with climate change, warning that humid temperatures becoming a more common occurrence would make vector-borne diseases a more easily spreadable phenomena. An estimated 250,000 people could also experience negative health effects between 2030 and 2050 as a result of climate change, a figure produced by Dr. Kumara's own research.

Sri Lanka's policies pertaining to climate change are in line with most other nations, who have committed to working towards net zero and signed onto the Paris Agreement. Dr. Kumara's warnings are dire though, and comprehensive policies to address these dangerous estimations will have to be formulated in order to offset the impacts of climate change. [Daily Mirror] [UNDP]

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

Brunei: Widespread disruptions after major power outage

(dql) A major power outage on October 17 has caused widespread disruptions of the people's daily lives in

large sections of Brunei, .

A number of areas are reportedly affected, including Mukim Gadong, Mukim Serasa, Mukim Mentiri, and Mukim Berakas in the Brunei-Muara District as well as large areas in the Belait, Tutong, and Temburong Districts.

An investigation is being carried out by the Department of Electrical Services (DES). [The Star]

Cambodia: 28 political parties set to enter alliance with ruling party

(dql) 28 political parties, which are represented in the government led by the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) have requested to form an alliance with the CPP and are now awaiting the signing of a related formal agreement by the end of the month.

In statement last week, CPP President and former Prime Minister Hun Sen warmly welcomed the political parties' wish to ally with his party and ordered the preparation of the cooperation agreement. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Tree reforestation campaign kickstarted

(dql) The Ministry of Environment has announced that is has launched a new campaign which seeks to plant at least one million new trees annually

As part of the campaign, the ministry calls on citizens to participate in planting activities and the protection and restoration of the country's forests.

It explained that increased forest cover means the carbon credits can be sold, in order to increase the incomes of forest communities.

The government aims to raise forest cover to 60 per cent by 2030, in a bid to achieve carbon neutrality. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Informal workers called on to register

(dql) Prime Minister Hun Manet has urged informal workers to voluntarily register their business to allow authorities to manage data and provide benefits, including access to the National Social Security Fund, such as healthcare and pensions, as well as debt waivers and a five-years tax exemption.

Manet made this call at an event that informed about the government's strategy and policy for economic development over the next five years.

He stressed the urgency of the matter citing the plan to implement the National Strategy for Informal Economic Development 2023-2028 by the end of the year. noting that the most informal economies are vulnerable people hit by the pandemic and economic crisis. [Kiri Post] [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Constitutional Court decides on presidential candidate eligibility

(dql/ss) The Indonesian Constitutional Court handed down a ruling on the eligibility of presidential candidates on October 17 that has sparked fierce criticism as it opens the door for Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the 36-year-old son of outgoing president Joko Widodo, to run for presidency in the elections scheduled for February 2024.

While the court rejected a petition to lower the minimum age for presidential and vice-presidential candidates from 40 years to 35 years, it also amended the country's election law to permit exceptions for candidates who have served as members of legislative councils or regional heads at the provincial or city level, regardless of their age.

Gibran, who is the mayor of Surakarta city, is being floated as potential vice-president candidate on a joint ticket with Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto as well as with Ganjar Pranowo, the former governor of Central Java, who both are campaigning for the presidency. Both are neck-on-neck in neck-and-neck in opinion polls, with former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan a distant third.

The ruling of Constitutional Court, whose Chief Justice Anwar Usman is the president's brother-in-law, has triggered fears over President Joko Widodo, who is unable to contest the upcoming presidential election as he is already serving the maximum of two terms in office, is attempting to retain his influence in politics or to establish a political dynasty by promoting family

members and loyalists to government positions. Joko has persistently rejected rumors about such attempts.

The ruling comes shortly before the registration for presidential and vice-presidential candidates will open on October 19 and close on October 25. Gibran, for his part, has not declared to run in the election. [Reuters] [Al Jazeera] [Benar News]

Indonesia: Child Protection Commission calls for blocking of online gambling websites

(ss) The National Child Protection Commission of Indonesia (KPAI) has urged the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) and the National Police to block online wagering sites.

The Commission cited for its call the danger of children becoming addicted to online gambling. [Antara News]

In a related development, Kominfo has The Ministry of Communication and Informatics called on Meta, which owns and operates Facebook, to speed up the elimination of online gambling content in Indonesia.

This comes after the ministry had ordered Meta representatives in Indonesia on October 2 to remove online gambling and slot gambling content and activities. [Tempo.co]

Indonesia: Food production remains strong despite El Nino impact

(ss) President Joko Widodo has reassured that despite the El Nino phenomenon that has caused drought and a decline in production capacity, national food production remains healthy.

He stated that the impact of El Nino on Indonesia's food security should not be viewed as alarming, as food production is continuing, with each hectare of land in Indramayu, the country's hub for rice industry being capable of producing eight to nine loads of unhusked rice due to the optimal irrigation system.

He added that, to control consumer rice prices, rice stored by the State Logistics Agency (Bulog) must be distributed to markets as quickly as possible.

According to estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture, El Nino could reduce rice production by up to 1.2 million tons this year. The rice production target is to reach 30 million tons this year. [Antara News]

Indonesia: Former agriculture minister arrested

(dql) The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) has arrested Syahrul Yasin Limpo, the former agriculture minister. He is suspected of bribery, abuse of power, and fraud involving contracts with private vendors.

During a raid at his office and official residence and a private house last month, carried out when Syahrul was away on a trip to Europe, KPK officials confiscated USD 1.9 million in cash, documents, and an Audi A6 car.

Syahrul resigned from his post as agriculture minister earlier this month. [The Diplomat]

Indonesia: Security forces to conduct operation to boost security in conflict provinces during election

(dql) The Indonesian Military and National Police (TNI-Polri) will conduct the Mantap Brata Mansinam Operation this week in a bid to boost security in West Papua and Southwest Papua during the 2024 General Election.

To be held on October 19-20, the operation will involve at least five thousand personnel from the West Papua Regional Police and TNI personnel from the Kasuari District Military Command, with joint personnel of TNI and Polri to be deployed in 13 districts and cities in the two provinces, covering a total of 218 sub-districts. [Antara]

West Papua and Southwest Papua area of the decade-long conflict between the Indonesia and the Free Papua Movement which seeks the secession of the territory.

Lao PDR: Government raise excise tax to curb foreign currency's outflow

(ws) President Thongloun Sisoulith issued a decree that increases excise taxes on specific goods. This measure is designed to restrict the import of luxury items and consequently decrease the outflow of foreign currency.

The Presidential Decree, which came into effect on October 9, raises excise taxes on various products, including fuel-consuming jeeps and sedans, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, soft drinks, as well as slot machines, gaming machines, and all forms of gambling equipment with valid licenses.

The underlying objectives of this decree are to stem the outflow of foreign currency, promote savings, combat corruption, and ensure that the state collects the appropriate and complete tax amounts, thereby making more funds available to drive social and economic development. [Vientiane Times]

Malaysia: Court rules former Prime Minister Najib, son have to settle over USD 357 million in unpaid taxes

(lm) Malaysia's Federal Court has ruled that former Prime Minister Najib Razak and his son Mohd Nazifuddin must settle unpaid income taxes totaling roughly USD 357 million and USD 7.9 million, respectively. This decision came after the Federal Court dismissed their appeal, which challenged the Inland Revenue Board's (IRB) applications to enter a summary judgment to recover the tax arrears. [The Straits Times]

Previously, in September 2021, both Najib and Nazifuddin had lost their appeals in the Court of Appeal to set aside the summary judgment. A summary judgment allows the court to decide a case based on written submissions without a full trial and without calling witnesses.

Justice Nallini Pathmanathan, delivering the Federal Court's decision, emphasized that the IRB was treating the appellants the same way it treats all citizens in terms of tax levies, with no discriminatory or unconstitutional treatment. She noted that the appellants could still bring their case for reassessment before the Special Commissioners of Income Tax (SCIT).

Justice Nallini explained that the court's role, under Section 106 of the Income Tax Act (ITA), is to facilitate tax recovery and collection, deferring full adjudicatory judicial power to later appeals based on questions of law or administrative and constitutional review. She

stated that this "pay first, dispute later" mechanism is used worldwide in tax imposition.

Malaysia: Center for stateless kids in Sabah coming next month, says Education Minister Sidek

(mw) Malaysia's Education Minister, Fadhlina Sidek, has reaffirmed the commitment of the current administration to ensuring access to education for stateless children. In a recent interview, the minister announced the government's expansion of the Sekolah Jalinan Kasih program, commencing in Sabah and later extending to regions with a significant stateless population. The program places a strong emphasis on holistic development, community engagement, and reducing dropout rates. Fadhlina also acknowledged the challenges in education while highlighting successful models during her remarks. [Malaysiakini]

Malaysia: 3,150 social media posts with scam elements blocked since January

(mw) The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) has revealed that it blocked a total of 3,150 social media posts related to fraud and phishing from January 1 to September 30. The MCMC under the directives and in collaboration with the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) can remove fraudulent content and can assist the victims of this fraudulent acts.

Deputy Communications and Digita Minister Teo Nie Ching and the government are taking proactive measures to combat this issue. These measures include amending the Personal Data Protection Act 2010 to require data users to appoint data protection officers, report data leakage incidents, and increase penalties for data users and processors. The Personal Data Protection Department is developing AI guidelines to control the use of AI related to personal data. [The Star]

Malaysia: Madani Economy has a comprehensive implementation framework, says Prime Minister Anwar

(mw/lm) Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has introduced the Madani Economy framework to replace

the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 (SPV 2030) as the government's economic paradigm, which sets short-term targets and medium-term targets that will be achieved in the next ten years. [PMO.GOV.MY]

Anwar cited several reasons for this change, emphasizing that the SPV 2030 lacked focus on governance and failed to address the country's current challenges, including issues such as the cost of living and the government's debt and deficit.

The Madani Economy is presented as a more comprehensive framework that aligns with the current economic environment and includes shared compassionate values. Anwar stated that it supports economic sustainability and fiscal development while also promoting inclusivity and good governance, which were not adequately emphasized in SPV 2030.

Anwar further highlighted that the Madani Economy will serve as the foundation for other economic policies, such as the 12th Malaysia Plan Mid-Term Review, National Energy Transition Roadmap, and New Industrial Master Plan 2030. It aims to provide transparency and clarity for both the government sector and the private sector.

Malaysia: Government has no plans to end Bernas monopoly on rice imports

(mw) The Malaysian government currently has no plans to eliminate the monopoly held by Padiberas Nasional Berhad (Bernas) as the national rice importer in the country. Agriculture and Food Security Minister Mohamad Sabu explained that the ministry believes the current primary rice import policy is the best way to address rice shortage and international challenges. This policy serves as a mechanism to shield the local rice and paddy industry from international market uncertainties and price instability. [New Straits Times]

The response came in reply to a question from an MP about when the ministry intends to eliminate the rice monopoly and allow more rice importers into the country. Mohamad Sabu stated that the increase in the price of imported white rice was not directly related to the monopoly but rather resulted from a 60 percent increase in the international rice market price at the end of August the previous year.

Additionally, he mentioned that 19 countries have restricted rice exports to prioritize their own consumption, contributing to the global rise in rice prices. This situation has been exacerbated by the

depreciation of the Malaysian Ringgit compared to the US Dollar.

Malaysia: Chinese automotive company to expand its investment, Prime Minister Anwar says

(mw/lm) Zhejiang Geely Holding Group Co., Ltd. (Geely), one of the largest privately-owned automotive manufacturers in China, intends to expand its investment in Malaysia, focusing on strengthening the country as a vehicle manufacturing hub for exports. Geely had previously committed to investing USD 6.7 billion in Malaysia. [PMO.GOV.MY]

This announcement came after a courtesy visit by Geely Chairman Li Shufu to Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. During the meeting, it was also discussed that Geely intends to increase its involvement in research and development as well as providing local skilled workers, aligning with the future needs of the automotive industry.

Malaysia: Parliament passes law to regulate large power users

(mw) Malaysia’s Parliament has passed the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act, which mandates that the country's largest energy consumers implement power-saving measures. This initiative aligns with Malaysia's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 45 percent by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050. [The Straits Times]

The Act will apply to industrial and commercial consumers consuming more than 21,600 gigajoules annually, targeting around 1,500 industrial consumers and 500 commercial consumers, which together make up less than one percent of the total users in both sectors.

These measures aim to bring Malaysia's energy efficiency regulations in line with international standards, and the law will require the appointment of registered energy managers, energy audits, and compliance with energy efficiency requirements for certain buildings, with enforcement expected to begin a year after gazettement.

Malaysia: Revival of national service training for youth under consideration

(mw/lm) Malaysia's Defense Minister Mohamad Hasan has announced the revival of a national service training program for Malaysian youth. Under this program, young people will undergo 45 days of basic army training.

The program, initiated in 2004, involved the random selection of 18-year-olds for mandatory three-month training periods. It was temporarily suspended in 2015 but reinstated the following year, with plans to make participation optional by 2019. However, it was completely discontinued in August 2018. In 2021, the prior administration reached an agreement that the defense minister would establish a committee to explore the potential revival of the program with a revised framework.

The new program aims to provide actual army training, particularly targeting those who have completed their Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) examination. It will be divided into two phases, with the first phase involving uniformed groups in schools preparing youth for the second phase, which focuses on army training.

This revamped program will utilize existing Territorial Army camps, significantly reducing costs from USD 105 million to USD 21 million. A committee is working on the proposal, which will eventually be presented to the National Security Council for approval, but no specific timeline has been provided. [CNA] [The Straits Times]

Myanmar: Diverging accounts on deadly Laiza incident

(sai) A deadly explosion in Myanmar near the China-Myanmar border has resulted in multiple casualties, including women and children. The incident occurred in a village inhabited by both locals and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Conflicting accounts have emerged, with the Myanmar military council claiming it was an accidental explosion at an ammonium nitrate warehouse on a KIA training compound, while the ethnic armed group Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and survivors maintain it was an attack. [Myanmar Now]

Myanmar: Attacks on healthcare facilities raise human rights concerns

(sai) Recent attacks on healthcare facilities in Myanmar have heightened human rights concerns.

The Demoso Township clinic, co-founded by medical volunteers, was targeted in a military airstrike. This incident left the local population without medical services for months.

The situation is seen among observers as part of a larger pattern, as the military is reportedly targeting clinics, hospitals, and IDP camps daily, particularly in Karenni State, where an estimated 250,000 out of 300,000 residents have been displaced due to violence.

The Nway Oo Kyan Mar clinic, part of a healthcare group operating in the region, has been targeted multiple times, posing significant challenges to its 30-person team. Local donors who once supported these initiatives are now facing surveillance and financial restrictions imposed by the military regime. Consequently, international support is being sought, but delivering aid through established local channels remains challenging.

Rebuilding the destroyed clinic is estimated to cost over USD 40,000, including the construction of essential facilities.

The attacks on healthcare facilities and the difficulties in obtaining funding underscore the pressing human rights issues faced by the people of Myanmar. [Myanmar Now]

Myanmar: 10-Hour battle in Kanbalu township inflicts losses on junta and resistance

(sai) Fighting in Myanmar's Sagaing Region's Kanbalu Township continues, with casualties reported on both sides as People's Defence Force (PDF) fighters clash with junta troops.

The battle resulted in the seizure of weapons by the PDF, including rifles and machine guns.

The conflict has disrupted essential services, such as electricity supply, leaving residents without cooking and lighting facilities and prompting residents to seek water sources elsewhere.

The presence of military personnel in the area has forced local residents to flee their homes, with many in need of food and shelter. [Myanmar Now]

Myanmar: Junta shelling claims lives of children in Eastern Bago Region

(sai) In eastern Bago Region's Pyu Township, a 14-year-old girl lost her life, and four others were injured due to junta shelling, as reported by resistance sources.

The fatal incident occurred when a heavy artillery shell struck the village of Kyaw Hla. [Myanmar Now]

Myanmar: Over 1,300 people in Myanmar arrested by the military junta for criticizing government online

(wn) Over the past 20 months, Myanmar's junta has arrested more than 1,300 people for online criticism.

According to residents, a number of those who were arrested had their private information shared on the internet by supporters of the junta. This made it easier for the authorities to identify and apprehend the individuals in question.

According to the 2023 Freedom on the Net report released on Oct. 4, Myanmar is the second worst abuser of internet freedom in the world, behind neighboring China.

The army and its informants used Telegram groups to share information on dissidents, allowing the authorities to identify, detain, and in some cases forcibly disappear them, Freedom House reported. [RFA]

Myanmar: Acting NUG President calls holding annual event on National Ceasefire Agreement dishonorable

(wn) Duwa La Shila, the Acting President of the National Unity Government, stated on October 14 that the military coup had rendered the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) contract invalid. Moreover, the military council has failed to comply with the NCA contract and has violated its fundamental principles.

In light of this, he called on the international community and ethnic armed groups to boycott the military council's (8th) anniversary ceremony on October 15.

The Karen National Union (KNU) has announced that they will not partake in the NCA until the violence against the people is stopped. On October 12, the Chin National Front (CNF) and the All-Burmese Student Democratic Front (ABSDF) released a joint statement declining an invitation to the ceremony from the Military Council.[RFA Burmese]

Myanmar: Military leaders invite ethnic armed groups to discuss peace

(wn) The Chairman of the Military Council, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, has invited ethnic armed groups who have not yet signed the ceasefire to hold peace talks and negotiations once again.

The military leader extended an invitation during the 8th-anniversary ceremony of the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) held on October 15 in Nay Pyi Taw.

Out of the ten ethnic armed groups that have signed a ceasefire, seven participated in the NCA anniversary event, while the remaining three, namely the Karen National Union (KNU), ABSDF, and Chin National Front (CNF) did not attend. [BBC Burmese]

Myanmar: Junta leader sentences two generals to life imprisonment for corruption

(ha) The junta military court sentenced former junta trade leader, Ex Lieutenant General Moe Myint Tun and his deputy, Ex Brigadier General Yan Naung Soe to life in prison for corruption.

Moe Myint Tun is considered to be a confidant of the junta leader and has been performing important government duties in addition to being a member of the State Council after the abdication of power. It is known that he and his assistants used their power to take bribes from businessmen working in the trade and foreign exchange supervision and economic sectors. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: Foreigners illegally obtaining passports, other documents 'national security issue'

(lb) The Philippines' Bureau of Immigration (BI) has expressed concern about foreign nationals obtaining authentic Philippine passports and other documents illegally, considering it "a national security issue". [Philippine News Agency]

In a Senate hearing for the 2024 National Expenditure Program of the Department of Justice and its attached agencies, BI Commissioner Norman Tansingco revealed that there have been instances of foreigners possessing Philippine passports, as well as other Filipino documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, and postal IDs. He noted that this year alone, they have intercepted around 10 cases where individuals had genuine Philippine passports but were not actually Filipino citizens.

Strict measures are being implemented to crack down on such illicit practices, and those involved may face charges for violating immigration rules, and potentially be banned from entering the country following deportation.

Philippines: Court acquits former Army general for 2006 abduction, torture of two brothers

(lb/lm) A regional trial court in the Philippines earlier this month acquitted retired Major General Jovito Palparan – who is currently serving a 40-yer prison term – and five other individuals associated with the military of charges related to the 2006 kidnapping and alleged torture of two brothers, Raymond and Reynaldo Manalo. [Rappler]

The court's decision was based on the argument that the Manalo brothers failed to clearly identify their abductors from a nighttime meeting in Bulacan. Although Raymond Manalo initially claimed recognition of Palparan during the encounter, the judge questioned the reliability of this identification due to the dark environment and noted discrepancies in the description of the meeting place.

Notably, Raymond Manalo played a crucial role as a witness in the 2006 enforced disappearance, torture, and rape of students Sherlyn Cadapan and Karen Empeno, who both to this date remain missing. Manalo's testimony in the case led to Palparan's first conviction in September 2018.

The recent verdict came on the heels of a number of abductions of activists in locations throughout the country. [Human Rights Watch]

Philippines: Thousands join pro-Palestine protest in country's south

(lm) Approximately 25,000 people gathered on October 16 in the southern city of Cotabato to demonstrate against Israel's airstrikes on the Gaza Strip in response to attacks by Hamas militants. Speakers at the protest called for an end to Israeli military actions and requested that the United States and the United Nations remain neutral in the conflict. [The Straits Times]

The Philippines, primarily a Roman Catholic country, has a significant Muslim minority in the southern region, which experienced armed Islamic separatist insurgencies until a peace treaty was signed nine years ago.

Philippines: Diokno: Economy to withstand impact of global slowdown

(lb) Philippine Finance Secretary Benjamin Diokno has expressed confidence in the country's economy being able to withstand the effects of slowing global growth. Diokno mentioned the slowdown in China, the world's second-largest economy, during an ASEAN Roundtable organized by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF's latest updates showed China's expected medium-term slowdown, posing risks to Asian economies. Diokno emphasized the importance of catch-up plans from government agencies to drive faster economic growth in the latter part of 2023, as the economy aims to grow by at least 6.6% in the second half of the year. [Manila Standard]

Singapore: Pew study hails Singapore's 'remarkable' religious diversity and high tolerance, acceptance

(lb) Singapore's remarkable religious diversity, highlighted in a Pew Research Center analysis based on a 2022 survey, is characterized by high levels of tolerance and acceptance of various faiths, with six in 10 Singaporeans expressing personal connections to religions outside their own. Unlike many regional

counterparts, Singaporeans do not consider their religious beliefs as central to their national identity, with just 13% linking their nation's majority religion to true belonging. Pluralistic beliefs prevail, with about two-thirds of those identifying with a religion believing that "many religions can be true." This religious inclusivity is underpinned by a historical context of state-sponsored coexistence, shaping a unique national landscape where cultural and religious diversity is viewed as an enriching factor, even more so among highly religious Singaporeans, who believe it enhances the quality of life in the country. [Today]

Singapore: Petition calls for immediate moratorium on executions, review of use of death penalty

(lb/lm) Family members of prisoners on death row in Singapore have delivered a petition to the Ministry of Home Affairs, calling for an immediate moratorium on executions and a review of the country's use of the death penalty. The plea, made on the eve of World Day Against the Death Penalty, was accompanied by a petition bearing over 1,700 signatures. [Al Jazeera]

At least 16 people have been executed in Singapore since 2022, and activists believe there are currently about 50 prisoners on death row, with most of them convicted of drug-related offenses. Singapore's use of the death penalty for drug offenses has been criticized internationally, with some arguing that it does little to address the root causes of drug-related issues.

In contrast to neighboring Malaysia, which has recently reformed its death penalty laws, Singapore's leaders maintain that capital punishment serves as a deterrent to protect citizens from the adverse effects of drugs.

Thailand: Opposition parties plan to seek general debate against Pheu Thai led government early next year

(ak/lm) Thailand's opposition parties, including Move Forward (MFP), Democrat, and Fair parties, are planning to initiate a general debate against the Pheu Thai-led government early next year. MFP leader Chaitawat Tulathon stated that the debate might escalate into a vote of no confidence if the opposition possesses information or evidence of any irregularities.

This decision comes after the three parties held their first official meeting on October 12 to outline their legislative agenda during parliamentary sessions and breaks. The MFP, as the primary opposition party, has called on its coalition partners to collaborate in scrutinizing the government's actions and encouraging public participation in the checks and balances system. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Prime Minister defends department's care of ex-Premier Thaksin

(lm) Thailand's Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, defended the Corrections Department on October 14 amid criticism that it granted special privileges to jailed former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. [Bangkok Post]

Thaksin returned to Thailand in mid-August after 15 years in self-exile and was sentenced to eight years in prison for three cases on the same day. However, he was transferred from the Bangkok Remand Prison to the Police General Hospital for health reasons on the same night and has remained there since.

His doctors have not yet informed the Department whether his hospital stay will be extended beyond the current deadline on October 22 or if he will be transferred back to prison. Any extension of his stay would need to be reported to the justice permanent secretary.

Thailand: Ruling Pheu Thai Party reaffirms digital wallet scheme will go ahead

(ws/lm) Thailand's ruling Pheu Thai Party has reaffirmed that its so-called 10,000-baht digital money handout scheme won't be suspended, saying all final detail will be announced by the end of this month.

The digital wallet program entails providing a one-time payment of 10,000 baht (approximately USD 275) to every Thai citizen aged 16 and above. This sum will be deposited into their digital wallet for spending within six months, primarily on products and services from stores located within a 4-kilometer radius of their residence or at state-run Blue Flag shops. The scheme, expected to be launched between February and March next year, is estimated to cost the taxpayers approximately USD 15.4 billion, a portion of which will

be financed through loans from a state-owned bank. [ThaiPBSWorld]

In the midst of a diverse range of opinions on the scheme, including a statement of disagreement issued by a group of academics, economists, and former bank governors, Prime Minister Srettha stressed the potential of the digital wallet initiative to contribute to community development. He encouraged its proponents to express their support.

Thailand: Opposition Move Forward Party takes disciplinary actions against members over alleged misconduct

(ws) Thailand's main opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) has taken actions in response to two separate incidents, namely expelling a former electoral candidate Kriangkrai Chankokpoeng for alleged sexual harassment, and penalizing Sirin Sanguasin for alleged engagement in a public brawl and violence.

The party's executive committee determined that Kriangkrai had committed sexual harassment and expelled him immediately due to this violation of party regulations. The party has also issued an apology to the victim.

In the second incident, Parit reported that one of the party's city councillors Sirin was penalized for his involvement in a public altercation and violence, actions that are not in line with the party's regulations. [ThaiPBSWorld]

Thailand: Activist lawyer Arnon denied bail again

(lm) Prominent activist and lawyer Arnon Nampa's second request for bail in a royal defamation case has been denied by the Court of Appeal. The court cited the severity of the charge and the possibility that Arnon might seek to flee the country of released. [Bangkok Post]

Arnon was sentenced to four years in prison and fined 20,000 baht for his actions and statements made at Victory Monument in Bangkok on October 14, 2020. His first bail request was denied earlier this month [see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1].

In regards to the second bail request, Arnon's legal team contended that their client is serving as a lawyer for defendants in over 39 cases across various courts in Bangkok and other provinces, emphasizing his lack of intention to evade legal proceedings. They also highlighted that the Southern Bangkok Criminal Court had previously granted permission for the activist to travel to South Korea in May to accept the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights.

Thailand: Emergency decree in Deep South extended for another three months

(ws) The administration panel overseeing the emergency decree in Thailand's Deep South has opted to extend it for another three months starting from October 20, the date when the current law is set to expire.

Notably, however, under the renewed terms, the decree will be lifted in three districts: Krong Pinang in Yala, Thung Yang Daeng in Pattani, and Yi-ngo in Narathiwat. In these areas, it will be replaced by the National Security Act. Additionally, the panel has chosen to reinstate the decree in Sri Sakhon district of Narathiwat, where there have been indications of renewed unrest over the past five years.

Statistics indicate that since 2007, there has been a general reduction in violence stemming from the insurgency in the southern border provinces of Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, and parts of Songkhla. According to the defense minister, while some Muslim residents have called for the repeal of the decree, groups of Buddhist residents have advocated for its continuation. [Bangkok Post] [Prachatai, in Thai]

Vietnam: 13th Party Central Committee's 8th plenum creates momentum for national reform

(km/lm) The eighth plenum of the 13th Party Central Committee, held from October 2-8, has provided momentum for comprehensive reforms and promoting Vietnam's rapid and sustainable development. During the seven-day event, committee members analyzed and forecasted the socio-economic and budget situations for 2023-2024. They defined development goals, key targets, and solutions for the rest of the year and all of 2024, including the

application of a new salary policy from July 1, 2024. [thanhnien.vn]

Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong emphasized the need to effectively implement the plenum's conclusions, with a focus on improving economic growth, job creation, and income generation while maintaining macroeconomic stability and social welfare. Close monitoring of both international and domestic situations was also stressed to achieve the set goals for 2023 and the entire 13th tenure.

The plenum resulted in resolutions to continue enhancing the quality of social policies, upholding national unity, and setting guiding principles, ideology, key goals, tasks, and measures for developing the intellectual workforce in the new context. Additionally, a resolution on the national defense strategy was unanimously adopted.

The committee discussed a personnel plan for the 14th Party Central Committee in the 2026-2031 term, and this plan will be considered and decided upon by the Politburo after the plenum, serving as a basis for the training and supervision of prospective officials.

Lastly, the plenum established five sub-committees for preparing the 14th National Party Congress. Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong will head a subcommittee on personnel of the coming 14th National Party Congress, while Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh will lead the socio-economic subcommittee, tasked with making a 2021-2025 report on implementing the Socio-National Economic Development Strategy for 2021-2030, and working out a five-year socio-economic development plan for 2026-2030. [Voice of Vietnam]

Vietnam: National Assembly Standing Committee discusses electricity planning and pricing

(km/lm) Vietnam's National Assembly (NA) Standing Committee has provided opinions on the thematic supervision report on the implementation of energy development policies and laws from 2016-2021, focusing on electricity planning and pricing. [vietnamnews.vn]

The report highlighted issues in the legal framework, challenges in energy planning, and the risk to national energy security due to shortages in domestic energy sources. The discussion emphasized the need for assessing and addressing obstacles in managing

electricity, coal, gas, and oil prices. Achieving fair energy transition required international support, and there were calls for refining the report with further recommendations.

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

China holds Belt and Road forum with Russian President Putin attending

(ga/dql) The Belt and Road Forum kicked off on October 17 in Beijing. Titled "High-quality Belt and Road Cooperation: Together for Common Development and Prosperity", Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to outline the future of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's role therein in his keynote speech scheduled for the second day, October 18, of the gathering.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the BRI, China's landmark global infrastructure project launched in 2013, the third Belt and Road Forum brings together more than 140 countries, 30 international organizations and over 4,000 delegates. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Among the highest-profile attendees is Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived on October 17 in Beijing on his second known trip abroad after Kyrgyzstan since the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant against him in March. He shook hands with Xi at the evening banquet hosted for global leaders and dignitaries attending the forum and stood next to him while posing for group photographs at the Great Hall.

Amid the ongoing war in Ukraine and the conflict between Israel and Hamas, Putin is expected to reaffirm the close relationship between Russia and China and the de-facto Sino-Russian alliance against the West as well as his personal relationship with Xi. Indicating this, Putin described in an interview given just a day before travelling the Chinese President as "one of the recognized world leaders" who does not “make a momentary decision based on some current situation,” but “assesses the situation, analyzes and looks into the future.” Putin added that is “what distinguishes a true world leader from the people we call temporary caretakers, who come for five minutes to show off on the international platform, and then disappear just as quietly.” [Reuters] [Newsweek] [AP] [Anton Gerashchenko, X]

China reviews anti-dumping duty on chemical imports from the US and Japan

(ms) The Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) began on October 16 the review process regarding the anti-dumping tariffs imposed on imports of hydriodic acid from the US and Japan.

Hydriodic acid is a chemical that, in addition to its use in pharmaceuticals, has applications in the manufacturing sector, including the production of integrated circuits, and is therefore crucial to China's tech ambitions.

Tariffs against the U.S. at 123.4 percent and Japan at 41.1 percent on imports of the chemical were imposed in October 2018 and have now officially expired five years later on October 16.

In the face of increased reported requests from Chinese industry to extend the tariffs to counter possible dumping from the two exporting countries, a one-year review period was initiated as the tariffs expired.

MOFCOM is expected to maintain the existing tariffs in the same or at least similar form at the end of the review, especially in light of continued U.S.-led sanctions against the Chinese tech sector. [Global Times]

Japan to embark on regional diplomacy

(ic) Amidst a year of turmoil for multilateral institutions, Japan appears to be following the winds

and emphasizing regional diplomacy. It will host a series of regional summits over 2023 and 2024, in a bid to expand its influence in the developing world.

Over October 8-13, Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko visited (in order) Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand to set the stage for a special Japan-ASEAN summit in December. Focal points for Japan-ASEAN cooperation will be digital technology, maritime security, and sustainable technology. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1]

In the October 8 dinner and October 9 meeting with Brunei Foreign Minister Prince Mohamed Bolkiah, the two parties discussed cooperation in green and blue economy initiatives, and expressed interest in further cooperation on women, peace, and security. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2]

This was followed up by a meeting and working lunch on October 10 with Vietnam Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son. Kamikawa discussed the "Extensive Strategic Partnership" between the two countries that cut across multiple bilateral areas, including Japan's interest in relocating production to Vietnam as well as expanded defense exchange. The two ministers also exchanged views on the ongoing crises in Myanmar, Ukraine, and Israel, with Kamikawa expressing candidly that the international community is at a crossroads between cooperation and conflict. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3]

After this, Kamikawa met Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Laos Saleumxay Kommasith in Laos on October 11. Expressing her support for Laos' chairmanship of ASEAN in 2024, Kamikawa also expressed a desire to expand investment into Laos, along with encouraging legal reform and humanitarian aid efforts. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 4]

On October 12, Kamikawa would round off her visits by meeting Deputy PM and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Thailand Parnpree Bahiddha-nukara. Discussions primarily centered on cultural and economic exchanges, with reference made to improving the investment environment based on the Five-Year Joint Action Plan on Japan - Thailand Strategic Economic Partnership signed in 2022. The two also exchanged views on the situation in Myanmar. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 5]

Additionally, Japan will seek to hold a summit with the Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in 2024, likely because of their access to strategic natural resources. [Asahi Shinbun]

The Pacific Island Leaders' Meeting (PALM), a forum that is headed by Japan, takes place every three years and is slated for its 10th round in 2024. [Nikkei Asian Review]

Japan is not the only regional power to lay claim to the mantle of leadership for the global South; as multilateral meetings this year have been defined primarily by division, China and India are both also jockeying for the position of leader of the global South.

New third-party institution set up to monitor Fukushima wastewater release

(ic) On October 11, Japan's Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) announced a monitoring mission in conjunction with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and third-party experts from China, South Korea and Canada.

They will collect samples around the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station (FDNPS) from October 16-23 and write up a report over one year to separately corroborate Japan's internal data and monitoring on the safety of the Fukushima water release. [International Atomic Energy Agency] [Nuclear Regulation Authority, Japan, in Japanese]

This will reportedly be China's first time participating in these third-party analyses of radioactive concentrations in the ocean and marine products, although these missions have been conducted since 2015. [Asahi Shinbun]

Despite China's participation, the Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed skepticism of the plan. He noted that monitoring missions like these "are carried out by the IAEA under its bilateral arrangement with Japan and, therefore, fall short of an international monitoring agreement with the full and substantive participation of all stakeholders that will stay effective for the long haul."

The ministry added that "China remains unequivocal about our opposition to Japan's ocean discharge of the Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

At the same time, the Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance released a statement on October 16 stating that Russia would follow in China's footsteps and temporarily restrict imports of seafood from Japan as a "precautionary measure". [Kyodo News] [Reuters]

North Korea condemns arrival of US aircraft in South Korea

(ap/tms) North Korea has condemned the arrival of Nimitz-class, nuclear-powered supercarrier USS Ronald Reagan its battle group arrived at South Korea's southeastern port of Busan on October 13, calling the move a provocation and threatened to respond with a preemptive nuclear strike. [AP]

The five-day stay of the carrier is part of an agreement on increasing the temporary deployments of US military assets in South Korea reached during May summit in Washington between US President Biden and his South Korean counterpart Yoon Suk-yeol in response to Pyongyang's growing nuclear program [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1].

South Korea joins global partnership for clean energy supply chain

(tms) South Korea's Finance Minister, Choo Kyung-ho, has announced the country's commitment to the Resilient and Inclusive Supply-chain Enhancement Partnership (RISE) program, aimed at promoting the participation of developing nations in the clean energy global supply chain.

The RISE initiative, supported by nations such as Japan, Canada, and Britain, as well as South Korea, will assist developing countries in utilizing their key mineral resources for eco-friendly industries.

The World Bank-backed program seeks to create more sustainable and diversified global mineral value chains, which will lead to increased local job opportunities and economic growth in developing economies.

This initiative is also seen as a step toward reducing dependence on China for critical resources.

Finance Minister Choo also pledged USD 50 million to the World Bank's fund for Ukraine, emphasizing the importance of knowledge and technology sharing in supporting the war-torn nation's reconstruction efforts. [Yonhap]

South Korea joins ICRC's major donor group following generous contributions

(tms) South Korea has become a member of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)'s 2023 Donor Support Group for the first time, having contributed 10.5 million Swiss francs (approximately USD 11 million) to the humanitarian organization last year.

This exclusive donor group comprises countries contributing over 10 million Swiss francs annually, including the United States, Germany, Switzerland, and the European Commission.

As part of this group, South Korea gains the privilege of engaging in high-level discussions with the ICRC regarding its policies and initiatives, potentially opening doors for participation in ICRC projects in North Korea.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICRC had an office in Pyongyang for various humanitarian efforts, but the organization withdrew its personnel in 2020 due to the pandemic and North Korea's strict border controls. [Yonhap]

Chinese ambassador calls for trilateral cooperation among South Korea, China, and Japan

(tms) Chinese Ambassador to South Korea, Xing Haiming, has called for enhanced cooperation among South Korea, China, and Japan to address contemporary challenges, including unilateralism and Cold War ideology.

Speaking at a forum in Seoul, Xing emphasized the significant changes in international politics and the need for the three nations to adapt to new circumstances while maintaining their strategic commitment.

He urged them to embrace genuine open regionalism and multilateralism while opposing actions that could lead to a Cold War or military conflict.

The importance of trilateral cooperation was echoed by Kim Gunn, South Korea's special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security, especially in the context of North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Japanese Embassy's Mondo Yamamoto also emphasized the potential for collaboration among the three countries. [Yonhap]

This comes as both South Korea and Japan are intensifying their security cooperation with the US amid China's assertiveness in Asia.

South Korean prime minister promotes Busan's 2030 World Expo bid during European tour

(tms) South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo embarked on an official visit to Denmark as part of his European tour to promote Busan's bid to host the 2030 World Expo.

During his visit, Han engaged in meetings with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen and Queen Margrethe II.

He sought Denmark's support for South Korea's World Expo bid and discussed cooperation to counter North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

Denmark affirmed its solidarity with South Korea and emphasized the strong partnership between the two nations.

Han's next stop is Zagreb, Croatia, where he will discuss defense and technology cooperation with Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic. He will then visit Greece for a summit meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis.

The host city for the World Expo will be selected in late November. [Yonhap]

South Korean foreign minister holds talks with South American and Caribbean officials on bilateral cooperation

(tms) South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin engaged in consecutive discussions with high-ranking officials from South American countries and Caribbean states during meetings held in Seoul.

One significant development was the strategic economic cooperation agreement reached with Ecuador, equivalent to a free trade agreement.

Both countries anticipate the agreement's official signing to promote closer collaboration within the global supply chain for raw materials. Additionally, an

accord on coordinating the criminal justice system was signed.

Separate discussions with Suriname's counterpart, Albert Ramdin, centered on enhancing cooperation across various sectors, leading to the signing of a comprehensive bilateral cooperation declaration.

The foreign minister also met with the secretary-general of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and held talks with counterparts from Jamaica and Grenada, who were in Seoul for a high-level forum between South Korea and Caribbean states. [Yonhap]

South Korea, Canada, Italy collaborate on nuclear reactor revamp in Romania

(tms) South Korea's state-owned energy company, Korea Hydro & Nuclear Power Co. (KHNP), is progressing towards securing a contract valued at approximately USD 1.87 billion to refurbish an aging nuclear reactor at Romania's Cernavoda power plant.

KHNP has entered into a consortium agreement with Canadian firm Candu Energy Inc. and Italian company Ansaldo Nucleare S.p.A. to jointly undertake the project for the modernization of Cernavoda's unit 1 reactor.

The Romanian government aims to extend the unit's operating license for an additional 30 years beyond its original expiration in 2026.

KHNP will oversee construction aspects of the project, while Candu and Ansaldo will handle engineering and procurement, given their roles as the original unit designers.

Negotiations with Romania's nuclear energy company, Nuclearelectrica, are set to commence. [Yonhap]

South Korea prepares for landmark summit with Africa, emphasizing diplomatic milestone

(tms) South Korea's Foreign Minister, Park Jin, described the upcoming Korea-Africa special summit in the coming year as a "major milestone" in the country's diplomacy. The remarks were made during the first interagency meeting involving 20 government agencies to discuss preparations for the summit.

Park emphasized Africa's immense potential and numerous opportunities, highlighting the continent's growing influence on the international diplomatic stage.

He underlined Africa's significance as a region rich in critical minerals like lithium, nickel, and cobalt, essential for future industries, especially considering global supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine.

South Korea is set to host its inaugural summit with Africa in June 2023, aiming to strengthen cooperative relations with African nations. [Yonhap]

South Korea hosts Asia-Pacific conference on UN's Global Digital Compact

(tms) South Korea's science ministry organized an Asia-Pacific conference as part of a United Nations initiative, which seeks to establish collective commitments for digital technologies and ensure a secure digital environment.

The conference's primary objective is to facilitate discussions among governments and relevant stakeholders in the Asia-Pacific region about the guiding principles and top priorities for global digital cooperation, as outlined in the UN's Global Digital Compact.

Key topics of focus during the Asia-Pacific conference include matters like internet human rights, artificial intelligence, and open-source software.

South Korea aims to play a role in shaping global digital standards, with the goal of creating a digitally inclusive and prosperous global society where everyone can benefit from the advantages of digital technology, as stated by Science Minister Lee Jong-ho. [Yonhap]

Indian Ocean Rim Association convenes Council of Ministers meeting in Sri Lanka

(lm) Sri Lanka on October 11 hosted top diplomats from the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) under central theme of "Reinforcing Indian Ocean Identity." The event saw the participation of foreign ministers and senior officials representing the 23 member countries of this regional organization.

The IORA is an inter-governmental organization formed in 1997 to strengthen regional cooperation and sustainable development within the Indian Ocean region. It comprises 23 member countries spanning across Africa, West Asia, South Asia, South East Asia, Australia, and the Indian Ocean's littoral states. Currently, Sri Lanka holds the position of Chair, succeeding Bangladesh, with India serving as the Vice-Chair, making the core leadership of IORA centered in the South Asian region. [The Hindu] [Khmer Times]

Bangladesh requests IMF to revise loan conditions amid currency reserve strain

(ps) Bangladesh has formally requested the visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) staff mission to amend its financial targets for its USD 4.5 billion loan deeming the existing figures unattainable under the current circumstances. Bangladesh was required to maintain a minimum of USD 26.81 billion in net foreign currency reserves by end of December, but current reserves are calculated to be less than USD 18 billion. The IMF has reportedly accepted the request to lower the net foreign currency reserve ceiling. [The Daily Star]

India to face diplomatic dilemma as neighbors Bangladesh, Nepal enter WHO race

(lm) India's diplomatic prowess will be put to the test at the end of this month as 11 member nations cast their votes to choose the new Director of the World Health Organization (WHO)'s South East Asia Regional Office, headquartered in New Delhi. The situation has become complex for India as its neighbors, Bangladesh and Nepal, have also entered the race, prompting India to make a strategic decision on which side to support. [The Times of India]

Notably, the competition has gained prominence with Dhaka nominating Saima Wazed, the daughter of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, while Nepal has put forward Shambhu Prasad Acharya, one of the WHO's senior-most officials. The victor must secure majority support from the 11 member states, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, North Korea, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Timor-Leste.

Indian defense minister enhances defense cooperation on visits to Italy, France

(hp/lm) Last week, India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh undertook official visits to Italy and France, resulting in significant agreements and discussions. These engagements underscore New Delhi's unwavering commitment to strengthening defense cooperation, promoting innovation, and fortifying partnerships with key European allies.

Italy

In Rome from October 9-12, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh met with his Italian counterpart, Guido Crosetto. During their meeting, they signed an agreement aimed at enhancing cooperation in various defense domains. The agreement covers areas such as security and defense policy, research and development, industrial co-development, co-production, and the establishment of joint ventures. [The Hindu] [The Indian Express]

During their discussions, the two ministers also explored opportunities for defense industrial cooperation, reflecting India's interest in expanding its defense equipment presence abroad. They also discussed various defense cooperation matters, including training, information sharing, maritime exercises, and maritime security.

On the last day of his visit, Singh met with the CEOs and industry leaders of 24 Italian defense companies, emphasizing the ease of doing business in India and urging the leaders to establish robust supply chain links with Indian defense manufacturers.

France

On October 12, Singh joined French Minister of Armed Forces Sebastien Lecornu in Paris for the 5th annual defence dialogue. During the discussions, they covered various topics, including regional assessments, ongoing military-to-military engagements, and enhancing defense-industrial cooperation. The ministers reviewed ongoing defense projects and explored ways to deepen collaboration between their defense industries, particularly in niche areas like space, cyber, and artificial intelligence.

During his visit to France, Minister Singh also visited the Safran engine division's R&D center near Paris to observe the latest developments in aero-engine technology. He met with the CEOs of top French defense companies to discuss plans for collaboration with India, emphasizing the advantages of co-development and co-production in India, including the

potential for exports to third countries. Singh highlighted India's vast, skilled workforce, world-class infrastructure, and strong legal framework as inherent advantages for collaboration. [The New Indian Express]

UN Secretary-General delays Nepal visit due to Hamas-Israel conflict

(na) UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has postponed his planned visit to Nepal due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Hamas. Originally scheduled for October 13, Guterres' visit to Nepal included plans to address the Federal Parliament, as well as visits to Lumbini and Pokhara. [My Republica]

Sri Lanka, China's EXIM bank reach deal on treatment of USD 4.2 billion debt

(lf/lm) Sri Lanka has reached an agreement with the China's EXIM bank on key terms and principles for restructuring USD 4.2 billion in outstanding debt, a significant step toward accessing the next installment of a USD 2.9 billion bailout program from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Last month, an IMF team reviewing Sri Lanka's reform program delayed releasing this second tranche due to concerns about the progress of debt restructuring. [BBC] [Daily Mirror] [Financial Times]

The details of the deal, as is typical of Chinese financial agreements, have been kept secret, with Indian, Japanese and French officials asking to be given similar treatment in their negotiations with Sri Lanka and receive an insight into what exactly both parties have agreed to. The IMF also indicated that it has not been informed on the specifics of the deal, although negotiations with creditors and the reaching of comprehensive plans with these parties is a fundamental requirement of their deal.

Although Sri Lanka has been making progress on its debt restructuring discussions with major creditors, including paying off its loans from Bangladesh [see AiR, No. 39, September/2023, 4] and reaching a deal with China's EXIM bank, the IMF claims that it has not been let in on the specifics of any debt settlement deal between Sri Lanka and its creditors. Speaking on October 12, IMF Senior Mission Chief for Sri Lanka Peter Breuer asserted that the organization has "not yet been informed about any specific agreements" and

would “need to assess the entire package of agreements in its totality to assess consistency with the IMF debt targets”. [Daily Mirror] [Reuters] [Bloomberg]

Cambodia ASEAN’s fastest growing economy, IMF predicts

(dql) According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Cambodia will see economic growth at 5.6 percent this year and 6.1 percent next year. This is up from 5.2 percent last year and will make Cambodia the fastest growing economy within the ASEAN for two years in a row.

Cambodia would be followed by the Philippines with a projected growth at 5.3 percent this year and 5.9 percent next year.

Indonesia’s (5.0 percent both this year and next year), and Vietnam (4.7 percent this year and 5.8 percent next year) will come on third and fourth place, followed by Laos and Malaysia. Both economies are said to grow by 4.0 percent this year, with growth remaining unchanged in Laos and rising to 4.3 percent in Malaysia in 2024.

Next comes Thailand (2.7 percent this year, 3.2 percent next year) and Myanmar (2.6 percent both this year and next year).

The two richest economies in ASEAN – Singapore and Brunei – are believed to perform worst, with the former to grow 1.0 percent this year and 2.1 percent next year, while Brunei’s economy will see contraction at 0.8 percent before rebounding to 3.5 percent next year. [IMF] [Khmer Times 1]

Meanwhile, according to data of the Council for the Development of Cambodia (CDC), Cambodia has attracted fixed-asset investments worth USD 3.76 billion from January to September this year, an 8.6 per cent increase from the USD 3.46 billion compared with the same period last year.

Leading foreign investments countries include China, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam and the British Virgin Islands. [The Phnom Penh Post]

However, the country’s exports of garments, footwear and travel goods (GFT) saw for the first nine months of this year a drop of nearly 18 percent, compared to the same period last year, according to the latest trade

data of the General Department of Customs and Excise (GDCE).

GFT exports, Cambodia's biggest export earner, stood at USD 8.20 billion for the period January to September, marking a sharp decline from the almost USD 10 billion recorded for the the same period in 2022.

The decline is attributed to the international economic situation and the subsequent drop in demand, especially from the US and the European Union. [Khmer Times 2]

Indonesia elected member of UN Human Rights Council

(dql) Indonesia has been elected member of UN Human Rights Council for the 2024-2026 term after securing 186 votes from 192 UN member state in the election at UN General Assembly on October 10.

This marks Indonesia's sixth term on the council, after 2006-2007, 2007-2010, 2011-2014, 2015-2017, and 2020-2022.

Indonesia will commence its term of office in the council on January 1, 2024. [Antara]

Indonesia hosts inaugural High-Level Meeting of the Archipelagic and Island States (AIS) Forum

(dql) Hosting the 1st High-Level Meeting of the Archipelagic and Island States (AIS) Forum last week, Indonesian President Joko Widodo has called for unity and collaboration among AIS Forum participating countries in the face of a divided world and common challenges, such as rising sea levels, marine resource management, and marine pollution.

He further assured that Indonesia, as a maritime nation, would remain at the forefront in supporting the AIS Forum as an inclusive cooperation of archipelagic and island countries, reaffirming that his country upholds its commitment to providing grants to address climate change, develop innovations, and promote sustainable ocean governance.

The concluded with the Leaders' Declaration on the Solidarity of the Archipelagic and Island States Forum,

in which the the leaders of 32 AIS participating countries agreed to make the cooperation forum an international organization and to prioritize four areas of future cooperation, including climate mitigation and change, blue economy and ecotourism, marine plastic pollution, and good maritime governance. [Antara]

43 Malaysians caught in phone scam operation in Peru, rescued from human traffickers

(mw) Malaysian authorities have reported that 43 of their citizens were rescued by the police in Peru after falling victim to a human trafficking syndicate involved in a fraudulent scheme known as the "Macau scam." This deceptive scheme is believed to originate from criminal organizations in Taiwan and China, where scammers impersonate banks or public officials to deceive individuals into revealing their personal banking information or transferring money to a third-party account. [Associated Press]

The rescued victims are now safe and will soon be repatriated to Malaysia. Details regarding the circumstances of their involvement with the syndicate or how they ended up in Peru have not been disclosed.

It's important to note that this incident is part of a broader issue where individuals from Malaysia and other countries are enticed by appealing job offers in Southeast Asian nations but are subsequently coerced into participating in various fraudulent activities, including online romance scams and cryptocurrency schemes.

Rise in piracy incidents in Gulf of Guinea, Singapore Straits raises concerns

(lb/lm) The ICC International Maritime Bureau (IMB) has reported a rise in piracy and armed robbery incidents against ships in the Gulf of Guinea and the Singapore Straits. In the first nine months of 2023, there were 99 reported incidents, up from 90 the previous year. In the Gulf of Guinea, there were 21 reported incidents, compared to 14 in the same period in 2022. In the Singapore Straits, there were 33 reported incidents, up from 31 in 2022. These incidents primarily involved vessels being boarded, with crew members taken hostage and threatened. [G Captain]

Tougher to articulate Singapore's national interests amid US-China rivalry, says new S R Nathan Fellow

(lb/lm) Singapore is facing growing challenges in defining its foreign policy interests in the midst of escalating geopolitical tensions, particularly between the United States and China, as highlighted by Joseph Liow, the 13th S R Nathan Fellow for the Study of Singapore. Speaking at the Institute of Policy Studies' 13th IPS-Nathan Lecture Series on "Navigating Uncertainty: Our Region in an Age of Flux," Liow emphasized the importance of Singapore not taking sides in this rivalry and instead focusing on prioritizing its national interests. However, he noted that the specific nature of these interests in relation to major powers has become less clear. [The Straits Times]

Liow underscored the need for policymakers to continue communicating these issues to the public, as Singapore increasingly finds itself caught between the United States and China. He also highlighted the significance of Singapore maintaining strong relations with both powers, enhancing its value proposition, and preparing for the growing pressure in this challenging geopolitical environment.

EU Election Delegation may be sent but Bangladesh must pay for costs

(ps/lm) The European Union (EU) is willing to send a small team to observe Bangladesh's upcoming general election, but Dhaka will be responsible for covering their expenses, according to Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen. This announcement came hours after a delegation from the ruling Awami League met with the EU envoy to Bangladesh, Charles Whiteley, who informed Momen that a four-member team of EU election observers would be arriving in November, with their stay concluding after the polls. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

The Bangladeshi foreign minister expressed limited enthusiasm for this arrangement, emphasizing that what Bangladesh needed were voters, not observers. Notably, Momen pointed out that most countries did not have election monitoring, including the United States, and it was somewhat ironic when individuals from such countries expressed an interest in observing elections in Bangladesh.

The decision not to send a full delegation was preceded by open criticism by the EU on the political and human rights situation in Bangladesh. An EU

parliament resolution on this matter and specifically defending Odhikhar – a human rights organization internationally known for documenting thousands of alleged extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in Bangladesh – was passed in September.

On October 15, the founder and secretary of Odhikar, Adilur Rahman Khan, along with rights activist ASM Nasiruddin Elan, were granted bail after spending over a month in prison in connection with a cybercrime case. An appeal hearing for their sentence is currently pending. Simultaneously, the state has lodged an appeal seeking to increase the activists' penalties. [Voice of America]

Cambodia-China: Cooperation agreements signed

(dql) On October 17 Cambodia and China have signed eights agreements on cooperation in various fields, including on establishing a Cambodia-China railway cooperation mechanism, promoting a project for bilateral production capacity and investment cooperation, and forming a working mechanism for the implementation of the cooperation plan for the joint construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road as well as working together in investments in green and low carbon development.

The agreements were signed during a meeting between Cambodian Prime Minister Dr. Hun Manet who is in Beijing to attend the Belt and Road Forum, and Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang. [Khmer Times 1]

Meanwhile, Chinese construction and engineering company China Machinery Engineering Corporation (CMEC) announced on the same day that it is planning to co-invest with two Cambodian companies to total of about USD 3 billion in the energy sector in the Southeast Asian country over the next ten years.

The announcement was made by CMEC Chairman Wang Bo who met Manet on the sidelines of the Belt and Road Forum. [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia-Myanmar: Former Prime Minister Hun Sen ready for fresh peace mission

(pm/dql) In a meeting with Japan's special envoy for national reconciliation in Myanmar Yohei Sasakawa on October 12 in Phnom Penh, former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen affirmed his readiness to visit Myanmar together with Sasakawa to seek dialogue with the ruling Myanmar junta in an attempt bid to broker peace.

A date for the joint peace mission is yet to be agreed on.

Last year, when Cambodia was ASEAN chair, Hun Sen visited Myanmar in his capacity as Prime Minister and met with junta leader Min Aung Hlaing several times. However, the meetings yielded no breakthrough for peace as the junta refused to commit to ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus for peace, including an immediate cessation of violence.

Sasakawa, for his part, was also involved in Myanmar's peace process before the coup, serving as a witness to the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement in 2015. Known to have good relations with junta leader in Aung Hlaing, he brokered a meeting in Thailand in March 2022 with leaders of several Myanmar ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) as the regime attempted to revive the peace process. But tangible results were achieved. [The Irrawaddy]

Cambodia-Vietnam: Cooperation in combatting crime reaffirmed

(dql) Cambodia and Vietnam have reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing security cooperation to fight crime during a meeting between Cambodia Minister of Interior Sar Sokha and Vietnamese Deputy Minister of Police Lt Gen Loeung Tam Kwong on October 12 in Phnom Penh.

Both sides agreed to cooperate especially in the areas of drug offenses, smuggling of merchandise, human trafficking and illegal cross-border gambling. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia-Indonesia: Cooperation in supporting disabled people dicussed

(dql) In a bilateral meeting held on October 13 in Phnom Penh, Cambodian Secretary of State for the Ministry of Social Affairs Em Chan Makara and her Indonesian counterpart Tri Rismaharini discussed

social support for disabled people and ways to strengthen cooperation between their countries.

Em Chan Chakara asked for help from Indonesia in providing experts to train Cambodian disabled artists, with Tri Rismaharini responding that her country was ready to support this request. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia-Brazil: Expansion of trade cooperation discussed

(dql) On October 12, Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet met with Brazil Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira in Phnom Penh to discuss ways to expand cooperation to boost trade and the flow of tourists between the two countries.

Both sides agreed to work together in the tourism and agriculture sectors as well as intensity people-to-people contacts among other numerous issues of common interests. [Khmer Times]

Chinese vice premier meets Volkswagen exec as VW sales slow

(ga) Chinese Vice Premier Ding Xuexiang met with the Chairman of Volkswagen's Board of Management, Oliver Blume, on October 11 in Beijing. Ding promised that China would provide a better regulatory environment for foreign companies to do business in China, and Blume promised to continue to increase its investments in China.

The meeting comes as Volkswagen, among other car manufacturers, has struggled to maintain sales in the Chinese market. On October 13, Volkswagen announced that its sales in China had declined by 5.8 percent in the quarter from July to September, although this had been offset by stronger sales in North America and Europe. Other German car makers saw similar declines in their China sales during the quarter.

Overall, car sales have begun to rise after declines in July in China. Despite this, the Chinese market has proved more difficult for foreign car companies as demand has slowed over the last few years and Chinese car companies have proven more competitive on price. [Xinhua] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

US considering new restrictions on AI chip sales to Chinese companies

(ga) Reuters exclusively reported on October 12 that the US is looking at "closing a loophole that gives Chinese companies access to American artificial intelligence chips through units located overseas."

These restrictions would add to the existing technology transfer restrictions which were placed on US companies and entities last year in order to prevent the Chinese military from receiving advanced American semiconductors or other computer chips which might help in military modernization [see AiR No. 41, October/2022, 2].

The mooted solution for the "loophole" is to prevent the sale of these chips to any Chinese companies, whether or not they are operating in China, in order to prevent the chips from being bought in third countries and shipped back to China.

The US is struggling to regulate access to chip technology as there are a number of ways to remotely access the capabilities provided by these chips. [Reuters]

On October 13, the Chinese Foreign Ministry rejected the plans, accusing the US of "politicizing, instrumentalizing and weaponizing trade and tech issues," and "seeking decoupling to serve political agenda [sic]." [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs]

China and Israel relations decline in wake of Israel-Palestine conflict

(ga) China began to clarify its position on the conflict between Israel and Palestinian group Hamas last week, leading to statements of concern from Israel's government.

On October 8, a day after the fighting between Israel and Hamas began, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that "China is deeply concerned over the current escalation of tensions and violence between Palestine and Israel. We call on relevant parties to remain calm, exercise restraint and immediately end the hostilities to protect civilians and avoid further deterioration of the situation".

The Ministry also highlighted Chinese support for the creation of a Palestinian state to resolve the conflict. [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1] [The Diplomat]

In response to these comments, a senior official at Israel's embassy in China said that Israel was disappointed that there was not "stronger condemnation" of Hamas's attacks by China, sentiments which were echoed by Israel's Foreign Ministry on October 13. [DW] [Reuters]

On October 13, the Chinese foreign ministry further clarified in a separate statement China's position, stating that "China opposes acts that harm civilians and condemns violation of international law", and that "China calls on all parties to exercise restraint…". [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2]

China has refused, however, to condemn Hamas for initiating the attacks, which has put it under fire from Israel and its allies internationally. [SCMP]

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi specifically said in a statement that Beijing believes that the "root cause" is "the long delay in the realization of Palestinians' aspiration to establish an independent state and failure to redress the historical injustice" they've faced. [SCMP]

Wang emphasized that China supports a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. To that end, he said that China is calling for international peace talks to take place through the United Nations. [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2] [SCMP]

Wang Yi also confirmed that China would send a special envoy to the Middle East, Zhai Jun, to "visit relevant countries in the region to make active efforts for the cessation of violence and the de-escalation of the situation", in reference to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. [SCMP]

Zhai has reportedly made phone calls to officials in Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Israel, and Saudi Arabia to try to diplomatically resolve the conflict and start peace talks. [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2] [SCMP]

China has been heavily involved in diplomacy in the Middle East for the last year, with meetings between President Xi Jinping and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in June, as well as involvement in negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in March [see AiR No. 11, March/2023, 2]. [DW]

EU foreign affairs representative visits Beijing, sets stage for China-EU trade summit

(ga) Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, visited Beijing from October 12-14 for the 12th round of China-EU High-level Strategic Dialogue. Borrell met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi while in Beijing. [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1] [Reuters]

Ahead of the meeting, the Chinese foreign ministry noted that 2023 is the 20th anniversary of China's Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with the EU, and stated that China expected Borrell's visit to "contribute to the sound and steady growth of China-EU relations, lay the ground for future high-level interaction and invigorate joint response to global challenges and efforts for global peace and security". [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2]

Tensions between China and the EU on trade have been very high recently, with the EU investigating subsidies to China's electric vehicle manufacturers and rumored probes into wind turbines from China. [SCMP]

At the start of Borrell's trip on October 12, the South China Morning Post reported that the EU is planning to "investigate overcapacity in China's steel sector", which could lead to significant tariffs placed on Chinese steel and aluminum by the EU. [SCMP]

The putative investigation and subsequent tariffs are rumored to be part of an agreement between Brussels and Washington to initiate tariffs on China in exchange for US tariffs on EU steel and aluminum being listed, set to be announced on October 20 when US President Joe Biden hosts European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel. [SCMP]

On October 13, Borrell said that the EU is committed to maintaining its bilateral relations with China in a "constructive and responsible manner". [Reuters]

Borrell warned China that trade deficits may lead the EU to decrease its trade links with China: "de-risking may indeed accelerate far more than is good, as public opinion will increase its pressure on political leaders to disengage more from China". The EU has a USD 426 billion annual trade deficit with China. [Reuters]

At their conference, Borrell and Wang Yi discussed their sides' respective positions on the conflict between Israel and Hamas, as well as the possibility of Chinese efforts to bring Russia to the negotiating table with Ukraine. [Reuters]

Wang Yi said that his talks with Borrell were "comprehensive, candid and friendly" and expressed concern that the EU should avoid "protectionist" approaches to trade. [Reuters]

The visit by Borrell was intended to pave the way for a China-EU summit before the end of the year. [Reuters]

Australian journalist returns home from China after detention

(ga) Australian business television anchor and journalist Cheng Lei, who was detained in China for over three years on charges of sharing state secrets with a foreign government, returned to Australia on October 11.

Cheng was a television anchor for Chinese state television channel CCTV before being detained in August 2020.

Cheng's release is seen as connected to the China-Australia bilateral relationship, which was under strain at the time of her arrest as Australia was calling for investigations into China's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic and has recently seen gradual improvements.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has announced that he is planning to visit China this year. [Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs] [NBC] [NPR]

China and Kazakhstan share information on citizens, enact visa-free travel

(ga) Last week Kazakhstan's Senate passed a bill which was passed by its lower legislative house in September, putting into effect a system of information sharing on citizens between Kazakhstan and China to prevent dual citizenship and facilitate visa-free travel. [SCMP] [see AiR No. 39, September/2023, 4]

The information shared under the agreement about citizens will include the "name, date and place of birth, photograph, identification issuing authority and citizenship status", as well as entry and exit records of citizens looking to travel to or settle in either country.

The introduction of this bill directly impacts Chinese Uyghur Muslims from the Xinjiang region, which borders Kazakhstan, as many Uyghurs have moved to

Kazakhstan and obtained citizenship there to avoid persecution and detention in China.

Applicants for citizenship in Kazakhstan from China have faced and will continue to face difficulties under this agreement, which allows for greater scrutiny by both governments of the individuals looking to move from one country to the other.

According to Kazakhstan's Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Igor Lepekha, both countries wanted to crack down on dual citizenships, which are illegal in both countries, but China required that citizen information be exchanged in order to create visa-free travel from Kazakhstan to China.

Proponents of the agreement have suggested that information sharing will prevent international crime such as smuggling. [SCMP]

Kazakhstan's President, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, arrived in Beijing on October 17 as part of his involvement in this week's Belt and Road Forum.

In Beijing Tokayev met with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who expressed desire to strengthen cooperation on investment, increase agricultural imports from Kazakhstan, and increase the scale of freight transportation through Kazakhstan. [Reuters]

China, India hold 20th round of military talks on border standoff; no indication of clear breakthrough

(hp/lm) Chinese and Indian military officials held talks on October 9-10 near the disputed Himalayan border, pledging to resolve the long-standing border dispute 'as soon as possible.' This meeting marked the 20th round of commander-level talks and took place on the Indian side of the Chushul-Moldo border meeting point. While the meeting emphasized the need to maintain peace and tranquility along the border, it did not yield a specific timeline for resolving the dispute.

The new round of discussions comes over two months after the 19th round of military talks in August [see AiR No. 34, August/2023, 4], during which India demanded access to all old patrolling posts along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). In the same month, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised the border issue with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS summit. Modi emphasized the importance of respecting the LAC as a crucial step towards normalizing India-China relations. [The Indian

Express] [Hindustan Times] [Reuters] [South China Morning Post]

Chinese Vivo executive among four people arrested in India as part of money laundering case

(lm) India's Enforcement Directorate (ED) on October 10 arrested four executives of Chinese smartphone maker Vivo, including one Chinese national, in connection with an ongoing case from 2022 related to money laundering allegations. The arrests come as a part of the ED's investigation into the company's financial activities and its alleged involvement in money laundering. Vivo has consistently denied the allegations and maintained its commitment to complying with Indian laws. [South China Morning Post]

Vivo, a subsidiary of China's BBK Electronics, is the second-largest smartphone brand in the Indian market, holding a 17 percent market share in shipments, just behind Samsung. In 2022, the ED had blocked 119 bank accounts linked to Vivo's Indian business, accusing the company of transferring approximately USD 7.5 billion to China illegally in an attempt to hide substantial losses in India and evade tax payments.

India's relationship with China has become increasingly strained since a deadly clash in 2020 between their forces along the disputed Himalayan border, resulting in casualties on both sides. In response, India has banned numerous Chinese apps, including TikTok, citing national security concerns. Additionally, India has tightened scrutiny of Chinese investments and business operations within its borders.

India’s reluctance to use Chinese yuan to buy Russian oil holding up cargo payments

(lm) The Indian government's reluctance to allow state-controlled refiners to pay for Russian oil imports with Chinese currency has led to a delay in payment for at least seven cargoes, with some payments overdue since the last week of September, according to sources. While the dispute over payment hasn't disrupted oil deliveries, it has created uncertainty for Indian refiners. [South China Morning Post]

India has become the top importer of Russian seaborne oil this year, benefiting from discounts on Russian crude after some Western countries suspended imports from Moscow due to the war in Ukraine. Indian refiners have been using yuan to pay for some oil from Russia, but the government is now uncomfortable with this arrangement given the strained relations between New Delhi and Beijing following a border clash in 2020.

This situation has led to a complex process for Indian refiners to settle payments, as they need to convert Indian rupees to Hong Kong dollars and then yuan to pay for the oil in yuan, incurring additional conversion costs of 2-3 percent compared to settling in United Arab Emirates dirhams, a process that adds an extra layer to the payment process.

Indian Prime Minister's unannounced visit to disputed border region ignites criticism in Nepal

(na/lm) Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to a Nepali border village, which has been claimed and occupied by India for decades as its own territory, has sparked criticism in Nepal. [The Kathmandu Post]

The so-called Kalapani dispute centers around the origin of the Kali River, defining the western border of Nepal and the Indian state of Uttarakhand. India claims the river originates from Kalapani, while Nepal asserts it begins from Limpiyadhura, leading to disagreements over territory and maps. Despite diplomatic efforts, a conclusive resolution has not been reached, and tensions have arisen periodically, with both countries producing conflicting maps.

Earlier, in June Indian Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Dahal engaged in discussions during Dahal's four-day visit to India. Both leaders expressed their commitment to resolving the boundary issues through established bilateral diplomatic mechanisms, highlighting the importance of strengthening the India-Nepal partnership. [AiR No. 38, September/2023, 3]

Against the backdrop of Modi’s recent visit to the region, lawmakers argued that the Indian premier had violated diplomatic decorum by visiting the territory without informing Nepal and demanded an explanation from the government for allowing the Indian prime minister to visit without prior approval. Some lawmakers labeled Modi's visit "unacceptable" and stressed the need for increased diplomatic efforts and engagement with India to address such issues.

India's External Affairs Minister meets with Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe

(lf) Three new MoUs were signed during a meeting between Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe and India's Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar on October 11. The meeting, which took place in Colombo, occurred on the sidelines of the 23rd Council of Ministers Meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which Jaishankar was present to attend.

Both men signed their nation to three new Memorandums of Understanding. The first concerned infrastructure, with Indian loan assistance scheme helping to build a number of new schools and learning institutions across Sri Lanka. The second concerned health, with a new surgical unit set to be built at Batticaloa Teaching Hospital. Finally, both countries will collaborate on dairy production to boost Sri Lanka's annual output. The two men also discussed regional and international issues, and celebrated 75 years of bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka, both of whom gained their independence a year apart from each other in 1947 and 1948 respectively.

This is Minister Jaishankar's second visit to Sri Lanka in 2023, signaling the growing relevance of the island to India. Although Sri Lanka's debt hangs over their bilateral ties, India has been the friendliest of Sri Lanka's major creditors, in an attempt to win the nation over from any Chinese external influence. [Daily Mirror] [NDTV]

In another area of their bilateral relationship, a ferry service between India and Sri Lanka was launched, easing transport between both nations. The service took off from Tamil Nadu's Nagapattinam in India to Kankesanthurai near Jaffna in Sri Lanka on October 14. Mr. Jaishankar called the ferries operations a "truly big step" in the bilateral ties between both states and will empower nationals from both states to easily commute for work and tourism purposes. [The Hindu]

Indian foreign minister given increased protection amid row with Canada over Sikh separatist's death

(hp/lm) The security cover for Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar has been upgraded to the maximum "Z"

category after "wanted" posters with his picture were displayed in Canada. [The Independent]

The posters, which labeled Jaishankar and other Indian officials as "enemies of Canada" and included the words "assassination" and "wanted," were erected by the pro-Khalistan group “Sikhs for Justice” outside a Sikh temple in Surrey. Apart from threats to important leaders of India, the posters also called out for a fresh unofficial referendum on whether a separate state for Sikh should be carved out of India. [Business Today] [Hindustan Times]

This development comes amid an unprecedented diplomatic dispute between India and Canada, which escalated when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made "credible allegations" suggesting Indian government involvement in the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June. India has denied any involvement in the assassination of Nijjar, a prominent activist who was listed as a wanted terrorist by New Delhi, and called for specific information to cooperate with an investigation. [AiR No. 39, September/2023, 4].

Speaker of Indian Parliament protests European Union’s resolution on Manipur

(hp/lm) The Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of India's Parliament, conveyed New Delhi's protest regarding a resolution by the European Parliament on the Manipur issue to European Union Vice-President Nicola Beer on the sidelines of the G20 Parliamentary Speakers Summit.

Speaker Birla emphasized India's sovereignty and protested against the European Parliament's proposal on India's internal issues. He stressed that each nation and parliament is sovereign, and internal matters should not be discussed by others."

In July of this year, the European Parliament passed a resolution condemning the nationalistic rhetoric used by prominent members of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the current ruling party at the center in India, in relation to the Manipur violence. India had rejected the resolution as “unacceptable.” [Hindustan Times] [Deccan Herald]

Indonesia, Malaysia vow to resolve Ambalat Border dispute

(ss/mw/lm) Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and Malaysian Prime Minister Da'to Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Hasan have pledged to resolve the Ambalat Block-related border dispute between their countries.

The pledge was made during the the 43rd Malaysia-Indonesia General Border Committee meeting, held in Jakarta on October 12 and attended by Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto and his Malaysian counterpart Da'to Seri Utama Haji Mohamad bin Haji Hasan.

Located in the Sulawesi Sea off the east coast of Borneo and lying the east of the Indonesian province of North Kalimantan and to the south-east of the Malaysian state of Sabah, the Ambalat Block is a sea block covering an area of 15,235 square kilometers. It is claimed by both Indonesia and Malaysia. [Antara News]

Furthermore, it was announced that 14 joint guard posts in the Indonesia-Malaysia border areas have been reactivated to fight cross-border crimes, with seven of them located on Indonesian and seven on Malaysian soil. According to Subianto, the two sides also explored opportunities to establish additional joint guard posts.

The 44th GBC Malindo will take place in Malaysia next year. [New Straits Times]

French Naval Group presents submarine proposal to Indonesia

(ss) French shipbuilder Naval Group has submitted an updated “Scorpene Evolved” submarine proposal to Indonesia, featuring a full Lithium-Ion Batteries (LIBs) configuration in its propulsion system.

This comes after in February last year, Indonesia and France already signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for two locally-made Scorpene submarines.

The Scorpene Evolved offers extended operational capabilities, with a total endurance of 80 days, an operational range exceeding 8,000 nautical miles, lower indiscretion rates, and a sustained top speed.

The Scorpene Evolved package includes the Black Shark and F21 heavy-weight torpedoes, as well as the integration of the MBDA Exocet SM39 submarine-launched cruise missile. Discussions between Jakarta

and Paris may also involve the procurement of the D19 multirole Unmanned Underwater Vehicle (UUV).

This solution signifies advancements in submarine technology and potential future collaboration between France and Indonesia in the field of energy-related military and commercial technologies. [Naval News]

Japanese companies pessimistic on Chinese investments

(ic) On October 12, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China released the results of a survey on the investment outlook of Japanese companies into China. The survey, conducted from September 8-22, documented responses from 1,400 firms. 25 percent indicated that they had abstained from any new investment into China over 2023; 22 percent indicated slower investment, 37 percent indicated a business-as-usual investment pace, and 16 percent indicated that they were ramping up investment. [Bloomberg] [Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry in China, in Japanese]

On the same day, Reuters separately released the Reuters Corporate Survey, conducted for Reuters by Nikkei Research between September 27-October 6. Among those surveyed, 52 percent expect poor Chinese economic performance to persist into 2025, and only 5 percent believe the economy will recover by Q1/2024. [Reuters]

Japan is China's second largest source of foreign direct investment, and a confluence of factors have caused investment interest to slow. These range from the broader effort to de-risk being undertaken by Japan's main strategic allies, to the ongoing diplomatic fracas between the two nations regarding the Fukushima nuclear wastewater release, to an escalation of ever-present concerns over Chinese territorial claims.

The lack of investment interest has a cyclical effect, as it dampens China's ability to recover economically which further reduces incentives for Japanese companies to invest in China.

Japan grateful for South Korean support evacuating nationals from Israel

(ic) Amidst hectic efforts by countries worldwide to evacuate their nationals from Israel in anticipation of the ground offensive into Gaza, Foreign Minister

Kamikawa Yoko thanked her Korean counterpart Park Jin over the phone on October 15 for Korean aid in evacuation.

On October 14, a military plane from Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International Airport landed at Seoul Air Base carrying 163 South Koreans, 51 Japanese and 6 Singaporeans. [Asia News Network]

Overall, relations with South Korea have been at a relatively high point for Japan. A survey conducted between August and September indicated among 1,000 Japanese respondents that 37.4 percent had a "good" opinion of Korea, the highest since the surveys were first conducted in 2013. [Asahi Shinbun]

Evacuation efforts are still ongoing as there remain about 1,000 Japanese nationals in Israel and Palestine as of October 14. [Japan Today]

Indian troops a week out after new term, says Maldives president-elect

(lm) Mohamed Muiz, the president-elect of the Maldives, has reaffirmed his campaign promise to remove Indian military personnel from the archipelago state. He stated that he would initiate the process following his inauguration on November 17, claiming that the people had expressed their desire for the removal of foreign military presence. [Al Jazeera]

This move is seen as a significant development in the geopolitical rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean region. Outgoing President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who was elected in 2018, faced allegations from Muiz that he allowed India an unchecked presence in the Maldives. Solih argued that the Indian military's presence was for building a dockyard under an agreement between the two governments and would not violate Maldives' sovereignty. The number of Indian troops in the Maldives remains undisclosed, leading to suspicion and rumors due to the secrecy surrounding the agreement.

Laos-Vietnam: Agreement on forestry cooperation signed

(dql) Laos and Vietnam have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in preventing violations in the forestry sector for 2024-2025.

Under the agreement, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Central Highlands province of Kon Tum and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry of Laos's Attapeu province will deepen their cooperation and coordination in exchanging information, knowledge and experience to control and prevent violations in this field. They will also work together to prevent and fight forest fire along the borderline.

Further, each side committed in the MoU to continuing to strengthen inspection and strictly monitore the export and import of forest products and wild species, while sharing information and coordinating in solving arising issues.

The two sides also agreed to strengthen close coordination in implementing dissemination and education activities in a bid to raise public awareness on forest resource protection and biodiversity conservation, as well as in inspecting and preventing violations of exploitation, trade, and transportation of forest products in border areas. [Vietnam+]

Laos-China: International cold-chain train services route launched

(dql) On October 16, a cold-chain freight train that carried fruits and vegetables from China's Yunnan Province to Laos' capital Vientiane marked the launch of international cold-chain train services on a China-Laos route. [Xinhua]

Malaysia, Thai Prime Ministers vow to strengthen bilateral trade, border growth

(mw/lm) Thailand and Malaysia are planning to enhance their economic collaboration, with a focus on boosting bilateral trade and fostering growth along the Thai-Malaysian border. This initiative follows a meeting between Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim, held in Putrajaya. [PMO.GOV.MY]

During the meeting, the leaders discussed various areas of mutual interest, emphasizing their commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation for the shared growth and prosperity of both nations. They proposed deeper collaboration in the agricultural and food sectors, particularly regarding halal food products.

To materialize their cooperation, both leaders agreed to establish a Task Force Group that will focus on areas of mutual interest, including tourism. They also explored the possibility of setting a new bilateral trade target, as Thailand and Malaysia are currently the top trading partners within ASEAN. Improving border connectivity and trade ties was identified as a top priority to strengthen their trade relations. [The Thaiger]

Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) arrests 37 Vietnamese fishermen for illegal fishing off Mersing waters

(mw) The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) detained thirty-seven Vietnamese fishermen for illegal fishing in Mersing waters. The encounter took place approximately 15.1 nautical miles northeast of Pulau Aur. The fishermen, aged eighteen to sixty-six, lacked valid identification documents, and their vessels had no permits for fishing in Malaysian waters.

The MMEA also seized 4,000 liters of diesel and 13,000 kg of catch worth RM2.5 million ($ 596,574). The case is under investigation, citing the Fisheries Act 1985 and Immigration Act 1959/1963. [The Star]

Singapore PM Lee: Singapore-Johor relations have grown under Johor Sultan’s leadership

(mw) Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong praised the strengthening relationship with Johor under Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar's leadership during a dinner at the Istana. They discussed key projects like the Johor Bahru-Singapore Rapid Transit System (RTS Link) and a possible Johor-Singapore special economic zone.

The RTS Link will enable swift commuting between Johor Bahru and Woodlands North by the last quarter of 2026. A task force has been set up to explore the special economic zone, to be discussed at the Singapore-Malaysia Leaders' Retreat this month.

The leaders emphasized the historical and kinship ties between Singapore and Johor. Notable figures and officials from both sides attended the dinner, where they explored potential collaborations. [Straits Times]

Malaysian Prime Minister expresses unwavering support for Palestinian people in call with Hamas

(lm) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim held a phone conversation with Ismail Haniyeh, the head of Hamas' political bureau, on October 16 to express Malaysia's unwavering support for the Palestinian people.

In a subsequent social media post, the Malaysian premier expressed his disagreement with Western pressure to condemn Hamas and called for an immediate end to the bombardment in Gaza, as well as the establishment of a humanitarian corridor in Rafah. He also called on Israel to abandon its adherence to the politics of dispossession, immediately cease hostilities with Hamas, and genuinely pursue a peaceful resolution to end the ongoing conflict. [The Straits Times]

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim also held a separate phone call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, where they discussed the latest developments concerning Palestine and Israel. [PMO.GOV.MY]

In related developments, Malaysia's education ministry has decided to withdraw its participation from this year's Frankfurt Book Fair, citing accusations that the event's organizers are taking a pro-Israel stance amid the ongoing conflict between Israeli and Palestinian forces. The Frankfurt Book Fair, known as the world's largest trade fair for books, had announced plans to make Jewish and Israeli voices "especially visible" at this year's edition. Malaysia's education ministry stated that it will not compromise with Israel's actions in Palestine, which it views as a violation of international laws and human rights. [The Straits Times]

Mongolia-France: Deal on lithium exploration signed

(ap) Mongolia and France have signed a lithium exploration deal under which the French government will invest USD 420,000 to explore a basin in Mongolia that is believed to rich in lithium.

The agreement was signed during Mongolian President Ukhnaagiin Khurelsukh's three-day visit to France last week and comes as Paris is intensifying its efforts to acquire critical metals needed for its clean energy shift and – as part of it – the production of electric vehicles,

while Ulaanbaatar seeks to expand trade beyond its two big neighbors China and Russia.

It was one of several cooperation documents signed during the visit including agreements on the financing of projects for additional training for the Air Search and Rescue and for the supply of special firefighting vehicles, as well as on geological science and technical cooperation and on France's support for a loan for Mongolia to purchase a communication satellite from French company Thales Alenia Space.

During their meeting on October 13, the two presidents reaffirmed their commitment to realizing the objectives agreed on in the joint declaration of Mongolia and France in May, when Macron visited Mongolia. Special attention was paid to the implementation of major strategic projects and programs and to "increasing investment and deepening cooperation in the sectors of economy, energy, communications, disaster management, agriculture, culture and education."

In a separate meeting between Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh and her French counterpart Catherine Colonna on the same day, the two countries reached agreement to elevate their relations to a strategic partnership and signed a road map towards this end. [Montsame 1] [Montsame 2] [Reuters]

Myanmar and Russia sign agreement to build a nuclear power plant

(ha) On October 11, Russian state-run nuclear corporation Rosatom and the junta's Ministry of Science and Technology signed an agreement to build a nuclear power plant. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar-China: Military leader orders swift implementation of Kyauk Phyu project

(wn) Military Council Chairman Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has ordered the implementation of the Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone project, China's largest project in Rakhine State, in a short period of time.

The project includes a deep-sea port, an industrial zone, and a high-end housing project. [RFA Burmese]

More than 10,000 Burmese arrested in Thailand in 2023

(wn) This year, over 10,000 Myanmar nationals were arrested for illegal entry into Thailand from January to September 2023 according to Thai officials.

Thai police apprehended a group of Myanmar nationals who had illegally entered Thailand on October 12. According to labor activists, the police inspected several cars and arrested more than 20 individuals. The arrests were made in Kanchaburi and Ayutthaya districts.

Due to the ongoing economic crisis in Myanmar, there has been a significant increase in the number of Myanmar nationals seeking employment opportunities abroad.

Thailand, being a neighboring country, has been the most popular destination for both legal and illegal entry. Since the coup, the number of illegal departures has increased even further, and there have been reports of frequent arrests of those attempting to leave the country.

Currently, of the five to six million Myanmar nationals in Thailand, only 1.6 million are working with legal documents. [VOA Burmese]

Nepalese President Paudel is to visit Germany in November

(na) Nepal's President Paudel is set to visit Germany next month upon a friendly invitation from his German counterpart. This announcement came during a special event in Nepal commemorating Germany Unity Day and the 65th anniversary of Germany-Nepal relations. [My Republica]

North Korea-China: Hundreds of defectors deported, raising concerns

(tms) China has reportedly deported approximately 600 North Korean defectors, forcibly sending them back to their home country following the conclusion of the Asian Games in Hangzhou.

Justice For North Korea, a local human rights group, disclosed that these defectors, detained in China's Jilin and Liaoning provinces, were repatriated against their will through cities near the North Korean border, such as Dandong and Hunchun.

This action marks China's first major repatriation of North Korean refugees since North Korea reopened its borders after extended COVID-19 lockdowns [see AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5].

South Korea's Unification Minister Kim Yung-ho expressed concern over the issue and stated that South Korea has repeatedly urged China not to forcibly repatriate defectors. The National Intelligence Service is working to verify the details. [Yonhap]

North Korea-Russia: Kim, Putin exchange letters, vow to strengthen ties

(tms) North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin exchanged letters, affirming their commitment to advancing bilateral ties and commemorating the 75th anniversary of their relationship, according to North Korea's state media KCNA.

This correspondence followed Kim's recent visit to Russia, where discussions encompassed military cooperation, North Korea's satellite program, and the situation in Ukraine [see AiR No. 38, September/2023, 3].

Kim expressed satisfaction with their discussions during the visit and pledged to elevate relations to new heights while wishing Putin success in resisting Western pressure over Ukraine.

Putin regarded their meeting as further evidence of progressing ties and stressed the importance of implementing agreements to enhance bilateral cooperation for the well-being of both nations and regional security and stability in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia. [KCNA] [Reuters]

North Korea-Israel: Pyongyang denies supplying Hamas with weapons

(ap) North Korea has rejected allegations that the government has supplied Hamas with weapons use in the attack against Israel, stating that the United States

are fabricating the claim to shift their responsibility from the conflict.

Analysts believe that the Hamas militants may be using North Korean F-7 rocket-propelled grenades, depicted in the North Korean Small Arms and Light Weapons Recognition Guide, published by Small Arms Survey research project. [Small Arms Survey]

The US National Security Council, meanwhile, said that it cannot confirm if North Korea supplies Hamas with rockets. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is scheduled to North Korea this Wednesday and Thursday week.

The visit comes on the heels of US claims that North Korea had provided Russia with 1,000 containers of munitions and military equipment for use in the war in Ukraine and only a month after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Russia [see AiR No. 38, September/2023, 3]. [VoA] [The Hill]

Chinese top diplomat meets with Pakistan foreign minister on sidelines of trans-Himalayan forum

(lm) On October 5, China's top diplomat Wang Yi met with Pakistani Foreign Minister Jalil Abbas Jilani during the 3rd China Xizang Trans-Himalaya Forum for International Cooperation. [Chinese Embassy in Hungary]

Afghan Taliban decline Pakistan's earthquake-related aid over controversial tweet

(tj/lm) The Taliban in Afghanistan have blocked earthquake-related relief assistance from Pakistan following a controversial social media post by Pakistan's Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar. [Voice of America]

The Pakistani government had announced it would send aid to the victims of a 6.3-magnitude earthquake in western Afghanistan, including winterized tents, blankets, food, medical supplies, and a medical team. However, Islamabad's relief efforts in response to the earthquake in Afghanistan took a controversial turn

when Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar posted a misleading message on social media platform "X" (formerly Twitter).

In the post, Kakar claimed that the aid being sent to Afghanistan was at the request of the Taliban government, despite the official Afghan government not having made any such request. Furthermore, the details about the items that Pakistan intended to send were inaccurately represented in the post.

This misleading social media post prompted the Taliban to refuse to accept the humanitarian aid offered by Pakistan. A senior Taliban official, speaking anonymously, confirmed that Kakar's post was the reason behind their decision. They criticized Kakar's statement as "irresponsible" and cautioned him to exercise greater care when making statements about Afghanistan.

The incident occurred in the context of already strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Allegations of militants based in Afghanistan carrying out attacks in Pakistan have heightened tensions between the two countries. Additionally, Pakistan's decision to set a deadline for all foreigners, including Afghan refugees, to leave the country has further complicated the relationship [see AiR No. 41, October/2023, 2].

Philippines Army considers acquisition of additional BrahMos missiles for coastal defense

(lb) The Philippine Army is considering acquiring additional BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles systems. While specific details were not disclosed, it was mentioned that this potential acquisition would be for the land forces.

BrahMos is a joint venture between India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya. The Philippines had previously signed a USD 374.96 million deal with New Delhi in January 2022 for the supply of three BrahMos batteries for the marines, which are expected to be delivered in the coming year.

In preparation for the deployment of these missile systems, the Indian Navy provided nearly 19 days of training to 21 Philippine Navy personnel in Nagpur starting in January 2023. The training focused on operating and maintaining the logistics package for the Shore-Based Anti-Ship Missile System (SBASMS) that

will be delivered to the Philippines, as confirmed by the Philippines Marine Corps. [Philippine News Agency] [The Hindu Business Line]

Philippines deploys another warship at West Philippine Sea

(lb) The Philippine Navy has deployed the BRP Davao del Sur (LD-602), a Tarlac-class landing platform, to strengthen its presence in the West Philippine Sea (WPS) amid Chinese aggression. The vessel will join the BRP Antonio Luna (FF-151), a guided missile frigate, in patrolling the region. These ships are tasked with interdicting foreign vessels engaged in illegal activities, such as collecting corals and other marine resources. The move follows a call by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff to fortify defenses in the area and protect Philippine territory. The AFP plans to procure additional naval ships, multi-role fighters, and drones, and to enhance the infrastructure on Philippine-occupied islands within the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). [Manila Times]

Philippines accuses China of 'dangerous maneuvers' in South China Sea

(lf/lm) The Philippine military has strongly condemned China's "dangerous and offensive" actions in the South China Sea after a Chinese navy ship closely shadowed and attempted to obstruct a Philippine navy vessel during a resupply mission last week. [Reuters]

The Philippines said the incident took place on October 13 near Thitu Island, which is part of the Spratly Islands chain and Manila's largest and strategically vital outpost in the South China Sea. China, for its part, has asserted sovereignty over the area near Thitu Island, which it refers to as Zhongye Island, and defended its presence there. [Al Jazeera]

In a separate incident on October 10, China's coast guard claimed to have chased a Philippine navy ship away from the disputed the Scarborough Shoal, which Beijing refers to as Huangyan Island, after it had ignored "multiple calls" to turn back. [Associated Press]

In response, Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) chief General Romeo Brawner, in an interview later on the same day, confirmed that a Navy ship was in the vicinity of the Scarborough Shoal on a maritime patrol mission but emphasized that the vessel continued on

its maritime patrol mission despite being challenged by the China Coast Guard. [Rappler]

Both incidents are part of a series of attempts by China to monitor and obstruct Philippine resupply missions to its personnel stationed on features controlled by Manila in the South China Sea. Both sides have had several encounters in recent months, including at Scarborough Shoal and at Second Thomas Shoal.

Philippines, United Kingdom commit to further boost defense ties

(lb) The Philippines and the United Kingdom have expressed their commitment to further strengthen their defense ties, focusing on their shared commitment to maritime law respect and the open Indo-Pacific. Annabel Goldie, a Minister of State at the British Ministry of Defence reaffirmed this commitment during her meeting with Lt. Gen. William Gonzales, Armed Forces Inspector General, at Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City. [Philippine News Agency] [CNN Philippines]

Canada to help Philippines track illegal fishing vessels using satellite technology

(lm) Canada has agreed to assist the Philippines in detecting illegal fishing activities using its satellite surveillance system. Canadian and Philippine officials signed the agreement during talks held in Ottawa, Canada, to discuss strengthening bilateral relations. [The Independent]

Illegal and unregulated fishing is a significant issue in the Philippines, including in disputed areas of the South China Sea, where Chinese vessels have been accused of disabling their location devices to evade detection. The agreement grants the National Coast Watch Center of the Philippines access to data from Canada's "Dark Vessel Detection System," which utilizes satellite technology to track illegal fishermen, even if they turn off their location-transmitting devices.

South Korea, US nuclear envoys to discuss North Korea's nuclear developments in Indonesia

(tms) The top nuclear envoys of South Korea and the United States are scheduled to convene in Indonesia for discussions regarding North Korea's nuclear and missile advancements, as confirmed by Seoul's foreign ministry.

Kim Gunn, the special representative for Korean Peninsula peace and security matters, will engage in bilateral discussions with his US counterpart, Sung Kim.

On a subsequent day, Kim will also meet separately with Japan's representative, Hiroyuki Namazu, with plans for trilateral talks.

Key topics on the agenda are concerns over potential arms agreements between North Korea and Russia, and North Korea's persistent efforts to strengthen its nuclear arsenal.

The meeting is particularly significant considering North Korea's recent constitutional pledge to bolster its nuclear capabilities, while Kim Jong-un continues to view trilateral security cooperation among Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo as a major threat. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Estonia: Presidents discuss defense industry cooperation, international stability

(tms) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Estonian President Alar Karis held discussions in Seoul, expressing their desire for enhanced collaboration in the defense industry and other sectors.

President Yoon emphasized their current active cooperation in areas like cybersecurity and e-government and proposed extending this collaboration to include research and development and the defense industry.

President Karis echoed this sentiment, highlighting the potential for cooperation in the defense and digital sectors.

Both leaders stressed the need to work together on the international stage to defend the rules-based international order and maintain peace while expressing concerns about military cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

President Yoon also outlined South Korea's vision to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan, promoting freedom, peace, and prosperity.

Following their meeting, they participated in a signing ceremony for a bilateral aviation deal aimed at boosting people-to-people and material exchanges between their nations. [Yonhap]

South Korea, Poland trade organizations join forces for Ukraine reconstruction projects

(tms) Trade organizations from South Korea and Poland have entered into a preliminary agreement to collaborate on reconstruction initiatives in Ukraine, as reported by the Korea International Trade Association (KITA).

The agreement, signed in Warsaw, brings together KITA and Poland's Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers (ZPP) to facilitate information sharing and pursue cooperative projects related to Ukraine's reconstruction efforts.

In the preceding month, a South Korean delegation held discussions in Kyiv, exploring the potential participation of South Korea in reconstruction endeavors estimated to be valued at around KRW 1,200 trillion (approximately USD 890.07 billion). [Yonhap]

South Korea-Chile: Broader economic collaboration explored on 20th anniversary of bilateral FTA

(tms) South Korea and Chile celebrated the 20th anniversary of their bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) by exploring opportunities for expanded collaboration in various economic and industrial sectors.

During an economic cooperation committee meeting in Seoul, around 100 officials from both nations discussed prospects for partnership in new areas such as supply chains, the digital economy, and renewable energy resources.

Since the FTA's signing, bilateral trade has surged more than fivefold, reaching approximately USD 8.3 billion in 2021, with Chile being South Korea's first FTA partner.

Both countries aim to strengthen their trade and cooperation by addressing non-tariff barriers and

adapting to evolving global dynamics, recognizing their complementary industry structures.

South Korea's Industry Minister Bang Moon-kyu and Chile's economic minister, Nicolas Grau, encouraged businesses to play a crucial role in advancing bilateral relations.

Further, South Korean Trade Minister Ahn Duk-geun held discussions with Grau to explore cooperation in supply chains for critical minerals and green energy resources and sought Chile's support for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Greece: Cooperation sought during prime minister visit

(tms) South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo has embarked on a visit to Greece with a dual agenda focused on promoting cooperation in advanced industries and garnering support for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo.

During a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis in Athens, Han highlighted the common values shared between the two nations, acknowledging Greece's historical support during the Korean War. He expressed his desire for expanded collaboration in advanced industries, renewable energy, and eco-friendly shipbuilding.

Han also sought Greece's backing for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan.

Mitsotakis echoed the importance of enhancing bilateral cooperation and welcomed South Korean advanced industry companies to enter the Greek market.

Han also extended his gratitude to Korean War veterans in Greece for their service during the conflict from 1950 to 1953. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Saudi Arabia: Industry collaboration with 17 new projects

(tms) South Korea and Saudi Arabia have reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing cooperation in multiple industry sectors, including automotive, biotechnology, and gaming.

During a meeting of the Vision 2030 Committee in Seoul, both nations agreed to pursue 17 additional projects alongside the 39 existing joint initiatives. These collaborations extend to areas like smart city development, bioengineering, and more.

The ministers also confirmed their intention to implement previously signed agreements, including those from Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to South Korea, where USD 30 billion worth of memorandums of understanding were established.

These initiatives aim to create new business opportunities for domestic companies in the Saudi market, bolstering Middle East exports. [Yonhap]

South Korea-UAE: Comprehensive economic partnership talks held

(tms) The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and South Korea have successfully wrapped up negotiations on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) aimed at strengthening their trade and investment ties.

In the first half of 2023, non-oil bilateral trade between the two nations reached USD 3 billion, reflecting a 21 percent increase from 2021.

Notably, South Korea played a significant role in constructing the USD 20 billion Barakah Nuclear Power Plant in Abu Dhabi, which commenced operations in April.

The UAE, known for its diverse CEPA agreements with various countries, continues to pursue a strategy of economic diversification. [Reuters]

In a separate development, the UAE and South Korea are in discussions to potentially increase their aviation links, however, concerns within South Korea's aviation industry remain. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Britain: Strategic defense talks held to enhance security collaboration

(tms) South Korea and Britain conducted strategic defense discussions on Monday to explore avenues for

reinforcing their bilateral security partnership, as reported by South Korea's defense ministry.

The Vice Defense Minister of South Korea, Shin Beom-chul, and his British counterpart, Annabel Goldie, held the second round of these dialogues in Seoul, following the inaugural session in the UK in July of the previous year.

The discussions included an evaluation of ongoing efforts to bolster bilateral defense and arms industry cooperation, particularly considering the 140th anniversary of their diplomatic relations.

Both parties agreed to intensify defense collaboration in a forward-looking manner and concurred that President Yoon Suk Yeol's upcoming state visit to Britain next month could further enhance their defense and security ties.

Goldie's presence in Seoul is part of her attendance at the three-day Seoul Defense Dialogue, an annual international security forum. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Croatia: Enhanced relations to forward-looking comprehensive partnership

(tms) South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, as part of his European tour, held a significant meeting with the Croatian Prime Minister in Zagreb to bolster the comprehensive strategic partnership between their countries.

This marked the first high-level official visit to Croatia in the 30 years since diplomatic relations were established.

During their encounter, both leaders agreed to elevate their relations to a "comprehensive future-oriented partnership," emphasizing shared values like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

The enhanced partnership will focus on the economy, sustainable development, science and technology, cultural and educational exchange, and security.

Han also sought Croatia's support for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo. In turn, Croatia expressed hope for continued cooperation in multilateral organizations. [Korea Times]

British Indo-Pacific Foreign, Commonwealth and Development minister makes three-day visit to Sri Lanka

(lf) The United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Minister for the Indo-Pacific Anne-Marie Trevelyan made a three-day visit to Sri Lanka, beginning on September 10, in commemoration of the 75 year bilateral relationship between Sri Lanka and the United Kingdom. Sri Lanka, then known as Ceylon, became an independent Dominion within the British Empire in 1948, before becoming a Republic in 1972. The minister visited the capital Colombo as well as the city of Jaffna for discussions with key Sri Lankan figures and politicians.

Ms. Trevelyan held a bilateral discussion with President Wickremesinghe in Colombo, where the two re-affirmed the friendship between both of their nations. Ignoring the nations' controversial colonial past, the two found common ground when discussing issues of climate change and humanitarian aid. The minister announced that the UK would be sending more patrol vehicles to Sri Lankan maritime authorities to help them patrol the island nation's ocean borders and protect security interests. They also briefly touched on a number of regional and international concerns as well as Commonwealth of Nations goals.

The minister's visit to Jaffna highlighted the UK's commitment to assist Sri Lanka in landmine clearance efforts, as the region's civilians are still threatened by deadly explosives which were laid during the nation's civil war from 1983-2009. The efforts to clear landmines are part of the UK's Conflict, Security and Stability Fund (CSSF).

The minister travelled to India following her Sri Lanka visit, with the two trips making up the whole of a good will visit from the United Kingdom's Foreign Ministry to two crucial South Asian nations, and Commonwealth states, who have a significant role to play in the United Kingdom's Indo-Pacific strategy. Holding a large diaspora of Sri Lankan's within their nation, UK diplomats are keen to maintain friendly relations with the island-nation going forward. [Daily Mirror] [Open Access Government] [Daily FT]

Tawain-US: TSMC receives extension for China sanction waiver

(dql) Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) has received a one-year extension to its exemption from US trade sanctions on China, allowing the world's largest semiconductor producer to continue acquiring advanced chip equipment for its operations there.

The extension makes it possible for the company to supply US chip equipment to the company's factories in China where [Asia Financial] [DigiTimes Asia]

US military jet flies over Taiwan Strait

(dql) On October 12, a US Navy P-8A Poseidon anti-submarine warfare (ASW) jet flew over the Taiwan Strait.

The US Navy's Seventh Fleet affirmed the jet was called the transit "operating within the Taiwan Strait in accordance with international law," and added that the move aimed at showing that the US is committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific. [Taiwan News]

Meanwhile, the Taiwanese defense ministry spotted 14 Chinese military aircraft and five naval vessels around Taiwan between early October 12 and early October 13, with one detected aircraft having entered Taiwan's southwest air defense identification zone (ADIZ). [Ministry of National Defense, Taiwan]

Taiwan-EU: President Tsai hails share values and economic cooperation

(jr) Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen attended the European Union Investment Forum (EUIF), jointly hosted by the jointly organized by the Ministries of Foreign and Economic Affairs and European Economic and Trade Office in Taipei on October 12.

In her opening address, Tsai emphasized common core values shared by Taiwan and Europe and pointed to a mutual trade volume that surpassed USD 75 billion for the first time in 2022, while cumulative direct investment by EU firms in Taiwan topped USD 57 billion as of August, accounting for more than 25 percent of total foreign investment in Taiwan and making the EU Taiwan's largest overseas investment source. She also highlighted increased investments in green energy in Taiwan.

As for investments of Taiwan's businesses in the European market, Tsai drew attention to Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company's planned

investment of USD 3.8 billion in a German plant as well as to the cooperation between Taiwan and Czechia in the fields of automotive industry, precision machinery and high-end laser equipment. [Office of the President, Taiwan] [Taiwan Today]

Taiwan-Japan: President Tsai meets Japanese lawmakers

(dql) Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen met with received a Japanese parliamentary delegation on October 11 in Taipei during which both sides reaffirmed their commitment to expanding the special partnership between Taiwan and Japan to make greater contributions to the Indo-Pacific.

Tsai further stressed that in the face of authoritarian expansion and challenges such as post-pandemic recovery and net-zero carbon emissions, Taiwan looks forward to continued cooperation with Japan to advance regional peace and prosperity.

The meeting was part of the delegation's visit to Taiwan on the occasion of the celebrations of Taiwan's National Day on October 10.

Led by Koichi Hagiuda, council secretary-general and chairman of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Research Council, the delegation consisted of members of the Japan-Taiwan Diet Members' Consultative Council. [Taiwan Today]

Taiwan-Nicaragua: Taipei lashes out against President Ortega

(dql) Taiwan's Foreign Ministry voiced harsh criticism against Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, calling him an "opportunist" dictator after his recent statement labelling Taiwan a province of China and saying the U.N. does not recognize Taiwan's sovereignty.

It accused Ortega of having become China's willing accomplice to support Beijing's efforts to undermine democracy in Central America and expand its influence in the region.

It further stressed that since he came to power in January 2007, Nicaragua has been provided with Taiwanese cooperation programs and financial aid that were extended although Ortega severed diplomatic relations in December 2021 to align with China [see AiR

No. 50, December/2021, 2]. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, in Chinese] [Taiwan News]

Belgian lawmakers visit Taiwan to discuss deepening of cooperation

(dql) A eight-member parliamentary delegation from Belgium is on a six-day visit to Taiwan this week. The group is led by Els Van Hoof of the Christian Democrats and Flemish party, the chair of the Chamber of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee and the Belgium-Taiwan Parliamentary Friendship Group.

The lawmakers are scheduled to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen, Legislative Speaker You Si-kun, Minister of Economic Affairs Wang Mei-hua, and Digital Minister Audrey Tang to discuss future cooperation on issues including human rights and supply chain resilience. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, in Chinese] [Focus Taiwan]

Lithuanian parliament speaker to visit Taiwan

(dql) The Lithuanian Foreign Ministry has confirmed Parliament Speaker Viktorija Cmilyte-Nielsen's visit to Taiwan from October 21-25 as part of her Asia tour which will lead her also to Japan from October 25-29.

The trip to Taiwan is aimed at deepening bilateral cooperation in IT and innovation.

Cmilyte-Nielsen will be accompanied by delegation that includes representatives of 14 Lithuanian companies, Lithuania Vice Finance Minister Mindaugas Liutvinskas, the Bank of Lithuania Centre for Financial Market Development head Lukas Jakubonis, and representatives from the Innovation Agency and the Lithuanian Business Confederation.

It is expected that two agreements on health cooperation and double taxation avoidance will be signed during her stay.

The visit comes as relations between Taiwan and Lithuania have deepened, after the Taiwan Representative Office and Lithuanian Trade Representative Office in Taipei were established in 2021 and 2022, respectively. [Taiwan News]

Lithuania adopted in July its Indo-Pacific strategy which “adheres to the One China Policy,” while stressing “that

status quo in the Taiwan Strait cannot be altered by military or coercive means. Peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is one of the most pressing geopolitical issues in international politics and a necessary pre-condition for security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lithuania]

Thai Prime Minister to discuss submarine wrangle during China trip

(lm) Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has announced plans to address the ongoing dispute regarding a Chinese submarine commissioned by Bangkok during his visit to China for the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand had agreed to purchase a S26T Yuan-class submarine from China in 2017 for USD 369 million, signifying the deepening ties between the two countries in the military asset supply. However, the project faced challenges in 2022 when Germany objected to the use of its MTU 396 diesel engine, categorized as a military-defense item. China's state-owned submarine producer, responsible for constructing the submarine under a government-to-government agreement, proposed a Chinese-made engine as an alternative, but the proposal was met with resistance from Thailand, possibly due to quality concerns.

During his visit to Beijing, Prime Minister Srettha is scheduled to hold meetings with China's President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Li Qiang, and the chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Zhao Leij. Discussions will revolve around reinforcing the Thailand-China comprehensive strategic partnership, enhancing cooperation in trade and investment, promoting connectivity, and strengthening people-to-people relations.

Thailand's Prime Minister visits Singapore to strengthen cooperation

(ak) Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin visited Singapore at the invitation of his counterpart Lee Hsien Loong. During the visit, the two leaders discussed strengthening cooperation in various areas, including renewable energy, the digital economy, fintech, and cybersecurity. [MFA Singapore]

They also reaffirmed the strong partnership between Singapore and Thailand and exchanged views on global and regional developments. Both leaders emphasized the importance of close cooperation within ASEAN, with a focus on initiatives like the Laos-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project (LTMS-PIP) to establish an ASEAN power grid.

Thailand seeks to expand cooperation with Brunei

(ws) During an official visit to Brunei, Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin engaged in discussions with His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam to address a range of bilateral and multilateral cooperation areas, resulting in their commitment to expand bilateral cooperation to cover new areas of trade and investment while working closely towards the regional goal of achieving regional economic integration. The newly identified sectors of interest involve the enhancement of food market and security, medical services, and high-capacity investments. [Bangkok Post]

UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy on LGBT+ Rights visits Bangkok

(lm) Lord Nick Herbert, the UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy on LGBT+ Rights, made a visit to Thailand from October 2-4. During his visit, Lord Herbert met representatives from the Royal Thai Government, civil society, and parliament, through a variety of activities. [GOV.UK]

Timor-Leste-UAE: Enhancing cooperation discussed

(dql) On October 16, José Ramos-Horta, President of Timor-Leste, met with Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in Abu Dhabi for bilateral talks.

During the meeting, both sides discussed opportunities to enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields, including economic, trade, and investment.

Sheikh Abdullah and Ramos-Horta also discussed cooperation in sustainability and climate change as the

UAE is preparing to host the Conference of the Parties (COP28). [WAM]

China-Vietnam relations enter new development stage, says Beijing's envoy to Hanoi

(lm) Chinese Ambassador to Vietnam, Xiong Bo, has highlighted significant achievements in the cooperation between China and Vietnam, stating that the two countries are entering a new stage of collaboration. He emphasized the stable and well-developed relations between the two countries, with increased high-level meetings, including General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam Nguyen Phu Trong's visit to Beijing last year. [VietnamPlus]

Ambassador Xiong Bo also noted the strengthening of investment, economic, and trade cooperation between China and Vietnam, emphasizing Beijing's position as Hanoi's largest trading partner and Vietnam's importance as China's largest trading partner in ASEAN.

Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, China's Chongqing cities vow to promote cooperation

(km) The Vice Chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee, Vo Van Hoan, welcomed the Deputy Mayor of China's Chongqing city, Zhang Guozhi, on October 13, to discuss ways to enhance cooperation between the two cities. Both officials agreed on the need to expand cooperative activities in various sectors, including economics, trade, agriculture, education, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges. (VietnamPlus)

While Ho Chi Minh City has established friendship relations with eight Chinese localities, including Chongqing, the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their cooperation.

Royal Australian Navy warship arrives in Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh city

(km) The Royal Australian Navy's helicopter frigate, HMAS Toowoomba, arrived in Ho Chi Minh City's Nha Rong wharf for a six-day goodwill visit to Vietnam, carrying 200 crew members. This visit is part of the

Indo-Pacific Endeavor (IPE) cooperation program and aims to strengthen friendship and mutual understanding between the two countries' navies, further enhancing Vietnam-Australia defense cooperation. During their stay, the Australian naval officers and crew will engage in exchanges and share experiences with their counterparts in the Vietnam People's Navy, focusing on healthcare on naval ships and rescue operations. [vovworld.vn]

Vietnam's Prime Minister encourages Amkor Technology's semiconductor manufacturing plan

(km) Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh encouraged Amkor Technology, a US-based company with global operations in semiconductor manufacturing, to support his country in its semiconductor industry development during a meeting with the company's CEO, Ji Rong Rip. (vovworld.vn)

Vietnam is focused on attracting global semiconductor firms and aims to train 50,000 personnel for the industry by 2030. Prime Minister Chinh requested Amkor's assistance in various areas and asked the company to expand its investment and promote chip production.

Announcements

Upcoming online events

18 October 2023 @ at 10 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Combating food insecurity and malnutrition: A national security imperative

Food security is vital for global security, however there is a lot of challenges destabilizing global food systems, supplies, and distribution. This discussion seeks to elevate global food insecurity as a key international security call and discuss possible ways for building more resilient, stable food and health systems that can withstand shocks and emerging security threats.

Learn more about the event at [Atlantic Council].

18 October 2023 @ 5:00 - 6:30 p.m. (GMT-7), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, USA

Asia-Pacific Digital Health Innovation: Technology, Trust, and the Role of APEC

There will be considered the topic of health systems in the Asia-Pacific region and the possibility of digital technologies to improve it. The speakers will analyze the ability of such technologies to develop health systems in details.

Learn more about the event at [Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies].

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

The Echidna Strategy: Australia's Search for Power and Peace

The discussion will be based on the findings of the book "The Echidna Strategy". There will be considered a bolder Australian foreign policy, with three goals: leadership in the Pacific; a much stronger relationship with Indonesia; and a regional order centred on a gathering of its great powers.

Learn more about the event at [Australian Institute of International Affairs].

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

Money for Madani? Anwar Ibrahim's Budget 2024

The topic of the webinar is Malaysia's Budget 2024. The questions will be raised are the ones arising from the principal accounting function of the federal budget, and the allocations, taxes, incentives, and policies. Some of the issues to which Budget 2024 addresses: (1) the continuing challenges of generating growth, stewarding public finance, increasing productivity and income, and promoting the energy transition and industrial transformation; (2) amelioration of the rising cost of living, foster equitable distribution, and assist vulnerable groups.

Learn more about the event at [ISEAS].

18 October 2023 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

The National Unity Government's Revenue Denial Strategy

The webinar will raise the political problems in Myanmar and consider the revenue denial strategy of National Unity Government and its impact on the Myanmar military.

Learn more about the event at [Stimson Center].

18 October 2023 @ 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Brookings Institution, USA

AI in employment and hiring: A fireside chat with EEOC Chair Charlotte A. Burrows

The event will concentrate on the topic of development and use of artificial intelligence (AI) in recruitment, hiring, retention, promotion, performance tracking, and dismissal. Also, there will be presented a new project directed to developing tools and resources to aid in the design and development of anti-racist, and non-discriminatory AI in areas that include employment, education, health care, and criminal justice.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

19 October 2023 @ 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

Digital Trade, Supply Chains, and Economic Security: Perspectives from Taipei and Washington

The conference will cover the issues critical to U.S.-Taiwan relations, including the new frontiers trade and the digital economy, building resilient supply chains, and preparing for and guarding against economic coercion.

Learn more about the event at [CSIS].

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

Weaker Claimants' Responses to China's Coercion in the South China Sea: A Comparative Analysis

The accent will be on the tensions causing by China in the South China Sea. The two key questions covering by the webinar are strategies employing by weaker nations to counter Chinese coercion and their effectiveness.

Learn more about the event at [ISEAS].

19 October 2023 @ 9:00 - 10:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

Cascading Disasters and Vulnerable Infrastructure in the Himalaya: Placing the Sikkim and Melamchi Floods in Context

The discussion is devoted to the Himalayan region, precisely – to the climate disasters taken place there. The experts will try to find out the best actions and policies to reduce vulnerability and promote resilience to these challenges. Also, there will be introduced new collaborative effort to develop monitoring and early warning processes for cascading disasters and extreme flow events in the Himalayan region.

Learn more about the event at [Stimson Center].

19 October 2023 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Institute for Economics and Peace (Oxford), UK

IFPSP 2024 Initial Conference

The main goal of the webinar is exploration of the impact of tensions both external to and internal to the institutions charged with supporting and maintaining our current world order.

Learn more about the event at [Institute for Economics and Peace].

19 October 2023 @ 11:30 a.m. (GMT+11), Institute for Economics and Peace, Australia

Humanitarian on the Fringes: New Innovations, Research and Systems

The discussion will reveal such aspects as: (1) palliative care in humanitarian crises; (2) creating a web-based collaborative public portal that would disseminate in real-time early warnings, risks analyses, and policy recommendations, produced by different human rights and humanitarian (I)NGOs, in relation to pending or ongoing conflicts; (3) the value and impact of international humanitarian law knowledge and training; (4) the emerging technology which can be harnessed for collective impact.

Learn more about the event at [Institute for Economics and Peace].

19 October 2023 @ 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. (GMT-7), Hoover Institution, USA

Deepening US-Taiwan Cooperation through Semiconductors

Taiwan is the world's leading innovator in and producer of semiconductors, and a trusted partner in critical supply chains, however its lack of diplomatic recognition and formal alliances contributes to its existential vulnerability to being invaded or otherwise involuntarily absorbed into the People's Republic of China (PRC). The event covers technological, economic and geopolitics issues.

Learn more about the event at [Hoover Institution].

23 October 2023 @ 2:00 - 3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Brookings Institution, USA

Why the Global South has a stake in dialogues on AI governance

Artificial intelligence (AI) plays a great role nowadays, it becomes applicable in the majority areas of our lives. The event will reveal the aspects of governance and advancing responsible and explainable AI frameworks that are trustworthy for individual users, organizations and government.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

23 October 2023 @ 4:00 - 5:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

Future of the U.S.-Israel Alliance at 75

The event is important not only for the United States and Israel but for the whole world since there will be considered challenges upcoming from the new act of aggression committed by the Islamic Republic of Iran against Israel, and the reaction of the international community, first of all – the United States.

Learn more about the event at [The Heritage Foundation].

23 October 2023 @ 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Book Talk | Putin's "Turn to the East" in the Xi Jinping Era

The event raises the issue of China-Russia relationship. There are two conclusions planned for discussion: Russia has increasingly joined with China in challenging the existing order in Asia, working to forge what Moscow calls a Greater Eurasian Partnership; and Russia and China have played a cat-and-mouse game of rival strategies that, on all fronts, have been difficult to reconcile.

Learn more about the event at [Wilson Center].

23 October 2023 @ 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. (GMT+9), Asian Development Bank, Japan

Virtual Conference on Promoting Digitalization for Green and Inclusive Growth in Developing Asia and the Pacific

The discussion will concentrate at digitalization's positive impacts on green and inclusive growth in Asia and the Pacific, including such factors as: strengthening of agriculture systems and food security by promoting efficiency and lower costs; improvement of energy grids and systems, supporting better energy distribution, reduced carbon emissions, and energy access.

Learn more about the event at [Asian Development Bank].

23 October 2023 @ 12:00 - 1:15 p.m. (GMT-4), Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, USA

Energy Policy Seminar: "The Future is Very Bright and Every Day is a Freaking Crisis: An Up-Close Look at the Clean Energy Transition"

The seminar will focus on the perspectives of, and possible challenges related to clean energy transition.

Learn more about the event at [Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs].

23 October 2023 @ 1:30 - 2:30 p.m. (GMT-5), Chicago Council on Global Affairs, USA

Roger Thurow on Nourishing and Preserving the Planet

The event will concentrate at global environmental problems and cover the issues of the future of global agriculture.

Learn more about the event at [Chicago Council on Global Affairs].

24 October 2023 @ 3:00 - 4:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Brookings Institution, USA

Implementing the 2022 National Defense Strategy: A conversation with Mara Karlin

The conversation will focus on the implementation of 2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States. Thus, there will be discussed the efforts of Department of Defense's, its resource allocation and prioritized objectives in practice. Also, attention will be given to the political issues in relationship with China.

Learn more about the event at [Brookings].

24 October 2023 @ 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

UK AI Summit: What can it achieve?

The event is dedicated to the development of artificial intelligence (AI). In addition, particular attention will be paid to the issue of transformative impact that AI could have on our economy, society and international affairs. At the same time, there will be considered risks artificial intelligence can bear and ways how states, private companies and civil society can manage them.

Learn more about the event at [Chatham House].

24 October 2023 @ 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Hudson Institute, USA

The Coast Guard's Vital Role in the Indo-Pacific with Admiral Linda L. Fagan

The discussion will be devoted to the aspect of strengthening the U. S. Coast Guard presence in the Indo-Pacific, training and conducting exercises with allies and partners throughout the region, and its growing role in combatting China's peacetime confrontation operations and protecting the marine environment and vital fisheries.

Learn more about the event at [Hudson Institute].

24 October 2023 @ 3:30 - 4:30 p.m. (GMT+1), Royal United Services Institute, UK

Webinar: Global Impact: A Conversation with Baroness Amos

This webinar will focus on the challenges and acts made to combat workplace discrimination and enabling international emergency relief efforts.

Learn more about the event at [Royal United Services Institute].

Recent book releases

Dan McQuillan, ***Resisting AI: An Anti-fascist Approach to Artificial Intelligence***, Bristol University Press, 160 pages, published July 15, 2022, reviewed in [LSE].

Florian Weigand, ***Waiting for Dignity: Legitimacy and Authority in Afghanistan***, Columbia University Press, 384 pages, published September 20, 2022. For a review, see [LSE].

Alexander V. Pantsov, ***Victorious in Defeat: The Life and Times of Chiang Kai-shek, China, 1887-1975***, Yale University Press, 736 pages, published March 21, 2023, with a review in [Foreign Affairs].

Calls

The Law and Society Association invites paper proposals for its 2024 Annual Meeting themed "Unsettling Territories: Tradition and Revolution in Law and Society," to be held on June 6-9, 2024. The deadline for abstract submission is October 24, 2023. For more information, see [Law and Society].

The **Association for Philosophy and Literature** and **Gettysburg College** invites paper proposals for the conference Borders/Freedom/Civility," to be held June 12-15, 2024. The deadline for abstract submission is December 21, 2023. For more information, see [Association for Philosophy and Literature].

Jobs and Positions

The **German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance (CPG)** seeks an **Office Manager** to be based in Bangkok, Thailand. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [CPG].

The **German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance (CPG)** seeks Asia **Weekly Regional Editors (South-, Southeast-, or**

East Asia) to be based in Remote Working. Applications are accepted until open until filled. More information is provided as [CPG].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Field Security Associate** to be based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **National Project Officer** to be based in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Data Analyst** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Legel Officer** to be based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Partnership and Development Effectiveness Associate** to be based in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Coordination & Information Management Officer** to be based in Dnipro, Ukraine. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Human Resources Assistant** to be based in Rwanda. Applications are accepted until October 27, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Programme Assistant** to be based in Cairo, Egypt. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks an **IT Operations Officer** to be based in Mali. Applications are accepted until October 27, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Senior Driver** to be based in Tunis, Tunisia. Applications are

accepted until October 30, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Senior Program Budget Associate**, to be based in Iran. Applications are accepted until October 23, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Consultancy**, to be based in Sweden and Remote Work. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks **Child Protection Specialist**, to be based in Abeche, Chad. Applications are accepted until October 25, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Foundation Phase Initiative Consultant**, to be based in Pretoria, South Africa. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Driver**, to be based in Sierra Leone. Applications are accepted until October 25, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks an **External Relations Officer**, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until November 2, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Technical Officer**, to be based in Maputo, Mozambique. Applications are accepted until November 2, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks an **Executive Associate**, to be based in Kathmandu, Nepal. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Program Management and Partnership Specialist**, to be based in Brasilia, Brazil. Applications are accepted until November 1, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Senior Advisor**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until November 1, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks an **Interpreter** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until November 25, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks an **Executive Associate** to be based in Mogadishu, Somalia. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Senior Human Rights Officer** to be based in Dakar, Senegal. Applications are accepted until October 25, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Political Affairs Officer** to be based in Dakar, Senegal. Applications are accepted until October 25, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Finance and Budget Assistant** to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until October 25, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Caseworker**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until December 12, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Russian/Ukrainian Healthcare Navigator**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until December 12, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Roving Operations Manager**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until December 12, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Program Officer**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until December 12, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks an **Employment Specialist**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until December 12, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **National Water Management Specialist**, to be based in Pakistan. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks an **Agrifood Systems Specialist**, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until November 12, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Reporting Specialist**, to be based in Multan, Pakistan. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks an **Office Associate**, to be based in Yaounde, Cameroon. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Gender and Climate Change Monitoring and Reporting Specialist**, to be based in Cairo, Egypt. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Consultant Monitoring & Knowledge Management**, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Programme Management Assistant**, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until November 10, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Data Coordinator**, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until October 31, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Donor Engagement and Resource Mobilization Specialist**, to be based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Applications are accepted until November 12, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** seeks a **Cooling and Cold Chain Project Management Specialist**, to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNEP].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Climate Mitigation Specialist**, to be based in Remote Work. Applications are accepted until November 7, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Human Resources Senior Associate**, to be based in Remote Work. Applications are accepted until October 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks an **Intern**, to be based in Bonn, Germany. Applications are accepted until November 3, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Project Manager**, to be based in Multiple locations. Applications are accepted until November 11, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Climate Adaptation Specialist**, to be based in Remote Work. Applications are accepted until November 7, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Climate Finance Specialist**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until October 31, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Senior Country Officer**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until November 3, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Procurement Assistant**, to be based in Washington DC, United States. Applications are accepted until October 25, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks a **Category Manager**, to be based in Sofia, Bulgaria. Applications are accepted until October 27, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **World Bank (WB)** seeks an **IT Officer**, to be based in Paris, France. Applications are accepted until October 27, 2023. More information is provided as [WB].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks a **Roster for Consultant Web Content Editors**, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [ILO].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks a **Human Resources Assistant**, to be based in Bangkok,

Thailand. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [ILO].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks a **Finance and Administrative Assistant**, to be based in Abuja, Nigeria. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [ILO].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks an **Administrative and Finance Assistant**, to be based in Bangkok, Thailand. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [ILO].

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)** seeks a **Senior Administrator**, to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [ILO].

The **College of Literature Science and the Arts at the University of Michigan** in Ann Arbor, Michigan is inviting applications for **Associate Professors** positions. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Michigan].

The **School of Science at Buena Vista University** in Iowa, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Agricultural Science** position. Application submission deadline is December 22, 2023. For more details, see [Buena Vista University].

The **University of Missouri Kansas City** in Missouri, United States is inviting applications for an **Adjunct Instructor** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Missouri Kansas City].

NYU Shanghai in China is inviting applications for **Tenure-Track Positions in Political Science**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [NYU Shanghai].

Syracuse University's School of Information Studies in New York, United States is inviting applications for an **Associate Teaching Professor or Professor of Practice in Information Studies** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Syracuse Universityk].

Syracuse University School of Architecture in New York, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in the History of Architecture** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Syracuse University].

University of Missouri in Missouri, United States is inviting applications for an **Associate or Professor of Economics** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Missouri].

Texas Christian University in Texas, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in Rhetoric and Composition** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Texas Christian University].

KIMEP University College of Social Sciences, Department of International Relations and Regional Studies in Kazakhstan is inviting applications for an **Associate or Professorial in International Relations** position. Application submission deadline is November 12, 2023. For more details, see [KIMEP University].

Department of Geography at Virginia Tech in Virginia, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Virginia Tech].

Duke Kunshan University in China is inviting applications for a **faculty position in international relations** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Duke Kunshan University].

Benedictine University in Illinois, United States is inviting applications for an **Adjunct Research Writing in Science** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Benedictine University].

Georgetown University in Qatar is inviting applications for an **Associate Professor or Professor in American Politics** position. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Georgetown University].

The **Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies at San José State University** in California, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor or Associate Professor in Chicana and Chicano Studies** position. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [San Jose State University].

The **Department of Politics in Whitman College** in Washington, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Politics** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Whitman College].

The **Department of Politics, Law and Society at Bryant University** in Rhode Island, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Political Science** position. Application submission deadline is November 1, 2023. For more details, see [Bryant University].

New York University Abu Dhabi in United Arab Emirates is inviting applications for a **Research Assistant in the Division of Science** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [New York University Abu Dhabi].

The University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in International and Global Studies** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [The University of the South].

Colby College in Maine, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Global Studies--Global Race and Inequality** position. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Colby College].

Colorado School of Mines in Colorado, United States is inviting applications for a **visiting Assistant Professor or Associate Professor of Energy Transition & Society** position. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Colorado School of Mines].

European Judicial Training Network is accepting applications for a **HR Partner** based in Brussels, Belgium until not specified. More information can be found at [EJTN].

European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association is accepting applications for a **Communications Manager** based in Brussels, Belgium until November 2, 2023. More information can be found at [ETNO].

Bundesverband Öffentlicher Banken Deutschlands is accepting applications for an **Office Manager** position based in Brussels, Belgium until not specified. More information can be found at [VÖB].

Specialised Nutrition Europe is accepting applications for a **Regulatory & Scientific Manager** position based in Brussels, Belgium until October 25, 2023. More information can be found at [SNE].

FuelsEurope is accepting applications for a **Policy Advisor** position ased in Brussels, Belgium until not

specified. More information can be found at [FuelsEurope].

European Stability Mechanism is accepting applications for a **HR Legal Counsel** based in Luxembourg until November 5, 2023. More information can be found at [ESM].

ThyssenKrupp AG is accepting applications for a **Senior Professional Packaging Policy** based in Brussels, Belgium until October 1, 2023. More information can be found at [ThyssenKrupp AG].

Council of Europe Development Bank is accepting applications for **Interns** based in Paris, France until November 5, 2023. More information can be found at [CEB].

European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless is accepting applications for a **Housing Policy Officer** based in Brussels, Belgium until November 3, 2023. More information can be found at [FEANTSA].

European Investment Bank is accepting applications for a **Senior Investment Officer** based in Luxembourg until October 27, 2023. More information can be found at [EIB].

Air University is accepting applications for a **Professor of Military and Security Studies** position based in Montgomery, Alabama until not specified. More information can be found at [Air University].

Air University is accepting applications for a **Professor of Strategy** position based in Maxwell AFB, Montgomery until not specified. More information can be found at [Air University].

University of Maryland Baltimore is accepting applications for an **Assistant Professor of International Relations** position based in Catonsville, Maryland until October 15, 2023. More information can be found at [University of Maryland Baltimore].

Lafayette College is accepting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Comparative Politics International Relations** position based in Easton until not specified. More information can be found at [Lafayette College].

Team:

Aida Pachedji (ap), Aimpavee Kiratiakkrasak (ak), Dan Kristian Rivera (kr), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Griffin Allan (ga), Hanzaw Aung (ha), Harshita Prashar (hp), Isabelle Chua (ic), Kanokphong Visetvoharn, Khin Ohnmar Moe (km), Lachlan Foster (lf), Lawrence Brenner (lb), Lucas Meier (lm), Maria Christina Wong (mw), Morten Strantzen (ms), Muhammad Hussain Amin (mha), Noor Afrose (na), Olena Krytska, Philipp Schüßler (ps), Phoo Wai Yan Myint (pm), Sai Laung Kam (slk), Saranya Setthi (ss), Tarazi Mohammed Sheikh (tms), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn), Worrawit Sirijintana (ws)

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