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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

Wishing you an informative read, I extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates The Philippines' Independence Day and Portugal's National 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: Control on state workers and applicants with overseas experience tightened

(ms) China has ramped up measures that restrict travel and job opportunities for its state workers and public sector job applicants, especially those with ties outside mainland China. These moves, ostensibly aimed at safeguarding national security and curbing foreign influence, signal a broader strategy that could lead to greater isolation of China and its workers, particularly those involved in sensitive areas.

The Chinese government has introduced stringent travel restrictions for state employees, encompassing civil servants, employees of state-owned enterprises, and academic leaders. The measures include outright bans on international travel, limitations on trip

frequency and duration, and a complex approval process. For example, employees at the China Development Bank are prohibited from traveling abroad this year. Even lower-level workers and public-school teachers face new restrictions. These new rules reflect heightened concerns about espionage and corruption.

Navigating the approval system has become increasingly challenging. Employees must provide detailed reports of their proposed trips, often including invitation letters from relatives abroad when visiting them. Passports are frequently kept in mandatory lockups, requiring employees to apply to "borrow" their own passports for any overseas travel. The decision on who can travel lies with the employer, with some imposing stricter measures than others. An official in a southeastern province for example was denied permission to attend her son's graduation in the UK and later to visit him in Hong Kong.

Authorities are also scrutinizing personal and familial connections abroad. State workers must now disclose information about relatives with foreign nationalities or permanent residency, as well as any foreign assistance or experience they have had. This is aimed at reducing the risk of espionage and the influence of foreign intelligence agencies.

While Beijing promotes a narrative of increased global engagement post-pandemic, experts argue that these restrictions could impede China's diplomatic and cultural exchanges. Limiting the travel of a significant segment of the population might hinder Chinese officials' ability to learn from and engage with the rest of the world, potentially leading to long-term negative impacts. [South China Morning Post 1]

Simultaneously, a Beijing district police bureau's recent job advertisement highlights another layer of restriction. The Pinggu branch of Beijing's Public Security Bureau has ruled out any job applicants who have lived outside mainland China – including Hong Kong and Macau – for more than six months. This move is part of a broader trend where time spent beyond mainland borders is increasingly scrutinized for roles deemed sensitive, especially in law enforcement and immigration departments.

Similar restrictions have been imposed by other law enforcement agencies and the immigration department in recent years. For instance, the Key Information Infrastructure Protection Centre, under Beijing's Public Security Bureau, disqualified anyone who had spent more than six months outside the mainland from applying for its roles. The National

Immigration Administration also enforced this restriction for new staff in April, continuing a trend seen over the past few years.

These job restrictions are part of the Communist Party's national security drive, which has gathered pace amid intensifying rivalry with the United States and following the 2019 anti-government protests in Hong Kong. The revised anti-espionage law (see AiR No. 13, March/2024, 4), which broadens the definition of spying, and an expanded state secrets law adopted May last year, reflect the tightening national security legislation.

These developments underscore a significant shift in China's approach to managing its workforce in sensitive areas, potentially leading to stronger isolation. By restricting travel and job opportunities for individuals with overseas experience, China aims to protect its national security and ideological integrity. However, these measures could also have unintended consequences.

The restrictions might impede the ability of Chinese officials and employees to engage with and learn from international counterparts, potentially stifling innovation and global understanding. Furthermore, the rigorous scrutiny of personal connections and past experiences abroad could discourage talented individuals from pursuing careers in the public sector. [South China Morning Post 2]

China: Export growth rebounds in May

(ms) China's export increased, in May, by 7.6 percent from a year earlier to USD 302.4 billion, according to customs data released on June 7. This growth surpassed the expected 6.35 percent increase predicted by Chinese financial data provider Wind and was a notable improvement from the 1.5 percent rise recorded in April.

The rise in exports was partly due to a lower base from the same period last year, when exports had decreased by 7.5 percent year-on-year. Despite ongoing trade tensions, particularly with the United States and the European Union, sustained overseas demand contributed to this growth. Imports, on the other hand, rose by 1.8 percent in May, which was a slowdown compared to the 8.4 percent increase seen in April and fell short of the 4.2 percent gain anticipated by a Reuters poll.

China's trade surplus expanded to USD 82.6 billion in May, up from USD 72.4 billion in April. This surplus indicates a strong position in global trade, even as international partners impose countermeasures. Recently, the U.S. increased tariffs on various Chinese products, including electric vehicles, solar panels, semiconductors, and certain steel and aluminum products. The European Union is also set to introduce new duties on Chinese electric vehicles, while Mexico, Chile, and Brazil have raised tariffs on Chinese steel (see AiR No. 21, May/2024, 3).

Manufacturing activity in China contracted in May, with the official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) dropping to 48.3, below the 50-point mark that indicates growth. Economists at Capital Economics noted that this decline might reflect concerns over new U.S. tariffs, which have not yet taken effect.

Despite these challenges, global demand continues to support China's economy. The United Nations has revised its growth forecast for China up to 4.8 percent for 2024, while the International Monetary Fund projects around 5 percent growth rate, thereby in line with the governments growth target. Some economists, including those at Capital Economics, have increased their growth outlook for China to 5.5 percent, reflecting stronger-than-expected global demand. [Nikkei Asia] [South China Morning Post]

China: Government bonds becoming attractive amidst ongoing real estate slowdown

(ms) China is witnessing a notable shift in investor behavior as the real estate market continues to be the country's worry child, prompting increased interest in government bonds. This surge in demand has driven yields to record lows, prompting the People's Bank of China (PBOC) to express concerns and hint at potential interventions.

The PBOC recently stated its readiness to sell low-risk assets, including government bonds, to address the rising demand for safe investments. This move comes amidst a flurry of activity in the government debt market, with the issuance of special ultralong bonds witnessing overwhelming demand followed by trading halts and subsequent price drops.

Investors are turning to government bonds seeking stable returns amidst the real estate slump and a general wariness towards stock market investments. Smaller banks, facing limited lending opportunities due

to weak business demand, are redirecting funds into government debt, reminiscent of Japan's post-economic-bubble scenario.

Rural banks, in particular, have increased their participation in the government bond market, reflecting President Xi Jinping's endorsement of gradually expanding bond trading. However, the PBOC's ability to intervene effectively may be limited, given its relatively small holdings of government bonds, which amount to about 5 percent of the market. [Bloomberg] [Business Times] [Nikkei Asia]

China: Property stocks plummet despite government incentives

(ms) China's property market is experiencing significant turbulence as property stocks have fallen by 20 percent from their highs in May. This decline has raised doubts about the effectiveness of Beijing's efforts to stabilize the sector.

A Bloomberg Intelligence index tracking Chinese developer shares dropped by up to 4 percent on June 6, extending losses since mid-May. Companies such as Sunac China Holdings Ltd. and Shimao Group Holdings Ltd. saw substantial declines, with shares falling by 12 percent and 9.3 percent, respectively.

The market's downturn is largely attributed to skepticism over a support package announced by the central government on May 17 (see AiR No. 21, May/2024, 3). The package includes measures like lower down-payment requirements for homebuyers, but many investors question its adequacy in reviving demand and addressing the surplus of housing inventory. The central bank's program to incentivize bank loans worth USD 69 billion is seen as insufficient given the scale of vacant apartments in China.

Analysts have voiced concerns about the short-term prospects of the property market, highlighting that recent sales data show little improvement in market fundamentals. Data from China Real Estate Information Corp. revealed that new-home sales at the 100 largest real estate companies dropped by 33.6 percent in May from a year earlier, slightly better than the 45 percent decline in April. However, the modest month-on-month improvement has not eased long-term worries, prompting investors to opt for short-term gains.

Additionally, some analysts suggest that more significant policy changes might be announced at the

Third Plenary Session in July.

Meanwhile, the government's efforts to stimulate home buying have sparked discontent among existing homeowners. In the last decade, strict measures to curb real estate speculation were introduced under Xi's guideline “housing is for living in, not for speculation” from the 19th Party Congress in 2017. These measures have now been lifted, causing frustration among homeowners who fear their property values will decrease. Complaints have been lodged on government websites, with residents expressing dissatisfaction over policies that appear to benefit new buyers at the expense of those who met previous requirements.

Additionally, the government's initiative to convert unsold homes into subsidized housing has caused further discontent (see AiR No. 21, May/2024, 3). Homeowners worry that integrating public housing into private developments will reduce property values.

As China’s property market faces these challenges, the government must balance economic stabilization efforts with addressing homeowner concerns, both critical for maintaining social stability in a sector that represents a significant portion of the national economy. [Bloomberg] [The New York Times]

China: Country Garden on the verge of selling stake in chip maker CXMT amid debt struggles

(ms) Chinese developer Country Garden Holdings is reportedly exploring the sale of its stake in chip company ChangXin Memory Technologies (CXMT) through its investment arm, Country Garden Venture Capital. The move comes amidst Country Garden’s ongoing liquidity crisis following a default on a dollar-denominated bond last October and an liquidation petition at the beginning of the year (see AiR No. 10, March/2024, 1).

Country Garden Venture Capital, established in 2019, is seeking to dispose of its undisclosed stake in CXMT, according to sources familiar with the matter. This decision aligns with Country Garden’s efforts to manage its financial obligations as it grapples with slumping home sales and a towering debt burden, which stood at approximately USD 211 billion as of June 2023.

CXMT, a prominent player in China's dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) chip sector, holds strategic

importance for Country Garden Venture Capital. Despite challenges such as US export controls targeting Chinese chip foundries, CXMT has made strides in developing high-bandwidth memory chips tailored for artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

Country Garden's struggles come amid a downturn in Chinese home sales, with contracted sales for May plunging 76 percent year-on-year and faces a winding-up petition due to non-repayment of loans in Hong Kong (see AiR No. 10, March/2024, 1) [Bloomberg] [South China Morning Post]

China: Investigation of top executive at state investment firm for corruption

(ms) China's ongoing campaign against corruption has led to the investigation of Xu Zuo, a vice president at China Citic Group, a major state-backed investment company. The Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) announced on June 9 that Xu is under suspicion of "serious disciplinary and legal violations," an often-used euphemism for corruption.

President Xi Jinping's anti-corruption drive, which has been ongoing for over a decade, has targeted various sectors, including finance, as part of efforts to improve governance and curb illicit activities. Critics have raised concerns about the potential for the campaign to be used as a tool for political purges, although supporters argue that it promotes transparency and accountability within the government.

The scrutiny of financial institutions has intensified in recent months, with regulatory bodies focusing on banking, insurance, and state-owned enterprises. This investigation follows the recent sentencing of Bai Tianhui, the former general manager of Huarong, another state-backed asset management firm, to death for accepting bribes exceeding USD 150 million (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

Alongside these actions within the financial sector, authorities have also cracked down on corruption in other areas of government. Sun Shutao, a former senior political advisor in Shandong Province, was recently sentenced to life imprisonment for accepting bribes totaling over USD 18 million. [The Strait Times] [VOA News] [Xinhua]

China: Shanghai expands insurance to cover fertility treatments amid declining birthrates

(ms) Shanghai has expanded its medical insurance scheme to cover assisted reproductive technology (ART) services in response to China's declining birthrate, which is particularly acute in Shanghai. As of June, couples in the city can reduce their medical costs by up to 70 percent for 12 types of ART, according to a recent government directive.

Shanghai, a city of nearly 25 million, reported a record low fertility rate of 0.6 in 2023. This is significantly below the replacement rate of 2.1, which is necessary for a stable population, and lower than South Korea's 0.72, the lowest global fertility rate last year. The declining birthrate in Shanghai reflects a broader national trend, with China's total fertility rate estimated at around 1 last year, down from 1.3 in the last official 2020 census.

The sharp drop in birthrates is contributing to China's rapidly ageing population, increasing the social dependency ratio and putting a strain on the social security system. This demographic shift is a consequence of the one-child policy that was in place for decades, resulting in fewer women of childbearing age. Although the policy was relaxed in 2016 to allow two children and again in 2021 to allow three, many couples delay marriage and parenthood due to rising costs and changing social attitudes.

In response to these challenges, Shanghai has implemented measures to encourage childbirth. However, experts argue that more is needed than just policy changes. Creating a more supportive environment for families, with greater tolerance towards mothers and children, is essential for addressing the long-term demographic issues. [South China Morning Post]

China: AI chip firms adapt to TSMC restrictions

(ms) Recent reports reveal that Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) chip companies are adjusting their chip designs to comply with restrictions imposed by the US on Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC), the world's leading chip contract manufacturer. These adjustments come amidst escalating tensions between the United States and China, which have led to export

controls on advanced processors and chip manufacturing equipment.

In response to these restrictions, Chinese AI chip firms such as MetaX and Enflame have reportedly submitted downgraded designs of their chips to TSMC. This move aims to ensure compliance with U.S. regulations while maintaining access to TSMC's production facilities, which rely on U.S. chipmaking tools.

MetaX has developed a downscaled version of its GPUs, known as the C280, to meet regulatory requirements. Similarly, Enflame, backed by Tencent, has adjusted its chip designs to align with the imposed restrictions.

These adjustments show the challenges faced by Chinese AI chip companies and the existing need of foreign technology. Despite significant investments and government support aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in chip manufacturing, China's limited number of advanced foundries poses a significant obstacle to its aspirations.

Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC), China's largest chipmaker, traditionally reserved its production capacity for key players like Huawei. However, recent developments suggest a shift in strategy, with SMIC reportedly agreeing to allocate a portion of its capacity to Chinese AI chip firms affected by U.S. restrictions. [Asia Financial] [Reuters]

China: Guangdong province announces 45 initiatives to boost AI Industry

(ms) The government of the Guangdong province, a major economic center in southern China, has introduced 45 measures to enhance its artificial intelligence (AI) industry. The provincial government's plan aims to significantly develop AI use across various sectors by 2027.

The new measures set clear targets for the AI sector's growth. By next year, the industry's value is expected to reach USD 41.4 billion, representing 2.3 percent of Guangdong's GDP. By 2027, this figure is projected to rise to USD 61.8 billion, or 3.3 percent of the province's GDP.

A key focus is on increasing computing power, with goals to surpass 40 exaflops by next year and 60 exaflops by 2027. An exaflop is a unit of measurement for computational speed, representing one quintillion (10^18) floating-point operations per second. Meeting

these targets would make Guangdong a significant contributor to China's national computing power target of 300 exaflops by 2025, potentially contributing about 13 percent of the total.

The initiativs aim to establish a comprehensive AI industrial chain in Guangdong, covering chip development and sourcing, computational infrastructure, algorithm design, and AI-powered applications. The goal is to develop a national algorithm system and a robust computing power network by 2027.

Guangdong plans to boost its AI chip development efforts, aiming to create an innovative AI chip ecosystem. This includes exploring integrated memory and computation, brain-inspired computing, chiplets, and instruction sets. The goal is to improve the use of high-performance cloud servers and AI chips in various applications.

The plan also emphasizes talent cultivation and policy support. Provincial and city funds will be coordinated to provide financial backing for the AI sector and support AI project development. Regulations for trustworthy AI products and services will be created, along with incentives for innovative products. Additionally, Guangdong will implement policies to attract top AI talent and develop training programs for critical technical skills. [South China Morning Post] [W.Media]

China: Launch of nationwide crackdown on "fake" government officials and financial crimes

(ms) China's Ministry of Public Security has initiated a nationwide campaign aimed at curbing fraudulent activities perpetrated by individuals posing as government officials. This crackdown follows a series of incidents where scammers exploited the reputation of state institutions to defraud investors and the public.

The ministry's directive came after a meeting where agencies were instructed to target individuals impersonating officials from government ministries or state-owned enterprises. Officials emphasized that such fraudulent schemes have had a detrimental impact on the image of the Communist Party and the government, as well as on social and economic stability.

The campaign will utilize various tools, including big data analysis, to identify and dismantle illegal fundraising, contract fraud, and unauthorized deposits. By proactively addressing these fraudulent activities, authorities aim to maintain a favorable business environment conducive to economic growth.

Reports from state media have highlighted numerous instances of fraud, including cases where impostors falsely claimed government backing to deceive victims. [South China Morning Post]

China: Airbus in talks to sell over 100 jets to Chinese airlines

(ms) Airbus is said to be in discussions with Chinese airlines about the selling of more than 100 A330neo aircraft according to Bloomberg. The negotiations are ongoing, and the exact terms and timing are still uncertain.

Airbus has not commented on the report, stating that it does not discuss confidential talks with customers. This potential deal comes after a recent meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron (see AiR No. 20, May/2022, 3).

In April, Airbus was reported to be in preliminary talks with China regarding a major order. Last year, the company agreed to build a second assembly line for its A320neo aircraft in China during Macron's state visit.

Historically, China has split its aircraft purchases between Airbus and Boeing. However, deals with Boeing have slowed in recent years due to trade and political tensions between China and the United States, giving Airbus an advantage. [Bloomberg]

China: Hong Kong's Tiananmen commemoration marred by arrests and heavy security

(ms) On the 35th anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, Hong Kong saw a number of arrests and an unprecedented police presence, reflecting the city's tightened grip on public remembrance. Authorities arrested four individuals, including two men and two women, aged between 23 and 69, on charges ranging from sedition to public disorder and assault.

The arrests occurred in Causeway Bay, a district traditionally associated with memorial vigils for the Tiananmen victims. Among those detained was 68-year-old activist Alexandra Wong, also known as "Grandma Wong," who was charged under Hong Kong's new Safeguarding National Security Ordinance for chanting slogans deemed seditious. This new legislation, enacted in March (see AiR No. 13, March/2024, 4), has been criticized for its broad and vague definitions that curb freedoms of expression and assembly.

Hong Kong's commemorations have dramatically changed since the introduction of the Beijing-imposed national security law in 2020. The once-annual vigil in Victoria Park, a symbol of the city's commitment to democracy and remembrance, has been banned, replaced by pro-government events. Despite the restrictions, international communities have continued to honor the memory of Tiananmen victims, with vigils held in cities such as London, Taipei, Washington D.C., and Vancouver.

In London, former Tiananmen student leader Shao Jiang, now in exile, led an assembly outside the Chinese Embassy. Taipei's Liberty Square saw around 6,000 attendees, while Washington D.C. hosted a gathering near the Victims of Communism Memorial. [Hong Kong Free Press 1] [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

China: Western judges resign from Hong Kong's top court amid political turmoil

(ms) In a development underscoring the growing concerns over judicial independence in Hong Kong, former Chief Justice of Canada Beverly McLachlin, along with two prominent British judges, Lord Jonathan Sumption and Lord Lawrence Collins, have resigned from the Hong Kong's Court of Final Appeal. Their departure comes just shortly after the introduction of the city's own National Security Law in March this year (see AiR No. 13, March/2024, 4).

Lord Collins explicitly cited the "political situation" in Hong Kong as the reason for his resignation, while maintaining his confidence in the court's independence. This sentiment was echoed by Sumption, who described a dire erosion of the rule of law in an article for the Financial Times, stating that the city is "slowly becoming a totalitarian state." He highlighted the growing "paranoia of the authorities" and the intimidating political environment fostered by Beijing, making it untenable for judges to operate independently.

While McLachlin, who announced she would retire from her position in July, cited her age and a desire to spend more time with her family, affirmed her confidence in the independence of the court's members, the timing however leaves room for speculation

The exodus of Western judges is a critical blow to Hong Kong's judiciary, historically buttressed by international judges to maintain its common law tradition, distinct from mainland China's legal system. The resignations follow the enactment of stringent national security laws imposed by Beijing in 2020 and supplemented by local legislation this year, which have been widely criticized for stifling political freedoms and dissent. These laws have led to numerous arrests and the suppression of civil society groups, with authorities claiming they restore stability, despite widespread condemnation from international bodies and human rights organizations.

Hong Kong officials, however, strongly refute allegations of compromised judicial independence. In response to Sumption's comments, the government issued a robust statement insisting that courts operate without political interference and criticized Western interference in Hong Kong's judicial affairs.

The resignation of these judges significantly diminishes the presence of non-permanent overseas judges in Hong Kong's top court, with only three British judges remaining. [ABC News] [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: Three arrested in Hong Kong for allegedly insulting national anthem

(ms) Three individuals were detained under Hong Kong's National Anthem Law on June 6 for allegedly disrespecting China's national anthem during a World Cup qualifier match between Hong Kong and Iran.

The suspects, two men and one woman aged between 18 and 31, reportedly turned their backs to the field and did not stand during the playing of the "March of the Volunteers" at the beginning of the match. Plainclothes officers were present and filmed the spectators during the anthem, leading to the trio's apprehension at the scene.

Following their arrest, the individuals were released on police bail but are required to report to the authorities in mid-July. Under the National Anthem Law, which was enacted in 2020, publicly and intentionally insulting the national anthem can result in a fine of up to USD 6400

and imprisonment for up to three years. [Hong Kong Free Press]

China: “Manta Ray” submersible fleet expanded with reconnaissance capabilities

(ms) China is expanding its fleet of submersibles designed to resemble manta rays, aiming to enhance their capabilities for reconnaissance roles. Developed by the Northwestern Polytechnical University, these submersibles imitate the swimming patterns of manta rays, making them more efficient and stealthy.

Originally, these submersibles were small and lightweight, used primarily for monitoring coral reefs. However, the state broadcaster CCTV's military channel reported plans to build larger models. The new envisioned 800-kilogram submersibles would be deployed for deep-sea applications this year, with a tonne-class prototype under development for future reconnaissance and strike missions.

Since 2006, six variants of the submersibles, ranging from 10 to 720 kilograms, have been created. Equipped with optical cameras, sonar systems, and the BeiDou Satellite Navigation System, these submersibles can transmit real-time data.

The submersibles are used for marine science, education, and environmental monitoring. Future models are expected to operate in swarms to improve range and payload capacity.

China's efforts in developing these submersibles are similar to those in the United States, where Northrop Grumman's "Manta Ray" submersible is developed for long-duration missions in difficult ocean environments. These biomimetic submersibles are expected to play a key role in underwater reconnaissance, providing higher endurance, longer range, and better stealth compared to traditional underwater vehicles. [Global Times] [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Lower house approves ruling party’s political funds bill

(rl) Japan's House of Representatives approved a bill on June 6 to revise the political funds control law. The bill, introduced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)

following a political funds scandal, passed with a majority vote and was sent to the House of Councillors.

With the new bill, lawmakers must create a document to confirm the contents of their political funds reports. It also introduces a system of "guilt by association", where politicians are held responsible for the actions of associated staffs. [The Asahi Shimbun] The minimum threshold for disclosing the names of those who purchase fundraiser tickets will be lowered to JPY 50,000, or about USD 320. The current minimum is JPY 200,000 yen, or about USD 1,280.

The bill received support from the LDP, its ruling coalition partner Komeito, and opposition party Nippon Ishin no Kai. The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, the Japanese Communist Party, and the Democratic Party for the People opposed it. The opposition is concerned that the bill will not effectively address the long-standing issue of politics and money, leaves many loopholes, and fails to strengthen transparency, all while a fundraising scandal continues to hurt the prime minister's popularity. [Kyodo news]

The bill, a focal point of the current parliamentary session, is expected to be enacted before the session ends on June 23. The LDP revised the bill three times to accommodate requests from Komeito and Nippon Ishin. [NHK News] [nippon.com]

The passage of the bill in Japan's lower house comes the LDP has been engulfed in a scandal since late last year that centers on political funds raised through LDP party event tickets bought by individuals, companies and organizations. LDP lawmakers pocketed profits from ticket sales as kickbacks by falsifying mandatory accounting reports (see AiR No 48, November/2023, 4).

Japan: Law to assist young caregivers enacted

(sh) On June 5, Japan's parliament enacted an amended law to provide government assistance for young people caring for family members. The revised law, aimed at promoting child-nurturing and youth development, was approved by a majority vote in the House of Councillors.

Previously, young caregivers often faced challenges with school and social relationships due to their responsibilities, with the central government not being required to assistance and some local governments providing support through their own ordinances.

The new legislation has now clarified that both central and local governments will support young caregivers. It also extends assistance to children and youths facing social difficulties, such as “hikikomori” shut-ins. [Nippon]

Hikikomori refers to the phenomenon of total withdrawal from society and seeking extreme degrees of social isolation and confinement. It is estimated that half a million Japanese youths have become social recluses, as well as more than half a million middle-aged individuals.

Japan: Birth rate hits record low

(rl) Japan's birth rate hit a record low for the eighth year in 2023, with only 727,277 births, down 5.6 percent rom 2022, according to the Health Ministry. The fertility rate is now 1.2 while marriages also fell by 6 percent to 474,717.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi described the situation as critical and called for urgent measures to reverse the trend.

Despite recent laws aimed at increasing support for child-rearing and expanding childcare access, experts warn these steps may not fully address the underlying issues. Japan's population, currently over 125 million, is expected to drop to 87 million by 2070, raising economic and security concerns. [AP]

Japan: Nuclear power prioritized in 2040 energy plan

(rl) Japan plans to increase nuclear power use in its 2040 energy policy update to ensure stable electricity supply amid rising demand and geopolitical risks. This marks a shift from its post-Fukushima disaster reduction in nuclear reliance.

The government aims to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, which currently generate 70 percentof Japan's electricity. The move follows energy price spikes and supply issues in 2022 due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The policy review, ongoing since last month, is the first since Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's pro-nuclear shift in 2022. The revised policy may include building new reactors, though challenges remain due to regulatory hurdles, public opposition, and high costs. Experts

predict Japan may fall short of its 2030 nuclear power target, potentially relying more on coal and gas.

The updated energy policy will also set new greenhouse gas reduction targets and decarbonization strategies for 2040. [Reuters] [Le Monde]

Japan: World's first wooden satellite to be launched in September

(rl) Japan's Kyoto University and Sumitomo Forestry announced on June 4 that Japan will launch the world's first wooden satellite, LingnoSat, this September.

The small cube-shaped satellite aims to explore sustainable space technology. Measuring 4 inches and weighing just over 2 pounds, LignoSat uses magnolia wood for its structure, chosen for its strength and workability. The satellite will be sent to the International Space Station (ISS) before being deployed into orbit. Researchers will study how the wood withstands the harsh space environment, including expansion, contraction, and degradation.

LignoSat's success could pave the way for environmentally friendly satellites, reducing the harmful metal particles traditional satellites release upon reentry. Takao Doi, an astronaut and professor at Kyoto University, emphasized the importance of wood as a sustainable resource for future space habitats on the Moon and Mars. [space.com]

Japan: Major automakers caught in series of safety test scandals

(rl/sh) A safety test scandal involving Japanese automakers has expanded. Toyota and Mazda have stopped shipments of some vehicles after Japan's transport ministry found that there were incorrect or manipulated data for safety certification tests.

The ministry also identified issues with applications from Honda, Suzuki, and Yamaha, involving incorrect or manipulated test data.

Toyota subsidiary Daihatsu faced accusations of misconduct starting in December. The automaker, renowned for its compact and mini-sized vehicles, confessed to extensive test manipulations dating back to the late 1980s, including those for engine and crash performance, impacting 64 models. [DW]

Toyota has now confessed to significant cheating on certification tests for seven domestic models during six assessments carried out in 2014, 2015, and 2020, using inadequate or outdated data in collision tests, and incorrect testing of airbag inflation and rear-test damage in crashes.

The revelations come ahead of Toyota's annual general meeting, where influential firms have recommended voting against re-electing Akio Toyoda as chairman due to the "spate of certification irregularities." Toyoda apologized for the misconduct, affecting models like the Corolla Fielder and Yaris Cross.

Toyota's shares dropped 1.8 percent and Mazda's fell 3.3 percent. Mazda also halted shipments of its Roadster RF and Mazda2 models due to engine control software test result modifications.

Honda admitted to wrongdoing in noise and output tests over eight years. The government called the misconduct "regrettable," emphasizing the impact on corporate reforms. [Reuters] [BBC]

In latest development, the transport ministry in Japan conducted on June 10 inspections at the headquarters of Honda Motor Co. and Mazda Motor Corp. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Mitsubishi financial group to be charged for not keeping customer information

(sh) Japan's securities watchdog is planning to punish a bank and two brokerage firms under Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group Inc. (MUFG) for sharing confidential customer information without permission.

The Securities and Exchange Surveillance Commission is weighing to submit a recommendation to the Financial Services Agency to act against MUFG Bank, Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley Securities Co., and Morgan Stanley MUFG Securities Co. The brokerages allegedly used information from the bank for sales, and the bank pressured customers to work with the brokerages for financing.

The Financial Instruments and Exchange Act requires a "firewall" to prevent such information sharing. The commission aims to investigate when the sharing began and the parent company's role. Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki declined to comment, noting the commission's independence. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Government bitcoin reports USD 300 million cryptocurrency disappearance

(rl) DMM Bitcoin Co., a Japanese cryptocurrency exchange operator, announced on June 7that digital assets worth at least JPY 48.2 billion (USD 300 million) have vanished for unknown reasons.

After detecting the issue, the company subsequently suspended operations, including withdrawals and the reviewing of new account applications.

This incident is the second-largest cryptocurrency loss in Japan, following the JPY 58 billion stolen from the Coincheck exchange in 2018.

Tokyo police are investigating the case after receiving an inquiry from DMM Bitcoin, according to an investigative source. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Fuel shortages affect plan to increase flights amid tourist boom

(rl) Fuel shortages at Japanese airports are putting a halt on plans to boost international flights. The surge in tourism has outpaced petroleum refiners' supply capacity, worsened by labor shortages in fuel distribution.

This shortage threatens efforts to revitalize regional economies through tourism ahead of the summer holiday season. The Japanese government ministries are assessing the situation for possible solutions.

In Hiroshima, a foreign airline had to revise its plans to increase flights due to insufficient fuel. Hokkaido's airports, including New Chitose, Asahikawa, and Obihiro, face similar issues. Sendai Airport remains unaffected, but airlines are concerned. The National Governors' Association may request central government action as other regions also face fuel-related flight increase challenges.

Petroleum wholesalers, unable to suddenly boost production, prioritize existing customers and find importing fuel unprofitable. Additionally, shortages of drivers and airport workers are affecting fuel transportation to airports. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Mandatory national pension enrollment for all foreign residents introduced

(rl) Starting October, Japan will ensure all new foreign residents are enrolled in the national pension system to enhance long-term social stability. With over 3 million foreign nationals currently residing in Japan, and this number set to increase, the government aims to provide a secure economic foundation for foreign nationals as they age.

Residents aged 20-59, irrespective of nationality, are required to join the pension system. Yet, some new arrivals have not been enrolling. A 2019 survey revealed that 4.4 percent of foreign residents were not enrolled, compared to just 0.1 percent of Japanese citizens in the same age bracket.

To address this, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare will update its systems to access data on new immigrants, ensuring their enrollment in the pension system. Non-responders to enrollment requests will be automatically enrolled. Additionally, efforts will be made to include the 4 percent of existing foreign residents who are not yet in the system.

Failing to enroll will result in ineligibility for benefits at age 65 and for disability payments. Japan's foreign population is expected to reach 4.2 million by 2030 and 7.29 million by 2050. Since 2019, all residents aged 20 and above must be registered in the public pension system. Foreigners who leave Japan before qualifying for a pension can claim a lump-sum withdrawal under certain conditions. [Nikkei Asia]

Japan: Controversial immigration rules take effect

(sh) On June 10, Japan's new immigration rules went into force limiting the number of times foreign nationals can apply for asylum and enabling the country to deport individuals rejected multiple times.

Under the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, those who've lodged three or more asylum applications face deportation unless they provide compelling reasons to stay. Previously, Japan could not deport those with pending refugee status applications, but changes were made due to concerns about abuse of the system by repeat applicants.

As part of the reforms, asylum seekers may now reside outside immigration facilities under family or supporter supervision to prevent community absconding.

The legislation, passed by the Diet in June 2023 (see AiR No. 24, June/2023, 2) aims to streamline asylum processes. It has drawn criticism over exposing repatriated asylum seekers to potential persecution in their home countries.

According to data of Japan's Immigration Services Agency, Japan granted refugee status to a record 303 individuals in 2023. This number includes five repeat applicants, three of whom were successful on their third attempt.[Kyodo News]

Japan: Prime minister vows to enhance "active cyber defense" to prevent attacks

(rl) Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has directed the preparation of a bill to strengthen Japan's "active cyber defense" capabilities against cyberattacks by monitoring early warning signs. Speaking at a government panel's inaugural meeting attended by 17 experts in the field, Kishida highlighted the urgency of the move, citing "the current security environment."

The government aims to submit the bill to parliament by the fall's extraordinary session. Digital Minister Taro Kono requested that the panel provide their findings within a few months.

Active cyber defense involves detecting cyberattack signs and, if necessary, neutralizing enemy servers with computer viruses. There are concerns, however, that this approach could infringe on the constitutional guarantee of communication secrecy.

Kono emphasized the need for a system comparable to those in the U.S. and Europe while safeguarding citizens' rights and interests. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Police search for suspects in war shrine graffiti

(rl) The Japanese police are hunting for suspects who vandalized Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, which honors the country's war dead, by spray-painting the word "toilet" on a stone pillar. The incident appears linked to protests against the release of treated radioactive

wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant. The graffiti had been cleaned by June 3.

The graffiti was discovered on May 31, and a video posted on Chinese social media shows a man, identifying himself as Iron Head, criticizing the wastewater release and vandalizing the shrine. Police believe the incident happened late May 31 and that the suspect may have already left Japan. A Tokyo-based cosmetic surgeon has offered a JPY 10 million (USD 64,300) reward for information leading to the arrest of the vandal.

Yasukuni Shrine called the graffiti "extremely regrettable" and an act of degrading the shrine's dignity. The discharge of Fukushima wastewater has been opposed by fishing groups and neighboring countries, particularly China, which banned all Japanese seafood imports following the release in August last year (see AiR No. 35, August/2023, 5).

Yasukuni Shrine honors about 2.5 million Japanese war dead, including convicted war criminals. It is viewed by China and the Koreas as a symbol of Japanese militarism, and visits by Japanese lawmakers to the shrine often draw criticism. [South China Morning Post]

Japan: Warship trial Starlink for internet access to maritime vessels

(sh) On Jun 9, the Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) initiated trials for the Starlink satellite internet service by SpaceX, aiming to provide internet access to deployed crew members of its maritime vessels.

Equipped with Starlink antennas, two Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) training ships now have access to high-speed internet via over 6,000 low-orbit satellites. The MSDF plans to install the system on about 90 percent of its surface vessels within three years, targeting young recruits with perks like internet access during off-duty hours. KDDI Corp., in partnership with SpaceX, offers the service, boasting data speeds of up to 220 megabits per second.

The initiative addresses the challenge of limited communication at sea, where crew members typically have restricted email access. As Japan faces security threats from China and North Korea, innovative measures like this aid in modernizing defense capabilities while attracting new talent amidst demographic challenges. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Fighter jets make emergency landings

(rl) On June 3, two Japanese F-35A stealth fighter jets made emergency landings at Aomori Airport in northern Japan due to a mechanical issue. The jets, on a training mission from Misawa Air Base, landed safely without injuries or damage reported.

The Air Self-Defense Force did not disclose the specific cause of the mechanical problem. The airport briefly closed its runway for about 20 minutes for the emergency landings before resuming normal operations.

This incident follows a series of recent issues involving Japan's military training flights. In April, two SH-60K Seahawk helicopters crashed during an anti-submarine drill, resulting in one death and seven missing crew members. Last month, a C-2 transport aircraft made an emergency landing after its cockpit window slid open mid-flight. [AP News]

Mongolia: Government to cover hepatitis treatment costs

(dql) The Mongolian Cabinet decided on June 6 to allocate funds to cover the expense of medication for hepatitis D patients in the state budget.

Health Minister Chinzorig Sodnom and Finance Minister Javkhlan Bold were tasked with restructuring the counry's budget package approved in 2024 and to begin to include the expenditures in the budget starting from 2025.

The move comes as Mongolia has the world's highest number of hepatitis D, a "satellite" virus accompanying hepatitis B. Around the world, more than 5 percent of hepatitis B patients develop hepatitis D. In Mongolia, this number stands at 36.5 percent. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Annual inflation at 5.7 percent in May

(dql) According the Mongolia's National Statistical Committee, the country's annual inflation stood at 5.7 percent in May.

The inflation is attributed to the increase in prices for medicines and medical services by 7 percent and for food products, soft drinks and mineral water by 6.7 percent. In addition, clothing, textiles and footwear saw a hike in prices of 5.8 percent, while prices for furniture, household appliances and electronics rose by 5.4%.

Meanwhile, the country's GDP grew by 7.8 percent in the first quarter of 2024 compared to last year, with experts from the World Bank forecasting that economic growth in Mongolia will be largely driven by increased output in the mining sector and a recovery in private consumption, along with a heavy reliance on fiscal expansion. [Aki Press]

Mongolia: Reporter to face jail sentence over investigation into embezzlement by deputy prime minister

(dql) *Reporters Without Borders* draws attention to the fate of Bayarmaa Ayurzana, an editor-in-chief of a Mongolian online media outlet who faces an eight-year prison sentence for exposing suspected embezzlement by Mongolian Deputy Prime Minister Sainbuyan Amarsaikhan.

From March 2021 and August 2022, Bayarmaa published a series of investigative articles raising suspicion of embezzlement by Sainbuyan, who is running in the upcoming legislative elections later this month. Notably, the articles shed light onto how the deputy prime minister allegedly diverted public funds allocated for the measures to modernize transportation infrastructure in the the capital city Ulaanbaatar and used his influence to halt the execution of a court ruling under which he was ordered to pay USD 4.7 million in overdue penalties for the purchase of mines from an American citizen.

Arrested on May 5, Bayarmaa is charged with "threatening to disseminate information that might cause serious damage" to Sainbuyan and faces a sentence of up to eight years in prison. Her trial date has not been announced yet. [Reporters Without Boarders]

North Korea: Crackdown on money changers underway

(ac) On June 6, North Korea announced new measures to prevent private money changers from overcharging for U.S. dollar in North Korean won exchanges at rates significantly higher than the official bank rates. The officials warned that offenders would be arrested, their names would be made public, and their foreign and domestic currency would be seized for violating the policies.

The policies aimed to stabilize the exchange rates between the US dollar and the North Korean won. Following the international sanctions, the exchange rates per U.S dollars were increased to around 13,000 or 14,000 won in the black markets.

Since the revaluation of its currency in 2009, North Koreans have increasingly relied on foreign currency for trade. [Radio Free Asia]

North Korea: Satellite imagery shows lands along demilitarized zone being cleared

(ac) On June 7, NK News reported that North Korea is clearing lands at six different locations on the east coast of the peninsula and across Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Planet Labs satellite imagery indicated that since late April, North Korean soldiers have been clearing land at the border at Panmunjom.

Analysts suggested that the border movements are tightening after North Korea abandoned its unification policies. The purpose of the land clearing is believed be to bolster border defense against South Korea and to prevent North Koreans from defecting to the South. [NK News]

North Korea: Transport vessel sinks

(ac) On June 3, the South Korea National Intelligence Service (NIS) disclosed that a large North Korean transport vessel sank down a river last month in May, killing 90 personnel on board. North Korea did not publish the incident in its documents or news outlets.

The NIS confirmed that the North Korean vessel originally had 130 personnel on board. The vessel was sent to work on a fortification project along the Easter border in the Gangwon Province. However, the vessel was overloaded, and 90 personnel was killed.

Analysts highlight that the sanctions had crippling effects on North Korea's aging vessels and the sanctions are making North Korea harder to obtain new repairs for the vessels. [The Maritime Executive]

South Korea: Lawmaker proposes bill to provide educational aid to children of North Korean defectors

(ac) On June 4, lawmaker of the current ruling People Power Party (PPP) Park Choong-kwon proposed a bill that allows children of North Korean defectors, regardless of where they are born, to receive educational support. The proposed bill is revised as the North Korean Defectors Protection and Settlement Act, which aims to allocate funding and provide consultations and supplementary lessons for children of defectors who were born in third countries.

Lawmaker Park, a North-Korean defector, highlighted that the current welfare systems only allow children who were born in North Korea and defected to South Korea to receive tuition and other financial supports. However, there is an increasing number of defectors are giving birth to children in third countries, such as China. Those children who later returned to South Korea, are neglected by the welfare system and encounter difficulties in their education, primarily due to language barriers and inability to access educational materials.

According to the Korea Educational Development Institute, children born to North Korean defectors in third countries make up over 70 percent of total number. This is due to an increasing quantity of North Korean defectors detained in China before reaching to South Korea. [The Korea Times]

South Korea: New National Assembly speaker elected amid vote boycott of ruling party

(ac) On June 5, lawmaker Woo Won-Shik of the opposition Democratic Party (DP) was elected as the new National Assembly speaker in a plenary meeting of the parliament. Key representatives of the Committee, including legislation and judiciary committee, were also dominated by DP in another plenary election on June 10.

The June 5 plenary meeting was held without the current People Ruling Party (PPP) as it boycotted the session, making it the first time in South Korea that the first plenary meeting parliament was held without the current ruling party.

PPP's actions came after failed negotiations between PPP and DP on how to form the parliamentary standing committees for the Assembly's four-year timers. The negotiations centered on who will become the chair in the three main committees, including legislation and judiciary committee. Those positions hold important decision-making power, as the key Assembly panel has the power to approve bills before they are put to a plenary vote. [Yonhap News] [The Korean Herald]

South Korea: Oppositions party express concerns on President Yoon's plan of oil extraction

(ac) On June 5, opposition parties expressed concerns over President Yoon Suk-Yeol's recent announcement of the potential oil and gas discovery off South Korea's east coast (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

Leader of the main opposition Democratic Party (DP) Lee Jae-myong questioned whether the project would waste government's budgets or raise unnecessarily public expectations. Lee stressed that such a project should be carried out with private capital and not with government funding to prevent public disappointment.

A meeting with the Trade, Industry and Energy Committee to question the project, including its feasibility, is planned by the DP. [Yonhap News]

South Korea: Samsung workers protest for better wages

(ac) On June 7, workers at Samsung Electronics protested for better pay as part of what is planned as a six-month campaign.

The workers' union, National Samsung Electronics Union, confirmed that many workers intentionally took their paid leave entitlements on the same to join the protest. Attendance in the workplace has significantly declined. The union demands additional days of annual leave and transparent performance-based bonuses.

Samsung Electronics has reportedly engaged in negotiations with the union and offered a 5.1 percent pay rise this year. The company also reassured that the workers' protest caused no impact on the productions.

According to Samsung Electronics' operating profit, the company was reported to make USD 4.85 billion at the end of April due to successful selling of the Galaxy S24 smartphone. Samsung Electronics produced chips for generative AI, including AI hardware from Nvidia.

Experts of Korean studies suggested that the protest marked a significant importance since Samsung Electronics have been suppressing workers' union for so long. The collective actions of the protests demonstrate a change of attitude towards labor empowerment in South Korea. [Al Jazeera]

South Korea: Development of new antimissile weaponry to be accelerated

(ac) South Korea's Defense Acquisition and Program Administration (DAPA) confirmed that the antimissile long-range L-SAM air defense systems are being developed.

The statement affirmed that South Korra is planning to develop the more advanced L-SAM-II at the end of 2024, underscoring that given the threats posed by North Korea, the government has accelerated the antimissile projects. The L-SAM-II project will receive USD 730 million budget, with the date of completion expected for 2032.

The L-SAM is designed to intercept targets at altitudes of 50-60 km, while L-SAM-II can intercept targets at 150km. The system allows two missile types to shoot down aircraft and ballistic missiles.[Defense News]

Taiwan: Cabinet requests reconsideration of reform bills

(jp) The Executive Yuan, Taiwan's cabinet, plans to request the parliament to reconsider recent amendments aimed at enhancing legislative oversight of the government, labeling them "unconstitutional" and "difficult to implement."

On May 28, the amendments were passed with the votes of the opposition parties Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) against the opposition of the ruling Democratic Progressive Part (DPP). These

measures grant the legislature new investigative powers and the ability to hold hearings, including penalizing public officials who refuse to attend a hearing or provide information (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

Minister without Portfolio Lin Ming-hsin argues that these amendments contradict Constitutional Court interpretations and lack clear definitions and proportionality. The amendments also demand the president's annual address and questioning in the Legislative Yuan, which Lin claims contradicts Taiwan's semi-presidential system. The Cabinet argues the passage of these measures lacked substantive legislative discussion and violated democratic principles, labeling the procedures unconstitutional.

The Executive Yuan, pending presidential approval, can request legislative reconsideration within ten days of receiving the bill. If the Legislature fails to act within 15 days, the bill becomes invalid. President Lai Ching-te is set to decide after careful assessment. Premier Cho Jung-tai emphasizes the Cabinet's intention is not to increase political division but to ensure constitutional alignment and national interest. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Heath care program for patients with "Three Highs" to be accelerated

(jp) Taiwan's National Health Insurance Administration (NHIA) is ramping up efforts to address people with three highs conditions—high blood pressure, blood sugar, and blood cholesterol levels. President Lai's 888 program from his Healthy Taiwan forums aims to enroll 83 percent of these patients in care networks, provide counseling to 80 percent, and achieve an 80 percent control rate. Currently, only 65 percent are in networks, prompting a push to reach the 83 percent target within five years.

Last year, 5.34 million people in Taiwan were affected by these conditions. Of these, 3.01 million patients are in chronic disease care programs, with some in multiple programs. To streamline care, the NHIA plans to classify each participant into a single program, leaving 2.3 million in the family physician integrated care program. Physicians will receive more training in chronic disease and preventive care. For the 2.33 million not in any program, the NHIA will follow up if they seek NHI-covered medical care at clinics.

Additionally, a "hospital version" of the care program is planned for district hospitals, providing disease management and preventive services. The government

has allocated TWD 500 million for district hospitals to implement a community healthcare program. A hospital budget meeting will discuss this initiative, aiming for a launch by August. A platform will be developed to consolidate data from various health agencies, enhancing patient follow-up. Future plans include uploading health data from wearable devices and using AI to predict disease risks and recommend preventive measures. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: President pledges to ensure preservation of Tiananmen Square memories

(jp) On June 4, thousands of people gathered in the center of Taipei to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the violent crackdown of the Tiananmen Square protests.

President Lai Ching-te emphasized the impact of the fight for freedom during the democracy wave in Asia 35 years ago and highlighted Taiwan's transformation into a democracy thanks to the sacrifices of its forebears and continued youth activism. He also stressed that a nation deserving of respect is one where individuals have the freedom to express their thoughts openly, referring especially to the youth. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: March supports Hong Kong democracy amid anniversary of 2019 protests

(jp) In a show of solidarity with the democracy movement in Hong Kong, activists in Taipei organized a march on June 9. Approximately 600 individuals participated in the “2024 March for Democracy - Taiwan and Hong Kong Stand Together” event.

This march commemorated the five-year anniversary of protests in Hong Kong, which erupted in response to the city’s 2019 Extradition Bill (see AiR 2/6/2019). The bill sought to establish a system for case-by-case fugitive transfers between Hong Kong and regions with which it does not already have extradition agreements, including mainland China. Critics feared that the proposed law would open the door for extradition requests of political nature from the Chinese government which the pro-Beijing Hong Kong government would not deny meeting.

The event was organized by Hong Kong Outlanders, the New School for Democracy and the Taiwan Hong Kong Association. It was aimed to urge Taiwan to remain vigilant about the situation in Hong Kong, assess the threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party, and enhance the asylum mechanism to safeguard the lives of Hong Kong residents seeking refuge in Taiwan. [CNA, in Chinese]

Taiwan: Quarterly exports projected to exceed USD 100 Billion in 2024

(jp) Taiwan is forecasted to report over USD 100 billion in quarterly exports in 2024, driven by the increasing global demand for artificial intelligence (AI) applications, according to the Ministry of Finance (MOF).

From April to May, Taiwan's exports reached approximately USD 74.84 billion, following USD 110.33 billion in the first quarter. Beatrice Tsai, Director-General of the MOF's Department of Statistics, projected that June exports will total between USD 37.5 billion and USD 38.5 billion, marking a 16-19 percent increase from a year earlier, marking the eighth consecutive month of growth. Tsai attributed this growth to the global AI boom and a low comparison base from the previous year. With Taiwan's tech sector thriving on AI development, second-quarter exports are expected to exceed USD 100 billion, a trend anticipated to continue throughout the year.

According to MOF, Taiwan's exports to the United States hit a record USD 43.07 billion in the first five months of this year. Tsai noted that exports to the US grew for ten consecutive months, reaching USD 8.29 billion in May, driven largely by AI-related business opportunities. Exports to the ASEAN bloc rose to USD 6.47 billion in May, up 6.4 percent year-on-year, with a 77.6 percent surge in the information, communications, and video/audio industries. Over five months, ASEAN exports reached a record USD 35.29 billion. In contrast, exports to China and Hong Kong fell 5.3 percent in May to USD 12.06 billion, totaling USD 57.37 billion over five months, accounting for 31 percent of Taiwan's total exports, the lowest ratio in 22 years. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Nvidia pans to increase investments

(jp) Jensen Huang, CEO of Nvidia, announced plans to build a new AI supercomputer center in Taiwan. This new facility will be similar to the existing Taipei-1 center located in Kaohsiung, but details on the specific location and timeline for the new center are yet to be revealed.

Nvidia is considering setting up headquarters in Taiwan due to its advanced local industrial sector. Nvidia has major partners like Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) along with companies like Foxconn Technology Group, Quanta Computer and Wiwynn Corp. Nvidia's already sizable Taiwanese workforce is set to grow even bigger with plans to hire about 1,000 engineers over the next five years. [Taipei Times]

At Computex Taipei 2024, Asia's largest IoT and ICT exhibition, President Lai Ching-te outlined his vision to transform Taiwan into an artificial intelligence hub through three key policies, one of which involves constructing supercomputers. He expressed his gratitude to Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang for the donation of Taiwan's first supercomputer in 2020. Lai emphasized that the support of industry leaders and increased investments and partnerships would bolster government efforts in advancing the AI industry and promoting digitization in Taiwan. [TVBS]

Taiwan: Consumer Price Index surpasses 2 percent mark in May

(jp) Latest data released by the government on June 6 reveal that Taiwan's Consumer Price Index (CPI) surged past the 2 percent threshold in May, reaching 2.24 percent, marking a notable increase from the previous month's 1.95 percent.

The Directorate General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS) attributed this rise primarily to the impact of unpredictable weather conditions on fruit and vegetable prices, which escalated faster than anticipated. Additionally, other contributing factors to the uptick in CPI included elevated costs associated with dining out, rental expenses, hospital registration fees, and the electricity rate hike implemented in April.

The inflation rate for the period from January to May stood at 2.24 percent, according to the DGBAS. This uptick in CPI figures could potentially influence the Central Bank's decision on June 13 regarding whether to adjust interest rates. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Defense Minister Asserts Right to Self-Defense Amidst Rising Tensions with China

(jp) On June 6, at the Foreign and National Defense Committee, Taiwan's Defense Minister Wellington Koo emphasized the country's stance on self-defense and countermeasures against potential threats from the Chinese military.

Koo clarified that if the People's Liberation Army of China were to initiate a first strike, Taiwan's military would respond accordingly by exercising its right to self-defense. The defense ministry emphasized its definition of "first strike" to include any intrusion into Taiwan outlying islands or entering within 12 nautical miles of its territorial airspace and waters. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Minister urges caution over travels to China following detention of Taiwanese tour group member

(jp) Tawain's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) Minister Chiu Chui-cheng has advised Taiwanese citizens to reconsider travel plans to China and stay vigilant due to safety concerns. This follows an incident where a Taiwanese tour group member was detained by Chinese authorities. According to an informed source, the detained individual might have previously worked in a "sensitive" profession, which could have led to their detention. The detained individual was released after the group had returned to Taiwan, and the council is investigating the specifics of the incident.

This is the first time a tour group member has been detained by China, confirmed MAC Deputy Minister Liang Wen-chieh. He stressed that tour guides must notify the Tourism Administration within 24 hours if a member is detained. The MAC has issued warnings on platforms, including Facebook, advising travelers to be cautious and register their trips on the council's online platform.

The MAC noted that due to China's stringent state security and counterespionage laws, there has been an increase in the number of Taiwanese detained and investigated upon entry into China. Premier Cho Jung-tai echoed the MAC's concerns, urging Taiwanese to be mindful of their safety due to the opaque and deficient legal system in China. The government is reviewing a recent ban on tour travel to China which was effective from June 1. [Taipei Times]

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

Bangladesh: Budget for FY24 passes over some key promises of ruling Awami League

(sg/lm) The Awami League government's first proposed budget after winning a fourth consecutive term outlines a vision for a smart and prosperous Bangladesh by 2041, listing 14 key areas aligned with their election manifesto. Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali announced the plan while presenting the next fiscal year's budget, which includes a proposed spending of USD 68 billion, a 5 percent increase from the current fiscal year.

Budget passes over some key promises ruling Awami League made in election manifesto

Notably, some promises from the Awami League's election manifesto, such as keeping essential prices within reach and implementing a new pay structure based on commodity prices, were not prioritized in the budget. Therefore, some observers have criticized that the new budget is unlikely to alleviate the ongoing high inflation in Bangladesh, as the government's measures are seen as insufficient to curb rising prices. [The Daily Star 1]

The budget deficit is targeted at 4.6 percent, only marginally lower than the previous year's 4.7 percent, indicating limited control over the deficit, which may not effectively reduce inflation. Concerns have also been raised about the government's increased

borrowing from the banking sector to cover the budget deficit could fuel inflation if it leads to more money being printed, according to observers. Despite these challenges, the finance minister remains optimistic about reducing inflation to 6.5 percent while maintaining a high GDP growth target of 6.75 percent. [The Daily Star 2]

Budgetary provision for legalizing black money

Also noteworthy, Bangladesh's government is proposing an amnesty with a significant tax incentive for people with undeclared assets, aiming to boost revenue. The amnesty would allow holders of undeclared wealth, such as securities, cash, and bank deposits, to declare these assets and pay a 15 percent tax. In contrast, regular taxpayers would see their tax rate increase to 30 percent, up 5 percent from the previous year.

Critics like the secretary general of the main opposition BNP, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, argue that this policy promotes corruption by allowing wealthy individuals with "black money" to legitimize their assets at a lower tax rate, thus undermining genuine taxpayers. Fakhrul also highlighted that the budget allocates significant funds to unproductive sectors, which he believes creates opportunities for public money to be misappropriated. He also criticized the increase in tax on capital machinery, arguing that it would hinder industrial growth and factory establishment by making it difficult to import necessary equipment. [The Daily Star 3]

By contrast, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina defended the budgetary provision for legalizing black money by emphasizing the need to integrate such money into the formal banking system with a nominal tax payment. She explained that this approach, akin to using bait to catch fish, would lead black money holders to regularly pay taxes thereafter. [The Daily Star 4]

Allocation for agricultural sector criticized

Economists have also raised concerns that the allocation for the agriculture sector is insufficient and could harm both farmers and food production. The budget allocates USD 325 million for farming and food security, which is 4.80 percent of the total budget. This represents a slight decrease from previous years: 4.97 percent in 2022-2023 and 4.71 percent in 2023-2024 – at a time when Bangladesh's reliance on food imports has increased, with domestic food grain production not rising significantly. The country imported about 12.5 million tons of food products in 2021, with the

dependency on imports growing from 9.3 percent of total food demand in 2010 to 11.2 percent in 2022. [The Daily Star 55]

Bangladesh: Fourth phase of sub-district polls sees lowest turnout

(lm) The fourth phase of sub-district (upazila) polls on June 5 saw the lowest turnout since 2009, with only 34.77 percent of voters participating. This marked the lowest turnout among all four phases held this year. Turnout percentages for the previous phases were 36.24 percent, 37.61 percent, and 36.10 percent respectively. Comparatively, during the 2009 upazila polls, the turnout was 70.57 percent, dropping to 61.23 percent in 2014. [The Daily Star 1]

Elections in 22 upazilas to the upazila parishad, the second-smallest unit in Bangladesh's local government system, were postponed due to Cyclone Remal. These elections have been rescheduled for June 9.

Post-election violence was reported in several areas. In the Madhyanagar upazila, at least seven people, including a defeated chairman candidate, were reportedly injured in an attack by rivals. Similarly, in the Basail upazila, around 12 to 15 supporters of a defeated candidate allegedly attacked a house with weapons. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

In particularly violent incident, a member of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the ruling Awami League, was shot dead in Brahmanbaria on June 5. Sixteen people, including a former BCL district vice-president, have been sued over the murder. [The Daily Star 4] [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Anti-graft watchdog to question former police chief Benazir on June 23

(lm) Bangladesh’s Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has postponed the interrogation of former inspector general of police Benazir Ahmed regarding allegations of amassing wealth beyond known sources of income. Originally scheduled for June 6, the hearing did not occur due to Benazir's absence. ACC Secretary Khorsheda Yasmin announced that the new date for Benazir's interrogation is June 23. [The Daily Star 1]

The investigation began after media reports surfaced in March and April detailing the illegal acquisition of wealth by Benazir. In response, the ACC formed a three-member committee to probe these allegations. The investigation covers substantial assets, including bank accounts and properties, with reports indicating that Benazir and his family amassed significant wealth during his tenure as the IGP and as the director general of the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB).

Notably, a Dhaka court has ordered the seizure of his properties and the freezing of 33 bank accounts linked to him. Additionally, the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has frozen the beneficiary owners' (BO) accounts of Benazir and his family members, effectively preventing them from trading shares in the stock market and liquidating investments. This action was taken following a request from the ACC. [The Daily Star 2]

Benazir and his family have reportedly left the country, initially traveling to Singapore and subsequently to Dubai. The ACC has summoned Benazir for questioning on June 23, while his wife and daughters were scheduled to appear on June 9.

Bangladesh: Government proposes USD 1.62 million allocation to anti-graft body for FY24

(lm) Bangladesh's Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali has proposed an allocation of approximately USD 1.62 million for the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in the budget for the fiscal year 2024-25. This allocation represents an increase of roughly USD 320,000 from the revised budget of approximately USD 1.31 million for the 2023-24 fiscal year. Initially, the proposed budget for the ACC in FY24 was about USD 1.57 million. [The Daily Star]

In his budget speech, the finance minister reiterated the government's "zero-tolerance policy" against corruption, aiming to establish an administrative framework based on good governance to achieve real socio-economic development. The government is also emphasizing the prevention of corruption and reduction of public suffering through digitization in various sectors.

Bangladesh: Senior journalist appointed new press secretary to Prime Minister

Hasina

(lm) In Bangladesh, senior journalist Nayeemul Islam Khan has been appointed as the new press secretary to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by the government. He will serve on a contractual basis with the status of a secretary, as per a notification from the Public Administration Ministry. This appointment comes after the position was left vacant following the passing of former press secretary Ihsanul Karim Helal on March 10. Nayeemul, who founded the daily Amader Shomay in 2003, has been a prominent figure in TV talk shows since 2007. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Tax administration looks to ease pressure on individuals to facilitate higher economic growth

(lm) In the fiscal year 2024-25, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) in Bangladesh has estimated tax exemptions to rise to approximately USD 13.86 billion to alleviate the tax burden on individuals and stimulate economic growth. [The Daily Star]

This amount, representing an 11 percent increase from roughly USD 12.5 billion in 2023-24, would enhance the tax-GDP ratio if included in total tax collection, reducing the state's dependency on borrowing. Therefore, economists and experts have voiced concerns over these tax exemptions, noting they can perpetuate corruption and reduce government revenue. However, they also acknowledge the positive impact on economic activities, such as the expansion of the domestic electronics sector. Calls for tax rationalization and targeted exemptions are growing, especially as Bangladesh prepares to graduate from the least-developed countries (LDC) list in November 2026.

Bangladesh: Government officials to come under new pension scheme

(lm) In Bangladesh, starting from July 1 next year, newly recruited government officials will join the Universal Pension Scheme instead of the traditional post-retirement pension benefits, as announced by Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali during his budget speech in parliament. This scheme aims to cover all government institution recruits eligible for pension benefits. Despite protests from employees of autonomous and state-owned organizations, the

minister stated that fresh recruits from these sectors have already been included in the scheme. [The Daily Star]

The government envisions including all citizens above 18 years in the Universal Pension Scheme, ensuring comprehensive social security. The scheme encompasses four programs, including "Prabash" for expatriate workers, "Pragati" for private sector employees, "Suraksha" for self-employed individuals, and "Samata" for those living below the poverty line. Additionally, employees of autonomous, state-owned, and other statutory organizations, as well as their recruits after July 1 this year, will be enrolled in the “Prottoy” scheme.

The existing system involves government employees contributing to the general provident fund (GPF), and those of autonomous and state-run corporations to a contributory provident fund (CPF) with interest rates ranging from 11 to 13 percent.

Bangladesh: 70 more sub-districts freed from homelessness, landlessness, Prime Minister Hasina says

(lm) Bangladesh’s Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced that 70 more sub-districts (upazilas) in 23 districts are now free of homelessness and landlessness, bringing the total to 58 districts and 464 upazilas. [bdnews24]

This initiative is part of the Ashrayan Project, launched to commemorate the 100th birth anniversary of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding leader of Bangladesh. The project has provided over 1.3 million homeless people with houses in its previous four phases, totaling 266,012 houses. In total, more than 4.3 million landless and homeless people have been rehabilitated through government programs, with over 2.9 million under the Ashrayan Project. The project has involved renovating 6,945 acres of land worth approximately USD 330 million and purchasing 371.10 acres worth around USD 21.68 million, rehousing 15,545 people.

Additionally, the prime minister pledged to rebuild and repair houses damaged by Cyclone Remal, ensuring aid and construction materials are provided to affected individuals.

Bangladesh: Gas crisis hits consumers hard

(lm) A two-week-long gas crisis in Bangladesh has severely impacted homes, factories, and vehicles running on compressed natural gas (CNG) following the shutdown of an LNG regasification terminal in Cox's Bazar on May 29. The supply disruption has made cooking difficult for many households and forced some factories to close due to low gas pressure. Long queues have formed at CNG filling stations, and power supply to rural areas has worsened as gas-powered plants struggle to operate. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Exports fell by 16 percent in May

(sg) Merchandise exports posted a 16.06 percent year-on-year fall to hit $4.07 billion in May this year, according to data released by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB). The downturn in exports, the main source of earnings for Bangladesh, paints a bleak outlook regarding recovery from the current economic challenges Overall, the country is facing, as the decline has eroded the gains in remittance earnings. Overall, the decrease in the export market isn't a good sign for the current economic recovery of the nation. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Awami League factional clash in Chattogram, 15 people injured

(sg) A clash between two factions of Bangladesh's ruling Awami League in Chattogram on June 7 resulted in 15 people being injured. The groups are reportedly loyal to Deputy Minister for Finance Wasika Ayesha Khan and former Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Lt Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman named as new army chief

(lm) Lt Gen Waker-Uz-Zaman, currently the chief of general staff of the Bangladesh Army, has been appointed as the next chief of the Bangladesh Army. He will be promoted to the rank of general and begin his three-year term on June 23, succeeding SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, who began his term on June 24, 2021. [bdnews24]

Waker, an alumnus of the Bangladesh Military Academy, was commissioned into the infantry corps in 1985. Throughout his career, he has held key positions in military command, staff, and instruction. He has commanded an infantry battalion, an independent infantry brigade, and an Infantry Division. He has also served in various staff appointments and as a distinguished instructor. Additionally, Waker has been involved with UN Peacekeeping Affairs, serving two tours of duty in Angola and Liberia.

Bhutan: Upper House to discuss fallow land, empty house phenomenon during upcoming session

(ps) In its upcoming 33rd session, the upper House of Bhutan's parliament will address various issues, including satong (fallow land), goongtong (empty houses), rural credit accessibility, human-wildlife conflict compensation, crop damage from natural calamities, and the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of Bhutan, 2013. It will also review education-related legislation and the state of persons with disabilities (PwDs). [Kuensel 1] [Kuensel 2]

Additionally, the session will deliberate on the annual budget appropriation Bill for 2024-2025, the supplementary budget appropriation Bill for 2023-2024, and the Public Accounts Committee's review reports on the Annual Audit Reports from 2010-2022. The prime minister will present the annual State of the Nation report, covering legislative plans, annual plans, and government priorities.

Bhutan: Hydro debt expected to rise with new projects

(lm) Bhutan's hydro debt – i.e. financial obligations incurred due to the development and construction of hydropower projects - is expected to increase as the government plans to construct more hydropower projects, particularly small ones. The government has allocated approximately USD 3.72 billion for hydro and renewable energy, which is separate from the 13th Plan budget outlay of roughly USD 6.14 billion. [Kuensel]

The country's hydro debt has been rising, from approximately USD 1.92 billion in March 2021 to roughly USD 2.01 billion in March last year. Despite this, its share of GDP has been decreasing, down from

82.8 percent in March 2021. The debt covers six major projects: Mangdechhu, Punatsangchhu-I, Punatsangchhu-II, Nikachhu, Dagachhu, and Basochhu.

Finance Minister Lekey Dorji emphasized Bhutan's commitment to developing hydropower due to its natural advantages, with ongoing projects like Kholongchhu and Chamkharchhu, and a focus on small hydro projects, wind, solar, and geothermal energy. The government is constructing small hydro projects totaling 365 megawatts in various locations and aims to install 500MW of solar and 23MW of wind energy in the 13th Plan.

Hydro loans are mostly concessional, with interest rates below 1 percent and long repayment periods of up to 40 years. Bhutan's Public Debt Policy, revised in 2023, mandates that non-hydro debt should not exceed 55 percent of GDP annually. As of March 2023, non-hydro debt stood at approximately USD 1.12 billion, or 35.1 percent of GDP.

The government aims to double GDP to USD 5 billion by 2029, which would increase fiscal space for borrowing and public spending, further driving GDP growth. As of March 2023, national debt was approximately USD 3.52 billion, or 109.8 percent of GDP, with external debt at about USD 3.13 billion and domestic debt at approximately USD 480 million.

Bhutan: Officer convicted to 10 years for rape of minor

(lm) In Bhutan, a former Kidu officer, was sentenced to 10 years, 3 months, and 17 days in prison for sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl. The verdict was delivered in absentia, as the man is currently residing in Australia. The Kidu Office in Bhutan is an important institution under the patronage of the King of Bhutan. The term "Kidu" refers to the royal grants and assistance provided by the King to support the welfare and well-being of Bhutanese citizens. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Challenges in obtaining loans for CIP

(ps) During a recent meet-the-press session, Bhutan's Minister of Industry, Commerce, and Employment, Namgyal Dorji, discussed the challenges and progress in the country's industrial estates and parks. The government aims to support these developments

through business support services, capacity building, infrastructure access, and market access. However, according to the minister, the COVID-19 pandemic and a loan moratorium led to fewer entrepreneurs applying for loans, impacting the development of these areas. [Kuensel]

A case in point is the Changchey Industrial Park (CIP) in Semjong, Tsirang, which was established with an initial investment of approximately USD 624,000 under the CSI Industrial Park initiative. Although operations were scheduled to begin in July 2021, progress has been limited. Despite efforts to attract entrepreneurs, only seven new applicants received Provisional Letters of Interest, with two withdrawing due to unpreparedness.

Other industrial estates include Dhamdhum for clean-tech industries and Norbugang for ferro-industries. Significant progress has been made in Dhamdhum's development phases, with 50 out of 77 slots occupied. About 195 acres in Norbugang are designated for ferro-industries. Samtse is being developed as an industrial hub, with enhancements like the Gawadrong dry port.

Meanwhile, in 2021, nine plots for agricultural production were abandoned due to the pandemic and loan challenges. New businesses struggled to obtain food clearance certificates from the Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA). Efforts are ongoing to issue provisional certificates for business licensing.

Bhutan: New non-tariff barrier policy for milk importers

(ps) From July 1, 2024, the Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA) has announced that they will implement an import control system for milk and conduct random testing to ensure safety. BFDA and the Ministry of Health have revealed that some imported milk brands contain Aflatoxin M1 above the permissible limit of 0.5 mg/kg. [The Bhutanese]

Aflatoxins are toxins produced by certain molds that can contaminate food, particularly milk. These toxins can cause liver cancer and other health problems, especially in children. Aflatoxin contamination can occur in crops due to drought or during storage if drying is delayed or moisture levels are high. Common cooking methods cannot destroy aflatoxins, so controlling contamination at the source is crucial. Milk is a significant source of aflatoxin M1, which is a potent carcinogen. Long-term exposure can lead to various health issues, including liver damage and cancer.

Children are particularly vulnerable to aflatoxin exposure.

Bhutan: Farmers in Bumthang seek government compensation amid potato crisis

(ps) Farmers in Tandingang and Khangrab, Bumthang, are seeking government assistance due to declining potato production, poor market prices, and climate challenges. The situation is worsened by late spring frost damage, and technological challenges further burden the largely senior citizen farmer population. The Bhutan Food and Drug Authority (BFDA) has emphasized the need for government intervention in seed distribution, market price management, and internal markets. Farmers also face wildlife threats, particularly from wild boars, and ineffective electric fencing. [Kuensel]

New potato varieties and climate-resilient clones are being introduced to improve the situation. The government plans to prioritize high-tech farming in the 13th Plan, with initiatives to introduce advanced Chirub farms, enhance resource use, and build farmer capacity.

Bhutan: Rubesa wind turbines set to resume operations after three-year hiatus

(ps) After more than three years of inactivity, the wind turbines in Rubesa, Bhutan, are set to resume operations. These turbines, part of a 2016 pilot project funded by the Asian Development Bank at a cost of approximately USD 2.12 million, aimed to diversify Bhutan's energy supply through renewable sources. [Kuensel]

Before ceasing operations in December 2020, the turbines generated 4.82 million units of electricity, yielding an income of around USD 294,800. On average, they produced 1.2 million units annually. Bhutan's potential for wind energy is 760 MW, but only 600 kW has been harnessed so far through the Rubesa wind farm, which provides just 0.079 percent of the feasible wind energy potential.

Feasibility studies are ongoing for additional wind farms in Gaselo and Rubesa, with a capacity of about 23 MW. However, challenges include power generation intermittency, securing suitable sites, obtaining

community and environmental clearances, and financing. The 13th Plan aims to develop 500 MW of alternative renewable energy by 2029 and increase it to 1000 MW by 2034 as part of Bhutan's strategy to enhance energy security.

Bhutan: New irrigation scheme brings hope to water-scarce communities in Wangdue

(ps) Phangyul and Kazhi in Wangdue, Bhutan, are set for a transformative change with the inauguration of a 38-kilometer pressurized piped irrigation scheme. Supported by the UNDP and funded by the Green Climate Fund and the Bhutanese government, the project aims to alleviate long-standing water scarcity in these communities, benefiting 285 households and 2,458 residents by irrigating 1,241 acres of agricultural land. [Kuensel]

The project, costing USD 6.08 million, includes two irrigation systems in Phangyul and Kazhi, addressing severe water shortages that have plagued these areas for generations. Challenges such as a historical water-sharing dispute between the two gewogs were resolved, enabling the successful implementation of the project.

India: Prime Minister Modi sworn in for third term after surprise election outcome

(wh/sg) On June 9, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi was sworn in for his third consecutive term, making him only the second Indian leader to secure a third consecutive term after Indian National Congress (INC) leader Jawaharlal Nehru in 1962. Modi, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), reiterated his commitment to eradicating corruption and poverty, and empowering the poor and middle class. He also countered opposition claims of an electoral mandate against his government, asserting the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA)'s commitment to religious equality. [bbc]

The ceremony followed the BJP-led alliance's success in securing a majority of 293 seats in the 543-seat Lok Sabha, India's lower house of Parliament. However, the BJP did not meet its ambitious goal of winning over 400 seats, a notable change from their 2019 victory with 303 seats. This election saw the BJP winning only 240

seats, thus losing the single-party majority that Prime Minister Modi had enjoyed since his first election in 2014.

Reflecting this shift in dynamics within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), the Janata Dal (United) (JD(U)), primarily active in Bihar and contributing 12 seats to the NDA's total, has asserted that it will not allow any anti-Muslim campaigns while in coalition with the BJP. [Scroll.in]

Meanwhile, the opposition INDIA alliance, led by Rahul Gandhi's INC, won 232 seats, with the INC winning 99 of those, increasing sharply from 2019, when it won only 52 seats, and with its allies, in 91 constituencies. A unanimous vote by INC leadership recommended Gandhi for the role of opposition leader, a position vacant since 2014. The nomination will be reviewed by the INDIA opposition alliance. [Al Jazeera 1] [The Wire]

The election outcome and nomination for the role of opposition leader marks a resurgence for Gandhi, who had faced setbacks in previous years. His comeback was fueled by extensive campaign efforts, including long marches across India to connect with marginalized communities. He won in two districts, Rae Bareli in Uttar Pradesh and Wayanad in Kerala, and will choose which to represent. [Al Jazeera 2]

India: Prime Minister Modi names new Cabinet; no change in top four ministries

(wh/lm) India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, newly inaugurated for a third consecutive term, announced his Cabinet on June 10, retaining key ministers in critical roles despite his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) losing its majority in an unexpected election outcome. The top four ministries remain unchanged: Subrahmanyam Jaishankar continues as External Affairs Minister, Amit Shah remains Home Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman stays on as Finance Minister, and Rajnath Singh continues as Defense Minister. [Associated Press]

Of the 71 ministers sworn in alongside Modi, 61 of them are from the BJP while the remaining are from allies under the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The Council of Ministers includes a diverse representation of social groups: 27 from Other Backward Classes (OBC), ten from Scheduled Castes (SC), five from Scheduled Tribes (ST), and five from minority communities. However, only seven ministers are women, and there are no representatives from the Muslim community, India's largest minority group,

whose political representation has declined under Modi. [NDTV]

India: Prime Minister Modi signs first official file to release funds for farmers

(wh/sg) After assuming office for the third time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed the first file of his new term, which pertains to the release of the 17th installment under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-Kisan) scheme. This installment will benefit 93 million farmers, with approximately USD 240 million being transferred directly to their bank accounts. [The Indian Express]

The PM-Kisan scheme provides eligible farmer families with roughly USD 72 per year in three installments of USD 24 each, through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT). Launched in February 2019, the scheme has released 16 installments so far, with the 16th installment benefiting 90.9 million farmers earlier this year.

Following the release of funds under the 17th installment, the Cabinet approved the construction of 30 million additional rural and urban houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY). This initiative aims to address the housing needs of an increasing number of eligible families. Since its inception in 2015-16, PMAY has facilitated the construction of 42.1 million houses equipped with basic amenities like household toilets, LPG connections, electricity, and functional tap water connections. [Business Today]

India: Congress leader Gandhi accuses Prime Minister Modi of 'stock market scam'

(lm) Rahul Gandhi, the de facto leader of India's main opposition Indian National Congress, has called for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to investigate a stock market crash that occurred following the general election results. He accused top Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders of encouraging people to buy stocks before June 4, leading to significant losses when the market crashed after the results were announced. [bbc]

The controversy stems from the stark difference between exit poll predictions and the actual election results, with the BJP failing to secure an outright majority. The crash, which occurred on June 4, resulted

in investments worth billions of dollars being wiped out. Gandhi labeled the incident as "the biggest scam" in India's stock market history, suggesting it benefited certain "dubious foreign investors" at the expense of Indian investors. BJP leaders, including departing trade minister Piyush Goyal, have refuted the allegations, arguing that Indian investors actually benefited from the market's rise and fall.

India: Opposition Congress demands Supreme Court-monitored probe into NEET exam ‘irregularities’

(lm/wh) As controversies surrounding the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) results intensify, India’s main opposition Indian National Congress party has demanded a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into alleged irregularities in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for medical courses. Party leaders, including Mallikarjun Kharge and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, accused the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of cheating students and manipulating exam results. They cited issues such as paper leaks, rigging, and the allocation of top marks to multiple students from the same exam center. [The Indian Express]

In response to these widespread concerns, which include reports of multiple students from the same exam center receiving perfect scores, the National Testing Agency (NTA) and the Union Education Ministry announced on June 8 the formation of a four-member committee. This committee is tasked with reviewing the results of over 1,500 candidates who were awarded "grace marks" to compensate for lost time during this year’s examination. The decision reflects the significant scrutiny the NEET-UG results have attracted, with some scores, like 718 or 719, being called into question by various stakeholders. [The Indian Express 2]

The review panel's establishment also comes in the wake of calls from other political entities, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the state of Maharashtra, for a retest and a transparent investigation into the results.

India: Election Commission kicks off preparations for assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir

(lm) India's Election Commission (EC) has initiated preparations for assembly elections in the Jammu and Kashmir union territory by accepting applications from political parties for the use of common symbols for their candidates. [The Indian Express]

The forthcoming elections will be the first for the Jammu and Kashmir assembly. The Delimitation Commission, established in 2020, finalized the delimitation order in May 2022, creating a 90-member assembly with 47 seats in Kashmir and 43 in Jammu.

The Supreme Court had previously ordered the EC to hold the assembly elections by September 30, 2023, following the abrogation of Article 370 and the division of the erstwhile state into two union territories in August 2019. In light of this, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar announced that the EC would begin the election process soon.

In the recent parliamentary elections, Jammu and Kashmir recorded a voter turnout of 58.58 percent, the highest in 35 years, signaling a positive outlook for the upcoming assembly elections.

India: The Rouse Avenue Court rejects Arvind Kejriwal's interim bail plea, extends judicial custody

(wh) The Rouse Avenue Court in Delhi on June 5 dismissed an interim bail plea by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who sought seven days of bail for medical reasons. Kejriwal is currently lodged in Tihar Jail in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy.

The court extended Kejriwal's judicial custody until June 19. Kejriwal was produced virtually before the court, which directed authorities to conduct the necessary medical tests for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief. The court will hear Kejriwal's application for default bail on June 7. [Hindustan Times]

India: Congress Leader Karti Chidambaram granted bail in Chinese visa scam case

(wh) Delhi's Rouse Avenue court granted bail to opposition Indian National Congress leader Karti Chidambaram in the Chinese visa 'scam' case. He was accused by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) of taking

a bribe of approximately USD 60,000 to facilitate visa approvals for Chinese personnel involved in a power plant project in Punjab state. [The Times of India]

The case centers on allegations that visas were issued to 263 Chinese nationals in 2011, during the tenure of Chidambara's father, P Chidambaram, as home minister. Karti has called the accusations "bogus" and denied any involvement in assisting Chinese citizens in obtaining visas. He described the ED's investigation as "fishing and roving" and asserted that he has provided all necessary paperwork.

India: Federal investigators file final chargesheet in 'land for jobs' scam; family of former minister included

(lm) The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), India's premier investigating agency, has filed its final chargesheet against 78 individuals, including former railway minister Lalu Prasad Yadav, in the so-called "land for jobs" scam. This scam involves allegations that Lalu Prasad's family received land parcels from ineligible candidates who were then appointed to various positions within Indian Railways, which is overseen by the railway ministry. The accused have been charged under sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) related to criminal conspiracy, cheating, and forgery, as well as provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. [The Indian Express]

According to the CBI, Lalu Prasad, during his tenure as Railway Minister from 2004 to 2009, conspired with railway officials and others to appoint candidates as Group D substitutes in 11 railway zones in exchange for land transfers. These appointments violated existing guidelines and included the submission of fake educational certificates.

The chargesheet also implicates 29 public servants from Indian Railways, 37 candidates, and six other private individuals. This marks the third and final chargesheet in the investigation, with previous chargesheets filed against other members of Lalu Prasad's family, including his son Tejashwi Yadav.

India: Judiciary has shifted to facilitating arbitration, chief justice says

(lm) India's Chief Justice (CJI) D Y Chandrachud stated that the Indian judiciary has shifted from a regime of

judicial interference with arbitration to one that facilitates it. Speaking at the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom, he highlighted that arbitration is now the preferred method of seeking commercial justice, though it still faces issues such as delays, costs, judicial interference, arbitrator bias, and enforceability of awards. [The Indian Express 1]

At the same time, the CJI emphasized the necessity of ensuring that arbitration institutions are not controlled by a "self-perpetuating clique." Chandrachud highlighted the importance of promoting a culture of commercial arbitration and robust institutionalization in countries like India, which will further arbitration practices in the Global South. [The Indian Express 2]

The CJI also highlighted the significant role of technology in arbitration, providing cost-effective and time-effective solutions. He noted that technology allows for virtual participation in arbitral proceedings, which has become increasingly important since the COVID-19 pandemic. The adoption of technology and artificial intelligence can enhance efficiency and accessibility in arbitration proceedings.

Additionally, Chandrachud addressed the issue of judicial overload in India, with the High Courts disposing of 2.15 million cases and the District Courts disposing of 44.70 million cases in 2023. He emphasized that while the judiciary performs its constitutional duty of ensuring access to justice, alternative dispute resolution methods like arbitration and mediation can help alleviate the burden on courts.

India: Tribunal concludes that ED's action against Praful Patel amounted to harassment

(wh) A Mumbai court recently quashed an Enforcement Directorate (ED) order to attach properties worth over USD 2.16 million belonging to Praful Patel, leader of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which primarily operates in the state of Maharashtra. The court, an Appellate Tribunal under the Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators Act (SAFEMA) Act, declared the ED's actions "illegal." [Hindustan Times]

The properties in question, seven flats in Mumbai's Ceejay House owned by Patel, his wife, and their company Millennium Developers, were not linked to money laundering or the late Iqbal Mirchi, a known associate of underworld figure Dawood Ibrahim. The ED had alleged these properties were acquired

through illegal transactions involving proceeds from money laundering and other crimes.

However, the tribunal clarified that separate properties belonging to Mirchi's family had already been attached, and a double attachment of the same properties was unnecessary. Additionally, the CBI closed a corruption case against Patel in March, citing no evidence of wrongdoing.

It is noteworthy that the tribunal's decision comes after Patel switched to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance in March, prior to the country's parliamentary elections. This decision followed a vertical split in the NCP, which was primarily between two factions: one led by Ajit Pawar, a senior NCP leader and nephew of party founder Sharad Pawar, and the other led by Sharad Pawar himself.

India: Delhi Court grants interim bail to businessman Amit Arora in excise scam case

(wh) A Delhi court has granted interim bail to businessman Amit Arora in a money laundering case linked to the Delhi liquor excise scam. The interim bail, lasting two weeks, was granted due to the need for Arora to care for his wife, who requires a surgical procedure. [The Hindustan Times]

Arora, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in November 2022, has been in custody for over 480 days. The ED's case is based on a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) FIR, which alleges that Arora, a close associate of former Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, was involved in managing and diverting illicit money from liquor licensees.

Arora is one of the individuals embroiled in this high-profile case, which includes prominent figures such as Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Sisodia, both currently in judicial custody.

India: Chief Minister-elect of Andhra Pradesh requests police investigation into alleged spyware misuse

(wh) Chandrababu Naidu, the chief minister-elect of India's Andhra Pradesh state, has requested a report from the state police on the alleged use of Pegasus spyware by the outgoing YSR Congress Party

government. The spyware, made by Israeli firm NSO, can access phone calls, emails, location information, and encrypted messages without the user's knowledge. Nara Lokesh, Naidu's son, claimed their phones were targeted twice, in March 2023 and April 2024, receiving alerts from Apple about potential spyware attacks. [Scroll.in]

Lokesh accused the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led administration of acquiring the spyware "off the books" and using it from outside the state. He alleged that systematic destruction of evidence was occurring and that Naidu has instructed the Director General of Police to halt these activities and secure the relevant offices.

This controversy follows a 2021 investigation revealing unauthorized use of Pegasus spyware for surveillance on journalists, activists, and politicians worldwide, including in India. Despite these findings, the Indian government denied the allegations, and a Supreme Court-appointed expert committee found malware on five out of 29 examined phones but could not confirm it was Pegasus due to lack of cooperation from the central government.

India: Centre releases additional USD 1.69 billion in tax devolution to states

(sg) In India, The Finance Ministry under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's newly formed government has released an additional installment of USD 1.69 billion for the devolution of taxes to states, bringing the total amount devolved for FY 2024-25 to USD 33.87 billion. This installment aims to support states in accelerating development and capital spending. [Business Today]

Earlier in February, the centre had released USD 1.72 billion and USD 884 million in tax devolution to states. The funds are intended to help states finance various social welfare measures and infrastructure development schemes.

Uttar Pradesh received the highest allocation of approximately USD 3.05 billion, followed by Bihar with USD 1.71 billion, and Madhya Pradesh with USD 1.34 billion. Smaller allocations were made to other states, including Goa (USD 6.65 million), Sikkim (USD 6.68 million), Mizoram (USD 8.62 million), and Nagaland (USD 9.80 million).

India: Five Naxalites killed, three soldiers injured in encounter in Chhattisgarh state

(lm) In an anti-Naxalite operation on June 7 in the Narayanpur district of India's Chhattisgarh state, five Naxalites were killed, and three soldiers were injured. [The Indian Express]

Naxalites, also known as Maoists, are members of communist guerrilla groups in India, primarily inspired by the ideology of Mao Zedong. They aim to overthrow the government through armed insurgency, targeting perceived injustices and advocating for the rights of marginalized rural populations. The movement began in 1967 in Naxalbari, West Bengal, and has since spread to several states, leading to ongoing conflicts with Indian security forces.

This incident brings the total number of Naxalites killed in encounters with security forces in the state this year to 122. Earlier, on May 23, seven Naxalites were killed on the Narayanpur-Bijapur inter-district border, and 12 were killed in Bijapur district on May 10. Additionally, on April 30, ten Naxalites, including three women, were killed on the border of Narayanpur and Kanker districts, and 29 died in Kanker district on April 16.

India: Border security, police conduct joint operation at Tripura border area, seize pistol, drugs

(lm) In a joint operation, India's Border Security Force (BSF) and state police seized illegal weapons and drugs near the country's border with Bangladesh in Tripura state. The operation led to the arrest of a man from whose residence authorities recovered yaba tablets worth approximately USD 24,000, a country-made pistol with ammunition valued at around USD 840, and other contraband items. [The Indian Express]

Tripura shares an 856-km-long border with Bangladesh, parts of which remain unfenced due to local disputes. Last year, the BSF reported seizing narcotics worth approximately USD 11.28 million at the Tripura border. This included yaba tablets worth USD 113,400, cannabis worth USD 171,360, phensedyl or eskuf syrups worth USD 46,920, and illegal alcohol worth USD 523,320. Additionally, they seized 2,582 cattle valued at USD 42,360 and gold jewelry worth USD 29,760.

India: At least 9 dead after suspected militants in Kashmir fire at Hindu pilgrims

(sg) In Kashmir's Jammu region, suspected militants attacked a bus carrying Hindu pilgrims on June 9, resulting in at least nine deaths and 33 injuries. The bus, en route to the Mata Vaishno Devi temple base camp, was fired upon in Reasi district, causing it to plunge into a deep gorge. [Times of India] [Associated Press]

The attack is attributed to Muslim militants opposing Indian rule in Kashmir. Rebel groups have been fighting for Kashmir's independence or its merger with Pakistan since 1989, leading to significant casualties. India and Pakistan both claim Kashmir, a region divided between them. [Business Today]

India: Young man mistaken for intruder shot in Jammu and Kashmir

(lm) A 26-year-old man was killed near the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba district. The man was apparently shot by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel who mistook him for an intruder due to suspicious movement. [The Indian Express]

The IB in Kashmir refers to the officially recognized boundary line between India and Pakistan in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. This border is different from the Line of Control (LoC), which is the de facto military control line that separates Indian-controlled and Pakistani-controlled parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Maldives: Parliament rejects amendment to Land Act

(hgh) In the Maldives, the newly constituted 20th Parliament has rejected an amendment to the Land Act, which was initially passed by the 19th Parliament. During the debate in the 20th Parliament, the request for reconsideration was rejected, with 75 members voting against it, 12 in favor, and one abstaining. Similarly, a vote to approve the amendment without further changes saw 76 members voting against, 12 in favor, and one abstaining. [Avas] [PSMnews.mv]

The amendment, submitted by a lawmaker from the then-largest party in Parliament, the Maldivian

Democratic Party, and passed on April 29, required the government to hand over residential land to recipients within three months from the date the permanent list of recipients is publicized. President Mohamed Muizzu, who is also the president of the now-ruling People's National Congress, had returned the amendment to Parliament last month for reconsideration after the 19th Parliament's term ended.

Maldives: Deputy Speaker urges government to disclose country's financial situation

(hgh) In the Maldives, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Ahmed Nazim has called on the government to openly disclose the country's economic and financial status without waiting until November to pass next year's budget. Speaking during the parliament's Committee of Economic Affairs meeting, Nazim emphasized the need for transparency about the feasibility of various projects. [the edition]

As of late 2022, the Maldives' total debt reached MVR 105 billion (approximately USD 6.8 billion), representing 111 percent of the country's GDP. The external debt alone stood at USD 2.3 billion, driven by various loans and financial agreements, including a USD 500 million Sukuk issued in 2021. This situation has been exacerbated by the continued reliance on foreign loans for recurrent expenditures and the approval of new loan agreements without adequate fiscal reforms.

Against this backdrop, international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have raised concerns about the Maldives' fiscal health. The World Bank has called for immediate fiscal reforms and sustainable infrastructure investment planning to address these issues, emphasizing prudent debt management and reducing wasteful expenditures for long-term economic stability. Similarly, the IMF's 2023 Financial System Stability Assessment stressed the urgency of addressing the nation's debt and fiscal challenges to maintain financial stability. [World Bank] [IMF]

Maldives: States invest heavily in police, results needed, says minister

(hgh) Maldivian Minister of Homeland Security and Technology Ali Ihusan emphasized the need for the

Maldives Police Service (MPS) to deliver results and improve services given the significant budget allocated to them. Speaking at the inauguration of MPS's four-year strategic plan, Ihusan highlighted that MVR 4 out of every MVR 100 in the state budget is allocated to the police, amounting to roughly MVR 2 billion (approximately USD 130 million) annually. [The edition]

The strategic plan prioritizes eliminating gang crimes and reducing the fear associated with crime. The aim is to entirely eliminate gang presence in the country by the end of the next four years. The plan also focuses on strengthening the relationship between police and society, upgrading infrastructure, technology, and facilities, reviewing and improving internal processes and policies, and ensuring transparent, professional, and accountable services.

Earlier this year, the government launched a project valued at USD 41 million to construct police buildings across 61 islands. This project includes an advance payment of USD 3.6 million to the contracted Indian company, and it has been confirmed that this amount is in the company's possession. This initiative is part of a broader effort to decentralize police services and make them more accessible to all islands in the Maldives.

Maldives: Homeland Ministry reports over USD 110 million in unpaid foreign worker fees

(hgh) The Maldives Homeland Ministry has announced that over USD 110 million (MVR 1.76 billion) in fees for foreign workers remains unpaid. According to the ministry, fees and penalties for 102,807 foreign workers, registered under 10,619 employers, have not been settled. The ministry has issued a deadline for employers to clear these dues by June 18. Failure to comply will result in employers being publicly named and facing suspensions in the expat system, including a halt on the issuance of new permits. [avas]

Maldives: Fisheries Ministry studies possible lift of ban on shark fishing

(hgh) In the Maldives, the fisheries ministry is currently conducting a study to assess the potential impacts of lifting the ban on shark fishing, which has been in place since 2010. This review is being prompted by concerns from local fishers about the economic impact of shark

depredation on their catches, particularly among those targeting large yellowfin tuna. [Sun.mv]

The fisheries ministry has cited significant pressure to reconsider the ban due to these depredation issues affecting the income of handline fishers. However, the proposal to lift the ban has faced substantial opposition from international conservation groups, local NGOs, and the tourism industry, which argue that maintaining the shark fishing ban is crucial for marine conservation and the economic benefits derived from shark-related tourism. Critics emphasize that sharks play a vital role in the ecosystem and are valuable for attracting divers, which significantly contributes to the Maldivian economy.

Maldives: Housing Development Corporation suffers USD 715 million loss from free land issuance

(hgh) The Housing Development Corporation (HDC) of Maldives has incurred a loss of nearly MVR 11 billion (USD 715 million) due to the free land issuance under the 'Binveriya Scheme,' launched by the former government. The Auditor General's Office revealed that the government had agreed to compensate HDC with MVR 10.5 billion (USD 683 million) for the plots issued, including several in Hulhumale'. [Sun.mv]

To offset revenue losses, the previous government assigned two lagoons, Galufalhu and Maagirifalhu, each valued at MVR 3.3 billion (USD 215 million), to HDC. Additionally, the government instructed HDC to coordinate with the Ministry of Finance to settle the remaining land costs of MVR 7.7 billion (USD 501 million).

Maldives: Over 7,000 in Hajj queue; new applicants to wait until 2033

(hgh) More than 7,000 Maldivians are currently in the queue for the hajj pilgrimage, with those who apply now expected to wait until 2033 to perform the rite. [Sun.mv]

The long wait is due to high demand and the limited quotas allocated for Maldivian pilgrims each year. This year, the Maldives has been allocated 1,000 Hajj quotas. This follows a significant reduction in quotas during the COVID-19 pandemic when the number was reduced to 453.

This long waitlist has become a significant concern, especially for those who have saved their entire lives for the pilgrimage. The issue gained further attention after the government decided to sponsor the pilgrimage for 1,000 people below the poverty line over the next five years, with 50 already traveling to Saudi Arabia this year.

Maldives: Family open for out-of-court settlement in 5-year-old's death if state admits negligence

(hgh) The family of Sadha Saudhulla, a five-year-old girl who died in 2021 after allegedly being left unattended in a state-run hospital in the Maldives, is willing to negotiate an out-of-court settlement if the state admits to medical negligence. [Sun.mv]

The Human Rights Commission of Maldives (HRCM) found sufficient grounds to believe that doctors and nurses were negligent in Sadha's treatment, allowing the family to sue for compensation. The family filed a lawsuit against the Health Ministry, and at a recent hearing, their lawyer stated they are open to settlement talks to avoid a prolonged court process.

Nepal: Prime Minister Dahal prepares for Cabinet reshuffle

(lm) Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is preparing for a Cabinet reshuffle. The reshuffle aims to include new ministers from the Janamat Party and Nagarik Unmukti Party and address demands from the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Unified Socialist) for a fair share in provincial and central government roles. Dahal has been consulting with coalition partners, including CPN (Unified Marxist–Leninist) Chairman KP Oli and CPN (Unified Socialist) Chairman Madhav Kumar Nepal, to finalize the reshuffle plans. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Prior to this, the coalition's stability was called into question when Madhav Kumar Nepal, leader of the coalition member CPN (Unified Socialist), attended a meeting of opposition parties late last month [see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1]. This action prompted concerns from Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Unified Marxist–Leninist chairman Oli, who both met with Nepal to address the situation.

The Unified Socialist made it clear that they seek additional ministerial roles and fair representation across various provincial governments. The party has expressed frustration over unfulfilled promises and insists on a comprehensive power-sharing deal, particularly regarding their roles in the provincial governments of Sudurpaschim and Koshi. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

The reshuffle may involve replacing some long-serving ministers, except Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun. The final decision on the reshuffle and power-sharing agreements is pending further discussions among coalition partners.

Nepal: Supreme Court to hear petitions on JSP-Nepal split; party begins Unity General Convention

(lm) The Supreme Court of Nepal has decided to forward two writ petitions regarding the split of the Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal (JSP-Nepal) to a full bench for hearing. These petitions, filed by JSP-Nepal chair Upendra Yadav, challenge the Election Commission (EC)'s recognition of a splinter group as a party despite the group not meeting the 40 percent support criteria from both the central committee and parliamentary party. Yadav also seeks to bar seven lawmakers from the splinter group from serving as members of the House of Representatives. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Earlier in May, Ashok Rai, the federal council chair of JSP-Nepal, along with six other lawmakers and 30 central committee members, split from the party to form a new faction, also named Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP). The EC officially registered the new Rai-led faction despite it not meeting the required 40 percent support from both the central committee and the parliamentary party. In light of this, the Supreme Court in mid-May issued an interlocutory interim order to halt the EC's recognition of the new party pending further hearings.

The split came at a critical time as the Yadav-led JSP-Nepal, along with the Unified Socialist party, was planning to withdraw support from the government. This would have led to a minority for the ruling coalition.

Against this backdrop of the recent split, the JSP-Nepal on June 10 commenced its Unity General Convention, which is significant as it marks the second time a party led by Yadav is holding such an event, aiming to

strengthen the unity among various Madhes-based parties. The convention has invited foreign delegates from India, Malaysia, Azerbaijan, Spain, and Indonesia. Key political parties in Nepal, except for the new faction led by Rai, are also expected to participate. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Supreme Court seeks case file in writ petition against Home Minister Lamichhane

(lm) Nepal's Supreme Court has ordered authorities to present the case file for a cooperative fraud case at the Rupandehi District Court. This request follows a writ petition seeking the suspension of Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane. The petition is due for hearing on June 18. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

A division bench of Justices Manoj Kumar Sharma and Til Prasad Sharma directed the authorities to present the file involving Gitendra Babu Rai, who is accused of illegally transferring significant sums from various cooperatives without collateral. In September last year, arrest warrants were issued against 19 individuals involved in the embezzlement case, including Rai, who remains at large. Victims of the fraud filed supplementary complaints against Lamichhane – who is accused of colluding with Rai in embezzling these funds – and others, leading to renewed investigations by the Central Investigation Bureau.

The petitioner seeks to annul a letter from the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) stating that Lamichhane had no pending cooperative fraud cases and is also demanding Lamichhane's suspension to prevent any potential influence on the investigation.

In related but separate developments, the East Nawalparasi District Court has remanded seven individuals to judicial custody for embezzling funds from the Kawasoti-based Chhipchhipe Consumers Cooperative. The case, which involves 35 people including federal lawmaker Gita Basnet, concerns the embezzlement of NPR 165.8 million (approximately USD 1.24 million). [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Eight including former chair of Century Bank arrested for banking offences

(lm) On June 10, the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) of Nepal Police arrested eight individuals, including Rajesh Kumar Shrestha, the former chairman of Century Bank, for banking offences related to extending loans without adequate collateral. [The Kathmandu Post]

Earlier, on February 27, the police had arrested ten people, including Manoj Neupane, the senior deputy chief executive officer of Prabhu Bank, and Tulasi Gautam, a former CEO of Century Bank, for similar charges. They were accused of providing loans from Century Bank without sufficiently valued collateral, totaling NPR 2.11 billion (approximately USD 15.83 million). The loans were given to firms owned by Rabindra Chaulagain and other board members of the Deurali Multipurpose Cooperative. The collateral for these loans was valued at only NPR 1.14 billion (approximately USD 8.55 million), meaning the loans exceeded the collateral value by NPR 974.17 million (approximately USD 7.31 million), violating banking norms.

Nepal: Madhesh province chief minister ousted; new government formed

(ps/lm) Madhesh Chief Minister Saroj Kumar Yadav lost his position after failing to secure a vote of confidence during a floor test in the provincial assembly. Yadav's government lost its majority after the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Unified Marxist–Leninist) and CPN (Maoist Centre) – the two key parties in the federal government – withdrew support on May 12. As per the constitution, Yadav was required to undergo a floor test within 30 days due to the withdrawal of support. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Consequently, Janamat Party lawmaker Satish Kumar Singh was appointed as the new chief minister and formed a 14-member Cabinet, marking the third chief minister for Madhesh Province since its establishment after the 2017 elections. Notably, the new Cabinet includes the first-ever Dalit representation in Madhesh's provincial government. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Singh later expanded his Cabinet by inducting two ministers from his Janamat Party. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

A controversial decision by the new government involves allocating substantial funds to lawmakers under the Constituency Development Fund, a practice criticized and halted at the federal level.

Nepal: Gandaki Chief Minister Pandey wins trust vote after floor cross

(lm) The chief minister of Nepal's Gandaki province, Surendra Raj Pandey, secured a confidence vote in the provincial assembly on June 10. This was made possible when Phanindra Devkota, a lawmaker from the Nepal Samajbadi Party who had contested the 2022 election using the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist Centre) symbol, crossed the floor to vote in favor of Pandey. Devkota's defiance of his party's whip, which instructed lawmakers to vote against the trust motion, was crucial in Pandey's victory. [The Kathmandu Post]

A total of 31 lawmakers, including Devkota and an independent member, voted in favor of the trust motion tabled by Chief Minister Pandey. Two provincial assembly members of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party also supported him. In contrast, 22 CPN (Unified Marxist–Leninist) lawmakers and six from the CPN (Maoist Centre) voted against the motion.

Pandey was sworn in as Chief Minister on May 29, following a Supreme Court ruling that declared the May 5 vote of confidence for former Chief Minister Khagaraj Adhikari of the Unified Marxist–Leninist unconstitutional. This is Pandey's second term as chief minister. He was initially appointed in April 2023 but resigned a year later after the Maoist Centre withdrew its support, leaving his government in the minority.

Nepal: Sudurpaschim Chief Minister Dirgha Bahadur Sodari expands provincial Council of Ministers

(lm) Sudurpaschim Chief Minister Dirgha Bahadur Sodari has expanded the provincial Council of Ministers following the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (UML)'s decision to join the government. The expansion includes seven new ministers, with three from the UML, three from the CPN (Maoist Centre), and one from the Unified Socialist. However, independent member Tara Joshi declined a ministerial position due to the government's decision to bifurcate the ministry he was supposed to lead. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Court orders fair compensation for land affected by transmission lines

(ps) The Supreme Court of Nepal has directed that fair compensation must be provided to landowners affected by the construction of electricity transmission lines. This ruling came after residents of Sankhuwasabha district filed a petition arguing that the current compensation policy was insufficient. Specifically, landowners whose property falls under high-voltage transmission lines receive only 10 percent of their land's value for the right of way. [The Kathmandu Post]

The court stated that compensation should reflect the impact on human health and potential displacement, beyond just the land where the transmission towers are built. Despite rejecting calls to overturn the compensation for land directly acquired for towers, the court emphasized the need for comprehensive compensation covering all affected areas.

This decision impacts the Arun-3 hydropower project, which is over 70 percent complete and expected to generate power by 2026. The project is being developed by SJVN, an Indian public-sector company. The compensation for land acquired for the towers ranges from USD 1,650 to USD 2,640 per ropani. However, the current compensation for the right of way remains at 10 percent of the land's value, a point of contention that led to this court ruling.

Nepal: Education Commission report kept secret by Oli government made public

(lm) The Nepal Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology has made public the High-Level National Education Commission's report, which had been kept secret since it was submitted to then-prime minister KP Sharma Oli over five years ago. The report was unveiled by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who handed it over to Education Minister Sumana Shrestha. [The Kathmandu Post]

The commission, formed in 2018, included education experts and representatives from various educational associations and was tasked with recommending improvements to Nepal's education policy. One of its key recommendations is to convert private schools into trusts within ten years to prevent the commercialization of education. The report also suggested increasing the education budget to at least

20 percent of the government's spending and ensuring basic education in children's mother tongues.

The report, which faced opposition from private school operators and pressure to remain unpublished, has now been endorsed by the government. The Ministry plans to implement its recommendations under the leadership of Prime Minister Dahal. Previously, the report was leaked to the media by commission members in December 2020. The release by the Ministry marks a formal acknowledgment and ownership of the report by the government, indicating a commitment to follow through with its recommendations.

Nepal: Cabinet recalls 11 ambassadors

(ps) The Pushpa Kamal Dahal-led government in Nepal has decided to recall 11 ambassadors from various countries, including India, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Initially, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Naryan Kaji Shrestha advised against frequent recalls, suggesting that only underperforming ambassadors should be recalled. However, pressure from Prime Minister Dahal and Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) chief KP Oli led to the mass recall without a formal proposal from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [The Kathmandu Post] [My Republica]

Critics have questioned why only certain ambassadors, primarily those appointed by the previous coalition government, were recalled, suggesting political motivations behind the decision. The timing of the recall, just before Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony—which Nepal's Prime Minister Dahal was set to attend—has further sparked controversy. Experts argue that recalling Shankar Sharma from India at such a critical moment sends a negative message and undermines Nepal's diplomatic image.

The ambassadors recalled include those from India, the United States, the United Kingdom, South Korea, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Denmark, Israel, Malaysia, and Portugal, with several appointed during the tenure of the previous Nepali Congress-Maoist Centre coalition government.

Nepal: Amendment proposes to legalize digital currencies and establish digital

banks

(ps) The first amendment to the Bank and Financial Institutions Act (Bafia) proposes significant changes, including the legalization of digital currencies and the establishment of a digital bank. This move reflects the growing importance of digital finance in the country's financial landscape. If passed, the amendment would pave the way for the regulation and oversight of digital currencies, providing a legal framework for their use and exchange. The establishment of a digital bank aims to enhance financial inclusion and promote innovation in the banking sector by leveraging digital technologies. [My Republica]

Nepal: Political parties affirming to help regarding preparedness for disasters

(ps) During an interaction program organized by the Ministry of Home Affairs, various political parties in Nepal expressed their unwavering support for disaster preparedness and response efforts. Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane emphasized the crucial role of political parties in mobilizing volunteers and grassroots mechanisms to effectively address disasters. Dr. Gangalal Tuladhar, representing CPN (Unified Socialist), highlighted that disaster preparedness and response are integral responsibilities of political parties. Kiran Poudel, leader of CPN (UML), pledged cooperation with the government during crises, emphasizing the importance of synergy between state and political party resources. Surya Subedi from CPN (Maoist Centre) proposed the formation of skilled representatives from all parties to contribute to disaster management projects. [Nepal News]

Nepal: Lower House ratifies International Solar Alliance Framework Agreement

(ps) In Nepal, Parliament’s lower House endorsed a proposal seeking the ratification of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework Agreement. This proposal, presented by Minister for Energy, Water Resources and Irrigation Shakti Bahadur Basnet, aims to enhance Nepal's engagement with the ISA, an international platform focused on increasing the deployment of solar energy technologies. [My Republica]

The ISA is a United Nations treaty organization initiated by India to promote large-scale solar energy

deployment. It was launched in November 2015 during the UNFCCC Climate CoP 21 in Paris by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron. The ISA aims to support the implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement through the rapid and extensive deployment of solar energy.

The ISA Framework Agreement, which provides the legal foundation for this collaborative effort, was opened for signature during CoP-22 in Marrakesh on November 15, 2016. Currently, 119 countries have signed the agreement, and 98 of these have submitted the necessary instruments of ratification to become full members of the ISA.

Nepal: Foreign currency reserves reaching USD 15 billion

(ps) Nepal's foreign currency reserves surged to approximately USD 14.78 billion by mid-May 2024, attributed mainly to a significant increase in remittance inflows. According to a recent update from Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), Nepal's total foreign exchange reserves surged by 24.2 percent attributed mainly to a significant increase in remittance inflows. The reserves grew by 22.7 percent, reaching USD 14.36 billion in mid-April 2024, up from USD 11.71 billion in mid-July 2023. Notably, imports from India and other countries decreased, while imports from China saw an increase. [My Republica]

Consumer price inflation moderated to 4.4 percent in mid-May 2024, down from 7.41 percent a year ago. Inflation in the food and beverage category was 6.27 percent, with notable increases in the price index of vegetables, pulses, spices, cereal grains, and sugar products. Non-food and service category inflation stood at 2.96 percent.

Pakistan: Federal government tables controversial ordinances in lower House

(ss) On June 6, Pakistan's federal government tabled two key ordinances in parliament, the National Assembly, which have stirred controversy. These are the Election (Amendment) Ordinance 2024 and the National Accountability (NAB) (Amendment) Ordinance 2024. These ordinances, which were both promulgated on May 27, are part of broader legislative efforts by the government but face significant pushback from

opposition parties who view them as measures to consolidate power and undermine political opponents. [Dawn]

The NAB ordinance extends the remand period from 14 days to 40 days. This change has been criticized by the main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan, who view the move as politically motivated, suggesting it aims to target political opponents, especially Khan and his supporters. Previously, in April last year, the remand period was reduced from 90 days to 14 days by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government under the leadership of the now-ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

Meanwhile, the election ordinance allows the appointment of retired judges to election tribunals. A move that is justified by the government as a necessity due to high courts being overburdened with 82,000 pending cases. However, this ordinance has already been challenged in the Islamabad and Lahore high courts. Critics argue that a 2013 electoral reforms committee had decided against appointing retired judges to election tribunals.

Additionally, the House extended the Seed (Amendment) Ordinance, 2024, for 120 days. During the question hour, the minister for information and broadcasting informed the National Assembly that investigations into the wheat import scandal were underway. The scandal revolves around the permission granted to the private sector for wheat imports based on market assessments. The minister opposed the idea of a judicial probe, arguing that it was the responsibility of the executive and parliament to address the issue. However, House members were unsatisfied, with some alleging high-level involvement in the scandal.

Pakistan: Parliament passes four bills amid opposition protest

(ss) Pakistan's lower House passed four bills on June 10, including "The Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2024," to fulfill the conditions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The legislative session was marked by vigorous protests from opposition members, particularly from the main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), who chanted anti-government slogans, surrounded the speaker's dais, and tore copies of the bills, calling them "black law unacceptable." [Radio Pakistan] [Business Recorder]

The four bills passed were the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2024; the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2024; the National Highway Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2024; and the Pakistan Postal Services Management Board (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

The key amendments in the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2024, align the PBC Act of 1973 with the SOE Act of 2023 to meet IMF structural benchmarks and performance criteria. This includes increasing the number of independent directors/private members on the PBC Board from four to nine, giving them a majority over ex-officio members. This change also includes representation from Islamabad Capital Territory, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, in addition to the four provinces. Furthermore, the role of appointing the director general of the PBC has been made decisive by the PBC Board, with the federal government appointing the director general based on the board's recommendations.

The Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2024, proposes amendments to the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation Ordinance of 1979 to streamline official business operations, including incorporating the federal government's powers into the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation Act. The National Highway Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2024, amends the NHA Act of 1991 to facilitate the smooth running of official business of the National Highways Authority, incorporating the federal government's powers as outlined in the proposed NHA Ordinance of 2023. The Pakistan Postal Services Management Board (Amendment) Bill, 2024, also aims to improve governance and operational efficiency, though specific details were not provided.

Pakistan: JUI (Sheerani) formally joins PTI-led opposition alliance

(ss) A faction within the larger Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI) party, an Islamic political party in Pakistan, has formally joined the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-led opposition alliance, known as the Tehreek-i-Tahaffuz-i-Ayeen-i-Pakistan (TTAP), or Movement for the Protection of the Constitution of Pakistan. [Dawn]

The TTAP was formed in April following allegations of electoral malpractice in the February 8 elections. The alliance includes several major political parties, such as the PTI of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M),

Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP), and Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen (MWM).

Pakistan: Court declares Kashmir poet ‘missing’ till safe return home

(lm) The Islamabad High Court (IHC) declared Kashmiri poet Ahmad Farhad a victim of enforced disappearance and directed authorities to refer to him as a "missing person" until his safe return home. Farhad disappeared from his Islamabad residence on May 14 and resurfaced on May 29 in the custody of Azad Kashmir police. His wife accused Pakistan's top spy agency, ISI, of abducting him. Farhad had been critical of the Pakistani military in social media posts before his disappearance. [Arab News]

The IHC criticized state institutions for failing to recover Farhad, who had been booked for obstructing a public servant's duties. The court ordered his safe return and the recording of his statement before a judicial magistrate under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Heads of ISI, Military Intelligence, Intelligence Bureau, and the Counter-Terrorism Department were directed to attend the next criminal justice committee hearing.

The case highlights the issue of enforced disappearances in Pakistan, where security forces are often accused of detaining and torturing dissenters without due process. Pakistani security agencies deny involvement in such disappearances.

Pakistan: 40 injured as violent protests erupt in Chaman over border restrictions

(ss) Violent protests erupted in Chaman, Pakistan, on June 6, injuring at least 40 people, including 17 security officials. The unrest was triggered by the arrest of leaders from a sit-in opposing the government's decision to restrict border crossing to those with valid passports and visas. Previously, identity cards sufficed for crossing. [Dawn]

Protesters attacked government buildings, blocked major roads, and disrupted traffic. Security forces responded with tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse the crowds. The protesters also targeted the Frontier Corps (FC) headquarters, leading to further clashes. Law enforcement detained 56 protesters.

In response to the instability in Chaman, the Balochistan government decided to open the Badini border crossing for trade with Afghanistan, previously used for repatriation of illegal foreign nationals. The government aims to facilitate trade through this crossing amid ongoing protests in Chaman.

Pakistan: National Economic Council approves budget proposals prioritizing CPEC, foreign investments

(ss) On June 10, Pakistan's top economic body, the National Economic Council (NEC), approved several proposals for the upcoming budget, focusing on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and foreign investment projects. The council received a detailed briefing on the 13th five-year development plan, which includes regional development, export increases, small and medium-scale industry promotion, social security, poverty alleviation, workforce efficiency, knowledge economy progress, and climate change mitigation strategies. [Arab News]

The NEC emphasized prioritizing CPEC projects, international investment initiatives, and nearly completed ongoing projects in the development budget. Sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the development of backward areas will also be prioritized. The CPEC, a USD 65 billion investment by Beijing, is part of China’s Belt and Road initiative and aims to modernize Pakistan’s economy through infrastructure projects.

The government aims to set ambitious fiscal targets for the fiscal year 2024-2025 to strengthen its case for a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout deal. Islamabad is negotiating with the IMF for a loan between USD 6 billion to USD 8 billion to avoid default. Along with IMF negotiations to support its struggling USD 350 billion economy, Pakistan has actively sought to boost foreign direct investment, engaging in high-level talks with countries, such as Saudi Arabia, Japan, Azerbaijan, and Qatar.

Pakistan: Government plans to sell around 24 state entities in coming years, minister says

(lm) Pakistan plans to privatize around 24 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the coming years, as announced by Privatization Minister Aleem Khan. This move comes

amid ongoing discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a new, longer-term bailout program following the completion of a USD 3 billion short-term package that helped Pakistan avoid default last year. The IMF had previously highlighted the need for stronger governance and reforms for loss-making SOEs. [Arab News]

Entities slated for privatization include Pakistan International Airlines, Roosevelt Hotel, First Women Bank, Utility Stores Corporation, and various power distribution companies.

Pakistan: Prime Minister Sharif resisting IMF diktat on increasing tax on salaried class in budget

(lm) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is resisting the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) demands to increase taxes on salaried class and agricultural products in the upcoming federal budget, as confirmed by a government official. The budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 is set to be presented in the National Assembly on June 12. This comes as Pakistan is negotiating with the IMF for a new financial bailout to address its severe economic crisis, characterized by drastically low reserves and a weakened currency. [Arab News]

Since 2022, Pakistan has implemented several painful measures required by the IMF, including increases in fuel and energy prices, leading to a significant rise in the cost of living. Inflation peaked at 38 percent in May 2023 but has since decreased to 11.8 percent as of May 2024. Despite these measures, the prime minister is reportedly unwilling to raise income taxes on the salaried class or impose taxes on agricultural products like tractors and seeds. Instead, the government plans to introduce measures to support the agricultural and industrial sectors, aiming to boost exports and create job opportunities.

The government also intends to protect lifeline utility consumers and increase funding for the Benazir Income Support Program, a poverty reduction initiative. While the IMF has proposed taxing pensions, the prime minister is generally opposed to this and plans to announce increases in pensions and salaries, striving for a "people-friendly" budget.

Opposition lawmakers, particularly from the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) supported by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's candidates, criticize the government for not consulting them on the budget

and accuse it of presenting an IMF-prepared document. They promise to present their own budget proposals in parliament and push the government to review its measures, which they deem anti-public. The opposition argues that the government lacks a coherent plan to revive the economy, which has severely deteriorated.

The government, however, maintains that it has consulted various stakeholders, including industry representatives, for the budget's preparation and will consider the opposition's proposals during parliamentary debates on the finance bill.

Pakistan: Balochistan province reports six cases of highly contagious Congo virus

(lm) In Balochistan, Pakistan, six cases of Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever (CCHF) have been reported this year, with officials warning of a potential increase in cases ahead of Eid Al-Adha. CCHF, commonly known as the Congo virus, is a highly contagious disease transmitted by ticks and contact with infected animals, often leading to severe symptoms and potentially fatal outcomes if not treated promptly. The disease typically spikes during the summer months and around Eid Al-Adha due to increased animal slaughter. [Arab News]

This year's cases have all been reported in June, with three women having recovered and three men still hospitalized. In 2023, there were 54 reported cases in Balochistan, resulting in 18 deaths, including healthcare workers.

Pakistan: Police arrest man accused of killing two minority community members in Punjab province

(lm) Pakistani police arrested a man accused of killing two members of the Ahmadi faith, a religious minority declared non-Muslim by Pakistan's Parliament in 1974, in Punjab province. The Ahmadi community has faced ongoing persecution, with homes and places of worship frequently attacked. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Prime Minister Sharif vows to eliminate 'terrorism' after blast kills seven soldiers

(lm) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif vowed to eliminate terrorism in Pakistan following a roadside blast that killed seven army soldiers, including a captain, in the Lakki Marwat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province. The blast, caused by an improvised explosive device, is suspected to be the work of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has carried out numerous attacks in the region. [Arab News]

The attack is part of a surge in violence in KP and Balochistan since the TTP ended its truce with the government in November 2022. Recent incidents in KP include the killing of four policemen and a prayer leader, and injuries to three anti-polio vaccinators and two policemen. Pakistan has attributed the violence to militants operating from Afghanistan, a claim denied by Kabul, which views the issue as Pakistan's domestic problem.

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court quashes presidential pardon for Royal Park murder convict

(hgh) The Supreme Court of Sri Lanka has quashed the presidential pardon granted by former President Maithripala Sirisena to Don Shamantha Jude Anthony Jayamaha, who was convicted in the so-called Royal Park murder case. The court deemed the pardon arbitrary and invalid, stating that it did not adhere to Constitutional provisions and violated the Fundamental Rights of the petitioner as well as the public trust doctrine. As a result of this judgment, the Supreme Court has directed the relevant authorities to enforce the original sentence imposed on Jayamaha. [Daily Mirror 1]

The Royal Park case involves the murder of a 19-year-old Swedish-Sri Lankan student on July 1, 2005, at the Royal Park Condominium in Colombo. Jayamaha, who was 19 at the time, was convicted of killing the victim by inflicting severe head injuries after an argument. He was found guilty in 2006 and sentenced to death in 2012 after a lengthy legal process, including appeals. In November 2019, former President Sirisena controversially granted Jayamaha a presidential pardon, leading to widespread public outcry and legal challenges. Critics argued that the pardon was arbitrary and did not follow proper constitutional procedures, undermining the rule of law and public trust.

Following its decision to quash the presidential pardon, the Supreme Court ordered former President Maithripala Sirisena to pay USD 3,300 to the petitioner,

the Women & Media Collective organization. The Supreme Court's ruling requires the payment to be made within one month. [Daily Mirror 2]

Additionally, in light of the apex court's ruling, Sri Lankan authorities have intensified efforts to extradite Jayamaha, who is suspected to be in Singapore. However, the lack of an extradition treaty between Sri Lanka and Singapore poses a significant challenge to these efforts. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Gender Equality Bill inconsistent with constitution, Supreme Court observers

(lm) In Sri Lanka, Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardhane has announced that the Supreme Court has found the Gender Equality Bill inconsistent with the constitution. The apex court ruled that the bill should be enacted with a two-thirds majority in parliament and also through a referendum. [Daily Mirror]

The Gender Equality Bill in Sri Lanka is currently at a critical juncture. It was introduced alongside the Women's Empowerment Bill, both aimed at enhancing women's rights and economic empowerment. The bills were announced by President Ranil Wickremesinghe during International Women's Day celebrations in March, and they were expected to be tabled in Parliament in May 2024. The Cabinet had previously approved the draft bill, and it had been published in the government gazette for parliamentary approval.

Sri Lanka: Catholic Church denies support for extending attorney general's mandate

(lm) Sri Lanka's plan to extend the term of Attorney General Sanjay Rajaratnam has sparked controversy, with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL) denying any involvement in the decision. [Daily Mirror]

Local newspapers reported that President Ranil Wickremesinghe extended Rajaratnam's tenure to ensure continuity in discussions regarding the investigation into the 2019 Easter bombings that targeted three churches and three luxury hotels across the country. The president claimed that Rajaratnam, who was appointed in May 2021, was crucial in liaising

with the bishops and that appointing a new attorney general would delay the process.

However, the CBCSL issued a statement refuting these claims, asserting that there had been no dialogue between the bishops and Rajaratnam regarding his extension. The bishops expressed concern that President Wickremesinghe was using the Easter Sunday attacks and the Church to justify the extension, noting Rajaratnam's failure to implement recommendations from the Presidential Commission of Inquiry over the past 36 months. The Commission's final report included several recommendations aimed at improving national security, enhancing intelligence operations, and holding accountable those responsible for the security lapses that allowed the attacks to occur.

Sri Lanka: Railway engineers call off strike after successful negotiations

(hgh) The Sri Lanka Railway Locomotive Operating Engineers' Union on June 10 decided to end a strike following successful discussions with Minister of Transport Bandula Gunawardena. The strike, which began at midnight on June 6, was in response to delays in second-class promotions for locomotive drivers and other issues. [adaderana]

Sri Lanka: Government to offer foreign jobs to retired military, war hero families

(hgh) Sri Lanka's Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment has announced its intention to allocate a portion of foreign job opportunities to retired military personnel and families of war heroes. This decision was discussed during a meeting aimed at educating tri-forces personnel about the program, under the patronage of State Minister of Defence Premitha Bandara Tennakoon. Senior officers from the tri-forces and representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment attended the discussion.[Daily Mirror]

Initially, job opportunities in the construction sector in Israel will be offered. Loan facilities at concessional rates will be provided through state banks for these expatriates. The Ministry has identified 67 personnel from the Army to be sent for these jobs, with invitations extended to Navy and Air Force personnel to nominate candidates. Retired armed forces

members under the age of 44 will undergo training and examination by the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment.

Sri Lanka: Preliminary approval for Starlink internet

(hgh) The Telecommunications Regulatory Commission TRCSL) granted preliminary approval for Elon Musk's Starlink internet service to operate in the country. This development follows discussions between President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Elon Musk, focusing on addressing Wi-Fi connectivity issues, especially in rural areas of Sri Lanka. [Lanka News Web]

Starlink is currently available for pre-order in Sri Lanka with a refundable deposit of USD 9, and the service is expected to launch later this year, pending final regulatory approvals from the Ministry of Defense. This initiative aims to enhance internet access across the country and aligns with Sri Lanka's renewable energy goals, exploring potential collaborations with Musk on various projects.

Sri Lanka: Government aiming to digitize schools by July

(hgh) The Sri Lankan government is aiming to digitize schools by July. This project involves networking and integrating digital technologies, such as smart interactive boards, across 3,000 schools that offer studies up to the GCE Advanced Level. The initiative aims to provide equal educational opportunities and enhance the learning experience through technology.

The Minister of Education, Susil Premajayantha, emphasized that this move is part of a broader effort to connect students with modern educational tools and resources, bridging the digital divide and ensuring that all students have access to quality education regardless of their location. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Parliamentary committee advocates boost in toddy, Palmyrah product exports

(hgh) In Sri Lanka, the Sectoral Oversight Committee on National Economic and Physical Plans has directed officials to eliminate barriers to the local production

and export of toddy, kithul, palm, and coconut products. The committee emphasized the significant market potential abroad for these products, suggesting that easing export restrictions could generate substantial revenue for the government. Officials were asked to submit a comprehensive proposal outlining all recommendations related to these products [Daily Mirror]

In 2023, the Palmyrah Development Board successfully earned over USD 102,422 from toddy exports. The government is taking steps to promote toddy and other Palmyrah-related products internationally, aiming to expand this industry and provide the country with much-needed foreign exchange [Daily News Sri Lanka]

Additionally, Finance State Minister Ranjith Siyambalapitiya advice on the importance of ensuring the production of high-quality, natural toddy for export. The government is also planning to organize a toddy festival targeting foreign consumers to further boost the market for Sri Lankan toddy. [LNW]

Sri Lanka: Surge in Dengue cases amidst flooding raises concerns

(hgh) Sri Lanka is experiencing a significant increase in dengue cases, exacerbated by recent flooding. Health authorities report over 25,000 dengue cases and nine deaths in the past five months. The floods have created ideal breeding conditions for mosquitoes, leading to a rise in dengue transmission. Officials are urging public cooperation to prevent a potential epidemic, emphasizing the importance of eliminating mosquito breeding sites and maintaining proper sanitation. [LNK]

Sri Lanka: Government loses USD 4 billion annually due to under-invoicing in international trade

(lm) Sri Lanka incurs losses exceeding USD 4 billion annually due to under-invoicing in international trade, according to the Global Financial Integrity Report, as highlighted by Patali Champika Ranawaka, Chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means. Following the Committee's recommendations to curb under-invoicing, Sri Lanka Customs reported earning approximately USD 49.5 million in revenue in 2023,

marking a significant improvement from previous years. [Daily Mirror]

Additionally, the Tax Expenditure Statement from the Fiscal Policy Department of the Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization, and National Policies, issued on March 31, revealed that Sri Lanka experienced losses of about USD 1.83 billion due to VAT relief, approximately USD 1.07 billion from customs duty relief, around USD 36.3 million from income tax relief, and about USD 287.1 million from institutional tax reliefs.

Sri Lanka: Expatriate remittances surge by 11.8 percent in first five months of 2024

(hgh) Sri Lanka has experienced a significant increase in remittances from expatriate workers, with May 2024 alone bringing in USD 544.4 million. According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), total remittances from January to May 2024 reached USD 2,624.4 million, representing an 11.8 percent rise compared to the same period last year. This surge provides a much-needed boost to the country's economy amid ongoing financial challenges. [Onlanka]

Sri Lanka: Financial aid, new city for Kelani River flood victims announced

(hgh) In Sri Lanka, Senior Advisor to the President on National Security and Chief of Presidential Staff, Sagala Ratnayaka, announced that each household affected by the recent floods along the Kelani River will receive an allowance of LKR 10,000 (approximately USD 33) for cleaning their homes. This decision was made during his observation tour to assess the welfare of residents in the Kolonnawa area impacted by adverse weather conditions. [LNK]

Sri Lanka: President re-appoints Shavendra Silva as Chief of Defence Staff

(lm) Sri Lanka's President Ranil Wickremesinghe has re-appointed General Shavendra Silva as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) until December 31. An extraordinary gazette has been issued to extend General Silva's term under Section 3 of the Chief of Defence Staff Act, No. 35 of 2009. General Silva's new

term commenced on June 1. He was initially appointed as CDS on June 1, 2022. [Daily Mirror]

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

Brunei: Over 1000 phishing websites tackled since 2023

(dql) The Cyber Security Brunei (CSB) has disclosed that more than 1,000 phishing websites have been successfully suspended or taken down since 2023.

Minister of Transport and Infocommunications Dato Seri Setia Shamhary presented the number of reported cybersecurity-related incidents in Brunei on June 10. [The Star]

Cambodia: Sweeping CCP victory in council elections

(lvw) The Cambodian People's Party (CPP) has won a significant majority (504 seats) in the Capital, Provincial, City, and District council elections held across the country. The CPP was followed by the Khmer Will Party (KWP) with 47 seats and the National Power Party (NPP) with eight seats. The election saw participation from opposition parties like the Khmer Will Party and the National Power Party, formed by former members of the Candlelight Party.

The party accepted the official election results announced by the National Election Committee (NEC).

In a statement issued on June 4, the CPP emphasized that all councils led by the party would prioritize the will and interests of the people and work towards achieving democratic development.

This assertion, however, has been challenged by critics, including opposition figures, who raised concerns about the fairness of the election, citing recent arrests of opposition activists and restrictions on political participation. CPP spokesperson Sok Ey San defended the measures, stating they were necessary for ensuring stability during the election process. [Khmer Times 1] [Khmer Times 2] [Radio Free Asia]

Cambodia: Ministry plans 250 model villages

(lvw) The Ministry of Rural Development in Cambodia plans to transform an additional 250 villages into model villages by 2028 to enhance infrastructure and stimulate economic growth in rural areas. Minister Chhay Rithisen announced this initiative during a recent forum, detailing plans to create the villages by the end of the government's 7th mandate in 2028, adding 50 villages annually.

The initiative includes upgrading economic and connectivity infrastructure, providing clean water supplies, building kindergartens and schools, and offering skills training and loans to facilitate social development.

This initiative follows the success of 30 existing model villages in Takeo, Kampong Speu, and Tboung Khmum provinces, established over the past decade with support from the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). The ministry will allocate USD 50,000 per village and seek additional support from development partners. [Khmer Times] [Phnom Penh Post]

Indonesia: Initiative to bury billions of tons of carbon dioxide underground launched

(jb) Indonesia has embarked on ambitious international projects aimed at burying billions of tons of carbon dioxide underground, aligning with global efforts to mitigate emissions. The first project, in collaboration with UK company BP, has commenced in West Papua province on New Guinea island.

With an estimated investment of USD 2.6 billion, this initiative targets the burial of up to 1.8 billion tons of liquefied carbon dioxide from industrial sources by 2026. A larger-scale project, involving Pertamina and Exxon Mobil, will operate in southeast Sumatra, capable of burying up to 3 billion tons of carbon dioxide.

These efforts signify a significant step towards carbon capture and storage, with potential long-term benefits for mitigating climate change. Experts estimate Indonesia's capacity to store up to 572 billion tons of carbon dioxide, significantly expanding global carbon capture capabilities. [News.am]

Indonesia: Anies Baswedan responds to support for Jakarta election candidacy

(si) During the celebration of King Charles III's birthday in South Jakarta on June 7, Anies Baswedan, the former governor of Jakarta and defeated presidential candidate, responded portentously: "Well, we'll see, just let it flow", to inquiries of journalists regarding his potential nomination by multiple parties as a candidate for Jakarta's gubernatorial election this year.

Several parties had expressed their interest in liaising with Anies for the upcoming election. [Tempo]

Indonesia: Three Supreme Court justices reported to Judicial Commission for alleged ethics violations

(rm) Three Supreme Court justices who ruled in favor of revising the age requirements for gubernatorial candidates have been reported to the Judicial Commission for alleged ethics violations. A group of lawyers from the Democratic and Constitutional Awareness Movement (Gradasi) claimed the three-member panel reached their decision in just three days, indicating possible political interference.

The approved changes require candidates to be 30 years old by the time they are inaugurated, rather than at the time of running. This decision has sparked suspicion of political interference, particularly due to speculation that President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo's youngest son, 29-year-old Kaesang Pangarep, will run in the upcoming Jakarta gubernatorial election. The change in age requirements makes Jokowi's youngest son eligible to run for Jakarta deputy governor.

The Supreme Court defended the timing of the decision, stating it was in line with the “principle of [hearing] a case without undue delay.”

The Judicial Commission said it would investigate the report to determine whether any ethics violations occurred. [Asia News] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Papuan militant injured in gunfire with soldiers

(si) A gunfight occurred early last week between the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) and a rebel group in the market area of Sinak Sub-district, Puncak District, Central Papua, which left an armed rebel injured. The separatist escaped by the rescue of his comrade.

The rebels are from the Papua Armed Criminal Group (KKB) led by Kalenak Murib. They were designated as terrorists by the Indonesian government in early 2021. They have also been identified with the West Papua National Liberation Army-Free Papua Organization (TPNPB-OPM), whose goal is to separate from the Republic of Indonesia and create a new state. [Scholarhub] [Republika]

The escalation is a result of the two-week confrontation between the TNI and KKB. The armed rebels have been active in their operations since 2018, including killing, taking hostages, and engaging in gunfights. [Antara]

Indonesia: President to begin working from new capital city in July 2024

(jb/si) Indonesia's President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo announced plans to start working from the new capital city, Nusantara, in July 2024. This comes amid concerns over the project's future following the unexpected resignations of senior executives overseeing its development (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

Jokowi stated that the first phase of infrastructure development for the USD 32 billion capital on Borneo island is approximately 80 percent complete. "God willing, in July I will start working from the new capital city," he shared in an Instagram post. Preparations for celebrating Indonesia's 79th Independence Day in the new capital this August are well underway.

Despite the recent resignations raising investor concerns, Jokowi dismissed any worries during his visit

to Nusantara to inspect development progress and initiate further construction. [Reuters]

Nevertheless, environmentalists and Indigenous groups continue to criticize the construction for reducing animal habitats and displacing the local indigenous population. [Newsday]

Indonesia: Aceh court sentences three Rohingya men for smuggling refugees

(jb) On June 5, a court in Indonesia's Aceh province sentenced three Rohingya men for smuggling over 100 refugees into the country. Muhammed Amin, 35, received an eight-year sentence, while Anisul Hoque, 27, and Habibul Basyar, 53, were each sentenced to six years.

The Jantho District Court found them guilty of violating immigration laws by transporting 134 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Aceh in December 2023. Each man was also fined 500 million rupiah (USD 30,645) or an additional three months in prison if they failed to pay.

The defendants argued that they were victims seeking refuge, not smugglers. Despite their pleas, the sentences matched or exceeded the prosecution's demands.

Meanwhile, another trial in Meulaboh involves four Indonesians charged with a smuggling incident in March 2024 that resulted in 11 Rohingya deaths. The men face up to 15 years in prison if convicted. [Benar News] [The Jakarta Globe]

Laos: 2025 census in preparation

(lvw) Laos will host its 5th Population and Housing Census (PHC) in March 2025, with a pilot test in Vientiane Capital, Houaphanh, Bokeo, and Sekong provinces.

This will be the first digital census in Laos, aiming to provide detailed population data, including information from remote areas, and gather insights on living conditions. The upcoming census will employ digital methods, using handheld devices for data collection and Geographic Information System technologies for geographic data analysis, essential for remote data collection.

The pilot test will involve field teams visiting 100 locations to interview household heads about residents' demographic and socio-economic characteristics, including age, marital status, religion, language, disability, education, employment, and housing conditions. [Laotian Times]

Laos: Economy experiences moderate recovery

(lvw) The economy of Lao PDR is moderately recovering, supported by tourism, transport, and logistics, as noted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) macroeconomic working group on June 5.

The ADB forecasts a 4 percent GDP growth for 2024 and 2025. Despite this, the country faces challenges such as high currency depreciation and domestic inflation, which strain the domestic finance market due to heavy reliance on it for external debt financing.

A recent meeting, attended by key officials including Vice Minister Ms. Phonevanh Outhavong and World Bank's Alex Kremer, focused on national socio-economic development, budget planning, and revising investment promotion laws to address current challenges and improve economic governance. [Lao News Agency]

Malaysia: House of Representatives Speaker confirms outstanding notification on status of six Bersatu lawmakers

(ba) Johari Abdul, the Speaker of the House of Representatives (Dewan Rakyat) has yet to receive any formal notification regarding the vacant seats resulting from the June 2 revocation of party membership for six Members of Parliament from the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (Bersatu) over their support for Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Bersatu is a major component party within the Perikatan Nasional coalition.

Prior to their membership revocation, the six Bersatu MPs failed to comply with a written directive from the party's supreme leadership council to pledge allegiance, resulting in their immediate expulsion. These MPs include Datuk Syed Abu Hussin Hafiz Syed Abdul Fasal (Bukit Gantang), Zahari Kechik (Jeli), Mohd Azizi Abu Naim (Gua Musang), Datuk Iskandar Dzulkarnain Abdul Khalid (Kuala Kangsar), Datuk Suhaili Abdul Rahman (Labuan), and Datuk Dr

Zulkafperi Hanafi (Tanjong Karang). [The Star] [The Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Former finance minister launches defamation lawsuit

(ba) Former finance minister Lim Guan Eng has initiated legal action against Zuraida Kamaruddin and *MalaysiaNow* news outlet for defamation. This stems from Zuraida's assertions that Lim obstructed the development of a housing project for former plantation workers in Bestari Jaya. Zuraida, a former local government and housing minister, made these allegations on May 10 following the government's announcement of plans to construct 200 flats for the workers.

Lim disputes Zuraida's claims, deeming them false and damaging to his reputation as a senior leader. Seeking damages, Lim had previously indicated his intention to pursue compensation amounting to USD 1.05 million. The lawsuit targets Zuraida, *MalaysiaNow*'s publisher MNow Media Sdn Bhd, and editor Abdar Rahman Koya as defendants. Lim accuses them of deliberately publishing the report for the sake of gaining cheap publicity.

Highlighting a rebuttal from his former political secretary, Tony Pua, Lim stresses that Zuraida's claims are unfounded and cautions against the dissemination of misleading information. Despite a demand for retraction, Zuraida allegedly declined to retract her statements, prompting Lim to take legal action. [Free Malaysia Today]

Malaysia: Anti-corruption watchdog arrests four individuals

(ba) Three civil servants and a former civil servant are currently being detained on allegations of accepting monthly bribes from illegal businesses operating in the city. The primary suspect, a deputy director at Kuala Lumpur City Hall in his 40s, is believed to have received between USD 21,000 and USD 105,000 monthly from syndicates managing unlicensed massage parlours, entertainment venues, and other establishments.

According to sources, in addition to the deputy director, one of the detained civil servants is his officer, and another is an enforcement officer.

Anti-corruption officers also seized USD 42,000 in cash and 28 gold wafers, the value and weight of which are still being determined. [The Star]

Malaysia: MyCC collaborates closely with ministries to detect and stop activities of diesel cartels

(ba) The Malaysia Competition Commission (MyCC) is collaborating closely with relevant ministries to obtain data that can help detect cartel activities related to targeted diesel subsidy information.

In a press release on June 10 the MyCC announced that it is working with both the Finance Ministry and the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Ministry to gather this essential data to monitor anti-competitive behavior.

This announcement follows a statement made on June 9 of the Domestic Trade and Cost of Living Minister Datuk Armizan Mohd Ali, who declared that his ministry would enforce the new USD 0.70 per liter retail price for diesel in Peninsular Malaysia starting on June 10. The announcement also confirmed that all regulations related to the sale of diesel remain in effect. [The Star]

Malaysia: Decision on 'Allah' Socks Issue: KK Supermart Representation Set for July 15

(ba) The status of the representation submitted by KK Supermart & Superstore Sdn Bhd founder and executive chairman Chai Kee Kan and his wife Loh Siew Mui, to the Attorney General's Chambers (AGC) to withdraw all charges against them will be revealed on July 15.

Sessions Court Judge Muhamad Anas Mahadzir set this date after Deputy Public Prosecutor Khairul Azreem Mamat informed the court that the AGC is still reviewing the representation submitted on May 17.

Chai, 57, and Loh, 53, are charged with deliberately intending to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims by displaying socks printed with the word "Allah" on a sales display rack at a KK Mart in Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya. If convicted, the pair faces a jail sentence of one year, a fine, or both. [The Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Date for decision on ex-prime minister Mahathir's request in Batu Puteh Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) set

(ba) The High Court on June 10 scheduled June 12 to decide on the judicial review application filed by Former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad regarding the Royal Commission of Inquiry (RCI) proceedings into Batu Puteh, Middle Rocks, and South Ledge.

Mahathir filed the application on June 5, naming RCI chairman Tun Md Raus Sharif and his deputy Tan Sri Zainun Ali as the first and second respondents. The third to eighth respondents are RCI members Datuk Baljit Singh Sidhu, Datuk Johan Shamsuddin Sabaruddin, Prof Datin Faridah Jalil, Datuk Mohammed Ridha Ham Abd Kadir, Dickson Dollah, and RCI Secretary Zamri Misman.

Mahathir seeks an order for the RCI proceedings on the sovereignty issues of Batu Puteh, Middle Rocks, and South Ledge to be conducted publicly. Additionally, he seeks an order to prohibit Md Raus from serving as the RCI chairman and to prevent Dr. Baljit and Mohammed Ridha from being members of the RCI. [The Malay Mail]

In 2008, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) determined that the island Batu Puteh belonged to Singapore, Middle Rocks to Malaysia, and South Ledge to the state in the territorial waters where it is located. Malaysia sought an interpretation of the judgment from the ICJ in 2017.

However, in 2018, the government led by Mahathir chose to retract an application aimed at challenging the International Court of Justice's decision that granted legal jurisdiction of Batu Puteh to Singapore. Last year, a dedicated task force, established to scrutinize the case, discovered that Mahathir might have erred in withdrawing the application. During that period, then Attorney General Idrus Harun characterized the decision to retract the application as "inappropriate" and "improper".

Malaysia: Former chairman of SRC International Sdn Bhd denies direct contact to former prime minister in corruption case

(ba) During his testimony in the High Court, former chairman of SRC International Sdn Bhd Ismee Ismail asserted that he had not been directly contacted by former Prime Minister Najib Razak amidst the emergence of scandals related to the 1MDB scandal roughly a decade ago.

Ismee, who helmed the subsidiary of the state investment arm from 2011 to 2014, clarified that Najib never summoned him to discuss any perceived failures in discharging his duties. Additionally, Ismee highlighted that Najib did not question his performance as a director of 1MDB. He expressed his confidence in Najib's directives as a shareholder of SRC International, emphasizing his respect for the former Prime Minister and his belief in Najib's dedication to serving the nation.

In the ongoing legal proceedings, SRC International is pursuing legal action against Najib and former CEO Nik Faisal Ariff Kamil for alleged wrongful appropriation of company assets and conspiracy to misappropriate them for personal gain. A default judgment has been entered against Nik Faisal, while Ismee and other former directors initially named as defendants have been dropped from the suit but later added as third parties by Najib.

Moreover, Ismee disclosed to the court that discussions among 1MDB directors did not involve plans to secure funds for SRC International. He clarified that the initiative to establish SRC International, intended for coal and uranium exploration, was proposed by Nik Faisal.

Ismee further stated that the 1MDB directors were unaware of the process leading to the company's request for a USD 630 million government grant. [Free Malaysia Today]

The 1MDB scandal is at the center of a graft scandal in which transfers totaling USD 681 million from a company in the British Virgin Islands to accounts investigators believe belong to the Najib were found. The 1MDB was founded in 2009 and was chaired by then Prime Minister Najib. Wholly owned by the Malaysian government it was formed to invest in property, infrastructure and energy projects.

Malaysia: Former Finance Minister pursues judicial review to lift asset freeze

(ba) Former Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin and his family have initiated legal action to contest the

confiscation of their assets and the freezing of multiple bank accounts linked to the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission's (MACC) probe into their financial affairs.

In this fresh legal endeavor lodged on June 6, Daim and his family are pursuing various court declarations to invalidate the asset seizures and to release the frozen bank accounts associated with 18 entities, as part of their application for judicial review at the Kuala Lumpur High Court.

Their requested declarations encompass branding the MACC's asset seizures as unlawful, indicative of power abuse, unreasonable, and made in bad faith. Additionally, they are seeking compensatory and punitive damages. [The Star] [The Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Police record testimonies of ministers and witnesses regarding bomb threat

(ba) The police have gathered statements from multiple individuals, including the Minister of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Datuk Seri Tiong King Sing, to aid in the investigation of the recent bomb threat incident.

The police affirmed that the incident at the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture building remains under investigation. Earlier, the police had confirmed that the package, claimed to contain a bomb and addressed to Tiong on June 5, was a hoax. [Astro Awani]

Malaysia: Melaka city police dismantle fraudulent job operation

(ba) A job scam operation, run from a condominium in Kota Laksamana, was dismantled by the Melaka city police, resulting in the arrest of seven individuals, including a teenager.

The police disclosed that the syndicate was unveiled during a raid conducted on June 6. Acting on intelligence, the Commercial Crime Investigation Division from the state police headquarters collaborated with Melaka Tengah authorities to carry out the operation.

Preliminary findings indicate that the syndicate lured victims with promises of commissions for tagging social media pages, assigning each victim 50 online tasks per day, with payments ranging from USD 2.5 to

USD 12.6 offered for each task, supposedly transferred through online payment methods.

Furthermore, police was able to resolve ten reported cases of fraud across the nation, with a total loss of USD 27,800, following the arrest of the seven individuals. All seven suspects have been remanded until June 10 to facilitate investigations under Section 420 of the Penal Code for cheating. [The Star]

Malaysia: Immigration department dismantles 'Geng Broga' syndicate in Selangor

(ba) The Immigration Department of Malaysia recently dismantled a syndicate known as 'Geng Broga', suspected of engaging in the illegal trafficking of Indonesians. The operation was carried out in Sungai Besar and Sabak Bernam, Selangor, on June 6.

In total, 15 individuals, ranging in age from 5 to 52, were apprehended. Among the seized items were five Indonesian passports, USD 1,300 in cash, and three vehicles.

The syndicate's modus operandi involved utilizing the sea route, smuggling Indonesians from Tanjung Balai, Indonesia, to Sungai Besar, Selangor, using fishing vessels. From there, they were transferred to smaller boats before reaching shore. Fees varied between USD 315 to USD 525 based on gender. The police believe that this syndicate has been operational for approximately a year. [The Star]

Malaysia: CCID director warns of vast majority of online investment schemes being fraudulent scams

(ba) According to Ramli Mohamed Yoosuf, director of The Royal Malaysia Police Commercial Crime Investigation Department (CCID), most investment schemes advertised on social networking platforms like Facebook and Telegram are fraudulent scams.

He emphasized that the flashy displays of wealth in these promotions are merely tactics to deceive victims into joining the schemes. Ramli stressed that these viral investment schemes are nothing but fraudulent techniques leading to cybercrime. He advised the public to steer clear of such schemes and instead opt for legitimate investments approved by authorities.

He made these statements after the police probationary sergeants passing-out parade at the Police Training Centre on June 7.

The statements came in response to the recent case of two national badminton players who fell prey to an investment scam syndicate, resulting in the loss of millions of US dollars. [The Malay Mail]

Myanmar: Authorities forcefully evict 500 from Mandalay shops

(jb) Military junta officials in Myanmar have forcibly evicted over 500 people who were residing in shops near Mandalay's sports stadium, citing lack of permission for residential use. The affected individuals, including shop owners and their families, were given 15 days to vacate the premises.

Residents of more than 100 shops, clinics, and offices in the area surrounding Ba Htoo Stadium were impacted by the eviction order, issued under the 1955 Government Housing Act. Despite having purchased the shops over 20 years ago, the occupants were ousted without compensation or alternative housing options.

The sudden eviction has left many displaced individuals, including employees, retirees, students, and the disabled, struggling to find shelter and stability. Attempts to reach Thein Htay, the junta's Minister of Economy for the Mandalay region, for comment on the evictions were unsuccessful. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Junta orders evacuation of villages near Sittwe

(jb) Junta troops in Myanmar ordered residents of five villages near the Rakhine state capital, Sittwe, to evacuate by 7 June 2024. The directive comes as the military prepares for anticipated attacks by the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic minority insurgent group.

Residents of Yae Chan Pyin, Aung Taing, Kyet Taw Pyin, Pa Lin Pyin, and Ohn Yae Paw were told to move into Sittwe city or face a massacre similar to the recent violence in Byain Phyu village, which resulted in nearly 80 deaths. Those unable to relocate were to be evacuated by junta vehicles.

The AA, which ended a ceasefire in November 2021, currently controls nine townships in Rakhine state and Paletwa township in Chin state. A battle for Sittwe has been anticipated for months, with junta forces fortifying their defenses around the city.

AA spokesman Khaing Thukha condemned the forced relocations as human rights violations, stating that the junta aims to use civilians as human shields. The junta has not commented on the evacuations. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Airstrike on insurgent meeting kills 16

(jb) A Myanmar military airstrike on a monastery meeting of anti-junta activists in Let Pan Tan village, Sagaing region, left 16 people dead, including two monks, and wounded 22 others, according to witnesses. The June 8 raid targeted a gathering of People's Defense Forces (PDF), formed by activists opposing the 2021 military coup.

The PDF, comprising members of the majority Burman community and ethnic minority insurgents, has been fighting the junta's rule. One PDF-associated witness suggested the military had inside information about the meeting, citing the precision of the airstrike.

Sagaing has seen intensified violence as junta forces clash with insurgents. On 3 June 2024, a junta airstrike on a wedding in Mingin township killed 33 people.

Following the recent airstrike, junta troops raided Let Pan Tan village, arresting around 10 people. Junta attacks have resulted in 662 civilian deaths and 1,492 injuries nationwide from January to May 2024. [Radio Free Asia]

Myanmar: Junta intensifies airstrikes in Mindat Township

(jb) The Myanmar Military Council has intensified its airstrikes on civilian areas in Mindat Township, Chin State, with recent attacks being labeled as potential war crimes by the Chinland Defense Force (CDF-Mindat). Since April 2024, Mindat Township has faced regular aerial bombardments, with a notable escalation in early June 2024.

On June 5, an evening strike on Ranpang village resulted in one death and three injuries. The following

day, jet fighters dropped four bombs on the same village, which detonated harmlessly in a forested area. These attacks, targeting schools, hospitals, and religious structures, have forced many residents to flee their homes.

Salai Ha Aum, CDF-Mindat spokesperson, condemned the military council's actions as genocide and war crimes. The ongoing violence has led to significant destruction, with nearly 30 buildings obliterated between April 1 and May 2 2024. Local and national resistance groups warn of further assaults, urging civilians to take precautions. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Soldiers commit atrocities in Rakhine village, witnesses report

(jb) Eyewitnesses report atrocities by Myanmar soldiers in a raid on Byai Phyu village, Rakhine State. Over 50 villagers were killed, and detainees endured brutal torture, including beatings, burns from petrol, and being forced to drink urine.

The National Unity Government (NUG) claims 51 people were "violently tortured and killed," with the Arakan Army (AA) estimating the death toll to exceed 70. Soldiers targeted villagers for suspected AA support, subjecting them to severe abuse regardless of their responses.

Survivors recounted how soldiers cut off tattoos and burned the wounds, and men were taken away, many still missing. Villagers were held without food or water for two days, and their possessions looted. Women and children were forced to flee to Sittwe for shelter.

The junta denies these allegations, asserting that their actions were for "peace and security." However, the isolation of Rakhine State hampers independent investigation. [BBC]

Myanmar: Junta's money printing crashes currency

(jb) Myanmar’s military junta has printed approximately 30 trillion kyats (USD 11 billion) since its coup, causing the currency's value to plummet, reports the National Unity Government (NUG) and economist Sean Turnell.

NUG's Union Minister for Planning, Finance, and Industry, U Tin Tun Naing, highlighted that this massive

issuance has led to the kyat's depreciation to around 5,000 per USD. This is a stark contrast to the previous National League for Democracy (NLD) regime, which printed only 3.656 trillion kyats in two years.

The junta's excessive money printing has spurred inflation and economic instability. Businesses have been urged to adopt barter systems due to a severe foreign currency shortage. Gold prices have soared to 5.8 million kyats per tical, up from 1.3 million kyats in 2020.

Military spending under the junta has surged, with a projected 5.6 trillion kyats in FY 2023-24. Myanmar's state debt has also risen sharply, reaching 63 percent of GDP from 42 percent in 2020. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Youth join armed resistance amid junta conscription

(jb) Since Myanmar's junta enforced conscription in February 2024, tens of thousands of young adults have joined armed resistance groups rather than serve the military, The Irrawaddy reports. The conscription law mandates at least two years of service for men aged 18-35 and women aged 18-27.

The National Unity Government's People's Defense Force (PDF) and other resistance groups have seen a surge in recruits. Resistance groups, such as the Bamar People's Liberation Army and the Chin National Defense Force, have also reported increased enlistment. [The Irrawaddy]

Philippines: Election body eyes allowing only current photos on candidates' campaign material

(lm) The Commission on Elections (COMELEC) in the Philippines is considering a new policy for the 2025 elections that would require candidates to use only recent photos, taken within the past six months, in their campaign materials. This proposal is part of a broader effort to combat misinformation and the use of AI-generated deepfakes in elections. [abs-cbn]

Philippines: President mandates 'Bagong Pilipinas' hymn after flag ceremonies in government agencies, schools

(tl) Philippines' President R. Marcos Jr. has mandated the recitation of the "Bagong Pilipinas" hymn after flag-raising ceremonies in all national government agencies, government-owned or controlled corporations (GOCCs), and educational institutions, including state universities and colleges (SUCs). Local government units (LGUs) are encouraged to do the same. [Philippine Information Agency] [Rappler] [GMA Network]

"Bagong Pilipinas" (New Philippines) is a branding initiative of the Marcos administration that embodies the principles and vision of governance and leadership promoted by President Marcos Jr.

Philippines: President Marcos suspends RBPMS, PBIS to improve government performance methods

(tl) In the Philippines, President Marcos's administration has suspended the implementation of the Results-Based Performance Management System (RBPMS) and Performance-Based Incentive System (PBIS) in order to streamline and improve government performance methods. These systems were created to standardize performance management and incentives for government employees but have been deemed duplicative and lacking a review mechanism. A technical working group has been tasked with studying and proposing changes to align with the government's internal audit program. The findings are to be submitted to the Office of the President within six months. [ABS-CBN News] [Rappler] [The Philippine Star]

Philippines: Ombudsman suspends Marikina City engineer, six officials over bribery allegations

(tl) In the Philippines, the Office of the Ombudsman has suspended a Marikina City engineer and six other officials for six months due to allegations of soliciting bribes to expedite building permits. This action follows complaints by residents who reported being pressured to pay PHP 430,000 (approximately USD 7,310) in fees for permit approval. Despite paying, their permits were delayed and later revoked, leading to harassment and bureaucratic obstacles. [Rappler] [Malaya Business Insight] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Senate president calls for review of USD 417 million new Senate building

(lm) In the Philippines, Senate President Francis Escudero has called for a review of the new Senate building project in Taguig City, citing its escalating cost as excessive. During a flag-raising ceremony, Escudero informed Senate employees that the move to the new building would be delayed beyond 2025 due to various issues requiring scrutiny. [Inquirer]

Initially budgeted at PHP 8.9 billion (USD 161 million), the cost has risen to PHP 13 billion (USD 235 million), with an additional PHP 10 billion (USD 181 million) needed to complete it, bringing the total to PHP 23 billion (USD 417 million). Escudero directed Senator Alan Cayetano to suspend payments and construction pending a review. While clarifying that he found no irregularities, Escudero expressed shock at the high expenses, suggesting it seemed extravagant, especially amid the country's economic challenges.

Philippines: BIR launches probe into Mayor Guo for possible tax evasion

(ms) In the Philippines, the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) announced on June 7 that it will conduct its own investigation into Alice Guo, the current mayor of the municipality of Bamban, and her connections to Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators (POGOs) for potential tax evasion, following evidence of several unfiled tax returns. This came just days after the Office of the Ombudsman ordered Guo's suspension for up to six months due to graft charges related to allowing illegal POGOs in Bamban [see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1]. [Rappler]

The investigation follows the discovery that a real estate company that is housed along with two POGOs in Guo's compound, failed to file necessary tax returns for 2019, 2021, and 2023. The failure to file tax returns, along with the substantial properties amassed by these entities, raised suspicions of tax evasion. The investigation is conducted alongside a Senate inquiry examining Guo's citizenship, businesses, and links to the raided POGOs.

The POGOs industry has significantly impacted the Philippine economy by generating revenue and creating jobs, primarily through online gambling services targeting foreign customers. However, the rapid growth of POGOs has led to numerous

challenges, including widespread tax evasion, inadequate regulatory oversight, and connections to criminal activities such as money laundering and human trafficking. In response, the Senate has called for a total ban on POGOs, a proposal under review by the Department of Finance. [Philippines News Agency 1]

Meanwhile, authorities rescued 187 workers, including both foreign nationals and Filipinos, in a raid at a POGO center in Pampanga province on June 4. Reports indicated instances of torture and abuse, including beatings and forced dancing. [Philippine News Agency 2]

Philippines: Rights-based approach marks shift in anti-drug campaign, NAPOLCOM vice chair says

(tl) During a House hearing, Alberto Bernardo, the vice chairperson and executive officer of the National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM), highlighted the shift in the Marcos Jr. administration's approach to combating illegal drugs, emphasizing a rights-based perspective. Unlike the previous "drug war," the current "anti-illegal drug campaign" focuses on law enforcement functions that prioritize human rights. Bernardo reassured lawmakers of the commitment to avoid past mistakes, such as extrajudicial killings. [Maharlika NuMedia] [Philippines News Agency]

Under the Marcos Jr. administration, efforts have led to numerous arrests, particularly of high-value targets, and a strong focus on legal actions and rehabilitation programs, according to Bernado. The Philippine National Police (PNP) reported the seizure of nearly PHP 32 billion (roughly USD 544 million) worth of illegal drugs from July 1, 2022, to April 21, 2024.

Philippines: President Marcos Jr. proposes new police legal department to protect police officers

(ms) Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has announced plans to establish a legal department within the Philippine National Police (PNP) to provide legal protection and advice to police officers facing complaints or charges. [Inquirer] [Rappler]

Speaking at a PNP Command Conference, Marcos Jr. highlighted the necessity of an internal defense council

to assist officers without imposing legal fees. He expressed concerns that legal cases against police officers are frequently used as tools for harassment. Critics, including Human Rights Watch, argue that this move prioritizes police protection over addressing victims of police misconduct. They urge the president to ensure justice for victims of police abuse, particularly those impacted by the drug war.

The concept of providing legal aid to police officers is not new. Former President Rodrigo Duterte also supported similar measures, but proposed bills to formalize this support did not pass into law.

Philippines: Over four years later, anti-terror law activists still face legal battle

(tl) Four years after their arrest, seven activists and a bystander, collectively known as the "Cebu 8," continue to face legal battles for protesting against the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 at the University of the Philippines Cebu (UPC). Progressive groups commemorated the arrests with a protest and banner display at the UPC campus on June 5. [Rappler]

The Cebu 8 were arrested during a peaceful protest on June 5, 2020, accused of rallying without a permit and violating quarantine protocols amid the COVID-19 pandemic. A court later dismissed one of the charges, but the charges of violating Article 151 of the Revised Penal Code and local quarantine protocols remain. If convicted, the Cebu 8 plan to appeal to the Supreme Court, challenging the absolute ban on mass gatherings in times of health emergencies as unconstitutional.

Notably, the arresting officers, including members of SWAT, entered the UPC premises in violation of the 1989 UP-DND Accord and the 1992 UP-DILG Accord, which prohibit police and military presence on university grounds without authorization. UPC Chancellor Liza Corro confirmed there was no coordination with or request from the university for police intervention.

Philippines: Police enters Quiboloy compound in Davao City

(lm) On June 10, more than 100 police officers from various Philippine National Police (PNP) units arrived at the compound of the religious organization *Kingdom of*

Jesus Christ in Davao City to serve a warrant against its leader, Apollo Quiboloy. [abs-cbn]

Quiboloy, who has been a spiritual adviser to former President Rodrigo Duterte, is facing multiple abuse and trafficking cases in courts in Davao City and Pasig City. Quiboloy and his followers have denied the accusations, attributing them to disgruntled former members. He has not been seen in public since the warrants for his arrest were issued.

Philippines: Four police officers arrested for kidnapping tourists, demanding ransom

(rm) Four police officers in the Philippines have been arrested for kidnapping four foreign tourists in the capital region and demanding a ransom. Officials have also indicated that ten civilian accomplices involved in the alleged kidnapping remain at large. [Benar News] [ABC News]

The incident involved two officers on motorcycles who stopped a luxury car carrying three Chinese and one Malaysian tourist. The tourists were handcuffed and forced into a van by the officers' armed civilian accomplices. Two Chinese tourists managed to escape and alert authorities. The remaining captives were beaten but released after a ransom of PHP 2.5 million (USD 43,100) was paid. Security camera footage and information from the freed tourists led to the arrest of the four police officers, including a major.

Philippines: Broadcaster association pushes for amendment to better protect journalists in drug-related court cases

(ms) The Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP), an association representing broadcasters in the Philippines, is intensifying its efforts to amend a clause within the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 that obliges journalists to serve as witnesses in drug-related court cases. This push comes as a response to the risks journalists face, including potential contempt charges or even arrest warrants, for failing to appear in court as witnesses. [Rappler]

The provision in question, Section 21 of the drug law, mandates reporters covering law enforcement operations against drug suspects to sign documents and act as witnesses. The KBP addressed broadcast

executives and journalists in Cagayan de Oro, rallying them to petition members of Congress for the removal of this requirement.

KBP revealed that Representative Robert Ace Barbers, chairman of the House committee on dangerous drugs, has indicated support for excluding reporters as witnesses, responding to pressures from media groups.

Philippines: House committee inspects Marawi rehabilitation amid ongoing challenges for IDPs

(tl) In the Philippines, members of a House ad hoc committee conducted a site inspection and public consultation to evaluate the government's rehabilitation efforts in the city of Marawi, the site of a five-month-long siege that took place in 2017 between Philippine government forces and militants affiliated with ISIS. The conflict resulted in extensive damage to the city, with many buildings destroyed or heavily damaged, and a large portion of the population displaced. Additionally, around 360,000 residents were displaced, creating a significant humanitarian crisis. [Politiko] [Philippine News Agency]

Seven years after the Marawi siege, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in temporary shelters are now facing rent payments and eviction threats due to expired land use contracts. Originally set up through agreements between the Task Force Bangon Marawi (TFBM) and landowners, these contracts have lapsed, forcing some IDPs to pay monthly rents ranging from PHP 500 to PHP 2,000 (approximately USD 8.50 to USD 34). [Rappler]

Moreover, officials have noted significant challenges in the rehabilitation process, including housing, electricity, water supply, and sewerage systems. Although 1,500 housing units have been completed, some remain unoccupied. The National Housing Authority aims to build an additional 150 units. There are calls for increased support and livelihood training for IDPs to help them rebuild their lives.

Philippines: Government aims to lower rice prices with tariff cuts, assures continued subsidies amidst farmer concerns

(tl) The Department of Agriculture (DA) in the Philippines hopes for a significant reduction in retail rice prices, potentially by PHP 6 to PHP 7 per kilogram, to help control inflation, following the reduction of tariffs on imported rice from 35 percent to 15 percent. The department anticipates that consumers will feel the price drop by July, given the typical two to three-week delivery time from Vietnam. [Philippine News Agency 1]

However, the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) has criticized this move, calling it a "death blow" to the country's rice farmers. They argue that the tariff reduction undermines the rice industry's stability and farmers' livelihoods, claiming that proper consultation processes were not followed. The FFF is concerned that the increased reliance on volatile global markets will harm domestic production and lead to higher rice prices in the long run. [Business Mirror] [Inquirer.net] [Manila Standard]

It was against this backdrop that Speaker Martin Romualdez assured farmers on June 6 that subsidies for rice production would continue despite expected revenue declines from the reduced tariffs on imported rice. Romualdez emphasized that the tariff cut is intended to mitigate price shocks in the global market and fluctuations in foreign exchange, not to inundate the market with imported rice. Additionally, Romualdez highlighted a bill amending the Rice Tariffication Law as a solution to help lower rice prices. The bill would allow the National Food Authority (NFA) to prioritize purchasing local milled rice, followed by imported rice from accredited importers, and as a last resort, directly import rice with authorization from the Agriculture Secretary. [Philippines News Agency 2]

Philippines: Authorities form technical working group to combat online-black market sale of babies

(tl) Three Philippine law enforcement agencies are forming a technical working group to tackle the online black-market sale of babies. The initiative also aims to address the growing issue of illegal surrogacy services. The Cybercrime Investigation and Coordinating Center (CICC), the National Authority for Child Care (NACC), and the Women and Children Protection Center (WCPC) of the Philippine National Police (PNP) are collaborating to identify and prosecute individuals involved in these illegal activities. [Manila Bulletin] [Philippine News Agency]

Babies are being sold through Facebook groups for prices ranging from PHP 30,000 (USD 510) to PHP 2 million (USD 34,000). This illegal trade, driven by poverty, has become more sophisticated with the use of social media. The agencies have already identified six active Facebook groups engaged in these activities.

Philippines: 76 percent view China as country's 'greatest threat'

(lm) A recent survey by OCTA Research reveals that 76 percent of Filipinos view China as the greatest threat to their country, primarily due to escalating tensions in the South China Sea. This sentiment marks a slight decrease from 79 percent in late 2023 but a significant increase from October 2022, shortly after President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. took office. Additionally, 91 percent of respondents expressed distrust towards China, up from 58 percent at the start of Marcos' administration. [The Diplomat]

The survey also found that only 13 percent of Filipinos believe China has a positive impact on their country, down from 16 percent in December 2023, while 44 percent see no positive impact on the economy, a sentiment that has grown since October 2022.

Singapore: Lee Hsien Yang signals continued support for opposition

(lb) Lee Hsien Yang, the youngest son of Singapore's founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, continues to support the opposition in the city-stsate despite a recent defamation ruling against him. On June 1, Lee Hsien Yang shared an op-ed by Harpreet Singh Nehal, a potential star candidate for the Workers' Party (WP), on Facebook, encouraging support for stronger opposition and independent journalism. [The Independant SG]

After a with his elder brother, former Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, which became public in 2017, Lee Hsien Yang joined the Progress Singapore Party (PSP) and campaigned for them in the 2020 general election, though he did not run himself. He showed interest in the presidential election last year but did not participate. Lee Hsien Yang and his wife are living overseas, partly due to the ongoing dispute and investigations by Singaporean authorities into their conduct.

Singapore: Ruling PAP to create two new groups on mental health, climate change

(lm) Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong announced that the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) will enhance its engagement with Singaporeans by establishing two new groups focusing on mental health and climate change. This initiative is part of the PAP's broader strategy to foster two-way dialogue and address cross-cutting national issues. [The Straits Times]

The PAP will also utilize its government parliamentary committees (GPCs) to better represent Singaporeans' views and improve public communication. Additionally, Wong pledged to increase his personal engagement with the public through regular media interactions and on-ground visits. This initiative is part of a six-month exercise to refresh and strengthen the PAP, which coincides with the party's 70th anniversary.

Singapore: Last offender to plead guilty in USD 2.2 billion money laundering case sentenced

(ms) Wang Dehai, the last of 10 individuals prosecuted in a USD 2.2 billion money laundering case in Singapore, has been sentenced to 16 months in jail after pleading guilty. Wang's case concludes a series of prosecutions, with other defendants receiving jail terms between 13 to 15 months, highlighting the significant issue of money laundering. [Channel News Asia]

The money laundering scheme involved 27 individuals who funneled funds obtained through an illegal remote gambling business in the Philippines into luxury properties and other high-value assets in Singapore. While 10 individuals have been prosecuted, 17 others remain under investigation, linked to approximately USD 2.1 billion in assets. Efforts to trace and prosecute these suspects continue, with some having Interpol Red Notices issued against them [The Strait Times]

Singapore: Citizens aged 75+ to receive MediSave top-ups of up to USD 1,100 in July

(ms) About 300,000 Singaporeans from the Pioneer Generation, defined as those born in 1949 or earlier, will receive MediSave top-ups of up to USD 1,100 in July, as announced by the Ministry of Finance (MOF). These top-ups, amounting to over USD 150 million, are intended to help cover medical expenses, including insurance premiums and hospitalization costs. [Channel News Asia] [The Strait Times]

MediSave, a crucial component of Singapore's healthcare financing system, covers various medical costs, including insurance premiums and outpatient treatments.

Singapore: Two men arrested with over USD 500,000 worth of drugs

(sm) Two men were arrested by the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) in a recent operation, with an estimated USD 514,000 worth of drugs. Investigations into the suspects' drug activities are ongoing and according to the city-state's anti-drug law, anyone found guilty of trafficking more than 250g of methamphetamine or 500g of cannabis could face the mandatory death penalty. [CNA]

Thailand: Main opposition Move Forward Party presents nine-point defense statement

(msz/lm) Thailand's main opposition Move Forward Party (MFP), which is facing disbandment and a lifetime political ban on its leaders, on June 9 presented a nine-point defense which it submitted to the Constitutional Court earlier, prior to a hearing scheduled for June 12. The party, which won the May 2023 general election to Parliament's lower House, faces allegations from the Election Commission (EC) that 44 of its MPs sought to overthrow the constitutional monarchy by proposing amendments to the royal defamation law (Section 112 of the criminal code) [see AiR No. 21, May/2024, 3]. [Nikkei Asia] [X (formerly, Twitter)]

Presenting the defense, Pita Limjaroenrat, the former leader of the party, emphasized that the constitution limits the court's authority to reviewing laws and complaints against officials, which is notable given the court's history of dissolving parties, including the Move Forward Party's predecessor in 2020.

Pita also said that the petition filed by the EC did not follow due process because the MFP was not given an opportunity to defend itself before the case was submitted to the court. The petition was filed after the same court ruled in January that the party must stop advocating changes to the law, which protects the monarchy from criticism by imposing penalties of three to 15 years in jail per offense.

Additionally, Pita maintained that the MFP had no intent to overthrow the monarchy and that the EC failed to warn the party about potential legal issues during the campaign. He also stated that the upcoming court deliberations should not be influenced by the January ruling, adding that legal penalty must be proportionate to the corresponding offense and, if any, should only apply to executive board members at the time of the actions in question.

The fact that the party decided to reveal the contents of its rebuttal statement and its strategy to fight the case against its dissolution, is noteworthy, given that the Constitutional Court had ordered the EC, the MFP, and its executive committee members to refrain from making public statements about the case to avoid influencing public opinion and judicial proceedings. [Bangkok Post] [The Nation Thailand]

However, the MFP has stated that its intention is not to pressure the court or mislead the public but to clarify the case and answer questions. Party officials emphasized that the information they intend to share is not confidential and is included in the party's rebuttal statement to the court. They also mentioned that the party has a contingency plan in case it is disbanded, asserting that all party members share the same political ideology and aspirations regardless of the party's fate. [Thai PBS World]

Thailand: Two-thirds dissatisfied with government's performance, according to poll

(lm) A recent opinion poll conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) on June 4-5, 2024, surveyed 1,310 Thais aged 18 and over to assess their satisfaction with Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin's government, which took office in September 2023. The results indicated widespread dissatisfaction and a lack of confidence in the government's ability to tackle national issues. [Bangkok Post]

Regarding satisfaction with the government's performance over the past nine months, 34.35 percent

of respondents were mildly dissatisfied, citing delays in addressing major issues and a lack of visible change. Meanwhile, 31.69 percent were very dissatisfied, pointing to a total lack of progress and failure to implement the policies promised during the election campaign. In contrast, 25.19 percent were mildly satisfied, noting some economic improvements and visible results from the government's measures, while 7.40 percent were very satisfied, believing the government is determined to improve people's well-being. A small percentage, 1.37 percent, were indifferent or uninterested.

When asked about their confidence in the government's ability to address the country's major issues, 35.95 percent of respondents were not confident at all, seeing no changes or solutions to root problems. Another 35.04 percent were not very confident, feeling the government had only scratched the surface of issues. On the other hand, 22.14 percent were mildly confident, believing the government has the experience and skills to move the country forward, and 5.42 percent were very confident, trusting in the government's determination to solve problems effectively. Again, a small percentage, 1.45 percent, were indifferent or uninterested.

Thailand: Prime Minister Srettha submits explanation to Constitutional Court

(msz/lm) Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has submitted his defense to the Constitutional Court concerning the appointment of Phichit Chuenban as Prime Minister's Office Minister. Srettha, who handed in his defense on June 7, declined to reveal details but stated it was a clarification. [Bangkok Post]

The Constitutional Court had requested Srettha's explanation following a 6-3 vote by the judges to accept a petition from 40 outgoing senators. The petition calls for Srettha's removal from office, citing ethical violations in appointing Phichit, who allegedly lacks the necessary qualifications. The court had given Srettha 15 days to respond.

In related updates, Chaithawat Tulathon, the leader of Thailand's main opposition Move Forward Party (MFP), dismissed speculation that his party might collaborate with the ruling Pheu Thai Party to form a new government if Prime Minister Srettha is found guilty by the Constitutional Court of ethical misconduct regarding the appointment of Phichit. [Thai PBS World]

Chaithawat emphasized that the Move Forward party is focused on long-term political goals and does not engage in short-term political gains. He stated that, given the current political climate, even the formation of a new government might not lead to effective governance. He also noted that the party has never been approached by Pheu Thai.

Both the Pheu Thai and Move Forward parties, along with a few smaller parties, had initially signed a deal to form a coalition government after the May 14th election last year. However, the coalition fell apart when the Move Forward party leader Pita Limjaroenrat's nomination for prime minister did not receive enough support in parliament.

Thailand: Upper House elections off to wobbly start

(bk/lm) Elections in Thailand to the country's parliamentary upper House began on June 9 with concerns that the new election system might not produce the Senate as intended by the charter drafters.

The 2017 constitution stipulates that the new Senate should consist of 200 members selected from 20 professional groups, with each group having 10 seats. The election process involves three phases, starting with intra-group and inter-group elections at the district level on June 9, followed by provincial elections on June 16, and concludes with national-level elections on June 26. Results are expected to be announced in July. Candidates are divided into 20 professional groups and must elect from among themselves, without direct public voting.

The Election Commission (EC) reported that 23,645 senatorial candidates passed the district-level selection process on June 9, advancing to the provincial-level election. Despite only 22 complaints of irregularities, which the EC will investigate within 20 days, the low number of candidates—48,117 instead of the expected 100,000—has raised concerns about the system's effectiveness. Some districts lacked candidates from all 20 groups in the first round of elections.

Notable winners include former Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat, former Election Commissioner Somchai Srisutthiyakorn, and Phanat Tasaneeyanon, former Dean of the Faculty of Law at Thammasat University. In Nakhon Ratchasima, a stronghold for the Chart Pattana Party, several ruling Pheu Thai Party-linked candidates succeeded in the first round of peer-

election. However, in Buri Ram, known for its support of the Bhumjaithai Party, Usanee Chidchob, sister of the party's de facto leader Newin Chidchob, did not advance. [Bangkok Post 2] [Thai PBS World 1] [Thai Enquirer]

However, caretaker Senator Somchai Swangkarn reiterated claims of manipulation in the election process, alleging that individuals were hired to participate solely to vote for candidates backed by political parties or interest groups. He pointed out that the district-level voting results showed some candidates received no votes while others had overwhelming support, which he attributed to a loophole in the organic law governing the election. Somchai suggested that this manipulation would become evident in the provincial-level voting on June 16. [Bangkok Post 3]

Adding to the concerns, the Constitutional Court on June 5 decided to consider two petitions questioning the constitutionality of certain provisions in the organic law governing the election of the 200 new senators. The court's decision was 8:1 in favor of reviewing these petitions, which challenge Sections 36, 40, 41, and 42 of the law in relation to Section 107 of the constitution. Both petitions will be consolidated due to their similarity. The Election Commission and other relevant agencies have been given five days to submit their rebuttals. [Thai PBS World 2]

Despite the petitions, the court unanimously rejected the petitioners' request for an injunction to halt the election process, citing that no damage has occurred and any arising issues can be managed by the EC.

Thailand: Ruling Pheu Thai backtracks on including royal defamation in amnesty bill

(lm) Thailand's ruling Pheu Thai Party has reversed its earlier stance on including violations of Section 112, the royal defamation law, in an amnesty bill. Deputy Prime Minister and Commerce Minister Phumtham Wechayachai indicated that the issue is complex and requires public consensus to prevent future turmoil. [Bangkok Post 1]

Earlier in the week, Somkid Chueakong, a spokesman for the House committee studying amnesty for political prisoners, mentioned that several committee members supported including Section 112 offenses in the amnesty bill. However, Phumtham clarified that the party has not reached a final decision on this proposal

and emphasized the importance of listening to public opinion.

Concerns have arisen that the amendment might benefit former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the de facto Pheu Thai leader, who faces royal defamation charges over comments he made in a 2015 interview with a South Korean newspaper. During the interview, Thaksin allegedly claimed that privy councillors backed the 2014 coup that ousted his sister, Yingluck Shinawatra. The computer crime charge pertains to the dissemination of information deemed a threat to national security.

Last week, Thaksin declared his readiness to confront the charges of insulting the monarchy. Confirming that he will report to prosecutors on June 18, Thaksin expressed confidence in his defense, labeling the case as “baseless”. Meanwhile, Phumtham dismissed claims that the amendment might benefit Thaksin, stating that the government aims to avoid conflict and is seeking the best approach. [Bangkok Post 2]

More recently, Thaksin filed another petition seeking fair treatment in the royal defamation against him. His lawyers claim that the investigators in the case have been influenced by pressure from influential figures, following the May 2014 military coup by the National Council for Peace and Order. They argue that investigators were not free to gather evidence and question witnesses without pressure. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Weed protesters ‘not going anywhere’

(lm) On June 10, around 300 cannabis advocates protested outside Government House in Thailand against the government's plan to relist cannabis as a narcotic, vowing to continue their demonstration until a law controlling cannabis use is enacted. Public Health Minister Somsak Thepsutin acknowledged the protesters' constitutional right to protest but emphasized that the government would keep medicinal use and economic stimulation options open. He assured business operators would have time to adjust if the plant is relisted as a narcotic. [Bangkok Post]

In 2022, Thailand decriminalized cannabis following a campaign promise by the Bhumjaithai Party, which made cannabis legalization a key issue in the 2019 election. This move made Thailand the first Southeast Asian country to decriminalize the plant. However, the decriminalization came before the establishment of

comprehensive legislation to regulate its use, resulting in a legal gray area and raising public concerns about potential abuse, particularly among younger people.

In light of this, the Bhumjaithai Party sponsored a cannabis and hemp bill aimed at providing a legal framework to control and regulate the use of cannabis. This bill passed its first reading in parliament but was ultimately rejected in the second reading, leaving a regulatory gap. With the current Pheu Thai-led government planning to relist cannabis as a narcotic, there is widespread speculation that the regulatory framework may become redundant if the plant is reclassified.

Thailand: New member named to anti-graft body

(lm) Phattarasak Wannasaeng has been appointed as a member of Thailand's National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) by the country's king, succeeding Natthachak Pattamasigh, who retired. The appointment, dated June 4, took immediate effect as of June 8, following endorsement by the caretaker Senate. The NACC is also currently inviting applications for the post of secretary-general, with a deadline of July 8. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Deputy minister's nephew arrested with 'ice'

(lm) The nephew of Thailand's Deputy Interior Minister Chada Thaised was arrested on June 10 at a hotel in Bangkok's Huai Kwang district. Along with the nephew, police apprehended another man and two women. The authorities seized six packets of crystal methamphetamine ("ice"), an 11mm pistol, and six rounds of ammunition from the hotel room. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Slot machine claim spurs probe order from prime minister

(lm) Thailand's Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin has directed the Metropolitan Police Bureau (MPB) to investigate allegations made by a police superintendent who accused his superior, a police major general, of ordering him to allow a gambling ring

to set up slot machines in his jurisdiction. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Bangkok Governor vows investigation into exorbitantly priced gym equipment procurement

(bk) Bangkok Governor Chadchart Sittipunt has acknowledged concerns over unusual procurement patterns for gym equipment at two sports centers managed by City Hall. The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) reportedly spent about THB 10 million (USD 287,000) on 22 pieces of gym equipment for sports centers in Khlong Sam Wa and Chatuchak districts, with prices significantly exceeding typical market rates. The procurement deal was signed before the current administration took office in June 2022. Governor Chadchart has vowed to conduct a thorough investigation to ensure transparency and accountability. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Veteran politician Vatana Asavahame remains abroad despite rumors of return

(lm) Veteran politician Vatana Asavahame, who fled Thailand in 2008 after being convicted for abuse of power, has not returned to the country, according to a source close to his family. Rumors of his return surfaced after a video clip showed him hosting a group of politicians, which was later revealed to have taken place at his residence in a neighboring country. [Bangkok Post]

Vatana, a former deputy interior minister, was sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2008 over the Klong Dan wastewater treatment plant controversy. While one case related to the project has expired due to the 15-year statute of limitations, a second case involving price-fixing has not yet expired.

In the video, Vatana expressed support for Soontorn Pansangtong, a candidate for the Samut Prakan PAO chairmanship, and affirmed that the Asavahame family remains active in politics. Nantida Kaewbuasai, the current head of the PAO and widow of Vatana's son, will not seek re-election when her term ends in December.

Thailand: Supreme Court upholds prison terms, political bans for former Bhumjaithai MPs in proxy voting case

(bk) On June 11, the Supreme Court of Appeal affirmed its decision to permanently revoke the political rights and impose nine-month prison terms on three former Bhumjaithai Party MPs. They were found guilty of allowing fellow lawmakers to utilize their electronic voting cards during deliberations on a fiscal budget bill in 2020. [Thai Enquirer] [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Earlier, in 2023, the Supreme Court's Criminal Division for Political Office-Holders sentenced three former Bhumjaithai Party MPs to nine months in jail and imposed life bans from participating in elections or holding political office, due to their involvement in proxy voting during the 2020 budget bill readings. The MPs were found guilty of dereliction of duty under Section 172 of the Organic Act on Counter Corruption. They argued that their actions would not benefit them, as the draft law could still pass by a government vote. However, the Constitutional Court ordered a fresh vote on the budget proposal due to the proxy voting controversy. This case arose from a lawsuit filed by prosecutors after the National Anti-Corruption Commission found grounds for allegations against the MPs.

Thailand: Government looks to address high levels of domestic abuse

(lm) Thailand's Social Development and Human Security Minister Varawut Silpa-archa is focusing on reducing domestic violence, which constituted nearly 70 percent of all reported violence cases in the past two months. Following a meeting with high-level ministry officials, Varawut announced that the Human Security Emergency Management Center is intensifying efforts to protect citizens facing domestic issues. This includes deploying a 24/7 rapid response task force nationwide. [Bangkok Post]

A recent survey by the center, involving 6,655 individuals receiving state assistance, identified insufficient income, poor domestic relationships, and violence as the primary issues. In April and May, there were 410 reported victims of violence, with 281 cases involving domestic violence. Among the victims, 302 were female, 108 were male, and 223 were children. Violence against children and the elderly occurred

exclusively within the family, mostly involving physical assault.

Thailand: Asian Pride Alliance established to advocate for gender equality, LGBTQ rights

(lm) The Asian Pride Alliance (APA) has been established in Thailand's Phuket province to advocate for gender equality and LGBTQIA2S+ rights in the region. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Over 100 patients escape Siboya Island drug rehab facility, alleging physical abuse

(msz) More than 100 patients escaped from a drug rehabilitation center on Siboya Island in Thailand's Krabi province, claiming they were physically abused during their rehabilitation. Officials reported that the escapees gathered on a nearby beach, trying to leave the island. The police attempted to negotiate with them, but the patients refused to return to the center, alleging severe mistreatment, including beatings that led to deaths. They also claimed that some patients were forced to work as laborers even after completing their rehab programs. Eventually, around 80 patients were taken to Khlong Kanan Police Station to wait for their relatives to bring them home. [Bangkok Post] [The Nation Thailand]

The escape has drawn public attention back to a December 2023 incident when a 31-year-old patient, who had bruises on his body, collapsed and died at the same rehabilitation center. The facility, known as the Pondok Koh Siboya Rehabilitation Centre, is reportedly operated by the Foundation of the Central Islamic Council of Thailand for Education and Orphans.

Thailand: Sharp rise in COVID-19 infections

(msz) COVID-19 cases in Thailand saw a significant increase last week, with 2,762 people hospitalized from June 2-8, averaging 395 cases per day. This marks a 48.3 percent rise from the previous week's 1,863 hospitalizations. The report also noted one fatality each day during these periods. Since January, 23,245

patients have been hospitalized with COVID-19, with 137 deaths reported. [Bangkok Post]

Meanwhile, the Centre for Medical Genomics at Mahidol University is developing a new COVID-19 vaccine using the KP.2 sub-variant, which accounts for 22.5 percent of Covid-19 cases in the United States. This new vaccine aims to maximize efficacy and is awaiting approval from global health organizations, including the WHO.

Thailand: *Suzuki* to stop close 12-year-old plant in Rayong by end of 2025

(lm) Suzuki Motor Corporation announced that it will cease production of cars and trucks in Thailand by the end of 2025 to concentrate resources on manufacturing electric and hybrid vehicles in other locations. The Japanese automaker will continue its sales and after-sales services in Thailand through vehicle imports, including EVs and hybrids, from other plants in the ASEAN region, Japan, and India. [Bangkok Post 1]

The decision to close the 12-year-old plant in Rayong province, which has an annual capacity of 60,000 units and employs approximately 800 people, is part of Suzuki's strategy to promote global carbon neutrality and electrification. This move comes amid increasing competition from Chinese automakers in Thailand and the growing pressure to produce more electric and hybrid vehicles.

The shutdown reflects broader trends in Thailand's automotive industry, which is experiencing factory closures due to economic slowdowns, mergers, and rising operating costs. The Federation of Thai Industries has noted that Malaysia is emerging as a new automotive hub, challenging Thailand's former status as the "Detroit of Asia". In the first half of this year, 360 factories were shut down, leading to the loss of more than 10,000 jobs. The Federation of Thai Industries warned that the number of factory closures might increase if the proposed THB 400 minimum wage is implemented nationwide, potentially making some plants uncompetitive.

However, Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin expressed confidence that other automotive manufacturers would not follow Suzuki Motor Corporation's decision to exit Thailand. Despite Suzuki's exit, Srettha emphasized that the government remains committed to supporting Japanese combustion engine vehicle manufacturers. Meetings with major manufacturers,

including Toyota, Honda, Isuzu, Mazda, and Mitsubishi, have reinforced their confidence in increasing their investment in Thailand. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Ad hoc House committee probing Land Bridge project wants more groundwork

(lm) An ad hoc House committee has advised the Thai government to establish a dedicated agency and conduct more public hearings before commencing construction on the Land Bridge megaproject, which centers around the construction of a transportation link connecting the Andaman Sea at Ranong with the Gulf of Thailand at Chumphon. The committee presented its recommendations to the Cabinet, emphasizing the need for clear project definitions, investment models, development guidelines, and anticipated benefits. [Bangkok Post 1]

Specifically, it urged the government to ensure community participation and transparency regarding environmental impacts and land expropriation. They recommended learning from the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) to identify potential obstacles and solutions. Public opinion should be gathered, and relevant agencies should provide comprehensive information to the public. Economically, the government should utilize modern technology to attract foreign investment.

Transport Minister Suriya Jungrungreangkit reported significant interest from foreign investors, particularly from Dubai and China, following overseas roadshows. He expressed confidence in the project's success and mentioned that the Southern Special Economic Zone bill is expected to be submitted in the next parliamentary session, with contractors' bids anticipated by the end of 2025. Construction is slated to begin immediately after the bidding process concludes.

However, while Prime Minister Srettha promotes the project as a key economic driver, locals, including ethnic groups and sea gypsies, worry about land expropriation, environmental degradation, and disruptions to their livelihoods. Public consultations have revealed a sharp divide, with some supporting the economic benefits and others fearing adverse environmental impacts.

A case in point, locals on Koh Phayam, an island 17 kilometers off the Andaman Sea coast in Ranong province, fear that the proposed Land Bridge project

could negatively impact the island's pristine environment and traditional way of life. The island, known for its unspoiled forests and beaches, has been a model of sustainable tourism, contributing significantly to Ranong's economy. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Government seeks greater control over central bank amid policy disagreements

(bk) In Thailand, Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin's administration is reportedly considering appointing an ally as the central bank board chairman when the current chairman's term ends in September, as the administration seeks more control over the Bank of Thailand (BoT) amid recurring policy disagreements. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bloomberg]

Among the candidates being considered are Kittiratt Na-Ranong, former Finance Minister under Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, and Supavud Saicheua, an advisor to the Finance Minister of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's cabinet and recently appointed chairman of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC). [The Nation]

While not empowered to directly dictate monetary policy, the chairman, as a member of the BoT Board, holds the powers and duties to assess the performance of BoT Governor as well as to issue regulations on the nomination, consideration, and selection of external experts joining the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), pursuant to Section 25 of the Bank of Thailand Act.

The clash between a Thaksin-linked ruling party and the central bank is not unprecedented. In 2001, M.R. Chatu Mongol Sonakul, the 19th BoT Governor, was ousted by the Thai Rak Thai (i.e. the PTP's great predecessor) led government, after disputes over the management approach for the Thai baht. In 2013, then-Finance Minister Kittiratt publicly urged the central bank to cut the policy interest rate.

Against the backdrop of ongoing political uncertainties and concerns about the government seeking more control over the Bank of Thailand, the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) index, dropped to a four-year low on June 10. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Central bank likely to keep policy interest rate unchanged

(bk) The Bank of Thailand's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) looks to keep the policy interest rate unchanged at 2.50 percent at its meeting on June 12 due to a sharp rise in domestic inflation in May and the prediction that the US Federal Reserve will maintain its benchmark interest rate at the current range of 5.25-5.50 percent at its two-day meeting on June 11-12. [Bangkok Post]

In May, headline inflation surged to 1.54 percent, exceeding the market's anticipated rate of 1.2 percent and marking the second consecutive month of positive growth after a 0.19 percent increase in April, driven by the low base effect from last year's electricity tariff and escalating food prices. This higher-than-expected inflation rate is the first since April 2023 to align with the Bank of Thailand's target range of 1-3 percent.

Critics note that, with inflation making an earlier-than-expected return to the target range and ongoing supply-side issues causing prolonged spikes in energy prices, there is less justification for a rate cut. In addition, considering that the Fed is projected to keep US rates elevated longer, the BoT will probably concentrate on stabilizing the baht.

Thailand: Pension lottery scheme proposed to boost retirement savings and NSF membership

(bk) Thailand's Finance Ministry is proposing to launch a pension lottery scheme in 2025 to bolster retirement savings, wherein lottery ticket purchases would contribute to the National Savings Fund (NSF). NSF Members, namely those who are insured under Section 40 of the Social Security Fund, and informal workers are eligible to buy up to a monthly total of THB 3,000 in digital tickets, each worth THB 50. Their purchase costs will be deposited directly into their NSF accounts, with prizes drawn weekly. The prizes include five first prizes of THB 1 million each and 10,000 second prizes of THB 1,000 each. Upon retirement at age 60, individuals can withdraw their accumulated savings. [Bangkok Post] [Thai PBS World]

The initiative, aiming to address inadequate retirement funds among low-income earners, could potentially increase NSF membership to 16-17 million from the current 3 million. The scheme, suggested by the ruling

Pheu Thai Party, is seen as a cost-effective means to encourage informal workers to join the NSF.

Thailand: Tourist arrivals surge in first 5 months; Prime Minister touts Chiang Mai as startup hub

(bk/wt) Nearly 15 million foreign tourists visited Thailand in the first five months of this year, marking a 38 percent increase compared to the same period last year, with Chinese tourists making up the largest group. This surge in arrivals has generated over THB 700 billion in revenue. By the year's end, the government expects a total of 35 million foreign visitors. [Bangkok Post 1] [Royal Thai Government]

As part of Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin's efforts to advance the tourism industry as a key economic driver in accordance with his "Ignite Thailand" development agenda, where he seeks to propel eight key sectors towards regional hub status [see AiR No. 9, February/2024, 4], the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, the Ministry of Labour, and the Tourism Council of Thailand will host the "Ignite Tourism Thailand: TAT Skill Factory" training event on June 15 and 16, to improve the sector's human resources.

On June 6, the premier visited Agoda's Thai office, discussing future tourism growth and recovery plans with its executives. [X (formerly, Twitter) 1] He also met with Airports of Thailand, Thai Airways International, and VietJet Air to explore increasing flight frequencies and offering fare discounts.

In a related development, during his weekend trip to Chiang Mai from June 7-8, Thailand's northern province known as the ruling Pheu Thai Party's political strong base, Prime Minister Srettha touted it as a future global hub for startups and digital nomads as it ranks among the top 10 destinations on the Nomad List, hosting a community of over 5,000 software developers. He noted the government's plans to support the startup ecosystem in Chiang Mai by providing matching funds and organizing hackathons. The anticipated establishment of the Apple Academy there will moreover offer expanded employment opportunities for young talents with the tech giant. [Thai Enquirers] [X 2]

Meanwhile, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is seeking partnerships with at least 11 international airlines to strengthen both rising and mature markets in the second half of the year. The agency plans to focus on increasing cooperation with airlines,

particularly those serving Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas, to improve seat capacity and manage high airfares. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Thai Oil expects crude price to stabilize

(lm) Thai Oil Plc, Thailand's largest oil refinery, anticipates that global crude oil prices will stabilize in the second half of 2024, remaining similar to last year's average of USD 82 per barrel, projected to range between USD 80-90 per barrel. The expected stabilization is due to an increase in oil supply and ongoing but manageable geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: More than 14,000 con artists arrested on crackdown on online scams

(lm) From October 1, 2023, to April 30 this year, the Royal Thai Police arrested 14,826 individuals involved in online scams, including call center scams, investment fraud, and illegal online gambling. This extensive operation led to the freezing of THB 4.56 billion (approximately USD 132 million) in assets. Discussions are ongoing with the Anti-Money Laundering Office regarding the distribution of these funds among victims. [The Straits Times]

The crackdown followed directives from Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin and acting national police chief Kittirat Panpet. The authorities have focused on three key areas: apprehending criminals, disrupting their infrastructure, and dismantling financial networks.

The operation also involved cooperation with the National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission to investigate the illegal installation of signal transmission equipment along the border, which was used to facilitate these illegal activities.

Thailand: Cabinet approves VAT tax on all imported goods valued over THB 1

(wt) Thailand’s Cabinet has approved a Ministry of Finance proposal to impose value-added tax (VAT) on all imported goods valued over THB 1 (approximately USD 0.03). This measure aims to curb the influx of cheap imports, particularly from China, and support

local producers affected by low-priced online products. [Bangkok Post]

The new threshold will take effect 15 days after its announcement in the Royal Gazette and remain in place until December 31. The government will review the policy's impact before deciding on an extension.

Currently, only imported goods valued over THB 1,500 (approximately USD 44) are subject to VAT. This change is part of the government's broader effort to create a fairer market for local businesses. The long-term plan includes amending the Revenue Code to address these issues permanently.

Thailand: Securities and Exchange Commission approves first bitcoin exchange-traded fund

(wt) The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has approved One Asset Management (ONEAM) to launch Thailand's first spot Bitcoin exchange-traded fund (ETF), which is limited to wealthy and institutional investors. The fund, named ONE Bitcoin ETF Fund of Funds Unhedged (ONE-BTCETFOF-UI), was offered from May 31 to June 6 and has an investment risk level of eight, which indicates a high-risk investment category. [Bangkok Post]

Bitcoin's market capitalization stands at USD 1.4 trillion, with a limited supply of 21 million coins and increasing demand. Historically, Bitcoin has shown an average annual return of 124 percent with high volatility. ONEAM suggests investors allocate 5 percent of their portfolios to Bitcoin to achieve an annual return of 8.90 percent.

Thailand: Authorities launch ‘Samui Model’ operation to investigate land encroachment, illegal ventures

(bk/lm) In Thailand, the Internal Security Operation Command (ISOC) Region 4, a government agency responsible for national security and internal stability, has collaborated with local authorities to investigate land encroachment on Koh Samui island in Surat Thani province, focusing on 600 villas built on the island's hilltops. [Bangkok Post 1]

Maj Gen Anusorn Ourai, deputy commander of the Fourth Army Region, chaired a meeting to discuss the

"Samui Model" operation aimed at combating environmental vandalism, illegal land ownership, and illicit business activities by foreign investors using Thai nominees. Maj Gen Anusorn announced that ISOC Region 4 will take legal action next week against two entities owning rented villas for violating these laws.

A source revealed that out of 17,000 registered legal entities in Surat Thani province, 9,000 have a single authorized signatory, many of which are based on Koh Samui and Koh Phangan islands and registered through Thai nominees with foreign signatories.

Simultaneously, the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) and other agencies raided a law and accounting firm in Phuket, allegedly owned by foreigners and registered through Thai nominees. This firm is suspected of facilitating up to 60 illegal business ventures in Thailand, including hotels, restaurants, and real estate properties, with a total cash flow of THB 200 million (USD 5.4 million).

In a related operation, the Economic Crime Suppression Division (ECSD) arrested 231 suspects, including 98 foreign nationals and 37 Thai nominees, and seized assets worth over THB 1.5 billion. The crackdown, prompted by local complaints about foreigners, predominantly Russians, purchasing properties and operating businesses, revealed a significant influx of Russians since the Russia-Ukraine war, with 59,717 Russians entering Phuket and 1,603 new businesses registered. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Woman falls to death from Pattaya condo, fifth such incident this month

(lm) A woman of unknown nationality fell to her death from her condominium room in Pattaya city in the early hours of June 8. This is the fifth such incident in Chon Buri province's beach town this month. [Bangkok Post]

Officers are currently inspecting the woman's room and reviewing security camera footage to determine the cause of the incident, suspecting she fell from her room. This tragic event follows four similar incidents in Pattaya earlier this month, including a 23-year-old Thai man who fell from a hotel on June 1, a 38-year-old Russian man who fell from a condominium on June 3, a 43-year-old American man who fell from a hotel balcony on June 4, and a 57-year-old German man who fell from a hotel on June 5.

Thailand: Revenue Department considers new overseas income tax rules

(lm) Thailand's Revenue Department is considering amendments to tax laws to collect taxes on income earned abroad by individuals, regardless of whether the income is brought into Thailand. Kulaya Tantitemit, the department's director-general, stated that the new system would be based on the principle of worldwide income, encompassing all income earned globally, including from employment, self-employment, investments, rental properties, royalties, and other sources. [Bangkok Post]

Currently, the proposal is still under discussion, and there is no specified timeline for its implementation. If enacted, this would mark a significant shift from the current rules. Since January 1, Thailand has required individuals who meet the 180-day tax residency requirement to pay taxes on foreign income when it is brought into the country, irrespective of when it was earned.

Expats in Thailand have expressed concerns about the tax treatment of pension income from previous employment brought into Thailand. Countries that have agreements with Thailand to prevent double taxation should, in theory, protect such income from being taxed twice. However, debates about the interpretation of these laws continue.

Thailand: Paraquat-led farm chemical ban a hit

(lm) Thailand's efforts to ban harmful herbicides and pesticides like paraquat and chlorpyrifos, and limit the use of glyphosate, have shown positive results in improving food safety, as highlighted in the seminar "A Decade for Driving to Food Safety." [Bangkok Post]

Prokchon Usap, coordinator of the Thai Pesticide Alert Network (Thai-Pan), reported that agrochemical imports decreased from 128 million kg in 2017 to 113 million kg in 2022. Additionally, the incidence of health issues related to agrochemical use dropped from 22.75 cases per 100,000 people in 2017 to 8.72 per 100,000 in 2023.

A significant improvement was noted in contamination levels, with zero hazardous chemical contamination found in research samples after the ban, compared to

26.6 percent contamination in 2019. Public health expenditure related to agrichemical-induced diseases is expected to decrease by over THB 48 billion (approx. USD 1.3 billion) in the coming years.

Thai-Pan's monitoring of agrochemical use in exported fruit and vegetables from 2012 to 2022 revealed that contamination levels had decreased from 50 percent to 20 percent. The organization plans to push for a total ban on four types of agrochemicals: carbonate, organophosphate, organochlorine, and pyrethroids.

Improved laboratory capacity now allows for testing around 500 chemicals, contributing to the reduction of chemical contamination in produce. In 2016, 60 percent of samples were tainted, but this figure dropped to 51 percent in 2022.

Thailand: Selection panel to decide on Gripen or F-16 offers

(lm) The Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) is setting up a selection committee this month to decide whether to purchase Sweden's Gripen fighter jets or the F-16 aircraft from the United States. This decision is part of a THB 19 billion (USD 513 million) plan to acquire four new fighter jets. According to Air Force Commander ACM Phanphakdee Phatthanakul, the details are nearly complete, but the RTAF remains open to additional proposals to ensure the best deal. [Bangkok Post]

ACM Phanphakdee and a working panel visited Sweden and the US last month for discussions with Swedish supplier SAAB and American manufacturer Lockheed Martin. The RTAF's chief-of-staff and the Office of the Comptroller are prepared to defend the procurement plan before the House committee vetting the 2025 fiscal year spending plan.

ACM Phanphakdee assured that the procurement plan would adhere to the government's offset policy, which requires suppliers of military hardware to offer reciprocal economic benefits in bilateral trade. A source close to the matter indicated that the RTAF is likely to choose the Gripen E/F fighter jets, as the Swedish supplier's proposal includes grants for military training, maintenance, and replacement of the Erieye radar system in its Saab 340 aircraft. The RTAF previously acquired 12 Gripen fighters in 2013, though one was lost in a crash four years later.

This procurement is part of the RTAF's white paper outlining its development goals, including plans to acquire a new squadron of fighter jets in the next fiscal

year starting October 1, and several all-domain development projects.

Vietnam: Legislator appoints new public security minister

(lm) Vietnam's parliament, the National Assembly, has appointed Senior Lt. Gen. Luong Tam Quang as Minister of Public Security for the 2021-2026 tenure. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh proposed Quang's name, and he was the sole candidate in a closed vote. Quang, 58, previously served as deputy minister of public security and is a member of the Communist Party Central Committee. He succeeds To Lam, who was relieved from the position on May 21 after being elected state president. [Radio Free Asia]

Observer commented that Quang's appointment strengthens To Lam's influence, suggesting that it was part of a strategic plan. Reports of a meeting on leadership positions within the Ministry of Public Security, which involved key personnel and police heads, hinted at To Lam's continued influence as the committee's secretary.

Quang, from Hung Yen province, graduated from Vietnam's Public Security Academy and has held various roles within the ministry, including assistant to the deputy minister, chief of staff, and spokesperson. In 2019, he became deputy minister and led the Security Investigation Agency. The ministry currently has four deputy ministers: Senior Lt. Gen. Tran Quoc To, Lt. Gen. Le Quoc Hung, Lt. Gen. Nguyen Van Long, and Lt. Gen. Le Van Tuyen.

Vietnam: Stat media announces Vietnam tycoon sentenced to death may face new charges

(wn) Truong My Lan, the chair of major developer Van Thinh Phat, who was sentenced to death for her involvement in a multi-billion fraud case, may now face prosecution for money laundering.

On June 5, investigators recommended prosecuting Lan and 33 others for fraudulent appropriation of assets, money laundering, and illegal cross-border currency trafficking. Lan, through four businesses, issued 25 bond packages valued at over VND 30 trillion (USD 1.17 billion) to raise money and subsequently misappropriate it. This recommendation follows the

second phase of an investigation into Lan and her accomplices for wrongdoings at her group and Saigon Commercial Bank (SCB). [VietnamPlus] [Al Jazeera] [The Star]

In the first phase, Lan was tried in Ho Chi Minh City and sentenced to death for causing losses of VND 677 trillion (USD 26.6 billion) – equivalent to 6 percent of the country's economy – to SCB. Lan, who denied the charges against her, has filed an appeal against her death sentence.

Lan is among the most high-profile business figures ensnared in a crackdown on corruption named Blazing Furnace. The anti-corruption campaign, initiated in 2016 but gaining momentum in recent years, has been linked to the resignations of two presidents and has resulted in hundreds of officials being disciplined or jailed.

Vietnam: Prominent journalist arrested over social media posts

(wn) Vietnamese authorities recently arrested prominent independent journalist Truong Huy San, also known by his pen name Huy Duc, for "abusing democratic freedoms" through his Facebook posts, which allegedly violated state interests and the rights of organizations and individuals. San's critical Facebook posts included comments on the concentration of power within the Ministry of Public Security and criticisms of the anti-corruption campaign led by Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong. Alongside San, lawyer Tran Dinh Trien was also arrested on similar charges. [Voice of America] [Jurist News]

Human rights organizations, including Reporters Without Borders and the Committee to Protect Journalists, have condemned the arrests and called for San's release, highlighting the ongoing repression of journalists in the country. Vietnam ranks low on the World Press Freedom Index, reflecting the harsh environment for journalists and the severe restrictions on freedom of expression.

Vietnam: Authorities intensify repression of Khmer Krom, activists say

(lm) Authorities in southern Vietnam have intensified their harassment of Khmer Krom activists who

advocate for the rights of the ethnic Cambodian community. Nearly 1.3 million Khmer Krom face severe restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, movement, and religion. [Radio Free Asia]

Khmer Krom activist Trieu Sieu was denied a passport by Soc Trang provincial police, citing his activities promoting human rights as the reason for the travel ban. Sieu, involved in spreading the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, faced interrogation over his online activities and was linked to activist Danh Minh Quang, who was imprisoned for "abusing democratic freedoms."

The police and the Immigration Management Department declined to comment on Sieu's case. The Vietnamese law allows for travel bans on grounds of national security or criminal suspicion.

Additionally, Buddhist monk Kim Som Rinh was expelled from his temple and ostracized for promoting human rights and supporting victims of injustices, including land confiscation cases involving Khmers. He stated that authorities oppose any discussion of indigenous rights and the use of symbols like the Khmer Krom flag.

Other Khmer Krom individuals were summoned by local police for their involvement in activities related to human rights and indigenous rights.

Vietnam: Activist released three months early

(lm) Vietnamese human rights activist Huynh Thuc Vy has been released from prison three months early, ending her 33-month sentence for "insulting the national flag." The 39-year-old founder of Vietnam Women for Human Rights was initially sentenced in 2018 for spraying paint on a Vietnamese flag and posting the picture on Facebook. Her sentence was delayed due to pregnancy and caring for a young child but was enforced in November 2021, despite her youngest child being under three years old. [Radio Free Asia]

Vy is the daughter of former political prisoner Huynh Ngoc Tuan, who was imprisoned for 10 years starting in 1992 for sending a political book abroad.

Vietnam: Animal welfare group calls for end to dog and cat meat trade

(lm) A global animal welfare organization, Four Paws, has launched a campaign in Ho Chi Minh City, Danang, and Hanoi, advocating for the end of the dog and cat meat trade in Vietnam. The campaign aims to educate the public about the cruelty involved in this trade and the health risks associated with consuming the meat, such as rabies and other diseases. [Radio Free Asia]

Although the sale and consumption of dog meat are legal in Vietnam, the government had banned cat meat consumption in 1998 but lifted the ban in 2020. Four Paws reports that approximately 6 million dogs and cats are annually caught, transported, and slaughtered for meat in Vietnam, with many animals being stolen from communities or taken as strays.

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Australia, China seek bigger ties with Solomon Islands

(rl) On June 6, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong emphasized Canberra's desire for deeper ties with Solomon Islands, stressing a region where decisions are made "without fear."

Australia, the largest development partner for Solomon Islands, has sent senior officials to meet Manele since his election. Wong, during her visit, pledged USD 3.4 million for infrastructure in 40 schools. Manele's government is reviewing security

cooperation, with Australia providing policing support for recent national elections.

This follows the visit of China's special envoy for Pacific Island countries affairs Qian Bo to Honiara to meet the new Prime Minister, Jeremiah Manele. Manele, elected as Prime Minister in April, has clearly vocalized that he will continue a strong relationship with China. [BBC] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China]

China, which has a security pact with Solomon Islands, reaffirmed its "special relationship" and ongoing support in various sectors since the nation switched diplomatic ties from Taiwan to Beijing in 2019. [Reuters]

China signs Central Asian railway deal with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan

(rl) On June 6, China signed an agreement for a railway linking it with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, marking a significant step in its Belt and Road Initiative. President Xi Jinping described the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway as a strategic project that underscores the three countries' commitment to cooperation and development. For China, the agreement is another step to to expand its connection with Eurasian countries.

The deal, which Xi hailed as "a show of determination," establishes a legal framework for constructing the railway. Kyrgyzstan President Sadyr Japarov and Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev also praised the project.

Japarov highlighted the 523-kilometer railway's potential to become a new transport link from Asia to Europe and the Persian Gulf, boosting regional connectivity and trade. Mirziyoyev noted its significance as the shortest land route from China to Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, aligning with the long-term interests of the involved states. [AA]

The USD 8 billion rail link will start in Kashgar, Xinjiang, traverse southwest Kyrgyzstan, and end in Andijon, Uzbekistan. It is expected to reduce the freight journey between China and Europe by 559 miles, offering a faster and cheaper alternative to routes passing through Russia.

Initially proposed in the 1990s, the project faced delays due to technical, political, and geopolitical challenges. While Russia initially showed reluctance, it now

supports the project, relying more on China for trade amidst Western economic sanctions over the Ukraine conflict. [Reuters]

U.S. proposal for UN Gaza ceasefire resolution passes despite initial dispute from China and Russia

(rl) June 10, the United Nations Security Council approved a U.S.-drafted ceasefire resolution to end eight months of conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. The resolution, endorsed by President Joe Biden, needed at least nine votes without any vetoes from the U.S., France, Britain, China, or Russia. Despite initial concern from Russia and China, China did not oppose, and Russia abstained.

The US draft resolution for a Gaza ceasefire, proposed by President Biden, includes a three-phase approach: a six-week ceasefire with an initial exchange of hostages and prisoners, followed by the complete release of hostages and Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, and concluding with major reconstruction efforts in the region. It also includes a permanent end to hostilities and a multi-year reconstruction plan for Gaza.

While Hamas welcomed the resolution, Israel's commitment remains uncertain, as recent events have reinforced Prime Minister Netanyahu's stance against a ceasefire. The EU has urged both parties to accept and implement the proposal.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, visiting Israel, highlighted the complexities of achieving lasting peace, warning of potential negative outcomes if a ceasefire is not maintained. [NBC] [euronews]

Japan approves treaty for joint fighter jet development with UK and Italy

(sh) On June 5, Japan's parliament approved an international treaty to establish an organization managing the joint development of a next-generation fighter jet by Japan, Britain, and Italy.

The treaty received majority approval in the House of Councilors, with support from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Komeito, and the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan. The House of Representatives approved it last month.

The joint project, named the Global Combat Air Program (GCAP), will create the GCAP International Government Organization (GIGO), headquartered in London. A Japanese national is set to lead the organization initially. GIGO will handle contracts with companies, streamlining operations across the three countries.

The envisioned sixth-generation fighter jet will succeed Japan's F-2 and aims for completion by fiscal 2035. The countries will continue discussions on the jet's performance and design, with Japan focusing on advanced air-to-air combat and networking capabilities. [Japan Times]

Japanese, U.S., and South Korean coast guards conduct first joint drill

(rl) On June 6, Japan, the U.S., and South Korea conducted the first trilateral coast guard exercise named "Freedom Edge", following a meeting of their defense chiefs at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2024 in Singapore (see AiR No. 22, May/2024, 4).

The drill involved patrol vessels and helicopters from each country, focusing on search and rescue operations near Maizuru, Kyoto prefecture. The scenario simulated rescuing crew members from a South Korean ship that caught fire after a collision.

During their talks on the sidelines of the Shangri-La defense forum U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, Japan Minister of Defense Minoru Kihara Minoru, and South Korea Minister of National Defense Shin Won-sik reaffirmed their commitment to countering North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, condemning its recent missile tests and satellite launches as violations of UN resolutions. They also criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine and China's maritime claims in the South China Sea.

In addition, during his visit to South Korea, US Indo-Pacific Command commander Adm. Samuel Paparo reiterated the US commitment to a strong defense relationship with South Korea and trilateral cooperation with Japan (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1). [USNI News] [Reuters] [AP]

In August last year U.S. President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and South Korea President Yoon Suk-yeol agreed during their meeting at Camp David to enhance security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region (see AiR No. 34, August/2023, 4).

U.S., Japan, South Korea plan trilateral coordination

(sh) On Jun 10, U.S. State Department officials announced that the U.S., Japan, and South Korea would decide on the location, size, and functions of a planned permanent body to oversee trilateral diplomatic cooperation later this year.

This decision followed a May 31 meeting between U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Masataka Okano, and South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun. (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1) Held informally at Campbell's retreat in Virginia, the diplomats discussed various regional and global issues. The three nations aim to create a coordinating body to ensure the smooth execution of their diplomatic engagements. An official emphasized the growing strength of the trilateral relationship compared to recent years.[Nikkei Asia]

Mongolia to cooperate with ADB and Japan on improving education

(dql) Mongolia is partnering up with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan to improve the lives of children with disabilities by making the country's schools more inclusive.

Under the Support for Inclusive Education Project, a partnership between ADB and the Japan Fund for Prosperous and Resilient Asia and the Pacific, Mongolia is crafting inclusive educational approaches, with enhancing personnel capacity, infrastructure, and learning materials as prioritized. [ADB]

South Korean human rights group demands stop of China's forced repatriation of North Korean defectors

(ac) South Korean human rights groups National Alliance against Forced Repatriation of North Korean Defectors, Movement for Investigating Truth about Forced Repatriation of North Korean Defectors, and Esther Prayer Movement held a press conference on June 8 to condemn the Chinese government for forced repatriations of North Korean defectors and demanded China to apologize to the world for

collaborating with North Korea's abuse of human rights.

The human rights groups instigated that China should exercise its influences as member of the U.N Human Rights Council to improve human rights issues in North Korea. [The Christian Post]

South Korea and Africa vow to strengthen cooperation at summit

(ac) On June 4-5, South Korea held its largest multilateral meeting in Seoul with delegations from 48 African countries, representatives from the African Union, and the African Development Bank gathering at the Korea-Africa Summit to discuss cooperations and partnerships.

The summit emphasized cooperations and solidarity under three pillars: shared growth, sustainability, and solidarity. Multiple conferences were held to address wide ranges of topics, including economics and trade, sustainable development, and challenges such as clean energy, climate change and health security. Key initiatives adopted at the summit included:

Economic and trade

South Korea and Africa agreed to strength mineral trade. The South Korean Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy signed 12 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) in the areas of mineral trade and investments with the African counterparts. Additionally, the two sides agreed to launch discussions on creating the Korea-Africa Economic Collaboration Committee, paving the way for a more comprehensive and sustainable partnership. The Korea International Trade Association (KITA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the office of the African Continental Free Trade Area to bolster this initiative. South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol also pledged USD 14 billion in export financing to promote trade and investments for South Korean firms in Africa.

Development aid

Yoon also pledged to increase South Korea's official development assistance (ODA) fund to Africa from USD 5 billion to USD 10 billion. South Korea and Africa recognized the importance of educations and vocational training on digital skills.

During a meeting on the sidelines of the Summit between South Korean Education Minister Lee Ju-ho and Uganda's Vice President Jessica Epel Alupo, both countries discussed to deepen cooperation, with Lee reaffirming South Korea's wish to expand infrastructure for education and research including establishing training schools and scholarship programs.

Peacekeeping and security

South Korea emphasized its support of peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts in Africa. The summit addressed concerns on the situations in the Gaza Strip and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Sustainable development

The summit reaffirmed the importance of ensuring sustainability and achieving climate change goals, with commitment to addressing sustainable agricultural, health security, and clean energy. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald1] [ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs] [African Development Bank Group] [The Korea Herald2]

South Korea discusses bilateral ties, economic cooperation with Peru, Honduras

(ms) Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul held talks with his counterparts from Peru and Honduras on June 9 to discuss bilateral relations and economic cooperation. The discussions were part of a multilateral forum on South Korea-Latin America cooperation.

In his meeting with Peru's Foreign Minister Javier Gonzalez-Olaechea Franco, Cho highlighted the expanding defense partnership between the two countries and promoted South Korea's FA-50 light attack aircraft. Gonzalez-Olaechea Franco expressed interest in further developing defense cooperation and attracting South Korean investment in Peru's electric vehicle and battery sectors. Additionally, the two countries signed a climate change partnership agreement, committing to work towards carbon neutrality in various industries.

Cho also met with Honduras' Foreign Minister Enrique Reina. They discussed ongoing South Korean development projects in Honduras and expressed hopes for continued cooperation in agriculture and forestry. Reina showed interest in South Korean participation in large infrastructure projects to

modernize Honduran ports and build regional railways.

These meetings coincide with President Yoon Suk Yeol's weeklong trip to Central Asia, aiming to expand cooperation in critical minerals and other key sectors. Yoon's itinerary includes state visits to Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, where he will engage in summits and business forums.

The foreign ministry stated that Yoon's trip aims to create new business opportunities for South Korean companies and diversify cooperation areas, including climate change response and technology. The government plans to establish a summit with leaders from all five Central Asian countries next year. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea to hold meeting on North Korea's human rights situation during its UNSC presidency

(ac) South Korea has officially began its rotating UN Security Council (UNSC) presidency on June 3 and has announced its plan to hold an open meeting on North Korea's human rights issues and a high-level debate on cybersecurity on June 20. South Korea also seeks to address North Korea's nuclear threats during its presidency in the UNSC.

South Korea asserts that North Korea's nuclear threats are closely intertwined with North Korea's human rights abuse. [Yonhap News]

Taiwanese investments in NSP countries soars in first quarter of 2024

(jp) Taiwan has seen a significant surge in its investments in countries targeted by its "New Southbound Policy" (NSP), with a 92.1 percent increase in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period last year, according to the Office of Trade Negotiations (OTN). The NSP, launched in 2016 by President Tsai Ing-wen's administration, aims to diversify Taiwan's economic partnerships and reduce reliance on China by fostering closer ties with 18 countries, including the 10 ASEAN members, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Australia, and New Zealand.

In the first quarter, Taiwanese investors committed approximately USD 2.72 billion across 80 projects, mainly in Singapore, Vietnam, and Thailand. The OTN said bilateral trade with NSP countries reached USD 42 billion, an 11.9 percent increase from the previous year. Taiwan's exports to these countries surged by 28.6 percent to USD 26.1 billion, while imports fell 7.7 percent to USD 15.9 billion, resulting in a USD 10.2 billion trade surplus. Agricultural trade totaled USD 1.5 billion, up 2.7 percent from a year earlier. Taiwanese agricultural exports to NSP countries grew by 11.7 percent to USD 330 million

Taiwanese investors secured two engineering project bids worth USD 255,116. Taiwan hosted 15 researchers from NSP countries or those studying issues in those countries and welcomed 33,907 students from these countries for higher education. To address teacher shortages in overseas compatriot schools, the Executive Yuan approved subsidies for hiring 129 teachers, focusing on northern Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Brunei. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan's Ocean Affairs Council Minister calls for regional cooperation against Chinese maritime expansion

(jp) Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling urged regional partners to unite against Chinese maritime expansionism during the International Conference on Sea Lane Security in Taipei. The conference gathered security experts and officials from Taiwan, the US, the UK, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, India, and the Philippines to explore the role of new technologies in enhancing maritime monitoring and response capabilities, and to discuss the importance of international cooperation.

Experts also stressed the need for increased freedom of navigation transits in the Taiwan Strait to counter Chinese military activities, after a Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) navy ship reportedly sailed east of the Taiwan Strait's median line to monitor a passing Turkish corvette.

Ho Cheng-hui, CEO of Kuma Academy, a Taiwanese non-profit civil defense organization, emphasized the necessity of demonstrating shared values such as freedom of navigation to counter authoritarian expansion. He argued that failure to act could embolden China and other authoritarian states to extend their influence.

Li Da-jung, director of the Tamkang University Graduate Institute of International Affairs and Strategic Studies, noted the disparity between advocating for freedom of navigation and actively practicing it. He pointed out that while the US frequently sends ships through the Taiwan Strait without fear of reprisal from Beijing, other nations remain hesitant due to potential political repercussions. [Taipei Times]

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka elected as ECOSOC member for 2025-2027 term from Asia-Pacific region

(sg) Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan have been elected as members of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) for the 2025-2027 term from the Asia-Pacific region. ECOSOC is a principal organ of the UN, focusing on multilateral diplomacy concerning development and social issues. [The Daily Star]

The new ECOSOC members are expected to enhance their visibility and efforts in implementing Agenda 2030 through active participation in various UN forums, commissions, committees, and executive boards. This membership is seen as a recognition of the successful efforts of these countries in sustainable development and their contributions to the international community.

Japan, UNDP donate specialized medical waste trucks to Bhutan

(ps) The government of Japan and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have donated five specialized medical waste collection trucks to Bhutan's Ministry of Health. [Kuensel]

This initiative is part of the “Project for Improvement of Infectious Waste Management,” a collaborative effort with a funding of USD 2 million from Japan, aiming to enhance Bhutan’s healthcare waste management and system resilience. The project, which began in September 2022, has already equipped 112 health centers with advanced waste management technologies, including autoclaves, PPE, and waste weighing scales. It also involved training over 300 waste handlers and introducing waste shredders and CCTVs to monitor and prevent illegal waste disposal.

India's foreign policy in government's new term to focus on resolving border issues, strengthening neighbor relations

(wh) India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, upon commencing his second term, outlined the new government's foreign policy priorities, emphasizing the resolution of longstanding border disputes with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and addressing cross-border terrorism with Pakistan. Jaishankar articulated a vision rooted in the principles of "Bharat First" and "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (the world is one family), aiming to position India as "Vishwa Bandhu" (friend of the world) amidst global conflicts and divisions. [Hindustan Times]

During interactions with media, Jaishankar highlighted the distinct challenges posed by India's relationships with China and Pakistan. He reiterated that the ongoing military standoff with China, which began in May 2020 due to the massing of Chinese troops near the LAC, remains a critical concern. Despite numerous diplomatic and military discussions, friction points at Depsang and Demchok have seen little resolution from the Chinese side, which continues to prioritize trade and investment over border issues.

Conversely, with Pakistan, the persistent issue has been cross-border terrorism. Jaishankar emphasized that such actions are not characteristic of a responsible neighbor and called for solutions to this long-standing problem.

Furthermore, Jaishankar reaffirmed the Modi government's "Neighborhood First" policy during the swearing-in ceremony by inviting leaders from Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Mauritius, Nepal, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka. He reported positive discussions with these leaders, underscoring the government's commitment to prioritize relationships with neighboring countries.

The minister also addressed a question about a Maldivian parliamentary panel's recent decision to investigate three agreements with India, including a naval base development. He described his meeting with Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu as "very good," subtly steering clear of direct commentary on the investigation.

India second biggest foreign threat to Canada after China, says government panel

(sg) A recent report by the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) in Canada has identified India as the second most significant foreign interference threat to Canada, following China. Prime Minister Trudeau has stated that the government takes the findings of the report very seriously. He emphasized the importance of addressing foreign interference to protect Canada's democratic institutions. [Independent]

The report highlights that India has been exerting influence across all levels of government in Canada. It alleges that India is involved in interfering with Canadian democratic institutions and processes, targeting Canadian politicians, ethnic media, and Indo-Canadian ethnocultural communities. Although India's activities are not as extensive as those of China, they are still considered significantly concerning. The report details that India aims to cultivate relationships with various individuals in Canadian society to exert influence, particularly to stifle or discredit criticism of the Indian government. The report also notes instances where some Canadian MPs provided confidential information to Indian officials. However, the names and identities of these MPs were redacted in the publicly released document.

The report underscores the long-standing tensions between Canada and India over the Khalistan movement, which seeks a separate homeland for Sikhs within India. This comes amidst already strained diplomatic relations, which deteriorated further after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused India of involvement in the assassination of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a Canadian Sikh leader, last year. India has denied these allegations, calling them "absurd," and demanded evidence.

Maldives join Egmont Group of national financial intelligence units

(hgh) The Maldives' Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has become a member of the Egmont Group, an international organization that facilitates cooperation and intelligence sharing between national financial intelligence units to combat money laundering and terrorism financing. [sun.mv]

The Maldives' FIU received its membership during the Egmont Group's 30th Annual General Meeting on June 2 in Paris, France. The Maldives Monetary Authority (MMA) noted that the FIU's membership bid, proposed in 2017, was sponsored by the financial intelligence units of Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

As a member, the Maldives' FIU will now have the opportunity to exchange information with other member units, access technical expertise, and participate in various crucial projects. The membership is seen as a significant boost to the Maldives' efforts to prevent money laundering and terrorism financing.

Nepal to host 21st meeting of IDA under World Bank Group

(ps) Nepal is ready to host the 21st meeting of the International Development Association (IDA) under the World Bank program, marking the largest World Bank event in the country's history. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is set to inaugurate the meeting, scheduled to take place in Kathmandu from June 18 to 21. Key attendees will include World Bank President Ajay Banga, senior managing director Axel van Trotsenberg, and several other high-ranking officials, along with more than 300 representatives from 60 donor countries and over 90 partner countries. [My Republica]

IDA, established in 1960, supports economic development in low- and middle-income countries through concessional loans and grants. The meeting will focus on economic development for low-income and middle-income countries. During the meeting, discussions will revolve around IDA's tasks for the next three years and resource limits for economic development. Additionally, World Bank officials will inspect ongoing projects funded by development partners in Kathmandu, including significant hydropower initiatives and engage in diplomatic discussions.

Pakistan among five countries elected non-permanent member of UN Security Council

(tj/ss) Pakistan was among a total of five countries – besides Denmark, Greece, Somalia, and Panama – that has been elected as a as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council for two-year terms starting on January 1 next year. They will replace Ecuador, Japan, Malta, Mozambique, and Switzerland, to join the existing non-permanent members Algeria, Guyana, South Korea, Sierra Leone, and Slovenia. [Radio Pakistan] [UN News]

The UN Security Council, responsible for maintaining international peace and security, consists of 15 members, including five permanent members with veto power: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The 10 non-permanent seats are distributed among four regional groups: Africa and Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and other States. The new members ran largely uncontested and were endorsed by their respective regional groups.

Sri Lankan president holds separate meetings with Indian foreign affairs, Bangladesh's prime minister

(hgh) Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe attended the swearing-in ceremony of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was re-elected for a third term. During his visit to New Delhi, President Wickremesinghe met with India's Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar on the sidelines of the ceremony to discuss various bilateral issues. [Ada derana] [LNW]

In addition, President Wickremesinghe met with Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This meeting, also held during his visit to attend Prime Minister Modi's swearing-in, focused on strengthening cooperation and enhancing regional ties between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. [Ada derana]

Sri Lanka lobbies UN for territorial sea expansion

(lm) Sri Lanka is actively lobbying the United Nations to expand its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and territorial sea, collaborating with the Maldives to avoid conflicts over overlapping claims. [Daily Mirror]

The EEZ is an area extending 200 nautical miles from a nation's coastline, where it has jurisdiction over resources like minerals, oil, gas, and fisheries. In May 2009, Sri Lanka submitted technical and scientific data to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, seeking to establish the outer limits of its continental shelf beyond the EEZ under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

A sub-commission was formed in 2016 to engage with Sri Lanka, and the country has since held 11 rounds of talks. Although the sub-commission is satisfied with the established outer edge of Sri Lanka's continental

shelf, it still awaits approval from the UN Commission. To manage this process, Foreign Affairs Minister Ali Sabry received Cabinet approval to establish the National Ocean Affairs Committee. This committee will work with the sub-commission on extending Sri Lanka's maritime boundaries, which hold significant commercial value due to their rich resources.

Sri Lanka's efforts include negotiations with the Maldives to address overlapping claims on the continental shelf. Both countries have decided to collaborate to avoid conflicts over these areas.

Indonesia condemns Israeli 'barbarism' in Gaza's Nuseirat camp

(jb) The Indonesian government has issued a strong condemnation of Israel's continued military aggression in Gaza, including a recent attack on the Nuseirat refugee camp. On June 8, Israel conducted an airstrike on a school in Nuseirat, run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East UNRWA. Tel Aviv claimed it targeted Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters. The strike resulted in 274 Palestinian deaths, including 64 children and 57 women, and injured 698 others.

The Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, via social media platform X, labeled Israel's actions as "repeated barbarism" and called for urgent international intervention to cease hostilities. Concurrently, Israeli forces rescued four hostages held since October 2023. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, attending a D-8 meeting in Istanbul, emphasized the importance of unity among member states to support Palestine.

The Nuseirat attack marks one of the deadliest incidents in Israel's ongoing eight-month campaign in Gaza. [Tempo.co]

President-elect Prabowo Subianto welcomes suggestion of sending 1,000 Gaza evacuees to Islamic boarding schools

(si) Prabowo Subiento, current Defense Minister and President-elect, told journalists on June 7 that he welcomes the suggestion of Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the former East Java governor, to send 1000 Gaza evacuees to the Islamic boarding schools to provide the group with education and medical treatment.

The proposal came as an extension of an earlier discussion at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, where Jokowi urged Prabowo to evacuate 1000 Gazans who were hurt by Israel's attacks on the trip to Indonesia. Several West Java figures have shown eagerness in the reception of the policy and expressed their readiness to take care of the group and send them to boarding schools.

Indonesia has maintained its stance regarding Israel's war on Palestine. Subianto believes that to solve the conflict in Gaza, it must be through ceasefire and negotiation. Indonesia supports the independence of Palestine, the two-state solution, and the immediate resolution to a ceasefire. [Tempo]

Indonesia's peacekeeping mission in Gaza depends on UN mandate, foreign minister says

(jb) Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Retno Marsudi recently emphasized that Indonesia's potential deployment of peacekeeping forces to the Gaza Strip hinges on receiving a mandate from the United Nations (UN).

Minister Marsudi underscored Indonesia's willingness to contribute peacekeepers under a UN mandate during discussions with Commission I of the House of Representatives (DPR). This statement follows Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto's declaration of Indonesia's readiness to dispatch peacekeeping forces and medical teams to Gaza if required.

Minister Marsudi emphasized ongoing coordination between relevant ministries for the prospective mission, including the proposed evacuation of one thousand Palestinians for medical treatment in Indonesia. Defense Minister Subianto, speaking at the 21st Shangri-La Dialogue, reiterated Indonesia's commitment to achieving a lasting ceasefire in Gaza and urged international collaboration for a comprehensive resolution to the conflict. [Antara News]

Indonesia to affirm workers' protection commitment at 112th ILC

(jb) Indonesia's Manpower Minister, Ida Fauziyah, will reaffirm the country's dedication to workers' protection, equality, and economic growth at the 112th

International Labour Conference (ILC) in Geneva, Switzerland, Antara News reports.

Scheduled to address the plenary session, Fauziyah will emphasize Indonesia's support for the conference, which runs from June 3-14.

The conference, attended by representatives from 187 ILO member states, serves as a forum for enhancing global cooperation on labor issues. Fauziyah expressed hope that Indonesia's active participation would yield positive outcomes for both global and domestic labor standards.

The ILC's theme, "Towards a Renewed Social Contract," includes key events such as the Asia-Pacific Group Ministers' Meeting and the inauguration of the Global Coalition for Social Justice. The conference will also mark World Day Against Child Labour on 12 June. [Antara News]

Indonesia joins global efforts to conserve coral reefs

(jb) Indonesia, with support from the Philippines, the UK, and Canada, has launched the Climate REEFS project to conserve coral reef ecosystems in the Coral Triangle region. This collaborative effort involves researchers from various Indonesian universities.

Situated at the heart of the Coral Triangle, Indonesia is vital for maintaining the global marine food web and complex ecological processes. However, coral reefs face severe threats from ocean warming, overfishing, and habitat degradation. Over 85 percent of coral reefs in the Coral Triangle are endangered, impacting millions of people worldwide.

Cilun Djakiman from Pattimura University's Maritime and Marine Science Center of Excellence highlighted that a research team in southeast Sulawesi and Maluku has been collecting coral specimens, photographing, and sequencing coral species' genes. This integration of marine science with genetic data marks a significant advancement in coral conservation efforts, ensuring sustainable marine ecosystems for future generations. [Vietnam Plus]

Indonesia seeks investment for sustainable tourism

(jb) Indonesian Tourism and Creative Economy Minister Sandiaga Salahuddin Uno emphasized the need for increased investment in sustainable tourism at the 2024 International Tourism Investment Forum (ITIF) in Jakarta on 5 June 2024. Despite the tourism sector attracting USD 3.6 billion in 2023, 80 percent of this was funneled into star-rated hotels, restaurants, cafes, and fitness centers.

Minister Uno highlighted the need for USD 15-20 billion to develop sustainable and inclusive community-based tourism. In Q1 2024, the sector saw USD 943.4 million in investment, reaching nearly 32 percent of the yearly target. This included USD 198.8 million for star-rated hotels and USD 114.4 million for restaurants.

Recognized as the best Muslim-friendly tourist destination by the Global Muslim Travel Index, Indonesia aims to host 17 million foreign tourists and 1.4 billion domestic tourists in 2024. Minister Uno expressed optimism that ITIF would attract more diverse investments, enhancing infrastructure and sustainable tourism initiatives. [Vietnam+]

Indonesia to advocate for national interest in Pandemic Treaty negotiations

(si) Indonesia's Ministry of Health has affirmed that Indonesia will focus on advocating the country's national interests in negotiating the Pandemic Treaty in the upcoming World Health Assembly (WHA) session.

Syahril specified four prioritized interests. First, the country believes in the fair sharing of data and international data standards. Second, it advocates for the support of developed countries in One Health Instrument which is a software tool to help developing countries strategize national health planning. Third, Indonesia pushes for equitable technology transfer and non-exclusive permits. Lastly, the country encourages a Pandemic Fund to ensure equal access to financing.

Due to the global impact of COVID-19, the WHO proposed an international agreement among the country members to prepare, prevent, and respond to future pandemics globally. The agreement is also commonly called the "Pandemic Accord" or "Pandemic Treaty", which has been discussed in WHA sessions since December 2021. [KFF] [Antara]

Lao National Assembly to receive modernization support from USAID, UNDP

(lvw) The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Development Organization (UNDP) in Lao PDR have donated ICT equipment and vehicles worth a total of USD 702,696 to the Provincial People's Councils (PPC) across the country.

This initiative aims to strengthen the National Assembly and People's Councils at the provincial level. [Lao News Agency]

Chinese coastguard releases videos to counter Philippine claims of 'barbaric' behavior

(lm) Chinese media on June 8 released videos from Chinese coastguards to counter accusations leveled a day earlier by the Philippine coast guard that Beijing blocked the evacuation of a sick Philippine serviceman stationed on the Second Thomas Shoal last month, where confrontations between the two nations have increased. The footage appears to show Philippine military and coastguard transferring supplies rather than personnel, contradicting the Philippine assertion that China's actions were "barbaric and inhumane." [South China Morning Post] [Nikkei Asia]

Against this backdrop, China accused the Philippines of "lying" and claimed the Philippine mission involved illegal transport and repair operations. Beijing also stated that it would potentially allow the Philippines to transport necessities and evacuate personnel if informed in advance but would not permit the delivery of construction materials to the disputed reef. In response, Philippine officials asserted they do not need permission from China for actions within their exclusive economic zone. [Global Times]

In a separate incident on June 7, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) released footage showing Chinese maritime personnel harassing Filipino scientists and PCG personnel during a marine research mission at Escoda Shoal in the West Philippine Sea. The mission, conducted on June 4 and 5, aimed to assess the marine environment. This incident follows a similar disruption on May 19. [Rappler] [PhilStar 1]

Tensions between China and the Philippines have escalated, with increased confrontations in the South China Sea, including incidents involving water cannons

and collisions. The Philippines has adopted a tougher stance under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., increasing supply missions to the Sierra Madre and funding a permanent structure on the reef. China claims that an unwritten agreement under former President Duterte prohibited sending construction materials, an agreement that Marcos Jr. has repudiated.

Against the backdrop of the most recent confrontations, Sweden's Defense Minister Pål Jonson expressed deep concern over China's repeated aggressive maneuvers against Philippine vessels in the South China Sea, labeling these actions as threats to both regional and global security. During a diplomatic reception in Manila, Jonson emphasized the need for strategic investments in security and freedom. [Associated Press]

In parallel, Philippines' Senator Francis Tolentino has urged the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to prepare for legal action against China's plan to detain fishermen for 60 days without trial in the South China Sea, effective June 15. This plan, according to Tolentino, would violate international laws and precedents. [PhilStar 2]

Singapore's Prime Minister Wong to visit Brunei, Malaysia as part of introductory visits

(sm) Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong on June 11 embarked on his first overseas trip since taking office, visiting Brunei and Malaysia over two days. This follows a tradition set by previous Singaporean leaders, including Senior Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who also began his introductory visits to Southeast Asian capitals with Brunei and Malaysia. Wong is accompanied by his wife and several ministers, including Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan and Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu. [AsiaOne]

In Brunei, Wong will meet with Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and his wife, and will be hosted for lunch. He will also meet with Crown Prince Al-Muhtadee Billah and Princess Pengiran Anak Sarah. Later, he will travel to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to meet Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and other Malaysian leaders.

This visit to Brunei marks Wong's second in six months, following a trip in December 2023 for the Ninth Young Leaders' Programme. The trip is significant as 2024

marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Brunei. [AsiaOne]

Singapore with highest suicide rate in Southeast Asia

(sm) Singapore has been identified as having the highest suicide rate in Southeast Asia, according to a recent index published by CEOWORLD Magazine, with a suicide rate of 11.2 per 100,000 people. The Philippines has the lowest suicide rate in Southeast Asia, ranking 174th globally. Following Singapore in the region are Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos, Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Myanmar, Brunei, and Indonesia. [The Independent Singapore]

In 2022, the Samaritans of Singapore (SOS) reported a concerning 25.9 percent increase in suicide deaths compared to 2021, with 476 cases, marking the highest number since 2000. The rise was notably significant among youths and the elderly. Suicide was the leading cause of death for individuals aged 10 to 29, accounting for 38.7 percent of all deaths in this age group for the fourth consecutive year. There was also an 11.6 percent increase in youth suicide deaths and a 60 percent increase among individuals aged 70 to 79.

US commerce secretary announces major IPEF agreements, 23 billion in sustainable projects during Singapore visit

(lb) U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo announced significant progress during her visit to Singapore for the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Ministerial meeting. Key achievements include the signing of the Clean Economy Agreement, Fair Economy Agreement, and the Agreement on IPEF. Additionally, Raimondo launched the inaugural IPEF Clean Economy Investor Forum with 22 U.S. companies, announcing USD 23 billion in priority projects to boost sustainable infrastructure in the region. [US Embassy, Singapore].

This visit highlighted a continued focus on advancing the Supply Chain, Clean Economy, and Fair Economy pillars. The IPEF partners also surpassed the IPEF Upskilling Initiative's goal of providing 7 million upskilling opportunities by 2032, reaching 10.9 million opportunities, including training for over 5.2 million women and girls across eight IPEF partner countries.

Raimondo held bilateral meetings with Singaporean leaders, including Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, discussing mutual concerns such as supply chain resilience and clean energy. She also led an AI roundtable with Minister for Communications and Information Josephine Teo and convened an Australia-U.S. Strategic Commercial Dialogue with Minister for Trade and Tourism Don Farrell.

Bangladesh, India prime ministers strengthen bilateral ties in New Delhi meeting

(lm) Prime Ministers Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh and Narendra Modi of India held a one-to-one meeting in New Delhi on June 9 night, following Modi's swearing-in ceremony. This was their first meeting since the general elections in both countries. During the meeting, Hasina congratulated Modi on his electoral victory and expressed her desire to work with the new Indian government to further strengthen bilateral ties. She also invited Modi to visit Bangladesh. [The Daily Star]

Hasina also met with several leaders of India's main opposition party, the Indian National Congress (INC), including INC Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, former INC president Rahul Gandhi, and party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra in New Delhi. The meeting highlighted the historical connection between the Gandhi and Sheikh families, tracing back to the relationship between Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Hasina's father, and Indira Gandhi, who supported Bangladesh's independence during the 1971 Liberation War. [Hindustan Times]

'Lecturing Bangladesh not foreigners' job' outgoing EU ambassador says

(lm) Outgoing European Union Ambassador to Bangladesh, Charles Whiteley, emphasized the importance of partnership and collaboration over lecturing or interfering in Bangladesh's internal affairs. Speaking at the National Press Club in Dhaka, Whiteley stressed that the role of foreigners should be to engage, listen, and work together with Bangladesh. He highlighted the country's positive efforts to align with EU policies and called for a mental shift among developed nations to treat Bangladesh as an emerging economic power. [bdnews24]

Whiteley, who has served in Bangladesh since September 2021, mentioned the EU's commitment to strengthening its partnership with Bangladesh, focusing on areas such as climate change, digitalization, and security. He also expressed interest in enhancing cooperation in defense and security, noting Bangladesh's efforts in tackling Islamist extremism and terrorism. The EU plans to introduce CRIMARIO software for maritime security and launch a climate change and security project involving various key actors, including intelligence agencies.

During his tenure, Whiteley observed criticism from various countries regarding Bangladesh's elections and democracy. Despite this, he reiterated the EU's dedication to working with Bangladesh to address common challenges. Whiteley also highlighted the importance of protecting freedom of expression to combat disinformation on social media. [bdnews24]

Italian envoy assures to make migration from Bangladesh 'safer and orderly'

(sg) Italian Ambassador to Bangladesh, Antonio Alessandro, emphasized the need to make migration from Bangladesh to Italy safer and more orderly by tackling issues like fake documents and illegal practices. In an interview, he pointed out that visa applications often include problematic documents and that migrants sometimes pay large sums to middlemen, creating significant issues. [The Daily Star]

The Bangladeshi community in Italy, the largest in the European Union, plays a significant role in attracting more migrants and contributes to both countries' economies, with EUR 1.2 billion in remittances sent to Bangladesh in 2022.

Bhutan's Prime Minister visits Prime Minister Modi

(ps) Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay attended the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India for his third term on earlier this week in New Delhi. Accompanied by senior officials, including the ministers for home affairs and infrastructure, Tobgay also met with Modi and other Indian leaders to discuss mutual interests and enhance strategic partnerships. [Kuensel]

Bhutan's king receives new EU ambassador

(ps) On June 7, the new European Union (EU) Ambassador, Hervé Delphin, presented his Letters of Credence to the king of Bhutan. Following the ceremony, Ambassador Delphin discussed Bhutan's perspectives and the Gelephu Mindfulness City initiative – a visionary initiative aimed at developing a city focused on promoting mindfulness, well-being, and sustainable living – with the king. [Kuensel 1] [Kuensel 2]

The EU-Bhutan partnership, dating back to 1982, currently focuses on climate change, green growth, good governance, and digital transition. The EU's budget allocation for Bhutan (2021-2024) is EUR 31 million, with additional funds for specific projects. In April, the European Investment Bank provided its first investment support to Bhutan with a EUR 150 million loan for hydropower and solar projects.

Brunei, Ghana reaffirm cooperation

(dql) During a meeting with Ghana's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, held on June 10 in Brunei's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah ibni Omar Ali Saifuddien III, discussed ways to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Both Commonwealth countries reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing multiple-sector cooperation across. They underscored the urgent need to combat the pressing issue and to promote collaborative initiatives among Commonwealth nations to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change.

With 60 percent of Commonwealth's 2.6 billion population being younger than 30, the discussion also touched upon youth empowerment and strategies to create skills and livelihood opportunities for young people across the Commonwealth, with both sides committing to fostering bilateral educational exchange programs. [Daily Guide Network]

Cambodia turns down Ukrainian Peace Summit invitation

(lvw) Cambodia has declined an invitation to attend an upcoming Ukraine Peace Summit in Switzerland, emphasizing that the summit cannot succeed without

Russia's participation. Despite Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky's call for all ASEAN nations to participate, Senate President Hun Sen stated that Cambodia will not attend if all parties to the conflict are not present.

Ukraine has urged ASEAN countries to join its peace initiative, which includes a 10-point plan for resolving the conflict, but Russia has rejected key elements of the proposal.

Hun Sen informed Ukraine's parliamentary speaker and US officials that the summit would be unsuccessful without Russia. He insisted that Cambodia's decision is independent and not influenced by China, responding to media reports that suggested otherwise. Russia's ambassador to Cambodia, Anatoly Borovik, declined to comment on Cambodia's policies but criticized the summit as biased towards Ukraine. [Khmer Times]

US Defense Secretary meets with Cambodian leaders

(lvw) United States Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Cambodian officials on June 4 to discuss resuming joint military exercises, signaling a potential thaw in strained relations due to Cambodia's close ties with China. Austin met with Prime Minister Hun Manet, Senate President Hun Sen, and Defense Minister Tea Seiha.

Discussions focused on strengthening defense ties for regional peace and security, including military training exchanges, de-mining training, and Cambodian participation in U.S. military education programs. They also discussed strengthening the U.S.-Cambodia defense relationship to support regional peace and security. Hun Manet confirmed discussions on resuming joint military exercises and access to U.S. military education.

Cambodia, China's closest ally in Southeast Asia, halted joint military exercises with the U.S. in 2017. Austin's visit marks his second trip to Cambodia, following his attendance at the 9th ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus in November 2022. [Associated Press] [US Department of Defense]

Cambodia, Brazil discuss ongoing cooperation

(lvw) Chum Sounry, Secretary of State of Cambodia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Eduardo Paes Saboia, Secretary of Asia and the Pacific of Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, discussed ongoing cooperation between Cambodia and Brazil during a meeting held in Brasilia on June 3.

Sounry and Saboia updated each other on the establishment of embassies in their respective capitals and explored enhancing cooperation in trade, agriculture, education, tourism, and people-to-people connections.

They touched on ASEAN-Brazil relations, with Saboia appreciating Cambodia's support for Brazil becoming ASEAN's Sectoral Dialogue Partner in 2022. They also highlighted the importance of MERCOSUR, the South American trade bloc, in fostering south-south cooperation and trade relations, with two-way trade reaching USD 33.3 billion in 2023. Sounry encouraged Brazil, a key MERCOSUR member, to advance ASEAN-MERCOSUR free trade arrangements. [ASEAN] [Khmer Times]

Cambodian Senate President meets Indonesian and Cuban ambassadors

(jb) Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen recently welcomed separate courtesy visits from the Ambassadors of Indonesia and Cuba at the Senate Palace.

During the meeting with Santo Darmosumarto, Ambassador of Indonesia, discussions revolved around enhancing Cambodia-Indonesia relations, particularly in trade, which has already surpassed USD 1 billion. Sen shared historical insights on Cambodia's peace process and urged increased cooperation in trade, investment, and agriculture.

Later, Sen met with Milena Caridad Zaldivar Piedra, the newly appointed Cuban Ambassador, who highlighted the strong bilateral ties and expressed Cuba's willingness to collaborate in areas like rice production and health. Sen expressed gratitude for Cuba's support post-genocide and suggested mutual learning in agriculture and health sectors. He emphasized the importance of further collaboration between the two nations. [Khmer Times]

New Chinese ambassador to Cambodia

(lvw) Former Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin has been appointed as China's ambassador-designate to Cambodia.

Cambodian officials are optimistic that Wang will enhance bilateral relations between the two countries, which share a strategic partnership and strong trade relations, including the export of Cambodian agricultural products to China.

Wang's appointment is expected to encourage investment in Cambodia, particularly in areas like construction and agricultural exports, and address criminal fraud networks that impact both countries. [Khmer Times]

China and US cooperation on law enforcement and anti-narcotics

(jm) On June 6, via video call, Chinese Minister of Public Security Wang Xiaohong and US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas discussed ongoing cooperation on anti-narcotics and law enforcement. Both sides agreed to deepen collaboration in areas such as drug control, repatriation of illegal immigrants, and combating transnational crime. Wang emphasized the importance of the US addressing China's concerns and taking practical actions to enhance bilateral cooperation. [The State Council, The PRC]

This call is seen as continuation of the momentum from the November summit in San Francisco where President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden established an anti-narcotics working group to address the fentanyl crisis. During the summit, China committed to reducing shipments of chemicals used to produce fentanyl (see AiR No. 47, November/2023, 3). Wang led the first virtual meeting of the anti-narcotics group in January (see AiR No. 3, January/2024, 3) and met with Mayorkas again in Austria in February. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken acknowledged China's efforts in curbing fentanyl during his April visit to China.

Additionally, during the November summit, Wang had urged the US to stop the "harassment" of Chinese students at the border, which has been a contentious issue as the US tightens immigration policies. The number of Chinese nationals detained at the US southern border has surged, with over 37,000 arrests in 2023, leading to high-level discussions about deportations.

Previously, China agreed to cooperate on this issue, including accepting deportation flights, with one flight reportedly arriving in March (see AiR No. 20, May/2024, 2) [SCMP]

China on US military presence in South China Sea as a serious security threat

(jm) On June 9, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong stated that the US military presence in the South China Sea poses the largest security challenge in the region. Sun emphasized that US actions are exacerbating maritime disputes and regional tensions, turning the area into "the whirlpool of an arms race."

Notably, He highlighted the deployment of medium-range missile systems by the US as a major concern, suggesting it could lead to increased geopolitical conflicts throughout the Asia-Pacific region. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The PRC]

Sun's remarks come amid rising tensions between China and the Philippines, a US ally. Incidents between Chinese and Philippine vessels have heightened the potential for conflict, with the Philippines accusing China of escalating harassment.

China, meanwhile, maintains that its extensive claims over the South China Sea, which is crucial for global commerce, are legitimate and that its coast guard operations are within its jurisdiction. (see article in this edition)

Despite these tensions, Sun asserted China's commitment to resolving disputes through dialogue. The Philippines, however, remains determined to assert its sovereign rights in the region, backed by US support. [Reuters]

US proposes increased internet security following Chinese carrier misroute

(rl) The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has advanced a proposal to improve internet security after reports that China Telecom exploited vulnerabilities in the Border Gateway Protocol (BGP), misrouting US internet traffic on six occasions. The new rules would require broadband providers to implement BGP security plans and report on risk mitigation progress.

FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel highlighted that these BGP hijacks could lead to personal data exposure, theft, extortion, and state-level espionage. This move is part of a broader US strategy to restrict Chinese telecom operations, including actions against undersea cables and domestic services.

Earlier this year, the FCC ordered US units of China Telecom, China Unicom, China Mobile, and Pacific Networks to cease broadband services due to national security concerns. Previously, the FCC had barred these companies from providing telecommunications services and prohibited approvals for new equipment from Huawei and ZTE, citing unacceptable security risks.

The proposal aims to address the inherent security weaknesses in BGP, which were not designed with modern security needs in mind. As the FCC continues its efforts to safeguard national security, broadband providers will need to comply with new security measures to protect the integrity of internet traffic routing. [Reuters]

US raise concern of Chinese drugmaker WuXi AppTec employees linked to Chinese military research

(rl) According to *Reuters*, citing public patent records and science papers, employees of WuXi AppTec, a Chinese drugmaker, have collaborated with People's Liberation Army (PLA) scientists on altitude sickness treatments. The patents, filed in the U.S., Europe, and China from 2018 to 2023, lists six WuXi staff and six PLA scientists as co-inventors.

These collaborations, vital for PLA operations in high-altitude regions, extend beyond previously known ties between WuXi AppTec and the PLA, raising national security concerns in the U.S. WuXi AppTec denies direct collaboration, attributing the patents to earlier hypertension research for a client, Shijiazhuang Sagacity New Drug Development.

The U.S. Congress is considering legislation to restrict biotech collaborations with Chinese firms, citing security threats. WuXi AppTec insists it has no special ties to the PLA and that security measures prevent unauthorized data sharing. China’s foreign ministry criticized the politicization of tech and trade issues, noting that the US companies also have military ties. [Reuters] [StratNews Global]

China responds to US arm sales to Taiwan

(jm) On June 8, China's Ministry of the National Defense condemned the recent USD 300 million US arms sale to Taiwan, marking the 14th sale since President Joe Biden's term began (see article in this edition). The Chinese Defense Ministry criticized the US for supporting "Taiwan independence forces," escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and violating the one-China principle and the three Sino-US Joint Communiqués, particularly the August 17 Communiqué.

The ministry urged Washington to cancel the arms sale and cease arming Taiwan to preserve military relations between the two countries.

The sale includes spare and repair parts for F-16 aircraft, according to the US defense Security Cooperation Agency. [Ministry of National Defense of the PRC] [AA]

US Senate panel expands investigation into German carmaker's use of banned Chinese parts

(rl) The U.S. Senate Finance Committee has expanded its investigation into BMW's use of electronic components sourced from a banned Chinese supplier, Sichuan Jingweida Technology Group (JWD). This follows revelations that BMW imported over 8,000 Mini Coopers with parts from JWD, despite a 2021 law prohibiting such imports due to forced labor concerns in China's Xinjiang region.

Senator Ron Wyden, who chairs the committee, has asked BMW North America CEO Sebastian Mackensen to confirm if any current imports contain JWD components and to detail steps taken to address the issue. BMW had previously halted the importation of affected products and is working to replace specific parts. The automaker emphasizes its commitment to strict employment practices and human rights standards.

The Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) was enacted to prevent the import of goods produced with forced labor (see AiR No. 52, December/2021, 4]).The investigation also found that Bourns Inc., a California-based supplier, sourced parts from JWD, which were then used by Lear Corp., a direct supplier for BMW. While Lear acknowledges the issue, it maintains no direct relationship with JWD.

BMW and related companies are under scrutiny as the Senate seeks to ensure compliance with U.S. laws aimed at combating forced labor and safeguarding national security interests. [Business Recorder]

Dutch ship encounters Chinese jets in East China Sea

(jm) On June 7, the Netherland's Ministry of Defence reported a Dutch frigate, the HNLMS Tromp, patrolling in support of UN sanctions on North Korea, was approached by Chinese aircraft in the East China Sea, creating an "unsafe" situation. The Dutch Ministry of Defence stated that two Chinese fighter jets circled the ship, and its NH90 helicopter was approached by additional Chinese jets and a helicopter. [Ministry of Defence, Netherlands]

The incident occurred in international airspace. Despite the tensions, HNLMS Tromp will continue its mission to Japan, which is part of the "Pacific Archer 24" naval exercises.

This incident coincides with increased tensions in the region, including Japan's protest against four Chinese ships entering Japanese territorial waters around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands (see article in this edition) [DW]

China seeks to investigate EU dairy trade imports

(jm) According to a post on X, formerly twitter, by *Global Times*, Chinese companies plan to request an "anti-subsidy" investigation into EU dairy imports. [X] This follows a decline in EU dairy exports to China from EUR 2 billion (USD 1.85 billion) in 2022 to EUR 1.7 billion (USD 1.57 billion) in 2023.

Amid rising trade tensions, in January China investigated EU brandy imports (see AiR No. 2, January/2024, 2) Meanwhile, in May, the EU began investigating Chinese flat-rolled iron or steel products and electric vehicles from China. (see AiR No. 19, May/2024, 1).

Moreover, Chinese firms are also considering a probe into EU pork imports. These actions reflect ongoing efforts by both regions to protect their domestic industries. [Reuters]

China suspected of sourcing drone technology for Russia

(rl) A Chinese trade agency, tasked with promoting trade with Russia, has been reportedly seeking drone detectors and jammers, raising concerns about Beijing supplying dual-use technology to Moscow.

The Guangdong Provincial Association for Promotion of Trade with Russia posted a procurement notice on its official WeChat account on May 22, looking for "unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) equipment" including drone detectors and jammers. The notice specified brands such as BorisTone, Assel Labs, and Bulat, known to be used by the Russian military.

Though the notice was removed from the Guangdong association's account, it remains accessible on the Yunfu City Association's WeChat account, inviting companies to submit product information.

Drone jammers disrupt drone communication by emitting signals at operating frequencies. Ukraine has extensively used drones in its conflict with Russia, targeting key infrastructure. The U.S. has accused China of covertly supporting Russia by supplying dual-use goods, despite Beijing's claims of neutrality. [Politico]

The Guangdong association denied the procurement was for Russian customers, claiming it was for Kazakhstan. [CNN]

China expresses willingness for space cooperation with the U.S.

(rl) China remains open to cooperation with countries, including the United States, in space exploration, the Foreign Ministry stated. This statement on June 6 followed NASA's congratulations on China's Chang'e-6 mission to the far side of the moon. [NASA]

The Chinese foreign ministry commented at a regular news conference that the U.S. needs to remove obstacles to facilitate further cooperation. Currently, U.S. law bans any direct or indirect collaboration with NASA. [DT NEXT] [Reuters]

Additional tariff to be added to Chinese vehicle imports by Turkey

(jm) On June 8, Turkey announced a 40 percent additional tariff on imports of vehicles from China to protect its domestic automakers and prevent further deterioration of its current account balance, according to the country's trade ministry. [Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Official Gazette]

Set to take effect on July 7, this measure was detailed in a presidential decision published in the Official Gazette. The tariff will apply to both conventional and hybrid Chinese passenger vehicles, with a minimum tariff starting at USD 7,000 per vehicle if the calculated 40 percent tariff falls below minimum.

This decision comes amid increasing global trade pressures on China over its growing exports of electric vehicles (EVs), which are alleged to be heavily subsidized by Beijing. Moreover, the European Commission is expected to decide soon on potential additional tariffs on Chinese EV imports.

The Turkish trade ministry emphasized that the tariff aims to increase and protect the decreasing share of domestic vehicle production, considering the country's current account deficit targets and efforts to boost domestic investment and production. In 2023, Turkey imposed additional tariffs on EV imports from China and introduced regulations regarding EV maintenance and services.

The Turkish government's broader strategy includes encouraging more domestic production and exports to address its chronic current account deficit, which was USD 45.2 billion last year. [Nikkei Asia]

Xinjiang officials meet Turkish foreign minister to strengthen bilateral ties

(rl) Senior Xinjiang officials, including Party chief Ma Xingrui and regional government chairman Erkin Tuniyaz, met with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and his delegation on June 5. The meeting was part of Fidan’s three-day visit to China’s westernmost province, marking the highest-level trip to the Xinjiang region since Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's 2012 visit is his capacity as then-prime minister.

Ma welcomed Fidan's visit, noting the positive progress in China-Turkey relations and increasing exchanges between Xinjiang and Turkish regions. He also expressed a desire to deepen cooperation with Turkey to combat separatism, terrorism, and extremism while underscoring Xinjiang's role in the Belt and Road

Initiative, aiming to enhance trade and cooperation with Turkey.

Fidan, for his part, praised the development and ethnic integration in Xinjiang, reiterating Turkey's stance against terrorism and support for China's territorial integrity, according to the Chinese state media. He emphasized the importance of strengthening anti-terrorism cooperation. Underscoring China role as Turkey's largest trade partner in Asia and third largest in the world, he called for expanding exchanges in trade, agriculture, and civil aviation. [Global Times] [AA]

Fidan's visit to China also included a meeting with his counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing. In their talks, Wang reaffirmed China's willingness to further expand cooperation with Ankara in multiple areas, including economics, trade, energy, infrastructure, and the hi-tech and digital economy.

In a thinly veiled criticism of the US and its allies, he called on the two countries to work closely together under the United Nations and other multilateral frameworks and to "oppose hegemonism and power politics, oppose the monopoly of international affairs by a few countries."

According to the statement of the Chinese foreign ministry, Fidan affirmed China's development as "vital to world peace and prosperity," and Turkey's opposition to bloc confrontation and "the erroneous act of suppressing and containing China's development." [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in Chinese] [SCMP]

Ukraine encourages China to participate in peace summit

(jm) On June 5, while meeting with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong in Beijing, Ukraine's first deputy foreign minister, Andriy Sybiha, encouraged China to attend a planned summit on Ukraine scheduled for June 15-16 in Switzerland. Sybiha expressed that China's participation could contribute to achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.

With Russia not invited, China has stated it will not attend unless both warring sides are present see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

During the meeting, Sybiha and Sun discussed the Ukrainian crisis and other international and regional issues. However, the Chinese Foreign Ministry did not

comment on Ukraine's request for summit participation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC]

Russia has dismissed the summit as ineffective without Russie its being involved, while the has Ukraine accused Moscow of attempting to undermine the event. Despite a proclaimed "no limits" partnership with Russia, China maintains a neutral stance in the conflict and had previously proposed a 12-point plan, which outlines principles for ending the war, welcomed by both sides (see AiR No. 18, April/2024, 5).

Recently, China and Brazil jointly called for peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. [Reuters]

China accused by the Philippines of hindering medical evacuation in South China Sea

(jm) On June 7, an official from the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) posted on X, formerly twitter, accusing the Chinese coast guard of obstructing efforts to evacuate a sick marine from the BRP Sierra Madre, a grounded Philippine vessel at the contested Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea. The blocking incident, which occurred in May, involved alleged harassment by Chinese vessels despite being informed that the operation was for medical purposes. The PCG condemned the actions of the Chinese coast guard as “barbaric and inhumane.” [X 1]

According to the post, Chinese vessels engaged in dangerous maneuvers and intentionally rammed a Philippine navy boat during the evacuation attempt. Philippine military chief Romeo Brawner reported that the initial evacuation attempt was blocked by the Chinese, but a subsequent attempt with coast guard assistance was successful.

Later that same day, the Global Times published photos that allegedly disapprove PCG’s claim of a medical evacuation. The photos, purportedly obtained by the Global Times, show that the Philippine military dispatched high-speed assault boats carrying a significant amount of materials, including supplies possibly intended for reinforcing their grounded ship. The footage allegedly contradicts the evacuation claim, showing all personnel in good condition and suggesting that the boats were used for resupply and repair rather than medical evacuation. [Global Times]

In response, the Chinese foreign ministry stated that it would allow the Philippines to deliver supplies and evacuate personnel if China is informed beforehand.

The Chinese foreign minister also warned against using this as a cover to transport construction materials to the vessel, which China refers to as Ren'ai Jiao. The Chinese foreign ministry emphasized that the Philippines must not attempt to permanently occupy the shoal. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC]

In a follow-up response to the Chinese Foreign Ministry of Affairs' statement, on June 8, the PCG posted on X, asserting that the Philippines need not ask China's permission for activities in the West Philippine Sea. The PCG criticized China's actions as inhumane and underscored that the Philippines has no obligation to seek approval from a country that has illegally deployed forces within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The PCG emphasized that Ayungin Shoal is 105 nautical miles from Palawan, thus falling within Philippine jurisdiction, not China's. [X 2] [The Daily Tribune]

The South China Sea, claimed almost entirely by China, is a critical shipping route with over USD 3 trillion in annual commerce. The Philippines and China have had numerous confrontations over disputed areas within Manila's exclusive economic zone. Despite a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague invalidating China's claims, Beijing has rejected the decision and continues to assert its jurisdiction, leading to ongoing tensions and international condemnation of China's actions in the region. [Reuters]

Palau president expresses concern over China's potential future interference in election

(jm) In an interview with Reuters on June 5, the Republic of Palau's President Surangel Whipps Jr. expressed concerns about potential Chinese interference in the country's upcoming national election due to Palau's recognition of Taiwan as a sovereign state. Whipps indicated that his stance on Taiwan makes him an adversary to China. Palau is one of the remaining 12 countries that maintain formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

To enhance regional capabilities, in December 2023, the US initiated the development of an over-the-horizon radar system in Palau and considered the permanent deployment of Patriot missile defense batteries. President Whipps noted that while the US does not yet see an imminent threat, they are prepared to respond if necessary. [Reuters]

During the interview, Whipps also confirmed that Palau experienced a cyberattack in March, attributed to China, resulting in the theft and leakage of approximately 20,000 documents on the dark web. The cyberattack coincided with the finalization of a two-decade aid agreement with the United States. Whipps, in a news conference in Tokyo, attributed the attack to sources traced back to China via Malaysia.

On June 4, during his visit to Tokyo, Whipps met with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, where both leaders committed to strengthening maritime security cooperation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan] [Nikkei Asia]

China, Pakistan discuss economic corridor

(jm) On June 7, during a meeting with Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, China's President Xi Jinping expressed China's willingness to collaborate with Pakistan on enhancing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC aims to develop and upgrade roads and railways connecting China's Xinjiang region to Pakistan's Gwadar port, part of Xi's broader Belt and Road Initiative (see article in this edition).

During their meeting, Sharif extended condolences for the deaths of five Chinese engineers in a suicide bombing in March, who were involved in a dam project in Pakistan (see AiR No. 14, April/2024, 1). In response, Xi emphasized the importance of ensuring the safety of Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan. [The State Council, The PRC 1] [AP News]

China to strengthen bilateral relations with Brazil

(jm) On June 7, as part of his 5-day trip, Brazilian Vice President Geraldo Alckmin met with China's President Xi in Beijing to discuss enhancing strategic collaboration. This meeting coincides with the 50th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between the two countries.

During the meeting Alckmin expressed a desire for Chinese participation in Brazil's infrastructure projects. Meanwhile, Xi highlighted China-Brazil relations as exemplary for fostering solidarity and cooperation among emerging economies. This is part of China's strategy to strengthen ties with countries like Brazil

and Russia to counterbalance US influence in global affairs. [The State Council, The PRC 2]

Alckmin's five-day visit to China includes various meetings with officials and business leaders, during which he signed several trade agreements focused on sustainable development, agriculture, and infrastructure. [AP News] [AA]

Indonesian President-elect Prabowo meets King Abdullah II in Amman

(si) President-elect Prabowo Subianto met with Jordanian King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein in Amman to discuss humanitarian aid for Gaza. Prabowo attended an emergency summit focused on organizing a humanitarian response and took the opportunity for bilateral talks with the king, his long-time friend.

King Abdullah II congratulated Prabowo on his election victory before discussing the Gaza crisis. Prabowo emphasized Indonesia's deep concern over the rising casualties and worsening conditions in Gaza, reaffirming Indonesia’s support for the Palestinian cause.

This was their first in-person meeting since Prabowo's election win. The king referred to Prabowo as "my brother," highlighting the importance of his leadership.

Both leaders share a history as alumni of the Fort Benning military academy, further solidifying their bond. In 2014, Prabowo shared a photo with Abdullah II on social media, expressing gratitude for the king's enduring kindness and friendship. [JakartaGlobe]

Indonesia and Norway partner for international fish trade training in Jakarta

(jb) Indonesia, in collaboration with the Norway Government, hosted the "International Fish Trade, Global Applicable Framework and Market Access" training in Jakarta from 4-6 June. This initiative is a follow-up to the MoU on Economic Cooperation and Capacity Building (MoU ECCB) of the Indonesia-EFTA Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (I-EFTA CEPA).

Organized by the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries, along with several international partners, the training focused on various aspects of international fish trade,

including market access, legality, and trade instruments. It aimed to enhance the understanding and skills of Indonesian authorities and business communities in the fisheries sector. [Tempo.co]

Japan protest Chinese armed vessels patrolling disputed islands

(rl) On June 7, Japan issued a formal protest against China after four armed Chinese coastguard vessels entered waters claimed by Japan around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. This incident marks the first time that Chinese vessels equipped with apparent cannons have entered these contested waters.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi condemned the move as a violation of international law, emphasizing Japan's position that the intrusion was unacceptable.

China's coastguard confirmed the patrol, describing it as a standard operation to uphold sovereignty and ensure regional stability. The Chinese authorities called on Japan to avoid provocative actions, framing their patrol as a necessary response to Japan's recent activities. The ships stayed in the disputed area for over an hour before leaving.

This incident is part of ongoing disputes between Japan and China over the islands. [Reuters]

U.S. and Japan to hold first defense industrial cooperation forum

(rl) Japan and the United States commenced the inaugural meeting of their Defense Industrial Cooperation Acquisition and Sustainment Forum (DICAS) in Tokyo on June 9.

This forum aims to enhance joint development and production of defense equipment, fostering a resilient supply chain to bolster both nations' military capabilities. The initiative follows an agreement between Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and U.S. President Joe Biden during Kishida's state visit to the U.S. in April.

Key topics include scaling up the production of air defense missiles, currently in global shortage due to Russia's actions in Ukraine and conducting

maintenance on U.S. military vessels and fighter jets in Japanese commercial facilities.

The forum, which concluded on June 10, features participants such as Masaki Fukasawa, commissioner of Japan's Acquisition, Technology & Logistics Agency, and U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment William LaPlante. [nippon.com]

Japan and US to hold security meeting

(sh) Japan and the United States are reportedly preparing for discussions involving their foreign and defense chiefs in Tokyo on July 28.

The itinerary hinges on U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's schedule. This would mark the first "two-plus-two" talks since January 2023. A review of alliance command and control frameworks to boost interoperability is expected to be on agenda, along with regional security challenges, including an increasingly assertive China.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and President Joe Biden, in an April summit (see AiR No. 16, April/2024, 3), directed representatives to address these issues. Additionally, the U.S. is considering appointing a four-star general to lead U.S. Forces Japan, coinciding with the establishment of a joint headquarters to coordinate Japan's military branches. [Kyodo News]

Japan and US hold first meeting on repairing US navy ships in Japan

(sh) On Jun 11, Japan and the US held their first working-level meeting to discuss repairing US military vessels in Japan, following an agreement from the Japan-US summit in April (see AiR No. 16, April/2024, 3). This framework allows Japanese companies to conduct extensive repairs on US Navy warships.

Key attendees included Fukasawa Masaki from Japan's Defense Ministry, US defense officials, and US Ambassador Rahm Emanuel. Fukasawa highlighted that maintaining US Navy vessels in Japanese shipyards would strengthen the Japan-US alliance's deterrence. Regular meetings will be held to discuss specific systems and cooperation.

Emanuel praised Japan's production capabilities and stressed the importance of collective deterrence. He emphasized that repairing ships in Japan would

eliminate the need for them to return to the US mainland, ensuring readiness in both peace and emergencies. [NHK]

Kishida plans Central Asia visit to boost ties

(sh) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is set to visit Kazakhstan in early August for Japan's first summit with five Central Asian nations.

Through this visit, Kishida aims to strengthen Japan's economic security by enhancing relations with Central Asia, a region rich in natural gas and minerals. He also seeks to counter Russia and China's influence in the area.

Kishida considers visiting Mongolia after Kazakhstan to meet President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh. The discussions would be expected to focus on economic cooperation, including mineral resource development. Given Mongolia's long-standing ties with North Korea, Kishida might request help in resolving the issue of Japanese nationals kidnapped by North Korean spies decades ago (see also article below).

This visit underscores Japan's strategic efforts to bolster its regional partnerships. [Nippon]

Japan considers Mongolia visit to address North Korea abductions

(sh) Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is considering visiting Mongolia in August to advance stalled talks with North Korea regarding the abduction of Japanese nationals.

If this visit occurs, it would be the first by a Japanese leader since 2016. Mongolia, maintaining close ties with North Korea, has often acted as a mediator for Japan, which lacks diplomatic ties with Pyongyang.

During the planned visit, Kishida seeks to meet Mongolian President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh to request his cooperation in resolving the abduction issue that centers on Japanese nationals abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s.

Kishida intends to emphasize the urgency of the matter due the abductees' relatives age and to advocate for a "high-level" dialogue with North Korea,

paving the way for a summit with Kim Jong Un. [Kyodo News]

Japan and Italy finalize action plan for enhanced cooperation

(sh) Japan and Italy reached the final stages of talks to launch an action plan to boost cooperation in seven areas, including diplomacy, defense, and economic security, amid China's growing influence and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The plan, covering 2024 to 2027, will introduce an annual "strategic dialogue" by vice foreign ministers and maintain senior-level security talks and joint defense drills. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is expected to announce the plan during his visit to Italy for the Group of Seven summit June 13.

The seven pillars of the plan also address the economy, cultural exchanges, science and technology, and agriculture. Key topics include supply chains, clean energy cooperation, AI management, and food security.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni proposed the plan during a February meeting with Kishida in Tokyo. [Kyodo News]

Russia wishes not to resume peace talk with Japan

(sh) On June 6, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that conditions were not suitable for resuming peace treaty talks with Japan, blaming Tokyo's support for Ukraine for souring relations.

During a meeting in St. Petersburg, Putin responded to a question from Kyodo News, saying Russia was not refusing dialogue but Japan needed to change its stance on the Ukraine war. He remarked that everything has been done by Japan, noting that nearly all bilateral talks stalled after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

In March 2022, Moscow suspended peace pact negotiations, criticizing Japan for imposing sanctions alongside the U.S. and other Western countries.

Putin also mentioned he would not avoid visiting the disputed islands near Japan's Hokkaido, reiterating their status as Russian territory, and deemed Japan's

actions more harmful to relations than such a visit. [Kyodo News]

Japan protests South Korean maritime survey

(sh) The Japanese foreign ministry has protested a maritime survey by South Korea in Japan's exclusive economic zone near the disputed islets known as Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in South Korea.

The ministry reported that a South Korean research ship deployed wires into the waters without Japan's prior consent. In response, Hiroyuki Namazu, director-general of the ministry's Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau, lodged a protest with a deputy minister at the South Korean Embassy in Japan. Namazu stated that the survey was unacceptable and demanded its immediate cessation.

The South Korean foreign ministry rejected the protest, asserting that the islets are undeniably part of South Korea's inherent territory.

The diplomatic dispute underscores the ongoing territorial tensions between the two nations. [Nippon]

Japan and Ukraine strengthen business ties

(sh) On June 6, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) held an event in Kyiv to facilitate business opportunities between Japanese and Ukrainian companies. Despite Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine, JETRO aims to support Ukraine's economic reconstruction by encouraging stronger business ties.

The event was attended by ten Japanese companies, including logistics giant Nippon Express Co., and around 20 Ukrainian businesses and organizations, such as chemical firm Enamine Ltd. An official from Padeco Co., a Japanese consultancy for international development projects, noted that the reconstruction process had already begun despite ongoing conflicts.

An Enamine official expressed gratitude for the chance to connect with Japanese companies. Major Ukrainian IT firm Eleks revealed plans to strengthen its operations in Japan, where it sees significant opportunities in software development. Eleks, which received investments from Dai Nippon Printing Co. and

Nomura Research Institute Ltd. in 2021, aims to expand its customer base in Japan, leveraging its global experience. [Nippon 1] [Nippon 2]

Japan strengthens economic ties with Luxembourg

(sh) On June 10, Japan's Emperor Naruhito met Luxembourg's Crown Prince Guillaume at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo. The Japanese Emperor thanked Luxembourg's government and businesses for supporting Japan after a deadly earthquake in the Noto region on New Year's Day. [NHK]

Prime Minister Kishida Fumio of Japan met with Luxembourg's Crown Prince Guillaume. He welcomed the Luxembourg Economic Mission led by Crown Prince Guillaume, hoping it would enhance economic ties, particularly in space and start-ups.

Both sides confirmed their commitment to strengthen cooperation in space and start-ups and discussed furthering bilateral relations, including for Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai. They also agreed to collaborate on various international issues. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Philippines signs deal with JICA for patrol ships

(sh) On June 10, the Philippines signed a deal with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to procure five large patrol ships for its coast guard by 2028.

Amid rising tensions with China over disputed waters, JICA and the Philippine Finance Department finalized the agreement on June 10, providing a low-interest loan of JPY 64 billion (USD 410 million). The 97-meter multi-role response vessels are designed for long-term missions in the open sea, with deliveries expected in 2027 and 2028.

Philippine Finance Secretary Ralph Recto emphasized the importance of equipping the Coast Guard to protect maritime sovereignty and the rights of Filipino fishers. JICA Philippines Office Chief Representative Sakamoto Takema pledged strong support for these needs. Since 2013, Japan has provided the Philippines with 12 patrol ships, mostly operating in the South China Sea. [NHK]

Sixth Laos-Thailand friendship bridge spurs interest

(lvw) The Lao-Thai friendship bridges, a series of major cross-border development projects, are looking to expand into their sixth iteration, after Thailand has expressed interest in its construction.

Thailand plans to build it over the Mekong River, connecting Ubon Ratchathani in northeastern Thailand with Salavanh Province in Laos. This project was a key topic in recent discussions between Thailand's Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa and Lao Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith. The bridge concept was initially proposed during Thai-Lao Joint Commission talks in November 2021. [Laotian Times]

Laos, Vietnam party inspection cooperation

(lvw) Top Party inspection officials from Vietnam and Laos reaffirmed their commitment to closer collaboration during talks in Hanoi, Vietnam, on June 4. Tran Cam Tu, head of Vietnam's Party Central Committee's Inspection Commission, highlighted Vietnam's socio-economic situation and anti-corruption efforts, emphasizing strict disciplinary actions against corruption. The cooperation agreement between the two countries' inspection commissions has strengthened their bilateral relationship, reaffirming their commitment to the 2022-2026 cooperation agreement.

Khamphan Phommathat, head of Laos' Party Central Committee's Inspection Commission, discussed Laos' anti-corruption efforts and collaboration with ASEAN countries. He committed to continued close cooperation with Vietnam through delegation exchanges and training opportunities for Lao officials in Vietnam. [Lao News Agency]

Malaysia to purchase Turkish warships

(dql) Malaysia has entered a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Turkey to buy three Turkish corvette warships.

The naval vessels will be built by Turkish defence firm STM. [TRT]

Malaysian prime minister receives a courtesy visit from New Zealand deputy prime minister

(ba) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim recently welcomed New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Winston Peters, on June 7.

Malaysia is Peters' second destination on his Southeast Asian tour, following Vietnam. This tour underscores New Zealand's commitment to fostering cooperation with this dynamically developing region.

Malaysia and New Zealand have maintained strong and stable diplomatic relations since their establishment on in 1957. Tourism between the two nations continues to grow, with 18,238 New Zealanders visiting Malaysia in 2022, and over 17,000 Malaysians residing in New Zealand. In the Pacific region, Malaysia stands as New Zealand's second-largest trading partner, with total trade between the two countries amounting to USD 1.42 billion as of June 2023. [The Star]

Maldives requests loan repayment extension from India

(hgh) The Maldives government has requested an extension on the repayment of a USD 150 million loan from India. This request was made by Minister of Foreign Affairs Moosa Zameer during his recent visit to India, where he met with his Indian counterpart, S. Jaishankar. [SunOnline International]

The original loan of USD 200 million, provided in 2019 as budget support, has seen USD 50 million repaid. Zameer confirmed that India did not demand any compensation for extending the repayment leniency and expressed optimism about India's willingness to help, based on positive signals from their discussions. As of the last quarter of 2023, the Maldives government owes MVR 6.28 billion (USD 406 million) in outstanding loans to India.

This request comes amidst a backdrop of evolving diplomatic relations between the two countries. President Mohamed Muizzu, who has recently taken office, has expressed the desire to maintain strong ties with India despite some tensions. These tensions have been partly due to Muizzu's earlier campaign rhetoric and decisions such as not renewing certain bilateral

agreements and seeking the removal of Indian military personnel from the Maldives. Nevertheless, Muizzu has stated that India remains a crucial ally for the Maldives, highlighting the importance of continued cooperation and support. [DNA India]

Sri Lanka asks Maldives to relax remittance restrictions

(hgh) Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Ali Sabry has requested the Maldives to revisit the current limits on foreign remittances sent by Sri Lankan migrant workers. Many Sri Lankans hold high executive positions in the Maldivian hospitality sector, earning around USD 3,000 monthly, mainly paid in Maldivian Rufiyaa. Currently, many of these Sri Lankan workers send their remittances via the informal Undiyal method, bypassing the official banking network. [sun.mv]

The announcement followed discussions between Sabry and his Maldivian counterpart Moosa Zameer during Zameer's official visit to Sri Lanka from June 3-6. During his visit, Minister Zameer also met with other key Sri Lankan leaders, including President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena, to discuss various topics, including diplomatic and economic cooperation between the two countries. [The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Maldives]

Mongolia, France discuss implementation of five-year cooperation plan

(dql) On June 6, Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh met with visiting France’s Secretary General of the Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs to discuss the progress of the implementation of the cooperation plan for 2023-2028.

The plan was agreed on during the mutual visits of the two countries presidents last year. [Montsame]

Mongolia holds political consultations with Finland, Switzerland

(dql) On June 5, the officials of the Mongolian foreign ministry and their Finnish counterparts held the second political consultation meeting.

During their talks, the two sides discussed ways to expand and deepen bilateral relations and cooperation

in multiple areas, such as trade, economy, investment, energy, environment, culture, and education.

Discussions also touched upon cooperation possibilities within Mongolia's long-term and medium-term national development policies, the "One Billion Trees" national campaign and the "Mission-2100" Scholarship Program initiated by the Mongolian president. [Montsame 1]

A day ealier, a political consultative meeting was held with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation.

Stressing the 60th anniversary of establishing diplomatic relations between Mongolia and the Swiss Confederation, the meeting discussed high-level visits within the framework of the anniversary, the upgrade of the level of relations, and enriching it with economic content.

The two delegations reached agreement on intensifying talks on draft documents related to expanding cooperation in certain sectors and strengthening the legal framework for bilateral relations. [Montsame 2]

In a separate meeting on the same day, Mongolian State Secretary of the Foreign Ministry Ankhbayar Nyamdorj discussed with a Polish delegation consisting of officials from the foreign and finance ministry as well as from the Ministry of Development and Technology ways to further advance and increase cooperation and speed up the implementation progress in mutually beneficial projects and programs.

The meeting was part of the Polish delegation’s working visit to Mongolia to attend the ninth “Ulaanbaatar Dialogue” International Conference on Northeast Asian Security. [Montsame 3]

Mongolia, Latvia conclude aviation agreement

(dql) Mongolian State Secretary of the Ministry of Road and Transport Development S. Batbold and Latvian State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Andris Pelšs signed on June a bilateral aviation agreement under which biotn sides will create opportunities to conduct direct flights and develop tourism.

In addition, the agreement will allow Mongolian air carriers to open new flight routes to Northern

European countries and expand their flight network under codeshare principles.

The two sides expect the agreement will substantially support the development of trade and economic relations and cooperation between the two countries.

With diplomatic relations established in 1991, the trade turnover between the two countries stands at USD 2.3 million. [Aki Press]

Bermuda sanctions updated amid Myanmar crackdown

(jb) Bermuda has joined London in imposing updated economic sanctions on Myanmar, coinciding with the military junta's crackdown on gold and foreign exchange traders. The Bermuda Monetary Authority issued a notice from the UK's Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation regarding the 2021 Myanmar (Sanctions) Regulations.

These regulations target individuals undermining democracy, repressing civilians, or obstructing human rights investigations in Myanmar.

Britain has enforced asset freezes and travel bans on three generals involved in the coup. The junta recently arrested 35 individuals, accusing them of attempts to destabilize the foreign currency exchange rate amid a depreciating kyat.

Businesses in Bermuda and Britain have been warned against dealings with International Gateways Group of Company Limited, which faces an asset freeze for allegedly funding the Myanmar armed forces and procuring military equipment used against civilians. [The Royal Gazette]

Nepal's Prime Minister Dahal meets Indian leaders in New Delhi

(lm) Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal of Nepal met with key Indian leaders during his visit to New Delhi for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony. Dahal's meetings included discussions with Indian President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

Dahal emphasized the importance of resolving contentious issues, such as border disputes, through

established bilateral mechanisms. He also stressed the need to rejuvenate the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and expressed optimism about progressing the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, which has significant potential for electricity generation, irrigation, and flood control but has been stalled due to disagreements over cost and benefit sharing. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Additionally, Dahal met with the Federation of India Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) to encourage Indian investment in Nepal, particularly in sectors like tourism, energy, and agriculture. The Indian business community showed interest in exploring investment opportunities in Nepal.

MCC from US deputy vice president discusses project progress with Nepal's finance minister

(ps) On June 4, Jonathan Brooks, Deputy Vice President of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), met with Nepal's Finance Minister Barsha Man Pun in Kathmandu. [The Himalayan Times]

Brooks requested updates on the progress of the electricity transmission line and roadways projects, expressing satisfaction with their advancement. The MCC project, signed between Nepal and the United States in 2017 and endorsed by Nepal's Parliament two years ago, includes the development of a 315-km transmission line and roadway projects over the next five years. This includes a 400 kV double circuit transmission line from Butwal to Gorakhpur, with sub-stations being built in Nuwakot, Tanahu, and Nawalparasi East, featuring 856 towers.

Nepal, Finland hold second meeting of Bilateral Consultation Mechanism

(ps) On June 6, Nepal and Finland held the second meeting of their Bilateral Consultation Mechanism in Kathmandu. The Nepali delegation was led by the Chief of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Europe America Division, while the Finnish team was headed by Deputy Secretary of State for International Development, Pasi Hellman. Both nations reviewed and expressed satisfaction with their current bilateral relations, emphasizing the importance of high-level visits and enhanced partnerships. Nepal thanked Finland for its ongoing support in drinking water, sanitation,

education, and climate change. Finland showed interest in expanding development aid to Nepal, focusing on innovative public sector investment facilities. The meeting also covered mutual cooperation on regional and global issues, including climate change and multilateralism. [My Republica]

North Korea removes inter-Korean railway

(ac) On June 5, the South Korea National Intelligence Service (NIS) detected signs that North Korea has been removing railway sleeper on the northern side of the Inter-Korean railway of the Donghae line. Apart from the removal of train sleeper, North Korea also removed streetlights and installed mine along the railway line.

The Donghae and the Gyrongui line were established in 2006 after the leaders of South Korea and North Korea met in a summit. Both lines passed through the Demilitarized Zone, linking 27-kilometre sections between South Korea and North Korea.

Analysts suggested that Pyongyang's move is part of its efforts to erase the unification references after North Korean leader Kim Jong-un declared inter-Korean ties as those "between two states hostile to each other" at a year-end meeting. [The Korea Times]

Russia youth delegations and North Korea discuss bilateral cooperation

(ac) On June 5, a Russian youth delegation met with North Korea officials in Pyongyang to discuss bilateral exchanges and cooperations between their youth associations.

The meeting was part of the bilateral cooperation where North Korean youth delegations were sent to Russia's Far East in later April.

North Korea and Russia have expanded bilateral ties following last year summit between Kim Jung-un and Vladimir Putin. [Yonhap News]

North Korean defectors send balloons with anti-Kim leaflet

(ac) On June 6, a group of North Korean defectors in Seoul named Fighters for Free North Korea sent giant balloons carrying anti-Kim leaflet and other South Korea culture materials across the border. The group claims that the balloon movement was a tit-for-tat response following roughly 1000 balloons filled with trash and manure into South Korea were sent by North Korea (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

South Korea's national police chief affirmed that South Korean authorities refrained from stopping the activists' leaflet actions, citing their freedom of expression. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News]

In direct response, North Korea sent more than 600 trash balloons across the border to South Korea on June 9 and 10,

On the same day, South Korea's National Security Council decided to launch for two days loudspeaker broadcasts at the Demilitarized Zone border for the first time in six years as a response. The superiority of liberal democracy, South Korea's economic success, the justification for reunification and the reality of North Korean society were among the themes broadcasted.

South Korea's military, meanwhile, confirmed North Korean military "encroached" on the inter-Korean land border on that day but "immediately" retreated after broadcast warnings had been issued and warning shots fired by South Korean military forces. [CNN] [Reuters] [Yonhap News] [NK News 1] [NK News 2]

Putin set to visit North Korea for talks on multilateral cooperations

(ac) According to information received by *Reuters,* Russian President Vladimir Putin is set to conduct a state visit to North Korea and Vietnam on June 19-20.

The Russian ambassador to North Korea confirmed that Pyongyang has been actively preparing for Putin's state visit, will his visit to Vietnam is still in discussions.

The discussions during the visits are expected to cover a range of issues including energy, military cooperation, settlement of payments and agreements in education. [Reuters]

Russian tourists train departs for North Korea

(ac) On June 7, Russia's Federal Customs Service confirmed that a Russian train carrying 41 tourists had departed for North Korea for the first time in four years.

The railway services connecting Najin of North Korea and Khasan of Russia was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

While it is uncertain whether the train services will run regularly, the visit reflects recent growing exchange and cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang. [KBS World]

Pakistani Prime Minister Shebaz's China visit lauded, but yields modest gains in securing major deals

(ss/lm) Pakistani officials are lauding Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's recent five-day visit to China as a success, aimed at boosting foreign investment and exports amidst an economic crisis. During the visit, 23 agreements and MoUs were signed in various sectors, including agriculture, infrastructure, and industrial cooperation. The agreements aim to boost foreign direct investment in Pakistan and were signed on the second day of Sharif's visit during the Pakistan Business Conference in Shenzhen. [Arab New] [Reuters] [Voice of America]

At the same time, observers note that Sharif's visit, aimed at securing significant energy and infrastructure deals, ended only with modest gains, highlighting Beijing's cautious stance towards further investment in Pakistan. In particular, the visit aimed to upgrade the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), with commitments to boost construction, mining, exploration, and industrial cooperation [see Air No.23, June/2024, 1]. However, Sharif secured few new commitments beyond a vague mention of upgraded economic cooperation. Notably, China agreed to proceed with the first phase of the USD 6.7 billion Main Line 1 (ML-1) Railway project and upgrade a portion of the Karakoram Highway, but these were limited steps. [Nikkei Asia]

Furthermore, debt restructuring remains a critical issue, with Pakistan owing China USD 7.5 billion in project debt and nearly USD 2 billion in circular debt to Chinese power producers. No public statements on

debt restructuring were made during the visit, and experts suggest any relief will be handled discreetly.

Moreover, security for Chinese nationals in Pakistan is a major concern, following recent attacks on Chinese workers. The Pakistani delegation, including the army chief, emphasized their commitment to enhancing security measures. Both nations called on Afghanistan to combat terrorism, as Pakistan blames militants based in Afghanistan for the attacks on Chinese nationals.

Pakistan expects no 'change' in Indian policy after Prime Minister Modi's latest election victory

(tj) Following Narendra Modi's victory in the Indian elections, securing a third term as Prime Minister, Pakistan does not anticipate any change in India's policy towards it, according to an internal assessment. [The Express Tribune]

The assessment indicated that while there is some readiness in Delhi for talks with Pakistan, Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expects Islamabad to accept the new status quo regarding Jammu and Kashmir, following the revocation of its special status in August 2019. The assessment also revealed that there is no significant appetite within the BJP for meaningful dialogue with Pakistan in the near future. The prevailing sentiment is that unless Pakistan regresses, Modi and the BJP are unlikely to approach Pakistan for talks.

The Pakistani government has been advised not to rush into any engagement with India unless there is a clear and genuine commitment from India towards peace. This would involve engaging in a Comprehensive Dialogue that addresses all issues, including Kashmir, and resuming trade within the framework of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Pakistan, Italy to collaborate to combat drug trafficking

(ss) Pakistan and Italy have planned to combat illegal immigration and human trafficking. This decision was made during a meeting between Minister Mohsin Naqvi and Italian Interior Minister Matteo Piantedosi in Rome. Minister for Overseas Pakistanis Chaudhry Salik Hussain was also in the meeting. [Radio Pakistan]

Both nations agreed to cooperate on fighting drug trafficking. Pakistan Minister Mohsin Naqvi stated that

measures have been implemented at all levels to prevent the illegal entry of Pakistanis into Italy and to address drug trafficking. Chaudhry Salik Hussain highlighted that Italy could benefit significantly from Pakistan's skilled workforce and Italy's minister agreed to collaborate on issues related to border security and human and drug trafficking.

Philippines, United Arab Emirates seek to strengthen diplomatic, trade ties

(tl) The Philippines and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are aiming to strengthen their bilateral relations, with the UAE hinting at increased investments in Manila. During a courtesy call on President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. and First Lady Liza Araneta-Marcos at Malacañang Palace, UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, expressed interest in enhancing the relationship and expressing gratitude to the Philippines for its welcoming investors. [Philippine New Agency 1]

Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo has stated that the Philippines-UAE relations are at their highest point since the establishment of diplomatic ties 50 years ago. The relationship has grown significantly in recent years, with agreements on space cooperation, investment protection, agriculture, and climate change. Manalo also noted high-level exchanges between the two countries on investments, renewable energy, tourism, and transportation. [Philippine New Agency 2]

Meanwhile, President Marcos Jr. has appointed Ma. Anna Kathryna Pimentel as Special Envoy to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for Trade and Investment. Pimentel, wife of Senate Minority Leader Aquilino "Koko" Pimentel III, has been active in international forums on investment and economic cooperation hosted by the UAE, including the World Government Summit in February 2024, United Nations Climate Change Conference in December 2023, and Dubai Airshow and Dubai Watch Week in November 2023. With the upcoming 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties, Pimentel hopes to contribute to strengthening the relationship with the UAE and deepen bilateral economic relations between the Philippines and UAE. [Presidential Communication Office - PCO] [Dubai Eye] [Arab News] [Philippine New Agency 3]

Philippines, New Zealand to elevate relationship to Comprehensive Partnership by 2026

(lm) New Zealand and the Philippines are working to elevate their relationship to a Comprehensive Partnership by 2026, as agreed by their leaders in April 2024. During a visit to Manila, New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters met with key Filipino officials, including President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo. Peters announced several initiatives, including an USD 8.6 million development program to support indigenous women and girls in Mindanao, a Mutual Logistics Supporting Arrangement between their defense forces, an agreement to improve ease of doing business, and a USD 245,000 contribution to the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity. [Beehive.govt.nz]

Singapore, United States launch new AI Talent Bridge program to enhance tech opportunities for women

(sm) Singapore and the United States have announced a new AI Talent Bridge program focusing on emerging technology and AI opportunities for women. This initiative builds on the US-Singapore Women in Tech Partnership Programme launched in 2022. The announcement was made at a roundtable on AI, attended by tech companies and government officials from both countries. [CNA]

The program aims to deepen collaboration on critical emerging technologies and support youth, women, and future leaders in tech. The initiative is part of ongoing efforts to increase investments in digital infrastructure, AI innovation, governance, and skills development.

Singapore's Minister for Communications and Information Josephine Teo highlighted the steady growth in tech spending in Singapore, amounting to around USD 74 billion over the past five years. Existing and committed capital investments in AI between the US and Singapore exceed USD 37 billion.

The initiative also aligns with Singapore’s National AI Strategy (NAIS) 2.0, which aims to triple the number of AI practitioners to 15,000 over the next three to five years. The program will focus on developing AI capabilities and ensuring safe, trustworthy AI technologies.

Singapore, Ethiopia pledge to strengthen cooperation in areas such as transport, digitalization

(lb) Singapore and Ethiopia have committed to enhancing their bilateral relationship by exploring new areas of cooperation such as transport, digitalisation, and capacity-building. This was announced during a three-day official visit to Singapore by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali. The visit marks the first time an Ethiopian head of government has visited Singapore since 1968. [WMCC] [The Straits Times]

During the visit, Prime Minister Abiy and Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong discussed various initiatives to strengthen ties, including a memorandum of understanding to establish a bilateral consultation mechanism between the countries' foreign ministries. This platform aims to facilitate regular dialogue on new areas of cooperation and exchange views on regional and international developments.

Additionally, the two leaders witnessed the signing of a statement of intent to strengthen transport cooperation between Singapore's Ministry of Transport and Ethiopia's Ministry of Transport and Logistics.

Singapore to attend Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland

(sm) Singapore confirmed to participate in a Ukraine-backed peace summit in Switzerland to support Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's peace proposals. Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and National Development Sim Ann has been appointed as Singapore’s special envoy to the summit. The summit, scheduled for June 15-16, aims to build consensus on the next steps for peace in Ukraine following the Russian invasion in February 2022. As part of Zelensky’s 10-point plan for peace, which calls for the full withdrawal of Russian troops, the priorities of the summit include nuclear security, food security, and the return of displaced Ukrainian children.

President Zelensky, who recently attended the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, has invited leaders from 160 countries and organizations, with at least 107 already confirming attendances. While in Singapore, Zelensky met with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and PM Wong, resulting in the signing of an air deal to

strengthen air connectivity between the two countries. [The Straits Times]

Australian Chief of Army receives Singapore's prestigious Meritorious Service Medal

(lb) Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, Chief of Army of the Australian Defence Force, received Singapore's prestigious Pingat Jasa Gemilang (Tentera) or Meritorious Service Medal (Military) from President Tharman Shanmugaratnam. The award was presented by Minister for Defence Dr. Ng Eng Hen at a ceremony at the Ministry of Defence. [Mind EF]

LTGEN Stuart was honored for his substantial contributions to strengthening the bilateral defence relations between Singapore and Australia. His leadership facilitated the joint development of training areas in Australia, enhancing the scope for future training exercises between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF).

During his visit to Singapore from June 6 to 8, Lt Gen Stuart inspected a Guard of Honour, met with Minister Ng, and discussed with Chief of Army Major-General David Neo. He also visited Headquarters Singapore Artillery to learn about its capabilities and developmental efforts.

South Korea, Turkmenistan discuss economic cooperations and energy partnerships

(ac) On June 10, President Yoon Suk Yeol and Turkmenistan President Serdar Berdymukhamedov held a meeting in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, to discuss cooperations in economic trades and energy partnerships. The meeting was part of Yoon visit to the Central Asian country who is also visiting Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan this week.

Both countries agreed on the ‘mutually beneficial partnership’ and signed eight documents to bolster private sectors engagements in energy, trade, digital economy and people-to-people exchanges. The agreements also allow South Korean private companies to invest in construction and infrastructure projects in Turkmenistan. Companies like Hyundai Engineering are involved in building natural gas

facilities of the Kiyanly Polymer Plant in Turkmenbashi, northwest of Ashgabat.

Apart from economic agreements, both countries discussed denuclearization and peace building on the Korean Peninsula.

Analysts suggest that with South Korea's growing manufacturing and electronics industries, the country is building bilateral ties with the Central Asian region to secure the supply chain of minerals and natural resources. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: President Yoon asserts country's strength against North Korea in Memorial Day speech

(ac) On June 6, President Yoon Suk Yeol led the Memorial Day ceremony at the Seoul National Ceremony to honor the soldiers died during the Korean War. During the ceremony, Yoon delivered a speech condemning North Korea's missile tests and the regime's abhorrent human rights violations.

He asserted that South Korea will not overlook the threat from North Korea, vowing to build stronger military alliance and cooperations with U.S and international community, to deter the threats. [Yonhap News]

South Korea, U.S. hold military drills near the Military Demarcation Line

(ac) Following the suspension of the Inter-Korean peace agreement after the balloon incidents and the GPS jamming conducted by North Korea, the South Korean ministry of defense announced that they will restore all military activities near the Military Demarcation Line on June 4 (see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1).

Shortly after this announcement, South Korea and the U.S. held a bombing drill with a long-range B-1B bomber over the Korean Peninsula for the first time in seven years on June 5.

Additionally, the South Korean army announced that in conjunction with the U.S army, they have commenced a large-scale river-crossing for five-days to improve operational capabilities on the same day of the bombing drill.

The combined drills reflect increasing joint military exercises between South Korea and the security commitment to South Korea and to strengthen the military partnerships. [Yonhap News1] [Yonhap News2] [Associated Press]

Sri Lankan Prime Minister discusses trade, investment expansion with Mauritius High Commissioner

(hgh) Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena recently met with Mauritius High Commissioner Haymandoyal Dillum to discuss expanding trade and investment relations between the two countries. The meeting was attended by Parliamentarian Yadamini Gunawardena, Secretary to the Prime Minister Anura Dissanayake, and other senior officials. [Lankan News Web]

Prime Minister Gunawardena highlighted the potential for investments in new sectors, such as power and energy. High Commissioner Dillum noted the rapid recovery of Sri Lanka's tourism sector and suggested collaboration in the hospitality industry, leveraging shared tourist attractions.

High Commissioner Dillum also invited Sri Lanka to join the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), assuring support for its membership. SIDS includes 29 island nations, among them Singapore, Mauritius, and Maldives. The discussion also covered collaboration in multilateral organizations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the African Union.

Sri Lankan exports to Mauritius have grown significantly, from USD 768,000 in 2017 to USD 7.5 million in 2023, at an annualized rate of 37.7 percent. Prime Minister Gunawardena emphasized the need for further trade diversification.

USAID supports Sri Lanka in enhancing investment climate through ADR

(hgh) The United States, via USAID, is assisting Sri Lanka in improving its investment climate by promoting commercial alternative dispute resolution (ADR). This effort includes training and accrediting 23 international commercial mediators, effectively doubling the number of qualified mediators in Sri Lanka. [U.S. embassy in Sri Lanka]

Under USAID's Efficient and Effective Justice (EEJ) project, the mediators received extensive training from the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC) in areas such as communication, problem-solving, and managing emotions. After a four-month mentorship, they are expected to handle around 100 commercial mediations in Sri Lanka by October 2026.

The EEJ project also involves pilot programs for judicial and court-referred mediation, aiming to reduce delays and backlogs in the justice system. These initiatives, involving local and international experts, provide training in ADR best practices to various stakeholders, including lawyers, law students, and companies, thereby enhancing the judicial process's overall efficacy in Sri Lanka.

Biden reiterates US military support of Taiwan

(jp) US President Joe Biden, in an interview with Time magazine, stated that he does not rule out using military force to defend Taiwan if China attempts to unilaterally change the "status quo" across the Taiwan Strait. Biden emphasized that while the US does not seek Taiwan's independence, any military action would depend on China's actions. He highlighted ongoing US consultations with regional allies and continued support for Taiwan's defense. Once asked of the details and if the US military would launch strikes from bases in Japan or the Philippines, the president refused to specify.

The Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanked Biden for his stance, reinforcing Taiwan's commitment to enhancing its self-defense capabilities and maintaining cooperation with the US' commitment to regional stability in the Asia-Pacific region. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: US Department of State approves sales of F-16 parts to Taiwan

(jp) The US Department of State has approved two potential sales to Taiwan of F-16 parts and related equipment, totaling USD 300 million, the Pentagon announced on June 5. These deals, marking the 14th arms sale to Taiwan since President Joe Biden took office in 2021, include standard (USD 220 million) and non-standard (USD 80 million) spare and repair parts, components, consumables, and accessories for F-16

aircraft, along with other technical and logistics support services.

The Defense Security Cooperation Agency stated that the sales aim to enhance Taiwan's ability to address current and future threats by maintaining the operational readiness of its F-16 fleet. The US Congress has been notified of the potential sales, though no contracts have been signed yet.

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense praised the sales, asserting that they would help maintain combat capabilities amid increasing pressure from China's "gray zone" tactics, which restrict Taiwan's air and maritime training and response time. The ministry called on China to stop “all irrational actions”, emphasizing the need for joint efforts to ensure stability in the Taiwan Strait.

Minister of National Defense Wellington Koo highlighted President Biden's consistent remarks about defending Taiwan, reflecting the island's strategic importance. Koo stressed the necessity for Taiwan to strengthen its self-defense capabilities and align with the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

The Taiwan-US Defense Industry Symposium commenced in Taipei, though the Ministry clarified that the forum is a business exchange event and not directly related to arms sales. Speculation suggests US defense contractors at the forum may discuss the arms sales with Taiwanese defense officials. [Taipei Times]

Taiwanese foreign affairs ministry seeks closer cooperation with India in trade and technology

(jp) On June 10, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) announced its desire for closer, mutually beneficial cooperation with India. As a key target country for Taiwan’s New Southbound Policy, India is seen as a vital partner for promoting bilateral cooperation in trade and semiconductor technology, which MOFA believes will enhance peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

Following Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi being sworn in for his third term on June 9, President Lai Ching-te congratulated Modi via an X post, expressing his anticipation for strengthening Taiwan-India partnership in trade and technology. Prime Minister Modi reciprocated the gesture, expressing eagerness

to build a closer, mutually beneficial economic and technological partnership with Taiwan.

This exchange drew criticism from China, which opposed official interactions between Taiwan and countries that maintain diplomatic relations with China. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning urged India to resist Taiwan's political maneuvers. [Taiwan News]

Indonesia seeks Thai cooperation to arrest fugitive drug lord Fredy Pratama

(bk/jb) Indonesian police are seeking cooperation from Thai authorities to apprehend Fredy Pratama, a major Indonesian drug trafficker believed to be hiding near the Myanmar border in Thailand. Pratama is alleged to lead a drug syndicate operating across Southeast Asia, with connections to gangs in Thailand and Malaysia, trafficking methamphetamine pills from the Golden Triangle. Despite a joint operation by Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand in September last year that resulted in the arrest of 39 individuals, Pratama remains at large. His network allegedly smuggled up to 500 kg of narcotics monthly into Indonesia between 2018 and 2023. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post] [Tempo.co]

This request follows Indonesia's recent arrest of Thai fugitive Chaowalit Thongduang, also known as Paeng Nanode, who had sought refuge in Indonesia after escaping from a hospital in Nakhon Si Thammarat in October last year [see AiR No. 23, June/2024, 1].

Indonesian narcotics division chief Pol Brig Gen Mukhi Juharsa emphasized the reciprocal nature of the request, expecting Thailand to apprehend Pratama in exchange for Chaowalit's extradition.

Laos-Thailand railway set for full trial this month

(lm) Thailand and Laos are set to launch a railway network connecting Bangkok and Vientiane, with a full trial run scheduled for later this month, according to the State Railway of Thailand (SRT). This project aims to improve connectivity for travelers and facilitate the transport of goods between the two countries, positioning Thailand as a regional logistics hub. [Bangkok Post]

SRT deputy governor Awirut Thongnet recently met with Lao National Railways managing director Daochinda Siharath to discuss the operation plans for the new train service. The planned route will run from Bangkok's Krung Thep Aphiwat Central Station to Vientiane's Khamsavath station, passing through Udon Thani and Nong Khai. A trial run is scheduled for June 13-14.

The discussions also covered tourism market development, advertising, public relations, and enhancing cross-border goods transport between Thailand, Laos, and China. Additionally, the SRT has provided training to Lao railway staff in train operations, station management, and ticket sales.

Malaysia, Thailand to work on a twin-city concept in Southern Thailand

(msz) The Thai and Malaysian governments will reportedly partner to promote the twin-city concept in Thai deep South. The concept is one among the projected bilateral initiatives in developing five southernmost provinces of Thailand. During the meeting to study the progress of the plans, Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Commerce Minister Phumtham Wechayachai said that the twin-city initiative aims to turn the conflict zones in these provinces into trade arenas stimulating the economy with the hope to push for peace. Under this twin-city initiative, five southern Thai provinces of Satun, Songkhla, Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat will be paired with five Malaysian states, namely Perlis, Kedah, Perak, Terengganu and Kelantan. [Bangkok Post]

According to Phumtham, Thailand and Malaysia will work together to achieve five goals as part of the initiative - forming a bilateral trade partnership focusing on boosting sales of agricultural produce and lifting bilateral trade measures; opening more halal market channels in Malaysia for Thai farmers and entrepreneurs, including a monthly Thai food carnival; establishing a comprehensive Thailand-Malaysia trade center to facilitate bilateral trade activities; resumeing trade activities near the border with Malaysia in the province of Satun after they were stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic; forming a collaborative task force between Malaysia's Ministry of Investment, Trade and Industry and Thailand's Commerce Ministry to drive the initiative. Phumtham added that Thailand's budget for the project is 160 million baht (around USD 4.4 million), and the project is expected to be approved next month.

Myanmar’s crackdown on Thai condo purchases could cause significant decline in condo transfer

(lm) Myanmar's crackdown on its citizens purchasing condominiums in Thailand has significantly impacted the market, causing a decline in transfers during the second and third quarters, according to the Thai Condominium Association. Over THB 1 billion (USD 28.7 million) in condo transfers to Myanmar buyers were blocked in April and May. [Bangkok Post]

The Myanmar buyer market had been rising steadily, becoming a crucial segment for Thai developers as Chinese market share declined. In the first quarter of 2024, Myanmar buyers purchased 392 units worth THB 2.2 billion (USD 63.1 million), rising to the second-largest foreign buyer group.

The crackdown is shifting condo purchases from completed to off-plan units, as buyers need time for foreign exchange transactions. Developers are advised to hold expos in Thailand to attract these buyers. The crackdown may lead to alternative payment methods or cancellations for those unable to transfer funds.

China, Vietnam hold talks to drive agro-forestry-fishery trade

(wn) On June 6, Vietnam’s Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development Hoang Trung met with Zhao Zenglian, Vice Minister of the General Administration of Customs of China (GACC), to discuss enhancing trade in agro-forestry-fishery products between the two countries. [Vietnam News]

Vietnamese agro-forestry-fishery products currently hold less than 5 percent of China’s market share in these categories. In the first five months of 2024, trade between the countries in these products reached USD 6.2 billion, with Vietnam’s exports at USD 4.6 billion, up 8.6 percent, and imports from China at USD 1.6 billion, up 31.5 percent.

Drug trafficking ring from Laos to Vietnam busted; five suspects detained

(wn) On June 8, 2024, police in Vietnam announced the busting of a drug trafficking ring operating from Laos

to the country. Five Vietnamese suspects, aged 22 to 48, were detained on June 5 for their involvement in the illegal drug trade. The police seized 988 synthetic drug pills, 39.9 grams of heroin, nine self-made guns, 12 knives, and one pepper spray. The investigation revealed that the group regularly collaborated with individuals in Laos to form an illegal drug trafficking network and were armed to resist authorities. [Vietnam Plus]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

12 June 2024 @ 3:00-4:30 p,m. (GMT+7), CPG, Thailand

Asia in Review Event Series on Elections in 2024

Singapore's Leadership in Transition: Challenges and Prospects for a Post-Lee Era

After some twenty years in office, Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in mid-April announced his intention to step down, paving the way for Finance Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Lawrence Wong to be the city-state's next premier. Against this backdrop, this webinar seeks to dissect the nuances of Singapore's historic leadership transition and its implications for the nation's future.

For more information, see [CPG].

14 June 2024 @ 3:00-4:30 p,m. (GMT+7), CPG, Thailand

CPG Constitutional Law Series on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the German Basic Law

The First Line of Rights Defense in Germany: The Concept of Human Dignity in the Basic Law

75 years ago, on May 23, 1949, the German constitution, widely known as the Basic Law, entered into force, following its passage in the Parliamentary Council on May 8 and subsequent approval by the occupying Western Allies of World War II. Since then, the Basic Law has developed into a mainstay of democratic governance, rule of law, and human rights protection in Germany, while inspiring the development and creation of constitutions in many countries around the world. To celebrate the Basic Law's 75th anniversary and its enduring impact on democracy, freedom, and the rule of law in the heart of Europe and beyond, CPG is hosting a series of online events as part of the "CPG Constitutional Law Series" to explore and discuss some of the many facets of the Basic Law.

The series will commence with an online talk titled "The First Line of Rights Defense in Germany: The Concept of Human Dignity in the Basic Law" and to be given by Professor Dr. Dr. Rainer Hofmann, Goethe University Frankfurt/Main. Itwill present and discuss the main features of the concept of human dignity as developed by the relevant jurisprudence of the Federal Constitutional Tribunal including its impact on issues such as the guarantee of basic legal equality irrespective of e.g. color, gender, race or religion, life imprisonment and the rights of persons in the criminal justice system, embryo research, and biogenetics, the shooting down by state authorities of a hijacked aircraft resulting in the death of the passenger, regulation of assisted suicide, to name but a few. Finally, the lecture will shortly address a development that led to the concept of human dignity becoming part of some of the more recent constitutions of European States and of Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU).

For more information, see [CPG]

12 June 2024 @ 1:00 -2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for a New American Security, USA

Lost Decade: The U.S. Pivot to Asia and the Rise of Chinese Power

The announcement, more than a decade ago, of a "Pivot to Asia" marked a dramatic departure in American grand strategy. In their new book, Robert D. Blackwill and Richard Fontaine detail this attempted to shift to an Asia-centric foreign policy, examine it from a global perspective, and draw out lessons for policymakers today. Join this virtual event with the authors. They will discuss the Pivot strategy, assess the effort thus far, and propose a way ahead for the United States in Asia and beyond.

For more information, visit [CNAS].

12 June 2024 @ 1:00 p.m. (GMT+3), Gulf Research Center, Saudi Arabia

Emerging Trends in Sub-Saharan African Migration to the GCC

Migration from Africa has been a significant topic of scholarly interest for many decades, encompassing both intra-continental movements and migration to other parts of the world. Recent trends have demonstrated notable shifts in migration patterns, particularly the growing migration from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The GCC region appeals to many individuals seeking economic and personal advancement, as well as enhanced living standards. In this webinar, experts will explore several important questions concerning migration trends between Sub-Saharan Africa and the GCC region.

For more information, visit [GRC].

12 June 2024 @ 11:00 a.m. -12:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

India's Post-Election Foreign Policy

In this panel discussion, three experts on Indian foreign policy will assess what the new Indian government's regional foreign policy agenda may be. Panelists will examine the potential for a thaw in India-Pakistan relations, the evolving reorientation of India's strategic focus to China, and its goals for the South Asian region writ large as it seeks to bolster its credentials as a net security provider and economic

partner of choice. They will also reflect on the implications of New Delhi's regional outreach for its ties with the United States.

For more information, visit [Stimson].

12 June 2024 @ 12:00 -1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

The Indo-Pacific and the World: A Conversation with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell

U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell joins the Stimson Center for a fireside chat exploring historic tensions, emerging competition, and new opportunities for strategic partnership across the Indo-Pacific.

For more information, visit [Stimson].

12 June 2024 @ 2:00- 3:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Maritime Security and geopolitical rivalry in the South China Sea

Join the event to learn more about maritime security in the South China Sea and how actors navigate the geopolitical landscape with their respective economic interests, political ambitions, and military posturing.

For more information, visit [DIIS].

12 June 2024 @ 10:00 – 11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Foreign Policy Research Institute, USA

Can China and Russia Navigate Their Power Transition in Central Asia?

China and Russia have long had a de facto partnership in Central Asia, in which Russia was the primary security provider and China was the primary investor. Under this arrangement, Beijing tacitly agreed not to challenge Moscow's regional primacy, and regional states largely respected the interests of their great power neighbors. Join the event to learn more about this topic.

For more information, visit [FPRI].

12 June 2024 @ 2:00- 3:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

Understanding the Growing Collaboration Between Russia and Iran

Please join the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program, in collaboration with the Middle East Program, for a conversation about the growing bilateral relationship between Moscow and Tehran. Max Bergmann will moderate a conversation with Jon B.
Alterman and Hanna Notte, analyzing how the governments of Russia and Iran have strengthened their political, economic, and security collaboration since the launch of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

For more information, visit [CSIS].

12 June 2024 @ 11:15 a.m.- 12:15 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for Strategic & International Studies, USA

The G7 Puglia Summit: Expectations & Outcomes

Join CSIS experts as they discuss expectations and outcomes for the G7 Summit in Italy on June 13-15 and also share the findings of a new CSIS report ""Bending" the Architecture: Reimagining the G7" on the future of the G7.

For more information, visit [CSIS].

12 June 2024 @ 2:00-3:00 p.m. (GMT+1), Chatham House, UK

Israel-Palestine: The implications for Jordan

In this webinar, a panel of experts will examine how the war in Gaza is affecting Jordan and will focus on: Short and long-term domestic consequences, Security ramifications of the Gaza war and its regional spillover, Implications for the future of Israel–Jordan relations, Jordan's diplomatic role in the region.

For more information, visit [Chatham].

12 June 2024 @ 10:00 -11:30 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

New Hurdles for Elections in Latin America

Join this event with the experts to discuss the challenges Latin America's election systems face, the lessons learned from recent elections in the region, and opportunities to reassure voters in the region of the credibility of elections and the democratic legitimacy of the winners.

For more information, visit [Wilson].

12 June 2024 @ 9:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

A Global South with Chinese characteristics

As part of Chinese ambition to compete with the existing liberal international order, China has been using political and economic tools to export its model of governance, particularly to the Global South. The panel will discuss this report and investigate the current extent of the Global South's acceptance and adaptation of the Chinese authoritarianism and how the Global South can ensure access to holistic, objective, and transparent information about China's intentions and its domestic affairs.

For more information, visit [Atlantic].

12 June 2024 @ 2:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

The art of diplomacy: Historic agreements that changed the world

Join the event for a discussion on the art of diplomacy with Amb. Stuart Eizenstat, Amb. Paula Dobriansky, Amb. Ronald Neumann, and Amb. John Negroponte. This event will also serve as an opportunity to launch a new book by Ambassador Eizenstat, The Art of Diplomacy: How American Negotiators Reached Historic Agreements that Changed the World. The book represents the views of the author and does not

necessarily represent the views of the Atlantic Council as an organization.

For more information, visit [Atlantic].

12 June 2024 @ 4:30 p.m. (GMT-4), Atlantic Council, USA

Book launch | "Battleground Ukraine: From Independence to the War with Russia"

The Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center hosts an event to launch Adrian Karatnycky's new book "Battleground Ukraine: From Independence to the War with Russia" with author Adrian Karatnycky, in conversation with The Atlantic's David Frum.

For more information, visit [Atlantic].

13 June 2024 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Italian Institute For International Political Studies, Italy

India in the Middle East: Looking Westward

Join this online event to learn more about this topic from speakers and experts such as Abdessalam Saad Jaldi, Nicola Missaglia, Viraj Solanki, and Sangeeta Mahapatra.

For more information, visit [ISPI].

13 June 2024 @ 10:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

China's Innovation and Industrial Policy: Achievements, challenges, and consequences for Europe

China's quest for innovation is undeniable, with very large human and financial resources devoted to moving up the ladder in manufacturing, but also in emerging technologies. In this seminar we look into China's achievements, but also the challenges. We will share new research on where China - but also the United States and the European Union - stand in key technologies, namely artificial intelligence,

semiconductors, and quantum computing, and we will also discuss key takeaways for Europe.

For more information, visit [Bruegel].

13 June 2024 @ 2:30-3:45 p.m. (GMT+2), German Institute of Global and Area Studies, Germany

Australia-China relations after the economic coercion campaign

With diplomatic contact between Australia and China returning to its regular rhythm, Beijing is also dismantling the last of its politically motivated trade restrictions. How did the Australian government and the country's exporters navigate this four-year long campaign of economic coercion? What, if anything, can other countries learn from the Australian experience? And what's the outlook for Australia-China relations? This presentation will also explore how deep economic interdependence between Australia and China has created sources of leverage and vulnerability for both countries, while also considering how these sources of leverage and vulnerability might be weaponised in conflict scenarios, including Taiwan Strait contingencies.

For more information, visit [GIGA].

13 June 2024 @ 4:00 – 5:30 p.m. (GMT+5:30), The Centre for Policy Research, India

MAGA vs The Liberals: US Presidential Election 2024 and Implications on India

As the 60th presidential election in the United States approaches, the internal political struggle between *Make America Great Again (MAGA)* supporters and Liberals is intensifying. The outcome will determine who becomes the next American President – Donald Trump or Joe Biden. While there are similarities in their foreign policy approaches to India, there are also major differences. Understanding both becomes exceedingly important at a time when the US-India bilateral relationship is staring at new horizons but also new complications. The talk will, therefore, decode the domestic political debates in the US, their impact on the presidential election, and the implications of a Trump or Biden victory for US-India relations.

For more information, visit [CPR].

13 June 2024 @ 6:30-7:30 p.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

The Lee Edwards Lecture in Conservative Leadership: How Reagan Won the Cold War

Join the event for the inaugural Lee Edwards Lecture in Conservative Leadership, with remarks delivered by Peter Robinson, Hoover Institution Senior Fellow and former speechwriter for President Ronald Reagan.

For more information, visit [Heritage Foundation].

13 June 2024 @ 9:00- 11:00 a.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Ukraine: The reconstruction of Mykolaiv

This seminar takes stock of the Danish efforts to support the reconstruction of Mykolaiv, and it offers perspectives from the Danish Embassy in Kyiv and from people working on the ground in Mykolaiv. The message from all involved is very clear: Work is being done and Mykolaiv is already preparing itself for a future after the successful conclusion of the war. Please note that this seminar will be followed by a panel discussion on “Russian mass-subversion of Ukrainian territories”.

For more information, visit [DIIS].

13 June 2024 @ 11:30 a.m.- 2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Ukraine: Russian mass-subversion of Ukrainian territories

DIIS offers a compact series of a total of four seminars to give you a comprehensive understanding of some of the most pressing issues relating to Ukraine. At this seminar, experts take a closer look at how Russian occupation of the temporarily occupied territories in Ukraine has been accompanied by strategies and policies to change the composition, both physically and mentally, of these territories.

For more information, visit [DIIS].

13 June 2024 @ 4:00-5:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, USA

What Strategies Work to Advance Women's Political Power?

Are current interventions to promote women's political empowerment still fit for purpose? How can policymakers, practitioners, and advocates improve their work going forward? To reflect on these questions, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace will host a discussion with the authors of the new book Aiding Empowerment: Democracy Promotion and Gender Equality in Politics, Saskia Brakemaker, fellow in Carnegie's Democracy, Conflict, and Governance program, and Katherine Mann, a University of Cambridge PhD candidate.

For more information, visit [Carnegie].

13 June 2024 @ 5:30-7:00 p.m. (GMT+10), Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia

Fifty Years Of Asean-Australia Relations: Perspectives From Asean Homs

The golden anniversary of ASEAN-Australia relations provides an opportunity to review how the relationship is traveling. Following their summit in Melbourne last March, ASEAN and Australian Leaders issued a Vision Statement setting out their strategic vision for the next 50 years. It calls for open, inclusive, and transparent rules-based regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific region, in which ASEAN is central. Join the event to learn more.

For more information, visit [AIIA].

14 June 2024 @ 12:00 -1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Stimson Center, USA

The Iran Challenge: A Conversation with Former CENTCOM Commander Gen. Kenneth 'Frank' McKenzie Jr.

Join this event where Gen. Kenneth 'Frank' McKenzie Jr., former head of CENTCOM sits to discuss his new memoir, "The Melting Point: High Command and War

in the 21st Century," his views on the challenges he faced and his advice for those who follow him.

For more information, visit [Stimson].

14 June 2024 @ 9:30 - 11:00 a.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Ukraine: Lessons learned and the prospects for the war in Ukraine

DIIS offers a compact series of a total of four seminars to give you a comprehensive understanding of some of the most pressing issues relating to Ukraine. At this seminar, James Nixey from Chatham House will give a talk on the lessons learned and the prospects for the war in Ukraine.

For more information, visit [DIIS].

14 June 2024 @ 11:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. (GMT+2), Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

Ukraine: The wider security developments in and around Ukraine

DIIS offers a compact series of a total of four seminars to give you a comprehensive understanding of some of the most pressing issues relating to Ukraine. This seminar discusses the challenge of dealing with acute security threats and reforming a state at war.

For more information, visit [DIIS].

14 June 2024 @ 11:00 a.m. -12:30 p.m. (GMT-4), The United States Institute of Peace, USA

Preparing the Next Generation of Diplomats

Join USIP to mark the book's publication, and for a conversation on the current state of U.S. and global diplomacy, its impact on real people's lives, and the urgent need for governments to rethink their approaches to recruiting and training diplomats.

For more information, visit [USIP].

17 June 2024 @ 3:00 p.m. (GMT+2), International Crisis Group, Belgium

Ukraine on the Diplomatic Front

As participants meet in Lucerne, Crisis Group welcomes you to a discussion of that meeting, its implications, and Ukraine's diplomatic strategy. Experts will discuss Ukraine's objectives for Lucerne and the goals of other participants, to say nothing of the Swiss hosts. Crisis Group analysts will also assess Kyiv's broader diplomatic strategy and the relationship between what happens in Switzerland and prospects for a sustainable peace deal, with Russian participation.

For more information, visit [Crisis Group].

17 June 2024 @ 4:30 p.m. (GMT-7), Hoover Institution, USA

The Un-Presidented Speaker Series: Luke Nichter

Join the event for this talk by Luke Nichter, American historian, professor of history and James H. Cavanaugh Endowed Chair in Presidential Studies at Chapman University, and author or editor of eight books, including most recently *The Year That Broke Politics. With introduction* by Victor Davis Hanson, the Martin and Illie Anderson senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.

For more information, visit [Hoover].

18 June 2024 @ 3:30 - 5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), National University of Singapore, Singapore

Chinese Nationalism against Taiwan: Investigating Its Social Base and Impact on Public Opinion in China and Taiwan

Join this event where the speaker will present the main findings of four studies on Chinese nationalism against Taiwan based on surveys in China and Taiwan. Dr Qi Dongtao is a Senior Research Fellow at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore. He received his PhD in Sociology from Stanford University and conducts research in the field of political sociology,

especially on state-society relations and nationalism in Taiwan and China.

For more information, visit [NUS].

18 June 2024 @ 10:00- 11:30 a.m. (GMT+3), Finnish Institute Of International Affairs, Finland

After the European Parliament election: How will the EU change?

The European Parliament elections on 6-9 June will mark the start of a crucial and likely contentious legislature. Over the next five years, the EU faces a tough political agenda – with geopolitical challenges, negotiations on enlargement and internal reform as well as a new long-term budget, and other projects such as the green and digital transformation and the reform of the single market. At the same time, the rise of far-right parties in both the Parliament and the Council could make it more difficult to build majorities. In this seminar, speakers take stock of the election results and look ahead to the next legislature. What new majorities will emerge? What will be the priorities of the next European Commission? And who is in the running for the EU's top jobs?

For more information, visit [FIIA].

18 June 2024 @ 8:30 -10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), The United States Institute of Peace, USA

A Grassroots Movement for Peace in Papua New Guinea

Join USIP for a conversation with John Lewis Peace Fellow James Komengi on grassroots peacebuilding in his home province of Hela and its lessons for U.S. engagement with Papua New Guinea under the SPCPS. The event will also feature a screening of a short USIP-commissioned documentary on the topic.

For more information, visit [USIP].

18 June 2024 @ 9:30 -10:45 a.m. (GMT-4), Wilson Center, USA

Forced Displacement in MENA and its Gendered Impacts

To mark World Refugees Day, join the Middle East Program for an expert panel to discuss the gendered impacts of forced displacement across the Middle East & North Africa. They will address how patterns of forced displacement; what the unique challenges that women and girls face are, and how policymakers can better address their needs and generate conditions of safety, security, and prosperity, among other issues.

For more information, visit [Wilson].

Recent Book Releases

Clare Hammond, ***On the Shadow Tracks: A Journey Through Occupied Myanmar,*** Allen Lane, 400 pages, published 6 Jun. 2024. For a review, see [The Asian Review of Books].

Annalee Newitz, ***Stories Are Weapons: Psychological Warfare and the American Mind,*** W. W. Norton & Company, 260 pages, published June 4, 2024. For a review, see [The New York Times Review of Books].

Sara B. Franklin, ***The Editor: How Publishing Legend Judith Jones Shaped Culture in America,*** Atria Books, 336 pages, published May 28, 2024. For a review, see [The New York Times Review of Books].

Åsne Seierstad, ***The Afghans: Three lives through war, love, and revolt,*** Little, Brown Book Group, 448 pages, published May 28, 2024. For a review, see [The Guardian Review of Books].

Steven K. Bailey, ***Target Hong Kong: A true story of U.S. Navy pilots at war,*** Osprey Publishing, 368 pages, published February 6, 2024. For a review, see [The Asian Review of Books].

Mikhael Manekin, ***End of Days Ethics, Tradition, and Power in Israel,*** Academic Studies Press, 146 pages, published November 21, 2023. For a review, see [The Los Angeles Review of Books].

Kerry Brown, ***China Incorporated: The Politics of a World Where China is Number One,*** 208 pages, published September 7, 2023. For a review, see [The LSE Review of Books].

Joseph E. Stiglitz, ***The Road to Freedom: Economics and the Good Society,*** W. W. Norton & Company, 384 pages, published April 23, 2024. For a review, see [The LSE Review of Books].

Calls

The **Luiss Centre for International and Strategic Studies (CISS)** invites paper proposals for its ***international conference "Distributive Justice in International Law,"*** to be held on October 3-4, 2024, in Rome. The deadline for abstract submission is June 30, 2024. For more information, see [Luiss].

Singapore Management University (SMU) invites paper proposals for its ***international workshop "Small States and Arctic Sustainability,"*** to be held on November 20, 2024, in Singapore. The deadline for abstract submission is July 15, 2024. For more information, see [SMU].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for an **Operations Analyst** to be based in New York, United States. Applications are accepted until June 22, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a **Communications and Research Intern.** This position is home-based. Applications are accepted until June 20, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a **Partnerships Analyst.** This position is home-based. Applications are accepted until June 22, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a **UNEP Policy Expert.** Applications are accepted until June 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a **Joint Programme Manager.** The duty station will be based in Damascus, Syria. Applications are accepted until June 22, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking **Individual contractors for BMOs' governance improvement.** Applications are accepted until June 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for an **Intern in Governance and**

Gender to be based in Seoul, South Korea. Applications are accepted until June 23, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking **National Planning Specialist for National Governance Programme** to be based in Pakistan. Applications are accepted until June 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for an **SDG Local Governance Award Evaluator** to be based in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Applications are accepted until June 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking **Consultancy Services to Develop a Comprehensive Election Dispute Resolution Mech** in Malawi. Applications are accepted until June 17, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is looking for a **Legal Expert.** This is a home-based position. Applications are accepted until June 20, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking **International Consultant for Judicial Integrity and Access to Justice Consultant.** Applications are accepted until June 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)** is looking for a **National Social Services Delivery Decentralization Coordination Consultant.** The location for this position is the Solomon Islands. Applications are accepted until June 18, 2024. More information is provided at [UNICEF].

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is looking for a **Communications Officer** to be based in Sudan-Port Sudan. Applications are accepted until June 17, 2024. More information is provided at [WHO].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for candidates for the position of **Rule Of Law Officer.** These positions are located in the United Nations Field Peacekeeping Operations, Special Political Missions, Service Centres, and Offices as applicable. Applications are accepted until July 6, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for **Senior Development Coordination Officer, Head of RCO and Strategic Planner.** Applications are accepted

until June 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for a **Senior Development Coordination Officer for crisis Management.** Applications are accepted until June 20, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for a **Political Affairs Officer** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until June 12, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for a **Legal Assistant** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until July 5, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for a **Political Affairs Intern** to be based in New York, USA, or work remotely. Applications are accepted until July 5, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for a **Legal Officer** to be based in New York, USA. Applications are accepted until July 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **United Nations Secretariat (UN)** is looking for a **Senior Speechwriter.** This position is located in the Strategic Communication and Speechwriting Unit in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. Applications are accepted until June 27, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Secretariat].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** is looking for an **Office Assistant** to be based in Italy-Rome. Applications are accepted until June 21, 2024. More information is provided at [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** is looking for a **National Specialist on Policy and Youth** to be based in Georgia-Tbilisi. Applications are accepted until June 21, 2024. More information is provided at [FAO].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** is looking for an **Expert on Socio-Economic Analysis.** This position is home-based. Applications are accepted until July 7, 2024. More information is provided at [FAO].

The **International Organization for Migration (IOM)** is looking for a **Senior Administrative Assistant (Staff Protocol)** to be based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Applications are accepted until June 20, 2024. More information is provided at [IOM].

The **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** is looking for an Information, **Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) Specialist** to be based in Yaounde, Cameroon. Applications are accepted until June 14, 2024. More information is provided at [NRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is looking for candidates for the position of **Country Director - Jordan CP.** Applications are accepted until July 7, 2024. More information is provided at [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is looking for candidates for the position of **Deputy Chief of Party** to be based in Bangladesh. Applications are accepted until July 7, 2024. More information is provided at [IRC].

The **International Rescue Committee (IRC)** is looking for a **Resettlement Caseworker** to be based in Wichita, KS USA. Applications are accepted until August 7, 2024. More information is provided at [IRC].

The **UN Women** is looking for a **National Consultant** to Facilitate Consultations with Political Parties in Georgia. Applications are accepted until June 24, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Women].

The **UN Women** is looking for a **Policy Specialist,** Ending Violence against Women to be based in New York or Nairobi. Applications are accepted until June 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UN Women].

The **University of Chichester** is looking for a **part-time Lecturer in Law.** Applications are accepted until June 30, 2024. More information is provided at [Chichester].

The **University of Limerick** is looking for a **Teaching Assistant in Law.** Applications are accepted until June 24, 2024. More information is provided at [Limerick].

The **Northumbria Law School at the University of Northumbria** is looking for a **Lecturer in Law.** Applications are accepted until June 18, 2024. More information is provided at [Northumbria].

The **Department of Politics and International Studies (PAIS) at the University of Warwick** is looking for a **Teaching Fellow in UK Politics and Policy.** Applications are accepted until June 23, 2024. More information is provided at [Warwick].

The **Sabanci University** invites applications for **full-time positions in Organization and Entrepreneurship.** Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis. More information is provided at [Sabanci].

The **Department of Government** is seeking to appoint an **LSE Fellow** to contribute to Departmental teaching with a particular focus on Public Policy and Administration. Applications are accepted until June 23, 2024. More information is provided at [LSE].

Dublin City University is looking for an **Assistant Professor in Human Geography.** Applications are accepted until June 24, 2024. More information is provided at [Dublin City].

The **University of Vanderbilt** is looking for **LL.M. Legal Writing Instructor.** Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. More information is provided at [Vanderbilt].

The **University of Vanderbilt** is looking for a **full-time clinical faculty position** to direct an Innocence Clinic at the law school. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. More information is provided at [Vanderbilt].

The **Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University** is looking for a **Finance Research Associate**. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis until the position is filled. More information is provided at [Vanderbilt].

The **University of Nottingham** is looking for a **Teaching Associate in Comparative Politics.** Applications are accepted until June 24, 2024. More information is provided at [Nottingham].

The **School of Politics & International Studies (POLIS) at the University of Leeds** is looking for a **Research Fellow in Computational Climate Politics.** Applications are accepted until June 24, 2024. More information is provided at [Leeds].

Team:

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Maggs (rm), Saw Eh Ta Mu (sm), Saw Khu Doh Soe (ss), Saw Lalbwel Htoo (sh), Shreya Goyal (sg), Sirikorn Indrayodha (si), Thurein Lynn (tl), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn), Wannee Thiraputthisakul (wt), Wyne Ei Htwe (wh)

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