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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 Latvia's Proclamation Day, Monaco's National Day and Morocco's and Oman's Independence Day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: Former head of CITIC Bank sentenced to death with deprive

(ms) Former CITIC Bank president Sun Deshun was sentenced to death with reprieve on November 10 as part of the ongoing anti-corruption campaign in China's financial sector.

Sun was found guilty of abuse of office and accepting bribes worth more than USD 100 million from 2003-2019. The suspended death sentence imposed on Sun typically undergoes commutation to life imprisonment after a two-year reprieve.

Despite reports indicating that China holds the record for the highest number of annual executions, details regarding these sentences and the subsequent

executions are seldom disclosed to the public. [Hong Kong Free Press] [Xinhua 1]

Simultaneously, progress has been made in investigations related to three other prominent figures implicated in corruption.

Tian Huiyu, the former president of China Merchants Bank, confronted comparable accusations in a Chinese court, albeit on a lesser scale, and entered a guilty plea during the trial. Nevertheless, the proceedings have recently commenced, and a final verdict is likely to be delivered in the upcoming months. [Xinhua 2]

Although not from China's financial sector, Zhou Zheng, former deputy general manager of state-owned COFCO Group, China's largest food producer and distributor, was placed under investigation for suspected serious violations of discipline and laws, an often-used euphemism for corruption.

In addition, Li Zaiyong former senior political advisor of southwest China's Guizhou Province was removed from office and expelled from the Chinese Communist Party on the same charges. [Xinhua 3] [Xinhua 4]

China: Former SOE employee sentenced to six year imprisonment for espionage

(ms) On November 7, a former high-ranking employee of a state-owned enterprise (SOE) was sentenced to six years in prison for espionage under the recently revised counter-espionage law, which took effect in July [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1].

The convicted individual, identified only by the surname Wang, had overseen the overseas operations of an unspecified Chinese SOE based in southwest China. He was charged with passing classified information to foreign entities, thus violating the new law.

Despite Chinese state broadcasters revealing that Wang had attracted the attention of security authorities in 2012, the timing of the verdict invites comparisons with the newly enforced law. In addition to Wang's case, four similar espionage cases have been publicly disclosed since August.

The recent case of Chinese citizen Hou, allegedly recruited by US authorities to divulge state secrets, gained headlines at the end of October [see AiR No. 43, October/2023, 4].

While the trial's exact details remain undisclosed, Hou's case underscores China's heightened emphasis on national security and counter-intelligence efforts. [Radio Free Asia]

China: New financial regulator gets department for tech sector

(ms) According to a document published by the Central Institutional Organization Commission on November 10, the National Administration of Financial Regulation (NAFR), the new financial regulatory authority introduced in March, will be equipped with a department specifically for the supervision of the national technology industry.

The new department will primarily be tasked in addition to drawing up development plans and risk monitoring systems for information technology to oversee cybersecurity, data security, and critical information infrastructure (more on that see entry below).

The NAFR was introduced during the "Two Sessions" in mid-March this year, absorbing the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission (CBIRC) and has been part of the overhaul of China's financial sector. In addition to the NAFR, the Central Finance Commission (CFC) was also presented during the "Two Sessions". The CFC only began its work at the end of September and received a chairman at the end of October in the form of Vice Premier and close confidant of President Xi Jinping, He Lifeng [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]. The introduction of both institutions is part of the greater centralization of control over the Chinese financial sector directly under the Chinese government.

The NAFR is stepping up its oversight to its predecessor institution by taking stronger action against illicit financial practices in addition to assessing, advising and, if necessary, correcting economic and financial plans of the business community or local governments. In line with the course set at the Central Financial Work Conference held at the end of October, the financial summit that takes place twice a decade [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1], the NAFR is especially committed to combating high levels of local debt. [South China Morning Post]

China: First Chinese data provider launches oversea platform following revised counter espionage law

(ms) Amid a significant regulatory shift in China, leading corporate data provider Qichacha is poised to unveil its overseas platform after securing a green light from the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC).

This marks the first approval granted by the regulator for an international expansion of business database services following the enactment of the counter-espionage law in early July [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1]. It reflects a step taken by the Chinese government to ease stringent cross-border data restrictions, aligning with a call for increased foreign business engagement.

Preceding the implementation of the counter-espionage law, data providers in the country were already subjected to security investigations since September of the previous year [see AiR No. 38, September/2022, 3]. These investigations were intended to enable the export of sensitive data to foreign entities. Subsequently, the espionage law compelled data providers to prohibit foreign customers from accessing specific company information.

Amid growing uncertainty among foreign investors regarding the Chinese market and the resulting decline in investment, the CAC proposed a relaxation of the previously tightened cross-border data restrictions at the end of September this year.

This move aimed to restore foreign confidence, exemplified by the recent approval granted to Qichacha. [South China Morning Post]

China: Nvidia plans release of new AI chips for Chinese market

(ms) In response to stricter US regulations on the export of high-end AI chips to China, US multinational technology company Nvidia, a world-leading supplier of artificial intelligence hardware and software, is set to launch three new AI chips specifically tailored for the Chinese market.

These chips – HGX H20, L20 PCIe, and L2 PCIe – are anticipated to comply with US restrictions introduced in October [see AiR No. 43, October/2023, 4] while maintaining cutting-edge AI capabilities, as reported.

Notably, the A800 and H800, two of Nvidia's AI chips initially designed for the Chinese market, have faced sales restrictions due to the tightened regulations. However, the new chips fall within the power limits specified by the US regulations. Nevertheless, there are concerns about one of the chips approaching the limits, potentially requiring a license.

Nvidia's strategic focus on these new chips aims to navigate the constraints posed by the tightened US export rules. Analysts caution that Nvidia's assertive approach to circumvent these restrictions may trigger additional regulatory actions and raise concerns among investors. [Bloomberg] [The Guardian]

China: US Branch of largest Chinese bank hit by ransomware attack

(ms) The U.S. branch of China's largest bank, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Financial Services (ICBC FS), disclosed on November 9 that it was hit by a ransomware attack.

The attack prompted a disruption in the U.S. Treasury market, leading the bank to isolate the affected systems to contain the incident. Despite the attack, ICBC FS has confirmed the successful clearance of U.S. Treasury trades on November 8 and repurchasing financing trades on November 9.

China's foreign ministry has reassured the normal functioning of business and office systems across ICBC's domestic and foreign branches. [FMPRC]

Reports indicate that the attack was carried out by Lockbit, a Russian-speaking hacking group known for encrypting computer files and demanding cryptocurrency payments. Lockbit's history includes targeting critical infrastructure globally, as acknowledged by the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency.

Past targets of attacks include organizations such as Boeing, Britain's Royal Mail, and a Canadian children's hospital. [Bloomberg] [CBS News]

China: State commission backs second biggest developer in unusual endorsement

(ms) In an unexpected development, China Vanke, the country's second-largest property developer, received significant support from Shenzhen Metro Group, its largest shareholder and an entity overseen by the state-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council (SASAC).

Shenzhen Metro has pledged to bolster Vanke's financial position by revitalizing bulk assets, involving the acquisition of specific urban renewal projects valued at USD 1.37 billion.

This uncommon move saw Vanke's stocks and bonds reaching new heights, underscoring confidence in the company's capability to manage its financial obligations, with Shenzhen SASAC alleviating concerns regarding Vanke's liquidity and debt servicing.

The move is considered unusual since SASAC rarely overtly endorses specific companies, particularly during financial uncertainties. It comes at surprise against the backdrop of the recent permission by the Chinese government for two of the country's largest developers, Evergrande and Country Garden, to default.

Experts suggest that the support for Vanke serves as a short-term measure to avert a potential domino effect of defaults. They cautioned that it doesn't necessarily imply a shift in the Chinese government's approach to the heavily indebted real estate sector. [Bloomberg] [South China Moring Post] [Yincai Global]

China: Xi advocates for fair and cooperative cyberspace

(ms) Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized the importance of a balanced approach to the challenges posed by technological advancements, particularly in AI, during the 2023 World Internet Conference held in the eastern province of Zhejiang from November 8 to 10. This annual gathering in Wuzhen focused on enhancing China's internet governance and development.

Xi advocated for a more inclusive and equal cyberspace, urging respect for cyber sovereignty and each nation's internet governance.

He called for collaboration on cybersecurity and the elimination of illicit online activities, highlighting China's willingness to work with other countries to implement the Global Artificial Intelligence Governance Initiative.

This initiative advertises respect in AI development, ensuring equal rights for all nations, irrespective of their size or social system, and was presented in the wake of the second round of sanctions of the US against China's high-tech sector and especially China's AI development [see AiR No. 43, October/2023, 4]. [South China Morning Post] [Xinhua]

Additionally, Xi's focus on collaboration is in line with the AI Safety summit held in the UK in early November, where key government, industry and academic representatives related to AI, including China and the US, laid a foundation for an international AI safety regime and signed a joint commitment to pre-deployment testing of AI technologies. [Carnegie]

China: Promoting home-made jets in Middle East

(ms) In a bid to establish a presence in the Middle East arms market, China presented seven models of the J-10C fighter jet at the Dubai Airshow in mid-November.

In service in the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) since 2005, the J-10 is recognized as the counterpart to the US F-16. The J-10C was unveiled in 2018 and has seen technological and weapons enhancements, coupled with the domestically developed WS-10B jet engine.

While the Middle East has traditionally been favored Western models, Pakistan has already ordered 25 J-10C models in 2020, and Egypt stands as the first country in the region to express interest.

Experts suggest that while China may not surpass Western suppliers, it presents an alternative due to the J-10C being wholly manufactured in China.

Unlike some Western processes involving multiple countries, China's production is streamlined, and there are no accompanying conditions or restrictions for the sale of fighter jets, in contrast to practices in Europe. [South China Morning Post] [The Eurasian Times]

Japan: PM Kishida to give up on snap election hopes

(ic) Senior government officials have unveiled that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has given up on his hopes for dissolving the Diet early and calling snap elections this year.

He will be looking for a good time to do so in 2024 instead. In the meantime, he will be utilizing the special session of the Diet to continue pushing for economic recovery efforts. The government aims to submit a supplementary budget for fiscal year 2023 on November 20. [Asahi Shinbun] [Nikkei Asian Review]

This is likely because of the beleaguered prime minister's persistent inability to raise his standing in the public eye. It was noted that 64 percent in a recent poll even disagreed with his cash handout plans, viewing them with suspicion. [Bloomberg]

Kishida's popularity has been ailing for some time, and a survey released on November 5 found that his approval rating dropped to 28.3 percent, from 32.3 percent in October [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1].

In a separate statement, the government further confirmed that the prime minister will return his salary increment in response to public outrage over depressed wages in general, and likely over his own unpopularity.

Nevertheless, efforts to pass a bill raising wages of national public servants in special positions, like the Prime Minister (by JPY 460,000/USD 3,035) and his Cabinet officials (by JPY 320,000/USD 2,112), will proceed. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Unification Church leaders apologize, to compensate victims

(ic) President Tanaka Tomohiro of the Japanese branch of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, also known as the Unification Church, held a press conference on November 7, the first press conference since the government had sought a court order to dissolve the religious group in October.

The Church resolutely opposed the dissolution request, but publicly apologized for the issue of forced/coerced large donations that had led to the shooting of the late former PM Abe Shinzo in 2022.

The public apology was not, however, meant to imply that the church admitted its own wrongdoing, as according to Tanaka "it is difficult to accept that all compensation claims are valid."

Noting concerns that the church would transfer its assets overseas to evade the government, the church plans to deposit JPY 6 billion (USD 36 million) to JPY 10

billion (USD 66 million) with the government for compensation. A group of lawyers representing victims has suggested that the total sum owed to victims may reach JPY 100 billion (USD 660 million). [Asahi Shinbun] [Kyodo News]

Following a government investigation, Education Minister Moriyama Masahito announced on October 12 that the government would be seeking to dissolve the Unification Church [see AiR No. 42, October/2023, 3]

Japan: Tax delinquent Deputy Finance Minister Kanda Kenji resigns

(ic) State Minister of Finance Kanda Kenji has admitted that he has repeatedly failed to pay property taxes for land and buildings for a company that he owns, and that the company had been foreclosed on four times.

He initially refused calls to resign from his post on November 9. The scandal had broken into the public the preceding day. [Asahi Shinbun] [NHK World]

However, bowing to public pressure, he eventually announced his resignation on November 13. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is now being questioned for his sloppy choice in Cabinet ministers, and the opposition has signaled that they will refuse to continue participating in further Diet discussions on a supplementary budget to fund a new stimulus package until a replacement for Kanda is found. [Kyodo News]

This scandal rocked Kishida's cabinet after the resignation of State Minister of Justice Kakizawa Mito and Vice Minister of Education Yamada Taro on October 31 and 25, respectively [see AiR No. 44, October/2023, 5, AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]

Japan: LGBT advocacy group calls for IVF support

(ic) Tokyo-based LGBT advocacy organization Kodomap requested the Children and Families Agency on November 7 to ensure all pregnant women have access to the same level of medical support.

This comes in response to a case of a woman in a same-sex relationship, who became pregnant through in-vitro fertilization (IVF), being denied service. Kodomap also referenced a case in which a single

unwed pregnant mother was refused service. [Kyodo News]

There is no framework to deal with the issue of anonymous sperm donation in Japan, with institutions that offer sperm donation and insemination generally following the guidelines of the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology (JSOG).

These guidelines restrict the process to married heterosexual couples, and proposed legislation in October 2022 based on these guidelines would feature similar restrictions. [ABC News]

Mongolia: Government to create national database

(ap) Chairperson of the National Statistics Office of Mongolia, Batdavaa Batmunkh, and Minister of Digital Development and Communications, Uchral Nyam-Oso, have been tasked with establishing a comprehensive national database that will serve as basis for future decision on socio-economic policies.

The gathering of data adheres to the regulations outlined in the Law on Protection of Personal Information of Mongolia, ensuring the proper collection and security of personal data.

Uchral elaborated that the big data initiative will amalgamate information from 152 specialized registration databases. [Montsame]

North Korea: Leaving area of residence banned during local election period

(ap) North Korean regional elections will be held on November 26, 2023, and the new law will allow for two pre-election candidates to run for office.

The government has banned people from leaving their regions of residence until after the elections are conducted as a way to ensure 100 percent participation in the voting. [Daily NK]

According to South Korean unification ministry, the new election law – despite introducing the selection between two candidates – is far from indicating democratic progress in suffrage rights as North Korean elections are closely monitored, while people need to show their loyalty to the party.

Elected bodies in North Korea have no real power as they carry out what the ruling Worker's Party decides, and elections are used as a method to strengthen the legitimacy of the regime, with turnouts usually standing at 100 percent. [Radio Free Asia]

North Korea: Chinese cell phones to be handed over to State Security

(ap) Agents from the Ministry of State Security in North Hamgyong Province, bordering China to the north, have instructed residents to return their Chinese cell phones. This directive poses a significant challenge for businesspeople, as Chinese-made cell phones serve as essential tools for them. Unlike domestically produced counterparts, Chinese cell phones enable international calls and the download of foreign apps like WeChat, facilitating communication with trade partners beyond the border.

The order follows the internal announcement by the ministry's branch in Hoeryong, situated in North Hamgyong Province opposite Jilin Province, China, separated by the Tumen River. Internally communicated plans detailed targeted crackdowns against Chinese cell phone users from October through November. The branch warned agents of potential demotions to rural areas if they failed to meet result targets, prompting a fervent enforcement of the recent crackdowns by agents. [Daily NK]

South Korea: Foreign ministry reports 4 GB data leak due to hacking

(tms) South Korea's foreign ministry revealed that approximately four gigabytes of data from its email system were compromised in a hacking incident last year.

According to the ministry, the breach occurred in January of the previous year and targeted its spam mail interception system through an undisclosed hacking route. It emphasized that no confidential information was part of the leaked data, with the harm suffered being minimal as most of the compromised data consisted of spam emails for personal accounts.

While there were suspicions that the hacking attempt was linked to China, the ministry remained cautious about attributing the attack solely to a specific country, citing the complexity of determining the source based

on an IP address, as hackers often use various routes. [Yonhap]

South Korea: President Yoon orders stringent measures against predatory private lenders

(tms) President Yoon Suk Yeol has called for stringent penalties for illegal private lenders who charge exorbitant interest rates, characterizing them as "vicious criminals that suck the blood of the weak."

Speaking during a meeting on illegal private financing attended by various stakeholders, including victims and government officials, Yoon expressed his concern over the devastating impact of predatory lending, suicides committed due to harassment by loan sharks and sexual exploitation.

Yoon emphasized the state's duty to protect ordinary citizens and vulnerable groups from such crimes and called for the eradication of illegal private financing and stressed that illegal private lending practices not only harm people's livelihoods but also erode fundamental constitutional values like liberty and human rights.

He called for the confiscation of illicit profits from these lenders and various measures to help victims recover from their psychological and physical suffering to maintain a truly democratic society. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Lawmaker's suspended prison term upheld for election law violations

(tms) An appellate court has affirmed a suspended prison sentence for lawmaker Lee Eun-joo of the minor opposition Justice Party, which, if confirmed by the Supreme Court, could result in her removal from parliament.

The Seoul High Court handed down an eight-month prison sentence suspended for two years, finding Lee guilty of violating the Political Funds Act and the article prohibiting lawmakers from contributing to individuals in their constituency or related to constituents under the Public Official Election Act.

Under current law, parliamentarians lose their seats if convicted of election law or political fund law violations

and receive a fine of KRW 1 million (USD 762) or more.

Lee was charged with running for a proportional representation seat for her party while serving as the policy director for Seoul Metro's labor union in 2020.

The court convicted her of unlawfully receiving political funds and providing meals to election campaigners but acquitted her of charges related to nighttime electioneering.

Lee has announced her intention to appeal against the decision before the Supreme Court. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Government adopts global minimum corporate tax rules to curb tax avoidance

(tms) South Korea is set to implement new global minimum corporate tax regulations in 2024, aimed at curbing tax competition among nations and preventing large multinational corporations from evading taxes.

The rules, which were passed by the National Assembly last year, stipulate a minimum corporate tax rate of 15 percent for multinational enterprises with annual revenues exceeding EUR 750 million (approx. USD 803 million) [see AiR No. 31, August/2023, 1].

This move aligns with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Base Erosion and Profit Shifting 2.0 Pillar Two, which has been ratified by 143 countries.

The Ministry of Economy and Finance in South Korea has issued pre-legislation notices regarding the planned revision of the enforcement decrees for the Law on the Coordination of International Tax Affairs, set to be effective from January 1, 2024.

The revision offers more detailed guidance on the regulations and is expected to be promulgated next month following Cabinet approval. Approximately 200 South Korean companies, including tech giant Samsung Electronics Co., will be impacted by this global agreement.

In 2021, the international community reached a significant agreement on a two-pillar solution addressing tax challenges arising from the digitalization and globalization of the economy. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Comprehensive plan launched to tackle rising inflation

(tms) South Korea has introduced a comprehensive government-wide initiative to manage prices of essential food and other commodities in a bid to control persistently high inflation.

Under this scheme, vice ministers from all government ministries will be responsible for monitoring prices and swiftly implementing necessary measures to counter inflation. This approach represents a strengthened response to the country's ongoing inflation challenges.

In October, consumer prices rose 3.8 percent year-on-year for the third consecutive month. Finance Minister Choo Kyung-ho has acknowledged the slower-than-expected easing of prices due to external uncertainties and adverse weather conditions.

The government has also initiated weekly vice ministerial-level meetings to coordinate responses among various ministries. Ministries such as agriculture and oceans have established task forces to conduct on-site surveys, monitoring prices of crucial fresh food products, including milk, bread, ice cream, coffee, pollack, and bay salt.

The government aims to address these inflationary pressures by enhancing price monitoring and coordination across ministries. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Government plans anti-monopoly measures against banks amid record profits

(tms) The government is set to unveil measures later this year aimed at breaking the monopoly held by banks, following President Yoon Suk Yeol's criticism of their structure and record profits from interest income.

The move comes amid the central bank's rate hikes, contributing to the highest earnings reported by the country's major banks.

The proposed changes include fostering competition among banks to lower market interest rates and expanding financial infrastructure to protect individuals, particularly the younger generation, from high-interest rates. However, experts are skeptical about the practicality of reducing interest rates, citing global economic conditions.

The government opposes the opposition's call for a windfall tax on banks, considering it incompatible with the corporate tax system and market principles. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Ruling party launches online filibuster against controversial bills

(tms) South Korea's ruling People Power Party (PPP) initiated an online filibuster in protest of four contentious bills passed by the opposition-controlled National Assembly.

The bills, including revisions to the Trade Union and Labor Relations Adjustment Act and broadcasting laws, faced PPP opposition, prompting the use of a virtual filibuster to explain their concerns to the public.

The move aims to garner public support before President Yoon Suk Yeol exercises his anticipated veto power to block the bills. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2]

The PPP also filed an injunction against the National Assembly speaker's decision to withdraw impeachment motions against the broadcasting watchdog chief, intensifying the political standoff. [Yonhap 3]

South Korea: Presidential office mulls reorganization, creating new roles for science, environment secretaries

(tms) South Korea's presidential office is reportedly contemplating a reorganization that includes the establishment of senior presidential secretary positions dedicated to science and the environment.

If implemented, these roles would be distinct from the existing economic and social affairs secretaries, emphasizing President Yoon Suk Yeol's commitment to advancing basic science and technological innovation.

The potential restructuring follows criticism from the scientific community over a proposed budget cut in research and development for the upcoming year, marking the first reduction in eight years.

While internal discussions are ongoing, no official confirmation has been provided by the presidential office. [Yonhap]

South Korea: Constitutional court president retires

(tms) Constitutional Court President Yoo Nam-seok's retirement this week leaves a leadership vacuum in South Korea's highest courts, compounded by the Supreme Court lacking a head for 47 days.

President Yoon Suk Yeol nominated Lee Jong-seok as the new Constitutional Court chief, with a parliamentary confirmation hearing scheduled a month after the announcement.

Past delays in appointing court presidents, dating back to 2006, have contributed to concerns about potential delays in rulings this month. [Yonhap 1]

Meanwhile, President Yoon named Cho Hee-dae as the new Supreme Court chief, pending parliamentary approval. [Yonhap 2] [Yonhap 3]

Taiwan: Oppositions parties agree on method to identify joint presidential candidate

(dql/jr) Taiwan's opposition parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Taiwan People's Party (TPP), have reached an agreement on the process for determining the order of a joint ticket for the January 2024 presidential election, ending a month-long deadlock in this issue.

Under the agreement both sides will conduct a nationwide poll to ascertain whether KMT's presidential nominee, Hou Yu-ih, or TPP's Ko Wen-je, should lead the joint ticket, either KMT-TPP or TPP-KMT.

The agreement came shortly after former President Ma Ying-jeou of KMT had suggested to refer to opinion poll data to choose a joint presidential candidate.

Most opinion polls indicate that Democratic Progressive Party presidential candidate and current Vice President Lai Ching-te is leading. [Focus Taiwan] [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Ruling party official resigns after nightlife activity, promiscuity exposed

online

(jr) On November 10, Lin Cheng-hong, the Organizational Department chief of Taiwan's current ruling party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), resigned following the release of compromising photos depicting him drinking and flirting with young women leading to their public dissemination and subsequent resignation.

The controversy unfolded during a press conference held by legislative candidates from a new party in front of the Democratic Progressive Party's headquarters, where it was revealed that Lin Cheng-hong was engaged in an affair. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Indigenous man to keep his native language name on ID card

(jr) The Taipei High Court decided in a ruling, delivered on November 9, in favor of the individual, allowing the use of their native name on their ID card. The court ordered the household registration office to change his name.

In 2021, Taiwan initially denied Bawtu Payen, an indigenous Atayal tribesman, the right to use their native name on their identity cards, citing concerns over Chinese characters.

The first of its kind in Taiwan, the ruling is widely considered as a victory for indigenous identity rights

Government records in Taiwan indicate that 467 people have expressed a desire to use their indigenous names, with nearly 1,800 individuals having reverted to indigenous names since 2013. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Prosecutors' protest against bail for China spy ring suspects

(jr) Prosecutors are preparing to protest a bail decision for two retired military officers and a civilian accused of establishing a spy ring within the Communist Party of China on November 11.

This comes after searches conducted on November 9 by the Qiaotou District Prosecutor's Office, which is now pressing charges against the two retired Major Generals named Sun and Liu, along with a civilian named Chu. They are accused of being involved in the

recruitment and solicitation of individuals to become spies for China.

Despite prosecutors advocating for their detention, the courts have granted bail to the three men.

Investigators assert that the case against Sun, Liu, and Chu, involving violations of the National Security Act and the Election and Recall Act, is robust, and argue against the release of the three men on bail, even with imposed restrictions on their movements. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Impeachment against for colonel for spying for China

(jr) The Control Yuan, the supervisory and auditory branch of Taiwan's government, voted unanimously on November 9 to impeach former Army Colonel Hsiang Te-en for breaching military discipline and official precepts.

Hsian was sentenced in February to seven years and five months in prison for pledging to surrender to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in case of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan and spying on Taiwan. The punishment by a High Court was upheld in September. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Military training for new conscripts reformed

(jr) According to a recently disclosed cabinet report, Taiwan is set to overhaul its conscript training program, scheduled to commence in 2024.

In line with the extension of the mandatory service period to one year for individuals born after 2005, that will take effect on January 1, the military is restructuring training requirements to better equip future conscripts for combat.

The revamped training program for both conscripts and volunteer troops will incorporate an eight-week camp aimed at improving individual rifle firing accuracy, rapid response shooting techniques, and other modifications outlined in the report. Additionally, soldiers will receive training in civil defense, including first aid and disaster search and rescue.

The program will feature 24-hour military exercises integrating training across various service branches of

the Taiwanese military, simulating a potential invasion by the Chinese People's Liberation Army with a focus on overall joint defense operations and air defense. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Harpoon missile base plans disclosed

(jr) On November 10, the Taiwanese military announced plans for harpoon missile bases, which, once established, will include offices, living quarters, garages, and peacetime training facilities.

The deployment of mobile harpoon missiles to tactical positions for coastline defense will occur only during wartime or under unique circumstances.

Taiwan's military has initiated a tender for the construction of six harpoon missile bases in locations including Yunlin's Huwei Township, Kaohsiung, and Pingtung.

In 2020, the United States approved the sale of 100 sets of short-range harpoon missile systems to Taiwan, comprising 400 RGM-84L-4 Harpoon Block II missiles, 4 RTM-84L-4 Harpoon Block II maneuver missiles, 100 Harpoon Coastal Defense System Launcher Transporter Units, 25 radar trucks, and related equipment and logistics support.

Since last year, Taiwan has collaborated with the US to expedite the delivery of these missiles, aiming to receive over half within three years and the remaining by the end of 2029. [Taiwan Naws]

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

Bangladesh: Garment factories shut, 11,000 workers charged

(lm) In Bangladesh, 150 garment factories were shut down indefinitely on November 11 as authorities filed blanket charges against 11,000 workers involved in violent protests demanding higher minimum wages. [The Straits Times]

These protests, which have been the most significant in over a decade, have led to the deaths of at least three workers and the ransacking or damaging of more than 70 factories. The garment sector is a linchpin of Bangladesh's economy, contributing to roughly 85 percent of its USD 55 billion in annual exports while supplying products for some of the world's largest brands.

On November 14, a government-appointed panel announced a 56.25 percent wage increase, raising the monthly wage to approximately USD 150 from December 1. However, garment workers have rejected this hike, arguing that it does not adequately address the surging costs of essentials such as food, housing, healthcare, and children's education. Their demand stands at a minimum wage of USD 208 across all factories [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]. [South China Morning Post]

In the aftermath of the wage announcement, 15,000 workers clashed with police on a major highway, resulting in the ransacking of Tusuka, a prominent factory, and a dozen others.

Prime Minister Hasina, addressing the situation, cautioned that violent protests could lead to job losses for workers and encouraged them to consider the adverse consequences of factory closures and disrupted production on their livelihoods. A union leader expressed concerns that Hasina's statements had instilled a "climate of fear" in the industry, potentially providing security forces with further

justification for cracking down on protests. [The Straits Times]

Bangladesh: Main opposition BNP continues protests amid crackdown ahead of election

(ps/lm) The oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and allied parties have held another series of blockades to push through their demands of having a neutral caretaker government overseeing the upcoming national elections and release of its arrested leaders. Some of these blockades have been marred by incidents of violence, including torching and vandalizing vehicles. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Arab News]

The BNP claims that over 12,000 of its activists have been arrested since the October 28 protest, and at least a dozen others have been killed as protests have turned violent. The party argues that free and fair elections are not possible under the current government and is calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In response, a total of 152 platoons of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) have been deployed across the country to assist law enforcement authorities in maintaining law and order. Among the deployments, 27 platoons were stationed in Dhaka and its surrounding areas. Moreover, the ruling 14-party alliance headed by Prime Minister Hasina's Awami League, held a counter-rally protesting the damages caused by BNP and their allies. [Dhaka Tribune 2] [The Daily Star]

The next round of blockades will be held between November 14 through 16. [Prothom Alo]

Bangladesh: Court dismisses petition by senior BNP official, issues arrest warrant in graft case

(lm) A Dhaka court on October 31 issued an arrest warrant for Mirza Abbas, a member of the main opposition BNP's Standing Committee, in a corruption case dating back to 2007. The case accuses him of amassing wealth through illegal means and providing false information about his wealth to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). The court rejected Abbas's request for more time, citing illness as the

reason for his absence, and set November 2 for arguments from the prosecution. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Local opposition leader deadly injured after police arrest

(ps) A local leader of the oppositional Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was deadly injured during an arrest by the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), a police unit. While RAB claims it was attacked first and responded in self-defense, BNP leaders say RAB opened fire on people that protested arrests without arrest warrants.

The injured person died in a hospital two days after the arrest on charges of sabotage. Police are still investigating his death. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Three voting centers results annulled for fraud in recent parliamentary by-election

(ps) After voting fraud was detected in three voting centers during the recent parliamentary by-election the Election Commission has annulled these particular results. As the winners of the parliamentary seats have a greater margin than the compromised votes no new elections will be held. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Prime Minister calls for gradual reduction of subsidies on utilities to ease state's fiscal burden

(lm) Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has instructed authorities to gradually reduce subsidies, starting with utilities like electricity and water, in an effort to ease the burden on the state treasury. During the last Executive Committee of the National Economic Council meeting, the prime minister suggested that charges and fees for these utilities be assessed based on geographical, income, and family criteria, aligning with practices in developed countries. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Dohazari-Cox's Bazar railway inaugurated

(lm) The Dohazari-Cox's Bazar railway was officially inaugurated on November 7. This railway, spanning 103.5 kilometers, is a key development initiative aimed at enhancing connectivity and transportation infrastructure in the South Asian nation. The project received funding from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and was constructed with the participation of the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and the China Railway Group Limited (CREC). [Bangkok Post]

Bangladesh: Prime Minister opens new fertilizer factory

(ps) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has inaugurated Ghorashal-Palash Urea Fertiliser Factory, the largest factory of its kind in Southeast Asia, that will nearly double Bangladesh fertilizer production and more than half the need of imports. The factory will be connected by rail, include its own gas power plant and create 30.000 jobs. [The Daily Star]

Bhutan: Election Commission warns against discussion of unmentioned pledges by political parties

(na) The Election Commission of Bhutan on November 9 cautioned political parties and candidates to refrain from discussing pledges not outlined in their approved manifestos. The commission's Director of Secretariat, Phub Dorji, issued a notice stating that parties violating this directive would face penalties as per election rules, emphasizing that warnings would no longer be issued. [Kuensel]

The commission introduced a practice of vetting party manifestos through an independent committee, exercising full discretion in approval, with the process taking a month. Door-to-door campaigning has been eliminated for candidate convenience and to mitigate corrupt activities during the campaign period, differing from past parliamentary elections.

Earlier this month, on November 1, Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck granted a Royal Kasho (decree) to appoint a nine-member interim government, which will oversee the routine functions of the government during the election period. This interim government will function for a maximum of 90 days, enabling the Election Commission to conduct free and fair elections. [AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]

This is the fourth time Bhutan will hold elections to the National Assembly since polls were held for the first time in 2008.

India: Mizoram, Chhattisgarh states vote in round of key tests for Premier Modi ahead of 2024 elections

(hp/lm) Local elections have begun in two Indian states, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram, testing the strength of the country's opposition against Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party ahead of the crucial national elections scheduled for 2024. The two states are among five states going to the polls between November 7-30; the other states voting this month include Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan in northern India and Telangana in the south.

While the polling was completed in Mizoram on November 7, Chhattisgarh will see the second phase of voting on November 17, along with polls in the neighboring Madhya Pradesh state. Voting in Rajasthan and Telangana will take place on November 23 and November 30, respectively. The votes from all five states will be tallied on December 3.

The Indian National Congress (INC), the main opposition party, currently holds power in Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, while Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rules Madhya Pradesh, and its regional ally is in power in Mizoram. Telangana is governed by a strong regional party, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), formerly known as Telangana Rashtra Samithi

Both Modi and Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the INC, have campaigned vigorously in these states, offering various incentives to woo voters. While Modi and the BJP remain popular nationally, they face challenges in these state polls, with issues like rising unemployment and increasing commodity prices influencing voters' decisions. [Voice of America] [bbc] [Voice of America]

India: Bihar state assembly approves bill sought to increase reservation to 75 percent

(hp) The state assembly of Bihar has unanimously passed a bill, increasing the overall quota for caste-based reservations from 50 percent to 65 percent, with an additional 10 percent reservation for economically

weaker sections (EWS), bringing the total reservation in the state to 75 percent.

This decision follows the release of a socio-economic caste survey earlier this year, which revealed that 64 percent of the state's population was categorized as being members of the so-called backward classes, a collective term used in India to classify castes which are educationally or socially backward [see see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1]. Moreover, 34 percent of people in Bihar are classified as "poor," which means that their monthly income is less than 72 USD, according to socioeconomic data from the caste survey report that was presented before the legislature on November 7.

The Bihar unit of India's ruling BJP supported the legislation, although there were allegations of discrepancies in the survey data. The main opposition Congress party also supports caste surveys and has promised to remove the 50 percent reservation ceiling if elected in the 2024 general election. [Indian Express] [Hindustan Times] [The Wire]

India: Supreme Court directs special benches to speed up disposal of criminal cases against lawmakers

(hp) India's Supreme Court has instructed high courts to establish special benches to oversee the speedy disposal of criminal cases against lawmakers, including members of Parliament, legislative assemblies, and legislative councils. The court emphasized that special courts should not adjourn proceedings in such cases except for rare and compelling reasons. Currently, there are over 5,000 criminal cases against lawmakers pending in court. [Mint]

The directive comes in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed in 2026 seeking the early disposal of criminal cases against politicians and the imposition of a life term ban on politicians upon conviction in such cases. The PIL also called for the establishment of special courts for this purpose and challenged certain provisions of the Representation of Peoples Act related to disqualification periods. [Hindustan Times] [Telegraph India]

India: Government proposes new law with self-certification for broadcasters, streaming giants

(lm) India's central government has introduced a new draft law to regulate the broadcasting sector, including streaming giants like *Netflix*. [The Straits Times]

The proposed law aims to ensure that all content is independently reviewed for obscenity and violence before being shown online, similar to the certification process for films in Indian cinemas. To this end, it calls for the establishment of individual content evaluation committees (CECs) by broadcasters to regulate content. Only shows certified by these committees will be allowed to be broadcast.

The central government will have the authority to define the CEC's size, quorum, and operational details. Furthermore, the law provides the government with powers to regulate online creators and news media platforms.

India: Fears grow over state-run 'fact-checking' units threatening freedom of speech

(lm) Several Indian states, including Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana, and Uttarakhand, have taken steps to establish their own fact-checking units aimed at countering media misinformation. These state-level initiatives come in the wake of a fact-checking unit established by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's central government. However, these state-level fact-checking units have raised concerns among activists and media watchdogs about potential administrative overreach and threats to free speech. [South China Morning Post]

One noteworthy development is Uttarakhand's decision to place its fact-checking department directly under the police administration. This move has sparked concerns about the potential misuse of power and its implications for press freedom.

The establishment of these fact-checking units also faces legal challenges, with public interest litigations filed in various courts. Critics argue that essential procedures have not been followed, and concerns have been raised about the lack of transparency in the selection process for personnel overseeing the units.

Many of these concerns stem from an amendment introduced in April by the central Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeITy), which grants sweeping powers to the government's fact-checking units. This includes the authority to order social media takedowns of content considered fake news. The amendment

specifies that only the federal government's fact-checking body can fact-check information related to the central administration, excluding non-government entities.

Rights groups and press freedom advocates argue that these amended rules pose a threat to media freedom and could lead to pre-censorship as media outlets may be forced to seek clearance for publishing certain information. While the Modi administration defends these moves, they face legal challenges, with a verdict expected on December 1.

India: Authorities bar pro-Palestinian protests in Kashmir

(lm) Indian authorities have banned pro-Palestinian solidarity protests in Kashmir and instructed Muslim preachers not to mention the conflict in their sermons, in an effort to curb any form of protest that could lead to demands for an end to India's rule in the disputed region. [Associated Press]

This shift in India's stance is seen as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy changes, moving away from its long-standing support for the Palestinians. India has traditionally had close ties to both Israel and the Palestinians and has sought to balance its relationships. However, during the recent conflict, India expressed solidarity with Israel and abstained from a UN General Assembly vote calling for a humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

This shift aligns with the support for Israel among India's Hindu nationalists, who form a core vote bank for Modi and his party. Critics argue that the Indian government's pro-Israel stance may have domestic implications, particularly given India's large Muslim population.

India: Tech titan’s call four 70-hour work week stirs debate over company culture, productivity

(lm) Narayana Murthy, an Indian tech billionaire and former chairman of multinational information technology giant *Infosys*, recently suggested that young people should work up to 70 hours a week to contribute to the country’s industrial development. This comment has sparked a debate about whether

such advice is relevant in today's economy. [South China Morning Post]

Murthy's statement has divided opinions, with some industry veterans and older individuals endorsing the idea of working long hours for national development. They argue that passion for work and nation-building should be the driving force.

However, many young people and executives believe that Murthy's advice is outdated in today's context. They argue that modern work culture emphasizes creativity and flexibility rather than long hours. The rise of digital businesses and remote work during the pandemic has prompted a reevaluation of the traditional workweek.

India: Big, bad loans hit record high

(lm) Unrecovered bank loans from willful defaulters have reached a peak in India, leading to concerns about political interference, corruption, and the need for accountability among banking and government officials. [The Straits Times]

Data shows that dues from individuals who deliberately do not repay their loans have increased by at least USD 14.4 billion since March 2019. This represents a nearly 50 percent rise in unrecovered loans, totaling USD 42.5 billion as of March 2023, with nearly 17,000 accounts involved. Notably, government-owned banks are the most affected, with 77.5 percent of the outstanding amount owed to them as of June.

Critics argue that the high proportion of willful defaulters reflects either poor due diligence by banks or corruption within the system. A significant portion of the outstanding loans belongs to a small number of big defaulters, including billionaires who fled the country after their fraudulent activities were exposed.

India: Activists slam country’s first-ever GPS tracker on Kashmiri suspect

(lm) Authorities in Indian-administered Kashmir have faced criticism for placing a Global Positioning System (GPS) tracker on an individual facing terrorism charges. This marks the first reported use of electronic monitoring in India. [Al Jazeera]

Ghulam Muhammad Bhat, a lawyer and associate of Syed Ali Shah Geelani, a prominent separatist leader,

has been wearing the ankle tracker as part of his bail conditions. He was arrested in 2011 under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) for allegedly financing the Hurriyat Conference, a leading separatist group in Indian-administered Kashmir. Bhat was held in a New Delhi jail and repeatedly denied bail until it was granted earlier this month.

While officials argue that it aids in monitoring bail conditions, human rights activists view it as a form of "virtual imprisonment" that compromises an individual's privacy and presumes guilt until proven innocent.

India: NIA carries out search operations in ten states over human trafficking case

(hp) India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested 44 individuals in 10 states and union territories across the country to dismantle "illegal human trafficking support networks" facilitating immigration across the India-Bangladesh border. [Deccan Herald] [Hindustan Times]

The crackdown came after investigation by police in Assam state in September revealed that illegal migration was being facilitated by middlemen and touts, not only in Assam but also in different parts of India and Bangladesh. The matter was considered a national security concern with inter-state implications, leading the Assam's state government to request the central home ministry to transfer one of the cases to the NIA. [News on Air]

India: Internet ban lifted in four districts in Manipur

(hp) On November 7, the Manipur government lifted internet ban in four districts on a trial basis. The decision of the government came after lack of ethnic violence in the areas of Ukhrul, Senapati, Chandel and Tamenglong, which are Naga-majority areas. The action came after the Manipur High Court urged the state government to install mobile towers in all district headquarters that have not been damaged by ethnic violence. [CNBCTV18] [Business Standard]

Internet services had been suspended in Manipur since May 3 [see AiR No. 19, May/2023, 2], barring a few days in September. Manipur has been in a state of turmoil since May 2023 due to ethnic clashes between

the Kuki and Meitei community of the district. The conflict between the two groups has claimed the lives of more than 180 people and displaced more than 50,000 people.

India: TRF terrorist killed by security forces in Kashmir's Shopian

(hp) In Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district, a newly recruited militant belonging to The Resistance Front (TRF) got gunned down in an encounter with the security forces. The Kashmir Zone Police posted on X revealing that incriminating materials such as arms and ammunition were recovered from the terrorist. The army, CRPF and J&K police had launched a search operation around Kathohalan based on information indicating the presence of terrorist activities going on in the region. [NDTV] [Times of India] [The Statesman]

India: NIA files charge sheet against seven suspected ISIS terrorists

(hp/lm) The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a charge sheet against seven individuals suspected of having ties to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) terrorist group and planning attacks in India. The charges include raising funds for ISIS activities under the guidance of their handlers with the intent of inciting violence and terror within the country. [Swarajya]

In separate developments, the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has detained two active ISIS members from the districts of Hazaribagh and Godda in the eastern state of Jharkhand. The individuals in question were engaged in propagating the banned terrorist outfit, collecting funds for the motive of carrying out anti-national activities, and causing discord between two communities. [News On Air] [Times of India]

India: Two Maoists arrested in Kerala after a gunfight with police

(hp) An encounter at the Wayanad district in India southernmost Kerala state between the special security forces of the local police and a Maoist group resulted in the arrest of two of the latter. The Maoist group consisted of five members who were in the Thalappuzha region when the Special Operation Group

(SOG) and the Thunderbolt Squad, an elite commando force of the Kerala police, arrived and engaged in a firefight with them. [India Today] [Kerala Kaumudi]

After engaging in a gun battle for over an hour and a half, two Maoists were taken into custody and the remaining escaped. Apart from the arrests, the squad also confiscated two AK-47 rifles. Following this, the SOP and the Thunderbolt Squad have launched a combing operation to hunt the Maoists in the region based on intelligence inputs given by a Maoist supporter. [The Hindu]

Maldives: Supreme Court orders Nasheed's no-confidence motion can move without the deputy speaker

(na/lm) The Supreme Court has ruled on a constitutional case related to the no-confidence motion against Parliament Speaker Mohamed Nasheed. The apex court stated that the Parliament Secretariat had misinterpreted parliamentary regulations by limiting the presiding authority to Deputy Speaker Eva Abdulla during a sitting where the motion was on the agenda. The court emphasized that regulations should not be interpreted in a way that disrupts the functioning of Parliament. [Edition 1]

The court cited Article 205 of the Parliament Regulations, highlighting the 14-day notice period required for a no-confidence motion against a speaker. It specified that the motion must be presented in a parliamentary session on the first working day following this notice period. The ruling underscored that the Constitution takes precedence over Parliament Regulations in all circumstances. [Edition 2]

The case was submitted by the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) following failed attempts to conduct a sitting to discuss the no-confidence motion [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]. The Supreme Court also ruled that Parliament must fulfill its constitutional obligations, including the presidential inauguration and cabinet approval, even if a no-confidence motion against the Speaker is pending.

Maldives: Parliament committee determines violation of privileges by Deputy Speaker and MP Afeef in no-confidence motion proceedings

(na) On November 12, the Parliament Committee on Member's Privileges and Ethics ruled that Deputy Speaker Eva Abdulla and Vilifushi MP Hassan Afeef had violated their parliamentary privileges during the recent no-confidence motion against Parliament Speaker Mohamed Nasheed. [Avas]

The investigation was initiated after two parliamentary sessions were abruptly concluded. Afeef had declared that the motion did not meet the necessary requirements in the first session, leading to its termination, while Deputy Speaker Eva concluded the second session, stating that the motion had already been rejected in the earlier session.

Following these events, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) submitted a disciplinary case against Afeef, alleging a violation of Parliament rules and infringement on parliamentary rights. Simultaneously, MP Ahmed Riza filed a second complaint against Deputy Speaker Eva, asserting a similar violation.

The Privileges Committee unanimously ruled that both Eva and Afeef had violated parliamentary privileges. The committee's decision is now set to be presented to the Parliament floor for debate and a vote on how to proceed.

Maldives: President-elect Muizzu confirms 22 ministries, emphasizes commitment to efficiency, anti-corruption

(na) President-elect Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has confirmed that his upcoming government will consist of 22 ministries, emphasizing that his administration, despite having more ministries, will deliver on its promises and run efficiently. [Avas]

Muizzu also stressed the commitment to efficient governance, emphasized the inclusion of qualified individuals, and highlighted the focus on anti-corruption measures, stating that the new administration will have fewer political positions.

Furthermore, Muizzu mentioned that his government will have the highest number of women in senior positions in the government, and the management of six important state companies will be handed over to women.

Maldives: Parliament Speaker Nasheed threatens to block MDP MPs' overseas travel

(na) Parliament Speaker Mohamed Nasheed has issued a warning to Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) MPs, threatening to impede their ability to travel abroad. He warned that MDP members would be removed from certain positions and that their travel to foreign countries would be restricted. [Avas]

Nasheed's anger stemmed from allegations that MDP lawmakers had communicated with the organizers of a conference in Dubai to prevent him from participating in the event. It also comes as the MDP has initiated a no-confidence motion against him in Parliament.

Maldives: Decision to withhold information about Indian military personnel incorrect, High Court rules

(na) The High Court in the Maldives on November 9 ruled that the decision to withhold information about the number of Indian military personnel in the country was incorrect. The decision was deemed noncompliant with prescribed procedures, as the Information Commissioner failed to provide a sufficient explanation for withholding the information. In light of this, the court directed the Information Commissioner to review the matter and issue a new decision. [Edition]

Earlier, journalist and social media activist Ahmed Azaan had requested the Defense Ministry to disclose information about foreign military personnel in the Maldives. The Ministry, backed by the Information Commissioner's Office (iCOM), refused, arguing that disclosing the number of Indian soldiers could jeopardize national security and bilateral relations. In response, Azaan appealed the case to the High Court, leading to the recent ruling.

Nepal: Concerns raised over possible conflict of interest in parliamentary committees

(na) Recent observations suggest that rules which prohibit lawmakers from serving on parliamentary committees when there is a clear conflict of interest with the committee's scope of work are not consistently followed. [My Republica]

Rule 175 (2) of the House of Representatives Rules, 2079, explicitly prohibits members with conflicting interests from being nominated to committees, emphasizing inclusion based on the representation of political parties in the House.

However, many lawmakers with evident conflicts of interest continue to serve on parliamentary committees. One glaring example is the inclusion of contractors and individuals involved in businesses closely related to the committees' focus areas. For instance, some MPs involved in the construction industry, real estate, and infrastructure development have been appointed to committees overseeing these sectors. Similarly, lawmakers with backgrounds in industries such as hospitality, banking, and microfinance have found positions in committees related to their respective sectors.

Against this backdrop, concerns have been raised about the inclusivity of committees, with calls for broader representation in specific committees, such as the Women and Social Affairs Committee. Additionally, there are objections to the constitution of committees, suggesting they may not align with constitutional provisions.

Nepal: Government approves regulatory framework for social media platforms, bans *TikTok*

(na) Nepal's government has decided to impose a ban on *TikTok*, citing its negative effects on social harmony and the encouragement of hate speech on the platform. The decision comes after discussions between the Cyber Bureau of the Nepal Police, Ministry of Home Affairs, and *TikTok* representatives. In the past four years, 1,647 cases of cybercrime have been reported on the video-sharing app. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Earlier**,** the Cabinet approved the “Directives on the Operation of Social Networking 2023”. Companies have three months to establish an office or appoint a focal person in Nepal and register their platforms with the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology. The directives also include a 19-point list of prohibited activities on social media, such as spreading hate speech and promoting illegal activities. The move aims to address user concerns and facilitate the removal of objectionable content. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Government allocates USD 500 assistance per family for earthquake survivors

(na) In response to the magnitude 6.4 earthquake on November 3, with its epicenter at Jajarkot's, the government has decided to provide USD 500 per family to survivors left homeless for the construction of temporary shelters.

This decision was made during a disaster management committee meeting chaired by Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Narayan Kaji Shrestha. The funds are intended for the purchase of materials, including corrugated zinc sheets.

The earthquake, which resulted in 154 casualties and damaged 8,000 houses, prompted additional measures, including free treatment for the injured across all hospitals and a disbursement of USD 2,000 to the families of those killed, as decided in a subsequent Cabinet meeting on November 12. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Maj. Gen. Pandey, in line to become army chief, resigns over dual birth date controversy

(na) Major General Tara Dhwaj Pandey, who was in line to become Nepal's next army chief, has resigned from his post as he faces complaints and investigations regarding his conflicting birthdates on different official documents, including his citizenship cards and educational certificates. His resignation clears the way for Major General Ashok Sigdel to become the chief of Nepal Army. [The Kathmandu Post]

A complaint filed at the State Affairs Committee of Parliament highlights the inconsistency between Pandey's citizenship certificate indicating a birth date of December 8, 1966, and educational certificates showing January 25, 1965. Also, complaints were filed against him at various institutions, including the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), parliament's State Affairs Committee, and the Prime Minister's Office.

Against this backdrop, The CIAA has instructed the defense ministry to investigate Pandey's birth date, prompting Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Purna Bahadur Khadka to direct the Army headquarters to look into the matter. Also, a probe

committee has been formed by the national army to investigate the issue.

Pakistan: PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif visits Baluchistan to expand party's alliance ahead of polls

(mr/lm) The leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Nawaz Sharif, on November 14 travelled to Baluchistan province as part of the party's strategy to form alliances in all provinces ahead of the upcoming general elections scheduled for February 8.

Sharif is scheduled to hold meetings with the leadership of the PML-N Baluchistan while in Quetta, and it is anticipated that leaders of the Baloch Awami Party (BAP) and other Baloch political parties will declare their intention to join a PML-N-led alliance. In addition, the PML-N is exploring the possibility of an alliance with the Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), and Awami National Party in the neighboring province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This development comes after the PML-N recently formed an alliance with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan, a Muhajir nationalist party with a stronghold in the southern port city of Karachi. This move is part of efforts by the PML-N to form an alliance against the Pakistan People's Party in Sindh province. A PML-N team met with leaders of various parties in Karachi, including the Pakistan Muslim League Functional (PML-F) President Pir Pagara. [Pakistan Today] [DAWN]

Pakistan: Son of opposition PTI president declared absconder in graft case

(mr) Moonis Elahi, the son of main opposition party PTI President Parvez Elahi, has been declared an absconder by a Lahore accountability court in a case involving allegations of receiving billions in kickbacks from development projects. The court has ordered the process of confiscating his properties to commence. [Nation]

Moonis faces multiple cases of corruption and money laundering, with charges registered against him by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Anti-Corruption Establishment, and the National Accountability Bureau NAB. He left the country last year amid a crackdown on

the PTI leadership and has been evading arrest and investigation.

Pakistan: Status of jailed former Prime Minister Khan's wife changed in corruption case

(lm) Bushra Bibi, the wife of imprisoned former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, could potentially face arrest as the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has decided to change in her legal status from a "witness" to an "accused" in the so-called Al-Qadir Trust corruption case. [Samaa]

Al-Qadir Trust is a non-governmental welfare organization established by Khan and Bibi in 2018 when Khan was in office. The NAB alleges that the trust served as a front for the former premier to receive valuable land as a bribe from real estate developer Malik Riaz Hussain, one of Pakistan's wealthiest businessmen.

The scheme is said to have originated with USD 230 million repatriated to Pakistan from the United Kingdom in 2019 after Hussain forfeited cash and assets to settle a British investigation into potential proceeds of crime. Instead of depositing the money into Pakistan's treasury, Khan's government used it to pay fines imposed by a court against Hussain for acquiring government lands at below-market rates for a development project in Karachi. In return for this favor, Hussain allegedly gave land in Jhelum and Islamabad to the Al-Qadir Trust.

Pakistan: Supreme Court agrees to hear late military ruler Musharraf's plea on his death sentence

(lm) Pakistan's Supreme Court on November 10 accepted all appeals filed by the late former military dictator Pervez Musharraf against his death sentence on treason charges and adjourned the case until November 21. [Deccan Herald]

The appeal was filed four years ago and comes months after Musharraf's death in February [see AiR No. 6, February/2023, 1]. At the hearing last week, the apex court inquired why the appeal had not been fixed for a hearing for the past four years, despite one judge's order in the chamber in February 2020.

The high treason trial of Musharraf, which began in 2013, stemmed from his suspension of the constitution in 2007 after imposing emergency rule in the country in a bid to cling to power. He also placed top judges, including the then-chief justice, under house arrest for opposing his rule.

In 2019, a special court found Musharraf guilty of high treason and sentenced him to death in absentia, but the Lahore High Court later annulled the death sentence, declaring the legal process leading to his conviction unlawful.

Pakistan: Supreme Court orders replacement of pejorative term for Christian

(lm) Pakistan's Supreme Court has ordered the government and public institutions in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) to replace the term "Esai" or "Isai" with "Masihi" when referring to Christian citizens. The term "Esai," historically used to identify Christians in Pakistan, carries a pejorative connotation linked to caste discrimination, while "Masihi" means "people of the Messiah" and has no negative connotations. [FSSPX]

The Supreme Court judgment, supported by the Council of Islamic Ideology, marks a significant change aimed at respecting the cultural and religious identity of Christian communities. The Election Commission of Pakistan has already replaced "Esai" with "Masihi" in voter registration forms, setting a precedent for other government departments to follow suit.

Pakistan: Students, journalists protest in Karachi against bombing of Gaza Strip

(xc/lm) Tens of thousands of students took to the streets in Pakistan’s port city Karachi to protest against Israel's bombing of Gaza Strip. The protest was organized by Jamaat-e-Islami, one of the country’s largest religious parties, which had been organizing similar rallies in the past weeks [see AiR No. 44, October/2023, 5].

Meanwhile, on November 8 journalists and their families gathered at the Karachi Press Club to express solidarity with Middle Eastern colleagues killed in Israeli airstrikes on Gaza. [Tribune]

Pakistan: Police officer killed, 12 injured in attack on gas company convoy

(mr) A policeman was killed and 12 others were injured in an attack on a convoy belonging to a private gas drilling company in Darazinda town in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The injured individuals were transported to the hospital, with two of them in critical condition. [ARYNEWS]

This incident follows a previous attack on an oil and gas company, during which two policemen providing security were killed and three others were injured in a firing attack.

Sri Lanka: President Wickremesinghe reveals 2024 budget to Parliament

(lf/lm) Sri Lankan Finance Minister and President Ranil Wickremesinghe on November 13 presented the country's national budget for the fiscal year 2024 to Parliament, acknowledging that the economy has improved compared to the previous year but has not fully recovered.

Notably, total tax revenue is projected to increase significantly to roughly USD 12.5 billion in 2024, with the largest growth expected in goods and services tax receipts. Meanwhile, budget expenditure has been set at a record USD 21.3 billion in 2024, an increase of nearly 33 percent compared to 2023, with capital expenditure more than doubling and USD 1.37 billion reserved for bank recapitalisation.

At the same time, the budget includes a lower-than-anticipated deficit target (9.1 percent of GDP), as Sri Lanka aims to secure its International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout program. The government has long-term goals set by the IMF to reach a primary surplus of 2.3 percent by 2025 and reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 95 percent by 2032, which currently stands at 113.8 percent as of the end of December.

President Wickremesinghe outlined a number of key initiatives which are aimed at improving the country's economic outlook. Four nerf universities will be established in the nation, specialising in Science and Technology, Defence, Management and Climate Change respectively. Furthermore, investments in fisheries, agriculture and farming were also announced, providing these essential sectors with

much needed financial support to bolster operations and ease rising resources costs.

Additionally, USD 24 million has been put towards resettling displaced families in Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces, where the Tamil culture is a majority. These funds will provide housing and resources to families who have been the victims of violence or oppression and, as such, were forced to flee their homes.

Initiatives to fund an increase in transport and sporting resources in the city of Kandy were put forward by the president, as well as infrastructure projects across the nation which will aim to restart Sri Lanka's constriction sector which was halted by the economic crisis. These projects, which focus on developing port facilities in Sri Lanka's major coastal cities and providing wide-spread public transportation, will be funded with government support as well a foreign investment, as the president asserted that local and external proposals for funding were being entertained from interested stakeholders. [Daily Mirror] [Economy Next] [Reuters] [The Hindu]

Sri Lanka: Parliament approves plans to restructure Ceylon Electricity Board, Sri Lankan Airlines

(lf) Sri Lanka's parliament passed a motion on October 9 which approved the spending of USD 2.7 billion on restructuring plans for the state-owned energy provider Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) and flag-carrier Sri Lankan Airlines. Both institutions will be restructured in order to maximise their operations and solve long-standing issues which have plagued their operations.

The CEB, which maintains a near 100 per cent monopoly over energy services over Sri Lanka, has struggled to keep up with electricity demands in certain provinces and has been accused of engaging in corrupt activities by denying competitors and start up business the opportunities to introduce green energy production projects within the country. The plan will see energy bill prices reviewed every six months to be maintained at a reasonable price for consumers and is expected to improve the conduct and services of the board.

Sri Lankan Airlines will likewise be restructured, as many speculate that the government is planning a partial privatisation plan to bring foreign money and investment into the country. The details of what the approved funds will be used for within Sri Lankan

Airlines have not been revealed yet, but the profitability and quality of service within the flag-carrier have been highlighted as areas for improvement as measures including adding new destinations and partnering with international airlines have aimed to revamp trust in the airline. [Reuters] [Daily Mirror] [Adaderana]

Sri Lanka: Total number of Dengue fever cases reaches 70,000 in 2023

(lf) Reports from the Epidemiology Unit of the Sri Lankan Ministry of Health released on November 8 indicate that four people have died from dengue fever in the country during the past week, bringing the total number of deaths in 2023 to 43. The overall tally of Dengue cases throughout the year has exceeded 70,000, a high tally for the island nation of 23 million people. [Daily Mirror]

The Colombo district of Sri Lanka, which includes the country's capital city, has contributing the highest number of cases at 14,884. The Western Province, with over 33,000 cases, leads the provinces in terms of infection. Notably, November alone has registered 1,685 Dengue cases. Health officials predict a further rise in dengue incidents due to the ongoing rainy conditions, leading authorities to encourage the public to maintain cleanliness in their surroundings and eliminate potential mosquito breeding sites.

Authorities attribute the rising number of cases to the prevailing rainy weather which Sri Lanka has experienced in recent months. It is unsure how the success of the 5-day dengue control program will be measured, by the policies which it has introduced are expected to end on Friday. [News 1st] [Xinhua]

Sri Lanka: Defence Ministry launches investigation into conduct of Civil Security Department

(lf) Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defence announced on November 7 that an investigation into allegations that members of the Civil Security Department (CSD), tasked with duties at places of worship, state facilities and other institutions, have engaged in activities beyond their official mandates, has been formally launched. The investigation is expected the reveal areas for improvement for the Department and rot identify specific individuals who have taken liberties in

their position by overstepping their responsibilities regarding the protection and security of important cultural and religious sites in Sri Lanka.

State Minister of Defence, Premitha Bandara Tennakoon, has specifically instructed the Director General of the CSD, Air Vice Marshal Roshan Biyanwila, to conduct the comprehensive inquiry, meaning that the review has been kept mostly within the ministry and will involve external, independent sources in a limited capacity, if at all.

In addition to the investigation, the minister has mandated a thorough review and update of the existing orders governing the attachment of Civil Security Department personnel to these institutions. The state minister also directed immediate action, including the termination of service, for any CSD personnel found violating official instructions.

Protection of sacred sites within Sri Lanka is a controversial topic, particularly as pertains to areas with a majority Tamil population, who had been subject to harassment and violent attacks during the period of ethnic tensions and civil war from 1983 to 2009 in Sri Lanka. There has been no timeframe given for the investigation's length from the Defence Ministry. [Daily Mirror] [Colombo Page]

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

Cambodia: National Power Party elects leadership

(pm) During its inaugural congress on November 12, the recently established National Power Party, formed in July, elected Sun Chanthy, its founder and former member of the Candlelight Party, as President. Chea Mony, the former president of Cambodia's Free Trade Union of Worker, was chosen as the Vice-President of the party. Rong Chhun, who recently resigned from his role as Vice President of the Candlelight Party to join the National Power Party, now serves as an advisor.

The party's leadership election comes ahead of the upcoming district and Senate elections scheduled for February 2024.

This development follows the exclusion of Candlelight Party candidates from the July general election by the National Election Committee, which refused to recognize the party, citing the inability to produce its original registration form issued by the Interior Ministry.

Critics viewed this move as politically motivated to sideline a credible contender against the ruling Cambodian People's Party, which ultimately secured 120 of the 125 seats in the National Assembly [see AiR No. 30, July/2023, 4].

Candlelight leaders since then have sought to regain official status. However, this has failed so far, prompting exploration of partnerships with smaller parties certified by the ministry. [Khmer Times 1] [Cambodianess] [Radio Free Asia]

In a latest development, the Ministry of Interior stated on November 13 that Chhun's taking up of the posy of party advisor is violating a court order prohibiting him from being involved in politics, citing his existing sentence over an incitement conviction.

In 2021, Chhun was sentenced ny the Court of Appeal to two years in prison on charges of incitement after a speech on the Cambodia-Vietnam border demarcation. However, he served 15 months and 11 days while the remaining eight months and 19 days were suspended. He was also placed under judicial supervision for three years.

In response to the ministry's warning, Chhun affirmed to continue to participate in politics with the National Power Party, arguing that the new Article 18 of the law on political rights, it is only forbidden to hold high positions such as president, vice president or member of the standing committee of a party while the role of advisers is allowed. [Khmer Times 2]

Cambodia: Commercial Court law ready to be approved

(pm) The Ministry of Justice has completed the draft law governing the establishment and functioning of the Commercial Court and commercial procedures.

Currently, the draft is undergoing a thorough review before being presented to the Cabinet for approval.

The implementation of this law is anticipated to significantly boost trade and investment, facilitating the resolution of business disputes in Cambodia and fostering increased confidence among foreign investors.

In an earlier development this year, the Ministry of Justice and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). According to the terms of the MoU, the ADB is committed to providing technical support to the ministry and enhancing the capacity of Cambodian judges in matters pertaining to trade laws and procedures. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: Chief Justice demoted for election-related ethical violation

(jb) Anwar Usman, the chief justice of Indonesia's Constitutional Court, has been dismissed from his position after an ethics council found him guilty of a conflict of interest over his part in a ruling that allowed President Joko Widodo's eldest son to run for the vice presidency.

The panel was formed after a public outcry over the court's decision to carve out an exception to the minimum age requirement for presidential and vice-presidential candidates, which allowed Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the eldest son of President Widodo, to become the running-mate of Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto. [AiR No. 42, October/2023, 3]

Against this backdrop, the panel concluded that Anwar committed a serious violation of the code of ethics and behavior of constitutional justices by violating principles of impartiality, integrity, competence, and more. It also reprimanded the other eight judges for violations of the ethical code, including allowing Anwar to be part of the decision.

Anwar's successor as chief justice will be elected by the nine-member constitutional court in the coming days. While he has been removed as chief justice, he is

allowed to remain one of the court's nine judges but must not take part in any election cases in which he could have a conflict of interest.

In related developments, the Constitutional Court is expected to issue its rulings on November 15 on several pending cases seeking to tighten the age exception by only allowing under age 40 candidates only for those who has served two terms in office as provincial governors to run in the presidential contest. [Al Jazeera] [Time]

Indonesia: Defense Minister Prabowo stretches lead on presidential contenders

(lm) Indonesian presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto has gained a significant lead over his closest rival in a recent opinion poll. The survey, conducted from October 27 to November 1, revealed that 39.7 percent of respondents would vote for the incumbent defense minister, while 30 percent would support Ganjar Pranowo, a former Central Java governor and the ruling party's candidate. This marks a substantial shift from previous polls that had shown the two candidates neck and neck [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]. [The Straits Times]

Indonesia: Top Islamic clerical body issues fatwa boycotting firms that support Israel

(lm) Indonesia's top Islamic clerical body, the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), issued a formal ruling, a fatwa, calling for a boycott of goods and services from companies that support Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians. The religious edict states that Muslims in Indonesia must support the Palestinian struggle against "Israeli aggression" and that supporting Israel or its supporters is considered "haram" (against Islamic law). [The Straits Times]

It's important to note that fatwas have no legal force but are intended to encourage religious adherence among Muslims in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. Indonesia has a history of supporting Palestinian independence and advocates for a resolution based on internationally agreed parameters, including a two-state solution.

Indonesia: Food prices forecast to remain high through year-end

(jb) The National Food Agency (Bapanas) in Indonesia has announced that food prices are expected to remain high for the remainder of the year due to the impact of the El Niño weather phenomenon on production in the country and elsewhere.

Indonesia, the largest economy in ASEAN, is currently facing a severe disruption in its rice production, primarily due to the extreme El Nino phenomenon. The prolonged drought has caused a shortage of rice, leading to a surge in prices and having a profound impact on small businesses and consumers in the region.

To control food prices, the Indonesian government plans to secure further imports of rice, corn, and sugar, and efforts are underway to boost production through initiatives like accelerating rice planting and improving fertilizer supply. The government will also import 500,000 tones of corn to stabilize prices. [Borneo Bulletin] [Bangkok Post] [The Star]

Indonesia: President's closest ally to become chief military

(dql) General Agus Subiyanto, a close ally of President Joko Widodo who was promoted to army chief only last month, received parliamentary committee approval to be the sole candidate to lead the country's armed forces after his predecessor retired. His appointment is set to be approved in a plenary meeting on November 21.

This has fueled further concern over what observers see as the president's moves to secure his influence in politics after his second and final term ends next year.

Analysts say that Subiyanto's appointment could be an attempt by the president to strengthen his grip on the military to support his eldest son's election as vice-president next year's presidential election, as the armed forces would have the authority to mobilize more than 500,000 personnel in the army, airforce, navy, and marine to vote for him. [BNN Bloomberg]

Lao PDR: Prime Minister orders crackdown on illegal lotteries

(ws) Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone has directed authorities in Vientiane and across the provinces to put an end to the use of unauthorized lotteries, particularly those originating from other countries, and to curb illegal gambling practices that are prevalent in Laos.

In the present scenario, some people are employing modern methods to promote lotteries, many of which are illegal. To address this issue, authorities have been advised to take decisive action against such operations and all forms of gambling.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister has instructed authorities to enhance legislation governing the sale of lottery tickets. Measures to penalize those violating the regulations are to be introduced, and efforts to encourage the public to act as whistleblowers regarding illicit lottery sales will be supported. [Vientiane Times]

Lao PDR: Displaced families refuse resettlement

(dql) According to the State Audit Organization, more than 100 families in northern Laos, displaced by the Laos-China Railway, are refusing to relocate to newly constructed resettlement villages.

Their primary objection is that the new homes are not situated near suitable farming land.

The Laos-China Railway, a high-speed connection between Laos and China, represents one of Beijing's significant investment projects in Southeast Asia, totaling USD 6 billion and spanning 410 km (255 miles) from the Lao-China border to the capital, Vientiane.

Despite the Lao-China Railway Company constructing two resettlement villages for 242 families in Luang Namtha and Oudomxay provinces, only 130 families have chosen to move in.

The Laos-China Railway Company is supposed to pay a total of USD 89 million to all villagers affected. So far, 6,073 families have received some USD 75 million while about 695 families have not yet been paid.

Meanwhile, hundreds of landowners, especially in the capital Vientiane, have declined to accept any compensation arguing that the offer is too low. [Radio Free Asia]

Malaysia: Main opposition BERSATU alleges some MPs getting pushed to back Prime Minister Anwar

(mw/lm) Malaysia's main opposition party, Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia (BERSATU), has alleged that some of its lawmakers are being coerced or bribed to shift their support to Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. [The Straits Times]

BERSATU's president, Muhyiddin Yassin, revealed that four lawmakers were either threatened with legal action or offered cash bribes to support Anwar. Two of them were suspended from the party and relieved of their party positions, while the other two are expected to face similar consequences. These lawmakers had recently switched their allegiance to Anwar's coalition, strengthening his majority.

Against this backdrop, BERSATU supreme council member Datuk Wan Saiful Wan Jan accused Prime Minister Anwar's administration of widespread money politics. Wan Saiful suggested the coordinated declarations and alleged payments indicate money politics within the government. [New Straits Times]

The increased support for Anwar could facilitate his plans to restructure the economy and reduce the budget deficit. While BERASTU has accused Anwar's camp of attempting to sway its lawmakers, Deputy Prime Minister Zahid Hamidi has suggested that more lawmakers may switch allegiances in the future.

The issue of party hopping in Malaysia has been contentious, and former Prime Minister Muhyiddin has proposed reviewing the ban on such actions. Currently, Malaysian law mandates that an MP's seat is vacated for elections if they switch parties, but this rule doesn't apply to the four lawmakers from BERSATU who recently shifted their support.

Malaysia: Former Prime Minister Mahathir appears on long-time rival Khairy's podcast

(lm) Former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and former Health Minister Khairy Jamaluddin, who had a long-standing rivalry dating back to their time in the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) party, appeared to have reconciled during an interview on Khairy's political podcast. The interview touched on various policy

disagreements and personal dynamics. [The Straits Times]

The two men clashed when Khairy was an aide to former Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who succeeded Mahathir as prime minister from 2004 to 2008. In the podcast, Khairy described the friction between Mahathir and Abdullah's administration as differences in opinion over policies such as the Singapore-Malaysia crooked bridge and the sale of the Malaysian-owned motorcycle company MV Agusta. He also mentioned Mahathir's criticism of Abdullah for canceling the double-tracking project for the rail operator KTMB.

Mahathir, on his end, acknowledged that he had contested against Khairy's son, Mukhriz Mohamad, for the UMNO Youth chief's post, and people had told him that Khairy's mother-in-law had campaigned for Khairy. Khairy had contested against Mahathir's son and won his first term as the UMNO Youth chief in 2005.

Malaysia: Former Youth Minister Syed Saddiq sentenced to jail, caning for graft charges

(mw/lm) Former Malaysian Youth and Sports Minister Syed Saddiq Abdul Rahman has been sentenced to seven years in prison, fined USD 2.1 million, and ordered to receive two strokes of the cane after being found guilty of charges including misappropriating funds, abetting in a criminal breach of trust, and money laundering. [TIME]

The charges stem from funds allegedly misappropriated from Armada, the youth wing of his former party, the Malaysian United Indigenous Party or BERSATU. Syed Saddiq, who was the youngest-ever minister in Malaysia when appointed to the Cabinet in 2018, had denied wrongdoing.

After the sentencing, Syed Saddiq expressed respect for the court's decision, emphasized the need to trust the judicial system, and stated his intention to appeal at the Court of Appeal to clear his name. His lawyer, Gobind Singh Deo, announced the plan to file a notice of appeal on the same day. [The Star]

Following his conviction, Syed Saddiq announced his resignation as the Malaysian United Democratic Alliance (MUDA) president to focus on clearing his name in court. He expressed his intent to continue serving as Member of Parliament but stated that he no

longer felt deserving of the MUDA president role. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: DAP chairman Lim Guan Eng launches legal action against opposition MP for false claims

(lm) Malaysia's Democratic Action Party (DAP) chairman, Lim Guan Eng, has initiated legal action against opposition lawmker Siti Mastura Muhammad following her allegations of ties between several DAP leaders and prominent historical figures. Siti Mastura has not retracted her allegations as of now. [The Straits Times]

Siti Mastura, a member of the Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), made these claims during a by-election rally in Kemaman, Terengganu. She alleged that former DAP leader Lim Kit Siang is a cousin of Singapore's founding prime minister Lee Kuan Yew, and she also claimed that Lim Guan Eng is related to other DAP leaders, including Transport Minister Anthony Loke, Local Government Development Minister Nga Kor Ming, and MPs Teresa Kok and Ngeh Koo Ham.

Lim Guan Eng responded by initiating legal action against Siti Mastura, stating that her remarks were a fabrication meant to incite fear and were full of outrageous lies. He accused her of making a hate speech that was racist and extremist. Lim Guan Eng also called on PAS president Abdul Hadi Awang and Perikatan Nasional chairman Muhyiddin Yassin to publicly state their position on the claims made by Siti Mastura.

Several other lawmakers have called on the police to investigate Siti Mastura for her allegations, particularly her claim that Lim Kit Siang is related to former Malayan Communist Party leader Chin Peng. MP Syerleena Rashid from DAP lodged a police report, accusing Siti Mastura of malicious intent to distort facts and create a negative perception of Lim Kit Siang and his family.

Malaysia: Federal Court commutes death penalty, life terms of 11 drug convicts

(lm) Malaysia's Federal Court has commuted the death sentences and natural-life prison terms of 11 individuals convicted of drug trafficking, including two Thai nationals. The sentences of all 11, including seven

death row inmates, have been reduced to life imprisonment for 30 years each. [The Straits Times]

The court's decision follows the capital punishment reforms passed earlier in 2023. The amendments to the law, passed in April, removed the mandatory death penalty for various crimes, allowing judges to use their discretion when sentencing. Nearly 1,000 individuals facing capital punishment or natural-life terms have submitted applications for re-sentencing.

Malaysia: Police bust drug processing, distribution ring in two-day operation

(mw) Police in Malaysia's Selangor state arrested 10 suspects and dismantled a suspected drug processing and distribution ring in a two-day operation. During the operation, conducted on November 2-3, police seized approximately 250.8 kilograms of methamphetamine and 9.37 kilograms of suspected methamphetamine. Additionally, during the arrests, the suspects led the police to a nearby area where more drugs were found buried, totaling approximately 326.8 kilograms of drugs and drug-manufacturing ingredients with an estimated value of roughly USD 2 million. [The Star]

Malaysia: National sewerage company not expected to need government subsidies from next year

(mw) Indah Water Konsortium (IWK), Malaysia's national sewerage company, is expected to no longer need subsidies from the government starting in 2024. Efforts to optimize the concession for management and operating costs, along with revenue generated from non-core businesses such as secular economic programs, solid bio-recycling, and leasing sewerage assets to third parties, have contributed to this development. The tariff adjustment implemented in January 2023, as approved by the Cabinet in April 2022, has also played a role in reducing the need for government subsidies to IWK. [The Star]

Malaysia: Communications minister meets social media platform representatives

(mw) Malaysia's Communications and Digital Minister, Fahmi Fadzil, met with representatives from social media platform providers *TikTok* and *Meta* to address concerns related to content regulation. The discussion included issues such as the removal of Palestine-related content on *TikTok*, online gambling, and the coordinated inauthentic behavior (CIB) strategy on the platforms. [The Star]

Fahmi raised complaints and major issues during the meeting and emphasized the need for immediate action. *TikTok* and *Meta* committed to closer cooperation to resolve these issues.

Earlier, evidence and consumer complaints had suggested that *TikTok* systematically removed content related to the Palestine-Israel conflict in Malaysia.

Malaysia: TVET graduates to get boost as government pushes for USD 640 minimum wage

(mw) Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi has emphasized the need for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) graduates to earn a minimum wage of RM3,000 (USD 640 USD) to ensure the attractiveness of skilled jobs.

He highlighted the relocation of the TVET secretariat to his office and the upcoming establishment of the China-Malaysia Institute focused on TVET in Johor. The secretariat is currently drafting the National TVET Policies set for a February launch after Cabinet approval. Ahmad Zahid advocated for global acceptance of TVET qualifications, stating their importance in meeting job demands.

He underlined the brighter career prospects for TVET graduates, citing higher job opportunities and salaries compared to traditional academic paths. He encouraged private employers to offer higher minimum wages for TVET graduates, aiming to enhance productivity and profitability without the need for parliamentary intervention. [The Star]

Malaysia: Government urged to keep renewable energy for economy, jobs, carbon offset

(mw) A Malaysian lawmaker, Bakri Jamaluddin, has urged the government to reconsider its decision to lift

the ban on exporting renewable energy (RE) to Singapore. He argued that if Malaysia sells its RE to Singapore, the republic would build its own data centers, which would stimulate its economic growth. Instead, Bakri suggested focusing on using RE domestically, which could attract data centers to operate in Malaysia, creating job opportunities and contributing to carbon offset goals. [Free Malaysia Today]

The ban, lifted in May, was initially imposed two years ago but was revoked with the aim of enhancing the country's green economy. The decision to export RE to Singapore was made in response to the republic's increasing investments, particularly in establishing data centers within Malaysian borders.

In addition, Bakri inquired about the government's strategies to promote the use of RE by local industries, drawing examples from successful RE usage in other countries such as Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

Malaysia: Faces looming white rice shortage amid uncertain weather and expensive padi seeds

(lm) Malaysia is facing a potential shortage of local white rice within five months due to a combination of unpredictable weather patterns and skyrocketing paddy seed prices. To address the issue, authorities are urged to monitor seed production, increase quotas for producers, and expedite farm creation applications to stabilize prices and ensure an adequate supply of paddy seeds. [The Straits Times]

Myanmar: Approximately 80,000 houses set on fire after coup

(wn) Data for Myanmar, a monitoring group for homes destroyed by fire, revealed that the military council army and its affiliated organizations burned down nearly 80,000 (76,923) civilian homes in the aftermath of the coup.

Specifically, between February 1, 2021, and October 31, 2023, Sagaing Division saw over 58,000 houses destroyed, with 11,540 homes affected in Magway and Chin State, of which 1,638 were burnt and destroyed. Records from Data for Myanmar indicate that 603 houses met the same fate in October 2023.

In Magway and Chin State, 11,540 homes were impacted, with 1,638 burned down, while other states and regions also experienced similar destruction. According to the data from Data for Myanmar, 603 houses were burned and destroyed in October 2023.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that the ongoing military conflicts and insecurity in Myanmar have led to nearly two million internally displaced people.

Out of these, approximately 1.7 million individuals were displaced due to the conflict and insecurity that emerged after the coup. [RFA Burmese][Data for Myanmar]

Myanmar: Martial law declared in eight townships in Northern Shan State

(wn) The military council has granted the Northeast Regional Military Headquarters (Ramakha) the authority to enforce martial law in Lashio, Theinni, Kut Khaing in northern Shan State, and the autonomous regions of Kone Kyann and Laoukkai townships, placing these areas under the jurisdiction of regional commanders.

On November 12, martial law was extended to eight townships, including Kumlong and Namkham. Theinni is reported to be under the control of Northern Alliance forces. Notably, Namkham town experienced a fire at the ruby hall, attributed to a heavy weapon discharge by military council troops in Camp New Hill.

The Northeastern Division Commander and the Regional Command Commander have been appointed by the military council as administrators for the townships under martial law. Endowed with the authority to conduct court martial and summary judgment, they are mandated to provide direct reports on the situation in these townships to the military leader, General Min Aung Hlaing. [The Global New Light of Myanmar] [BBC Burmese]

Myanmar: Military council summons all armed forces to front line

(wn) The military council has ordered all armed forces to prepare for battlefield combat due to a shortage of fighting soldiers caused by significant losses during Operation 1027.

This operation, initiated by the Brotherhood Alliance – consisting of the Arakan Army (AA), the Taung National Liberation Army (TNLA), and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) – involved capturing over 100 military council camps and towns in Northern Shan State, Kachin State, Upper Sagaing Region, and Mandalay Region.

Former Captain Lin Htet Aung reported that the military leader directed armed forces, including army doctors graduating from military hospitals, to join combat troops in conflict zones. Soldiers from the North Shan operation have been observed forming combat units.

Additionally, troops initially assigned to secure the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon are now actively engaging as combat soldiers on the front line. [Irrawaddy Burmese 1]

On November 8, the Brotherhood Alliance announced the expansion of Operation 1027 to encompass the entire country, aiming for more effective joint operations with other armed resistance forces nationwide in the near future.

The coordinated attack, initiated from northern Shan State, involves multiple resistance forces, including the People's Defense Forces (PDFs), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Burma People's Liberation Army (BPLA), and Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF).

Operation 1027, which commenced on October 27, resulted in the capture of at least 150 military council camps and seven towns, effectively blocking the military council's land access to China, as stated in the released statement by the Brotherhood Alliance.

Acting President of the National Unity Government (NUG), Duwa La Shila, emphasized the widespread hope instilled by Operation 1027, showcasing the benefits of well-coordinated military actions. He also stressed the importance of striving for the highest possible military achievement for the revolution. [Irrawaddy Burmese 2]

Myanmar: Military Council plane crashed during the battle in Karenni region

(wn) On November 11, a military council jet crashed in the Karenni region, where ongoing clashes persist between the military council forces and the Karenni coalition forces.

The Karenni National Defense Force (KNDF) reported that the plane was shot down during combat near Loikow. The KNDF asserts that the aircraft was downed as part of their offensive against the Military Council in the Karenni region, claiming the capture of eight Military Council camps, along with weapons and ammunition.

Responding to this, the Military Council stated on Viber that their light training aircraft had crashed due to engine failure and confirmed contact with the two pilots. [VOA Burmese]

Myanmar: Kokang Army announces complete seizure of Kumlong

(wn) On November 12, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), the armed resistance group in the Kokang region located in the northern part of Shan State and sharing a border with China's Yunnan Province to the east, announced the successful capture of the Military Council's strategic hill and Kunlong bridges.

These key locations, situated on the west side of the Thanlwin River and opposite Kunlong city, were secured after a six-day operation.

Historically, the Kunlong region was administered by the Kokang group until 1969 when it fell under military control.

The MNDAA shared this information in a statement, highlighting the significance of Kunlong city and Kunlong Suspension Bridge, known for the historic Kunlong 40-day battle between the Communist Party of Burma and the army. The military's dominance over this area has spanned more than fifty years.[RFA Burmese][The Irrawaddy]

In a separate statement, the MNDAA has announced the capture of Mongko, in collaboration with the Arakan Army (AA), on November 7, following attacks on a junta tactical base two days earlier.

MNDAA spokesperson Li Kyar Win reported the group has raised its flag at the China border gate, although residents are not yet permitted to return due to ongoing area-clearing operations. [MyanmarNow]

Myanmar: TNLA and PDF initiate prolonged offensive against a military

camp near the Goteik viaduct

(sk) The Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), in collaboration with the Mandalay People's Defence Force (MDY-PDF), targeted a Myanmar military camp near the Goteik viaduct in northern Shan State's Nawnghkio Township.

The joint forces initiated the attack last week, engaging in ongoing fighting to displace the junta's forces from the area.

Positioned strategically near the viaduct, a 670-meter railway bridge over the Goteik gorge, the TNLA and MDY-PDF confronted the military camp from higher ground. While successfully impeding a military convoy near Shwe Nyaung Pin village, battles in the vicinity have prompted locals to seek refuge in surrounding forests.

Villages are now under a military-imposed curfew from 5 pm to 6 am. [MyanmarNow]

Myanmar: Resistance forces struggle to gain control of Tigyaing

(sk) The junta air force conducted an airstrike in Tigyaing, Sagaing Region, responding to assaults by anti-junta armed groups attempting to seize control of the town.

The clash unfolded after temporary roadblocks were set up on the Tagaung-Tigyaing-Indaw highway by the anti-junta forces. At least three junta aircraft initiated an airstrike after 4 pm, with two more joining an hour later.

The initial attack reportedly targeted two monasteries, resulting in casualties, as clashes spread throughout Tigyaing. The remaining junta personnel withdrew to a police station, engaging in a fierce battle with anti-junta forces defending the building.

Local civilians, unable to evacuate before the conflict, reportedly faced casualties. Some residents had left Tigyaing since the takeover of Kawlin town by anti-junta forces on November 6. [MyanmarNow]

The Philippines: Court grants bail to ex-president Duterte's top critic after six years in jail

(lm) A Philippine court on November 13 granted bail to Leila de Lima, a former senator and vocal critic of former President Rodrigo Duterte's "war on drugs." [The Straits Times]

She has been detained for over six years in connection with a drug case that accused her of conspiring to support the illegal narcotics trade in a Philippine prison. De Lima has consistently maintained that the charges against her are politically motivated.

Her detention came after she launched a Senate inquiry into Duterte's anti-drugs crackdown, which attracted international attention due to the high number of deaths. Duterte accused her of colluding with drug gangs in jails and publicly criticized her.

The Philippines: Supreme Court affirms dismissal of President Marcos Jr.'s wealth case

(lm) The Philippines' Supreme Court has upheld a 2012 decision by an anti-graft court to dismiss an ill-gotten wealth case against the family of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. The ruling stated that the government failed to prove that the assets in question "originated from the government's resources." [BNN Bloomberg]

This decision comes as part of the ongoing legal battle over the wealth amassed by Ferdinand Marcos Sr. during his dictatorship, with estimates ranging from USD 5 billion to USD 10 billion. The Philippine government has recovered approximately USD 3 billion of these assets as of 2020, but lawsuits are still pending to obtain more. Earlier this year, the anti-graft court also denied petitions by the Marcos family to recover sequestered assets.

The Philippines: Coalition of human rights advocates denounces alleged rights violations by government

(lm) A coalition of human rights advocates, the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines (ICHRP), has condemned multiple instances of assaults against human rights advocates in the Philippines. The coalition points to ongoing human rights violations in the country, including extrajudicial killings, disappearances, suppression of civil liberties, the designation of leaders as terrorists under the Anti-

Terror Act, and red-tagging of activists and organizations. [INQUIRER.NET]

The Philippines: Treatment of prisoners, disappeared persons reflects lack of regard for human rights, says journalist

(lm) *Rappler* journalist Jairo Bolledo has claimed that the Philippines' low regard for human rights is exemplified by cases of prisoners' conditions and enforced disappearances. [RAPPLER]

During the November 9 episode of *Newsbreak Chats*, he highlighted the frequent violations of prisoners' rights, including extended detentions and deplorable conditions in detention centers. Overcrowding in these facilities is a significant issue, with the Philippines having the fourth-highest jail occupancy rate globally as of November 2023. Bolledo also stressed the need for comprehensive reforms in the national justice system, including addressing substandard health conditions within prisons.

Regarding enforced disappearances, Bolledo noted that a law meant to address the issue has yet to be fully implemented. The Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act, signed in 2012, criminalizes enforced disappearances and requires law enforcement to provide information on reported victims. However, no one has faced prosecution or been found guilty under this law, raising questions about its effectiveness.

The Philippines: Senate increases Coast Guard budget

(lm) The upper House of the Philippines' Parliament, the Senate, has increased the budget for the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) for 2024 by USD 23.1 million to strengthen the agency amid issues in the West Philippine Sea (WPS). The Senate Committee on Finance allocated around USD 483.4 million for the PCG, up from the 2024 General Appropriations Bill's USD 458.4 million. [CNN Philippines]

The PCG plays a critical role in defending the country's interests in the WPS, and the increased budget aims to enhance its capabilities and daily operations. The PCG spends USD 30.3 million a year on fuel alone, and the additional funds will support fuel, maintenance, and equipment needs.

Singapore says wearing clothes linked to Israel-Gaza war could lead to 6 months' jail

(lb) Singapore's government has issued advisories warning against the public display of clothes with foreign national emblems related to the Israel-Gaza war and logos of militant groups like Hamas. Given the "emotive issue" and "heightened sensitivities" surrounding the conflict, such clothing should not be worn in Singapore. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) emphasized that the public display of foreign national emblems without a permit is an offense, punishable by a jail term of up to six months, a fine of up to S$500 (US$370), or both. The advisory extends to travelers using Singapore's checkpoints, with firm action, including denial of entry, against those who do not comply. Additionally, the Office of the Commissioner of Charities issued an advisory regarding fundraising activities for foreign charitable causes, emphasizing the need for a permit and urging vigilance and discernment among donors. The peace and harmony in Singapore should not be affected by external events like the Israel-Gaza war, according to MHA. [South China Morning Post]

Singapore: Parliament approves longer training for law graduates

(lm) Singapore's Parliament has passed legislative changes to extend the practice training period for aspiring lawyers from six months to a year before they can qualify to practice law. After completing at least six months of their training, trainees can apply for a provisional practicing certificate, allowing them to appear in court and give advice to clients under supervision. [The Straits Times]

Some MPs have expressed concerns about fair remuneration and benefits during the extended training period, but the government has not mandated a minimum wage for trainees, leaving compensation to individual law firms.

Singapore: Human rights lawyer M. Ravi receives IBA Human Rights Award

(lm) Singapore-based human rights lawyer Ravi Madasamy (M. Ravi) has been awarded the 2023

International Bar Association (IBA) Award for Outstanding Contribution by a Legal Practitioner to Human Rights for his exceptional work in defending human rights and advocating for the decriminalization of homosexuality and the abolition of the death penalty in the city-state. [International Bar Association]

Ravi Madasamy, a founding member of the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network and the Singapore Anti-Death Penalty Campaign's community group, has worked to save over 40 inmates from death row and played a key role in the decriminalization of homosexuality in Singapore.

In March, the Court of Three Judges issued a five-year suspension order against M. Ravi for making "grave and baseless accusations of improper conduct" against the Attorney-General of Singapore. The five-year suspension is the maximum allowable sanction for a lawyer's misconduct.

Thailand: Election Commission asked to investigate Deputy Speaker's ouster from Move Forward Party

(ws) The Bhumjaithai Party, a junior partner in Thailand's ruling coalition, has called on the country's Election Commission (EC) to investigate the expulsion of Deputy House Speaker Padipat Suntiphada from the main opposition Move Forward Party. Supachai questions whether the expulsion followed the party's regulations and is seeking the dissolution of the party. [ThaiPBSWorld]

Padipat was expelled from the MFP on September 28 in a move that was widely seen as enabling the party to retain both roles – opposition leader and deputy speaker [see AiR No. 40, October/2023, 1]. Subsequently, he joined the Fair Party.

Against this backdrop, the Bhumjaithai Party has now requested the EC to check if the MFP took disciplinary action against Padipay prior to his expulsion, as required by the party's regulations and by law. Thailand's Constitution requires the leader of the biggest opposition party to serve as opposition leader, but it also prohibits any member of that party from serving as cabinet minister, House Speaker or Deputy Speaker.

Thailand: Pita vows to run again for premiership

(nt) Pita Limjaroenrat, from the Move Forward Party and the thwarted winner of the Thai election, has declared his intention to once again run for the position of prime minister. This decision comes despite facing opposition from political forces that prevented him from assuming the role earlier in the year.

Additionally, Pita is awaiting a court case where the Constitutional Court will convene on November 15 to determine whether his Member of Parliament status will be terminated due to his ownership of iTV media shares during his candidacy for election. [France 24]

Thailand: Bill on dissolution of Internal Security Operations Command reaches dead end

(dql) The proposal to dissolve the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) by the opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) faced dismissal after Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin argued that "[d]issolving the ISOC was never a part of the Pheu Thai Party's policy, neither before, during, nor after the election."

During Thailand's struggle with a communist insurgency between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, ISOC was in charge of a wide range of civil affairs projects as part of a broader effort to extend the influence of the Thai military into broader areas of society.

The discussion on terminating the ISOC was initiated by Romadon Panjor, an MFP lawmaker, who recently introduced a bill aimed at ending the Internal Security Law, potentially leading to the dissolution of the ISOC. Romadon clarified that dismantling the ISOC aligns with the party's military reform policy, intending to cease military intervention in political and civilian affairs.

However, the bill is tied to budgetary allocations and requires the endorsement of the prime minister to be considered by the House of Representatives. Given Srettha's explicit rejection of dissolving the ISOC, it appears that the bill is unlikely to progress further. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government approve measures to support rice farmers

(ws) Amidst the prevailing downturn in rice prices, the Thai cabinet has approved measures to intervene in rice pricing. The aim is to dissuade farmers from hastily selling their agricultural yield to traders or millers. Instead, farmers are encouraged to store their crops in cooperative barns and await opportune pricing.

As of November 7, the cabinet has allocated USD 1.54 billion primarily through the Bank of Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives (BAAC). This funding is intended to provide credit or loans to farmers' associations, cooperatives, and individual farmers with their own storage facilities.

The goal is for them to purchase paddy, store the unmilled grain for 4-5 months to reduce humidity, and then sell it to millers for potentially higher profits. [ThaiPBSWorld]

Thailand: Wisanu, Arkhon appointed as members of Council of State

(ak) Wisanu Krea-ngam and Arkhom Termpittayapaisith, former cabinet ministers in the Prayut Chan-o-cha government, have been appointed as members of the Council of State, the government's legal office. These appointments were made to fill two vacancies created by the passing of council member Nopphanithi Suriya last year and the resignation of council member Udom Rathamarit. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Charter referendum possibly to be alongside provincial administrative organization elections

(ak) The panel for the charter referendum is exploring the option of conducting the referendum concurrently with the provincial administrative organization (PAO) elections, anticipated for either next year or 2025.

In addition, discussions with the Election Commission are underway to assess the feasibility of implementing electronic voting for the referendum. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Prime Minister highlights government's 60-day achievements in televised address

(bk) On November 9, Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin delivered a televised speech, offering an overview of the government's initiatives taken since coming to power two months ago. Key measures presented by Srettha included a reduction in electricity rates to alleviate financial burdens, addressing household debt issues, and implementing solutions to mitigate high-interest charges, and plans for income augmentation featured a digital wallet scheme.

In the realm of agriculture, the government underscored the importance of expanding markets, particularly in Africa and the Middle East. Tourism initiatives aimed at enhancing national income included visa exemptions for visitors from China, Taiwan, and India.

Infrastructure improvements, extending beyond major cities to secondary destinations, were discussed with a focus on enhancing the overall tourist experience. Transportation, including the development of a high-speed train network, was deemed crucial for national connectivity.

The Prime Minister also delved into export priorities, emphasizing the significance of the durian trade and efforts to streamline the documentation process.

Social issues, including constitutional amendments and legislation on same-sex marriage, were mentioned, with a commitment to resolving these matters.

He provided clarification on the status of organizations like the Internal Security Operations Command, highlighting ongoing development and changes.

Acknowledging time constraints, he urged efficiency and productivity from government agencies, emphasizing the importance of cooperation to address the nation's concerns and stimulate economic growth. [The Nation]

Thailand: Key details of the 'Digital Wallet' scheme unveiled; prime minister defends debt plan

(bk/lm) Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin announced on November 10 the launch of the so-

called digital wallet scheme next May. [Thai PBS World 1] [Royal Thai Government]

Thai citizens aged 16 and above with a monthly income not exceeding THB 70,000 and bank savings below THB 500,000 are eligible for a one-time THB 10,000 (USD 277) cash benefit. This will reach approximately 50 million Thais, costing the taxpayer THB 500 billion, as opposed to the original plan covering 54.4 million people at a cost of THB 560 billion. Funding will come from government-secured loans repayable within four years. To facilitate the fund-raising, a special bill will be passed by parliament early next year.

Following the announcement, Sirikanya Tansakul, Member of Parliament (MP) from the opposition Move Forward Party (MFP) and the MFP's deputy leader, raised concerns about the government's decision to secure loans for the digital wallet scheme, suggesting it could be constitutionally and fiscally risky. She criticized the government for opting for a Loan Bill to fund the project without apparent urgency and drew parallels with the past rejection of the Yingluck Shinawatra administration's THB 2 trillion loan bill by the Constitutional Court for the bill's lack of justifiable urgency.

Meanwhile, political activist Srisuwan Janya plans to petition the Constitutional Court, questioning the legality of the planned THB 500 billion loan bill. [Thai PBS World 2] [Thai PBS World 3]

However, Prime Minister Srettha defended the borrowing plan, stating that the additional debt would only increase the government's public debt to 64 percent of GDP, still below the legal ceiling of 70 percent. He argued that the economic stimulus was necessary to revitalize an economy that has experienced average growth of less than 2 percent over the past decade, lagging behind its Southeast Asian neighbors. [BNN Bloomberg]

Thailand: Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin denies Chinese police patrol plan after public outcry

(ak/lm) Seeking to clear the air following a public outcry, Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin clarified that the country has no plans to invite Chinese police officers to patrol its tourist destinations. Srettha emphasized that Thailand is interested in cooperating with Chinese police for information exchange regarding criminal networks that may be active in Thailand, with the aim of boosting the confidence of

Chinese tourists. However, this cooperation would not involve the stationing of Chinese police personnel in Thailand. [Bloomberg]

The country has been actively working to revive its tourism industry, which is a key driver of economic growth. To attract more Chinese tourists, Thailand waived visa requirements for Chinese travelers for a five-month period, with an extension granted to travelers from India and Taiwan through May of the following year. Despite these efforts, Chinese arrivals have not yet reached the Thai government's full-year target, as official data shows 2.8 million Chinese tourists so far this year, trailing the target of 4 million to 4.4 million.

Thailand: BOI's report highlights robust growth, foreign investment inflow

(bk) According to the Thailand Board of Investment (BOI), Thailand has witnessed a substantial increase in project applications during the period from January to September, totaling 1,555 and reflecting a 31 percent surge in value, reaching TBH 516.8 billion (USD 14.5 billion), marking a noteworthy 22 percent year-on-year growth.

This upswing is attributed to heightened confidence among foreign investors in Thailand's investment landscape, propelled by the success of the new investment promotion strategy focused on the "New Economy."

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) applications experienced a significant boost, with a 49 percent increase in projects totaling 910, and a 43 percent rise in investment value, reaching THB 398.5 billion.

China emerged as the leading contributor to FDI, trailed by Singapore and Japan. Targeted industries, constituting 51 percent of total investment applications, contributed THB 366.2 billion, with the electrical appliances and electronics sector taking the lead, followed by the agro-industry and food processing sector.

Actively addressing challenges, the BOI board is collaborating with government agencies to enhance the investment climate through the "Ease of Investment" agenda. This initiative involves relaxing Foreign Business License requirements, easing visa regulations for foreign workers, and addressing regulatory hurdles.

To expand its global reach, the BOI plans to increase its workforce and establish offices in strategic locations such as Riyadh, Chengdu, and Singapore. Additionally, the BOI is championing the automotive industry by promoting automation and robotics, approving enhanced incentives for manufacturers, including a 3-year corporate income tax exemption and import duty exemptions. [Thailand Board of Investment] [Yahoo Finance]

Thailand: Energy Ministry investigates speculations of fuel hoarding

(nt/lm) Thailand's Energy Ministry has pledged to take strict action against fuel retailers found to be hoarding fuel in response to complaints about a sudden fuel shortage at petrol stations following the government's decision to lower the prices of gasohol 91 and gasohol 95. [The Thaiger]

Motorists reported that many petrol stations ran out of these fuels just hours after the price reduction took effect. The Ministry is investigating possible illegal activities such as fuel hoarding by sellers. Retailers found guilty could face fines or prison sentences.

The price reduction was initiated by a Cabinet resolution and is set to run until January 31, 2024.

Thailand: Clean air campaigners demand government act on air pollution

(nt/lm) Campaigners in Thailand are urging the government to pass a "clean air act" as the country prepares for its annual peak pollution season. The Thailand Clean Air Network (CAN), a group of academics and activists, has submitted a proposed law to the government, along with an open letter to Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, calling for urgent action to address the air pollution crisis. In the letter, CAN highlighted the lack of coordination between government ministries and the need for a fully integrated approach to address air pollution. A draft clean air bill is expected to be presented to the cabinet this month. [The Straits Times]

Thailand: PTT Plc initiates reinvestment phase to explore new business sectors for future growth

(nt/lm) PTT Plc, Thailand's national energy conglomerate, is embarking on a reinvestment phase to explore new business sectors for future growth. Traditional businesses centered around oil refining and petrochemicals have shown limited potential for future income growth, prompting the need for reinvestment. [The Thaiger]

PTT's reinvestment strategy, called "Future Energy and Beyond," encompasses sectors such as electric vehicles (EVs), EV batteries, hydrogen and future energy sources, AI, robotics, lifestyle, life sciences, nutrition, logistics, and pharmaceuticals. The company aims for 30 percent of its net income to come from future energy and plans to allocate THB 1 billion for investments in these sectors from 2023 to 2027.

PTT also has ambitious environmental goals, aiming to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent from the 2020 level by 2030, achieve carbon neutrality by 2040, and reach net-zero emissions by 2050. The company expects its new ventures to start yielding results within the next 3 to 5 years.

Despite its focus on reinvestment, PTT remains committed to the country's energy security. The company made strategic decisions to purchase and store 4 million barrels of oil during the Russia-Ukraine crisis to secure the country's energy supply, even though it incurred losses when oil prices fell.

Thailand: Defense Minister Sutin supports military modernization

(ws) Defense Minister Sutin Klungsang delivered a speech, affirming the Defense Ministry's readiness to aid in the advancement of a more robust and technologically advanced armed forces, aimed at addressing emerging security threats to the kingdom.

Acknowledging past misconceptions about military spending, Sutin emphasized that funds allocated for military procurements should be tailored not only to meet the armed forces' requirements but also to counter defense challenges posed by other nations. He stressed the importance of avoiding actions that create distance between the military and the public, emphasizing the key goal of strengthening and modernizing the military to function as an efficient and streamlined force.

Sutin, previously the deputy leader of the largest coalition party, Pheu Thai, becomes Thailand's sixth civilian defense minister. Notably, he is the first person

in this role who does not concurrently serve as the prime minister. [Bangkok Post]

Vietnam: New Chairperson of Committee on Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations Affairs appointed

(tt) Vietnam's Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Minh Hang has been appointed as the new Chairperson of the Committee for Foreign Non-governmental Organizations Affairs (COMINGO), replacing her predecessor, Ha Kim Ngoc. Nguyen Minh Hang was formerly the Assistant to the Foreign Minister and Director of the Department of Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]

COMINGO is responsible for assisting the Prime Minister on matters related to foreign non-governmental organizations operating in Vietnam. It also collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in creating and proposing legal regulations concerning the activities of foreign NGOs in the country. The committee plays a key role in evaluating foreign NGOs and forwarding documentation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the issuance, renewal, modification, or revocation of Certificates of Registration for these organizations.

Vietnam: Government announces measures to strengthen combat against IUU fishing

(tt) Vietnam's Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh has issued a telegram outlining urgent measures to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the country. The measures include strict enforcement of existing directives, allocating resources, raising awareness, improving legal frameworks, enhancing monitoring of fishing boats, ensuring traceability of aquatic products, and strengthening international cooperation. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development will oversee implementation and report progress to the relevant authorities. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]

The move is part of the government's efforts to remove the so-called yellow card" warning by the European Commission against seafood exports and ensure a sustainable fisheries sector. Under the 2010 IUU Regulation, the Commission issues yellow cards to

third countries when it has evidence that they are not cooperating fully in fighting IUU activities. In September 2017, the Commission issued a yellow card to Vietnam and made nine recommendations that the country must implement to comply with EU standards.

Vietnam: Population Law drafted to address declining birth rates, labor shortages

(tt) Vietnam is considering a new Population Law to combat labor shortages caused by declining birth rates. [VietnamExpress]

The draft law encourages couples in areas with low birth rates to have two children and proposes providing one-time monetary support to women giving birth to a second child. It also suggests waiving or reducing tuition fees for children in preschools and elementary schools, especially in industrial parks and export processing zones. Provinces and cities with low fertility rates would be required to encourage couples to have two children and create favorable conditions for this.

Vietnam's fertility rate has dropped significantly over the past two decades, posing the risk of labor shortages and other long-term consequences.

Vietnam: 18 sentenced to death in drug bust

(lm) Eighteen individuals, including two South Koreans and one Chinese, were sentenced to death in Vietnam for drug smuggling and trafficking. The group was found guilty of illegally storing, trafficking, and trading over 216 kilograms of drugs between May and June 2020. The narcotics were trafficked from Cambodia to Ho Chi Minh City, some for domestic consumption and others for transport to South Korea. Three defendants received life imprisonment, and one underage individual was sentenced to 15 years in prison. [France24]

Vietnam: Government targets top 3 regional labor productivity with by 2020 with national plan

(tt) Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister Tran Hong Ha recently approved a national plan that aims to increase labor productivity through 2030, as the country seeks to become one of the top three regional countries in terms of labor productivity by 2030. [VNExpress]

The national plan aims for an average annual labor productivity growth rate of over 6.5 percent and includes specific targets such as 6.5-7 percent growth in labor productivity in manufacturing and processing, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and services sectors. Key economic regions and cities will aim for even higher productivity growth rates.

Vietnam: Electricity price picks up 4.5 percent

(tt) The retail price of electricity in Vietnam increased by an average of 4.5 percent starting from November 9, as announced by the Electricity of Vietnam (EVN). The average retail price per kWh rose to USD 8.5 cents from the previous rate of USD 8.2 cents per kWh, excluding value-added tax. This marks the second price increase for electricity in the country this year. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]

The impact of the price hike is expected to be moderate for 1.27 million low-income households and social beneficiaries, as the government continues to provide electricity subsidies to them. However, service providers are estimated to pay an additional USD 9.43 per month on average, and manufacturing companies are expected to pay an extra USD 17.34 per month on average. Administrative organizations will see an increase of USD 3.69 per month on average.

Vietnam: National action month on gender equality launched

(tt) The National Action Month on Gender Equality and Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response was officially launched in Hanoi on November 10. The event was organized by the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the United Nations Office in Vietnam and Viet Nam Airlines. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]

The National Action Month on Gender Equality has been held annually from November 15 to December 15 since 2016. Vietnam has improved its ranking on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index,

moving up 11 places from 83rd to 72nd out of 146 countries over the past year, with a score of 0.711.

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Conclusion of China International Import Expo

(ic) November 10 saw the conclusion of the 6th China International Import Expo (CIIE) that had started on November 5.

The CIIE is an annual event that seeks to court foreign interest in trading with Chinese firms, and Chinese sources suggest this year's iteration attracted around 3,400 exhibitors and 410,000 professional visitors, marking a full return to its pre-pandemic level. [CGTN 1]

It was estimated that USD 78.41 billion worth of deals were made, marking a 6.7 percent increase since the 5th CIIE in 2022. [Shanghai Daily] [South China Morning Post]

Among other market trends observed on-site was an increased effort to offer Chinese consumers health-related products and solutions, seeing ongoing Chinese efforts to expand healthcare access as an opportunity for engagement. [China Daily]

Another key industry highlighted in Chinese media was the microchip and semiconductor industry. With 47 related companies represented at the fair, Chinese news media suggested that businesses were eager to

sell their products to China and hampered by their home countries' geopolitical strategies. [CGTN 2]

US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns noted the strong presence of US firms at CIIE, highlighting that the most important element for facilitating trade between the two countries was stability in China-US relations, something recent summits had contributed significantly to. He also noted that US firms were the most represented in terms of number of businesses at the CIIE this year. [Xinhua]

China imposes rare-earths export restrictions

(ga) On November 7, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced that export controls on critical minerals and rare earths would be made stricter.

Exports of rare earths, iron ore, copper ore concentrate, crude oil, and potash fertilizer will need to report both the minerals being exported and their final destinations, although there are no quotas on exports. The new restrictions will last until October 2025.

The new export restrictions follow recent moves of the Chinese government, including an October restriction on graphite exports, which are needed for electric vehicle batteries, and July restrictions on germanium and gallium which are used in computer chips [see AiR No. 28, July/2023, 2].

The restrictions are seen as a signal from Beijing to Washington about the significant leverage that China has over the market for rare earths, which are used in high-end technologies such as microchips and components for electric vehicles. China is the world's biggest exporter of rare earth minerals, extracting 60 percent of rare earths and processing 87 percent of global rare earth minerals.

The US and the West have been working over the last few years to reduce their dependence on rare earths minerals and to find sources outside of China. The US, EU, and Australia have all announced initiatives to invest in domestic extraction and processing of rare earths minerals.

China is working hard to retain its control of critical minerals exports though, and is expected to have set a record level of investment in overseas critical minerals projects this year. China is developing rare earths export and extraction partnerships globally,

particularly in the Global South, as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. [Foreign Policy] [Newsweek] [Stratfor]

China hosts Aman Youyi drills in South China Sea

(ic) Militaries from Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam have sent personnel and warships to the Aman Youyi 2023 (Peace and Friendship 2023) drills that kicked off on November 13 and focuses on joint anti-terrorism and maritime security.

Held in southern Guangzhou province, Cambodian and Vietnamese defense ministries said Aman Youyi-2023 is expected to continue until November 22. [China Military]

The Philippines, despite having participated in past iterations of this exercise as an observer, is refraining from doing so this year, likely as a result of a recent flare-up in the South China Sea dispute between them and China.

On the other hand, Malaysia and Vietnam also hold competing claims against China in the South China Sea. [Radio Free Asia]

G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting discussed cross-cutting global diplomacy and security

(ic) The G7 Foreign Ministers' Meeting, conducted November 7-8, saw six meetings in total culminating in a seven-point Foreign Ministers' Statement, which addressed the primary geopolitical issues today. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 1]

The G7 condemned the terror attacks by Hamas, emphasizing Israel's right to self-defense. At the same time, they decried violence by Israeli settlers in the West Bank against Palestinians and called for urgent action to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, primarily through a humanitarian pause. They reiterated support for a two-state solution. [Nikkei Asian Review]

Continued commitment to standing by Ukraine was reaffirmed, along with increasing economic pressure and imposing robust sanctions and other restrictions against Russia. Furthermore, Russia's weaponization of food was condemned which has compounded

economic vulnerabilities, exacerbated already dire humanitarian crises, and escalated global food insecurity and malnutrition worldwide

The ministers also affirmed unwavering support for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) centrality and unity in the Indo-Pacific and called for the complete de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

With regards to China, they emphasized that measures taken in national interest are not targeted at China. Nevertheless, they confirmed to seek to address the challenges posed by China's policies and practices seen as distorting the global economy. They expressed opposition to unlawful Chinese activities in the East and South China Seas and reiterated their position on the Taiwan issue, reaffirming "the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as indispensable to security and prosperity in the international community and call for the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues."

The G7 expressed concern at the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, urging Azerbaijan to fully comply with its international humanitarian law obligations and welcome international humanitarian efforts.

On Iran, the group called on Tehran to cease its efforts to destabilize the Middle East through supporting actors like Hamas and Hezbollah, or through nuclear or ballistic weapons programs. It called on Iran to also cease its support of Russia, and to not interfere with navigational freedoms in Gulf waterways.

At the same time, competition agency representatives met to discuss fair competition in the tech sector and agreed to strengthen cooperation in promoting fair market practices in cutting-edge technology like generative artificial intelligence and online virtual spaces.

The meeting of G7 competition agency representatives has been held annually since 2021, with Japan hosting for the first time this year. [Kyodo News 1]

On the sidelines of the G7 meeting, Japan also held various bilateral meetings.

On November 7, the Japan-Canada Foreign Ministers' Meeting featured discussions on the Japan-Canada Action Plan towards a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 2]

The Fifth Japan-UK Foreign and Defense Ministers' Meeting ("2+2") on the same day saw similar discussions around FOIP, noting the timeline for the Global Combat Air Program (GCAP) that would aim for a next-generation fighter aircraft by 2035. Japanese and British colleagues also confirmed the deployment of a British carrier strike group to the Pacific in 2025 as well as the anticipated expansion of joint drills following the enactment of a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) in mid-October. [Kyodo News 2] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 3]

Further, the Japan-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting saw US and Japanese counterparts concur on China, Israel, and Russia. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 4]

On November 8, the Japan-Germany Foreign Ministers' Meeting saw both sides discuss their desire to quickly conclude the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) between the two countries. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 5]

Thereafter, the Japan-Italy Foreign Ministers' Informal Talks saw both parties exchange views on pressing international issues. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 6]

At the Japan-EU Foreign Ministers' Meeting the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that had concluded on October 17 was discussed, with Japan expressing its gratitude for the EU's support in the Fukushima water release issue. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 7]

Finally, the Japan-France Foreign Ministers' Dinner saw Kamikawa thank her French counterpart for their support in the Fukushima water release issue. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan 8] [IC1]

South Korean prime minister seeks Central American support for 2030 World Expo bid

(tms) South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo convened with vice foreign ministers from six Central American countries in Seoul to garner backing for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo.

The meeting, part of a broader forum to boost trade and cooperation, saw Han emphasizing the Expo as an avenue to share South Korea's economic development experiences globally.

Stressing the importance of both governmental and private sector collaboration, Han urged increased contributions from local companies to aid in the sustainable development of Central American nations.

The host city, to be decided by vote in late November, is set to further strengthen bilateral ties and foster global partnerships. [Yonhap]

South Korea hosts multinational cybersecurity drill with ASEAN nations

(tms) South Korea conducted on November 8-9 a multinational cybersecurity exercise with 17 members of the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) to enhance collective responses to cyberthreats.

The Cyber Training and Exercise (CYTREX), held in Seoul, marked the first in-person gathering since the COVID-19 pandemic for the ADMM-Plus. The two-day drill involved investigating cyberattacks and analyzing malicious codes in a simulated cross-border network environment, representing a significant step in coordinated regional cybersecurity efforts.

Launched in 2010, ADMM-Plus includes ASEAN members and eight dialogue partners, fostering security and defense cooperation. [Yonhap]

South Korea, IAEA conduct 12th round of talks addressing North Korea's nuclear program

(tms) South Korea and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) engaged in their 12th round of high-level policy talks in Seoul on November 8, focusing on North Korea’s nuclear program and collaborative efforts to counter it.

Deputy Foreign Minister Park Yong-min and IAEA Deputy Director General Massimo Aparo discussed enhancing readiness for verifying North Korea’s nuclear activities and expanding cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Aparo expressed the IAEA’s strict commitment to verification, while separately voicing concerns over North Korea’s nuclear actions.

South Korea, for its part, emphasized its peaceful use of nuclear energy and emergence as a nuclear

exporter, contrasting with North Korea's continued illicit nuclear weapons development. [Yonhap]

Global coalition backs implementation of crypto-asset reporting framework for tax compliance

(tms) South Korea, along with 47 other countries, including the United States, Britain, and Japan, issued a joint statement endorsing the swift adoption and implementation of the Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework (CARF).

Approved by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in August 2022, CARF facilitates standardized reporting of tax information on cyber asset transactions for automatic exchange among tax authorities.

The Group of 20 nations supports the framework, setting 2027 as the target year for implementation.

The statement aims to expedite domestic procedures for CARF, urging more nations to join the initiative to enhance global tax transparency and combat tax evasion in the rapidly growing crypto-asset market. [Yonhap]

South Korea, Japan, US to commence real-time North Korean missile data sharing in December

(tms) Defense leaders from South Korea, Japan, and the United States have confirmed their commitment to initiate a real-time data-sharing initiative on North Korean missiles in December, according to South Korea's defense ministry.

During a meeting in Seoul, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, South Korean counterpart Shin Won-sik, and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara discussed strengthening trilateral cooperation amid challenging security environments.

The move follows a commitment made by US President Joe Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in August [see AiR No. 34, August/2023, 4]. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

The ministers also denounced increased military cooperation between North Korea and Russia, emphasizing the importance of peace in the Taiwan Strait.

Meanwhile, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Charles Q. Brown affirmed the United States' dedication to South Korea's defense during talks with his South Korean counterpart in Seoul. [Yonhap 1] [Yonhap 2]

South Korea honors UN Command troops' sacrifice ahead of defense ministerial meeting

(tms) South Korean Defense Minister Shin Won-sik praised the noble sacrifice of UN Command (UNC) troops during the 1950-53 Korean War at a reception in Seoul.

The remarks preceded the inaugural defense ministerial meeting with the 17 member states of the UNC, aiming to strengthen ties.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin called the gathering an "important show of strength" from the international community. Discussions will focus on enhancing interoperability between South Korea and the UNC, with potential expansion to include like-minded countries.

The UNC, formed in 1950 to support South Korea, saw 1.98 million personnel from 22 countries, with over 40,000 casualties.

The event also honored US Army Col. Kim Young-oak with the Paik Sun-yup ROK-US Alliance Award. [Yonhap]

South Korean president discusses collaboration with International Criminal Court

(tms) President Yoon Suk Yeol met with Piotr Hofmanski, Chief of the International Criminal Court (ICC), to explore avenues for South Korea's cooperation in advancing the international criminal justice system.

Yoon affirmed South Korea's strong support for a rules-based international order, emphasizing

collaboration with the ICC to uphold freedom, human rights, and the rule of law.

Acknowledging South Korea's longstanding contributions, Judge Hofmanski expressed hope for deeper cooperation.

Foreign Minister Park Jin held a separate meeting with Hofmanski, discussing ICC cooperation at the ministry level and addressing global issues such as the Ukraine conflict, Israel-Hamas tensions, and North Korean human rights. [Yonhap]

South Korea participates in APEC pre-summit meeting in San Francisco

(tms) South Korea, represented by Deputy Foreign Minister Kang Jae-kwon, engaged in the Concluding Senior Officials' Meeting in San Francisco preceding the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum summit.

The delegation reviewed this year's activities and explored avenues for enhanced collaboration. Kang also met with APEC Secretariat Executive Director Rebecca Fatima to discuss South Korea's hosting of the APEC summit in 2025.

The upcoming APEC summit, scheduled for November 15-17, will convene leaders from 21 member economies, including South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

APEC, established in 1989, fosters inter-governmental cooperation to promote free trade in the Asia-Pacific region. [Yonhap]

Children in South Asia most likely to face water scarcity problems, UN report finds

(lm) According to a report by the United Nations, approximately 347 million children under 18 in South Asia are exposed to high or extremely high water scarcity. The report also highlighted the impact on homes, health centers, and schools when village wells go dry, underscoring the severity of the situation. [South China Morning Post]

Climate change has disrupted weather patterns and rainfall in the eight-nation region (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka), leading to unpredictable water

availability, affecting the quality, quantity, and management of water resources.

Eastern and Southern Africa were identified as the second most affected region, with 130 million children at risk from severe water scarcity.

Bangladesh reviewed for fourth time under Universal Period Review mechanism

(ps/lm) Bangladesh on November 13 was reviewed for the fourth time under the Universal Periodic Review, a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each United Nations Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years.

While the Bangladesh government's national report highlights efforts to strengthen the judiciary, a compilation of information prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights emphasizes the need for legal reforms in accordance with international human rights standards and conventions, as well as ratification of international conventions against enforced disappearance and torture. The note also calls for the strengthening of the independence of the national human rights commission and the protection of civil society, lawyers, and journalists who criticize the authorities. [UN Human Rights Council]

At Universal Periodic Review, India calls on Canada to prevent ‘misuse’ of freedom of expression

(lm) India has urged Canada to strengthen its legal framework to prevent the "misuse" of freedom of expression for inciting violence and to curb activities of extremist groups. This call was made during the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a unique mechanism of the Human Rights Council that calls for each UN Member State to undergo a peer review of its human rights records every 4.5 years. [The Wire]

During Canada’s fourth review on November 10, New Delhi offered three suggestions to Ottawa, including preventing the misuse of freedom of expression, effectively preventing attacks on places of worship, and addressing disparities for indigenous children.

Tensions between India and Canada have been strained since September when the prime minister, Justin Trudeau, alleged there was credible evidence linking India to the assassination of a Canadian Sikh leader in British Columbia.

European Union delegation visits Bangladesh to access labor, human rights standards

(ps) A delegation from the European Union (EU) arrived in Bangladesh on November 12 to hold discussions with relevant stakeholders on the country's labor sector and human rights. [Dhaka Tribune]

The visit aims to assess the progress in implementing Bangladesh's National Action Plan for the labor sector, which is closely linked to a roadmap submitted by the government to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Governing Body in response to a so-called Article 26 complaint. Invoking Article 26 is a procedure whereby complaints can be filed alleging the non-effective observance of a ratified ILO Convention.

The EU has emphasized the alignment of labor laws with international standards as an essential element for considering Bangladesh's application for market access under the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+).

India, United States exchange views on Bangladesh

(lm) India and the United States discussed political developments in Bangladesh during their Fifth Annual 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi. The talks took place as the US calls for free, fair, and peaceful elections in Bangladesh, while India has deepened its bilateral ties with the country through various projects. However, India maintained that Bangladesh's elections are an internal matter for the Bangladeshi people to decide. [The Daily Star]

Pakistan suggests referral to ICJ to investigate possible war crimes by Israel in Gaza Strip

(mr) Pakistan’s caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar has suggested that Arab and Islamic nations

consider a referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate whether war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity have been committed by Israel during its ongoing military operation in the Gaza Strip. Speaking at the Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit hosted by Saudi Arabia, the prime minister also called for the establishment of an international mechanism and a halt to illegal settlements by Israel. [Pakistan Today]

Pakistan seeks enhanced regional integration at ECO summit in Tashkent

(mha) Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar emphasized regional integration while addressing the 16th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Summit in Uzbekistan's capital of Tashkent on November 9, saying that the regional forum was only contributing two percent to the overall global trade despite its enormous potential. [Arab News]

The ECO, an intergovernmental organization, was established by Pakistan, Iran and Turkey in 1985. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it expanded to include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in 1992.

Prime Minister Kakar also held meetings with Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev along with Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev on the sidelines of the event.

World Bank approves plan to strengthen Sri Lanka's financial sector, grants USD 150 million in financing

(lf) The World Bank approved a USD $150 million aid package to strengthen Sri Lanka's financial sector in the aftermath of its economic crisis, announcing the package on November 10. The package from the World Bank is another program aiming to bolster Sri Lanka's finances, following the example of similar initiatives from the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

Faris Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director, emphasised the need for robust safety nets, stating that a stable banking sector is vital for the economy and individuals. The Financial Sector Safety Net Project

aims to enhance the Sri Lanka Deposit Insurance Scheme (SLDIS), managed by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL). This includes strengthening the nation's economic and legal framework, increasing foreign currency reserves and supporting institutional capacity.

Alexander Pankov, Lead Financial Sector Specialist, highlighted the importance of a strong safety net whilst a nation is dealing with a debt crisis, emphasising the role of deposit insurance in maintaining financial stability. The approval aligns with Sri Lanka's efforts to address foreign debt challenges by reaching agreements with creditors and building confidence in the financial system. Faris Hadad-Zervos reiterated the measures' goal of protecting smaller depositors and sustaining trust. Additionally, President Ranil Wickremesinghe announced a focus on servicing external credit in the 2024 budget presentation, emphasising his government's ongoing commitment to restoring financial stability. [Daily Mirror] [BQ Prime] [Investing]

US agency lends USD 553 million to Adani-owned port; conglomerate plans USD 750 million investment into renewables in Sri Lanka

(lm) The United States International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), a US foreign development agency, announced on November 8 it would provide USD 553 million in financing for a deepwater terminal project in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, operated by Indian multinational conglomerate Adani Group. [South China Morning Post] [Financial Times]

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone holds a 51 per cent stake in the project, known as the West Container Terminal, which it is developing with Sri Lankan conglomerate John Keells Holdings and the Sri Lanka Ports Authority. The project is set to be operational by December 2024 and will involve a total capital expenditure of USD 1 billion.

Notably, the project marks the largest infrastructure investment by the DFC, an agency created during the Trump administration to bankroll international infrastructure projects, in Asia. Within the past four years, Sri Lanka has become the DFC's second-largest market in the entire Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, the funding for the project is seen as a potential endorsement of Adani Group, which faced

allegations of fraud by short seller Hindenburg Research earlier this year, causing a significant drop in its market value.

Having secured the debt financing from the DFC, Adani Group is now planning to establish a 500-megawatt wind power project, to be located in Sri Lanka's northwestern region, which will involve an initial investment of USD 750 million. Once approved by the Sri Lankan government, the first phase of the project is expected to take 24 months to commission. Additionally, the conglomerate plans to establish a cross-country transmission corridor that will connect Sri Lanka to the Indian power grid, similar to connections between India and Bangladesh. [BQ Prime]

Cambodia, UN to strengthen cooperation on protection of rights of children

(pm) On November 7, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior of Cambodia, Sar Sokha, met with Ann Marie Skelton, Chairman of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, and Dr. Will Parks, UNICEF Country Director for Cambodia.

During the meeting, both parties reaffirmed their commitments and mutual support for the implementation of projects aimed at child protection, specifically addressing the needs of vulnerable children and combatting child trafficking. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia, UN conduct heavy equipment training

(pm) The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces is currently hosting a four-week training course at the National Centre for Peacekeeping Forces (NPMEC), marking the first time such an event has taken place in Cambodia.

As part of the biennial rotating of UN-selected tripartite training projects, the drills focus on the utilization of heavy machinery for horizontal construction, primarily involving bridges, roads, and airfields. The course is being conducted under the supervision of South Korean military instructors.

This initiative was established by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during a peacekeeping summit in 2014. [Phnom Penh Post]

Malaysia says it won't recognize unilateral sanctions on supporters of Palestinian groups, hopes China will help resolve conflict

(mw/lm) Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said on November 7 his country will not recognize unilateral sanctions in response to a proposed United States law aimed at cutting off international financing to groups like Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Ibrahim stated that the bill could affect Malaysia only if it is proven to provide material support to these groups. [Anadolu Agency] [Reuters]

In related developments, during a meeting with China's Vice-President Han Zheng, Anwar expressed hope that Beijing will actively contribute to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and facilitate humanitarian aid delivery to Gaza without restrictions. [The Star]

Philippine heirs of Sulu sultan withdraw claim on Paris buildings linked to arbitration dispute

(mw/lm) The heirs of the former Sultan of Sulu have withdrawn their claims over three Malaysian-owned diplomatic properties in Paris, marking a significant development in the USD 15 billion arbitration dispute between the two parties. [South China Morning Post]

The Filipino heirs had filed for arbitration proceedings in Spain to seek for billions of US dollars from Malaysia over Sabah. They won a USD 14.9 billion award in a French arbitration court last year in a dispute over a colonial-era land deal, leading them to target Malaysian assets.

Malaysia has utilized legal remedies in courts across several countries, including Spain, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands, to challenge the awards and claims made by the Sulu group. The Hague Court of Appeal had previously dismissed the group's application to recognize and enforce the final award in the Netherlands. This latest decision in France further solidifies Malaysia's position in the ongoing legal battle.

In the same vein, the Paris Court of Appeal upheld Malaysia's challenge against enforcing a partial award in June. The withdrawal of claims against the Paris properties follows this court decision.

Malaysia asserts that the ultimate annulment of the purported final award by the Paris Court of Appeal is

only a matter of time and is actively working towards securing that result.

Myanmar-UN: Repatriation of Rohingya refugees discussed

(wn) A meeting between Military Council Foreign Minister U Than Swe and UNHCR Deputy High Commissioner Mr Rao Mazu in Nay Pyi Taw was held on November 9 to discuss Rohingya repatriation from Bangladesh.

The Military Council and UNHCR explored avenues for collaboration on Myanmar's re-examination and acceptance process for those who had left their homes in Bangladesh.

On October 31st, a delegation led by U Saw Naing, the social minister of the Rakhine government, along with military council members, examined approximately 150 Rohingya refugees in Teknaf, Bangladesh.

Witnesses reported that these refugees included individuals who had registered for return and those already verified by the governments of Bangladesh and Myanmar. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Myanmar's Facebook Page] [BBC Burmese]

Multinational military training exercise KAMANDAG 7 commences in Philippines

(lb) Service members from the United States, Philippines, Japan, and South Korea, with observers from the United Kingdom, on November 9 commenced the training exercise KAMANDAG 7. It is scheduled to run until November 20 and will take place at various training sites across the Philippines, including Luzon, Batanes, Zamboanga, Tawi-Tawi, and Palawan. The exercise will involve approximately 950 members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, 850 U.S. Marines, Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force, and Republic of Korea Marines. [Marines]

Singapore strengthens humanitarian assistance and disaster relief partnership with PDC

(lb) Singapore's Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Coordination Centre

(RHCC) and the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC) have announced a renewed agreement for their longstanding collaboration on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief initiatives. The announcement coincided with their participation in the multinational Exercise Coordinated Response (Ex COORES) 2023 held in Singapore, where PDC served as an observer and provided data from its DisasterAWARE platform to support Changi RHCC's OPERA application. The exercise, involving 180 personnel from 26 militaries and 25 civilian organizations, simulated a typhoon and subsequent flooding and landslides, testing coordination in search and rescue and humanitarian assistance operations. The renewed Memorandum of Understanding focuses on enhancing information sharing, capacity development, joint training, and interoperability in early warning and disaster response. The partnership aims to strengthen disaster risk reduction and response through technology innovations and capacity building. [ReliefWeb]

IMF delegation completes 2023 Article IV Consultation with Thailand

(nt/lm) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) conducted the 2023 Article IV Consultation with Thailand, assessing the country's economic performance. The Washington-based lender projects Thailand's growth to be 2.7 percent in 2023 and 3.6 percent in 2024, with inflation averaging 1.3 percent in 2023 and slightly accelerating to 1.6 percent in 2024. It recommends continued macroeconomic policy normalization to rebuild fiscal buffers and ensure financial stability amid global uncertainty. [International Monetary Fund]

The report advises well-targeted support for vulnerable groups within the budget envelope provided by the Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF). Fiscal consolidation starting in FY25 is recommended to create room for infrastructure and skills investment while reducing public debt.

Thailand's current neutral monetary policy stance is considered appropriate, but the Bank of Thailand should be prepared to tighten policy if inflationary risks arise. Financial sector support measures should be gradually tapered, with efforts to strengthen the financial safety net and address household debt.

Structural reforms are needed to harness the benefits of digital and green transformations, including competition enhancement, labor force upskilling, and investments in digital infrastructure and research and

development. Effective carbon pricing is recommended to help Thailand meet its climate goals.

Antidumping, countervailing duty petitions on frozen warmwater shrimp filed with United States DOC

(tt/lm) The United States Department of Commerce (DOC) has received an antidumping duty (ADD) petition on imports of frozen warmwater shrimp from Ecuador and Indonesia and a countervailing duty (CVD) petition against frozen warmwater shrimp from Ecuador, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

The ADD petition alleges that these imports are being sold in the US at less than fair value, while the CVD petition claims that the governments of the mentioned countries are providing countervailable subsidies for the production and export of frozen warmwater shrimp. The American shrimp industry is alleging material injury and further threat due to these imports.

By November 14, the DOC must decide whether the ADD petition contains the legally required information regarding petitioners' standing, dumping, and injury to warrant initiating an investigation. Experts expect the DOC to initiate the investigation, given that the standard for initiation is low, requiring only that the petition contains information that is "reasonably available" to the petitioners. [VietnamNews] [White & Case]

Vietnam elected as the Vice President of the UNESCO General Conference

(tt) On November 8, Vietnam was elected as the Asia-Pacific region's Vice President to the 42nd session of the UNESCO General Conference.

According to Ha Kim Ngoc, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO, the election validates the Party and State's sound foreign policy of multilateralization, diversification, and comprehensive and effective international integration.

It also confirms Vietnam's growing international prestige and serves as a vivid illustration of the international community's confidence in Vietnam's contributions to global multilateral mechanisms.

With this position, Vietnam will have more opportunities to make positive and practical contributions to international issues of UNESCO's interest, to strengthen UNESCO's programs and orientations in the five areas of education, culture, natural science, social science, and information and communications, and to capitalize on UNESCO's initiatives to develop the nation sustainably and comprehensively, according to Ngoc.

With this election, Vietnam becomes a member of the UNESCO Executive Board, Vice Chair of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions for the 2021-2025 tenure, and a member of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage for the first time.

They provide opportunities for the country to participate in the formulation of UNESCO policies and import decisions. [VietnamPlus]

Bangladesh signs 15-year deal with United States company on LNG supply

(ps) The United States has become a long-term supplier of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Bangladesh. *Excelerate Gas Marketing Ltd Partnership* will supply LNG to the South Asian nation for 15 years starting in January 2026. *Excelerate* will initially deliver approximately 0.85 million tons of LNG per year, increasing to 1 million tons annually from 2028 to 2040. This marks the first long-term supply deal with a private company, as previous agreements were government-to-government deals with Qatar and Oman. [The Daily Star]

Russian warship flotilla calls at Bangladesh port for first time in 50 years

(ps/lm) Russian warships, including anti-submarine warfare ships Admiral Tributs and Admiral Panteleyev, along with the tanker Pechenga, from Russia's Pacific naval fleet, docked at Bangladesh's port of Chattogram. This visit marks a significant development in Russia-Bangladesh relations, as the last time Russian/Soviet naval ships visited Bangladesh was 50 years ago.

This visit has raised concerns about growing Russian influence in South Asia, as it comes shortly after Myanmar and Russia conducted their first joint naval exercise. Despite Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Bangladesh has maintained good relations with Moscow, with Russia involved in projects like constructing Bangladesh's nuclear power plant. [The Daily Star] [MSN] [TASS]

Brunei-China: Largest petrochemical joint venture to enter second phase

(dql) Hengyi Industries, the largest joint venture between Brunei and China, achieved a significant milestone by signing an Implementation Agreement for the Pulau Muara Besar (PMB) Phase 2 Development Project on November 8, further solidifying the flagship petrochemical project's success.

Hengyi Industries is a collaboration between China's Zhejiang Hengyi Group and Damai Holdings, a wholly-owned subsidiary under the Brunei government's Strategic Development Capital Fund, holding 70 percent and 30 percent of the shares, respectively.

The first phase of the Hengyi PMB petrochemical project commenced operations in November 2019. The completion of Phase 2 will augment crude oil refining capacity by an additional 2 million tons per year. [Xinhua]

Cambodia, US to deepen cooperation on transnational crimes

(pm) In a meeting between Deputy Prime Minister Neth Savoeun and the US Ambassador to Cambodia, Patrick Murphy, discussions focused on enhancing cooperation to address transnational crimes such as terrorism, cybercrime, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and money laundering.

Additionally, they emphasized the importance of eliminating sexual exploitation of children and punishing child perpetrators.

Murphy sought Cambodia’s ongoing support for the jointly established Task Force by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation and Cambodian National Police, highlighting its past success in combating crimes committed by US citizens.

Savoeun, on his part, affirmed his agreement with Murphy's request and, in return, urged the US to continue providing comprehensive training on transnational crimes to enhance the capabilities of Cambodian police officers in effectively addressing such offenses. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia-France: Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni meets French President Emmanuel Macron

(dql) During a meeting with Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni on November 13 in Paris, French President Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed the French government's commitment to Cambodia in healthcare, including human resource training, Tele-Medicine, and artificial intelligence, as well as in culture.

Macron also addressed the King's request for collaboration in the study, renovation, and expansion of the National Museum by French experts, the cooperation between the National Museum and the Guimet Museum, and the restoration of bronze statues of Vishnu, along with exhibitions of Khmer artifacts in France and museums.

The meeting was part of the King's visit to France from November 12-18. [Khmer Times] [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia-China: Commitment to "diamond cooperation" reafffirmed

(pm) Cambodia and China have affirmed their commitment to deepening their partnership through the "diamond cooperation" framework and have designated 2024 as the year of people-to-people exchanges to boost investment and tourism.

This commitment was emphasized during a meeting between Cambodian Foreign Minister Sok Chenda Sophea and Lou Qinjian, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of China's National People's Congress (NPC), on November 7 in Phnom Penh.

The framework outlines plans for intensified cooperation, with a specific focus on politics, production, agriculture, energy, and security relations. [Phnom Penh Post] [Khmer Times]

Cambodia-Laos: New border card to streamline Stung Treng province border crossings launched

(pm) A new border card has been launched to be used by residents of in Stung Treng province to pass the Cambodia-Laos border.

This aims to get rid of repeated border pass applications when crossing the border and to assist border authorities in managing the database management. [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodian Defense Minister meet Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh

(dql) During a meeting with visiting Cambodian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence Tea Seiha on November 13 in Hanoi, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh expressed hope for continued cooperation between the two countries, focusing on facilitating high-level delegations, enhancing economic connectivity, human resource training, and fostering a peaceful, friendly, cooperative, and developmental border.

He also emphasized the importance of ongoing support for the Vietnamese community and businesses in Cambodia, including addressing the legal status of Khmer people of Vietnamese origin.

Additionally, Pham underscored Vietnam's "four nos" policy, which includes not participating in military alliances, not aligning with one country against another, not allowing foreign military bases on Vietnamese soil, and refraining from using force or threats in international relations. He expressed a desire for both countries to maintain unity and prevent hostile or opposition forces from undermining the solidarity between them.

Tea Seiha, in response, reaffirmed his commitment to raising public awareness of the Vietnam-Cambodia relationship to nurture bilateral ties. [Khmer Times]

Chinese President Xi visits US to meet Biden and attend APEC summit

(ga) On November 10, China and the US jointly announced Chinese President Xi Jinping's forthcoming

visit to San Francisco from November 14-17. The visit will include a China-US summit meeting with US President Joe Biden and the 30th Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum's Economic Leaders' Meeting.

Biden and Xi, whose last face-to-face meeting occurred at the G20 meeting in Bali, Indonesia in November 2022, are scheduled to convene on November 15. The White House outlined their agenda as discussing issues in the U.S.-PRC bilateral relationship, emphasizing the importance of maintaining open lines of communication, and addressing various regional and global matters.

According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the two leaders will engage in in-depth communication on strategic, overarching, and fundamental issues shaping China-U.S. relations, as well as major concerns related to world peace and development. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2] [US White House 1]

A wide range of issues is expected to be discussed during the presidential meeting including trade, Taiwan, China's influence over North Korea and Iran, potential Chinese interference in the 2024 US election, the war in Ukraine, human rights, and the resumption of communication between the US and Chinese militaries, which has been virtually nonexistent for several years.

The resumption of military-military communication with China ranks among the top relationship priorities for the US to prevent potential miscommunications or crises in the future.

Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng, meanwhile, expressed China's desire for assurance that the US does not seek to change China's system, opposes a new Cold War, rejects Taiwan independence, and harbors no intention to seek economic decoupling from China.

Despite the plethora of topics up for discussion, no major announcements are expected from Xi's trip to the US or his meeting with Biden. [AP] [BBC] [Politico] [BBC]

In anticipation of Biden's meeting with Xi on November 8, Congressional Republicans on the House Select Committee on China sent a letter urging Biden to "challenge Beijing." The letter specified demands, including halting the flow of chemicals fueling the fentanyl crisis in the US, releasing Hong Kong pro-democracy advocates like Jimmy Lai, and addressing

the wrongful detention of Americans. Additionally, the letter called for an end to the perilous intercepts of US ships and aircraft by the Chinese military. It concluded by urging Biden to adopt a more robust approach in engaging with China should these demands remain unmet. [NBC] [Reuters]

With regards to the APEC summit which will run from November 15-17, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that Xi would "deliver an important speech at the meeting to fully elaborate on China's major propositions on deepening Asia-Pacific cooperation and driving regional and global growth." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 2]

Chinese Vice Premier, US Treasury Secretary discuss bilateral economic relationship

(ga) From November 9-10, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng convened in San Francisco ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum this week and the upcoming meeting between US President Joe Biden and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Over the two-day discussions, which extended for more than 10 hours, both sides reached a consensus on sustaining a dialogue between China and the US on economic matters, steering clear of economic decoupling, and collaborating on shared international economic challenges like climate change and restructuring international debt for low-income countries.

During her remarks on the meeting, Yellen elucidated the rationale behind US economic actions, emphasizing national security considerations, including export restrictions to China. While expressing concerns about the global implications of the People's Republic of China's non-market policies, Yellen underscored that the US is not actively seeking economic decoupling from China.

Vice Premier He, on his part, reiterated apprehensions regarding US restrictions on two-way investment, sanctions on Chinese enterprises, export controls, and additional tariffs. He urged earnest action from the US to address China's concerns in these areas. [State Council, China] [China Daily] [US Treasury Department] [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

The dialogue between Yellen and He come as part of a series of ongoing Economic and Financial Working Groups announced between China and the US in October [see AiR No. 39, September/2023, 4].

China-US: Climate envoys hold talks

(ga) Last week US Climate Envoy John Kerry and his Chinese counterpart, Xie Zhenhua, had four days of climate talks in California.

Kerry described the talks as “very successful,” referring to agreements reached. The Chinese Ministry of Ecology and Environment also described the talks as successful, noting that “positive outcomes on carrying out bilateral cooperation and actions on tackling climate change” had been reached.

Notably, both sides agreed to establish a climate change fund dedicated to assisting countries vulnerable to and affected by climate change. The fund will be open to donations from any nation.

Although Kerry did not disclose other discussion topics, he hinted at further information to follow.

Coming shortly ahead of the COP28 climate summit scheduled for November 30 to December 12 in Dubai, the dialogue is viewed by observers as positive and raises cautious optimism for successful outcomes at COP28 which operates on a consensus basis to craft agreements geared towards limiting greenhouse gas emissions.

Given that China and the US rank as the world’s largest and second-largest producer of greenhouse gases respectively, agreements between them hold substantial influence over global climate goals.

However, despite advancements in climate agreements, China continues to construct coal-powered plants, refusing to set specific targets for reducing fossil fuel use, as most of the China’s energy production originates from coal sources, contributing significantly to its status as the world’s largest polluter. Xie called the setting of those targets “unrealistic.”

Addressing the ongoing construction of coal-based power plants, Kerry emphasized that “it is irresponsible to be funding a coal-fired power plant anywhere in the world.” [BBC] [China Daily] [People’s Daily Online] [Reuters] [Voice of America]

Meanwhile, the Chinese Ministry of Ecology and Environment released a statement on November 7 that called for more “forceful” action in tackling methane emissions at the COP28, although it fell short of outlining targets.

This is despite China not being party to the Global Methane Pledge that was signed at COP26 in Glasgow. The document said China would focus on improving its monitoring and supervision systems for methane through to 2030, covering all sectors from energy to agriculture and waste. [Financial Times]

China, US hold arms control talks in Washington

(ga) On November 6, US Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance, Mallory Stewart, met with Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director-General of Arms Control, Sun Xiaobo, in Washington, D.C. to discuss arms control and nuclear non-proliferation.

The talks covered issues including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, non-proliferation efforts, cooperation between nuclear states, preventing the use of chemical or biological weapons, security in outer space, and conventional arms control.

The US side asked the Chinese side to increase its transparency and engagement on nuclear weapons and in outer space during the talks. The US also "highlighted the need to promote stability, help avert an unconstrained arms race, and manage competition so that it does not veer into conflict".

China highlighted a desire to continue a dialogue with the US "on the basis of mutual respect" and expressed its interest in a cooperative approach to arms control, with an emphasis on "respect[ing] each other's sovereignty".

Both China and the US called the meeting "constructive", and the meeting opens the door to similar engagements in the future. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [US Department of State] [See also AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1]

The US and China haven't held arms control talks since the Obama administration, nearly ten years ago. China has historically rejected arms control agreements because it has a much smaller arsenal of nuclear weapons than the US. China is estimated to have around 500 operational nuclear warheads, moving to roughly 1,000 by 2030, whereas the US has around 3,700.

There were no major breakthroughs in the talks, but they represent a substantive step towards greater

communication on arms control issues. [SCMP] [The Diplomat]

Chinese imports of sanctioned Iranian oil increase

(ga) Last month Chinese imports of oil from Iran hit new records, despite US sanctions against Iran over its nuclear weapons development program.

Since the start of the year China has bought an average of 1.05 million barrels of oil per day from Iran and an average of 1.45 million barrels per day in the month of October.

Because Iran is heavily sanctioned by the US, Iranian oil must be imported indirectly, being labeled as coming from other countries such as Malaysia or countries in the Middle East. The oil is either carried by ships which hide their location while picking up oil from Iran or carrying out concealed transfers of oil outside of approved ports.

Chinese oil refiners purchase Iranian crude oil because it is cheap and of high quality, and because they can operate largely outside the dollar-based trading system and avoid sanctions – most purchases of oil are likely made in renminbi. [Reuters]

Chinese evasion of US sanctions in regard to Iranian oil is well known and has caused many in the US to call for more stringent enforcement of sanctions. On November 7, US Senators Jim Risch and Marco Rubio introduced a piece of legislation that would increase requirements for monitoring and cracking down on Chinese purchases of Iranian oil. [US Senate]

China's doesn't want foreign interference in Bangladesh's upcoming national poll, envoy says

(ps) The Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh, Yao Wen, has stated that Beijing has no interest in international interference in the South Asian nation's upcoming parliamentary election. He further expressed an interest in social stability in Bangladesh, given the large Chinese investments there and hold elections in line with the constitution. [Prothom Alo 1]

Bangladesh biggest opposition party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has criticized Yao Wen's

statements as conflicting with the desire of the people. The party stated that it was impossible to hold elections under the current government and that a new constitution was required as the current constitution was manipulated in favor of the government. [Prothom Alo 2]

China, Pakistan navies kick off 'Sea Guardians-3' drills; will for the first time conduct joint maritime patrols

(mr/lm) Naval forces from China and Pakistan on November 11 launched the "Sea Guardians-3" joint maritime exercise in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi. The exercise will conclude on November 17 and troops from the two countries will conduct their first joint maritime patrol during the drills. [Dawn1] [China Military]

Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka promotes investment in country's northern provinces

(lf) Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka Qi Zhenhong, on his second visit to Sri Lanka's Northern Provinces, expressed Chinese enterprises' interest in investing in the region. During the visit, the ambassador donated 5,000 boxes of dry rations worth USD 450,000 under the Faxian Charity Project to impoverished families. [Daily Mirror] [Economy Next]

Qi Zhenhong highlighted China's promise to donate Rs. 150 million USD 1.8 million to the Northern Provinces for food rations, fishing nets, and housing units. Qi also encouraged an increase in the exporting of seafood from the Northern Provinces to China and expressed Chinese enterprises' interest in investing in the region.

China is one of Sri Lanka's largest foreign creditors and is eager to find a permanent spot within the domestic economy. The ambassador's visits to one of the nation's poorest areas, which holds a majority Tamil population, was likely a strategic decision to attract widespread support from the nation's population who are somewhat skeptical of the extent of China's goodwill.

China-Netherlands: Foreign ministers speak on phone

(ga) On November 8, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke over the phone with newly appointed Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot.

Wang Yi congratulated Slot on her position, highlighting the positives in China-Netherlands relations such as trade and noting China's interest in continuing to see human exchanges between China and the Netherlands. Wang also expressed China's hope that the Netherlands will maintain trade and economic links in technological fields.

Slot, for his part, noted the strong economic links between the Netherlands and China, saying that his country is looking forward to continuing to strengthen the two countries' bilateral relationship, according to the readout of the meeting of the Chinese foreign ministry.

The two also spoke about the China-EU relationship and international issues of concern, with Wang saying that "China-EU relations do not depend on and should not be interfered with by any third party," in an apparent reference to the US. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

Wang's comments come as the Netherlands ramps up enforcement of restrictions on exports of computer chip-making equipment to China. The Netherlands placed restrictions on chip exports to China which began on September 1 but will have penalties starting on January 1, 2024 [see AiR No. 28, July/2023, 2].

The US has encouraged allies, including Japan and the Netherlands, to stop exports of technology which can be used to support China's military modernization efforts [see AiR No. 5, January/2023, 5].

In anticipation of forthcoming penalties, China has increased imports from the Netherlands, specifically focusing on computer chip-making equipment. Chinese companies are strategically stockpiling lithography machines, a key component in chip manufacturing.

This surge in imports is driven by the fact that domestically produced lithography machines in China are deemed less advanced. Notably, China imported lithography machines totaling USD 1.3 billion in value from the Netherlands in September.

Trade between China and the Netherlands has continued to rise as a result of this even though trade between China and the EU generally is declining. [SCMP]

Meta and Tencent agree to sell VR headsets in China

(ga) US company Meta Platforms, owner of Facebook, has reached a deal with Chinese video game company Tencent Holdings which will allow Meta to sell a low-cost virtual reality (VR) device in China in late 2024.

The deal provides for Meta to take a larger share of revenues from sales of its VR headsets while Tencent would take a larger share of the revenues from apps and games sold for the headsets. As part of the deal, Tencent will manufacture the headset using designs and software from Meta.

The deal marks Meta's return to the Chinese market after 14 years of being effectively barred, as its popular platforms Facebook and Instagram were both banned from use in 2009 after providing a platform for dissent in the wake of protests in China's Xinjiang province. [Reuters] [Business Insider] [Yahoo! Finance]

China-EU: Summit possibly to be held early December

(ic) The European Union (EU) and China are reportedly scheduled to hold a summit on December 7-8, with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Council President Charles Michel making their first visit to China in four years.

Negotiations are expected to revolve around core stances of the two sides, with the EU emphasizing that de-risking serves its security, but isn't directed at China, and remaining open to Chinese trade. Meanwhile, China aims to promote "restraint on the use of trade remedies."

Key agenda items are likely to include the EU's anti-subsidies investigations into Chinese electric vehicles and the issue of data transfer from China by European companies. [Bloomberg] [Politico]

There is growing frustration over what is perceived as fruitless missions to China by European representatives. EU leaders have threatened a more adversarial approach unless China agrees to trade on "fairer" terms.

Von der Leyen, in particular, criticized China's international revisionism and support for Russia and Iran, among other concerns. EU officials have

expressed a desire to investigate Chinese wind turbines and medical devices, with the EU Wind Power Package, unveiled on October 24, specifically targeting Chinese dominance in wind turbine production. [Nikkei Asian Review] [South China Morning Post]

This follows the 10th EU-China High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue held on September 25, where both parties agreed on the establishment of channels of dialogue and dispute settlement mechanisms [see AiR No. 39, September/2023, 4].

Philippines raises issue of Chinese sleeper cells

(ic) The Philippines has alleged the presence of China-backed clandestine forces in the country, vowing on November 7 to step up multi-law enforcement efforts to take down such groups.

The Chinese embassy in the Philippines has denied the existence of such forces. [News Inquirer] [South China Morning Post]

Russia requests Chinese cooperation on military satellites and other weapons

(ic) In televised remarks at the outset of a meeting on November 8 with Chinese Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission General Zhang Youxia, Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the need for Moscow and Beijing to enhance their collaboration in military satellites and other advanced defense technologies. This statement underscores the deepening defense ties between the two nations. [Associated Press]

They were also joined at the talks by Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, who declared that China and Russia “are not creating a military bloc”. [Reuters]

The increased military cooperation has generated concerns from other countries in the region. On November 11, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida voiced wariness about this collaboration in a speech at the Air Self-Defense Force's Iruma Air Base in Saitama Prefecture near Tokyo, referring to recent joint Sino-Russian exercises in waters near Japan. [Kyodo News]

In July the Chinese and Russian navy conducted a joint patrol in the North and West Pacific focusing on simulating destruction of enemy submarines,

conducting replenishment maneuvers on the high seas, and practice helicopter flights [see AiR No. 31, August/2023, 1].

In June, Chinese and Russian bombers flew together over Japanese waters [see AiR No. 24, June/2023, 2]

EU to reduce dependence on China for critical minerals

(ic) On November 13, EU negotiators agreed on the terms of the Critical Raw Materials Act, that was proposed in March 2023. The Act sets out a series of comprehensive actions to ensure the EU's access to a secure, diversified, affordable and sustainable supply of critical raw materials. The agreed benchmarks specify that the EU should have the capacity to extract 10%, process 40%, and recycle 25% of its annual consumption of strategic raw materials by 2030. [European Commission]

With negotiations over the common text complete, it is likely that the law will be able to enter into force by early 2024. Furthermore, while China is not mentioned by name, recent diplomatic fracas with China over green industries and the raw materials that fuels them imply that the agreement is part of a broader push towards reducing European dependence on China overall. [Reuters]

China warns Estonia against opening Taiwan office

(ic) On November 8, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin urged Estonian authorities to “stay committed to its solemn commitment of adhering to the one-China principle, not to allow Taiwan to set up any organization of official nature, and earnestly safeguard the political foundation of its relations with China.” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

This was in response to a statement made the previous week by Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna, who expressed an interest in a non-diplomatic economic or cultural representation of “Taipei” in Estonia. Taiwan setting up a similar office in neighboring Lithuania had, at the time, triggered several countermeasures that included an effective embargo as well as sanctions on the Deputy Transport

and Communications Minister for visiting Taiwan. [Politico] [Reuters]

India, Pakistan soldiers trade fire in disputed Kashmir, killing one India soldier

(xc) Indian and Pakistani soldiers exchanged gunfire and shelling along their heavily militarized frontier in disputed Kashmir, resulting in the death of an Indian border guard. The authorities in the Indian-administered region of Kashmir stated that Pakistani soldiers fired mortars and machine guns at border posts in the southern Jammu area on Wednesday night, describing it as an "unprovoked" attack. India's Border Security Force responded, and one of its border guards was killed. [Yahoo News]

India, Taiwan work on labor supply pact; realization expected for December

(lm) India and Taiwan are planning to strengthen economic ties by allowing tens of thousands of Indian workers to be employed in Taiwan for jobs in factories, farms, and hospitals. The two countries are expected to sign an employment mobility agreement by December – a move that is driven by Taiwan's need for more workers due to its aging population and India's desire to provide jobs for its growing young workforce. [The Straits Times]

It's worth noting that India's decision to engage with Taiwan in this manner could potentially strain its relations with China, as Beijing considers Taiwan its territory and opposes official exchanges with it. New Delhi is not officially abandoning the "One China Policy" but has been fostering an unofficial relationship with Taiwan. Earlier this year, a visit by three former Indian military chiefs to Taiwan for a security conference faced objections from Beijing. Additionally, there is an existing investment promotion pact between Taiwan and India dating back to 2018.

India, United Kingdom foreign ministers meet; New Delhi hopes to find ‘landing point’ in FTA negotiations

(lm) India’s External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on November 13 met with his British counterpart David Cameron in London. During their discussions, they

addressed shared global challenges, including the situation in Israel and Gaza, as well as Russia's war in Ukraine. Furthermore, they emphasized the significance of the Indo-Pacific region for global growth and prosperity. [GOV.UK]

Additionally, they reflected on the strength of the UK-India relationship and their commitment to achieving the goals outlined in the UK-India 2030 Roadmap. The Foreign Secretary and Dr. Jaishankar also talked about advancing negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA) and exploring collaborations in defense, science, and technology.

Talks for an FTA have so far undergone 13 rounds of negotiations, with officials of both countries hopeful of clinching a deal ahead of general elections in both countries scheduled for 2024. Jaishankar, who arrived in the UK over the weekend for a five-day visit told attendees of a special Diwali Reception on November 13 that New Delhi was hopeful of finding a “landing point” in the negotiations that works for both sides. [BQ Prime]

In fact, India and the UK are working to resolve differences in their proposed FTA, with chief negotiators planning the next round of talks. Issues include automobiles, medical devices, and professional mobility. [Business Standard]

India, United States hold annual 2+2 Dialogue, push defence deals

(lm) India and the United States on November 10 held their annual "2+2 Dialogue" in New Delhi, which brought together top diplomats and senior ministers from both countries. The discussions centered on defense and geopolitical challenges, highlighting the growing partnership between the two nations. [Reuters]

Notably, progress was made on significant defense deals. One key deal involves the United States supplying and manufacturing engines for Indian fighter jets. This agreement is in partnership with General Electric's aerospace unit and India's state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics. Indian Defense Secretary Giridhar Aramane indicated that the deal is progressing well, with finalizing commercial arrangements and legal requirements underway.

Another substantial deal being processed is India's plan to purchase 31 armed drones from General Atomics, valued at over USD 3 billion. However, India is

currently awaiting US government clearances for the next steps in this procurement. The talks also touched upon discussions regarding infantry combat vehicle systems offered by Washington, with India expressing interest in potentially manufacturing these vehicles jointly in India.

Indonesia to convey to US that Hamas-Israel war should end

(jb) *US News* has reported that Indonesian leader Widodo will convey to US President Biden that the war between Israel and Hamas must be stopped.

"I will be delegated to tell President Joe Biden that the Hamas-Israel war should immediately be stopped," President Widodo noted.

President Widodo travelled to Saudi Arabia for an international summit on the war on Friday. He will convey the outcome of the summit to President Biden when they meet on Monday. Recently, the Indonesian Vice President Ma'ruf Amin has hailed Saudi-Indonesian relations and is looking for economic opportunities in the country, grounded the Saudi Vision 2030. [US News] [Arab News]

Meanwhile, the Israel Defense Forces has claimed that Hamas, in collaboration with Indonesia, had intentionally constructed the Indonesian hospital in Gaza to conceal its underground terror infrastructure.

Indonesia promptly refuted these Israeli claims, insisting that the hospital is "a facility constructed by the Indonesian people solely for humanitarian purposes, intended to address the medical needs of the Palestinian population in Gaza." [Times of Israel] [Channel News Asia] [Reuters]

Indonesia's President urges US on delayed USD 20 billion funding for green transition

(jb) In an interview with British daily business newspaper Financial Times, Indonesia's President Joko Widodo has called on Western states to fulfill their promise of providing USD 20 billion in funding for his country's green energy transition.

This appeal comes amidst growing concern in Indonesia over the delay in receiving these funds, which were pledged by a group of advanced economies, led by the United States, a year ago.

Widodo emphasized Indonesia's commitment to the energy transition, citing the development of the electric vehicle industry to support green energy. He expressed his confidence that Western financing would eventually materialize, emphasizing that it was the commitment of developed states that was in question.

This call for action by President Widodo coincided with his bilateral meeting with US President Biden at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. During this meeting, Widodo sought an exemption to allow Indonesia's nickel industry to benefit from subsidies in the Inflation Reduction Act.

While Indonesia seeks more funding to shift away from coal, it is important to note that private coal power has expanded, particularly for nickel processing. [Financial Times]

Indonesia calls for help to develop EV manufacturing power

(jb) Indonesia, rich in nickel, a key component of long-range electric vehicle (EV) batteries, aspires to play a pivotal role in the manufacturing of EVs and their batteries.

Deputy Minister for Investment Promotion Nurul Ichwan expressed the nation's desire to move beyond being a raw materials supplier to the West and urged the United States and Europe to invest in Indonesia's burgeoning EV sector.

However, Indonesia faces challenges as U.S. and European nations have increasingly sought measures to reduce their reliance on Chinese supply chains.

Ichwan noted that while Chinese companies have invested in Indonesian smelters to process nickel into battery materials, Western countries have shown a preference for purchasing nickel ore.

Indonesia imposed a permanent ban on nickel ore exports in 2020, part of an effort to develop its mineral processing industry domestically and export higher-value products, reducing its dependence on raw material exports.

Indonesia has been actively courting Western EV manufacturers to invest in the local supply chain. So far, Ford Motor is the only U.S. carmaker to announce an investment in Indonesia, partnering with Vale Indonesia and Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt for a nickel smelter project.

The generous subsidies offered by the U.S. and the European Union to domestic EV producers, designed to mitigate geopolitical risks and bolster domestic manufacturing sectors, have complicated Indonesia's efforts to attract Western investors. Indonesia hopes to reward businesses that contribute to building EV ecosystems in the country with incentives.

Indonesia and the EU are exploring opportunities for cooperation, including investment in developing the EV ecosystem in both regions. Nonetheless, Indonesia must navigate geopolitical tensions, especially with its close links to China, as the U.S. views Chinese interference in tech sectors with caution. [Nikkei]

Indonesia-Singapore: Joint air force training conducted

(dql) The Indonesian Air Force and the Republic of Singapore Air Force (RSAF) are currently conducting joint training in Pekanbaru focused on war tactics. This training is part of the final phase of Mission Oriented Training (MOT) or the 4th Joint Fighter Weapon Course (JFWC), which commenced on November 13 and will continue until November 16.

The training involves a fleet of over 15 aircraft, including six F-16 fighter aircraft. Among them are five F-16 AM/BM aircraft from Air Squadron 3, one F-16 D aircraft from Air Squadron 14 based at the Iswahjudi Air Base, and one CN 295 aircraft from Air Squadron 2. [Antara News]

25 Japanese arrested, linked to Cambodian scam ring

(ic) Deported from Cambodia as suspected members of a scam ring, 25 Japanese people have been arrested mid-flight on November 8.

Nine prefectural police departments jointly arrested the men aged between 20 and 42 on suspicion of defrauding a 70-year-old woman in Hokkaido in August 2023. In addition, the group is believed to have swindled hundreds of millions of yen from victims across Japan.

Preliminary reports from some Cambodian and Japanese investigators indicate that the men may have been held trapped in an apartment complex and forced to run a variety of scams on their own

countrymen/women, with some even having sought help from the Japanese embassy in Phnom Penh. [Asahi Shinbun]

Police from Gifu Prefecture have also obtained an arrest warrant for a Japanese man suspected of

making fraudulent phone calls from Thailand to Japan. He is due to be extradited soon. [NHK World]

On March 17, PM Kishida had ordered a crackdown on burglary and fraud crime rings that operate on social media through fraudulent recruitment of unwitting individuals into what is termed a "dark part-time job." He emphasized at the time on the need for "cyberpatrols" to eradicate recruitment and protect personal data. [Japan Times]

A recent report released by the United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) unveiled that scam rings in Southeast Asia are quickly becoming the largest human trafficking issue of our time, with reportedly hundreds of thousands across a belt of developing Southeast Asian nations – but in particular Cambodia and Myanmar – lured to those countries then held in degrading conditions and forced to run scams on others across the world. [United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights]

Philippines Defense Secretary expresses hope for 2024 joint exercise with Japan

(ic) On November 7, Philippines Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro expressed hope to reporters from Kyodo News that a joint military exercise by Philippine and Japanese troops under a new bilateral security agreement could be held as early as 2024.

Teodoro added that he was optimistic about the possibility of the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), that would allow the deployment of military forces on each other's soil and would permit the Philippines to purchase defense equipment from Japan, between the two countries being finalized and signed at the December ASEAN-Japan Commemorative Summit. [Kyodo News]

This follows discussions on November 3 between PM Kishida and President Marcos Jr on the progress of the RAA. They had also agreed during those discussion for Japan to give coastal radar systems worth JPY 600 million (USD 4 million) as part of the Official Security

Assistance (OSA) program. [Nikkei Asian Review] [The Defense Post]

Domestically, sources claimed on November 6 that a group of government lawmakers are planning to start talks on lifting an export ban on weapons for defense purposes, including surface-to-air missiles, for nations with close security ties [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1].

This may signal a desire to expand the types of equipment to be made available to allies like the Philippines down the line.

Russia backs out of de-nuclearization agreement with Japan

(ic) On November 9, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin issued an order to terminate the country's agreement with Japan, focused on the reduction and containment of nuclear stockpiles. The 1993 agreement involved Japan assisting in the dismantling of decommissioned Russian nuclear submarines and other nuclear weapons in the Russian Far East, aiming to halt Russia's disposal of liquid nuclear waste in the waters between the two nations. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

The program had stagnated due to Russia's cessation of providing Japan with necessary data. [Newsweek] [Reuters]

This move by Russia aligns with its recent de-ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) on November 2, amid escalating nuclear tensions with the United States. [The Moscow Times]

Japan and Laos vow cooperation during 2024 ASEAN Chairmanship

(ic) During a meeting with Lao Deputy Prime Minister Saleumxay Kommasith in Tokyo on November 10, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida expressed Japan's desire to continue its cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and in particular with Laos in its role as ASEAN Chair for 2024.

Kommasith met with Foreign Minister Kamikawa Yoko later that day to discuss the reconstruction of the Chao Anouvong Stadium. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

The Commemorative Summit for the 50th Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation will take place over December 16-18, 2023.

Analysts have been stating that the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed between ASEAN and Japan on September 6 signals a large shift in Japan's relations with ASEAN, evolving to a more equal footing. [East Asia Forum] [Fulcrum]

Japan expresses wariness of China-Russia joint long-range bomber flights

(ic) On November 11, PM Kishida Fumio expressed in a speech to about 800 personnel at an Air Self-Defense Force review ceremony at Iruma Air Base in Saitama Prefecture that the government was wary about increasing Chinese and Russian joint long-range bomber flights near Japanese airspace.

The prime minister highlighted three Japanese countermeasures that are underway: an increase in defense spending, the acquisition of standoff weapons, and the Global Combat Air Program (GCAP) that aims to develop a next-generation fighter aircraft by 2035 in conjunction with the UK and Italy. [Kyodo News] [NHK World]

On June 6, two Chinese Xian H-6 and two Russian Tupolev Tu-95 bombers had 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 [see AiR No. 42, October/2023, 3]

The Ministry of Defense signed four contracts worth a total of USD 2.83 billion for improved ground-launched Type 12 anti-ship missiles on April 3. Production will begin this year and deliveries are scheduled for 2026 and 2027. [USNI News]

This, and the new jet fighter, can be considered weapons that function in a primarily offensive capacity, and have thus been regarded by experts as marking a further significant shift in Japan's interpretation of the pacifist Article 9 of its Constitution. [Nikkei Asian Review]

Laos to receive funding from Switzerland for land management project

(ws) Laos is set to receive financial support from the Swiss government to advance land management and

foster investments for climate-resilient livelihoods.

While prevailing land use practices, primarily spearheaded by private investors and individuals, have played a pivotal role in driving economic growth and generating revenue, they pose a risk of unsustainability. Issues such as the potential loss of land use rights for rural communities, extensive monoculture farming, and excessive use of agrochemical inputs have emerged. These practices have led to challenges for rural farmers' livelihoods, environmental pollution, and a significant decline in soil fertility, largely due to their short-term focus.

The project, formalized through an agreement signed in Vientiane by Laos and Switzerland, aims to support the Lao government in elevating land management practices. It focuses on advocating for quality investments in sustainable land management and enhancing knowledge, capacities, and processes to benefit the most vulnerable communities. [Vientiane Times]

Laos receives USAID support for disaster risk reduction

(ws) Laos is poised to receive a USD 2 million support package from the United States through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), aimed at enhancing disaster risk reduction efforts to establish resilient communities in the face of climate challenges. The initiative is projected to benefit over 16,000 individuals across four districts in the provinces of Oudomxay and Phongsaly.

The primary goals of the project include actively involving communities in disaster risk reduction efforts, ensuring year-round improvements in livelihoods, and fortifying both national and local disaster management systems. The project will concentrate on mitigating the threats posed by climate-related hazards and their impact on communities, with a specific focus on enhancing food security for the most vulnerable populations. [Vientiane Times]

Malaysia, China agree to further promote bilateral ties during Vice-President Han Zheng's visit

(mw) During a recent four-day visit to Kuala Lumpur, Chinese Vice President Han Zheng has expressed Beijing's willingness to strengthen ties with Malaysia as the two countries approach the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations next year. [The Star]

During his visit to Malaysia, Han met with Malaysian Supreme Head Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah and discussed enhancing cooperation in various fields, promoting sustainable prosperity and stability in the region, and upgrading bilateral cooperation for mutual benefit.

Han also held talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, emphasizing the importance of the Malaysia-China relationship and encouraging closer exchanges and cooperation in various sectors. Anwar welcomed Chinese enterprises to invest and do business in Malaysia to achieve common prosperity and development.

Chief Minister of Malaysia's Sabah state meets top Hong Kong leader to boost trade ties

(mw) Hong Kong's Chief Executive, John Lee Ka-chiu, has expressed a strong interest in strengthening trade relations with Malaysia's Sabah state. During a meeting with Sabah's Chief Minister, Hajiji Noor, Lee highlighted the potential for collaboration in the tourism and food industries. [The Star]

Hajiji, for his part, shared his vision of making Sabah a gateway to Southeast Asia and the Brunei-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA). He emphasized the importance of direct communication between Hong Kong and Sabah to foster greater trade and cooperation.

The discussion between the two leaders included various key investment areas such as energy, low-energy-intensity industries, green technology-based products, biomass downstream products, food processing, medical devices, oil and gas, tourism, and new industries.

Residents in Malaysia's Sarawak state targeted by Myanmar-based traffickers, job scammers

(mw) Police in Malaysia's Sarawak state have received 52 reports involving human trafficking syndicates and job scams targeting residents in the state. Victims were promised high-paying jobs at casinos and hotels in Myanmar, leading to 81 Sarawakians being stranded there due to these non-existent job offers. Of these, 30 individuals have been successfully repatriated. [Bernama]

India, Malaysia foreign ministers meet, discuss using national currencies in bilateral trade

(mw) Malaysia and India are exploring the possibility of using their national currencies in bilateral trade transactions as a way to strengthen economic cooperation. This issue was discussed during the Joint Commission Meeting (JCM) co-chaired by Malaysia's Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir and his Indian counterpart S Jaishankar in New Delhi. [New Straits Times]

Malaysia has previously used local currencies for trade with Thailand and Indonesia and is now proposing the same with India. New Delhi is Kuala Lumpur's top economic partner in South Asia, with bilateral trade valued at USD 19.6 billion in 2022.

The JCM also covered areas such as digital economy, semiconductor manufacturing, defense, tourism, healthcare, fintech, agriculture, education, and food security, with discussions on amending the Malaysia-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement to reflect the new economy and digital sector developments. [NDTV]

Malaysia, Russia sign eight MoU to enhance cooperation in higher education

(mw) Malaysia and Russia signed eight memoranda of understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation in higher education. The agreements cover areas such as establishing mirror labs, student mobility, satellite labs, double degrees, matching grants, joint academic and research programs, enhancement of learning curricula, and training and technology transfer. [The Star]

The collaboration also includes efforts to promote the Malay language in Russia and the Russian language in Malaysia, fostering cultural exchange and language learning. Additionally, the Higher Education Ministry in

Malaysia has agreed to recognize degrees granted by Russian authorities, subject to acceptance by relevant professional bodies in Malaysia.

Mongolia-China: Joint border defense exercise

(ap) On November 10, China and Mongolia conducted a joint border defense cooperation drill in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region to address border crimes such as smuggling and terrorist activities.

The exercise encompassed joint commands, including siege and capture, hostage rescue, combat, and observation, aimed at preserving peace and security along the border. The practice involved information sharing and command post activities.

Notably, one of the exercises simulated terrorist chasing, evidence collection, battlefield extraction, and counter-terrorism operations. [CMC]

Mongolia-Laos: Presidents agree to further enhance cooperation

(ap) On November 6, President Thongloun Sisoulith of Laos hosted official talks with his Mongolian counterpart Khurelsukh Ukhnaa in Vientiane.

Khurelsukh's visit to Laos commemorates the 60th anniversary of diplomatic and friendly relations between the two nations. Discussions encompassed political, defense, and economic aspects, emphasizing a commitment to enhancing relations.

Both leaders underscored the importance of the "Agreement between the Government of Mongolia and the Government of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on Aviation Relations" to facilitate cooperative travel and cargo exchange. Addressing environmental degradation due to climate change, both nations expressed dedication to collaboration with the UN, formalizing their commitment through signed bilateral documents to fortify the legal environment. [Montsame 1]

As part of his state visit, Khurelsukh also met with Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone, expressing confidence in the close cooperation between their governments for mutually beneficial trade.

The two leaders expressed eagerness to organize a trilateral meeting involving Mongolia, Laos, and China, with the aim of fostering increased trade, transportation facilitation, coordination of transit ports by railway. [Montsame 2]

Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister of Canada visits Mongolia

(ap) Assistant Deputy Foreign Minister of Canada Weldon Epp was received by State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia N. Ankhbayar in Ulaanbaatar on November 7.

The meeting marks 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries and both sides highlighted the great importance of expansion of trade and economic cooperation. [Montsame]

Japanese and Mongolian ambassadors discuss bilateral cooperation

(ap) Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Mongolia to Japan B. Bayarsaikhan received newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Mongolia Igawahara Masaru on November 6, 2023.

Both sides focused on advancing the “Special Strategic Partnership for Peace and Prosperity” and highlighted the economic cooperation in the future. [Montsame]

China issues warning to its citizens to abstain from visiting the war zones in Myanmar

(wn) The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a warning to its citizens, urging them to avoid areas in Myanmar currently experiencing conflict.

This caution follows reports of Chinese nationals sustaining injuries and fatalities in border regions where clashes have intensified, particularly in northern Shan State and Kachin State.

The fighting intensified in northern Shan State, concurrent with Kachin Independence Army (KIA) forces engaging in combat in Kachin State and Karen National Union (KNU) forces in Karen State.

Additionally, there have been local defense force assaults in areas like Magway. [VOA Burmese]

Meanwhile, Chinese special forces have reportedly entered Myanmar for the first time to combat online fraud rings operating in Lauk Kai, the capital of Kokang in the northern part of Shan State, bordering China.

While past interactions between border guards from both nations involved friendship visits, this recent operation marked an unprecedented bilateral effort, involving exchanges of fire with online fraud gangs.

The decision for this joint operation was reached through mutual agreement between the Minister of Public Security and the Military Council during a recent visit to Burma. This collaborative effort was also discussed at the National Defense and Security Council meeting.

Although the specific date of the special forces' entry has been kept confidential by both countries, a BBC investigation has unveiled that the operation commenced within days of the decision. [BBC Burmese]

Vietnamese government urges citizens to leave Myanmar

(wn) The Vietnamese foreign ministry has urged Vietnamese citizens currently residing in Myanmar to leave immediately. Additionally, Vietnamese citizens are advised to avoid travelling to Myanmar's Shan and Karen states due to ongoing military conflicts.

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry confirmed that 166 citizens have been relocated to a safe place near the Chinese border in northern Myanmar.

However, due to ongoing fighting in various regions of Myanmar, including the Karen State where more Vietnamese citizens are believed to be, access to and protection of citizens remain difficult. [Vietnamplus] [RFA Burmese]

North Korea criticizes South Korean Constitutional Court ruling on law banning anti-Pyongyang leaflets

(ap) North Korean authorities have voiced their criticism of South Korea's decision to repeal a law

prohibiting activists from sending anti-Pyongyang regime leaflets to the People's Republic of Korea. In response, North Korea issued a threat involving a "shower of shells."

This official stance from North Korea, communicated through the Korean Central News Agency, marks the first response since South Korea's Constitutional Court's decision to lift the ban in September, citing concerns about its impact on freedom of speech.

The court's ruling was prompted by complaints from North Korean defectors residing in the South. Park Sang-hak, a frequent target of the North Korean government, notably launched 10 balloons carrying 500,000 leaflets. Other defectors, including Park, have utilized helium-filled balloons containing USB sticks with global information and US dollars, criticizing the oppressive regime in North Korea. [AP 1] [AP 2]

North Korea closes its embassy in Nepal

(ap) North Korea has decided to shutter its embassy in Nepal, marking the fifth closure in a recent series of foreign mission shutdowns. In the preceding month, North Korea closed embassies in Spain, Hong Kong, Uganda, Angola, and additional African countries [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1].

North Korean Ambassador Jo Yong Man conveyed this decision to Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Kathmandu, citing the ongoing economic downturn and shifting geopolitical dynamics as primary factors.

Diplomatic relations between Nepal and North Korea, established in 1974 with the signing of a bilateral trade agreement, will now be overseen by the North Korean embassy in India. Notably, a North Korean embassy was opened in Kathmandu at the time, while the Nepalese embassy in Pyongyang was never established, with diplomatic relations being conducted in China. [NK News]

Pakistan extends stay of 1.4 million registered Afghan refugees, calls Taliban regime enabler of terrorism

(tj/lm) Pakistan announced on November 10 extended the legal residence status of about 1.4 million Afghan refugees until the end of the year after a four-month delay. However, it again rejected calls to halt

deportations of all undocumented Afghans and other foreign nationals. [Voice of America]

Since November 1, Pakistan has been cracking down on foreigners residing in the country without legal documentation, a group that includes an estimated 1.7 million Afghans. This deportation plan has drawn criticism from various quarters, including the United Nations, global human rights organizations, and the Taliban government in Afghanistan. The concern is that forcibly evicting Afghans, particularly those without proper documentation, could expose them to retribution and abuses by Taliban authorities, worsening the already dire humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

At the same time, the caretaker information minister of Pakistan's Baluchistan province on November 9 said the national government would plan to repatriate "registered refugees" to their home countries after deporting all illegal immigrants in the country. [Arab News]

Moreover, Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar pinned the recent surge in terrorist attacks on the Taliban government in Afghanistan and called it a reaction to the deportation drive. Kakar said there was a 60 per cent increase in terrorism and a 500 percent spike in suicide bombings since the Afghan Taliban came to power in August 2021. [Dawn]

South Korean intelligence agencies accuse China of operating fake news websites of propaganda

(tms) South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) suspects Chinese agencies, specifically Haimai and Haixun, of orchestrating a scheme involving counterfeit websites resembling prominent South Korean news outlets.

The agency claims that these phishing sites disseminated "pro-China" and "anti-US" stories, including critiques of South Korea's involvement in the US-led Summit for Democracy and praise for China's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NIS views these actions as part of Beijing's covert online influence operations. Taking action, the NIS has identified and shut down 38 such websites, all identified as promoting pro-China narratives.

The intelligence service has also sought cooperation from social media platforms to remove the circulating Chinese-generated propaganda. [Korea Herald]

Philippines to launch five coast guard patrol ships with loan from Japan

(lm) The Philippines is set to launch five coast guard vessels valued at half a billion US dollars through a Japanese government loan. This move is aimed at improving patrol capabilities in the disputed waters of the South China Sea. [The Straits Times]

Japan has played a significant role in upgrading the capabilities of the Philippine coast guard, and Tokyo has financed the acquisition of patrol vessels for the agency in recent years. Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida also pledged to provide the Philippines with a coastal radar surveillance system during his visit to Manila earlier this month [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1].

Philippines thanks Qatar for mediation on evacuations of foreigners from Gaza

(lb) The Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Philippines, H.E. Enrique Manalo, recently held a meeting with Qatar's Ambassador to the Philippines, H.E. Ahmed Saad Al Hamidi. The discussions centered on various aspects of cooperation between the two nations. The Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs conveyed gratitude to Qatar for its mediation efforts, particularly in facilitating the opening of the Rafah crossing to foreigners, including Filipinos. Additionally, appreciation was expressed for Qatar's mediation leading to the release of hostages. This diplomatic exchange reflects the positive collaboration and support between Qatar and the Philippines on international matters. [The Penisula Qatar]

Timor-Leste's President Ramos-Horta in Philippines on official visit

(lb) During Timor-Leste President José Ramos-Horta's state visit to the Philippines, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing bilateral relations. President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. welcomed Ramos-Horta, and discussions covered various important topics, including the South China Sea issue.

Agreements were reached to enhance education, health, and social security cooperation. They also expedited negotiations on agreements for health, social security, and direct flights between their capitals. [CNN Philippines]

Visiting USAID official backs Philippines in boosting manufacturing workforce, cybersecurity

(lb) During his visit to the Philippines, Michael Schiffer from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) announced increased support for the country. USAID will focus on enhancing the Philippine workforce's skills for advanced manufacturing and bolstering the nation's cybersecurity capabilities. [US Embassy in the Philippines]

Schiffer engaged in discussions regarding environmental issues, including the "green habitat" in the West Philippine Sea. He also explored opportunities for local vaccine production in the pharmaceutical sector. Additionally, Schiffer met with industry leaders, academia, and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to discuss the Advanced Manufacturing Workforce Development Alliance (AMDev) program.

An important development during the visit was the signing of an MOU between the DTI, the Makati Business Club (MBC), and pharmaceutical firm Unilab to support AMDev. This five-year USAID-funded program aims to train 11,000 individuals in advanced manufacturing skills, establish Advanced Manufacturing Institutes (AMIs) nationwide, and institutionalize the Advanced Manufacturing Skills Council (AMSC) for long-term program sustainability.

USAID has allocated USD 5.2 million for AMDev, with the private sector matching and leveraging the grant during implementation. The program initially focuses on semiconductors, electronics, and pharmaceuticals to strengthen vaccine production capabilities.

Additionally, USAID expressed interest in deepening collaboration with the Philippine government and local government units (LGUs) in cybersecurity. The agency is implementing the USD 3.3 million Better Access and Connectivity (BEACON) program, enhancing ICT access, connectivity, and addressing cybersecurity threats.

Overall, Schiffer's visit highlights USAID's commitment to supporting the Philippines in workforce

development, advanced manufacturing, and cybersecurity. The agency continues to address environmental and humanitarian challenges in the country, with significant financial allocations for 2023.

Special Presidential Envoy for Climate Kerry's travel to Singapore

(lb) Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry is scheduled to visit Singapore from November 10 to 12, aiming to advance U.S. goals in climate and clean energy. As part of a series of high-level visits to the Indo-Pacific preceding the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Week in San Francisco, Secretary Kerry plans to engage with Singaporean Prime Minister and ministers to review initiatives within the U.S.-Singapore Climate Partnership. Additionally, he is set to participate in the Bloomberg New Economy Forum, addressing climate-related issues, and engage with private sector leaders to promote accelerated climate action in preparation for the 28th UN Climate Change Conference (COP28). This visit underscores the importance of international collaboration in addressing climate challenges and underscores the United States' commitment to fostering partnerships in the region.

Singapore: Han Zheng Attends the Sixth Bloomberg New Economy Forum and Visits Singapore

(lb) Chinese Vice President Han Zheng attended the sixth Bloomberg New Economy Forum in Singapore from November 7 to 8, 2023, and during his visit, delivered a keynote speech at the forum's opening ceremony. He highlighted President Xi Jinping's vision of building a human community with a shared future and proposed three key ideas for international cooperation: seeking cooperation through opening-up, creating more dynamics through innovation, and promoting development through peace. Han Zheng expressed China's commitment to strengthening communication with the United States, promoting mutually beneficial cooperation, and addressing global challenges together. During his visit, he met with Singaporean leaders, including President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, discussing the upgraded bilateral relationship and expressing a commitment to deepening cooperation in various fields. Both sides emphasized the importance of true multilateralism and building

consensus for global development and stability. [MOA PRC]

China unlikely to launch ‘D-Day’ on Taiwan, Singapore PM says

(lb) Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, downplayed the likelihood of an immediate conflict over Taiwan, emphasizing that China is not "trigger happy" about taking over the island and expressing uncertainty about how to integrate Taiwan into "one China." He suggested that unless provoked, China is not likely to launch a sudden military operation. Prime Minister Lee's comments reflect optimism ahead of a potential meeting between Presidents Xi Jinping and Joe Biden. He also addressed Southeast Asian concerns about U.S.-China tensions and discussed the need for regional cooperation on issues like the South China Sea. Additionally, Lee touched on topics such as the Israel-Hamas conflict, terrorism risks in Southeast Asia, the development of artificial intelligence, and Singapore's tax policy. [Business Times]

Singapore, China vow to advance all-round high-quality future-oriented partnership

(lb) China and Singapore have reaffirmed their commitment to advancing their all-round high-quality future-oriented partnership during a meeting between Chinese Vice President Han Zheng and Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. The leaders pledged to work together on building a high-quality "Belt and Road," upgrading cooperation projects, enhancing people-to-people exchanges, and making use of bilateral cooperation mechanisms. Singapore expressed its readiness to deepen alignment of development strategies and elevate the all-round high-quality future-oriented partnership to a new level. In a separate meeting with Singaporean President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Han emphasized the importance of true multilateralism and consensus to promote global cooperation, with both sides expressing their commitment to deepening practical cooperation for mutual benefit. [English News CN]

Singapore and Indonesia Further Enhance Bilateral Judicial Relations with Signing of

Memorandum of Understanding to Promote Bilateral Judicial Cooperation

(lb) The Supreme Court of Singapore and the Supreme Court of Indonesia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for judicial cooperation on November 7, 2023. The MOU, signed by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Chief Justice Prof Dr Muhammad Syarifuddin, focuses on four specific areas of collaboration: cross-border commercial law, international commercial courts and dispute resolution, the International Consortium for Court Excellence and International Framework for Court Excellence, and judicial education and training. Chief Justice Menon described the MOU as a landmark instrument, laying the foundation for deepening bilateral cooperation between the judiciaries of Indonesia and Singapore in various areas, fostering an enduring and vibrant partnership in the years to come. The collaboration aims to strengthen ties between the two countries through judicial engagement and knowledge exchange. [Cision PR]

South Korea-US: Talk on growing Russia-North Korea military ties, global dynamics held

(tms) South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken engaged in extensive discussions, giving prominence to concerns over North Korea's expanding military cooperation with Russia.

The talks were prompted by revelations that North Korea supplied a substantial amount of munitions to Russia for the Ukraine conflict following a rare September summit between Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin.

Blinken, who recently attended a Group of Seven meeting in Tokyo, strongly condemned North Korea's actions and thanked Seoul for its commitment to aiding Ukraine.

Beyond North Korea, the discussions covered global challenges, including Middle East instability, and focused on reinforcing the US commitment to the Indo-Pacific amidst the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Blinken's concerns about Russia's potential technical assistance to North Korea's long-range missile program were highlighted, given North Korea's preparations for a potential third attempt to launch a military spy satellite.

Prior to talks with Park, Blinken paid a courtesy call on President Yoon Suk Yeol, whereby they discussed on North Korea, the alliance, and other regional and global issues. [Yonhap 1]

The diplomatic talks, preceding a US-China summit and addressing China-related issues, underscored Washington's strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific amid evolving global dynamics.

Blinken's nine-day multination tour, which included stops in the Middle East, concludes with talks in India. [Yonhap 2]

South Korea-US: Cybersecurity collaboration agreement signed

(tms) South Korea's National Intelligence Service (NIS) announced a cybersecurity collaboration agreement with the US Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA).

The memorandum of understanding (MOU) outlines joint efforts, including cyber training and information sharing on threats.

In line with the Seoul-Washington summit agreement in April, both agencies aim to bolster cooperation against cyber adversaries [see AiR No. 18, May/2023, 1]. The focus extends to safeguarding critical infrastructure, crafting policies, and exploring innovative cybersecurity technologies.

The MOU signifies a step forward in implementing the bilateral Strategic Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework established during the summit. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Iran: Double taxation treaty revised

(tms) South Korea and Iran have signed a provisional agreement aimed at amending their bilateral double taxation treaty.

The three-day negotiations in Seoul resulted in a revision that addresses the prevention of double taxation and fiscal evasion.

The changes include easing regulations for residents seeking dispute resolution and bolstering bilateral information exchanges. The update aligns with

evolving international standards and recommendations from organizations like the OECD.

The formal signing ceremony is pending, with both countries set to undergo domestic procedures for the revised agreement to take effect. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Italy: Technological alliance forged during President Yoon's summit

(tms) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Italian President Sergio Mattarella, in a summit at Yoon's office on the occasion of Mattarella's three-day state visit to South Korea, have pledged to bolster cooperation in cutting-edge technology sectors.

Emphasizing the potential for expanded trade and investment, the leaders committed to advancements in hydrogen, artificial intelligence (AI), and space exploration.

Several memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were signed, focusing on next-generation industrial collaboration, space exploration, and increased joint research in basic sciences.

The leaders also discussed global issues, expressing a joint commitment to address North Korea's nuclear program and collaborate internationally to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. [Yonhap]

South Korea-France: Bilateral relations, global issues discussed in Paris meeting

(tms) South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin engaged in talks with his French counterpart, Catherine Colonna, in Paris, covering topics ranging from North Korean threats to the Ukraine conflict.

Park highlighted Seoul's efforts for peace in the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia, seeking enhanced cooperation with France in space and nuclear energy. Colonna expressed full support for South Korea's regional peace endeavors.

The diplomats also discussed the Indo-Pacific's strategic importance and pledged close cooperation on international issues, including North Korea and Ukraine.

Park also sought France's backing for South Korea's bid to host the 2030 World Expo in Busan. [Yonhap 1]

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo is set to visit Paris to bolster final support ahead of the crucial November 28 vote by the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE). [Yonhap 2]

South Korea-Poland: Banks consider syndicated loan to facilitate arms export

(tms) Five major South Korean commercial banks, including KB Kookmin, Shinhan, Hana, Woori, and Nonghyup, are reportedly exploring the option of issuing a syndicated loan to support South Korean companies in exporting arms to Poland.

Last year, South Korean firms secured substantial contracts totaling KRW 17 trillion for the supply of military equipment to Poland.

However, efforts to finalize additional contracts worth KRW 30 trillion this year faced challenges due to lending limitations by the state-run Export-Import Bank of Korea (Eximbank).

The proposed syndicated loan, initially estimated at USD 2.7 billion, aims to address this financing gap and boost South Korea's ambitions to become the world's fourth-largest arms exporter by 2027. [Yonhap]

South Korea-Canada: Support sought to address North Korea's human rights crisis

(tms) South Korea's Unification Minister, Kim Yung-ho, urged Canadian Ambassador Tamara Mawhinney for support in resolving North Korea's dire human rights conditions during their meeting.

Kim outlined South Korea's efforts to address the forced repatriation of North Korean defectors in China and emphasized the need for collaboration on North Korea's denuclearization.

Recent reports by South Korean human rights groups highlighted China's forcible repatriation of North Korean defectors, a practice condemned by Seoul.

The Canadian ambassador expressed the government's active engagement in improving North Korea's human rights situation, emphasizing multilateral efforts.

Both parties underscored the importance of cooperation to address the severe human rights

violations in North Korea. [Yonhap]

Taiwan-US: Taiwanese ships joins Maritime Aid Pact Led by US Coast Guard

(jr) In a latest sign of enhanced maritime collaboration between Taiwan and the US, Taiwan's Ocean Affairs Council announced on November 8 the formation of a national rescue team comprising 155 local crews from Taiwan-flagged vessels.

This team is set to participate in the Automated Mutual Assistance Vessel Rescue (AMVER) program, initiated in 1958 and led by the US Coast Guard.

The AMVER program facilitates the coordination of emergency aid to vessels navigating the high seas, with the active involvement and backing of private shipping and fishing companies. Presently, more than 22,000 international vessels are engaged in the AMVER program. [Ocean Affairs Council, Taiwan, in Chinese] [Taiwan News]

Top US military official doubts Chinese invasion of Taiwan

(jr) United States senior military officials are toning down their rhetoric on China's potential invasion of Taiwan, expressing doubts about its likelihood.

General Charles Brown, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested that Chinese President Xi Jinping may not seek to take Taiwan by force but could explore alternative means.

Emphasizing the historical preparedness of Taiwan for a possible invasion since the Chinese Civil War in 1949, the difficulty of a beachfront invasion, and the evolving nature of conflicts, officials highlight the need to consider various methods the Chinese Communist Party might employ.

Brown's remarks coincide with attempts to ease tensions between Washington and Beijing, with President Joe Biden and Xi Jinping set to meet at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) in San Francisco [see article in this edition], marking only their second meeting as leaders. [Financial Times]

Taiwan-UK: Trade partnership agreement signed

(ga/jr) On November 8, the UK hosted its 26th annual trade talks with Taiwan in London, with UK Trade Minister Nigel Huddleston and Taiwanese Deputy Minister Chern-Chyi Chen of the Ministry of Economic Affairs meeting.

The discussions focused on furthering economic exchanges, particularly in the areas of renewable energy and semiconductors. At the talks, British and Taiwanese representatives signed an Enhanced Trade Partnership agreement, which focuses on “two-way investment, digital trade, and energy and net-zero.”

The UK also guaranteed GBP 380 million, NTD 15 billion, in funding for an offshore wind project in Taiwan, estimated to provide power to a million homes upon its completion.

The Enhanced Trade Partnership agreement marks the first such trade partnership Taiwan has made with a European country. [Department for Business & Trade, UK] [Overseas Community Affairs Council, Taiwan] Taiwan]

Recent developments include Canada and Taiwan concluding talks on a bilateral deal to enhance foreign investment [see AiR No. 44, October/2023, 5], and in August, US President Joe Biden signing legislation for the "21st Century" trade initiative between the US and Taiwan [see AiR No. 32, August/2023, 2].

Taiwan is hoping that its trade deal with the UK can be a steppingstone to membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a trade pact which Taiwan applied to join in 2021 and which the UK formally signed in July. [Barron’s]

Bilateral trade between the UK and Taiwan in 2022 was GBP 8.6 billion, USD 10.6 billion, and will likely be increased by the new trade agreement. [Reuters 1]

In response, the Chinese government warned the UK not to “us[e] trade cooperation as an excuse to engage in official exchanges or enhance substantive relations with Taiwan”, which China claims as part of its territory. [Reuters 2]

Neither China nor Taiwan are members of the CPTPP, but both aspire to join. [The Guardian]

Taiwan-Czech Republic: Agreement on rebuilding water and energy systems in Ukraine signed

(dql) Taiwan and the Czech Republic have signed an agreement to cooperate in helping reconstruction work in Ukraine.

Under the agreement, the two sides will work together to rebuild water and energy systems. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan] [Focus Taiwan]

China, Thailand army chiefs discuss expansion of cooperation

(ak) Royal Thai Army (RTA) Commander-in-Chief General Jaroenchai Hintao welcomed General Li Qiaoming, Commander of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA), during his official visit to Thailand.

The discussions revolved around expanding military study exchange programs to cover more subjects, levels, and institutes, as well as cooperating in hosting military exercises and developing military intelligence in cyber security and national security technology. [The Nation]

Chinese Embassy in Bangkok slams Thai media over Taiwan's Foreign Minister interview

(bk) China's embassy in Thailand issued a statement condemning a recent interview with Taiwan's Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, published by *Thai PBS*. The embassy criticized the interview as spreading "nonsense" and "fallacies" that harmed the relationship between Thailand and China. [Prachatai English]

In the interview, held with *Thai PBS* anchor Phongsathat Sukhaphong on November 1 in Taipei City, Minister Wu said Taiwan will leave no stone unturned to prevent conflict despite China’s escalating military threats and economic coercion. [Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Thailand]

Timor-Leste seeks cooperation with Brunei Darussalam

(dql) In an interview given during his four-day state visit to Brunei last week, Timor-Leste President Jose Ramos-Horta reaffirmed his country's wish to expand and deepen the cooperation with Brunei Darussalam in various fields, including forest conservation, oil and gas, as well as education, agriculture and health.

Ramos Hortha further referred to the memorandum of understanding on workers' mobility that was signed during his visit [see AiR No. 45, November/2023, 1] which would allow Timor-Leste workers to come to Brunei for employment in areas like hospitality and to learn and be more productive. [The Star]

Chinese, Vietnamese officials discuss territorial, border issues

(tt/lm) On November 9, Vietnamese and Chinese officials, led by Permanent Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Minh Vu and Chinese Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Sun Weidong, met in Hanoi to discuss territorial and border issues. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam] [Reuters]

The discussions covered positive developments in land border management, infrastructure, transportation connectivity, and tourism promotion in border areas. Both sides committed to close cooperation in border management, customs clearance, and cultural and commercial exchanges to create a peaceful and cooperative border.

Regarding maritime issues in the South China Sea, both sides emphasized the importance of adhering to previous agreements and working together to maintain peace, stability, and self-restraint in the region. Vietnam proposed respecting each other's rights and interests, addressing differences through negotiation, and finding long-term solutions in line with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The meeting also discussed progress in various cooperative projects, such as fisheries protection and environmental management. They pledged to accelerate negotiations on water delimitation, establish hotlines for contingencies in fishing activities, enhance search and rescue cooperation, and promote collaboration in less sensitive maritime areas.

Japanese, Vietnamese geoparks sign cooperation agreement

(tt) A memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation between UNESCO Global Geopark Dong Van Karst Plateau in Vietnam and the aspiring UNESCO Global Geopark Mine-Akiyoshidai Karst Plateau in Japan was signed on November 10. This MoU aims to facilitate tourism cooperation activities, exchange of delegations, marketing efforts to attract tourists, and improve the quality of products and services. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]

Vietnam, Germany intensify legal affairs collaboration

(tt) On November 8, representatives from the Vietnamese Ministry of National Defence's Department of Legal Affairs and the German Ministry of Defence's Directorate-General for Legal Affairs held discussions in Hanoi to enhance bilateral cooperation. [VietnamPlus]

The discussion focused on issues related to the development and improvement of the two countries' military and defense legal systems, as well as the creation of several legal documents on military affairs, national defense, United Nations peacekeeping, and civil defense.

Both sides agreed on the necessity of signing an international agreement at the defense ministerial level regarding cooperation in military and defense legal affairs and committed to further exchanges, information sharing, and human resources training.

Russian emergencies minister on working visit in Vietnam

(tt/lm) The Russian Minister of Emergency Situations, Sen. Lieut. Gen. Kurenkov Aleksandr Vyacheslavovich, visited Vietnam on November 9 and held talks with high-level officials, including Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and National Defence Minister Gen. Phan Van Giang.

Vyacheslavovich affirmed Russia's commitment to its traditional relations with Vietnam and its eagerness to strengthen cooperation in areas such as investment, trade, tourism, and people-to-people exchanges.

Vietnamese officials highlighted the significance of the comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia and expressed a desire to enhance cooperation across various fields. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh proposed increasing delegations at all levels, utilizing cooperation mechanisms, upgrading the Free Trade Agreement between Vietnam and the Eurasian Economic Union, launching new investment projects, and reopening direct flights between the two countries. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam] [TASS] [VietnamPlus 1] [VietnamPlus 2]

Vietnam, Cambodia urge multiple collaboration

(tt) Nguyen Thi Thanh, Chairwoman of the Vietnam-Cambodia Friendship Association, and Samdech Men Sam An, Chairwoman of the Cambodia-Vietnam Friendship Association, co-chaired a conference in Tay Ninh province on November 12 to review the one-year implementation of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on coordination between the two associations for the 2022-2027 period.

Bilateral trade is growing steadily and is expected to exceed USD 10 billion this year. In terms of tourism, Vietnam is one of Cambodia's most important sources of visitors.

In the coming months, the two sides will promote cooperation in the opening of vocational training courses for young people in border provinces, as well as increase economic, trade, and investment cooperation activities and create favorable conditions for businesses to expand their investment and business cooperation. [VietnamPlus]

Local-to-local cooperation is important to Vietnam and China relations

(tt) On November 13, at the opening ceremony of the 10th Conference, Deputy Prime Minister Tran Luu Quang, a head of the Vietnam-China Steering Committee for Bilateral Cooperation, stated that cooperation in the economic corridor between Viet Nam's four localities of Ha Noi, Lao Cai, Hai Phong, and Quang Ninh, and China's Yunnan province is a local-to-local cooperation part of Vietnam's comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China.

Regarding cooperation in the economic corridor, Tran emphasized that the close geographical proximity of the four Viet Nam and Yunnan localities has allowed them to develop traditional friendship and long-term cooperation.

Tran proposed that the two countries strengthen the role of existing cooperation mechanisms while considering the creation of new frameworks and models to achieve greater breakthroughs in economic, trade, and investment ties between the two countries. He also suggested that both sides increase transportation connectivity, particularly cross-border road and railway connectivity; and strengthen cooperation for the safe, effective, and sustainable management and use of water resources, thereby contributing to energy and food security, poverty reduction, and the improvement of people's living standards.

He urged local governments to increase their efforts, become more active, and be more creative to contribute to the realization of the high-level agreements and perceptions reached by the leaders of the two countries to ensure the increasingly sustainable development of the Vietnam-China comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. [Socialist Republic of Vietnam]

Thinking of writing it into two blocks; one for each day. Would depend on how much was discussed at each meeting. [IC1]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

15 November 2023 @ 1:30 - 2:20 p.m. (GMT-5), Atlantic Council, USA

A conversation with General Chance Saltzman on maintaining competitive endurance in space

The conversation is dedicated to the situation of space exploration by the United States and becoming China a worthy adversary in this area.

Learn more about the event at [Atlantic Council].

15 November 2023 @ 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

Missile Technologies in Southern Asia

A panel of regional experts will assess the role that missile and missile defense technologies play in Southern Asia today and the impact they may have in the future.

Learn more about the event at [Stimson Center].

16 November 2023 @ 9:30 – 10:15 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), USA

Biden-Xi Summit: The Capital Cable #82

The special discussion will be directed at the upcoming meeting between U.S. president Joe Biden and Chinese president Xi Jinping.

Learn more about the event at [CSIS].

16 November 2023 @ at 3:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Istituto Affari Internazionali, Italy

Technologies to fight global deforestation: the case of Indonesia

This is a key time to protect global forests. The event is devoted to exploration of different methods and instruments helpful for reaching this goal. There will be considered such aspects as novelty and the obstacles faced in their usage, with specific reference to Indonesia as a case study.

Learn more about the event at [Istituto Affari Internazionali].

16 November 2023 @ 4:00 – 5:15 p.m. (GMT+8), S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Singapore

Is Malaysia Ready for its Next Major Flood? History, Politics, and Policy Challenges in Flood Governance

This webinar will bring together a panel of experts to analyze the historical and contemporary government and societal responses to extreme weather events in Malaysia, and what they tell us about Malaysia's environmental and political landscape.

Learn more about the event at [RSIS].

16 November 2023 @ 10:30 - 11:45 a.m. (GMT-5), Stimson Center, USA

What Can Taiwan Learn from Honduras's Switch to China?

The conversation will consider and compare experience of Taiwan with the ones of Honduras in relations with China. The speakers will compare different issues arising and propose the ideas of which lessons Taiwan can learn from pitfalls Honduras met in its relations with China.

Learn more about the event at [Stimson Center]

16 November 2023 @ 10:00 - 11:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Middle East Institute, USA

From Crisis to Action: The Climate Extremes of 2023 and COP28

The experts will discuss climate changes and consequences of it. There will be considered recent outcomes, as well as predicted ones.

Learn more about the event at [Middle East Institute].

16 November 2023 @ 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), NUS East Asian Institute, Singapore

The Development of Chinese Politics and Society in Post-Mao China

This talk delineates a four-stage development of Chinese politics and society in post-Mao China and highlights the tensions between the state and society in each of these four stages and the logics behind the pattern of its development, leading to the rise of a new kind of Chinese state and society of what you see today.

Learn more about the event at [NUS East Asian Institute].

17 - 19 November 2023 @ 3:00 – 5:50 p.m. (GMT+9), Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF), Japan

The International Eelgrass and Blue Carbon Workshop

The aim of the event is to accelerate efforts to conserve and restore blue carbon ecosystems in Japan and around the world.

Learn more about the event at [SPF].

20 November 2023 @ 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. (GMT-8), Asia Society (Seattle), USA

Executive Roundtable on Prospects of U.S.-China Collaboration in Biotech

The event will reveal the topic of development in biotechnology of two impactful actors in the arena of international politics and economy – the United States and China. There will be discussed the opportunities of these two states to collaborate. However, there are many challenges and risks that will need to be resolved or at least mitigated to foster greater collaboration, including protection of biological information, intellectual property rights, and national security concerns. What can the public and private sectors in both countries do to improve future collaboration in biotech?

Learn more about the event at [Asia Society].

21 November 2023 @ 8:00 - 9:15 a.m. (GMT+9), Asia Society (Tokyo), Japan

Ambassadors' Circle with the Australian Ambassador

Australia and Japan have a very close partnership, officially called a 'Special Strategic Partnership." With a shared commitment to international rules that underwrite stability, prosperity, and sovereignty, the partnership has grown significantly in the past decade. The expert will examine the opportunities and challenges for the two countries, working together in a regional and global environment increasingly characterized by sharp strategic competition.

Learn more about the event at [Asia Society].

21 November 2023 @ 2:00 – 3:00 p.m. (GMT+1), German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Germany

India's G20 Presidency: Reviving Multilateralism through Responsible Leadership

There will be analyzed the contributions that India's G20 Presidency has made to the revival and reform of multilateralism at the panel. The experts in this round will explore how these ideas can be developed further under the Indo-German partnership.

Learn more about the event at [GIGA].

21 November 2023 @ 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (GMT+7), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Thailand

National Capacity Building Workshop Financing Clean Cooking in Bhutan and Nepal

The accent of the event will be made on clean energy sector in Bhutan and Nepal. International experts will discuss different approaches to financing clean cooking, and by extension for other clean energy initiatives.

Learn more about the event at [ESCAP].

21 November 2023 @ 8:00 – 9:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Asia Society (Washington, DC), USA

APEC 2023: Achievements, Insights, and the Road Ahead

The conversation will unpack this year's Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco directed to supply chain resiliency, digital trade, climate action, women's empowerment, and more.

Learn more about the event at [Asia Society].

Recent and upcoming book releases

Hein de Haas, ***How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics***, Viking, 464 pages, published November 9, 2023. Visit [Chatham House] to read a review.

Philip Frankel, ***Human Trafficking in South Africa***, HSRC Press, 207 pages, published May 31, 2023, reviewed in [Foreign Affairs].

Anto Mohsin, ***Electrifying Indonesia: Technology and Social Justice in National Development***, University of Wisconsin Press, 270 pages, to be released December 5, 2023. The book is reviewed in [Asian Review of Books].

Scott R. Stroud, ***The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction***, University of Chicago Press, 310 pages, published March 17, 2023. For a review, see [LSE].

Nj Ayuk, ***A Just Transition: Making Energy Poverty History with an Energy Mix***, Made for Success, 342 pages, published March 7, 2023, with a review in [Kirkus].

Matthew Longo, ***The Picnic: A Dream of Freedom and the Collapse of the Iron Curtain***, W. Norton & Company, 320 pages, published November 7, 2023. A review is available at [Kirkus].

Anna Reid, ***A Nasty Little War: The West's Fight to Reverse the Russian Revolution***, John Murray, 384 pages, published November 9, 2023. Find a review at [The Guardian].

Cat Bohannon, ***Eve: How the Female Body Drove 200 Million Years of Human Evolution***, Knopf, 624

pages,published October 3, 2023. For a review, visit [The Guardian].

Vortex Group (ed.), ***The George Floyd Uprising***, PM Press, 288 pages, published January 24, 2023, with a review in [Los Angeles Review of Books].

Calls

The **Caruso School of Law** invites paper proposals for the ***2024 Annual Meeting of the Association of Law, Property and Society (ALPS)***, to be held on June 13-15, 2024, Malibu, California, USA. The deadline for abstract submission is December 31, 2023. For more information, see [ALPS].

Common Ground Research Networks invites paper proposals for its ***20th International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic & Social Sustainability***, to be held on January 24-26, 2024, at the University of Aveiro, Aveiro, Portugal, and Online. The conference theme is "Pathways to Sustainability Innovation: Perspectives from Civil Society, Government and Business". For more information, see [On Sustainability].

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 a **Asia Weekly Regional Editor (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 **Project Assistant** to be based in Jakarta, Indonesia. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist** to be based in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Finance Officer UNOCHA** to be based in Caracas, Venezuela. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks an International Gender Statistics Consultant to be based in Tbilisi, Georgia. Applications are accepted until November 27, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** seeks a **Program Associate** to be based in Quito, Ecuador.Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNDP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Business Support Assistant (Programme)** to be based Manila, Philippines. Applications are accepted until November 27, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Logistic Assistant** to be based in Egypt. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Programme Policy Officer** to be based in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Applications are accepted until November 25, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **CBT Consultant** to be based in Islamabad, Pakistan. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **World Food Programme (WFP)** seeks a **Vulnerability Analysis & Mapping Officer** to be based in Haiti. Applications are accepted until November 25, 2023. More information is provided as [WFP].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Programme Associate**, to be based in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks an **Information Communication Technology Assistant**, to be based in Bolivia. Applications are accepted until November 27, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks an **International Consultancy**, to be based in Kenya. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Senior Operation Associate**, to be based in Aleppo, Syria. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** seeks a **Business Analysis Manager**, to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until November 27, 2023. More information is provided as [UNICEF].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Consultant**, to be based in Manila, Philippines. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Medical Officer**, to be based in Amman, Jordan. Applications are accepted until December 3, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Consultant**, to be based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks a **Technical officer Laboratory**, to be based in Ankara, Turkey. Applications are accepted until December 2, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** seeks an **Executive Assistant** to be based in Kingston, Jamaica. Applications are accepted until November 30, 2023. More information is provided as [WHO].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Legal Officer** to be based in Geneva, Switzerland. Applications are accepted until December 6, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **National Information Officer** to be based in Yangon, Myanmar. Applications are accepted until December 2, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Security Officer** to be based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Applications are accepted until December 1, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Public Information Officer** to be based in Amman, Jordan. Applications are accepted until November 28, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **United Nations Secretariate (UN)** seeks a **Finance and Budget Officer** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until December 20, 2023. More information is provided as [UN].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Job Developer**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until January 11, 2024. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Mental Health Supervisor**, to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until January 11, 2024. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Finance Assistant** to be based in United States. Applications are accepted until January 3, 2024. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Regional Partnership Advisor**, to be based in Kenya. Applications are accepted until December 2, 2023. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** seeks a **Recruiter**, to be based in Lebanon. Applications are accepted until March 11, 2024. More information is provided as [IRC].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks **National Epidemiologist,** to be based in Lilongwe, Malawi. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks an **Economist**, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **National Digital Villages Specialist**, to be based in Tbilisi, Georgia. Applications are accepted until November 24, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks a **Capacity Development and Training Specialist**, to be based in Rome, Italy. Applications are accepted until

December 1, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** seeks an **Internal Procurement Specialist**, to be based in Mogadishu, Somalia. Applications are accepted until December 1, 2023. More information is provided as [FAO].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Project Assistant**, to be based in Costa Rica. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Humanitarian Coordinator,** to be based in Bogota, Colombia. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Data and Research Coordinator**, to be based in Nairobi, Kenya. Applications are accepted until November 22, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Supply Chain Officer**, to be based in Multiple Locations. Applications are accepted until November 30, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** seeks a **Programme Manager,** to be based in Aden, Yemen. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2023. More information is provided as [IOM].

The **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)** seeks **a Coordinator**, to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [CTBTO].

The **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)** seeks a **Linux/Unix Support Technician**, to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until November 19, 2023. More information is provided as [CTBTO].

The **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)** seeks a **Maintenance Engineer**, to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [CTBTO].

The **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)** seeks an **Associate Voluntary**

Contributions and Programme Coordination Officer, to be based in Vienna, Austria. Applications are accepted until December 6, 2023. More information is provided as [CTBTO].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks an **Administration Associate**, to be based in Harare, Zimbabwe. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Data Engineer**, Remote work. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Senior Project Manager**, to be based in Chisinau, Moldova. Applications are accepted until November 26, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Civil Engineer**, to be based in Tarawa, Kiribati. Applications are accepted until November 29, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)** seeks a **Senior Technical Mine Action Advisor**, to be based in Libya. Applications are accepted until November 29, 2023. More information is provided as [UNOPS].

The **Family Health International (FHI 360)** seeks a **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Lead**, to be based in Rwanda. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [FHI 360].

The **Family Health International (FHI 360)** seeks an **Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery Advisor,** to be based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [FHI 360].

The **Family Health International (FHI 360)** seeks a **Logistics Assistant**, to be based in Tunis, Tunisia. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [FHI 360].

The **Family Health International (FHI 360)** seeks a **Senior Human Resources Officer**, to be based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [FHI 360].

The **Family Health International (FHI 360)** seeks a **Senior Administrative Officer**, to be based in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Applications are accepted until not specified. More information is provided as [FHI 360].

Metropolitan State University in Minnesota, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Metropolitan State University]

The **Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at University of Missouri-Kansas City** in Missouri United States is inviting applications for an **Adjunct Faculty Teaching Position**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Missouri-Kansas City]

Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in American Studies**. Application submission deadline is December 20, 2023. For more details, see [Kenyon College]

The **Department of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University** in New York, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in Black Cultural Studies**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [New York University].

Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of English**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Hofstra University].

The **School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Rochester** in Rochester, New York is inviting applications for a**Director, Susan B. Anthony Institute**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Rochester].

The **Department of Gender and Women's Studies (GWS) at the University of Rhode Island** in Rhode Island, United States is inviting applications for a **Visiting Assistant Professor in Black Feminisms**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [University of Rhode Island].

The **School of Social Science and Global Studies at The University of Southern Mississippi** in Hattiesburg, Mississippi is inviting applications for an **Assistant Teaching Professor**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [University of Southern Mississippi].

The **Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University** in New Haven, CT is inviting applications for a **Postdoctoral Associate in East Asian Studies**. Application submission deadline is January 5, 2024. For more details, see [Yale University].

The **Council on East Asian Studies at Yale University** in New Haven, CT is inviting applications for a **Postdoctoral Associate in Central Asian Studies**. Application submission deadline is January 5, 2024. For more details, see [Yale University].

The **University of Wisconsin-Madison** in Wisconsin, United States is inviting applications for an **Africana and Francophone Studies Librarian.** Application submission deadline is December 4, 2023. For more details, see [University of Wisconsin-Madison].

The **Department of African American Studies at Princeton University** in New Jersey, United States is inviting applications for a **Visiting Research Position**. Application submission deadline is January 4, 2024. For more details, see [Princeton University].

The **Department of Political Science at Northwestern University** in Evanston, Illinois is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Instruction in Computational Social Science**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Northwestern University].

St. Thomas University in Florida, United States is inviting applications for a **Faculty Professor Humanities**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [St. Thomas University].

The **Department of Child and Family Science at National Taiwan Normal University** in Taipei, Taiwan is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor**. Application submission deadline is January 31, 2024. For more details, see [National Taiwan Normal University].

The **Foothill-De Anza Community College District** in California, United States is inviting applications for an **Instructor, Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies, De Anza College.** Application submission deadline is January 22, 2024. For more details, see [Foothill-De Anza Community College District].

The **College of Science at Virginia Tech** in Virginia, United States is inviting applications for an **Associate Director for Educational Research.** Application submission deadline is open until January 5, 2024. For more details, see [The College of Science at Virginia Tech].

Texas Southern University in Texas, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Administration of Justice.** Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Texas Southern University].

Texas Southern University in Texas, United States is inviting applications for a **Chief Of Police and Executive Director of Emergency Management**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Texas Southern University].

Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor of Psychology**. Application submission deadline is December 20, 2023. For more details, see [Kennesaw State University].

Minnesota State University in Minnesota, United States is inviting applications for an **Assistant Professor in Criminal Justice**. Application submission deadline is not specified. For more details, see [Minnesota State University].

The **Department of English at Southern Methodist University** in Dallas, Texas is inviting applications for an **Open Rank Professor and Kahn Endowed Chair**. Application submission deadline is open until filled. For more details, see [Southern Methodist University].

Baylor University in Waco, Texas is inviting applications for a **Professor and Department Chair, Educational Psychology**. Application submission deadline is March 1, 2024. For more details, see [Baylor University].

Team:

Aida Pachedji (ap), Aimpavee Kiratiakkrasak (ak), Busawan Kachonnarongvanish (bk), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Griffin Allan (ga), Harshita Prashar (hp), Isabelle Chua (ic), Jonathan Riley (jr), Joseph Black (jb), Lachlan Foster (lf), Lawrence Brenner (lb), Lucas Meier (lm), Maria Christina Wong (mw), Morten Strantzen (ms), Muhammad Hussain Amin (mha), Natthiphorn Tienhom (np), Noor Afrose (na), Olena Krytska, Philipp Schüßler (ps), Phoo Wai Yan Myint (pm), Sai Laung Kam (sk), Saranya Setthi, Tarazi Mohammed Sheikh (tms), Teerada Thammapoonphol (tt), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn), Worrawit Sirijintana (ws), Xiangyi Chen (xc)

We would greatly appreciate your feedback! Please send any feedback you have regarding this newsletter to: info@cpg-online.de

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