German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance
CPG

Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

No. 46, November/2024, 2

Brought to you by CPG

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 Angola's and Poland's Independence Day this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

Webpage: www.cpg-online.de, Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/CPGTU

Main Sections

- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in East Asia
- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in South Asia
- Constitutional Law and –Politics, Human Rights and National Security in Southeast Asia
- International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia
- Announcements

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

China: Authorities crack down tens of thousands of Chinese college students cycling at night

(jf) Over the weekend, police in central China enforced traffic restrictions to stop a viral phenomenon where thousands of university students rode share bikes overnight to Kaifeng in search of breakfast. Known as the "Night Riding Army," this group had been gathering momentum for months, but pictures on social media from November 8 showed that their latest ride led to a clogged highway.

This event is part of a broader trend among young Chinese who, facing limited job prospects and stagnant wages, are embracing low-cost travel – often described as moving “like special forces.” The route stretches more than 60 kilometers along the Yellow River,

connecting Zhengzhou, Henan province's largest city, with the historic city of Kaifeng, famous for its soup dumplings. [Reuters]

The craze's surge in popularity prompted authorities to act swiftly. Police were deployed and bike lanes were shut down after tens of thousands of riders congested traffic, while abandoned bikes piled up in Kaifeng, complicating life for Zhengzhou commuters who struggled to find bikes for their return. Videos shared on social media showed that at night, Zhengkai Avenue, a major route between the two cities, was filled with young cyclists, occupying all five car lanes as police tried to maintain control. By the weekend, Kaifeng and Zhengzhou authorities closed off bike lanes on the main avenue to prevent further cycling surges. Additionally, three bike-sharing companies in Zhengzhou announced that their bikes would lock automatically if taken out of the city limits. Some universities even restricted students from leaving campus to discourage participation.

Officials cited traffic safety and disruptions as reasons for the clampdown. However, the sight of such large-scale youth gatherings likely stirred unease among local officials, given the Communist Party's wary stance on youth mobilization and its focus on social stability. While these gatherings might have raised concerns due to their scale, they didn't appear politically motivated. Some students did carry Chinese flags, sing the national anthem, or shout pro-Communist Party slogans – one even displayed a banner calling for unification with Taiwan – but most joined simply for the thrill of the experience.

For many, the ride offered more than fun or cost-cutting. It was an opportunity to momentarily step away from anxieties about a tough job market and uncertain economic future. [CNN]

China: Alliance for nuclear technology industry growth established

(lb/dql) China has launched an alliance aimed at advancing the nuclear technology application industry. This initiative includes participation from key stakeholders across the nuclear energy sector and associated industries. The new alliance is part of broader efforts to strengthen the industry's development and innovation capabilities.

The establishment of this alliance follows the recent announcement of a three-year plan by China's Atomic Energy Authority. The plan outlines strategic measures

to promote the growth and application of nuclear technology, indicating a concerted push to expand its industrial and technological potential. [State Council, China]

This move comes amid recent studies that have highlighted China's recent rapid expansion and advancement of its nuclear power capacity and technology. The country's nuclear power capacity is growing faster than any other country in the 21st century, expected to surpass France and become the world's second-largest nuclear fleet within the next few years, with nearly half of the world's nuclear projects currently under construction located there. In parallel, China leads in renewable energy development, with about two-thirds of the world's utility-scale solar and wind power projects under construction. [Global Energy Monitor] [Nuclear Engineering] [Information Technology & Innovation Foundation]

For an analysis of the competition between China and Russia in the global nuclear power market, see Haley Zaremba at [Oilprice.com], who argues that "with Moscow's attention and resources consumed by wartime chaos, China has a clear upper hand." Zaremba views this "potential shift of nuclear energy power and profit toward China" as "part of a much broader trend in the global energy landscape," where Beijing has consistently outspent the rest of the world on renewable energy, green infrastructure, and manufacturing, positioning itself as a key player in global clean energy supply chains. China has become indispensable to the clean energy sectors of developed nations in Europe and the Americas, while also expanding its influence in emerging markets. By stepping into the global nuclear energy industry, Beijing is further consolidating its dominance in global energy markets, taking over a role that was once held by Russia.

For a discussion about what the "nuclear renaissance" with China and Russia "at the forefront" [Core Power] for US energy policy, see DJ Nordquist at [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace] who warns that "[i]t would be a mistake for the United States, which reached full energy independence in 2019, to trade dependence on the Middle East's oil fields for dependence on China's energy supply chain," suggesting that the US "must double-track its energy efforts just as China has: work to increase nuclear power as a workhorse that can ensure the United States has reliable electricity, while also (re)establishing domestic renewable supply chains and manufacturing."

China: Central bank reassures foreign financial institutions continued support for economic recovery

(lb) Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China (PBOC), has affirmed that the central bank will maintain a supportive monetary policy to bolster economic recovery. During a meeting with foreign financial institution executives, Pan emphasized the importance of balancing economic growth with quality and managing both domestic and international factors, as well as investment and consumption.

Executives from major global banks such as HSBC, Standard Chartered, Citibank, and JPMorgan Chase, among others, attended the meeting. His remarks are widely seen as part of efforts to reassure stakeholders amid China's ongoing economic challenges.

The PBOC has implemented a series of stimulus measures since late September, which include interest rate cuts and liquidity injections, to help the economy meet the government's growth target of around 5 percent for 2024. This response comes as China, the world's second-largest economy, navigates the effects of a prolonged property market downturn and other headwinds impacting consumption and investment.

Financial markets are paying close attention to any new fiscal measures that might emerge from upcoming legislative meetings. Finance Minister Lan Foan indicated in October that the government would significantly increase its debt issuance and provide more support to both consumers and the real estate sector. [CNA] [Reuters]

China: 2025 GDP growth forecast cut by UBS due to potential trade tensions under Trump

(jf) Investment bank UBS has lowered its forecast for China's economic growth for next year, citing potential challenges from significant U.S. tariffs under the incoming presidency of Donald Trump. On November 10, the Swiss investment bank revised its GDP growth projection for China to "around 4 percent" for 2025, down from the 4.5 percent estimate made in October. UBS also predicted that growth in the world’s second-largest economy would be "considerably lower" in 2026.

Tao Wang, UBS’ head of Asia economics, noted that this new baseline assumes the Trump administration

will gradually implement additional tariffs on most Chinese imports beginning in the latter half of 2025, though there remains significant uncertainty regarding the scale and timing of these tariffs and related U.S. policies. The forecast also incorporates "continued weakness" in China's property sector.

UBS anticipates that RMB will depreciate against a strengthening USD, trading at approximately RMB 7.3 per USD by the end of this year and reaching around RMB 7.6 per USD by the end of 2025.

In contrast, other global financial institutions like Goldman Sachs and HSBC stated on November 11 that they were maintaining their prior forecasts of 4 to 5 percent growth for China in 2025. These forecasts account for pressures such as the ongoing slump in the real estate market and subdued consumer spending.

Moody's Analytics indicated that it is still developing a clearer understanding of anticipated U.S. policies before revising its 2025 growth projection, according to economist Harry Murphy Cruise.

Last week, Zhang Ming, deputy director at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Finance and Banking, expressed an expectation that China would set its 2025 economic growth target at "around 5 percent." China recorded a GDP growth rate of 4.8 percent over the first three quarters of 2024, following a growth of 5.2 percent in 2023. [South China Morning Post]

China: Largest chip manufacturer warns of oversupply in 2025

(jf) Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp (SMIC), China's leading chipmaker, has warned that the current overcapacity in mature node chips is expected to continue through 2025, prompting a more cautious stance on expanding production capacity. The semiconductor industry has faced challenges since late 2022, transitioning from pandemic-driven shortages to an oversupply that has left sectors like the automotive industry dealing with excess inventory.

Despite this, SMIC and other Chinese chipmakers have increased production in recent years, spurred by trade tensions with the United States and its allies, with industry utilization rates remaining at around 70 percent, well below the optimal 85 percent, reflecting significant overcapacity that is unlikely to see notable improvement soon.

For the quarter ending in September, SMIC reported a 34 percent increase in revenue, totaling USD 2.17 billion, aligning with market forecasts of USD 2.2 billion according to data from London Stock Exchange Group. This growth was partly driven by China's push for localization, encouraging international clients to shift chip production to domestic producers. However, SMIC noted that this trend of substituting foreign suppliers would likely slow by 2025, as local suppliers have already secured a large share of the market.

The company's capital expenditure for 2023 rose sharply to USD 7.3 billion, up from USD 4.5 billion in 2021. SMIC emphasized that due to current oversupply issues, it would adopt a more cautious approach when considering further capacity expansion. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, Michael McCaul, chair of the US House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee, has urged the US Department of Commerce to check up on SMIC's facilities and find out whether the company is illegally producing chips for Huawei. [evertiq]

For a discussion of the pressures on economies in Southeast Asia stemming from China's export glut, see Henry Storey at [The Interpreter], arguing that "[a]side from wanting to avoid poking the dragon, ASEAN's dilemma is complicated by the fact that Chinese imports often serve as inputs into finished goods bound for Western markets."

China: New USD 837 billion debt package approved

(jf) China has approved an ambitious RMB 6 trillion (USD 837 billion) plan to help stabilize its struggling economy by allowing local governments to restructure their hidden debt, while also unveiling further stimulus measures. The move comes amid concerns about the potential economic challenges tied to the anticipated return of Donald Trump to the White House. [State Council, China]

Finance Minister Lan Fo'an announced on November 8 that the RMB six trillion debt ceiling would be spread over the next three years to assist regional governments in replacing their "hidden debt," typically linked to local government financing platforms backed by city or provincial authorities. Lan stated that various factors have impacted central and local fiscal revenues, causing them to fall below expectations since the beginning of 2024. [Ministry of Finance, in Chinese]

The announcement followed the conclusion of a five-day meeting held by China's top legislative body, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. Years of stringent pandemic-related measures and a prolonged real estate crisis have heavily strained local government finances, leaving many authorities across China struggling under heavy debt. This issue has become so severe that some cities are facing difficulties in delivering basic public services, with the risk of default growing.

Lan disclosed that, by the end of 2023, China's hidden debt totaled a staggering RMB 14.3 trillion (USD 1.99 trillion). The government's goal is to reduce this amount to RMB 2.3 trillion (USD 320 billion) by 2028.

In response to a summer marked by disappointing economic performance, President Xi Jinping authorized a comprehensive stimulus package focused primarily on monetary policy at the end of September. Economists have since speculated that additional measures, potentially amounting to RMB 10 trillion (USD 1.4 trillion), could follow to boost confidence and stimulate growth in the world's second-largest economy (see AiR No. 45, November/2024, 1). [CNN]

China: Parcel delivery industry hits new record

(jf) China's parcel delivery industry has broken a new record, processing over 140 billion parcels so far this year, surpassing the total volume for last year, according to data of the State Post Bureau, announced on November 6.

This increase reflects progress for an industry that is expanding steadily, especially as the peak delivery season unfolds. In 2022, the sector handled a total of 132.1 billion packages, which itself was a record at the time. A total of 110.58 billion parcels were collected and delivered in China last year, up 2.1 percent compared with 2021. The sector's revenue was RMB 1.06 trillion (USD 148 billion), up 2.3 percent from 2021. According to the State Post Bureau of China, the revenue of the parcel delivery sector is expected to reach RMB 1.13 trillion (USD 116.8 billion) this year, a year-on-year increase of 7 percent. [State Council, China]

The surge in parcel volume comes amid technological and operational advancements in China's delivery infrastructure, including faster end-to-end logistics facilitated by automation, AI-powered decision-making tools, and advanced navigation technologies like the

Beidou satellite system. Automated sorting and data-driven route optimization have become standard practices, which enhanced efficiency and cut costs.

The delivery sector has become a cornerstone of China's booming e-commerce market, meeting the rising consumer demand nationwide. Notably, rural areas have seen significant development in delivery services. These regions, historically underserved, represent a new area of growth. [China Daily]

China: Economists offer recommendations for property sector decline

(jf) Beijing is being urged to take additional measures to ensure a controlled recovery for China's critical property sector as the country seeks to manage debt risks, restore market confidence, and meet its economic growth goals. During a forum at Renmin University on November 6, policy experts and economists emphasized the need to address vulnerabilities such as developers' tax burdens, land supply issues, and anxieties around a potential property tax.

Wang Xiaolu, deputy director of the National Economic Research Institute, stressed that policy changes are necessary to cushion the impact of real estate debt issues. He warned that without addressing bad debts and recalibrating home prices to realistic levels, China risks prolonged economic stagnation similar to Japan's post-bubble recession in the 1990s.

Other economists at the forum shared this sentiment, highlighting that property policies must remain a government priority to achieve the targeted GDP growth of around 5 percent for the year. Last month, China's housing ministry announced plans to add one million units to its urban village reconstruction efforts and to double funding for approved property projects to about RMB 4 trillion (USD 558.33 billion) by year-end (see AiR No. 43, October/2024, 4).

Although housing sales have shown some improvement in major cities, Mao Zhenhua, co-director of the Institute of Economic Research at Renmin University, voiced concern over declining home prices (see AiR No. 45, November/2024, 1). Mao suggested halting new project launches to send a clear message to the market and proposed shifting support from developers to homebuyers, particularly those needing affordable housing. He noted that directing funds as

subsidies to low- and middle-income groups could help them achieve homeownership.

Feng Jun, former head of the China Real Estate Association, emphasized that stabilizing market expectations is crucial to revitalizing the sector. He pointed out that consumers' cautious outlook won't change if housing price trends remain uncertain. Feng also noted that the effectiveness of policies is diminishing, as many areas began loosening restrictions two years ago, leaving limited room for further incentives.

To aid the sector's recovery, Feng proposed eliminating advance tax collection to reduce developers' liquidity pressures and adjusting tax incentives for those upgrading to new homes to boost purchasing power. He also advocated for reforms in the presale system, clearer principles for real estate taxation, and stricter regulation of developer practices. [South China Morning Post]

China: Consumer prices increase at smallest rate in four months

(jf) China's consumer prices grew at their slowest rate in four months in October, and deflation in producer prices worsened, as per data released on November 9. This comes even as Beijing intensifies its efforts to revitalize the economy with stimulus measures.

Analysts predict this package may have minimal immediate impact on economic activity, demand, and pricing. The consumer price index (CPI) rose by 0.3 percent year-on-year in October, down from September's 0.4 percent and marking the lowest rate since June. This fell short of the 0.4 percent increase expected by economists in a Reuters poll. However, core inflation – which excludes volatile food and fuel costs—rose to 0.2 percent in October from 0.1 percent in September. Month-over-month, China's CPI decreased by 0.3 percent compared to an unchanged result in September and below the anticipated 0.1 percent drop. Dong Lijuan from the statistics bureau attributed this decline to falling food prices. [National Bureau of Statistics in Chinese]

Producer prices in October dropped by 2.9 percent year-on-year, a deeper fall than September's 2.8 percent and below the forecasted 2.5 percent decline. This was the most significant drop in nearly a year. The deflation at the factory gate was particularly pronounced in sectors such as petroleum and natural

gas extraction, oil and coal processing, chemical manufacturing, and the auto industry.

With about 70 percent of Chinese household wealth tied up in the struggling real estate sector – once a significant part of the economy – consumers are tightening their spending, creating deflationary pressures. Goldman Sachs projected that headline consumer inflation in China would likely remain low at 0.8 percent next year, and producer prices might not turn positive until the third quarter of 2025. [Reuters]

China: Advancements in nuclear-powered aircraft carrier development

(lb) China is advancing toward constructing its first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, as revealed by satellite imagery and documents analyzed by researchers at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California. This development represents a significant step for Beijing's navy, already the world's largest in numerical terms, toward solidifying its ambition for a blue-water fleet capable of extended global operations.

The analysis centered around a site in Mucheng township near Leshan, Sichuan province, where researchers discovered a land-based prototype nuclear reactor designed for large warships. Dubbed the Longwei, or "Dragon Might" Project, the reactor was confirmed through satellite imagery, public procurement documents, and environmental impact reports. This project is controlled by the Nuclear Power Institute of China, under the China National Nuclear Corporation.

Supporting evidence includes reactor equipment procurement by China's 701 Institute and infrastructure developments at the site, such as water intake systems and construction linked to nuclear reactor facilities. The findings have been supported by independent analysts who agree on the compelling nature of the research.

However, the report does not specify when China might launch an operational nuclear-powered carrier. China's previous carrier developments include the Liaoning, a refurbished Soviet vessel, and a second domestically-built ship based on Soviet design. [AP News]

China: Lijian-1 Rocket launches 15 satellites

(lb) A Chinese commercial rocket, the Lijian-1 (Kinetica-1), successfully launched 15 satellites into orbit late Sunday from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center. The liftoff, which occurred at 11:03 p.m. Eastern on Nov. 10 (0403 UTC, Nov. 11), marked the first international payload mission for launch service provider CAS Space. The launch took place within the "Dongfeng Commercial Space Innovation Test Area," a sector of Jiuquan designed to support new commercial space ventures and ease spaceport access challenges.

The mission's payload included satellites such as Shiyan-26 A, B, and C; Jilin-1 Gaofen 05B; Jilin-1 Pintai 02A 03; six Yunyao-1 satellites; two Xiguang-1 satellites; Tianyan-24; and the Omani IRSS-1/OL-1. The Shiyan satellites remain classified, while the Jilin-1 satellites support remote sensing and aim to expand the Jilin-1 constellation, operated by Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co., Ltd. (CGST), which now boasts over 117 satellites in orbit and aims for 200 by 2027.

Other payloads included Yunyao-1 satellites carrying meteorological instruments for data collection and the Xiguang-1 satellites—China's first commercial high-resolution methane detection satellites, equipped for environmental monitoring. Tianyan-24 is an optical remote sensing satellite, and the Omani IRSS-1/OL-1 satellite, developed in collaboration with Chinese firms like China Great Wall Industry Corp. (CGWIC), signifies CAS Space's venture into international launch services.

The Lijian-1, developed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, has a payload capacity of 1,500 kilograms to a 500-kilometer sun-synchronous orbit and features SP70 solid rocket motors from CASC. Weighing 135 tons and measuring 30 meters in length, this rocket showcases China's push to expand commercial space capabilities and engage in international partnerships despite stiff competition from global entities like SpaceX. [Space News]

China: New J-35A stealth fighter to debut

(lb) China is set to debut its new J-35A stealth fighter jet at the upcoming November 12-17 Zhuhai air show, the country's largest airshow and aerospace trade expo, showcasing an important addition to the country's expanding military capabilities. The air show is expected to be attended by air force leaders and representatives from more than 30 countries. [People's Liberation Army Air Force, China, in Chinese]

The J-35A is designed for both air combat and air-to-surface operations, with military analysts suggesting it may be intended for use by the People's Liberation Army Navy. The aircraft's development, ongoing for more than a decade, marks China's continued efforts to modernize its armed forces and enhance its competitive stance in Asia's military landscape.

The J-35A follows China's earlier stealth fighter, the J-20, which entered service in 2017, making China the only nation besides the United States with two types of stealth fighters. The debut comes as China has been increasing its forward deployment of J-20 jets, reportedly adding more than 70 to its fleet over a recent one-year period, bringing the total to approximately 195. This growth reflects a strategic push to bolster its military readiness and capability. [The National Interest]

Details about the J-35A's technical specifications remain limited, complicating direct comparisons with U.S. stealth fighters like the F-22 and F-35. The aircraft is believed to be an improved version of earlier prototypes, featuring more advanced engines. While the exact timeline for the J-35A's commissioning into military service is unclear, experts anticipate that production could begin by early next year, enhancing China's sea and air combat strength.

The Zhuhai air show will also feature other significant new technologies, including China's H-19 surface-to-air missile system and new UAVs designed for reconnaissance and strike missions. This event will include military equipment from 49 countries and will mark the first appearance of Russia's Su-57 stealth fighter, signaling a diverse display of global military advancements. [CNN]

China: Aerospace and satellite internet innovation alliance launched

(lb) China has launched an aerospace information and satellite internet innovation alliance to deepen collaboration in these sectors. Led by centrally-administered state-owned enterprises, the alliance includes telecommunications operators, universities, research institutes, private companies, and experts. Its primary goals are to foster international partnerships, promote academic dialogue, and drive technological advancements in the aerospace and satellite internet industries.

The alliance focuses on pooling resources and expertise across various sectors. It aims to create an

open platform that supports technology development and encourages the adoption of new technologies. Additionally, the alliance seeks to establish a networked ecosystem for joint technology development and resource sharing, thereby accelerating progress in the field. [State Council, China]

China - Hong Kong: National security guidelines for civil servants introduced

(lb) The Hong Kong government plans to introduce confidential national security guidelines for civil servants in the first half of 2025. Security Chief Chris Tang announced the initiative, highlighting that some civil servants had expressed uncertainty about how to integrate national security measures into their daily duties. The guidelines aim to provide practical steps and embed a national security mindset among government employees.

Tang emphasized that, while the guidelines would elaborate on how civil servants could promote 20 areas of national security laid out by President Xi Jinping and in the 2022 *Study Outline of the Concept of Comprehensive National Security* in their daily duties, they must remain confidential to prevent individuals who may threaten national security from adapting their behavior. He added that while the guidelines are intended as a supportive framework, any deliberate violations that compromise national security would be managed under the Civil Service Code. The Security Bureau has been tasked with issuing the document in the first half of next year. [Hong Kong Free Press] [South China Morning Post] [Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry]

In recent years, the Hong Kong government has strengthened efforts to ensure civil servants uphold national security, particularly following the 2019 protests. In June 2024, a revised civil service code was introduced, placing "upholding the constitutional order and national security" at the forefront of core values, alongside new principles such as being people-oriented and focused on outcomes. This updated code marked a shift by removing objectivity and impartiality from the list of core values.

The change followed earlier moves requiring civil servants to declare allegiance to the city (see AiR No. 3, January/2021, 3) after the 2020 enactment of the Beijing-imposed national security law (see AiR No. 26, June/2020, 5).

As of June 2022, 129 Hong Kong civil servants and 535 other government workers have been fired or submitted their resignation after refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the government. [Hong Kong Free Press]

Japan: Ishiba re-elected as prime minister

(hs) In a closely watched prime ministerial in Japan's House of Representatives on November 11, Shigeru Ishiba of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was confirmed as Prime Minister. His re-election following his first election on October 1 (see AiR No. 40, October/2024, 1) and the October 27 snap election he had called for and which the LDP and its junior coalition partner had lost their majority in the Lower House election, forcing Ishiba into a runoff. In the initial round of voting, no candidate reached the required 233 votes for a majority. Ishiba, who secured 221 votes, advanced to a second round against Yoshihiko Noda, leader of the opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP). With support from smaller opposition parties and invalid votes for other candidates, Ishiba maintained his lead, matching the ruling coalition's total of 221 votes, while Noda received 160 votes.

Following his appointment, Ishiba pledged to address the nation's internal and external challenges. The election process underscored the fragmented nature of Japan's political landscape, as opposition parties like Nippon Ishin no Kai and the Democratic Party for the People (DPP) chose not to support Noda, instead backing their own leaders in both rounds.

Ishiba and the LDP/Komeito coalition face considerable pressure to implement reforms. Before the vote, opposition leaders Noda and the DPP's Yuichiro Tamaki urged him to boost consumption, lower gasoline prices, and reform political funding, with Tamaki also advocating for greater transparency and higher tax exemptions for part-time workers. In recent years, the LDP has faced scrutiny over political scandals, including its connections to the controversial Unification Church and accusations that its politicians concealed millions in fundraiser donations. When Kishida announced his resignation as prime minister in August, he cited these issues as contributing to the party's crisis of trust (see AiR No. 34, August/2024, 3). [The Japan Times] [BBC]

Ishiba also announced his new 20-member Cabinet. The poor election results led to two ministers losing their seats, prompting Ishiba to appoint Keisuke Suzuki

as Justice Minister and Taku Eto as Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, replacing Hideki Makihara and Yasuhiro Ozato, respectively. Kōmeitō leader Keiichi Ishii also lost his seat and was succeeded by Saitō Tetsuo, who resigned as Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism. Ishiba appointed Hiromasa Nakano of Kōmeitō to that position. All other Cabinet ministers remained unchanged.

While coalition members retained all Cabinet posts, several key Diet committee chair positions were assigned to opposition politicians, reflecting the new power dynamics in the chamber. [nippon.com]

Japan: "Kingmaker" party fears economic instability under Trump

(hs/sw) Yuichiro Tamaki, leader of the opposition Democratic Party for the People (DPP), expressed concerns about Japan's economy following Donald Trump's re-election as U.S. President. He warned that Trump's economic policies could weaken the yen against the U.S. dollar, citing potential inflation in the U.S. due to increased tariffs or tax cuts, which might lead to higher interest rates.

Tamaki advised the Bank of Japan (BOJ) to avoid raising interest rates until wage growth outpaces inflation, emphasizing that "domestic policies should be conducted for domestic objectives." The BOJ had previously ended negative interest rates in March and raised short-term rates to 0.25 percent in July. [Japan Today]

Japanese business leaders as well have voiced concerns about potential protectionist shifts in US policy while urging deeper Japan-U.S. ties. Ken Kobayashi, chairman of the Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, called for policies that support the global economy and a rules-based free trade system, cautioning against excessive protectionism. Masakazu Tokura of the Japan Business Federation expressed hope that Trump would view Japan as a vital partner in maintaining an open, law-based international order.

Others, such as Takeshi Niinami of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, highlighted the need for Japan to prepare for potential changes in trade and security and encouraged stronger ties with South Korea and greater engagement with China to enhance regional stability and economic cooperation. [Mainichi]

Following the October 27 election (see AiR No. 44, October/2024, 5), the DPP's has positioned it as a "kingmaker" in Japan's political landscape. By quadrupling its seats from 7 to 28, Yuichiro Tamaki's Democratic Party for the People now holds enough leverage to prevent any single party or coalition from achieving the 233-seat majority required in the House of Representatives. With the LDP falling short of a majority, Ishiba has turned to Tamaki for support in passing critical legislation, making cooperation with the DPP essential for stability.

Tamaki's strategy focuses on policies popular with younger and lower-income voters, such as increasing the basic tax-free income allowance to boost consumption and stimulate economic growth. This newfound influence allows Tamaki to drive the political agenda on a case-by-case basis, maintaining the DPP's independence while ensuring its voice remains prominent without fully aligning with the ruling coalition.

Tamaki stressed that it is in Japan's best interest for Prime Minister Ishiba to stay in power to maintain stability. He warned that if Ishiba's government were to collapse, it could lead to political turmoil, especially amid inflation-driven price increases that could further burden Japanese households. [Kyodo News] [BNN Bloomberg]

Japan: Komeito appoints Tetsuo Saito as new leader

(hs) Komeito, the junior partner in Japan's ruling coalition, has officially endorsed Tetsuo Saito as its new party leader. Saito, 72, succeeds Keiichi Ishii, who stepped down after losing his seat in the October 27 general election. The election results saw the ruling coalition – comprising Komeito and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) led by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba – lose their majority in the House of Representatives.

Saito is set to be confirmed at an extraordinary party convention and will face the challenge of revitalizing the party ahead of crucial elections, including the House of Councillors election in the summer of 2025. His primary focus will be on rebuilding Komeito's support base, which suffered a decline in votes during the recent election. Komeito lost eight seats, dropping from 32 to 24.

Holding a doctorate in engineering, Saito has experience in space development research and

previously served as Komeito's policy chief. He is expected to leverage this expertise to enhance communication between the ruling coalition and opposition lawmakers.

uring a meeting with Ishiba on November 9, Saito reaffirmed their parties' commitment to cooperation, particularly in advancing a supplementary budget for fiscal 2024. He also urged Ishiba to pursue further reforms within the LDP following the party's recent slush fund scandal, which contributed to its election losses. [Kyodo News]

Japan: New candidate for JIP leadership

(hs) Hirofumi Yoshimura, co-leader of the Japan Innovation Party (JIP) and governor of Osaka Prefecture, announced his candidacy for the party's leadership election on December 1 during a press conference on November 12. His decision follows the party's loss of six seats in the recent House of Representatives election, reducing their total to 38 seats.

Osaka-based representatives encouraged Yoshimura to run. Other potential candidates include Seiki Soramoto and Shigefumi Matsuzawa, but neither has secured the required 50 endorsements from party members holding elective office. Official campaigning will begin on November 17. [The Japan News]

Japan: New data shows worrying drop in births

(hs) The number of births in Japan in 2024 is projected to fall below 700,000 for the first time, as government data released on November 5 shows a 6.3 percent decline in births in the first half of the year, totaling 329,998. This trend underscores Japan's ongoing demographic challenges, with increasing numbers of people delaying marriage and childbirth.

In contrast, the first half of 2024 saw a 1.8 percent increase in deaths, reaching 800,274, resulting in a natural population decrease of 470,276. Japan has experienced a declining population for 15 consecutive years, exacerbating labor shortages and threatening the sustainability of its social security systems.

To tackle this crisis, the government is implementing policies such as expanding childcare allowances and enhancing parental leave benefits, with a goal of

reversing the declining birth rate by the early 2030s. For reference, the first half of 2023 recorded 352,240 births, with a full-year total of 727,277. Preliminary data from August 2024 indicates that overall births, including those of foreigners and Japanese citizens abroad, dropped by 5.7 perceent to 350,074 in the January to June period. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Ministry lifts restroom restrictions on transgender employee

(dql) The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has lifted restroom restrictions on a transgender employee, following a Supreme Court ruling last year that deemed such limitations illegal. The ministry informed the employee, a woman diagnosed with gender dysphoria, that she is now allowed to use any female restroom in the ministry building. Previously, she was limited to restrooms at least two floors away from her office.

In July of the previous year, the Supreme Court ruled against the 2015 approval by the National Personnel Authority, which had endorsed the ministry's restrictions. On October 29, the Authority issued a redetermination stating that the continued restroom limitations were "unfair," despite the ministry's efforts to promote understanding of LGBTQ and sexual minority issues. The employee, who has been on hormone therapy for years, has not undergone sex reassignment surgery due to health reasons. [Kyodo News]

Japan: TEPCO completes first melted fuel extraction at Fukushima

(sw) Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Inc. (TEPCO) has successfully extracted a sample of melted nuclear fuel from the No. 2 reactor at the damaged Fukushima Daiichi plant, marking a first step in the complex's decommissioning.

TEPCO's retrieval involved using a telescopic gripper to collect a piece no larger than 5 millimeters and 3 grams from the reactor’s containment vessel. The sample will be transported to the Japan Atomic Energy Agency in Ibaraki Prefecture for detailed analysis.

An estimated 880 tons of melted fuel debris remain in reactors 1, 2, and 3. The retrieval process, initially planned for 2021, resumed on October 28 after

previous delays due to worker errors and technical issues with camera equipment. It is the first retrieval of melted fuel since the 2011 disaster caused by a massive earthquake and tsunami. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Ambitious geothermal expansion targets 1.5 million kW output by 2030

(sw) The Japanese government plans to support private companies in accelerating geothermal power development, leveraging Japan's status as the world's third-largest geothermal resource holder. Aiming for commercialization by 2030, Japan will establish a public-private committee to address key challenges, including next-generation technology use and development timelines.

Increased state subsidies will aid costly geological surveys, which average JPY 1 billion (USD 6.5 million) and face high failure rates. To reduce financial risks, the Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security will fully fund drilling until steam is confirmed. These initiatives will be integrated into the new basic energy plan draft by year-end.

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba emphasizes the economic benefits for rural areas where geothermal resources are concentrated. Although conventional geothermal plants impact hot springs, new "closed-loop" technology, which draws heated water without affecting springs, is expected to ease local opposition. Japan's geothermal capacity currently stands at 600,000 kilowatts, with a goal to reach 1.5 million kilowatts by fiscal 2030. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Government drafting new comprehensive economic plan

(hs) The Japanese government is preparing comprehensive economic measures to be finalized by the end of this month. A draft obtained by *The Yomiuri Shimbun* outlines three key objectives: stimulating national and regional economic growth, addressing high prices, and ensuring public safety and security.

The draft proposes over JPY 10 trillion (USD 67 billion) in support for the artificial intelligence and semiconductor sectors, aiming to strengthen their foundations. This support is expected to generate public and private investment exceeding JPY 50 trillion (USD 335 billion) over the next decade. Additionally,

discussions will be held to raise the national minimum wage to JPY 1,500 (USD 10.07) per hour by the end of the 2020s.

For households exempt from residential taxation, benefits will be increased based on the number of children they have. The government is also considering reintroducing measures to reduce electricity and gas bills, which expired in October 2024.

The draft also includes measures to improve disaster evacuation center conditions and address the rise in “dark part-time jobs,” such as those linked to scams. There are provisions for strengthening local crime prevention efforts as well.

While there have been calls from the Democratic Party for the People to review the JPY 1.03 million (USD 6,890) income threshold for income tax, this issue was not addressed in the draft, as further discussions are needed. [The Japan News]

Japan: Highest pay rise in 31 years

(hs) Japan's base wages rose by 2.6 percent in September, marking the largest increase in over 31 years and reinforcing the Bank of Japan's (BOJ) view that the economy is on a recovery path. While this surpassed August's 2.4 percent rise, real wages still declined for the second consecutive month as inflation outpaced nominal gains. Nominal cash earnings grew by 2.8 percent, just shy of the expected 3 percent.

In response, BOJ Governor Kazuo Ueda maintained a steady interest rate policy last week but suggested that Japan is on track to meet its inflation target, signaling a possible rate hike in the coming months. Nearly half of economists surveyed anticipate a rate increase by December, with others predicting an adjustment in January. Bloomberg economist Taro Kimura believes that sustained wage growth will support the BOJ's case for a January rate hike, especially if U.S. economic conditions remain stable.

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, focusing on real wage growth, is preparing an economic stimulus package to alleviate household cost pressures and support small and medium-sized businesses in raising wages. Future wage growth will largely depend on ongoing annual wage negotiations, with Japan's largest union group, Rengo, advocating for a 5 percent increase. Rengo's chair, Tomoko Yoshino, emphasized that wage gains for smaller firms and part-time workers will be essential to maintaining wage growth momentum.

Labor market conditions remain tight, as evidenced by a 2.4 percent unemployment rate and a rising job-to-applicant ratio. These dynamics further support wage increases, which could strengthen the case for the BOJ's first rate hike since ending its negative rate policy in March. However, a weakened yen, influenced by external factors such as geopolitical developments, could pose additional inflationary risks. [The Japan Times]

Japan: Household spending dropped again in September

(hs) On November 8, Japan released data showing that household spending declined in September for a second consecutive month, underlining economic pressures from high living costs. Consumer spending dropped by 1.1% year-on-year, better than the forecasted 2.1 percent decrease. Month-on-month, it fell by 1.3 percent, surpassing the 0.7 percent estimate. Average household spending in September was JPY 287,963 (approx. USD 1,923), reflecting a nominal 1.8 percent increase but a real 1.1 percent decline. Workers' households saw income rise to JPY 493,942 (approx. USD 3,297), up 1.3 percent nominally but down 1.6 percent in real terms.

Norinchukin Research Institute, a think tank fully owned by The Norinchukin Bank attributed the trend to elevated living costs and a strong saving impulse, with many households opting for cheaper food alternatives, such as chicken over beef.

The July-September average consumer spending also showed a 1.0 percent decline from the previous year, highlighting the downward trend. The Bank of Japan (BOJ) closely watches consumption and wage data to gauge economic resilience, as these factors influence its decision on potential interest rate hikes. September wage data, released a day earlier, indicated a second straight month of inflation-adjusted wage declines, despite nominal wage increases and cooling consumer inflation.

Further economic pressures could arise from the yen's depreciation following Donald Trump's election as U.S. president, which may increase import costs and dampen consumption. However, if the yen's slide intensifies, the BOJ could face pressure to raise rates.

Preliminary GDP data for July-September, due this week, is anticipated to reflect slower growth due to weak consumption and capital spending. [Reuters] [Japanese Government]

Japan: Mitsubishi heavy industry net income declines

(hs) Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) reported a quarterly net income below analysts' expectations due to a decline in defense orders, despite revenue growth in its core sectors. Shares dropped 2.5 percent on November 5 after the company announced a net income of JPY 44.8 billion (USD 294 million) for the June-September quarter, falling short of the JPY 67.5 billion (USD 443 million) forecasted by analysts.

Quarterly revenue reached JPY 1.19 trillion (USD 7.81 billion), surpassing the expected JPY 1.17 trillion (USD 7.68 billion). Investor optimism over MHI's energy and defense divisions has driven its share price to more than double this year. The company's mid-term growth plan focuses on these segments, aiming to increase revenue by JPY 1 trillion (USD 6.57 billion) before the end of the 2026 fiscal year.

The company's aircraft, defense, and space division reported a JPY 197 billion (USD 1.29 billion) decline in the first half of the fiscal year, attributed to an unusually high volume of orders in the same period last year. Meanwhile, business profit, which excludes manufacturing and sales expenses, surged 87 percent to JPY 188 billion (USD 1.23 billion) in the six months through September. MHI maintained its full-year profit guidance of JPY 350 billion (USD 2.3 billion) and raised its order intake forecast to JPY 6 trillion (USD 39.4 billion) which is still 10 percent lower than the previous year's level. In its defense and space segments, MHI saw an uptick in orders for gas turbine engines and steel-making machinery, while profits rose across its energy, defense, and space units.

Despite the quarterly shortfall in defense orders, MHI remains focused on its long-term growth strategy, particularly in its core energy and defense sectors. With a projected revenue increase of JPY 1 trillion (USD 6.57 billion) by the end of fiscal 2026, the company's broader outlook remains positive. This ambition is supported by rising orders in gas turbines and steel-making machinery, alongside stronger profits across its energy, defense, and space divisions. [Japan Times] [Defense Mirror]

Japan: Nissan cuts 9000 jobs, CEO's pay

(hs) Nissan is facing a crisis due to its lack of hybrid vehicles, which have been key to the success of rivals

like Toyota and Honda. The company is also under intense competition from Chinese electric vehicle producers in the world's largest car market. This situation highlights broader pressures on the global car industry, as seen in Volkswagen's announcement of plant closures in Germany for the first time in its 87-year history. [New York Times]

To strengthen its balance sheet, Nissan reduced its stake in Mitsubishi Motors from 34 percent to 24 percent. The company, which has a long-standing alliance with France's Renault, has turned to a new partnership with Honda to develop a new electric vehicle and jointly create software to compete with Chinese rivals.

To adapt, Nissan lowered its production forecast for the year to 3.2 million cars from 3.45 million and reduced its annual operating profit forecast by 70 percent to JPY 150 billion (USD 1.01 billion).

The company is also cutting nearly 7 percent of its workforce, which stood at 133,580 at the end of the previous financial year. Operating profit for the six months ending in September plunged by 90 percent, falling to JPY 32.9 billion (USD 222 million), with revenues declining by 1.3 percent to JPY 6 trillion (USD 40.5 billion). Nissan stated that it is taking urgent measures to improve its performance and create a more resilient business.

The profit downgrade marks Nissan's second of the financial year, following a previous reduction to its full-year forecast after reporting its first-quarter earnings.

Nissan emphasized the need to strengthen its alliances with Honda and Mitsubishi to stabilize the business and enhance competitiveness. As part of its strategy, Nissan plans to revamp its ageing vehicle line-up by launching new electric vehicles (EVs) in China and plug-in hybrids in the US. Additionally, the company will introduce a new role of Chief Performance Officer from December, tasked with overseeing sales and profits to ensure quicker decision-making for a turnaround. [Financial Times]

Japan: Tohoku University secures historic research grant

(sw) Tohoku University, in Sendai, has become the first Japanese institution formally designated to receive a significant research grant from a new JPY 10 trillion (USD 65 billion) government fund aimed at elevating Japanese universities in global rankings. Of ten

applicants, including the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University, Tohoku was the sole institution selected, with grants set to begin disbursement in fiscal 2025 over a 25-year period.

The university aims to foster a globally competitive research environment, with plans to internationalize its faculty, increase revenue from private-sector research partnerships, and restructure academic teams for innovation-driven projects. A council of external experts will oversee its budget and management, in line with the newly enacted law on national university corporations. Tohoku's performance will be reviewed annually, with government panels conducting periodic evaluations.

The government intends to launch a second round of applications within the current fiscal year to select additional universities, and several institutions have already shown interest in applying. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Nintendo face slow sales

(hs) Japanese gaming giants Nintendo and Sony face a slow holiday season, as both companies struggle to attract mass-market consumers with aging consoles or premium products. Sony launched the PlayStation 5 Pro at USD 700, aiming at high-end users, but its steep price led to mixed reviews. Meanwhile, Nintendo reduced its fiscal year sales projection for the seven-year-old Switch console from 13.5 million to 12.5 million units, with total sales since its 2017 release reaching 146 million.

The gaming industry is quiet, as developers anticipate a next-generation console from Nintendo, expected in early 2024, and no blockbuster game releases are due this year. Analysts highlight the 5-year console cycle, yet the Switch, now in its 8th year, and the PlayStation 5, which has sold over 65 million units since 2020, reveal an industry contemplating a shift away from traditional hardware towards cloud-based, platform-agnostic gaming.

Microsoft's strategy aligns with this trend, with plans to promote its Game Pass subscription across various devices, while Sony positions the PS5 Pro as a premium, high-margin product. Sony anticipates selling 18 million PS5 units this year, including the Pro model, which targets hardcore gamers with 67 percent more computer capacity and 45 percent faster rendering.

Nintendo's success with the hybrid Switch console – both handheld and dockable – has pushed competitors to rethink portable gaming. While waiting for a successor, Nintendo is carefully timing its blockbuster releases. Nintendo's upcoming Switch model, confirmed to be backward-compatible, is expected by March 2024. Industry observers believe it could set a pricing benchmark at USD 400 (JPY 60,000) to USD 450 (JPY 67,500) without backlash, especially in light of criticism surrounding the PS5 Pro's price. [The Financial Times]

Japan: Prime Minister Ishiba reiterates commitment to boosting military

(hs) Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has reaffirmed his commitment to bolstering Japan's military capabilities and strengthening its alliance with the United States in response to escalating regional security threats. During an annual military review in Tokyo on November 9, Ishiba emphasized the deteriorating security environment, citing tensions with China, Russia, and North Korea. He condemned recent airspace violations by Chinese and Russian warplanes as breaches of Japan's sovereignty and direct threats to its national security. Ishiba specifically highlighted China's increasing military activities near Japan and North Korea's ongoing missile tests as key factors driving the need for an enhanced defense posture.

Ishiba pledged to continue the military buildup efforts initiated by his predecessor, Fumio Kishida, under Japan's 2022 security strategy. This includes the development of long-range cruise missiles and improved coordination with U.S. forces, signaling a shift from Japan's traditional self-defense policies. He stressed the importance of balancing military readiness with diplomatic efforts, particularly by reinforcing the U.S.-Japan alliance, which he views as essential for countering regional security challenges. This commitment was further underscored by a brief phone conversation with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

The deepening defense cooperation between the U.S. and Japan, exemplified by joint military exercises and coordinated defense strategies, highlights the growing importance of this alliance in maintaining regional stability. Japan's evolving defense strategy is seen as crucial not only for its national security but also for the broader stability of the Asia-Pacific region. [AP News] [Asia Pacific News]

Japan: Minesweeper Ukushima sinks after engine fire

(sw) The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) minesweeper Ukushima sank off Japan's southwestern coast on November 11 after a fire started in the engine room. The vessel, carrying around 40 crew members, was conducting a drill near Oshima Island, Fukuoka Prefecture.

All crew were evacuated to another minesweeper, the Toyoshima, by Sunday afternoon. However, Officer 3rd Class Tatsunori Koga, who was on duty in the engine room at the time, remains missing. One crew member sustained a non-life-threatening injury and was hospitalized.

The fire was initially contained but later reignited, ultimately causing the ship to capsize after midnight. The Japanese Coast Guard has deployed divers to search for the missing crewman, while the JMSDF has begun investigating the cause of the incident. [Kyodo News]

Mongolia: E-cigarettes banned in educational institutions

(fs) Mongolia's Minister of Education has implemented a ban on e-cigarette use across all educational institutions.

The directive requires school administrators to conduct regular awareness programs that inform students about the health risks associated with electronic cigarettes, in coordination with governmental and non-governmental organizations. Additionally, institutions must work with healthcare providers to facilitate personalized support, including psychological counseling, for students using e-cigarettes.

The ban also mandates e-cigarette prohibitions to be included in each institution's internal rules and policies. Parents, guardians, and caregivers are encouraged to actively engage in monitoring and discussing the risks of e-cigarette usage with children, aiming to strengthen awareness about potential health hazards. [GoGo]

Mongolia: Government targets reduction in infant mortality

(fs) The Ministry of Health has established a dedicated team to lower infant mortality rate and improve life expectancy across the population. The team, working with researchers from the U.S., Japan, and China, aims to reduce infant mortality from 7.7 per 1,000 live births to 5.5 by 2028.

Key actions include using advanced technology for treatment, preventive measures against premature birth causes, and early disease detection in infants.

In Mongolia, infant mortality accounts for 64% of deaths among children under five, with 71.6% of these occurring during the newborn period. While Mongolia's infant mortality rate is lower than the global average, it remains above the regional average and has seen minimal change in recent years. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Central Bank acquires 1.9 tons of precious metals in October

(fs) The Central Bank of Mongolia acquired 1,902.5 kilograms of precious metals in October, raising its total purchases to 14.1 tons for the year. This total reflects a 0.6 percent decrease compared to the same period in 2023.

Regionally, the bank's Darkhan-Uul branch bought 670.9 kg, while the Bayan-Khongor branch acquired 1,085.7 kg of precious metals. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Government partners with Huawei to drive digital transformation

(fs) The Mongolian government has formed a partnership with Huawei to advance digital innovation and develop a smart city, focusing on key sectors like digital energy and technology training for young professionals.

This collaboration supports Mongolia's New Revival Policy, which emphasizes three main transitions: the use of AI-based digital technologies to boost development, a shift towards green energy, and investment in human resources.

A joint working group, led by Minister of Digital Development, Innovation, and Communications

Baatarkhuu Tsend, will oversee projects involving 5G systems, smart mining transport, smart traffic, and green energy. [Akipress]

Mongolia: Leading digital bank partners with Visa to enhance global payment accessibility

(fs) M Bank, Mongolia's leading digital bank, has entered a strategic partnership with major global payment technology company Visa to streamline cross-border payment services.

This collaboration will enable M Bank customers to conduct faster, more secure, and cost-effective international transactions across 180 countries and in 35 currencies. The initiative is expected to boost M Bank's inbound and outbound transaction volumes in its first year, generating additional revenue and lowering operational costs. [Montsame]

North Korea: Three laws further regulate workers' freedom abroad

(jb) The North Korean government is intensifying the enforcement of three new laws recently enacted to ensure that their workers abroad will comply with state regulations for cultural and political expression: the "Reactionary Ideology and Culture Exclusion Act", the "Young Education Guarantee Act" and the "Pyongyang Cultural Language Protection Act."

An investigation into Chinese seafood factories have revealed that North Korean workers are cut off from outside information. A source reported that workers are prohibited from accessing South Korean media, including books, videos, and photos, as well as American, Japanese, or Chinese media deemed non-socialist or anti-socialist. Violations of these restrictions can lead to repatriation, harsh reviews, job loss for managers, and even life imprisonment or execution under the Reactionary Ideology and Culture Rejection Law.

In mid-October, the regime intensified ideological education for overseas workers, coinciding with a recent constitutional revision declaring South Korea a hostile state (see AiR No. 43, October/2024, 40). Lectures at a seafood factory in Donggang, Liaoning focused on correcting attitudes towards South Korea

and reinforcing the ideological divide between the two countries.

Meanwhile, the Pyongyang Cultural Language Protection Law has further tightened control over workers' speech. The law prohibits the use of South Korean terms like “oppa” (older brother) and requires workers to use official titles or “comrade” instead. In July, four workers at a Donggang factory were fined for using “oppa” while discussing a South Korean film. Violations of the law can result in severe penalties, including hard labor or death.

The regime also maintains strict control over workers' communication with their families in North Korea. Contact is heavily censored, and international calls are nearly impossible. [Daily NK English]

North Korea: Kim Jong Un's flood recovery deadline extended again amid delays

(mc) North Korean President Kim Jong Un inspected the housing projects for North Korean citizens affected by floods along North Korea's border with China on November 4. Following his inspections, Jong Un decided to extend the completion period of the housing projects until the end of December before the Party's plenary meeting.

These housing projects for flood victims were created to create a 'utopian rural cultural city' following severe floods last July that inundated more than 4,000 homes and damaged 7,400 farmland.

The new buildings planned for Sinuiju and Uiju, the two North Korean cities covered by the project, are designed with elevated structures to minimise future flood damage. However, satellite imagery of activities in the region shows that the construction process is still far behind schedule and that the foundations of most buildings are made of weak concrete.

President Kim Jong Un visited the flood-affected areas for the fifth time. [NK News]

North Korea: State authorities inspect factories for localization compliance

(jb) Factories and companies based in North Hamgyong province are under an inspection by North Korean state authorities which began in mid-October to assess their supply chain, procurement as well as

their compliance with state regulations. The inspection is part of an effort to ensure localization of industries within the country and to oversee adherence to state orders for localization.

The use of science and technology in various industries is also being monitored as a shortcut solution to long-drawn-out production processes. However, industrialists and company officials have reported that hurdles to efficient production still exist despite their application of science and technology to their production cycles. While provincial party officials expect short-term results, company officials report that such application can only be observed for the long-term and that short-term results are not possible as more research is required. [Daily NK English]

North Korea launches series of ballistic missiles ahead of U.S. presidential election

(dql) Just before the U.S. presidential election, North Korea launched a series of at least seven short-range ballistic missiles into the sea on November 5. [Military.ccom]

The missiles traveled up to 400 kilometers, landing between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. Japan's Defense Minister Gen Nakatani condemned the launches as a direct threat to regional and global security. Meanwhile, South Korea boosted its surveillance efforts, considering the missiles' potential to target key facilities, including U.S. military bases in South Korea.

This missile barrage followed North Korea's recent testing of its Hwasong-19 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) on October 31 (see AiR No. 45, November/2024, 1). Despite claims of it being the "world's strongest" ICBM, experts believe the missile's size limits its wartime utility. North Korea is also believed to be preparing for a seventh nuclear test, with officials suspecting Kim Jong Un aims to use its growing nuclear arsenal as leverage in negotiations with the incoming U.S. president.

Tensions have escalated as North Korea has supported Russia's war in Ukraine by sending troops and munitions. Reports indicate that as many as 10,000 North Korean soldiers are stationed near Ukraine's border (see article in this edition), marking the first significant involvement of North Korean troops in a large-scale conflict since the Korean War. [Associated Press]

South Korea: President Yoon apologizes for first lady's controversies in address marking his second half of term

(bw/dql) President Yoon Suk Yeol has apologized for causing public concern and pledged to reform state affairs amid growing controversies involving First Lady Kim Keon Hee. Speaking at a televised press conference on November 7 marking the second half of his term, Yoon acknowledged his shortcomings and expressed a "heartfelt apology" to the public, particularly as his approval ratings have fallen below 20 percent (see AiR No. 45, November/2024, 1). Public discontent has stemmed from allegations about his past ties to Myung Tae-kyun, a self-proclaimed power broker, and ongoing issues surrounding his wife.

Myung is facing accusations of receiving about KRW 90 million (USD 65,000) from former ruling People Power Party (PPP) lawmaker Kim Young-sun as she sent him part of her parliamentary salary over dozens of instances between August 2022 and December 2023, after she won a by-election for a constituency in Changwon in June 2022. The prosecution suspects that a polling agency which Myung de-facto owned, conducted over 81 opinion polls for Yoon ahead of the May 2022 presidential election. In exchange, Myung, by using his ties to the president and the first lady, allegedly requested them to help Kim Young-sun secure the nomination as candidate for the constituency. Following her nomination and election, she allegedly offered the money to Myung in return (see article below). [The Korea Times]

Yoon admitted that, despite his efforts over the past 2.5 years, his initiatives may have caused discomfort and that issues involving those close to him have led to public concerns. He specifically addressed the controversies surrounding Kim, including allegations of accepting a luxury handbag, stock manipulation, and improper involvement in government affairs. [BBC]

Yoon acknowledged that Kim should have exercised greater caution and that her actions, which caused public unease, were wrong. He also mentioned appointing a secretary to establish an office dedicated to supporting her work, emphasizing that she would refrain from public activities unless they were necessary for diplomacy or national interests.

Despite these remarks, Yoon rejected the opposition Democratic Party's proposed special counsel bill to investigate Kim's allegations, calling it "unconstitutional" and "political propaganda." The bill,

which would be the third attempt to investigate Kim, expands the scope to include claims that she sought Myung's help in influencing public opinion before the 2022 election. Yoon denied any inappropriate involvement in election meddling, asserting that there was nothing to hide.

Regarding his recent absence from the parliamentary budget speech – a first for a sitting president in 11 years – Yoon criticized the opposition for its hostile stance, including submitting special counsel bills and impeachment motions against his appointees. He expressed a desire to attend the National Assembly next year, contingent on the opposition showing respect.

Yoon, who needs cooperation from the Democratic Party, which hold the majority in the National Assembly, to advance key reforms, also promised to revamp state affairs to meet public expectations, announcing a broader Cabinet and presidential office reshuffle, with a vetting process already underway for new candidates. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Political power broker appears before prosecutors

(bw) Myung Tae-kyun, a self-proclaimed power broker at the center of a growing political scandal, is under investigation for allegedly accepting funds from former ruling party lawmaker Kim Young-sun in exchange for aiding her nomination in the 2022 by-elections. [Yonhap News Agency]

Myung is suspected of receiving approximately 90 million won (USD 65,200) from Kim Young-sun, a former lawmaker of the ruling People Power Party (PPP). He claims innocence regarding financial ties to the election and faces accusations of conducting free polling for the PPP presidential candidate to secure Kim's candidacy. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

The controversy has drawn media attention, particularly after a phone call between Myung and President Yoon surfaced, hinting at broader involvement in the nomination process.

Kim, the former PPP lawmaker, appeared twice before prosecutors this week as a suspect in the case but reportedly denied the allegations against her.

South Korea: Police detain 11 protesters at large-scale trade union rally

(jb/bw) A large-scale trade union rally held in Seoul on November 9 resulted in a police crackdown, with 11 protesters detained on charges of obstructing official duties.

The rally, organized by the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), was one of two demonstrations by major labor unions protesting the labor policies of the administration of President Yoon Suk Yeol. While the police estimated the crowd size at 30,000, the KCTU claimed nearly 100,000 people participated. A separate, smaller rally was held by the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU).

The Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency criticized the protests, labeling them illegal and accusing demonstrators of assaulting police officers who were enforcing the law. Protesters, however, accused the police of using excessive force against peaceful participants, leading to injuries.

The KCTU has vowed to continue its protests, announcing plans for two additional rallies on November 20 and December 7. [Korea Joongang Daily]

The rallies come at a time when South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, halfway through his term, is grappling with a record-low approval rating of 17 percent according to a Gallup Korea poll released November 8. This marks an all-time low since the president took office in May 2022. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Ruling party to propose semiconductor incentives bill

(mc) The ruling People Power Party (PPP) announced on November 5 its intention to propose a semiconductor bill designed to incentivize chipmakers starting from the investment stage. The bill, expected to be officially unveiled on November 6, aims to gain bipartisan support and pass by November 28.

Key provisions include offering upfront subsidies to companies as soon as their investments are confirmed, similar to practices in the United States. The bill also proposes measures to enhance labor flexibility, especially in regard to the 52-hour workweek for large companies, allowing exemptions with mutual agreement between labor and management.

PPP officials emphasize the need for rapid legislation to support Korean companies amidst increasing global trade volatility. [Yonhap Agency News]

South Korea: Ruling party launches consultative body to address medial school enrollment quota dispute

(mc/dql/jb) The ruling People Power Party (PPP) has launched a consultative body involving the government, medical sector, and ruling People Power Party (PPP) to address a prolonged walkout by trainee doctors, sparked by the government's plan to raise medical school enrollment quotas. The mass resignation of thousands of trainee doctors, which began in February (see AiR No. 8, February/2024, 3), has disrupted the national healthcare system.

Held on November 11, the inaugural meeting was attended by PPP leader Han Dong-hoon, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, Health Minister Cho Kyoo-hong, and other key government officials, as well as medical school deans and medical researchers. However, junior doctors and the Korea Medical Association (KMA), South Korea's largest doctors' group, stayed away from the talks in protest.

PPP officials emphasized that the body's decisions would guide future policy. Prime Minister Han pledged to address the concerns of trainee doctors, including improving working conditions and fair compensation, noting that healthcare reform involves more than just increasing medical school quotas. [Yonhap News Agency] [Asia News Network]

The prolonged conflict centers on the opposing positions of the government and the medical community. The government argues that more doctors are needed to address the growing demands of an aging population and to improve healthcare in remote areas. Conversely, many doctors contend that the primary issues lie in inadequate pay and poor working conditions, which should be prioritized before expanding the workforce.

In a related development, the Korean Medical Association's (KMA) council of representatives passed a no-confidence motion against President Im Hyun-Taek on November 10. The motion garnered 170 votes in favor, 50 against, and 4 abstentions, out of a total of 246 representatives, surpassing the required two-thirds majority (see AiR No. 44, October/2024, 5).

Im faced a vote of no confidence after just six months in office due to perceived inadequate leadership on critical issues affecting the medical community. The primary grievance was his ineffective handling of negotiations with the government regarding medical school enrollment quotas, which the KMA deemed insufficient to meet healthcare needs. Additionally, Im was embroiled in a scandal involving allegations that he solicited money from a fellow KMA official to remove defamatory posts from an online forum.

Following the vote, the KMA is mandated to elect a new president within 60 days. In the interim, an emergency transition leader will be appointed [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: President of national sports agency under investigation

(bw) A governmental ethics committee has announced that it is set to request the police to launch an investigation into allegations of misconduct involving eight sports officials, including Lee Kee-heung, President of the Korean Sport & Olympic Committee (KSOC). Lee is accused of relaxing hiring criteria to facilitate the employment of a friend of his children and allegedly manipulating staff changes to support this arrangement.

Additional allegations involve the KSOC allowing a sports association president, reportedly a close associate of Lee, to cover expenses amounting to approximately KRW 80 million (USD 57,000). These expenses included providing nutritional supplements and purchasing uniforms for athletes. This individual allegedly sought a role within Korea's Paris Olympics team and was subsequently hired.

The KSOC has denied any wrongdoing, citing challenges in conducting audits and committing to cooperate with ongoing investigations. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Social media regulations tightened to counter deepfake sex crimes

(jb) The government has tightened regulations on social media regarding the circulation of deepfake pornographic material, complementing the National Assembly's revision of the Act on Special Cases Concerning the Punishment of Sexual Crimes in September 2024 (see AiR No. 42, October/2024, 3).

Reports of deepfake sex crimes, which have quadrupled between 2023 and 2024, have become a central issue in the legal and security discourse between the government and civil society in South Korea.

As part of this initiative, the government has targeted social media platform Telegram, notifying the company that it will be required to appoint a local representative in South Korea to prevent the distribution of pornography and other sexually harmful material, particularly as the platform is widely used by children. In September, the government also established a hotline for reporting inappropriate content on Telegram.

Failure to comply will result in fines from the Korea Communications Commission (KCC). Additionally, the KCC is monitoring other platforms, including Naver, Meta (which operates Instagram and Facebook), and has called on these companies to propose self-regulation measures. [Hanykyoreh]

The government is also preparing to collaborate with social media platforms to help block and remove such content from their websites. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Meta fined USD 15 million for illegal data collection

(jb) South Korea's Personal Information Protection Commission (PIPC) has fined social media giant Meta a total of KRW 21.6 billion (USD 15.43 million) along with an additional administrative penalty of KRW 10.2 million (USD 7,200) for misuse of personal data in targeted advertising.

The penalties, announced on November 5, follow a four-year investigation into Meta's data practices that began in November 2020. The PIPC found that over 980,000 South Korean users' data was improperly used by Meta's platform Facebook, constituting a violation of the Personal Information Protection Act. The misuse of personal information involved sensitive details, including users' religious beliefs, sexual orientation, status as North Korean defectors, and political views, which were exploited for tailored advertising without proper user consent. [AP News]

The PIPC had previously fined Meta KRW 30.8 billion (USD 21.49 million) in September 2022 for similar violations, where Meta was found to have used personal data for targeted ads without user permission. The recent fine is part of a series of

penalties issued over a four-year period due to repeated data breaches by Meta. The PIPC's report also highlighted Meta's vague disclosures about its data usage policies, stating that while the company informed users their data would be utilized, it did not clearly specify the purposes, thereby breaching several data protection laws in South Korea. The case has reignited discussions on personal data protection in the country, emphasizing the need for stricter compliance by tech companies. [The Chosun Daily]

South Korea: Third quarter profits fall for a third of companies

(bw) In the third quarter, one-third of South Korean companies, including Samsung Electronics, Hyundai Motor, LG Chem, and Samsung SDI, reported operating profits below market expectations with 57 companies showing "earnings shocks" of profits at least 10 percent below forecasts.

This disappointing performance, driven largely by weak demand in the semiconductor and rechargeable battery sectors, contributed to a broader economic slowdown.

These weak corporate performances led to a slowdown in the country's overall economic growth. Bank of Korea (BOK) data reports a 0.1 percent expansion to the gross domestic product on-quarter in the July-September period, falling far short of market expectations of a 0.5 percent expansion. [Korea Times]

The quarterly figure has been on a steady decline since the third quarter of last year. It marks the longest streak of on-year declines since 2010, when the agency began compiling the relevant data.

While the index has been on the decline, the rate of decrease has gradually slowed. The index dropped 2.9 percent on-year in the third quarter of 2023, followed by a 2.8 percent decline the following quarter, 2.4 percent in the first quarter of 2024 and 2.3 percent in the second quarter. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Current account surplus recorded for fifth consecutive month

(mc) According to data released on November 7 by the Bank of South Korea, South Korea posted a current account surplus of USD 11.12 billion in September, the fifth consecutive month of surplus. Additionally, the

current account surplus reached USD 61.67 billion in exports, up 9.9 percent year-on-year, and imports rose 4.9 percent to USD 51 billion.

Moreover, the primary income account, which reflects wages, dividends and interest income from abroad, posted a surplus of USD 3.09 billion, up from USD 1.69 billion in August.

However, the services account deficit widened to USD 2.24 billion, compared to USD 1.23 billion in the previous month. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Government websites hit by cyberattacks, Russian ties suspected

(jb) The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Environment, among several other government ministries, faced cyberattacks in the form of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) on the morning of November 6, causing the websites to be taken down until they were restored in the afternoon.

The military, which was called upon to deal with the cyberattacks, has blocked the IP address and it is currently tracing the source of the attacks. They conveyed that the ministries were overtaken by large incoming traffic, overwhelming the websites and causing them to break down.

The National Information Resources Service confirmed that several other minor ministries were also targeted as part of the attacks. [Yonhap News Agency]

The following day, the websites of several prominent courts, including the Seoul Central District Court, reported that operations were down owing to suspected cyberattacks. Cyber Operations Command, the cyber unit of the South Korean military, is investigating the issue, suspecting possible ties to North Korea and Russia.

The Presidential Office has also released a statement, tying the sharp increase in cyberattacks, since North Korean troop deployment in Russia, to the work of “pro-Russian hacktivists”. [The Korea Herald] [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea: Drug use rises

(bw) The number of drug users in South Korea has surged to over 400,000 in 2024, according to a Ministry

of Health and Welfare report, based on an estimated figure of 400,530 people, reported by local newspaper DongA Ilbo.

Despite the rise, 13 of the 31 state-designated drug addiction treatment hospitals have failed to treat patients, treating zero patients this year as of September. Four hospitals each treated one.

The South Korean government has allocated KRW 900 million (USD 644,700) to support the 31 hospitals, averaging about KRW 29 million per hospital, for addiction-related programs. Despite an overall increase in the national budget for anti-drug initiatives this year, only a small portion is allocated specifically for drug addiction treatment.

The Ministry of Economy and Finance designated KRW 416 million (USD 295,000) for drug addiction treatment programs, separate from the subsidy provided to the 31 hospitals. This allocation is significantly lower than the KRW 2.8 billion (USD 2 million) initially requested by the Ministry of Health, highlighting a funding gap in addressing drug addiction treatment needs. [The Korea Herald] [Straits Times]

South Korea: Police find 4,700 online gambling minors in crackdown

(bw) The National Police Agency reported that 4,715 minors were identified in a special crackdown on illegal online gambling conducted between September 2023 and October 2024. Among those caught, 17-year-olds represented the largest group with 1,763 individuals, followed by 16-year-olds (1,241) and 15-year-olds (560).

Online casino games were the most popular form of gambling among these youths, accounting for 82.6 percent of the cases. The total amount wagered reached KRW 3.7 billion (USD 2.64 million), with an average bet of KRW 780,000 (USD 554) per person. [Yonhap News Agency]

Given the persistent issue of underage gambling, the police have decided to extend their crackdown efforts for another year. The surge in teen gambling, especially online, mirrors global trends, where advancements in technology and accessibility have significantly boosted the online gambling industry.

By the end of 2024, the global online casino market is expected to generate around USD 97.15 billion, with projections reaching up to USD 132.90 billion by 2029. [European Business Review]

South Korea: Arrest warrant issued for army officer accused of murder and dismemberment

(mc) The Chuncheon District Court in South Korea has issued an arrest warrant for an army officer on charges of murdering a female colleague, dismembering her body and dumping it in the Bukhan River, citing concerns about possible evidence tampering and flight risk.

According to the information provided, the murder took place on October 25, and the body of the female victim, who was in her 30s, was found on October 28 after a search operation involving more than 200 police officers, divers, and drones.

Following the discovery of the South Korean victim's body by the authorities, the suspect was arrested on November 3 in Seoul's Gangnam District. [Korea Joongang Daily]

South Korea: Defense drills on western border islands conducted

(jb/bw) As part of its annual Hoguk military exercises, the South Korean Armed Forces conducted comprehensive defense drills along the inter-Korean maritime border in the Yellow Sea last week, led by the Marine Corps. These exercises, which have been ongoing for over three weeks since starting on October 21, involved 6,600 troops across all service branches, along with 10 naval vessels and 35 aircraft, including Apache and Blackhawk helicopters. [Ministry of Defense, South Korea]

The specific drills, held from November 6 to 8, were aimed at testing combat readiness and response capabilities, particularly focusing on countering North Korean threats such as drone incursions and artillery attacks. The Marine Corps emphasized that these exercises are essential for evaluating defense strategies and preparing for potential conflicts.

Additionally, the drills included emergency response training, incorporating medical personnel and emergency staff to ensure readiness for evacuation and medical assistance on the islands south of the maritime border. This aspect of the exercise focused on enhancing the military's ability to provide aid to both combatants and civilians in crisis scenarios.

The Marine Corps confirmed that similar defense drills would continue periodically over the coming months to strengthen the nation's defensive posture. [Yonhap News Agency]

In a separate development, South Korean military and Seoul city officials conducted a joint security drill to prepare for potential North Korean drone attacks targeting the capital.

According to the Army's 52nd Infantry Division, the exercise involved 190 personnel from five military units, as well as local police and fire stations.

It simulated an air defense scenario against unidentified drone attacks, with the infantry division planning to use insights from the drill to improve operational plans and enhance defense readiness. [KBS]

South Korea: Authorities continue nighttime search for 12 missing from fishing boat

(jb) The South Korean Coast Guard is currently engaged in a search and rescue operation for 12 missing persons from a total of 27 crew members of a fishing boat which sank on November 8. The operation, which has been ongoing since the night of the incident, involves 47 ships and 5 aircraft that are conducting nighttime searches with 222 flares for the missing crew members at the site of the incident, 24 kilometers off the coast of Jeju's Biyang island.

The Jeju Coast Guard reported that the other 15 members were rescued soon by a passing vessel; however, two members had a cardiac arrest, and two others were declared dead on arrival at the nearest hospital. The fishing boat was identified as a 129-ton vessel named Geumseong carrying 16 Korean nationals and 11 Indonesians. [Korea Joongang Daily]

Taiwan: Interior ministry seeks dissolution of Chinese Unification Promotion Party

(sk) The Taiwanese Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has announced legal action against the Chinese Unification Promotion Party (CUPP), petitioning for its formal dissolution due to its involvement in Taiwanese elections on behalf of China. [Taipei Times]

According to a media release from the Ministry of the Interior, CUPP has been involved in a range of criminal activities, including national security threats, election interference, organized violence, and weapons violations. Eight major cases and 11 suspects are under investigation, with charges including violations of the National Security Act, the Anti-Infiltration Act, the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Election and Recall Act, and the Act Governing Relations Between the People of the Taiwan Area and the Mainland Area. Since 2010, law enforcement has linked 134 CUPP members to various crimes, including murder, robbery, human trafficking, assault, and intimidation. [Ministry of the Interior, Taiwan, in Chinese]

This legal action follows charges against CUPP central committee members, including spokesperson Chang Meng-chung and his wife, Hung Wen-ting, who are accused of receiving NTD 74 million (USD 2.3 million) from China to create propaganda aimed at influencing Taiwanese elections in support of a pro-Beijing political agenda since 2011. [Investigation Bureau, Ministry of Justice, Taiwan, in Chinese] [Focus Taiwan]

CUPP was founded in 2005 by Chang An-lo, a figure associated with the criminal triad “United Bamboo Gang.” The party is widely seen as a pro-Beijing political entity in Taiwan, advocating for unification with China under the "one country, two systems" model, while opposing Taiwanese independence. [Sing Tao]

In 2018, Taiwanese police raided Chang An-lo's residence and the CUPP headquarters to search for evidence of funding from Beijing, a claim that Chang denied. While charges related to violations of political donation laws were dropped in July 2024, Chang was sentenced to eight months in prison for document forgery and tax violations. [VoA]

Taiwan: Review of 2025 government budget plan set to begin after parliamentary deadlock resolution

(sk) After months of deadlock, Taiwan's 2025 central government budget is set to proceed, following approval from both the ruling and opposition party leaders in the Legislative Yuan , Taiwan’s parliament, on November 8. This decision came after inter-party negotiations led by Premier Cho Jung-tai and was agreed upon by caucus representatives from the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), as well as the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP). [Focus Taiwan]

The DPP cabinet submitted the review at the end of August, and the process began following the inauguration of new legislators on September 20. However, disagreements over issues such as compensation for Taiwan's Indigenous people affected by the logging ban, National Health Insurance credits, and the acquisition of public grain led to opposition from the KMT and TPP, causing a stalemate. [Radio Taiwan International, in Chinese].

After 49 days of deadlock, the three major parties – DPP, KMT, and TPP – finally approved the general budget plan, which has now been sent for further review by various committees. This deadlock was largely due to the DPP's status as a minority government, with the opposition holding significant power in the Legislative Yuan.

[CNA, in Chinese].

According to the proposal submitted in August, social welfare takes the largest share as over one-fourth of the budget, followed by spending on education, technology and culture, economic development and defense expenditure, in total NTD 3.33 trillion (USD 103 billion) [CNA, in Chinese].

Taiwan: Government reiterates commitment to net-zero goals after re-election of Trump

(am) Taiwan's Environment Minister Peng Chi-ming stated that Taiwan's commitment to its net-zero goals will remain unchanged, even if Donald Trump is re-elected. Despite Trump's track record of supporting fossil fuels and opposing green energy initiatives, Peng emphasized that Taiwan will continue its environmental efforts, regardless of potential disruptions to global climate change efforts under a Trump administration.

Trump has previously pledged to suspend U.S. green energy projects and prioritize fossil fuels if re-elected. As president, he also scaled back the U.S.'s commitment to climate action, a move that caused concern at COP22 in Morocco. However, under President Biden, climate cooperation has returned to pre-Trump levels. Peng warned that future climate change conferences may face similar challenges to those experienced during Trump's first term. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Premier Cho unveils plan to transition from coal to natural gas by 2034

(sk) On November 8, Premier Cho Jung-tai pledged Taiwan energy transitions from coal-fired power to natural gas power by 2034 with phasing out coal-fired power generation facilities in Taichung Power Plant, during an official visit there. Premier Cho expressed that this measurement would improve the air quality in Taichung and maintain industrial development for Taiwan. [Taiwan News]

The plan of energy transition is relied on the state-operated Taiwan Power Co. (Taipower), which operates the largest coal-fired power plant domestically, and is required to expedite gas facility construction. [Focus Taiwan]

According to the governmental plan, four natural gas power generation facilities will be operated by 2032, in order to replace the dismantled four coal-fired power generation facilities. In 2032, the other 6 coal-fired power generation facilities will be offline for national security purposes and considered for their existence [UDN, in Chinese].

For Taichung, this plan fulfils the objective of 1-for-1 exchange of coal power for gas power generation, demanded by the Taichung City Government, while Lu Shiow-yen, the Mayor of Taichung City, worries on the potential danger of Taichung as the major attack target from foreign threat as the centralized power generation in Taichung [CNA, in Chinese].

Taiwan: Chipmaker TSMC suspends production of advanced AI chips for China

(am) Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. (TSMC) announced it will halt production of advanced AI chips for the Chinese market following orders from the U.S. [Taiwan News 1]

The U.S. Department of Commerce directed TSMC to cease supplying advanced AI chips to Chinese customers as part of new export restrictions aimed at limiting China's access to cutting-edge technologies.

TSMC will suspend the manufacturing of chips at process nodes smaller than 7 nanometers that are used for AI accelerators or graphics processing units (GPUs). However, chips for mobile communications and connectivity-related applications will remain

unaffected. As a result, the overall impact on TSMC's revenue is expected to be limited.

The restrictions could affect major Chinese companies like Baidu and Alibaba, which produce their AI chips in Taiwan. This policy shift follows the discovery of a TSMC chip in a Huawei product in late October, which may indicate a breach of U.S. restrictions on Huawei imposed in May 2019. [Taiwan News 2]

Taiwan: Major US defense purchases planned

(hs) Taiwan is preparing to request a significant military aid package from the United States, aimed at enhancing its defense capabilities against China. The proposed package, potentially exceeding USD 15 billion, could include advanced weaponry such as Aegis destroyers, Patriot missiles, F-35 fighter jets, and other high-tech systems. This move comes as Taiwan seeks to bolster its defence in response to growing military tensions in the Taiwan Strait.

Key components of the proposed package include up to 60 F-35 fighter jets, four Advanced Hawkeye radar systems, 10 retired warships, and 400 Patriot missiles. While these systems are considered vital for Taiwan's defence, some experts suggest focusing on more mobile and cost-effective weapons, such as munitions and air defence systems, to better counter China's military strength.

The primary motivation behind Taiwan’s large-scale military request is to send a clear message to China about its commitment to securing its sovereignty. By investing heavily in advanced US military hardware, Taiwan aims to demonstrate its seriousness in strengthening its defences. The request also aligns with broader US policy under both the Trump and Biden administrations, which have encouraged allies, including Taiwan, to increase defence spending.

In addition to security concerns, Taiwan’s request is also a strategic move to strengthen ties with the incoming Trump administration. Informal discussions between Taiwanese officials and Trump’s team have focused on crafting a defence package that would demonstrate Taiwan’s resolve to invest in its own military capabilities, a priority for Trump, who has emphasized increased defence spending by US allies.

The proposed package reflects Taiwan’s ongoing efforts to bolster its security in the face of China’s growing military threat. During the Trump

administration, the US approved 11 arms packages to Taiwan worth USD 21 billion including fighter jets and tanks. The Biden administration has continued to provide substantial support, though with a focus on more cost-effective, mobile systems, such as munitions and air defense, considered better suited to counter China's superior military. [The Financial Times]

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

Bangladesh: Interim government faces backlash over appointment of new advisers amid reshuffle

(lm) The interim government of Bangladesh has sworn in three new advisers as part of a significant reshuffle aimed at streamlining administration. Businessman Sheikh Bashir Uddin, filmmaker Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, and former special assistant Mahfuj Alam took their oaths at Bangabhaban on November 10, in a ceremony presided over by President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus.

Sheikh Bashir Uddin, the managing director of Akij-Bashir Group, will now oversee the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Textiles and Jute. Renowned filmmaker Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, known for his acclaimed works like Third Person Singular Number and Television, has been assigned to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. Mahfuj Alam, a prominent figure in the recent student-led mass uprising, has yet to have his specific responsibilities detailed.

This reshuffle included adjustments to existing portfolios. Salehuddin Ahmed retains the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Science and Technology, while Hasan Arif will focus on the Ministry of Land and the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus will now directly oversee the Cabinet Division, Defence, Armed Forces Division, and Public Administration. Other changes include Asif Nazrul narrowing his responsibilities to Law, Justice, Parliamentary Affairs, and Expatriates' Welfare, while Asif Mahmud Sajeeb Bhuiyan takes charge of Local Government, Rural Development, Cooperatives, and Youth and Sports. Brigadier General (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain has assumed leadership of the Ministries of Labor and Employment and Shipping, and Ali Imam Majumder now heads the Ministry of Food.

The interim government, which took office on August 8 following the ousting of the Awami League government in a mass uprising, has expanded its cabinet to 24 members, including the chief adviser. [The Business Standard] [Dhaka Tribune]

However, the appointments have sparked outrage among the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, which played a pivotal role in the July uprising that ousted the AL government. Protesters accused the government of appointing individuals tied to the former regime and ignoring the democratic aspirations of the uprising. "We overthrew Hasina to end her legacy, not preserve it," said movement leader Hasnat Abdullah during a demonstration at Dhaka University's Raju Memorial Sculpture.

The movement warned of further protests if the advisory council continues to include figures perceived as loyalists of the previous government. The Jatiya Nagorik Committee echoed these concerns, urging the government to align its decisions with the uprising's democratic values. Hefazat-e-Islam also questioned Farooki's inclusion in the government, demanding clarity on his appointment. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: ICT prosecutor seeks Interpol Red Notice for Hasina's arrest

(lm) The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) chief prosecutor, Tajul Islam, has requested Interpol to issue a Red Notice for the arrest of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on charges of crimes against humanity. The request, sent through the inspector-general of police over the weekend, aims to facilitate her arrest as she is reportedly outside Bangladesh's jurisdiction.

Tajul stated that Hasina is accused of crimes against humanity with an existing arrest warrant, and Interpol's involvement is crucial to ensure her detention. A Red Notice, as defined by Interpol, is a request to locate and provisionally arrest a person pending extradition or similar legal action, though it is not an international arrest warrant.

Additionally, the ICT has issued arrest warrants for four police officials, including Jakir Hossain, the officer-in-charge of Jatrabari Police Station, in connection with mass killings during July and August. Evidence reportedly links the officers to the atrocities, according to the ICT prosecution.

The tribunal has also approved a request to interrogate Major General Ziaul Ahsan, a former army officer and director general of the National Telecommunication Monitoring Center, currently under arrest. The date for questioning remains undisclosed due to security concerns. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Supreme Court stays Khaleda Zia's extended jail term in Zia Orphanage case

(lm) The Supreme Court has stayed the High Court verdict that extended BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's jail term from five to 10 years in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case. The Appellate Division, led by Justice Md Ashfaqul Islam, granted Khaleda permission to appeal the High Court's decision and directed her lawyers to submit concise statements within two weeks.

The case, filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), initially sentenced Khaleda to five years in prison on February 8, 2018, considering her age and social status. However, the High Court later increased the sentence to 10 years on October 30, 2018, following an ACC petition. Khaleda was accused of misappropriating over BDT 21 million (USD 176,400) intended for orphans. Five other accused, including her son Tarique Rahman, received 10-year sentences.

Khaleda, 79, is on bail and faces a total of 37 cases on charges including corruption, violence, arson, defamation, and sedition. Of these, 12 were dismissed by the High Court recently, nine were dropped by lower courts, and two saw presidential clemency earlier this year after Sheikh Hasina resigned as prime minister. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami call for reforms and timely elections

(lm) Thousands of supporters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami, two of the country's prominent opposition forces, have called for political reforms and timely elections to restore stability and democracy. The BNP, led by exiled vice-chairman Tarique Rahman, and Jamaat-e-Islami, represented by its leadership, emphasized the need for systemic changes before elections are held under the interim government led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus.

At a massive BNP rally in Dhaka on November 8, Tarique Rahman addressed supporters via videolink from London, warning of alleged conspiracies by allies of ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to undermine the interim government. Rahman urged vigilance, asserting that while Hasina has fled to India following her removal in August, her associates continue to threaten the democratic transition. BNP General Secretary Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir echoed these concerns, accusing Hasina's loyalists of destabilization efforts and calling for a clear election roadmap to avoid further unrest. [Associated Press] [ChannelNews Asia]

Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh's largest Islamic political party, similarly stressed the need for reforms before polls. At a conference in Kushtia, Secretary General Professor Mia Golam Parwar highlighted Jamaat's readiness to participate in elections, announcing plans to release a manifesto once the schedule is declared. In Nilphamari, Jamaat Ameer Dr. Shafiqur Rahman expressed cautious support for the interim government, urging reforms to ensure free and fair elections. "This doesn't mean years, but without reforms, any election will lack fairness," he remarked.

Both parties also addressed their shared history of repression under the Awami League government, which targeted BNP and Jamaat leaders with arrests, office closures, and allegations of war crimes against Jamaat members. Reflecting on these challenges, Dr. Shafiqur called for a judicial system free from corruption, where justice is accessible to all and misconduct is met with accountability. [Dhaka Tribune 1] [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Bangladesh: 15th Amendment faces High Court scrutiny amid allegations of undermining democracy

(lm) The 15th amendment to Bangladesh's Constitution, passed in 2011 under the recently ousted Awami League government, is under intense scrutiny in the High Court, with petitioners and opposition lawyers arguing that it undermines democratic principles, free elections, and citizens' fundamental rights.

The amendment abolished the nonparty caretaker government system established through the 13th amendment in 1996, which was designed to ensure impartial elections after political turmoil and mistrust between major parties over electoral fairness.

During recent hearings, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) lawyer Zainul Abedin argued that the 15th amendment was politically motivated to secure the Awami League's prolonged hold on power, suppressing citizens' rights and fostering authoritarianism. He highlighted discrepancies in the Supreme Court's handling of the 13th amendment case, noting that an earlier allowance for two caretaker-led elections was omitted from the final judgment, which he called judicial misconduct.

Supreme Court lawyer Sharif Bhuiyan criticized the amendment for enabling "midnight elections" and undermining fair polls. He argued that the caretaker government system aligned with the Constitution's foundational principles and ensured electoral integrity. Sharif also condemned the sweeping changes made to 54 articles, calling the amendment an "authoritarian scheme," and criticized Article 7(A) for suppressing dissent. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: NHRC chairman and five members resign

(lm) The chairman of Bangladesh's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Dr. Kamal Uddin Ahmed, and five members of the commission submitted their resignation letters to the President last week. The resigning members are Md Selim Reza, Md Aminul Islam, Kangjari Chowdhury, Dr. Bishwajit Chanda, and Dr. Tania Haque. Reasons for their collective resignation were not disclosed. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: BNP submits names for new Election Commission

(lm) The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has proposed five candidates for the new Election Commission (EC) to the search committee. BNP leaders Salahuddin Ahmed and Shahiduddin Chowdhury Annie submitted the names to Cabinet Secretary Sheikh Abdur Rashid on November 7 but declined to disclose them.

The search committee, established by the interim government on October 31, invited nominations from political parties and others. Led by Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury, the committee will recommend candidates for the EC, which plays a crucial role in overseeing elections. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Supreme Court to hear review petitions on 27th BCS viva cancellation on December 4

The Supreme Court of Bangladesh has set December 4 for hearings on three review petitions challenging its 2010 verdict that upheld the cancellation of the results of the first viva voce of the 27th Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examinations held in 2005. The cancellation, implemented by the Public Service Commission (PSC) in 2007 during a caretaker government, affected 1,137 candidates due to allegations of irregularities, including question leaks and corruption.

The Appellate Division, led by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, fixed the date following arguments from petitioners' lawyers. The review petitions, filed by 138 affected candidates earlier this year, contest the SC's 2010 ruling that affirmed a High Court judgment declaring the PSC's cancellation decision legal. The original cancellation invalidated viva voce results for 3,567 candidates. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: BSEC warns directors over dividend payment delays

(lm) The Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has warned directors of 10 companies to pay overdue dividends by specified deadlines or face fines. Nine companies, including Safko Spinning Mills, Pacific Denims, and Lub-rref (Bangladesh), have until December 15, while Advent Pharma faces a November 30 deadline.

Non-compliance could result in penalties ranging from BDT 1 million (USD 9,400) to BDT 23.5 million (USD 220,900) per director. Two securities firms, Prudential Capital and NLI Securities, also face fines for customer account deficits, with additional daily penalties for continued violations. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Three Awami League, Jubo League leaders arrested over student's murder

(vk) Bangladeshi police arrested three political leaders on November 10 in connection with a fatal shooting during a student protest in Dhaka. Among those detained were Ahmed Ali, a former Awami League (AL) official, Subhas Chandra, an AL unit vice-president, and Shafiqul, a member of the Jubo League, the youth wing of the ruling party.

The arrests stem from an incident on August 5, where gunfire broke out during a demonstration, leading to a protester's death. According to police, members of the Awami League and its affiliates were allegedly involved in the violence. A murder case was filed on November 2. [Bss News]

Bangladesh: Syndicate misuses BTRC to embezzle over USD 67.2 million

(asa) For nearly a decade, a syndicate operating through the International Gateway Operators Forum (IOF) exploited the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), reportedly embezzling over BDT 8,000 crore (USD 67.2 million). The scheme allegedly involved influential figures, including Salman F Rahman, an advisor to former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The IOF, established in 2015 with 29 international gateway operators, gave control of international call terminations to a select group of companies, including Unique Infoway, Digicon Telecommunications, Roots Communications, Global Voice, Bangla Track, and Novo Telecom. Initially created as a "trial platform," the IOF continued operating unchecked, doubling its monthly profits from BDT 700 million (USD 5.88 million) to BDT 1.4 billion (USD 11.76 million). This arrangement caused significant revenue losses for mobile operators, ICX exchanges, and the BTRC.

Under Salman F Rahman's alleged influence, BTRC officials approved the IOF model amidst political pressure. Oversight of the IOF reportedly fell to Rahman's son, Shayan Rahman, who managed its operations. Critics argue that this system unfairly favored private companies over public interests, leading to substantial losses for government revenues.

Shahed Alam, Robi's Chief Corporate and Regulatory Affairs Officer, described the IOF as an "extra layer" that disrupted revenue sharing agreements between operators and the government. He noted that Pakistan had tried a similar system but abandoned it after court intervention due to transparency issues.

Mohiuddin Ahmed, president of the Bangladesh Mobile Phone Users Association, condemned the IOF as an "illegal layer" enabling financial misappropriation under legal pretenses. He urged the immediate dismantling of the IOF to prevent political favoritism and money laundering.

There are also allegations that former State Minister for Telecommunications, Tarana Halim, was removed from her position for resisting concessions to the IOF. Ahmed called for an investigation into these claims.

Despite the change in government on August 5, the IOF model remains operational, sparking public outrage. Critics, including Ahmed, argue that the BTRC must terminate the IOF and align its practices with national and global standards. [Bangla News 24]

Bangladesh: Press freedom concerns persist amid repeal of Cyber Security Act

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government, led by Muhammad Yunus, has repealed the controversial Cyber Security Act, marking a significant step toward addressing longstanding concerns about press freedom and civil liberties. Enacted in 2023 as a replacement for the equally contentious Digital Security Act, the law faced widespread criticism for suppressing dissent and targeting journalists. The decision was confirmed during an advisory council meeting, with Law Adviser Dr. Asif Nazrul stating that all cases related to "speech offenses" under the law would be dismissed, and detained individuals released through legal processes.

While this move has been welcomed as a corrective measure, Dr. Nazrul clarified that cybercrime cases involving hacking, fraud, and blackmailing will proceed. He also emphasized that the interim administration

has not initiated any new cases against journalists or interfered with their work, signaling a departure from the practices of the previous regime. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Despite these advances, concerns over media independence persist. In a controversial move, the government recently revoked the press credentials of over 50 journalists, including prominent figures like former Press Institute Director-General Zafar Wazed and journalists from major outlets such as ATN News and Ekattor TV. Media watchdogs, including Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), condemned the actions, warning that they could stifle critical voices and promote self-censorship.

Bangladesh ranks 165 out of 180 on the World Press Freedom Index, with RSF describing its media environment as "hostile." While the repeal of the Cyber Security Act offers hope, recent developments raise questions about the government's broader commitment to safeguarding press freedom. [Voice of America]

In response to criticism, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam reaffirmed the government's zero-tolerance policy toward attacks on the media. At a press briefing, he emphasized that the administration has not interfered with journalistic content or assignments, breaking from practices observed during the previous Awami League regime.

Addressing concerns over threats to newspapers, Shafiqul assured that security has been provided to affected outlets. However, he refrained from commenting on the removal of Bangladesh Television correspondents or the revocation of accreditation cards, deferring these issues to the relevant authorities. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

Meanwhile, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has voiced alarm over persistent attacks, harassment, and arbitrary lawsuits targeting journalists. TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman criticized these actions as counterproductive to the vision of a "new Bangladesh" that emerged from the July-August mass uprising.

He warned that recent moves, including the revocation of press credentials, echo the authoritarian practices of the previous regime and threaten to undermine press freedom. TIB urged the government to foster a safe environment for independent journalism, cautioning that failure to act could render promises of media independence hollow. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Rizvi retracts remarks on Bangabandhu portrait removal

(lm) BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi has expressed regret for his earlier criticism of the removal of a portrait of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from Bangabhaban, citing a misunderstanding about the location of the photograph.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, widely referred to as Bangabandhu (Friend of Bengal), was the founding leader of Bangladesh and its first prime minister. His leadership during the 1971 Liberation War earned him a revered place in the nation's history. However, his legacy remains a point of contention in the nation's polarized political landscape.

Earlier in the day, Rizvi had criticized the act, stating that the photo should not have been removed and referencing historical events under Khandaker Mushtaq Ahmed and Ziaur Rahman. He acknowledged that contributions at the national level must be recognized and added, "BNP is not as narrow-minded as the Awami League, which is why I said the portrait should not have been removed."

The controversy follows a Facebook post by government adviser Mahfuj Alam, who confirmed the removal of Mujib's photo from Darbar Hall and stated it reflected the "spirit of July." The removal has sparked debate, with Rizvi's initial comments and subsequent apology highlighting tensions over symbols of political legacy in post-Awami League Bangladesh. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Tensions rise at Awami League rally; ward leader dies in custody

(lm) Several individuals were assaulted on November 10 near the Awami League (AL) office at Bangabandhu Avenue, suspected of being party activists, during a tense confrontation between AL supporters and protesters from the anti-discrimination student movement. The clashes coincided with an AL rally and a counter-demonstration in the area.

Around 12:45 pm, a man, approximately 60 years old, was severely beaten by protesters who accused him of being an AL affiliate. Witnesses reported that the man was seen wandering near the party office, prompting

suspicion and a violent response. He was later rescued by police, though his identity remains unknown.

At least six similar incidents occurred in the area throughout the morning, according to local traders. Paltan Police Station's investigation inspector, Moniruzzaman, stated that no injured individuals had been handed over to law enforcement.

Additionally, two AL activists, including a female leader, were turned over to the police around 2:45 pm, further highlighting the volatile atmosphere surrounding the day's events. [The Daily Star 1]

Separately, an AL ward leader in Bogura died in jail custody early the same day. Detained since October 4 on explosives charges, the leader suffered from pre-existing health conditions. Jail authorities stated his condition worsened at night, prompting a transfer to Bogura Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical Hospital, where he was pronounced dead. However, AL sources alleged delays in medical care contributed to his death. The body remains in the morgue for an autopsy. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: RMG workers block Dhaka-Mymensingh highway over unpaid wages

(lm) Thousands of garment workers from five factories under the TNZ Group staged a protest on the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Gazipur last week, demanding overdue wages. Over 1,200 workers participated in the blockade, which disrupted traffic and caused significant inconvenience to commuters and goods transport.

The workers had previously gone on strike on October 29 over similar grievances. The protests arose from TNZ Group's repeated failure to honor commitments to pay wages for September and October. Originally scheduled for October 23, payments were postponed after an October 24 meeting involving the army, factory owners, and worker representatives. New deadlines were set for November 3 and November 20, but these, too, were missed.

Last week, TNZ issued a notice promising to pay September wages by November 7 and October wages by November 28, urging workers to maximize production starting November 9 to support timely payments. However, the protests reignited when TNZ failed to meet its November 7 commitment.

In response, TNZ's chairman issued another notice citing power outages as a key factor behind production delays and wage disbursement issues. The notice expressed regret for the situation and assured workers that efforts were underway to restore electricity and resume operations. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: 50,000 farmers face uncertainty over Boro cultivation due to waterlogging

(lm) Around 50,000 farmers in Khulna, Jashore, and Satkhira are at risk of missing the Boro paddy season as 96,000 hectares of farmland remain waterlogged, following heavy August floods. Farmers in affected areas, including Dumuria and Phultala upazilas of Khulna, struggle as water levels remain high due to silted rivers and broken sluice gates.

Efforts to drain floodwaters using pumps by the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) and Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) are ongoing, but officials warn that if the water does not recede within three weeks, Boro cultivation could be severely impacted, leaving land uncultivated and worsening food insecurity.

Farmers, reliant on Boro cultivation for income and sustenance, fear financial and food crises. Md Rafiqul Islam, DAE's Khulna director, emphasized the urgency of resolving waterlogging, while local leaders highlight the need for sustainable river management to prevent recurring issues. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Dengue claims five more lives, 466 hospitalized

As of November 8, in the past 24 hours, dengue fever has claimed five more lives in Bangladesh, raising this year's death toll from the mosquito-borne disease to 342, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS). Among the latest fatalities, three were reported in Dhaka South City Corporation and two in the Chittagong division.

During the same period, 466 new dengue cases were recorded, with 145 patients hospitalized in Dhaka North City Corporation and 97 in Dhaka South City Corporation. Currently, 4,227 dengue patients are receiving treatment in hospitals nationwide.

Since January 1, 2024, Bangladesh has reported 69,922 dengue cases. Although the numbers remain alarming, they are still significantly lower than last year, which saw 1,705 deaths and 321,179 reported cases, making it the deadliest year on record for dengue in the country. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Petrobangla to launch open tender for LNG supplier list

(lm) Petrobangla, Bangladesh's state-owned oil, gas, and mineral corporation, is set to issue an open tender next week to create a new list of international liquefied natural gas (LNG) suppliers for the spot market. The move aims to enhance transparency and diversify suppliers in response to allegations of favoritism under the previous Awami League government.

The tender, prepared by Petrobangla and its subsidiary Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Limited (RPGCL), will replace the current list of 23 companies, which includes prominent suppliers like Vitol Asia, TotalEnergies, Excelerate Energy, and Gunvor Singapore. Some of these companies were allegedly linked to business interests involving former government officials and local groups.

Since 2019, Bangladesh has imported LNG from the international spot market to meet its growing energy demands, producing 3,100 million cubic feet per day (mmcfd) against a demand of 4,000 mmcfd. Currently, 150-200 mmcfd of LNG is sourced from the spot market, while the remainder is supplied through long-term contracts with Qatar and Oman.

The interim government, which suspended the Speedy Increase of Power and Energy Supply Act 2010, mandated that LNG imports must now adhere to the Public Procurement Rule 2008. This shift intends to ensure transparency and encourage participation from more reputed international companies, reducing costs for bulk LNG imports, which exceed a billion dollars annually.

Energy experts believe the new supplier list will lower LNG procurement costs and ease the country's energy crisis, ultimately benefiting the government and reducing dependence on a few dominant players in the market. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: BPC clears USD 346 million in dues with private bank support amid dollar shortage

(lm) Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) has settled USD 346 million in outstanding payments to foreign fuel suppliers within two months by utilizing dollar reserves from private banks. This shift was necessary as state-owned banks faced a dollar shortage, delaying payments since July.

By August, arrears reached USD 420 million, prompting suppliers like Vitol Asia and PetroChina to delay fuel deliveries. Government approval allowed BPC to open Letters of Credit (LCs) with private banks, reducing arrears to USD 110 million by October.

City Bank issued USD 132 million in LCs, playing a key role in restoring imports. BPC Chairman Amin Ul Ahsan noted the critical role of private banks in overcoming the crisis. BPC requires approximately USD 1.25 billion monthly to sustain fuel imports. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Seven native plant species declared extinct in new "Plant Red List" report

(asa) Bangladesh has announced that seven plant species have become regionally extinct, according to the newly released "Plant Red List of Bangladesh," a project developed under the Sustainable Forests and Livelihoods (SUFAL) initiative by the Forest Department, with funding from the World Bank. The Red List, unveiled by Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan at the Bangladesh Secretariat, evaluates over 1,000 plant species. Notably, it identifies five species as critically endangered, 395 as vulnerable, 127 as endangered, and 263 as near threatened, underscoring the urgent need for focused conservation efforts. [Dhaka Tribune]

Furthermore, Adviser Rizwana Hasan emphasized that the Red List will be critical in prioritizing plant conservation across Bangladesh, supporting the government's broader biodiversity conservation goals. She noted that the list will serve as a key resource for policymakers, conservationists, and researchers by providing vital data for effective conservation strategies and resource allocation. [BSS News]

Meanwhile, Hasan also highlighted that special management strategies are being developed in protected areas to mitigate the impact of 17 invasive

plant species, such as water hyacinths, which pose significant ecological threats. [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh: Government targets significant gas production boost by 2028

(vk) The interim government of Bangladesh has announced plans to boost daily gas production by 648 million cubic feet by December 2025 through the installation and workover of 50 wells. Further expansion is projected for 2026-2028, with an additional 1,500 million cubic feet per day expected from 100 new or rehabilitated wells, according to a government progress report marking three months in office.

Current average gas production has declined from 2,643 million cubic feet per day in the 2018-19 fiscal year to 2,201 million cubic feet in 2022-23, necessitating these measures.

In a related move, Petrobangla has canceled agreements with Summit LNG Terminal II Co. Ltd for the construction of a third Floating Storage Regasification Unit (FSRU) in Moheskhali, Cox's Bazar, aiming to streamline operations. Governing bodies within the Power and Mineral Resources sector have also been restructured to enhance transparency and accountability.

The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission Act 2003 has been amended to grant the commission authority to adjust gas prices. In a bid to alleviate costs for consumers, octane and petrol prices were reduced by BDT 6 (USD 0.05), and diesel and kerosene prices by BDT 1.25 (USD 0.01). Additionally, outstanding payments for fuel imports have been lowered to USD 160 million from USD 478 million. [Bss News]

Bangladesh: Decision on LDC graduation to take more time, commerce adviser says

(lm) Bangladesh will need additional time to finalize its decision on graduating from the least developed country (LDC) category, scheduled for 2026, Commerce Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed announced over the weekend. Speaking at a press conference, Ahmed acknowledged that business leaders are advocating for a delay to retain LDC trade benefits for an extended period. [The Daily Star]

Graduating from LDC status poses significant challenges for Bangladesh, particularly the loss of preferential trade benefits such as duty-free access under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) and other schemes like the EU's Everything but Arms (EBA). This could make Bangladeshi exports, especially garments, less competitive due to increased tariffs, potentially as high as 12 percent in the EU.

Bangladesh: Environmental action plan prioritized amid escalating crises

(lm) Environment Adviser Syeda Rizwana Hasan has pledged to implement a cost-effective, time-bound action plan to address Bangladesh's severe environmental challenges. Speaking at a seminar in Dhaka, she highlighted critical issues including air and noise pollution, soil degradation, and river pollution. "Bangladesh has the most polluted air globally and ranks first in noise pollution," she said, adding that 78 percent of soil is contaminated and Dhaka remains one of the least livable cities.

The ministry has instructed district commissioners to submit restoration plans for one polluted river per district. "Plans from 57 districts have already been received," she noted, emphasizing the urgency of initiating solutions despite decades of accumulated problems. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Major reshuffle in police force amid post-government transition

(lm) In a significant restructuring, 64 police officers, ranging from deputy inspector general (DIG) to superintendent of police (SP), have been transferred or reassigned across various units nationwide. Notifications from the home ministry detailed the reshuffle, with 48 officers transferred to active roles and 16 made Officers on Special Duty (OSD), a designation often linked to sidelining personnel.

Nazmur Karim Khan, DIG of Police Staff College, was appointed commissioner of Gazipur Metropolitan Police (GMP), filling a vacancy left after former commissioner Khandaker Rafiqul Islam's promotion to additional IGP and chief of the Special Branch. Other transferred officers were reassigned to units such as the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Criminal Investigation Department, and Tourist Police.

This latest overhaul follows the fall of the Awami League government on August 5 amid a mass uprising. Since then, over 400 officers have been transferred, with all divisional range DIGs, metropolitan commissioners, and district SPs replaced.

The police's role during the uprising drew widespread criticism for excessive use of force, including live fire, which resulted in significant casualties. During the Awami League's 15-year tenure, allegations of partisan favoritism in police promotions and postings were widespread, with many officers accused of acting as party loyalists. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Youth killed in cross-border shooting incident in Sylhet's Jaintapur

(asa) On November 6, a Bangladeshi youth was fatally shot at the Bangladesh-India border in the Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet, in the Jaintapur upazila of Sylhet. The deceased was reportedly attempting to illegally cross the border into India when he was wounded by gunfire from Indian Khasia individuals in the Tiprakhla-Ghilatail area, near international pillars 1286-1287. [Dhaka Tribune]

Meanwhile, local residents rescued and took him to the Jaintapur Upazila Health Complex, where medical staff declared him dead. Abul Basar Mohammad Badruzaman, the officer in charge of the Jaintapur Model Police Station, confirmed the incident, noting that legal procedures are in progress. The body has been transported to the morgue of Osmani Medical College for an autopsy. [NewAge]

Bangladesh: Deadly clashes in Geneva Camp fueled by drug trade and firearms

(lm) Geneva Camp, a settlement in Mohammadpur, Dhaka, originally established to house Bihari Muslims —Urdu-speaking migrants from India who moved to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) during the 1947 partition—has been plagued by escalating violence over the past three months. The clashes, driven by disputes over the camp's drug trade, have left at least seven dead and hundreds injured. The situation has worsened since the fall of the Awami League government on August 5, with firearms being openly used in the camp for the first time in its history.

The violence centers on rival factions vying for control of the lucrative drug trade. Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-backed "Chua Selim" has attempted to assert dominance, while Awami League-aligned "Bunia Sohel" has resisted. Firearms entered the camp in three phases: initially supplied by Awami League leaders to suppress protests, later looted from police stations following the government's collapse, and finally purchased by "Chua Selim" to strengthen his group's position. [Dhaka Tribune]

The unrest reached a new level on November 1, when a bomb explosion during a clash between rival groups killed one person and injured 10 to 12 bystanders. The incident, tied to the ongoing power struggles over the drug trade, has intensified calls for stronger intervention. A murder case has been filed, and authorities have made arrests, but the camp remains volatile. [The Daily Star]

Despite intensified law enforcement efforts, including raids and firearm recoveries, the daily drug trade valued at approximately USD 41,500 continues unabated. Residents of Geneva Camp have expressed frustration over the lack of meaningful intervention to restore peace and address the root causes of the violence. The camp's deteriorating security situation highlights the urgent need for comprehensive action to tackle both the criminal activities and the systemic issues fueling the unrest. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: Army chief briefs chief adviser on law and order

(lm) Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman met with interim leader Muhammad Yunus over the weekend to discuss the country's overall law and order situation. The meeting, described as a courtesy call, took place at the chief adviser's office in Tejgaon. During the discussion, General Waker-Uz-Zaman provided an update on the army's activities. In response, Chief Adviser Yunus issued necessary directives. [The Daily Star]

Bhutan: National Assembly to address Parliamentary Entitlement Bill, key policy reforms

(lm) The National Assembly of Bhutan will begin its second session of the fourth Parliament on November 14, focusing on key legislative and policy discussions. A

highlight of the session is the tabling of the Parliamentary Entitlement Bill, which aims to address inconsistencies in the Pay Structure Reform Act of 2022. Deputy Speaker Sangay Khandu emphasized that the bill seeks to strengthen parliamentary functioning rather than serve MPs' personal interests.

Other bills on the agenda include the Goods and Services Tax Amendment Bill 2024 and the Cattle Tax Exemption Bill 2024, aimed at updating tax frameworks and providing relief for livestock farmers. Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay will brief Parliament on reforms to the bell curve performance evaluation for civil servants as part of the Max Moderation Exercise.

Updates from various ministries will address compensation for landowners affected by electric pole installations, crop and livestock loss compensations, healthcare services, and the contentious Constituency Development Grant. Recommendations on the Economic Stimulus Plan and motions on the Pension Act, the Property Tax Act, and educational access will also be discussed. The session concludes on December 11. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Rising domestic and gender-based violence cases spark urgent need for support

(mt) Domestic violence (DV) and gender-based violence (GBV) are on the rise in Bhutan, with a sharp increase in reported cases in recent years. Victims, particularly in remote areas, often face economic abuse and find it difficult to report incidents due to a lack of resources and support.

While local leaders note that many cases go unreported, police records from 2019 to 2024 show only a small number of DV and GBV cases. However, national data paints a grimmer picture, with reported GBV cases rising by over 43 percent in 2023 and increasing by another 55.68 percent in early 2024. Economic abuse, especially among young women, continues to be a widespread issue, often limiting their ability to work and support themselves.

In response, organizations like RENEW have been crucial in providing shelters, advocacy, and educational support to survivors and their children. RENEW has expanded its Community Service Centres to 10 dzongkhags and is working with local communities to create safer environments for victims. Despite these efforts, advocates urge more government investment

and comprehensive strategies to combat DV and GBV, ensuring that every Bhutanese woman has the resources to rebuild her life in safety. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: MoAL works on third Nationally Determined Contributions for 2025

(lm) Bhutan's agriculture and livestock sector, employing 43.5 percent of the population, is highly vulnerable to climate change. A workshop held from November 6-8 in Paro focused on enhancing livestock climate action for Bhutan's third Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) due in 2025.

NDCs are a key element of the Paris Agreement, where countries outline their plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Bhutan's third NDC will set specific targets for the agriculture and livestock sector, which contributed 14.67 percent to GDP in 2022 and is a significant source of methane emissions.

During the workshop, experts discussed strategies to mitigate climate change impacts in the sector, such as improving livestock management, feed quality, and promoting climate-smart agriculture practices. Tashi Yangzome Dorji, Director of the Department of Livestock, stressed the importance of climate action to maintain Bhutan's carbon neutrality.

The third NDC will integrate strategies like organic farming, biogas production, and emission reduction measures to align with Bhutan's climate goals under the Paris Agreement. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: FMCL launches crop aggregation program to support farmers

(mt) The Farm Machinery Corporation Limited (FMCL) has launched an aggregation program in Guma gewog, Punakha, to improve market access for farmers and ensure stable pricing for essential crops like maize, wheat, quinoa, and rice. The program, part of the Price Guarantee Scheme (PGS), aims to support farmers by providing reliable markets and fair prices.

FMCL will aggregate, collect, and distribute crops, with quality checks in place for moisture and purity. The initiative will expand nationwide in 2025, addressing challenges such as inconsistent pricing and post-harvest losses, while promoting food security and reducing reliance on imports. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Government to collaborate with private IT firms for future procurements

(lm) Following concerns raised by Bhutan's private IT sector, the government has announced plans to involve private firms more closely in future procurement processes. This comes after the direct awarding of contracts for laptops and desktops to the State Trading Corporation of Bhutan Limited (STCBL), which many in the private sector viewed as unfair.

Finance Minister Lekey Dorji confirmed that while the 2024-25 procurement will proceed as planned, future procurements will see closer collaboration with the IT Association of Bhutan (ITAB) and the Department of Procurement and Properties (DPP).

Private firms, including members of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), expressed concerns over the decision, arguing it could harm their businesses, which have made significant investments in training and infrastructure. Critics also pointed out that the direct contract violated the Procurement Rules and Regulations (PRR) 2023, which mandate open tendering for larger contracts. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Government launches National Cybersecurity Strategy to tackle rising cyber threats

(mt) Bhutan has unveiled its National Cybersecurity Strategy 2024-2029 to strengthen its defenses against growing cyber threats. The country has witnessed over 100 scam cases in recent years, leading to financial losses, defamation, and extortion, as highlighted by the Bhutan Computer Incident Response Team.

The strategy addresses the rising threat of cross-border cybercrime, with hackers exploiting shared languages, cultural similarities, and interconnected infrastructure to target businesses and government institutions in Bhutan and neighboring countries. Bhutan has already seen targeted attacks on its critical infrastructure, including ransomware incidents in the power sector and online investment scams in the financial sector. The country's vulnerability is exacerbated by outdated systems, ineffective patch management, and open ports in its digital infrastructure.

To mitigate these threats, the strategy emphasizes collaboration with international partners, the creation of a robust cybersecurity framework, and a coordinated approach among government agencies

and private sector stakeholders. The government has already set up a Financial Institution Cyber Response Team to combat online scams, particularly cryptocurrency-related fraud, and aims to elevate cybersecurity to the highest levels of government. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: New fire exposure index launched to strengthen climate resilience

(mt) Bhutan has introduced the Forest Fire Exposure Index, an open-source platform developed by geospatial company Geoneon, to predict and mitigate forest fire risks. The AI-driven tool uses satellite data and advanced algorithms to assess fire severity and building exposure, enabling government agencies and communities to allocate resources effectively and prioritize safety measures.

Launched as fire risks increase with the approaching winter, the platform has been piloted in Gelephu and Phuentsholing. It equips Bhutan with real-time data for proactive response, benefiting from USD 225,000 in funding from the World Bank and Asian Disaster Preparedness Center.

With 69.71 percent forest cover and 26 percent of land protected, Bhutan faces rising fire threats exacerbated by climate change. The platform supports government agencies and the public by offering tools for risk assessment and resilience planning.

Between 2019 and 2023, forest fires destroyed thousands of hectares annually, peaking at 8,731.8 hectares last year. The new tool aims to curb such destruction by enabling informed strategies and preparedness efforts. [Kuensel]

India: Kashmir assembly passes resolution to restore special status

(lm) The legislative assembly in Indian-administered Kashmir has passed a non-binding resolution calling for the restoration of the region's special status that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration revoked in 2019.

The resolution, driven by the National Conference (NC), gained majority support in the 90-member assembly but was firmly opposed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which holds 29 seats. Restoration of autonomy would require the approval of Lt. Gov. Manoj Sinha, the

central government's appointed administrator for Kashmir.

The move to revoke semi-autonomy in 2019, which divided the former state into two federally controlled union territories, has remained contentious in the region, fueling concerns about changes to its demographic and political landscape. Although the BJP has promised statehood restoration post-elections, no timeline has been provided, and Modi's government has committed to upholding the 2019 changes. [Associated Press] [Al Jazeera]

Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary defended the resolution, emphasizing that other states, including Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, also enjoy special provisions. Reiterating Home Minister Amit Shah's parliamentary assurances on safeguarding land and jobs for locals, Choudhary accused BJP legislators of privately supporting the resolution but staging protests under external pressure. He provocatively suggested narco tests for BJP MLAs to reveal their true stance.

Choudhary criticized the BJP for failing to address critical issues like unemployment, recruitment scams, and policies favoring external industrialists, instead focusing on Article 370 protests. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah made his first visit to the Jammu Secretariat, marking a symbolic moment for the new administration as it seeks dialogue with the central government to advance the resolution. [The Indian Express]

India: Winter Session of Parliament scheduled from November 25 to December 20

(lm) The Winter Session of Parliament will run from November 25 to December 20, coinciding with the announcement of election results in Maharashtra and Jharkhand states. This marks the third session of the 18th parliamentary lower House under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, following his historic third-term mandate.

The agenda, while not fully disclosed, is expected to include the contentious Waqf (Amendment) Bill, which proposes significant changes to the management of Islamic charitable endowments. Introduced in August, the bill seeks to reform the management of properties associated with mosques and Muslim endowments. The bill, criticized by opposition parties as an attack on

constitutional rights, remains under scrutiny by a joint parliamentary committee.

In anticipation of the forthcoming Winter Session, Muslim scholars and community leaders have announced a protest march to Delhi on November 24, a day before the session's start, to oppose the proposed Waqf (Amendment) Bill. The announcement followed a protest event in Jaipur, attended by Waqf Board members, representatives from the Ajmer Dargah, Indian National Congress MLA Imran Masood, and others. Masood, a member of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the bill, criticized it for infringing on constitutional rights and warned of broader implications for other religious properties. [India Today]

In addition to the Waqf Bill, there are 30 other pending legislative items, including the Banking Laws (Amendment) Bill, the Carriage of Goods by Sea Bill, and the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill. The session will also revisit recent political developments, including the resignation of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which prompted an all-party meeting led by external affairs minister S. Jaishankar.

The previous session was marked by both productivity —136 percent in the lower House and 112 percent in the upper House—and contention, including walkouts and clashes between upper House Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar and opposition leaders. [Hindustan Times]

India: Justice Sanjiv Khanna Takes Oath as 51st Chief Justice

(lm) Justice Sanjiv Khanna was sworn in as the 51st Chief Justice of India (CJI) on November 11, succeeding Justice D.Y. Chandrachud. Justice Khanna's tenure, which lasts until May 13, 2025, begins with critical challenges, including high case pendency and judicial appointments. Notably, he presided over cases affirming the sanctity of personal liberty, supporting electronic voting machines (EVMs), and defending secularism as an integral part of the Constitution.

Chief Justice Khanna steps into his role with significant expectations. Pending cases such as the criminalization of non-consensual marital intercourse and defining essential religious practices await attention. Additionally, he faces the responsibility of appointing two new Supreme Court judges and managing other anticipated retirements during his tenure.

A seasoned jurist, Justice Khanna's legal journey spans decades, beginning in 1983 at Delhi's district courts. Elevated to the Supreme Court in 2019, he bypassed conventional career steps, such as heading a High Court, to take his place among the apex judiciary. Justice Khanna's legacy is underscored by a familial tradition of championing liberty; his uncle, Justice H.R. Khanna, is celebrated for his dissent against emergency-era curtailments of rights. [The Hindu]

India: BJP, Indian National Congress accuse each other of poll code violations

(lm) India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress have both approached the Election Commission of India (ECI), accusing each other of violating the election code of conduct in poll-bound states.

The BJP filed a complaint against Congress MP Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge, alleging that their statements promote enmity. The party urged the EC to lodge an FIR and restrict Gandhi from making what it called "false claims" during his campaign in Maharashtra and Jharkhand. The BJP accused Gandhi of stating that the BJP and RSS are undermining the Constitution and favoring Gujarat over Maharashtra for major projects like an iPhone factory and a Boeing unit.

The Congress, in turn, submitted multiple complaints, including one about an allegedly "communal and divisive" advertisement shared on the BJP's official social media handle. The Congress claimed the ad falsely portrayed Gandhi as taking away reservations from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes to benefit a particular religious minority.

The BJP described Gandhi as a "serial offender" and called on the EC to take decisive action to ensure fair elections. Meanwhile, the Congress criticized the BJP for spreading false narratives, accusing it of communal polarization in its campaigning. [The Indian Express]

India: Supreme Court rules against mid-process changes in public appointment eligibility

(lm) A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, ruled that

eligibility criteria for public appointments cannot be altered midway through the recruitment process. The decision upholds the principle that any rules established at the beginning of a recruitment process must remain unchanged if they are non-discriminatory and consistent with Article 14, the right to equality under the Indian Constitution.

Justice Manoj Misra, authoring the judgment, clarified that inclusion in a selection list does not grant candidates an absolute right to appointment. However, recruiting authorities must provide valid reasons if candidates who meet the initial selection criteria are not appointed. The case arose from a 2009 recruitment by the Rajasthan High Court, where the eligibility cut-off for translators was raised after the exam stages, resulting in only three candidates qualifying for 13 vacancies. [The Hindu]

India: Supreme Court restricts State's power to acquire private property for community use

(lm) In a landmark decision, a nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India ruled that the State does not have the unrestricted power to acquire privately-owned property as a "material resource of the community" for public benefit. The majority judgment, authored by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, rejected a broad interpretation of Article 39(b) of the Constitution, which aims to distribute community resources to serve the common good, cautioning against imposing a "rigid economic dogma" that disregards the role of private investment.

The judgment revisited Justice Krishna Iyer's dissent in the 1977 case Ranganath Reddy vs. State of Karnataka, which had previously influenced cases allowing greater state control over private resources. However, Chief Justice Chandrachud stated that India's economic evolution—from socialism to liberalization—supports a constitutional framework balancing public and private investments, not absolute state control.

The ruling clarified that, while certain privately-owned resources could theoretically serve community needs, decisions on acquisition must consider multiple factors, such as the resource's nature, scarcity, and societal impact. The judgment emphasized that indiscriminate state acquisition of private assets could compromise India's constitutional principles and economic growth. [The Hindu]

India: BJP expels 40 members for anti-party activities

(lm) India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) expelled 40 office-bearers last week for engaging in activities against party interests. This disciplinary action comes amid rising tensions within the party, especially in constituencies where BJP and its allies are fielding candidates.

The expelled members, including representatives from Jogeshwari East and Magathane (both contested by Sena), faced charges of violating party discipline. The expulsions are set to last for six years. BJP's internal discord has led to notable figures, such as former MP Gopal Shetty and other MLAs, defying the party by filing their own nominations, although several eventually withdrew after internal negotiations.

Additionally, newly appointed BJP city Vice President Ravi Raja requested the disqualification of Ganesh Yadav, the Congress candidate for Sion-Koliwada, over alleged misuse of his photos for campaigning purposes. [Times of India]

India: Congress dissolves Pradesh Congress Committee in Himachal Pradesh for restructuring

(lm) India's main opposition Indian National Congress party has dissolved its Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) unit in Himachal Pradesh state, including all district and block-level units, as part of a major restructuring plan.

This marks the first significant reorganization since the party took power in the state. Pratibha Singh, the outgoing state president and wife of former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh, recently joined the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's highest decision-making body. Announcing the decision, AICC General Secretary K.C. Venugopal confirmed Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's approval for the dissolution, effective immediately.

Factionalism has long troubled the Himachal Pradesh Congress, with notable incidents such as the February Rajya Sabha elections, where internal discord led to cross-voting and the loss of Congress candidate Abhishek Singhvi to the BJP's Harsh Mahajan. [The Times of India]

India: Supreme Court orders liquidation of debt-ridden Jet Airways

(ad) The Supreme Court of India has directed the liquidation of Jet Airways, ending a prolonged legal battle over the debt-ridden airline, which has been grounded since April 2019 due to financial distress. The bench overturned the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal's (NCLAT) ruling that approved the transfer of the airline's ownership to the Jalan-Kalrock Consortium (JKC) under a resolution plan.

The court upheld a plea by the State Bank of India and other creditors, citing a five-year delay in the resolution process as grounds for liquidation under its Article 142 powers. The bench criticized the adjustment of INR 1.5 billion (USD 18 million) in performance bank guarantees by JKC as "perverse" and contrary to a January 2024 court order and legal principles.

JKC, which won the bid to revive Jet Airways in 2021, argued that procedural delays, including security clearances, caused it to incur losses exceeding INR 6 billion (USD 72 million). Despite claiming to have fulfilled its financial commitments, including an additional infusion of INR 1 billion (USD 12 million) in September 2023, the consortium was found to have failed to meet the resolution plan's requirements, according to the court. [The Hindustan Times]

India: Supreme Court overturns 1967 ruling, orders review of AMU minority status

(ad) The Supreme Court of India has overturned the 1967 Azeez Basha ruling, which denied Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) its minority status. By a 4-3 majority, the court directed a fresh evaluation of AMU's minority character under Article 30 of the Constitution, which allows religious and linguistic minorities to establish and manage educational institutions.

The bench, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, asserted that minority institutions must reflect minority character and act in the community's interest. Dissenting justices argued procedural flaws undermined the referral to a larger bench.

If declared a minority institution, AMU would no longer need to reserve seats for marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).

The government argued AMU's status as an institution of national importance demands inclusivity and representation, while proponents of minority status emphasized its establishment by Muslims for educational advancement.

The court has referred the matter for further review, with the Chief Justice to constitute a bench to determine AMU's minority status and reassess the 2006 Allahabad High Court ruling. [The Hindustan Times]

India: Parliament panel to debate proposal on private sector quotas for Dalits and Tribals

(lm) A key parliamentary committee on the welfare of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) is set to deliberate on extending caste-based reservations to the private sector. The contentious proposal, which has significant political, social, and economic implications, seeks to address concerns about shrinking government-sector opportunities due to privatization.

The demand for private-sector quotas gained traction during the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by Manmohan Singh, which established a dedicated group of ministers to examine the issue. However, despite prolonged discussions, no concrete measures were implemented. This marks only the second time a top government or parliamentary body has revisited the subject.

The initiative was reportedly proposed by Azad Samaj Party MP Chandrashekhar Azad during the panel's agenda-setting meeting and received backing from other members. Proponents of the proposal argue that privatization has reduced opportunities for marginalized communities who rely on government-sector quotas. Critics, however, contend that such a move could harm the economy, compromise merit in corporate hiring, and potentially conflict with constitutional provisions. [The Times of India]

India: CPI(M) leader P.P. Divya granted bail in additional district magistrate suicide case

(ad) A Kerala court has granted bail to Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) leader P.P. Divya, who

was arrested for allegedly abetting the suicide of Additional District Magistrate (ADM) Naveen Babu. Divya, a former Kannur district panchayat president, had been in judicial custody since October 29 after surrendering to police following the rejection of her anticipatory bail plea.

The case arose after Divya publicly criticized Babu during his farewell function on October 14, accusing him of delaying the approval of a petrol pump in Chengalai and hinting at ulterior motives behind his actions. Babu was found dead at his quarters the next day.

The incident led to protests by Congress workers in Kannur, demanding accountability from District Collector Arun K. Vijayan for allowing Divya's remarks at the event. The protests escalated into clashes with police, with water cannons being used to disperse demonstrators.

Following Divya's bail, the ruling CPI(M) defended her, with state secretary M.V. Govindan describing her as a committed party cadre who would be corrected if found at fault. Reports suggest that the party may remove Divya from its Kannur district committee, though Govindan emphasized the party's role in rehabilitating errant members rather than ostracizing them. [The Indian Express]

India: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri receives 19-month extension

(lm) Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri has been granted a 19-month extension in his role, extending his tenure until July 14, 2026. The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet approved the extension, which goes beyond his scheduled superannuation date of November 30, 2024. Misri assumed the position on July 15, 2024, succeeding Vinay Mohan Kwatra, who now serves as India’s Ambassador to the United States.

A career diplomat from the 1989 Indian Foreign Service batch, Misri has held key roles in the Ministry of External Affairs and Indian missions worldwide, including Pakistan, the US, Germany, Belgium, and Sri Lanka. He has served as India’s ambassador to Spain, Myanmar, and China, where he was instrumental in negotiations following the Galwan Valley clashes in 2020. Misri’s previous roles include serving as Deputy National Security Adviser (2022–2024), Joint Secretary in the Prime Minister’s Office, and Private Secretary to three prime ministers. [The Indian Express]

India: Yasin Malik's wife urges Rahul Gandhi to raise trial concerns in Parliament

(lm) Mushaal Hussein Mullick, wife of jailed Kashmiri separatist leader Yasin Malik, has appealed to Rahul Gandhi, Leader of the Opposition, to initiate a parliamentary debate on her husband's ongoing legal battles. Mullick, a former advisor on human rights and women's empowerment, highlighted Malik's trial in a decades-old sedition case, where the National Investigation Agency (NIA) is seeking a death sentence. Malik, leader of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), is also contesting the NIA's appeal for a death penalty in a 2017 terror funding case, for which he was sentenced to life in 2022 after pleading guilty.

Mullick emphasized Malik's transformation, recounting his shift from armed struggle to non-violence, and noted his indefinite hunger strike since November 2 in protest of alleged inhumane treatment in jail. She accused the BJP government of "victimizing" Malik since 2019 and claimed the charges were politically motivated. Mullick urged Gandhi to leverage his moral and political influence to advocate for Malik's case in Parliament, arguing that Malik could play a significant role in fostering genuine peace in Jammu and Kashmir.

Malik's case comes amid renewed debates on autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir, following the Congress and Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (JKNC) alliance's campaign promise of greater autonomy, a stark contrast to the BJP-led government's 2019 abrogation of Article 370 and reorganization of the state into union territories. [The Indian Express]

India: Wikimedia denies receiving government notice on content issues

(lm) The Wikimedia Foundation stated it has not received an official notice from the Indian government regarding alleged "bias and inaccuracies" on Wikipedia, despite a government official's earlier claims. This follows a legal case by Asian News International (ANI) challenging Wikipedia's portrayal of the agency as pro-government. Wikimedia emphasized its model relies on diverse volunteer contributions, while digital rights advocates warn against subjecting the non-profit to regulations designed for commercial platforms, citing its unique, community-driven structure. [The Hindu]

India: Calm shattered in Manipur's Jiribam as teacher from Hmar community is shot, set on fire

(ad) Violence erupted in Manipur's Jiribam district on November 7, ending two months of relative calm. An attack on the tribal Hmar village of Zairawm resulted in the death of a woman and the torching of seven houses. The incident occurred near a camp of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), India's largest paramilitary force tasked with internal security, and just seven kilometers from the district police station.

Local Hmar groups accused armed individuals identified as Meitei militants of orchestrating the attack, alleging that the victim was shot while attempting to flee. Villagers have since evacuated to Gilgal, a nearby settlement on the Assam border, taking the victim's remains with them.

The Hmar Students' Association condemned the inability of the CRPF to prevent the violence, stating that the attack unfolded over an hour in close proximity to the paramilitary camp.

This incident highlights ongoing ethnic tensions between the Kuki-Zo tribes and the Meitei community in Manipur, following a violent clash in September that left five dead. The repeated violence underscores persistent challenges to peace and security in the region. [The Indian Express]

India: Government freezes 450,000 'mule' bank accounts to combat cybercrime

(lm) The Indian government has frozen 450,000 "mule" bank accounts used to launder money from cybercrimes in the past year, with significant cases detected in public sector banks such as State Bank of India (40,000 accounts), Punjab National Bank (10,000 accounts), and Canara Bank (7,000 accounts). Kotak Mahindra Bank and Airtel Payments Bank also reported thousands of such accounts.

The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), which operates under the Ministry of Home Affairs, presented these findings during a recent meeting with the Prime Minister's Office. Officials emphasized that fraudsters are increasingly withdrawing funds from mule accounts—created using stolen KYC documents—via checks, ATMs, and digital methods.

Since January 2023, over 100,000 cybercrime complaints have been registered through the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal, with approximately INR 170 billion (USD 2 billion) defrauded during this period. The meeting highlighted loopholes in the banking system and urged state and union territory police to act against these fraudulent accounts.

Additionally, the Reserve Bank of India and the Ministry of Finance's Department of Financial Services were instructed to strengthen oversight and investigate the role of bank officials in enabling such accounts. Airtel Payments Bank clarified that it does not offer high-risk facilities such as current accounts or checks, adding that it uses AI/ML models and real-time screening with the I4C registry to minimize fraud risks. [The Indian Express]

India: State Bank of India economists see Q2 GDP growth slowing down to 6.5 percent this fiscal year

(ad) State Bank of India (SBI) economists estimate India's Q2 FY25 GDP growth will slow to 6.5 percent, down from 6.7 percent in Q1, the lowest in 15 quarters. Despite this dip, they expect FY25 growth to approach 7 percent.

The slowdown reflects pressures across agriculture, industry, and services, with fewer leading indicators showing acceleration—69 percent in Q2FY25 versus 80 percent a year ago. Aggregate demand remains steady but has lost momentum.

Economists view the decline as temporary, with recovery expected in the December quarter, driven by rural demand, evidenced by strong tractor sales and rising agricultural wages. Urban demand reflects changing preferences, with trends like quick commerce underrepresented in data.

They cautioned against disruptive policies, such as farm loan waivers, which harm credit culture, or overreliance on minimum support prices, which strain resources and budgets. Optimism remains for renewed growth driven by rural and urban adjustments. [The Business Standard]

India: PepsiCo, Unilever sell lower quality products in nation, finds report

(ad) A report by the Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNI) has revealed that multinational food and beverage companies, including Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Unilever, sell less healthy products in low-income countries like India compared to high-income nations.

The study assessed 30 companies using a health rating system from Australia and New Zealand, which found an average product score of 1.8 out of 5 in low-income countries versus 2.3 in high-income countries. Products scoring above 3.5 are considered healthy. This marks the first time the index has compared product quality across income levels, revealing significant disparities.

ATNI's research director, Mark Wijne, called for increased government vigilance, emphasizing that companies are actively promoting unhealthy products in poorer regions. According to the World Health Organization, over one billion people globally live with obesity, 70 percent of whom are in low- and middle-income countries, with unhealthy processed foods contributing to this epidemic.

In India, influencers like Revant Himatsingka, known as "Food Pharma," have been raising awareness about health violations by multinational corporations. Himatsingka has criticized products like Nestlé's Cerelac and Kissan's tomato ketchup on social media, despite facing lawsuits from these companies. [The Business Standard]

India: Two Village Defence Guards abducted, killed by suspected militants in Kashmir

(rsv) Two Village Defense Guards (VDGs) were kidnapped and killed by suspected militants in Kishtwar district, Jammu and Kashmir, on November 7. The Kashmir Tigers, linked to the Jaish-e-Muhammad, claimed responsibility, alleging the victims were pursuing them in the forests. Initial reports indicate the two were shepherds grazing cattle in the area. [The Hindu]

Maldives: Public referendums planned for key electoral reforms

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has announced plans to hold public referendums on three major electoral reforms aimed at improving efficiency and

reducing costs in the Maldives' election processes. Speaking at the Republic Day ceremony on November 10, President Muizzu outlined proposals to merge presidential and parliamentary elections, move the presidential inauguration date to November 11, and adopt a one-round voting system.

The President emphasized the cost-saving potential of combining elections, noting that separate elections incur significant expenses for the Election Commission, amounting to hundreds of millions of Maldivian Rufiyaa.

The proposed shift of the presidential term inauguration to November 11 seeks to align the ceremony with Republic Day, restoring its symbolic significance. The current practice sees presidents sworn in on November 17 due to political scheduling.

President Muizzu also introduced the idea of a one-round voting system using preferential voting, which would eliminate the need for a second round by determining the winner through voters' ranked preferences.

The Attorney General's Office is currently studying the proposed changes, paving the way for national referendums on these issues. [avas.mv]

Maldives: Yameen to contest in 2028 presidency if not imprisoned

(lm) Former President Abdulla Yameen has expressed his intention to contest the 2028 presidential elections, provided he is not sentenced to prison in the next five years. In an interview with RaajjeTV, Yameen stated that if the legal proceedings go in his favor, there is no reason why he should be imprisoned again.

Yameen had previously been sentenced to 11 years for money laundering and bribery, but the High Court annulled the sentence, calling for a retrial. The State has appealed the case to the Supreme Court, with the hearing scheduled for November 20. Yameen emphasized that if no new convictions arise, he plans to run for presidency, with key goals of reclaiming Chagos and removing Indian military personnel from the country. [the edition]

Meanwhile, Yameen has criticized President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's administration for a perceived lack of accountability and oversight. Speaking at a People's National Front (PNF) gathering, he questioned the government's handling of corruption investigations

and accused the People's Majlis, where the ruling coalition holds a supermajority, of failing to address public concerns.

Yameen expressed frustration with what he described as unfulfilled promises and neglect of citizen rights by members of the ruling People's National Congress (PNC). Despite President Muizzu's description of the 20th People's Majlis as the most balanced in the nation's history, Yameen remains skeptical, calling for greater accountability and focus on public welfare. [Rajjee]

Maldives: President Muizzu rules out presidential commissions to target political rivals

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has pledged that his administration will not establish presidential commissions to prosecute political opponents, marking a departure from practices of previous governments. Speaking at the Republic Day ceremony, he emphasized that his government would not engage in political vendettas or arrests aimed at sidelining rivals.

President Muizzu highlighted the nation's past, where politicians, including close associates, were allegedly framed and imprisoned to eliminate competition. He assured that such actions would not occur under his leadership, stating, "The tradition of eliminating political competition has been forever eradicated from this country the day this administration assumed power."

While dismissing the idea of politically motivated commissions, the President clarified that theft or misuse of public resources would still be investigated by relevant independent agencies, free from political interference. He stressed the importance of accountability but rejected the need for politically charged inquiries or revenge-driven commissions.

Muizzu's stance comes in contrast to former President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's administration, which established two presidential commissions to investigate prior governments but yielded no tangible outcomes.[the edition 1]

Meanwhile, the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has accused Muizzu's government of attempting to consolidate power through proposed legislation in Parliament. MP Mauroof Zakir criticized bills that would grant the President authority to appoint leadership

positions in the Elections Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission, as well as amendments increasing fines for political parties. The opposition alleges these moves indicate a shift toward authoritarianism.

MP Abdul Ghafoor Moosa further accused the government of mismanaging public funds, failing to address corruption, and neglecting citizens' welfare. Criticizing the proposed 2025 budget, he argued it offers little hope for ordinary Maldivians. MDP Parliamentary Group Leader Ibrahim Nazil questioned the transparency of the MVR 4 billion (USD 260 million) allocated for PSIP projects, calling for a detailed breakdown of expenditures. [the edition 2]

Maldives: Parliament reviews dismissal of independent commission members

(lm) The Maldivian Parliament is reviewing proposals to dismiss key members from independent commissions, including the Civil Service Commission President, the vice presidents of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Elections Commission (EC), and other commission members. The moves align with proposed legislative changes to allow the president to appoint commission leadership, replacing the current system of internal elections.

The ruling People's National Congress supports the changes, citing inefficiencies in the ACC, while the opposition Maldivian Democratic Party opposes them, accusing the government of undermining institutional independence. [the edition] [The Sun]

Maldives: Speaker Abdul Raheem calls for mechanism to remove underperforming MPs

(lm) Speaker of Parliament Abdul Raheem Abdulla has advocated for a constitutional mechanism allowing constituents to remove their members of parliament if they are dissatisfied with their performance. Speaking in an interview on state media, the Speaker emphasized the disparity in accountability measures between the President and MPs.

While the President, elected by the entire population, can be impeached under specific procedures, there is currently no provision for constituents to remove MPs, who are elected by smaller constituencies of

approximately 5,000 voters. Abdul Raheem argued that this lack of accountability is outdated. [the edition]

Maldives: Progress on Israeli passport ban legislation

(lm_) The Maldives is advancing its proposed ban on Israeli passport holders, with the Security Services Committee (241 Committee) scheduled to meet November 12 to discuss an amendment to the Immigration Act. This amendment would prohibit entry to all Israeli passport holders, including those with dual citizenship.

The proposal, submitted by opposition MP Meekail Ahmed Naseem in June, is part of Maldives' response to the ongoing Palestinian crisis. Despite initial debate and submission to the 241 Committee, progress has been slow, drawing criticism from the public. The committee meeting aims to set a timeline for completing the bill's review, including stakeholder consultations and input from relevant institutions.

Vice Chairperson of the 241 Committee, MP Ibrahim Falah, emphasized the government's commitment to expediting the process, noting that President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu is a strong advocate for Palestinian rights. However, the government has highlighted concerns about the bill's current language. Attorney General Ahmed Usham previously warned that an outright ban could affect Palestinians traveling with Israeli passports, suggesting revisions are necessary to avoid unintended consequences. [the edition]

Maldives: Public consultation on 20-year National Development Plan begins

(lm) The Maldives has officially launched the public consultation for its 20-Year National Development Plan, aimed at transforming the country into a developed nation by 2040. President Mohamed Muizzu, speaking at the launch ceremony, emphasized the importance of sustainable development, with a focus on key sectors such as education, health, and social development.

The plan, to be completed by November 2025, includes a goal to expand the digital economy to 15 percent of GDP by 2030. Muizzu also highlighted the drafting of a national development law and proposed a constitutional clause to legally support the plan. The

consultation process will involve discussions across all islands and calls for participation from all political parties. [the edition]

Maldives: Emergency motion on Aasandha rejected by Parliament

(lm) The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP)'s emergency motion urging the government to ensure uninterrupted Aasandha services was rejected by Parliament Speaker Abdul Raheem Abdulla, citing that it did not meet the criteria for an emergency motion.

Aasandha is the national health insurance program that provides free or subsidized healthcare. The MDP raised concerns after hospitals stopped providing Aasandha services, requiring patients to pay out of pocket. The government recently changed the scheme to cover only after other private insurances are exhausted.

The National Social Protection Agency reassured that Aasandha services would still be available for patients paying out of pocket. [the edition]

Maldives: Laws too broadly protect criminals' rights, will amend those: Minister Ihusan

(lm) Minister of Homeland Security and Technology, Ali Ihusan, has stated that current laws in the Maldives are overly protective of criminals' rights, creating significant challenges for law enforcement in combating crime and bringing offenders to justice. During a recent visit to the Hiyaa Flats area to observe a police operation, Ihusan highlighted that laws have been structured in a way that favors those accused of crimes rather than assisting those working to prevent crime.

Ihusan emphasized that the government plans to amend these laws to remove these obstacles, particularly as many repeat offenders are being released due to the current legal framework. The Minister acknowledged the importance of maintaining checks to protect innocent people from wrongful conviction, but argued that the protections currently in place are too broad and hinder the justice system.

With gang crimes and drug offenses spiraling out of control, Ihusan reiterated President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's pledge to combat these issues during the current administration's five-year term. A dedicated police unit has already been formed to tackle gang-related crimes, and Ihusan assured that the government will take strong action to ensure the safety of its citizens. [the edition]

Maldives: Legal changes proposed to enhance civil justice system

(lm) The Judicial Service Commission (JSC) has submitted a bill to the Attorney General aimed at amending the Civil Procedure Act to address delays and the backlog in the civil justice system. The bill, once reviewed by Parliament, seeks to resolve the challenges faced by the system since the Act's implementation in mid-2022.

According to JSC, civil cases have been piling up in courts, and delays in proceedings, along with unenforced judgments, have created significant difficulties. These issues have negatively affected banks, businesses, and the public. The proposed amendments are seen as necessary to temporarily address these challenges.

One key issue highlighted is the lack of enforcement mechanisms in the current law. While past measures focused on seizing property from defaulters, the law fails to take further action when there is no property available, a concern raised by the legal community. The JSC has now outlined the required amendments and submitted them to the Attorney General's Office for review. [the edition]

Maldives: USD 1.04 million project, no documentation, emails deleted

(lm/sl) Minister of Education Dr. Ismail Shafeeu revealed that documentation related to a MVR 16 million (USD 1.04 million) school project in Malé is missing, following the tenure of former Education Minister Dr. Aishath Ali. The contractor involved in the project claimed the Education Ministry owes MVR 16 million (USD 1.04 million) for expediting the development work, but there is no official documentation or approval for the payment.

Shafeeu explained that the project was awarded without the proper approvals from the Finance Ministry or the bid committee. Attempts to retrieve communications from the previous administration were unsuccessful, as all related emails were reportedly deleted by Dr. Aishath Ali. The Education Ministry had previously filed a police case regarding the deleted emails, and Dr. Ali claimed the emails were deactivated on the final day of the previous administration. [the edition]

Maldives: About 300 education sector staff penalized without evidence, says Minister

(lm) Minister of Education Dr. Ismail Shafeeu revealed that around 300 education sector staff have been penalized without sufficient evidence, including the transfer of principals to schools other than those they were originally assigned to. The Minister made this statement in response to concerns raised by South Fuvahmulah MP Ibrahim Hussain regarding allegations of discrimination among students by some principals.

Shafeeu explained that upon taking office, he inherited a situation where many staff members had been unjustly penalized under the previous administration. He mentioned that 40 principals had been reassigned to different locations and emphasized the importance of fairness in addressing issues. The Minister assured that no action would be taken against staff until a team from the Ministry visits the affected schools to investigate the matter thoroughly. [the edition]

Maldives: Corrections suspends ACP Asif over corruption allegations

(lm) Assistant Commissioner of Prisons Mohamed Asif has been suspended by the Maldives Correctional Service following corruption allegations. The suspension, which took immediate effect, was announced on November 8.

Maldives Corrections has refrained from providing further details, as the matter remains under investigation. Local reports suggest that an internal notice has been issued barring Asif from entering any correctional facilities.

Asif, who also serves as the President of the Prisons Club, is accused of transferring over MVR 200,000 (USD

13,000) from the Prisons Club bank account to various other accounts. Employees of the agency have submitted a petition against him, leading to concerns over the delayed action in addressing the allegations. [the edition]

Maldives: Committee approves bill banning vapes, raises minimum tobacco purchasing age

(sl) Parliament's Committee on Social Affairs has approved a bill to amend the Tobacco Control Act. This bill introduces a nationwide ban on vaping and raises the minimum age for purchasing tobacco products to 21 years.

According to the provisions of the bill, the import of vapes and related products will be prohibited starting from November 15. Anyone found importing these products after this date will face a fine of 50,000 MVR (USD 3,226), plus an additional fine of 10,000 MVR (approximately USD 645) for each individual vape device imported.

The ban on the sale, distribution, and use of vapes will come into effect on December 15. Violating this sales ban will result in a fine of 20,000 MVR (USD 1,290), with an additional fine of 10,000 MVR (USD 645) for every unit sold. Distributing vapes for free will also incur a fine of 10,000 MVR (USD 645).

Furthermore, stricter penalties apply if vape products are sold to individuals under the age of 21. In such cases, the offender will face a fine of 50,000 MVR (USD 3,226). [the edition]

Maldives: USD 17,000 spent monthly on 8 consultants at Male' City Council

(lm) The Male' City Council (MCC) is spending MVR 261,000 (USD 17,000) each month on the salaries of eight consultants, according to a report by Mihaaru News. These consultants, hired for various roles, include former government officials from the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), who assist in different capacities within the council.

The council did not provide specifics regarding the roles and responsibilities of these consultants, though they are all members of the opposition MDP. The information was obtained following a Right to

Information (RTI) request submitted by Mihaaru News. [the edition]

Maldives: Honoring Dr. Mohamed Zahir Hussain with highest civilian award on Republic Day

(mt) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has announced that Dr. Mohamed Zahir Hussain, Chancellor of the Islamic University of Maldives (IUM), will be awarded the Order of the Distinguished Rule of Izzuddin (ODRI) in recognition of his exceptional contributions to the Maldivian education sector. This distinguished award will be presented at the Republic Day ceremony, held on Sunday evening at Dharubaaruge.

Alongside Dr. Zahir's recognition, the ceremony will also feature the presentation of the President's National Award for Special Achievement to 40 individuals selected by the Special Awards Committee for their remarkable accomplishments. Additionally, 53 individuals will receive awards honoring their outstanding service to the state, selected by the National Awards Committee. [Rajjee]

Maldives: Criminal Court allows Deputy Minister Raghib to represent client against government

(lm) The Criminal Court has ruled that Mohamed Raghib Ahmed, Deputy Minister of the Environment Ministry, can represent Hassam Mamdhooh (Mandey) as defense counsel, despite a standing High Court ruling disallowing political figures from representing clients against the state. Raghib is defending Mamdhooh, who faces multiple charges related to fraudulent property sales linked to K-Park Residence.

The High Court had previously barred Raghib from representing clients against the government while holding a political office, citing a potential conflict of interest. However, Judge Ali Nadheem of the Criminal Court ruled that every individual has the right to choose their lawyer, and that the court cannot decide on potential violations of the legal code of conduct. He stated that such matters should be handled by the Bar Council, not the court, and allowed Raghib to represent Mamdhooh in court.

Mamdhooh faces 50 counts of misrepresentation, 50 counts of fraud, and charges of forgery and money

laundering. [the edition]

Maldives: Death threats issued on social media over financial dispute

(lm) Zubair Farooq, a man affiliated with the People's National Congress (PNC), has posted a video on TikTok threatening to kill an individual and his family due to a financial dispute. In the video, Zubair claimed his men could "chop off their fingers" if he ordered, and referred to himself as "a very dangerous person," asserting his control over drug-related criminals in Hulhumale. He also used abusive language towards the debtor's family, saying, "I know what I am talking about. I will take all the responsibility."

Zubair, who was previously associated with the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM) and is currently employed at WAMCO, has reportedly shared similar threatening messages on multiple social media platforms. The alarming content has led some social media users to urge the police to investigate, with some labeling the threats as an act of terrorism. [the edition]

Maldives: Court acquits accused in assault of ex-MP Zareer

The Criminal Court has acquitted three individuals accused of assaulting former MP for Mathiveri constituency, Hassan Zareer. Zareer was attacked with a hammer while inside a cafe, suffering severe head injuries.

The accused had been charged with using a hammer and physical force in the attack. However, the court found insufficient evidence linking them to the crime. Witness statements and video analysis did not confirm the involvement of the accused, and Zareer later retracted his identification of the attackers. The court ruled that the charges were not proven. [the edition]

Maldives: Lamha requests bail again in Filipino nurse murder case

(lm) Haleemath Lamha, accused in a 2021 murder case, has requested bail once again from the Criminal Court. Lamha, along with her co-accused, faces charges related to the murder, with one accused of

murder with intent and Lamha charged as an accomplice.

Lamha was previously granted conditional bail, but the High Court ruled that her release was incorrect and ordered her remand pending trial. In the recent hearing, her lawyer argued that her prolonged detention violated her rights, pointing to delays in the trial process. The state opposed her release, emphasizing the seriousness of the crime and concerns about community safety. The court has scheduled a follow-up hearing to decide on Lamha's remand. [the edition]

Maldives: President Muizzu highlights economic reforms and debt-free plans

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu, during the Republic Day ceremony, presented a comprehensive update on his administration's economic reforms and financial strategies aimed at stabilizing the nation and fostering growth.

The President announced that all pending bills under MVR 5 million (USD 325,000) inherited from the previous administration have been cleared, with MVR 501 million (USD 32.5 million) allocated last week to settle overdue payments. This effort primarily benefited small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which have received MVR 6.6 billion (USD 429 million) since Muizzu took office. Prioritizing SMEs over State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs), the government has supported smaller businesses as a cornerstone of economic growth.

Despite inheriting a staggering national debt of MVR 120 billion (USD 7.8 billion), President Muizzu pledged to avoid printing money, a practice he attributed to the previous administration's devaluation of the Maldivian Rufiyaa. His government has instead focused on deficit-free financing, working closely with international financial bodies to approve the 2025 budget.

The upcoming budget includes structural reforms to subsidy systems, healthcare under the Aasandha program, pensions, and SOEs, with an emphasis on equitable resource distribution and improved living standards for the most vulnerable populations. [the edition 1] [the edition 2]

The Sovereign Development Fund (SDF), a safety net established in 2017 to mitigate economic shocks and support development loan repayments, has grown significantly under Muizzu's leadership. Starting with a

balance of just MVR 2 million (USD 130,000) when he assumed office, the fund has reached MVR 87 billion (USD 5.65 billion) in deposits over the past year.

The government plans to increase the SDF's balance to USD 100 million (MVR 1.55 billion) by the end of 2024 and USD 150 million (MVR 2.33 billion) by 2025. This growth reflects strategic deposits funded by airport development fees and service charges at Velana International Airport. While essential withdrawals have been made, they are promptly replenished, and legislation has been introduced to grant the SDF formal legal authority. [avas.mv 1]

The administration has recovered MVR 3.7 billion (USD 240 million) in unpaid funds owed to the state, a move facilitated by strengthened enforcement and amended laws to address past negligence. This recovery has reduced the government's reliance on additional borrowing, reinforcing fiscal stability. [avas.mv 2]

Looking ahead, President Muizzu envisions elevating the Maldives' GDP to USD 10 billion (MVR 155 billion) within seven years. His administration's plans include free trade agreements, launching a bunkering service, introducing digital currency, and advancing major infrastructure projects like airport expansion.

Maldives: Block grants for local councils to be increased to USD 130,000

(lm) The Ministry of Finance has proposed increasing the block grants allocated to local councils for the next fiscal year, raising the total to MVR 2.1 billion (USD 136,500). This follows concerns raised by councils about insufficient funding. Initially, MVR 1.4 billion (USD 91,000) had been allocated, but an additional MVR 700 million (USD 45,500) was added from the contingency budget.

President Muizzu also announced plans to allocate a percentage of local tourism revenue to councils and implement key changes in the law to further support local governance. The increased funding comes amid a reduction in the contingency budget from MVR 950 million (USD 61,750) to MVR 250 million (USD 16,200). City councils will receive the largest share, based on state revenue. [the edition]

Maldives: Government opens small interest housing loan applications

(lm) The Maldives government has launched the 'Hiyaavehi Financing Scheme' to assist first-time homebuilders. The scheme offers loans for new home constructions or to complete partially built homes.

The loans are available in three categories: MVR 1 million (USD 65,000) for all islands, MVR 3 million (USD 195,000) for urban areas, and MVR 6 million (USD 390,000) for Malé. The interest rate is set at 5 percent, with a repayment period of 25 years. Applicants for loans in urban and Malé areas must provide 5-10 percent equity.

The scheme, in collaboration with Bank of Maldives, Housing Development Corporation, and Maldives Islamic Bank, is open until April 2025. The government has allocated MVR 4.8 billion for housing, with MVR 1 billion dedicated to loans. [the edition]

Maldives: Government to release updated interim flat list next week amid ongoing public demand for housing solutions

(mt) The Maldives Ministry of Housing, Land, and Urban Development announced that the interim list of recipients for the 4,000 flats under the Gedhoruverin housing scheme will be published next week. Minister Dr. Ali Haidar Ahmed confirmed on Public Service Media's Raajje Miadhu program that the revised list will be open for public complaints once released, allowing the government to address any issues before finalizing the allocations.

This announcement follows extensive re-evaluation by the ministry, which took over the process after determining that the final list prepared by the Housing Advisory and Housing Consultative Committees was unsatisfactory. The ministry's recent statement emphasized that the interim list had been delayed until the second week of November to ensure thorough vetting, now directly handled by the ministry following challenges with the committee's assessments.

The Gedhoruverin scheme, introduced by the previous administration, sought to address housing shortages in the Greater Malé Region, with an initial list recognizing 15,046 eligible applicants and offering flats to 3,778 recipients. During his election campaign, President Mohamed Muizzu pledged to uphold these housing allocations, ensuring fairness in the distribution process. However, delays in releasing the recipient list have sparked ongoing protests, with citizens expressing frustration over postponed decisions that impact their housing security.

Public interest remains high, as housing remains a significant challenge in Malé, and the upcoming list release is expected to clarify the government's commitments to providing shelter for eligible citizens. [Rajjee]

Maldives: Economic Gateway project to begin within six months following USD 100 million investment

(mt) The Maldives Economic Gateway project is set to break ground within the next six months, according to Economic Minister Mohamed Saeed. A recent framework agreement signed with Singapore-based Capital Asia Investments marks a major step forward for this initiative, which will establish a port and related services in the designated free zone. This project is spearheaded by the Maldives Industrial Development Free Zone (MIDFZ), a joint venture involving the State Trading Organization, Maldives Ports Limited, and various government agencies.

Minister Saeed disclosed that Capital Asia Investments will inject an initial USD 100 million to launch the project. The detailed implementation schedule and final agreement are expected within the six-month timeframe, following studies conducted by Capital Asia's technical teams on-site. This first phase represents a substantial boost for the Maldives' economic development, with a focus on enhancing trade infrastructure and creating a strategic free zone in the region. [Avas]

Maldives: Seven islands get designated as urban centers to boost regional development

(mt) Housing Minister Dr. Ali Haidhar has announced that islands designated as urban centers must have a minimum population of 10,000 to provide efficient and sustainable services. On Saturday, President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu selected seven islands to become central urban hubs across the Maldives: R. Ungoofaaru, B. Eydhafushi, Lh. Naifaru, ADh. Mahimadhoo, F. Nilandhoo, Dh. Kudahuvadhoo, and L. Fonadhoo.

In a recent interview with state media, Minister Haidhar explained that this initiative aims to reduce travel distances for essential services by centralizing development in islands with growing populations. The

selection of these islands was based on current investments, existing healthcare and educational infrastructure, and the potential for further land expansion.

Dr. Haidhar highlighted that 55 of the Maldives' 186 islands currently have populations of fewer than 500 people. These smaller populations create sustainability challenges, as maintaining essential services on each island demands significant resources from the state. To address this, the government envisions creating two key regional hubs: the Northern Integrated Development Zone and the Southern Integrated Development Zone, collectively supporting a population of approximately 55,000. These hubs are designed to match the level of services available in Malé, the capital.

The government has submitted a bill to establish urban centers across the Maldives to ensure equitable access to essential services and spur regional growth. Minister Haidhar emphasized that this urbanization approach will help create sustainable housing solutions, enhance service quality, and foster broader economic development across the nation. [Avas 1] [Avas 2]

Nepal: Rabi Lamichhane faces extended detention amid protests and fraud investigation

(lm) The Kaski District Court has extended the detention of Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) Chairperson and former home minister Rabi Lamichhane by 13 days as investigations into cooperative fraud, organized crime, and money laundering continue.

Lamichhane, in custody since October 18, faces accusations of misappropriating NPR 142.9 million (USD 1.06 million) from Supreme Cooperative and diverting funds to Gorkha Media Network, a now-defunct company he co-founded. Total alleged embezzlements across multiple cooperatives amount to NPR 780 million (USD 5.8 million).

Lamichhane was transferred to Bhairahawa for questioning on November 12 to address additional allegations. Police have also implicated other individuals, including former Nepal Police DIG Chhabilal Joshi and Gorkha Media co-director Leela Pachhai, while several suspects remain at large.

The RSP has condemned Lamichhane's arrest as politically motivated, accusing the government of suppressing opposition voices. In response, the party has launched nationwide protests, with Vice Chair DP Aryal rallying supporters in Pokhara. Despite internal and external pressures, Aryal reaffirmed Lamichhane's leadership and dismissed claims of party discord. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3][The Kathmandu Post 4]

Nepal: Nepali Congress-Unified Marxist-Leninist parties form body to support governments

(lm) The ruling Nepali Congress (NC) and Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) have formed a three-tier political mechanism at the central, provincial, and district levels to support the functioning of their coalition government and address disputes. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba will lead the mechanism, aimed at minimizing differences between the two parties and ensuring effective governance until the 2027 elections.

The central-level body consists of eight members, with four representatives from each party, including office bearers and ministers. At the provincial and district levels, each party will have three representatives. The mechanism's key objectives include supporting government operations and resolving conflicts within the coalition. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Committees' delays may leave Parliament with little business

(lm) Parliamentary committees in Nepal are facing criticism for their slow progress, which could leave the upcoming winter session of the federal parliament without adequate business. Despite commitments from major political parties to expedite discussions, most House committees remain inactive, with only the Finance Committee showing signs of progress.

The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Devraj Ghimire, had urged chief whips and committee chairs on October 22 to finalize pending bills. However, two weeks later, little progress has been made. Five committees are sitting on 15 bills, some crucial for implementing federalism, including amendments to

the Nepal Police Act, the Political Parties Act, and civil aviation laws.

The committees' inactivity coincides with the government's failure to register any new bills in the past three months. Mahesh Bartaula, chief whip of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML), attributed delays to lawmakers returning late from festivals but vowed to address the issue.

According to the Parliament Secretariat, only 111 of the 151 laws required to implement the 2015 constitution have been enacted, with 40 more needing major amendments or replacements. Officials warn that continued delays could render the winter session, typically called the "bill session," unproductive.

The federal parliament's previous budget session, prorogued in mid-September, saw limited activity, with only five bills passed over 130 days. The winter session must convene by March 16, as mandated by the constitution. However, without progress on pending legislation or new bills from the government, the session risks being overshadowed by a lack of substantive business. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Parties expedite candidate selection for local by-polls

(lm) Political parties in Nepal are quickly finalizing their candidates for the upcoming local by-elections scheduled for December 1. The by-elections are being held to fill vacant positions in various local units, including chiefs of district coordination committees, rural municipality chairpersons, vice-chairs, mayors, and ward chairpersons, all due to vacancies following the 2022 local elections. The election process will see voters elect officials in areas such as Kathmandu, Kirtipur, Okhaldhunga, Kailali, and several rural municipalities.

The Election Commission has set November 18 as the deadline for filing candidacies. Parties are now selecting their candidates, with the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist Centre) ahead in the process. The party has already finalized its candidates for the mayoral and vice-chairperson positions in Kirtipur and Gaurishankar Rural Municipality. Other major parties, including the ruling CPN (Unified Marxist–Leninist) and Nepali Congress, are still finalizing their selections. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Ruling Unified Marxist-Leninist party's plan to trace voters' political tilt raises eyebrows

(lm) The ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) has sparked controversy with its plan to gather information on the political affiliations of individual voters across Nepal. The ruling party intends to send volunteers to households to assess voters' political leanings, aiming to strengthen its support base ahead of the next general elections.

The survey, which will begin in areas with upcoming local by-elections, is planned to run nationwide from mid-February to mid-April 2025. While the party insists the survey is for internal purposes to evaluate its strength, critics view it as an intrusion into personal matters and a potential misuse of state machinery. Political experts argue that such efforts may intimidate voters and infringe on privacy, particularly in a country where government treatment often depends on political affiliation.

Despite this, CPN-UML leaders claim the survey is simply a tool for policy planning and not intended to infringe on citizens' rights. However, critics, including political analysts and academics, warn that this could lead to the exploitation of political power and create a more divided electorate. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Court dismisses petition against Nepal-India power trade agreement

(lm) The Supreme Court of Nepal has dismissed a petition challenging the Nepal-India power trade agreement, signed on January 4, 2024. The petition sought to cancel the agreement, which stipulates that Nepal will export 10,000 megawatts of electricity to India over the next decade.

The full bench of the Supreme Court issued the dismissal order after a hearing. Along with the dismissal, the court issued a directive order concerning the agreement, though details of the directive are yet to be made public. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Former Koshi minister arrested amid Japan visit controversy and preliminary police findings

(dg/rs) Lila Ballav Adhikari, former Minister for Internal Affairs and Law of Koshi Province and a lawmaker from the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML), has been arrested in connection with a human trafficking scandal. The arrest follows Adhikari's resignation last week amid allegations of his involvement in facilitating forged documentation for individuals attempting to travel to Japan under the guise of attending a cultural program.

Adhikari and three others were deported from Japan on October 30 after Japanese immigration authorities flagged their suspicious identification documents. The group had traveled to Tokyo for an event organized by Arts Council Tokyo from October 29 to November 3. Nepali authorities allege that Adhikari exploited the event to enable human trafficking. Preliminary investigations revealed that the three individuals who accompanied him had paid NPR 1 million (USD 7,400) each to attend the event.

Upon their return to Nepal, the three individuals were detained at Tribhuvan International Airport, while Adhikari reportedly avoided immediate investigation by using his ministerial credentials. Evidence seized during the investigation includes fake identity documents allegedly signed by Adhikari.

Adhikari initially claimed he was unaware of the trafficking network's operations until reaching Hong Kong. However, police suspect he informed Nepali authorities only after being denied entry into Japan. The Kathmandu District Police has since arrested six other suspects linked to the network and is pursuing two additional individuals still at large.

The controversy has also raised questions about Adhikari's unauthorized travel, as Koshi Province ministers are required to seek approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Chief Minister's Office before traveling abroad. Chief Minister Hikmat Karki stated that Adhikari ignored prior warnings about his unauthorized international trip, which further exacerbated the issue. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3] [Ratopati]

Nepal: President Paudel appoints Niraula and Pandey as Supreme Court justices

(lm) President Ramchandra Paudel has formally appointed Nripadhwaj Niraula and Nityananda Pandey as justices of Nepal's Supreme Court. The appointments follow the recommendation of the

Judicial Council and unanimous approval from the Parliamentary Hearing Committee.

The nominations, made by the Judicial Council on September 27, were scrutinized by the Parliamentary Hearing Committee last week, chaired by Pashupati Shamsher Rana. During the hearing, lawmakers questioned Niraula based on submitted complaints, while Pandey faced no objections. Both nominees outlined their action plans, receiving endorsement from the committee on November 8.

Niraula, formerly the Chief Judge at the Patan High Court, and Pandey, who served as Chief Judge at the Tulsipur High Court, bring significant judicial expertise to the Supreme Court. The appointments were made under Article 129(2) of Nepal's Constitution, which authorizes the President to appoint justices based on Judicial Council nominations. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Conflict victims nominate representatives for transitional justice commissions

(lm) Victims of Nepal’s 1996-2006 Maoist insurgency have taken steps to nominate their representatives for two transitional justice commissions: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP).

The Conflict Victims National Network announced plans to recommend at least two representatives, one victimized by the state and the other by the Maoists, with one of them being a woman. Victims' organizations also plan to recommend human rights activists for roles as chairpersons and members.

The nominations follow a public notice issued by a selection committee led by former Chief Justice Om Prakash Mishra. The committee invited applications for the positions of chairpersons and members of both commissions, with a November 14 deadline. According to the amended Enforced Disappeared Enquiry, Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act, candidates must qualify to serve as a Supreme Court or High Court judge to be eligible for leadership roles.

Despite the progress, not all victims are seeking direct representation in the commissions. Rights advocate Ram Bhandari suggested victims should focus on roles managing reparation funds rather than serving as commissioners. Still, Bhandari acknowledged the

importance of human rights defenders being included in the commissions.

The commissions, first established in 2015, have largely been inactive since July 2022, leaving over 63,000 complaints with the TRC and around 2,400 cases with the CIEDP unresolved. The amended Act provides the commissions with a four-year mandate to investigate cases and recommend actions, including prosecution and reparations, with the possibility of term extensions if required.

Stakeholders have demanded more rigorous selection procedures, including mandatory public hearings for shortlisted candidates, to ensure accountability and transparency. The selection committee, which will evaluate resumes and gather public feedback on shortlisted names, has also indicated it will directly approach renowned figures if sufficient applications are not received. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Ownership of disputed land transferred to Bhat-Bhateni ahead of Supreme Court hearing

(lm) The ownership of a controversial plot of land, initially registered under Road Show Real Estate and announced as a donation to the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML), has been transferred to Bhat-Bhateni Supermarket and Department Store, owned by Min Bahadur Gurung, just days before a Supreme Court hearing on the matter. The land, intended for the construction of CPN-UML's central office, was previously announced as a donation during Dashain's Fulpati, with plans for Gurung to construct three buildings on the site within a year.

The Supreme Court had issued a temporary interim order on October 28 following a petition challenging the donation. The court is set to hold a hearing next week to decide whether the interim order should continue. [MyRepublica]

Nepal: Police arrest former Gandaki minister Deepak Manange

(lm) Police arrested Rajiv Gurung, known as Deepak Manange, a member of the Gandaki Provincial Assembly and former minister, in Kathmandu on

November 12. His arrest follows the Supreme Court's September 5 ruling, which upheld his conviction for attempted murder in a 2004 sword attack on Milan Gurung, a rival gang leader.

Initially sentenced to two years for assault by the Kathmandu District Court, the Patan High Court later elevated the charge to attempted murder, increasing the sentence to five years. Manange had served two years of his sentence following his 2018 imprisonment but still owes three years.

Manange, independently elected from Manang in 2017 and 2022, leveraged shifting provincial politics to secure ministerial roles. However, he had recently criticized the political system and distanced himself from ministerial responsibilities. Police stated that the arrest aligns with implementing the Supreme Court's verdict. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: TikTok completes official registration in Nepal

(lm) TikTok has officially registered in Nepal, complying with the government's 2023 directives for social media operations. The platform has committed to promoting tourism, investing in digital literacy, supporting public education, and ensuring appropriate language use. This makes TikTok the third social media company to register, following Viber and WeChat.

Previously, Nepal banned TikTok in November 2023, citing concerns over its impact on social harmony. The ban was lifted in August 2024 after TikTok addressed cybercrime issues and agreed to cooperate with Nepalese authorities.

The registration process, initiated in October 2024, aligns with the government's efforts to regulate social media platforms operating in Nepal. The Ministry of Communications and Information Technology has urged other major platforms to complete the registration process. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Campaign to make Nepal street children-free nation expedited

(rs) Nepal's government has intensified its efforts to make the country free of street children by the end of the current fiscal year, 2024/25. A cabinet decision on July 15 outlined this ambitious goal, with the Ministry

of Women, Children, and Senior Citizen leading the initiative through the National Child Rights Council.

As part of the campaign, 1,559 children (442 boys and 1,117 girls) have been rescued from the streets and reunited with their families. Additionally, 32 children facing violence or at risk have been temporarily placed in custody. With the support of various organizations, 20 children were brought back to Nepal from India. A total of 408 street children have been provided relief and custody, including 335 rescued in the previous fiscal year.

The Ministry is also in the process of amending the Child Protection Act-2075 to enhance protections. Minister Nabal Kishor Sah Sudi emphasized the importance of tracking funds allocated for child welfare, with preparations underway to introduce a 'budget coding' system to monitor investments in children's welfare programs. [The Rising Nepal]

Nepal: Tribhuvan University part-time teachers threaten to shut down university from November 15

(rs) Part-time teachers at Tribhuvan University (TU) are threatening to shut down the university from November 15 unless their demands for permanent contracts are met. The teachers, some of whom have worked for 19 years, are protesting the lack of action on an agreement made in July 2024. They have also requested that an upcoming Assistant Professor exam be postponed until their contracts are converted.

Currently paid NPR 500 per period, far less than full-time staff, the teachers are calling for the university to fill over 4,000 vacant positions and for the process to be transparent. If their demands are not met, they plan to take further action, including going to the Labor Court. [Ratopati]

Nepal: Balmiki Ashram and nearby settlement remain neglected

(lm) Balmiki Ashram, a historically significant Hindu shrine in Chitwan, remains neglected, with no government action to conserve the site or improve the living conditions of local residents. The Ashram, believed to be the residence of Balmiki, the author of the Ramayan, is surrounded by forests and faces risks from wildlife. The local community, which has lived in

the area since the 1960s under a settlement plan by King Mahendra, continues to struggle with inadequate infrastructure and a lack of basic amenities like electricity and water.

Despite its religious and cultural importance, no efforts have been made to preserve the Ashram. Local residents also lack land ownership certificates, and they are forced to depend on neighboring India for essential supplies. These challenges are compounded by the dangers posed by wildlife and harassment by border security forces, leaving the community in a vulnerable and unsupported position. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Tensions rise as NEA resists government directive to reconnect power lines

(rs) The Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) faces mounting tension following the government's directive to restore power to 34 industrial firms disconnected since October 24 due to unpaid dues of NPR 8.25 billion (NPR 8.25 billion / USD 60.9 million). The Cabinet ordered reconnections within 24 hours, citing economic harm and job losses caused by the power cuts. However, NEA Chief Kul Man Ghising has resisted, demanding written instructions before acting and prioritizing dues collection.

The NEA Employees Welfare Council and the National Employees Union have strongly opposed the directive, warning of protests if lines are reconnected without payments. They accused the government of favoring industrial firms over regular consumers, who face power disconnections if bills remain unpaid for 60 days. The employees criticized the extension of installment periods for industrial firms to 56 months, calling it discriminatory.

This follows recommendations by the Lal Commission, which reduced the firms' dues from NPR 22 billion to NPR 6.65 billion, adding a 25 percent fine. While some firms have paid and had power restored, others demand further adjustments. Energy Minister Dipak Khadka insists the NEA must comply with the Cabinet decision, but employees argue that disregarding revenue collection laws would undermine the authority's integrity and financial discipline. [Ratopati] [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Workers abroad without labor permit to be legally recognized

(rs) Nepali workers employed overseas without labor permits can now obtain legal status by securing permits retroactively, with September 2024 as the cut-off date, according to Labour Minister Sharatsingh Bhandari.

The new process requires biometric registration, which may pose logistical challenges in countries where Nepali diplomatic missions lack the necessary facilities. To address this, diplomatic missions and Nepali organizations will assist in registering workers and integrating them into the labor permit system. [The Rising Nepal]

Nepal: Rice prices remain high despite India lifting export restrictions

(lm) Rice prices in Nepal remain elevated despite India lifting its export ban and duties on October 23. The price of jeera masino rice, which peaked at NPR 2,500 (USD 18.50) per 25 kg during the ban, has dropped slightly to NPR 2,400 (USD 17.75), far above pre-ban levels of NPR 1,600 (USD 11.85).

Traders blame the high costs on older stock imported with previous export duties, though they expect prices to ease as new, duty-free rice reaches the market. Smuggling of untaxed Indian rice continues to undercut local millers and tax revenues.

Meanwhile, recent floods and landslides have damaged over 65,000 hectares of farmland, threatening this year's harvest and food security, with estimated losses of NPR 5.88 billion (USD 43.55 million). [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Opposition leader Dahal warns of potential SPP agreement under Prime Minister Oli

(rs) Nepal's former Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, leader of the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), has accused Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's government of advancing the country's participation in the controversial State Partnership Program (SPP), a United States-backed military cooperation initiative. Dahal, citing reports from US media, alleged that the Oli administration had already

provided a "theoretical agreement" on the SPP, raising concerns about its implications for Nepal's sovereignty.

The SPP, administered by the U.S. National Guard, focuses on military-to-military engagements for disaster management and security cooperation. However, its association with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy has sparked significant opposition in Nepal. Critics, including political parties, civil society, and intellectuals, argue that such agreements conflict with Nepal's longstanding policy of non-alignment and could undermine its independence.

Nepal was included in the SPP in 2019, following requests made in 2015 and 2017 for disaster management and humanitarian aid. However, the Sher Bahadur Deuba government terminated Nepal's participation in the program in 2022 amidst widespread political controversy. The U.S. embassy in Kathmandu clarified at the time that Nepal could exit the SPP at its discretion, and a Cabinet decision subsequently formalized the withdrawal.

Dahal's allegations follow the contentious 2022 approval of the US-funded Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) agreement, which also faced public backlash for its perceived alignment with US geopolitical interests. While Dahal's concerns have reignited debates over Nepal's foreign policy direction, senior leaders from the Maoist Centre admitted they lacked concrete evidence to support the claims, casting doubt on the basis of the accusations. [Ratopati] [The Kathmandu Post]

Pakistan: 26th Constitutional Amendment challenged in Supreme Court

(ja) Several prominent figures, including political leaders and a senior lawyer, have challenged Pakistan's 26th Constitutional Amendment in the Supreme Court, arguing that "a vote cast under coercion is no vote at all." The amendment, enacted on October 20, introduces significant changes to the judiciary, such as curbing the Supreme Court's suo motu powers and allowing parliament to nominate the chief justice from among the three most senior judges.

Among the petitioners are Akhtar Mengal, Balochistan National Party-Mengal (BNP-M) leader; former National Assembly Speaker Fahmida Mirza; National Democratic Movement (NDM) chairman Mohsin Dawar; and former senator Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar. They argue that the amendment undermines fundamental constitutional principles like the separation of powers and judicial

independence. Alongside, former Sindh High Court Bar Association president Salauddin Ahmed has filed a separate petition, demanding an independent investigation into alleged coercion of parliamentary votes.

Both petitions question the legality of the amendment's passage, contending it violates constitutional principles. Ahmed's petition also challenges two related legislative acts— the Supreme Court (Practice and Procedure) (Amendment) Act 2024 and the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) (Amendment) Act 2024— labelling them as violations of judicial independence. [DAWN] [tribune.com.pk].

Pakistan: Supreme Judicial Council to broaden consultations on interference allegations

(tf) The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) convened on November 8 to address pressing concerns about judicial independence and efficiency, including allegations of intelligence agency interference in judicial matters.

At the heart of the discussions was a letter from six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges, written in March 2024, which accused intelligence agencies of meddling in judicial affairs. Chaired by Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi, the council decided to expand consultations on the matter, emphasizing the universal applicability of the judges' code of conduct to institutional heads and judiciary members alike. The council will revisit the issue at its next meeting, part of a broader commitment to hold monthly sessions aimed at addressing a backlog of over 100 complaints against superior court judges.

In reviewing 10 complaints under Article 209 of the Constitution, the council found insufficient evidence to proceed in any of the cases. While specific details were not disclosed, sources revealed some complaints concerned both current and retired Supreme Court judges. The SJC issued a warning against filing frivolous complaints, underscoring the importance of maintaining judicial integrity. To streamline its operations, the council approved the creation of a dedicated Secretariat and initiated the drafting of new procedural rules. It also sanctioned the temporary appointment of a secretary to assist with administrative tasks and enhance the council's functionality.

Meanwhile, the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) held a separate session, also chaired by CJP Afridi, to address delays in resolving constitutional cases in the Sindh High Court (SHC). Following extensive deliberations, the JCP unanimously approved SHC Chief Justice Muhammad Shafi Siddiqui's proposal to nominate all SHC judges to constitutional benches. This temporary measure, effective until November 24, is intended to clear the backlog of cases, with a review set for the following day. [DAWN]

Pakistan: Protests for Imran Khan's release turn violent in Quetta as Swabi rallies draw thousands

(lm) The political turmoil surrounding former Prime Minister Imran Khan escalated as violent clashes erupted in Quetta on November 8, leaving at least 14 people injured, including eight police officers. Simultaneously, thousands of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supporters gathered in Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on November 9 to demand Khan's release and oppose recent constitutional amendments.

In Quetta, PTI protesters defied Section 144 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which prohibits unauthorized public gatherings, resulting in arrests of dozens of demonstrators. Authorities claimed some protesters carried weapons, including hand grenades, and used vehicles to attack officers, severely injuring a senior police official. PTI's Balochistan president, Dawood Shah, argued the protest was peaceful until infiltrators incited violence, accusing authorities of replicating the May 9 unrest, when demonstrators allegedly attacked military and government installations following Khan's brief arrest. [Arab News 1]

Meanwhile, in Swabi, thousands of PTI supporters, led by key party figures including KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, rallied to demand Khan's release. Gandapur vowed to intensify protests, while PTI chairman Gohar Khan dismissed accusations of seeking foreign intervention, emphasizing constitutional and judicial independence. [Arab News 2]

Khan, jailed since August 2023, faces multiple charges and claims his ouster in April 2022 was orchestrated by the government and military—allegations both deny. PTI has vocally opposed constitutional amendments that extend military chiefs' tenures and alter judicial appointments, which critics say undermine judicial

independence. The party plans to challenge the amendments in the Supreme Court.

In a related legal development, the Lahore High Court (LHC) ruled that the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) had not issued any notification barring TV channels from airing Imran Khan's name. The court directed that Khan's name should be broadcast in accordance with his fundamental rights. The petition, filed by PTI member Akmal Khan Bari, had claimed that Pemra had banned the airing of Khan's name, but the authority's report clarified that no such order had been issued. [DAWN]

Pakistan: Parliamentary panel approves bill criminalizing promotion of Zionism

(lm) A parliamentary committee in Pakistan has approved a draft law proposing up to three years of imprisonment and fines for individuals promoting Zionism or displaying its symbols. The bill, introduced by Senator Dr. Afnan Ullah Khan of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, requires majority approval from both houses of parliament, the Senate, and the National Assembly, to become law.

The legislation stipulates a three-year prison term or a fine of PKR 40,000 (USD 145), or both, for preaching Zionism, and a two-year sentence or a fine of PKR 30,000 (USD 108), or both, for displaying Zionist symbols aimed at inciting hatred or disturbing public peace.

Pakistan, which does not recognize Israel, maintains its stance in favour of an independent Palestinian state based on pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Anticipated wheat shortage of over 5 million tons highlights agricultural challenges

(lm) Pakistan is projected to face a wheat shortage of 5.66 million tons in 2025-26 due to reduced sowing areas and lower production targets set by provincial governments. This shortage could strain the economy, heighten inflation, and exacerbate food security concerns in the country. Wheat, a staple for Pakistan's 241 million people, is critical for maintaining political and social stability.

The federal government aims to produce 33.58 million tons of wheat from 10.368 million hectares to achieve self-sufficiency. However, provincial estimates place production at 27.92 million tons from 9.263 million hectares, signalling a significant gap. The Indus River System Authority also forecasts a 16 percent water shortage for Punjab and Sindh during the winter crop season, further complicating wheat cultivation.

Farmers have urged the government to announce a minimum support price of over PKR 4,500 (USD 16.20) per 40 kilograms to incentivize wheat sowing. Without such support, wheat cultivation may decline by over 30 percent, according to Kissan Ittehad, a farmers' association. This comes as Punjab, the largest wheat-producing province, reduced its procurement target due to financial constraints and pressure to cut expenditures, allowing the private sector to play a larger role in wheat purchases.

Experts warn that the shortage could force Pakistan to rely on costly wheat imports, straining foreign reserves. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Polio cases rise to 48 amid ongoing crisis

(ja) Pakistan's polio tally for 2024 has risen to 48, with new cases reported in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). The latest victims include a young boy from Ghotki, Sindh, and a 28-month-old from Dera Ismail Khan, KP. The provincial breakdown stands at 23 cases in Balochistan, 13 in Sindh, 10 in KP, and one each in Punjab and Islamabad. Wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) has also been detected in environmental samples from districts like Karachi East, Multan, and Quetta.

The rise in cases coincides with Pakistan's recent nationwide anti-polio campaign, which aimed to vaccinate 45 million children but missed approximately 500,000 due to refusals and inaccessibility. Challenges include violence against polio teams, with over 90 workers killed since 2012.

To combat the resurgence, authorities are launching targeted campaigns in high-risk areas, such as southern KP, and collaborating with Afghanistan on synchronized vaccination efforts. [DAWN] [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: PTI criticizes government for blocking VPN, accuses it of undermining mandate

(tf) Pakistan's main oppoistion Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has strongly criticized the government for restricting Virtual Private Network (VPN) access, calling it an attack on freedom of expression. PTI Central Information Secretary Sheikh Waqas Akram accused the government of prioritizing social media suppression over tackling national issues, including terrorism. He denounced the significant expenditure on digital firewalls aimed at controlling platforms like X (formerly Twitter), which remains banned in Pakistan, instead of addressing the country's pressing challenges.

Meanwhile, internet users across Pakistan reported restricted VPN access and poor connectivity over the weekend. VPNs are widely used to bypass bans on platforms like X. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has been clamping down on VPN usage since August, citing national security concerns. Information Minister Attaullah Tarar defended the ban, stating that separatists and terrorists were exploiting X, which necessitated its restriction. However, users have taken to social media to highlight throttling and access issues, further fueling criticism of the government's digital policies. [Pakistan Today] [DAWN]

Pakistan: Punjab closes schools and sets up 'smog war room' amid record air pollution

(sn) Authorities in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, have shut educational institutions in multiple areas until November 17, transitioning to online teaching to protect children from hazardous air pollution. The decision follows escalating health concerns in cities like Lahore, where the Air Quality Index (AQI) hit alarming levels of over 1,100, according to IQAir rankings.

Doctors in Lahore report a surge in patients with respiratory issues and burning eyes, with tens of thousands treated in a single week. The smog has also impacted other major cities, including Faisalabad, Multan, and Gujranwala.

To address the crisis, Punjab has launched a "smog war room," integrating staff from eight departments to coordinate efforts such as monitoring farm waste burning and managing traffic. Twice-daily sessions

analyze data to provide updates and advisories. Officials are also exploring artificial rainfall as a potential solution.

Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb warned residents to stay indoors, citing the worsening air quality. While pollution levels have slightly dropped from last week's record AQI of 1,900, additional measures like restrictions on construction and work-from-home directives remain in place.

Punjab officials have attributed some pollution to cross-border drift from India, 25 kilometers (16 miles) away, and plan to raise the issue with India's Ministry of External Affairs. Severe air pollution, intensified by cold weather trapping emissions, is a recurring winter problem across South Asia. UNICEF estimates that nearly 600 million children in the region are exposed to harmful air pollution, contributing significantly to childhood pneumonia deaths. [Al Jazeera]

Pakistan: Punjab reports 79 new dengue cases, health department says

(ja) The Punjab Health Department reported 79 new dengue cases on November 10, 2024, showing a slight decline in infections. The majority of cases were recorded in Rawalpindi, with 65 cases. Other areas with reported cases include Chakwal (4), Sialkot (2), and one case each in Lahore, Attock, Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Kasur, Chiniot, Gujrat, and Okara. In total, 6,838 dengue cases have been recorded across Punjab in 2024.

Dengue, transmitted by infected mosquitoes, remains a significant concern globally, with an estimated 100–400 million infections annually, according to the WHO. Health officials urge residents to eliminate stagnant water and follow preventive measures to curb the spread. Hospitals are stocked with necessary medicines to manage the increasing number of cases, as early detection and treatment are crucial to reducing fatalities. [DAWN]

Pakistan: Winter power relief package to cut costs, boost demand, reduce gas reliance

(lm) The Pakistani government has unveiled a winter electricity relief initiative to reduce tariffs, increase power consumption, and decrease reliance on natural

gas for heating. Running from December 2024 to February 2025, the program provides substantial financial relief to domestic, industrial, and commercial consumers while supporting utilities that face reduced demand in colder months.

Under the plan, domestic users will pay a flat rate of PKR 26.07 (USD 0.094) per unit for incremental electricity usage, saving PKR 11.42 to PKR 26 (USD 0.041 to USD 0.094) per unit. Industrial users will see reductions of PKR 5.72 to PKR 15 (USD 0.020 to USD 0.054) per unit, cutting costs by 18 to 37 percent, while commercial consumers will save PKR 13.46 to PKR 22 (USD 0.048 to USD 0.079) per unit, a 34 to 47 percent reduction.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif emphasized that the package will alleviate financial burdens, promote industrial growth, enhance agricultural output, and boost exports, strengthening Pakistan's economy. Power Minister Awais Leghari highlighted that the initiative aligns with energy sector reforms under the $7 billion IMF loan program, supporting economic recovery.

Beyond immediate relief, the government is rationalizing tariffs, restructuring energy debt, and promoting clean energy solutions, including incentives for electric vehicles. These measures aim to modernize Pakistan's energy sector while addressing longstanding concerns over high electricity costs and uncompetitive exports.[Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Stock market hits historic high of 94,000 points amid economic optimism

(lm) The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) soared to an all-time high during intraday trading on November 11, breaching the 94,000-point mark for the first time. The KSE-100 Index climbed to 94,020 points, continuing a bullish trend attributed to improved market sentiment driven by PKR stability and a significant cut in the central bank's policy rate.

Analysts highlighted key factors fueling the surge, including the government's reduction of the policy rate by 250 basis points to 15 percent last week, the fourth consecutive cut since June, and MSCI's inclusion of eight Pakistani companies in its Frontier Market Small Cap Index. Ahsan Mehanti of Arif Habib Corporation noted that lower lending rates and a slump in government bond yields also boosted blue-chip stocks.

Pakistan's economic indicators have shown signs of recovery following a USD 7 billion, 37-month IMF bailout secured in September. The country had previously averted a sovereign default last year through a USD 3 billion emergency IMF program, helping stabilize foreign reserves, strengthen the PKR, and ease inflation. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Canadian group Al-Nihang offers USD 358 million for PIA

(lm) Canadian-based Al-Nihang Group, led by Pakistani expat Faqir Muhammad M Ali, has offered PKR 100 billion (USD 358 million) to acquire Pakistan International Airlines (PIA). This comes after the cash-strapped Pakistani government struggled to attract sufficient bids in its ongoing effort to privatize the debt-ridden national carrier.

PIA's privatization aims to reform state-owned enterprises under a USD 7 billion International Monetary Fund program. However, the process faltered last month when only one bid—worth PKR 10 billion (USD 36 million) for a 60 percent stake—was submitted, significantly below the government-set minimum price of PKR 85 billion (USD 304 million).

In a letter dated November 3, addressed to multiple Pakistani ministries and divisions, Al-Nihang Group outlined its proposal to acquire full ownership of PIA. The group has pledged to assume PIA's liabilities of approximately PKR 250 billion (USD 896 million) and ensure the airline's outstanding payments. Additionally, it has committed to retaining all current PIA employees for 2-3 years, continuing to pay salaries and benefits.

Faqir Muhammad M Ali, Al-Nihang's CEO, has a background as a former magistrate and senator in Pakistan and has worked extensively in the UK and Canada. His career highlights include negotiating an airline treaty between Pakistan and Canada and serving as president of the Pakistan Canada Association of Hamilton.

The Pakistani government had pre-qualified six groups for the privatization process in June. However, the sole bid came from Blue World City, a real estate development company, which offered below the government's expected price. Analysts attribute the lack of interest to unattractive terms, inconsistent government communication, and PIA's legacy challenges, including financial instability and reputational issues. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Lucky Cement to establish hybrid wind-solar power project under SIFC

(lm) Lucky Cement, one of Pakistan's largest cement producers, has announced plans to establish a hybrid wind and solar power plant under the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC). This initiative is part of Pakistan's broader strategy to enhance private investment in the energy sector and address the country's energy challenges, state media reported.

The SIFC, established last year, aims to attract foreign investment and provide domestic companies with improved conditions by removing barriers such as unfair competition from state-owned entities. The council also supports private sector access to international markets. The planned hybrid project will generate environmentally friendly electricity, building on Lucky Cement's previous success with a 42.8-megawatt solar power plant in Karachi.

The announcement comes amid a significant decline in Pakistan's private investment levels, which stand at around one-third of the South Asian average. World Bank data highlights a drop in private investment from an average of 13.7 percent of GDP in the 2000s to around 10 percent in FY21.

Power consumption in Pakistan has declined by 8 to 10 percent year-on-year over the past three quarters, reflecting economic challenges and reduced energy demand. Persistent power cuts, particularly in rural areas, and the economic impact of the International Monetary Fund's bailout last year have exacerbated difficulties for households. Rising electricity and fuel prices have further strained the poor and middle-class populations.[Arab News]

Pakistan: Prime Minister Shehbaz announces 100 MW electricity, USD 3.6 million fund for Gilgit Baltistan

(tf) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, during a special meeting of the Gilgit-Baltistan (G-B) Cabinet in Gilgit, announced key initiatives to address the region's development needs. He pledged 100 megawatts of electricity to improve G-B's power infrastructure and established a PKR 1 billion (USD 3.6 million) endowment fund for students at Baltistan and Karakoram universities.

Shehbaz lauded the timely reconstruction of housing for 2022 flood victims in Buber village, Ghizer district, and directed the administration to prioritize critical services such as education, electricity, and recreational facilities. He also introduced Daanish Schools to enhance access to education in remote areas.

The premier highlighted positive national economic indicators, including record stock market gains, increased remittances, and tax filings, attributing these to inter-provincial collaboration, including with G-B. He unveiled infrastructure projects such as the Naltar Expressway, new university facilities, and foundational energy and water supply initiatives, including the Attabad Lake Hydro Project and the Greater Water Supply Hunza Project.

The premier also emphasized the importance of IT and vocational training to equip the region's youth for opportunities abroad, particularly in Gulf countries. He also cited Qatari interest in G-B's tourism sector, which could bolster the local economy and create jobs. [The Express Tribune]

Pakistan: USD 50 million Climaventure initiative for resilience projects launched

(mra) Pakistan has launched Climaventures, a USD 50 million initiative aimed at attracting private investment into climate-related projects. The program, led by the National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), has received a USD 25 million contribution from the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Climaventures aims to bridge the financing gaps for sustainable solutions by providing technical support, grants, and equity to startups focused on climate resilience and innovation.

The initiative was introduced in Islamabad, with Pakistan's Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, highlighting its importance in driving sustainable development. Pakistan, one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, faces severe impacts from flooding, heatwaves, and droughts, affecting agriculture and food security. [DAWN] [The Express Tribune]

Pakistan: Government targets USD 25 billion in IT exports, plans 5G rollout despite internet challenges

(lm) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has announced an ambitious target to boost Pakistan's IT exports to USD 25 billion within three years and accelerate the rollout of 5G services. Speaking after a meeting with VEON Group Chairman Augie K. Fabela on November 8, Sharif reaffirmed his government's commitment to its "Digital Pakistan" vision, despite ongoing connectivity issues.

The IT sector faces hurdles due to Internet disruptions caused by firewall installations aimed at combating malicious content. These disruptions have delayed project deliveries and tarnished Pakistan's IT industry's reputation, with estimates from the Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) suggesting a USD 300 million economic loss in 2024.

Sharif emphasized that 5G services would enhance Internet reliability and support economic growth, including a shift to a cashless economy. He praised contributions from VEON subsidiary Jazz Group and reiterated plans to foster IT, artificial intelligence, and digitization.

Despite challenges, IT exports have grown to USD 3.2 billion in the last fiscal year, up 24 percent from the previous year. International collaborations with Saudi Arabia, China, and Qatar have further bolstered the sector. However, persistent Internet disruptions have led some multinational companies to relocate, highlighting the need for improved digital infrastructure. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Deadly Quetta train station blast highlights growing separatist threat

(tf/lm) A powerful explosion at a train station in Quetta, Balochistan, on November 8 claimed at least 24 lives and injured over 50 others, making it one of the deadliest attacks in the region in recent years. Among the victims, 13 were identified as soldiers. Authorities are investigating whether the explosion was carried out by a suicide bomber or caused by an explosive device planted on the platform.

The separatist Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) claimed responsibility for the attack, stating that its Majeed Brigade suicide unit targeted a "Pakistani army unit" returning via train after completing a course at an infantry school. This incident underscores the growing sophistication of the BLA, which has intensified its operations in recent months, including coordinated assaults in August that resulted in over 50 fatalities. [CNN] [Arab News 1]

Balochistan, Pakistan's largest and resource-rich province, has been at the heart of a decades-long insurgency. Separatist groups accuse the federal government of exploiting the region's mineral wealth while neglecting its development. The province's strategic importance includes major China-led projects under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, such as the Gwadar port and gold and copper mines. This instability poses significant challenges to both Pakistan's internal security and its economic partnerships.

In response to the rising violence, Pakistan has launched a military operation targeting separatist militants linked to the August attacks. Counterterrorism Department Deputy Inspector General Aitzaz Ahmed Goraya reported the arrest of two militants and the killing of three others, who provided critical intelligence on the planning, funding, and hideouts of the insurgents. Security forces, including the Frontier Corps, CTD, Levies, and police, are conducting coordinated operations in districts like Duki and Loralai. [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Police kill infamous bandit in Punjab's riverine backwaters

(lm) Pakistani police have eliminated a notorious bandit in Punjab's katcha region, a lawless area of riverine backwaters along the Indus River. The gang leader, known for his brazen social media presence showcasing weapons and parading hostages, was killed in a joint operation by police forces from Rahim Yar Khan and Rajanpur districts.

The bandit, wanted in 28 criminal cases including murder, kidnapping for ransom, and terrorism, had a bounty of PKR 10 million (USD 35,811) on his capture. The katcha area, spanning provincial borders, has long been a refuge for criminal gangs, complicating law enforcement efforts. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Security forces intensify operations amid rising attacks in northwest

(ja/lm) Pakistani security forces killed 10 terrorists and injured eight in three separate operations in North Waziristan, reflecting intensified efforts to combat surging militancy in the region. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) reported that these operations

targeted militants involved in attacks against civilians and security forces.

In Spinwam, an intelligence-based operation (IBO) neutralized six terrorists and injured six others, with significant weapons and ammunition recovered. A second operation intercepted militants attempting to infiltrate from Afghanistan, killing two and injuring two more. A third engagement in the same area led to the deaths of two militants during heavy exchanges of fire. [DAWN 1] [ispr.gov.pk] [tribune.com.pk]

Separately, on November 7, four Pakistani soldiers and two schoolchildren were killed in two attacks in the northwest. A roadside bomb in South Waziristan targeted a military vehicle, killing four soldiers and injuring five others. In retaliation, the military claimed to have killed five militants. In the Tirah Valley, a mortar shell fired by militants struck near a road, killing two children walking to school. While no group has claimed responsibility, the TTP remains highly active in the region. [Al Jazeera] [DAWN 2]

These incidents highlight the worsening security environment. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies, 785 militant attacks in 2024 have resulted in 951 deaths and 966 injuries. Pakistan has accused Afghanistan's Taliban-led government of allowing cross-border militant activity, further straining bilateral relations.

Seychelles: 2025 budget focuses on climate change, debt reduction, and economic diversification

(mt) Seychelles' proposed budget for 2025, totaling SCR 11.9 billion (USD 880 million), aims to address climate change, economic diversification, and public sector productivity to ensure the country remains on track to reduce its debt by 50 percent by 2030. Secretary of State for Finance Patrick Payet highlighted that the government is actively managing fiscal risks, such as potential slowdowns in the tourism sector, which could impact revenue.

Climate change mitigation is a priority, with measures like solar panel financial schemes to reduce reliance on conventional energy sources. Payet emphasized the need for fiscal discipline to achieve debt reduction while continuing to perform well in international financial programs. Economic diversification, especially outside of tourism, is also a key focus, with plans to invest in other sectors outlined in the national development plan. Enhancing public sector

productivity and improving services for the private sector are seen as vital for future growth and faster debt repayment. [Seychelles News Agency]

Seychelles: Training to combat tax crimes and to enhance tax transparency launched

(mt) Seychelles launched a four-day training programme on November 6, focused on strengthening tax crime frameworks. The "Tax Inspectors Without Borders for Criminal Investigation" (TIWB-CI) initiative, led by the OECD, UNDP, and ATAF, aims to improve tax crime detection and resolution.

Agencies involved include the Seychelles Revenue Commission (SRC), the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), and the Seychelles Police Service. The training focuses on advancing tax transparency, combating tax evasion, and equipping officials with skills to tackle tax non-compliance.

TIWB, a joint OECD-UNDP initiative, has helped developing countries generate over USD 2.3 billion in additional tax revenues. [Seychelles News Agency]

Seychelles: Local agencies participate in CBRN preparedness exercise

(mt) S Several Seychelles agencies participated in a tabletop exercise on November 6 to strengthen their response to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) events. The training involved agencies such as the Disaster Risk Management Division (DRMD), Seychelles Police, Ministry of Health, and Department of Environment.

Organized by the UNICRI, US Department of State, and EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative, the exercise aims to enhance preparedness and response capabilities. Key objectives include identifying challenges and good practices from past events, simplifying tools for policymakers, and establishing a regional network of experts. Participants engaged in scenario-based discussions to improve decision-making and response coordination.

Though the likelihood of such an event in Seychelles is low, the exercise emphasized the importance of effective collaboration and resource use in handling a potential CBRN event. Following the workshop,

Seychelles will develop a National Action Plan to address identified risks and capacity gaps. [Seychelles News Agency]

Seychelles: Supreme Court sentences two foreign nationals for drug importation

(mt) The Seychelles Supreme Court has sentenced a Brazilian national to 26 years in prison for importing over 2.4 kilograms of cocaine. The individual was intercepted at the Seychelles International Airport on June 29, and the court emphasized the seriousness of the offence, stating that foreigners using Seychelles for drug trafficking must be stopped.

In a separate case, a Ugandan national received an eight-year sentence for the importation of 63 grams of cocaine. The individual was arrested at the airport on May 18. [Seychelles News Agency]

Sri Lanka: Controversy over Easter Sunday Attack reports and calls for justice intensify

(lm) As Sri Lanka gears up for parliamentary elections, crucial for President Anura Kumara Dissanayak to secure a majority for his left-wing National People's Power (NPP) coalition, the 2019 Easter Sunday attacks, one of Sri Lanka's deadliest tragedies, is again increasingly fueling the political and social debates.

Udaya Gammanpila, a Colombo district candidate for Sarvajana Balaya, has accused President Anura Kumara Dissanayake of suppressing key reports prepared by two committees under the previous administration. According to Gammanpila, the reports implicate senior officials for negligence that enabled the attacks, which targeted churches and hotels, killing hundreds. Despite calls for transparency, the reports remain unpublished, prompting Gammanpila to release them himself after the President failed to act.

Gammanpila alleged that the suppression is an effort to protect officials named in the reports and criticized the Cardinal for rejecting their findings without legal recourse. He called for independent investigations, free from the influence of implicated officials, to restore credibility and uncover the full truth.

Meanwhile, Dr. Kavinda Jayawardena, a Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) candidate for Gampaha District, has

urged the government to fully implement the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on the attacks. Jayawardena emphasized the importance of addressing security lapses to prevent future tragedies, stressing that justice is vital not just for Catholics but for all Sri Lankans.

Jayawardena highlighted his advocacy efforts, including appeals to the Vatican and the UN Human Rights Council, to seek impartial investigations. He called on the government to act transparently, urging patience but demanding swift action to close security loopholes and hold those responsible accountable. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: President pledges release of political prisoners, return of northern lands

(lm) Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake announced plans to release political prisoners and return lands in the north and east that were previously seized by security forces for operational purposes. Speaking at an election rally in Vavuniya, the President assured that these steps would be taken in consultation with the Attorney General.

Emphasizing the importance of national harmony, Dissanayake urged residents in the north and east to support the National People's Power (NPP), which he described as the only party capable of fostering unity among Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim, and Burgher communities. He added that voting for a party with broad national backing would significantly address longstanding national issues.

Dissanayake also dismissed claims from some political groups indicating they would join an NPP government after its victory, remarking that such offers had come too late. "They have missed the bus," he stated, urging voters to rally behind the NPP for meaningful change. [Sri Lanka]

Sri Lanka: Elections Commission urges citizens to exercise their voting rights

(mt) Elections Commission (EC) Chairman R. M. A. L. Rathnayake has called on citizens to vote in the Parliamentary Election on November 14, emphasizing voting as both a right and a civic duty. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Minister Herath clarifies there is no double standard by the government on PTA

(sl) At the Cabinet briefing, Minister Vijitha Herath, in response to increased concerns from some parties about the government's stance on the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), stated that the government has not changed its position on amending or abolishing the PTA and clarified that the act will be discussed in the new parliament. The Minister also emphasized that some media had misquoted his earlier remarks, assuring that the government has not shown a double standard on this issue, contrary to claims by certain northern politicians. He reiterated that the PTA will not be amended or abolished at this time but will be reviewed when the new parliament convenes. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Minister Herath responds to opposition claims on fulfilling government promises

(sl) At a campaign rally, Minister Vijitha Herath, in response to opposition claims that the government had not fulfilled its promises, stated that the National People's Power (NPP) manifesto was intended to be completed within five years, not five weeks.

The minister emphasized that the government had not yet been fully formed and that, over the past five weeks, important decisions had been made in politics and the economy. According to him, only three ministers are currently running the country, while hundreds of others have failed to address the issues that ultimately led the country to bankruptcy. He cited corrupt political culture, fraud, corruption, and waste as the primary causes. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: School principal remanded over alleged bribery

(mt) A Wattala school principal has been remanded until November 22 on charges of demanding a bribe of LKR 150,000 (USD 510) for admitting a five-year-old boy into Grade 1 for 2025. The complaint, filed by the boy's mother, alleged the principal sought payment after the child's application was initially rejected.

The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) arrested the principal in an undercover operation where marked cash was delivered. CIABOC also seized LKR 250,380 (USD 850) from the principal's office, though its relevance to the case remains under review. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Education Ministry issues guidelines for social communication tools

(mt) The Education Ministry has issued a circular regulating the use of tools like WhatsApp and Telegram in schools to address concerns over their impact on education and student well-being. Schools must prioritize classroom teaching over digital tools, ensure fairness for students without access to technology, and prohibit content that harms student privacy. Administrators of communication groups are held accountable for misuse, with legal measures applicable under the Information Communication Act. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Measles-rubella vaccination campaign launched in 12 districts

(mt) The Health Ministry has initiated a four-week measles-rubella vaccination program across 12 districts, starting November 8, amid concerns over the resurgence of measles in Sri Lanka. The campaign aims to curb the spread of the disease, which had previously been eradicated in the country.

Targeting individuals aged 20–30, the initiative also seeks to immunize those who missed prior vaccinations. Public awareness program held earlier in November emphasized the importance of participation. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Government plans to reduce VAT on school materials, essential foods, and medicine

(mt) The Sri Lankan government is considering lowering the Value Added Tax (VAT) on school materials, essential foods, and medicine, according to Senior Presidential Advisor on Economic and Financial Affairs Prof. Anil Jayantha. Speaking at a farmers' meeting in Miriswatta on November 7, he acknowledged concerns over the VAT burden,

particularly on textbooks, which some noted makes Sri Lanka unique in taxing educational materials.

Prof. Jayantha explained that the government, working within the framework of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) extended credit facility, aims to increase revenue to 15 percent of GDP by 2025. While indirect taxes like VAT are essential for achieving this goal, discussions are underway to reduce the VAT rate on school supplies from 18 percent to 7 or 5 percent, or potentially eliminate it entirely. Another proposal includes financial grants to help students purchase school materials.

The government also plans to prioritize VAT reductions on essential food and medicine as part of its broader economic strategy. Final decisions on these measures are pending further evaluation and discussions with the IMF. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Central Bank signs MOUs to combat money laundering and terrorist financing

(mt) The Central Bank of Sri Lanka's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with 16 local institutions and 45 international entities to enhance efforts against money laundering and terrorist financing. These agreements aim to facilitate the exchange of critical financial crime information and support investigations under the Financial Transactions Reporting Act No. 6 of 2006.

Governor Dr. Nandalal Weerasinghe, Chair of the National Coordination Committee on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, emphasized the importance of inter-agency and international collaboration in combating these crimes. He warned of the potential misuse of non-governmental organizations for illicit activities that could destabilize economic and financial systems. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Police expenditure on former president's security matches annual police hospital budget

(mt) The Sri Lanka Police allocate approximately LKR 1,000 million (USD 3.4 million) annually to maintain security for five former presidents and the widow of a late president, according to official figures. This

expenditure covers 45 police vehicles, and 530 officers deployed for their protection.

The costs include salaries and allowances for police personnel, fuel, and utilities for their barracks and offices. Notably, the expenses do not account for military protection some former presidents receive, which involves additional vehicles, fuel, and allowances for military personnel. These individuals also benefit from government-provided vehicles and staff, adding further to the total expenditure.

Police sources estimate that including all additional costs could double or triple the stated amount.

For context, the police hospital, which serves around 100,000 active and retired officers and civil staff, operates with a similar annual budget of approximately LKR 1,500 million (USD 5.1 million). This comparison highlights the significant resources devoted to protecting former leaders relative to other police operations. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Man accused of USD 34 million pyramid scam remanded

(mt) A man accused of defrauding over LKR 10 billion (USD 34 million) through an illegal pyramid scheme in Kurunegala has been remanded until November 22. The 52-year-old suspect, who fled Sri Lanka during court proceedings, was arrested by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) upon his arrival from Kuala Lumpur at Katunayake Airport. His wife, a director at the financial institution "JD's Business School," was also detained.

The CID revealed that over 2,500 depositors were defrauded, with significant investments used to build an apartment complex and purchase land in Kurunegala. Investigations uncovered 11 bank accounts linked to the financial scheme, along with ties to 68 additional suspects. Further probes are ongoing, including by the Colombo Narahenpita Illegal Assets Division. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Police empowered to enforce law impartially, says Acting IGP

(lm) Acting Inspector General of Police (IGP) Priyantha Weerasuriya announced that the Sri Lanka Police now operates in an environment that supports impartial law enforcement without undue influence. Speaking at

the inauguration of a new building at the Chunnakam Police Station in Jaffna on November 10, Weerasuriya credited the current government for promoting equal application of the law to all citizens.

He highlighted the absence of post-election violence following the last presidential election, contrasting it with previous elections often marked by unrest. This, he said, is a result of collaborative efforts by the community, the government, and a more empowered police force.

"The ability to enforce the law reflects our institutional strength," Weerasuriya remarked, adding that the current favorable conditions allow the police to fulfill their responsibilities without external pressures, ensuring justice and stability across the nation. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Defence Secretary reviews security in Arugam Bay following recent terror threats

(lm) Sri Lanka's Defence Secretary Air Vice Marshal (Retired) Spath Thuyakontha visited Arugam Bay over the weekend to assess the security situation following recent terror threats targeting Israeli tourists. The Defence Secretary was accompanied by senior officials from the Defence Ministry, military personnel, Special Task Force members, and police officers during the visit.

In late October, both the United States and Israeli governments issued warnings about credible threats to popular tourist locations in Sri Lanka, particularly Arugam Bay, a renowned surfing destination frequented by Israeli tourists. The US Embassy in Sri Lanka advised Americans to avoid the area, citing "credible information warning of an attack targeting popular tourist locations". Subsequently, Sri Lankan authorities arrested several individuals in connection with the alleged plot

During his visit, Defence Secretary Thuyakontha provided directives to local authorities on enhancing security in Arugam Bay and other tourist destinations nationwide. He emphasized the importance of protecting tourists' freedom and bolstering confidence in Sri Lanka's security measures. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Air Force earns USD 130 million through peacekeeping missions

(sl) Since 2014, the Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) has contributed approximately USD 130 million to the national Treasury through its participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions. Another contingent, comprising 20 officers and 88 airmen, is set to deploy to the Central African Republic in December as part of the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSCA). [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Deadline to return firearms extended to November 21

(sl) The Ministry of Defence has extended the deadline for civilians to return firearms issued for personal protection to November 21. This decision was made following requests from various licensees, including those currently abroad, and challenges in notifying all license holders through formal letters.

Previously, licensees were instructed to return their firearms to the Commercial Explosive Firearms and Ammunition Procurement Unit (CEFAP) by November 7. [Daily Mirror]

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

Brunei: Foreign nationals sentenced for visa overstay following immigration operation

(ga) Two foreign nationals were sentenced to three months in prison for visa overstays by Brunei's Magistrates' Court on November 6, with an additional month added due to their inability to pay the fines. The penalties were imposed following an operation which investigated foreign worker residences in Pengkalan Batu and Sengkurong districts. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia: Justice ministry launches social media channel to address misinformation

(mfr) The Ministry of Justice has launched the new Facebook page "Quick Reaction to Justice Issues" to address misinformation and provide clarifications on justice-related concerns. The page will serve as a one-way channel for the ministry to explain issues raised in public discussions or media reports. It will not accept public complaints but will focus on disseminating accurate information and responding to media inquiries.

Managed by a dedicated committee, the page aims to promote transparency within the judicial system and help prevent the spread of false information.

The new platform has received support from Pa Chanroeun, president of NGO Cambodian Institute for Democracy, who sees it as a positive step for improving communication. However, he recommended changing the term "reaction" to "feedback" and suggested consolidating public inquiries into a single ministry page to streamline the process. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Sudary calls on diplomats to champion national interests and values

(mfr) President of the National Assembly, Khuon Sudary, emphasized the importance of diplomats in defending Cambodia's national interests and values. During a meeting with Cambodian ambassadors to various countries, she highlighted the role of diplomats in representing the nation on the global stage and ensuring the protection of national identity, sovereignty, and economic growth.

Sudary urged the ambassadors to prioritize the nation's interests, safeguard Cambodia's reputation, and combat misinformation that may harm the country's image. She also encouraged them to work

towards strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations and to promote a positive image of Cambodia to attract foreign investment and tourism.

Additionally, Sudary advised the ambassadors to support Cambodian students abroad and foster closer relations between the Cambodian Parliament and the legislatures of their host countries. She underscored the growing significance of parliamentary diplomacy in promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Pursat province waste firm converts trash into organic fertilizer

(mfr) Save the Lives (Cambodia) Co Ltd, a waste management firm in Pursat province, has begun converting solid waste into natural organic fertilizer. The company was granted rights to clean, collect, transport, and store waste from all seven Sangkats in Pursat City starting in mid-April 2024. By June, it had started producing the fertilizer, branded "Sovannaphum," from the collected waste. Over the past four months, the company has produced 450 tonnes of the fertilizer.

Cambodia produces nearly 4 million tons of waste annually, with Phnom Penh alone generating up to 5,000 tonnes per day. Recycled organic fertilizers like Sovannaphum are part of the country's efforts to promote sustainable development. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Tourism sector surges towards pre-pandemic recovery

(ma) Cambodia attracted 4.8 million tourists in the first three quarters of this year, marking a 22 percent increase compared to the same period last year, according to a Ministry of Tourism report. Thailand remained the top source of foreign visitors with 1.52 million arrivals, despite a 14 percent decline from the previous year. Visitors from Vietnam and China saw significant growth, with 973,407 Vietnamese and 607,542 Chinese tourists – a year-on-year increase of 33 percent and 49.8 percent, respectively.

The tourism sector has been a critical driver of Cambodia's economic growth, contributing USD 3.08 billion in revenue last year from 5.45 million foreign visitors. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Court sentences drug traffickers to 30 years in jail

(mfr) The Phnom Penh Court of Appeal has re-sentenced three individuals involved in methamphetamine trafficking after a previous decision by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court. On November 8, the Court of Appeal confirmed its revised sentencing for the defendants, who were initially acquitted or given lighter sentences.

On September 20, the Court of Appeal reviewed the case, involving Chhim Srey Khouch, who had been acquitted by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court of drug trafficking charges. The Court of Appeal reversed the initial ruling, sentencing Khouch to 30 years in prison.

Meanwhile, Sieu Long (alias A Chhay) and Sok Phearum (alias Ab) had previously been sentenced to three years in prison each by the Phnom Penh Municipal Court on July 4. However, the Court of Appeal increased their sentences to 30 years in prison for their involvement in the illegal drug trade. All three defendants. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Foreign national arrested for murder of fellow countryman found in reservoir

(mfr) A foreign national has been arrested for the murder of his compatriot, whose body was found in a reservoir with metal weights attached. The victim, identified as 31-year-old Chinese national Chheng Horakang, went missing on October 30, after leaving his cousin's house in Poipet City, Cambodia. His wife reported him missing that same night.

On November 1, police discovered Horakang's body in O'Khaidon Reservoir in Poipet, Banteay Meanchey Province. The victim's body showed signs of swelling and bruising, and it was tied to two pieces of metal weighing 20 kilograms.

Police arrested 48-year-old Sun Ji Jia (also known as Yang Yang) on November 5, in connection with the murder. He was apprehended alongside three others during a search operation led by the Poipet City Gendarmerie. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia: New criminal code to prioritize restorative justice

(mu) The new Criminal Code (KUHP) will prioritize restorative justice over prison sentences, according to Yusril Ihza Mahendra, the Coordinating Minister for

Law, Human Rights, Immigration, and Correctional Services. Speaking at the Central Leadership National Coordination Meeting in Bogor on November 7, Mahendra explained that the new code, which will take effect in 2026, is grounded in a legal system that incorporates people's, customary, and religious law, reflecting evolving societal values.

The government plans to focus on deliberative efforts to resolve criminal cases, emphasizing the restoration of victims' rights and enforcing appropriate sanctions on perpetrators. However, the minister clarified that the new KUHP will not eliminate the concept of legal sanctions, but will rather seek a more balanced approach to justice. [Antara] [Republika, in Indonesian]

Indonesia: President allowed to endorse regional head candidates

(mu) President Prabowo Subianto is legally permitted to participate in the electoral campaign for regional head candidates, provided he does not use state resources and is on leave, stated Hasan Nasbi, the head of the Presidential Communications Office, in a written message on November 10.

This clarification came in response to a viral video showing the president endorsing a candidate pair in the Central Java Province election. Nasbi emphasized that it is natural for the head of state to support candidates from his own coalition, such as Ahmad Luthfi and Taj Yasin, especially since Prabowo remains the chairman of the Great Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) party. [Antara] [CNN Indonesia, in Indonesian] [Kompas, in Indonesian]

Indonesia will hold the 2024 Regional Head Election on November 27, which will take place simultaneously across 37 provinces, 415 districts, and 93 cities.

Indonesia: Foreign exchange reserves increase to USD 151.2 billion

(ft) Bank Indonesia reported a rise in the country's foreign exchange reserves to USD 151.2 billion by the end of October, up from USD 149.9 billion at the end of September. This USD 1.3 billion increase is attributed to higher tax and service revenues, as well as foreign debt withdrawals.

The reserves are sufficient to cover 6.6 months of imports, surpassing the international benchmark of

three months. Bank Indonesia stated that these reserves will support Indonesia's external resilience and help maintain macroeconomic and financial stability. The central bank also expressed confidence that the reserves will remain adequate, supported by strong export trends and positive investor sentiment towards Indonesia's economy. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: Cyber and crypto agency pushes for cybersecurity bill

(mu) The National Cyber and Crypto Agency (BSSN) has urged the House of Representatives to prioritize the Cybersecurity and Resilience Bill (RUU KKS) in the national legislative agenda. This appeal was made during a meeting with lawmakers on November 7.

BSSN Head Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Hinsa Siburian emphasized that the bill aligns with the new government's Asta Cita vision, which focuses on eight key priorities during President Prabowo's presidency. These priorities include strengthening the country's defense and security systems, as well as achieving self-sufficiency in food, energy, water, the creative economy, green economy, and blue economy.

The agency also outlined plans to enhance information control processes, ensuring that authorized ministries and institutions filter content, enforce laws, and neutralize harmful information. Emphasizing cybersecurity, BSSN highlighted the importance of securing electronic systems used in government operations to mitigate cybercrime.

To achieve this, the agency aims to expand critical cybersecurity infrastructure across ministries and has called for the regulation to be elevated to the level of a bill. [Antara] [Kompas, in Indonesian] [Tempo.co, in Indonesian]

Indonesia: Death penalty demanded for three Indian citizens in drug smuggling case

(mu) The Riau Islands Prosecutor's Office has requested the death penalty for three Indian nationals arrested on July 13 for attempting to smuggle 106 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine. The suspects were apprehended while traveling aboard a ship bound for Surabaya, East Java.

According to Indonesian investigators, the suspects claimed they received the drugs from a Malaysian citizen, intending to transport and distribute the package in Australia. [Antara] [Tempo, in Indonesian]

Laos: Population and housing census advances with stakeholder support

(mt) The Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB), the Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) held a stakeholder meeting in Vientiane on November 8 to strengthen preparations for the 5th Population and Housing Census (PHC), scheduled for 2025.

Throughout 2024, the LSB gained support from new partners like the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Luxembourg Aid and Development, complementing existing collaborations with USAID, DFAT, and China Aid. These partnerships provide financial and technical backing for the upcoming census, which will apply digital tools for accurate, timely data collection.

A new census policy emphasizing gender equality and equitable representation has been established, ensuring the census will capture diverse demographic and socio-economic insights.

An estimated 13,000 field staff will collect data from approximately 1.4 million households in 18 provinces. [Laotian Times]

Laos: Plan to become Asia's top potash supplier announced

(mt) Laos has unveiled a development plan to position itself as Asia's leading potash supplier by expanding mining operations and building new production facilities. Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines Chansaveng Boungnong presented the plan at the 2024 China Potash Salt Industry Chain Development Conference on November 3.

The plan includes the establishment of three NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium) fertilizer plants and two bromine salt factories. Exploration and mining rights have been granted to 18 companies across key regions rich in potash, including Vientiane Capital and Khammouane Province.

A major aspect of the plan is sustainability, with an emphasis on environmentally friendly practices in potash production. The Laos-China Railway, a green

electrified route, will significantly reduce transportation costs, enhancing Laos's access to the Chinese market and boosting its competitive advantage.

With estimated reserves of 133.62 billion tons of potash, Laos aims to become the third-largest global supplier, meeting growing demand in China and neighboring countries. [Laotian Times]

Laos: IndusTek launches first occupational safety and health training center

(mt) IndusTek Co., Ltd., in collaboration with AustCham Lao and EuroCham, has launched Laos' first Occupational Safety, Health, and Environment (OSHE) Training Centre in Vientiane, aiming to elevate safety standards across industries. IndusTek, a major supplier of safety equipment in Laos, offers comprehensive training to improve workplace safety practices, particularly for high-risk sectors like mining and construction.

The new facility combines both theoretical and firsthand training in areas such as machinery operation, chemical handling, confined space work, and emergency response. [Vientiane Times]

Laos: Authorities tighten regulations on online gaming operators in Golden Triangle SEZs

(mt) The Management Board Committee for Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Laos has directed online game operators in the Gold Triangle Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to consolidate their operations in a single location for improved management, inspections, and cyber security oversight.

This directive affects 16 parent companies and 95 subsidiaries, which must centralize their operations within the same building or neighborhood. The companies have 15 days to comply, with failure to meet the requirements resulting in forced closures.

The move follows a series of security operations, including the dismantling of a cyber-fraud ring in August that led to 770 arrests. Authorities are urging Chinese investors involved in illegal activities to shift to

legal ventures in compliance with Lao laws. [Laotian Times]

Malaysia: Sabah BN and PH form communication platform ahead state election

(ga) Sabah Barisan Nasional (BN) and Pakatan Harapan (PH), both alliances in the ruling coalition in Malaysia, have agreed to establish a communication platform to enhance collaboration and open discussions with other parties ahead of the 17th Sabah state election. This agreement was reached during an informal meeting on November 5, where leaders emphasized the importance of aligning their cooperative efforts to benefit Sabah's people and the state.

The discussion follows mutual goals set by PH Chairman and Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and BN Chairman Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi to promote unity.

The meeting included key leaders from both coalitions, among them Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) President Arthur Joseph Kurup, United Kinabalu Progressive Organisation (UPKO) Deputy President Donald Peter Mojuntin, and Sabah BN Chairman Bung Moktar Radin, who joined discussions on advancing cooperation and mutual understanding. [Bernama] [Daily Express Malaysia]

Malaysia: Selangor Unity Government forms committee to strengthen coalition ties

(ga) The Selangor Unity Government has formed a secretariat to promote unity among coalition parties in the state. This decision was made during the inaugural Selangor Unity Secretariat meeting on November 7, chaired by State Unity Secretary Dr. Mohd Khairuddin Othman.

Attendees included representatives from the Selangor Unity Government's leadership, such as the State UMNO Information Chief, the State Barisan Nasional Secretary, as well as the State Malaysian Chinese Association and Malaysian Indian Congress Secretaries, along with Women's and Youth wing secretaries and the Selangor State Executive Secretary. [Selangor UMNO Facebook] [Bernama]

Malaysia: New aid announced for Sarawak citizens

(oc) In Sarawak, the Malaysian state located in Northwest Borneo, Premier Abang Johari Openg has announced financial aid measures to support low-income households struggling with rising living costs. The assistance will range from USD 53 to USD 170 annually, depending on an individual's specific needs and eligibility.

For instance, households with a combined income of USD 1,060 or less will receive USD 170, while senior citizens without dependents in the same income bracket will receive USD 85. Single individuals earning below USD 530 can access aid amounting to USD 53. The Sarawak state government has allocated a budget of USD 100 million for this initiative, targeting approximately 850,000 recipients next year.

Additionally, financial support will extend to students from low-income families, with a one-time payment of USD 270, benefiting around 25,000 students in total. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Former prime minister to pay USD 300,000 for defamation

(oc) Former Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin has been ordered by a Malaysian court to pay USD 300,000 to politician Lim Guan Eng in a defamation case. This ruling adds to Muhyiddin's ongoing legal challenges, which include sedition charges for allegedly insulting a former king, as well as accusations of corruption and money laundering.

The defamation charges stem from comments made by Muhyiddin in March 2023, targeting Lim, who was the former finance minister. On November 8, Lim expressed satisfaction with the court's decision, acknowledging that the remarks made by Muhyiddin were wrong.

Muhyiddin's lawyer, Chetan Jethwani, has indicated plans to appeal the ruling. [India Today] [South China Morning Post]

Malaysia: Penang and federal government launch four major water supply projects

(ga/oc) The federal government, in collaboration with the Penang state government and the Penang Water Supply Corporation (PBAPP), will implement four new major water supply projects in Penang to enhance the state's water resilience.

The projects include the 400 million litres per day (MLD) Lahar Yooi Pump House to accelerate the refilling of the Expanded Mengkuang Dam (EMD) during the wet season, supported by the new 440 MLD dual-purpose pipeline from the EMD to the Sungai Dua Canal. Two off-river storage systems, known as Takungan Air Pinggiran Sungai (TAPS), are also planned for the Dua River and Muda River.

These projects are designed to secure up to 1,040 MLD of water from the EMD during emergencies, with additional federal funding requested under the 13th Malaysia Plan (2026-2030) to complete the TAPS systems. Once operational, these initiatives will complement the ongoing Water Contingency Plan 2030 and the RM4.5 billion Perak-Penang Water Project to ensure a reliable water supply for Penang. [Bernama 1] [New Straits Times]

Meanwhile, the Sarawak 2025 state budget includes new environmental targets aimed at achieving net-zero emissions through the Sarawak Net Zero and Carbon Plan. Sarawak Premier Abang Johari Openg announced that the state would allocate USD 2.5 million for this initiative. [Bernama 2]

Malaysia: Port Klang Road upgrades to boost productivity and enhance safety

(ga) The Malaysian government has allocated MYR 107 million (USD 22.47 million) in Budget 2025 for road upgrades in Lingkaran Pulau Indah and Northport, Selangor, to support economic growth by enhancing the nation’s logistics infrastructure. These improvements aim to reduce congestion and increase productivity for Port Klang, Malaysia’s main shipping gateway and the 11th busiest port globally in 2023.

Upgraded roads are expected to facilitate smoother cargo and worker transit, attracting investment by strengthening the logistics network. Safety measures, such as road widening and enhanced lighting, are also planned to reduce accident risks and improve travel conditions for residents and port workers. [Bernama 1]

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Transport is focused on enhancing Labuan’s port facilities to improve its competitiveness and strengthen its role as the island’s

economic gateway. Transport Minister Anthony Loke acknowledged the progress made by Labuan port operator Megah Port Management Sdn Bhd (MPM), which has significantly improved efficiency and service quality since taking over operations in 2020.

MPM has now invested MYR 25 million (USD 5.28 million) in new machinery and infrastructure, including mobile cranes, to boost cargo-handling capacity. The port now operates 24/7, a shift from its previous limited hours.

Minister Loke emphasized the need for a more extended concession period to support further infrastructure improvements, such as repairs to the aging jetty. He further affirmed the port's potential to accommodate cruise liners, which could increase foreign vessels and economic opportunities for the region. [Bernama 2]

Malaysia: 5,000 liters of smuggled petrol seized

(ga) The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) thwarted an attempt to smuggle 5,000 liters of petrol to the Philippines when they detained a pump boat on November 9 near Karamunting, Pitas. The MMEA patrol team discovered petrol on board, which was being transported without a valid permit.The two crew members, a local man and a Filipino, were arrested, with the Filipino suspect lacking identification.

The seized goods were valued at over MYR 10,000 (USD 2,100). The suspects and seized items were handed over to authorities for further investigation under the Control of Supplies Act 1961 and Immigration Act 1959/63. Additionally, the MMEA detained a trawler in Kudat waters for violating the Fisheries Act 1985 by trawling too close to shore. [Bernama]

Myanmar: Urgent need for medicinal treatment amid malaria outbreaks

(nf) Vice-Senior General Soe Win, Deputy Prime Minister of Myanmar, recently addressed the coordination meeting for the 23rd Myanmar Traditional Medicine Practitioners' Conference and Seminar at the Ministry of Health in Nay Pyi Taw. He emphasized the importance of collaboration between Myanmar's traditional medicine practitioners and their

foreign counterparts, as well as with international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, and Mekong initiatives. He also highlighted the need for quality certification in traditional medicine education and urged efforts to raise global awareness of Myanmar's traditional medicine. [The Global New Light of Myanmar]

Soe Win's remarks come at a time when access to basic healthcare remains challenging for many communities in Myanmar. In Ngape Township of Magway Region, predominantly Asho Chin ethnic villages have been grappling with a severe malaria outbreak for the past three months, with an undetermined number of deaths and infections due to limited resources. Malaria cases have been reported in villages such as Gokegyi, Laythar, and Bonebaw, as well as in Minhla and Mindon townships.

Residents have accused the junta of obstructing the delivery of malaria testing and treatment supplies to the affected villages for the past five months. [Burmese News International]

Myanmar: Former NLD minister dies days after junta pardon

(sc) U Win Khine, former electricity and energy minister under Myanmar's ousted National League for Democracy (NLD) government, died on November 8 following a brief release from prison due to severe health issues.

Diagnosed with multiple health problems, U Win Khine spent nearly four years in Obo prison before being moved to intensive care and pardoned on October 28, only to pass away twelve days later. The 73-year-old was arrested on the day of the 2021 coup alongside top NLD officials. [The Irrawaddy] [Radio Free Asia]

U Win Khine had previously drawn the military's ire by ending its monopoly on electricity meter supply, a lucrative arrangement held by the military-owned Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) for over a decade. After the NLD government opened contracts to competition, MEHL's meters consistently lost bids for better-priced alternatives. Since the coup, however, a MEHL-linked company has resumed a dominant role in supplying electricity meters, signaling the regime's reestablishment of former military-backed business monopolies. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Military Junta Launches Deadly Airstrikes on Civilian Areas in Mogoke

On Monday, the military junta launched airstrikes targeting civilian areas in Mogoke, northern Mandalay region, which is controlled by the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA). Since the town's capture by the TNLA in July, pro-military Telegram channels have urged the regime to intensify airstrikes on the town. Local sources and ethnic armed groups reported that the airstrike killed several residents and damaged infrastructure. TNLA spokesperson Lway Yay Oo confirmed that the regime bombed residential wards in Mogoke, killing nine civilians, injuring 13 others, and destroying homes. She also warned residents to remain alert for further airstrikes. Monday's bombing has reportedly spread terror among residents. [The Irrawaddy]

His passing comes just a month after NLD senior leader Dr. Zaw Myint Maung's similar fate, raising concerns over conditions in Myanmar's prisons (see AiR No. 41, October/2024, 2).

Myanmar: United Nations warns for food shortage in Rakhine State

(tl) The UN has warned that Myanmar's Rakhine State is heading towards food shortage due to the ongoing civil war, which is affecting commerce and agricultural production. The UN Development Programme has projected famine conditions by mid-2025 in Rakhine if food insecurity is not addressed. [UNDP]

The shutdown of international and internal commerce routes, which restricts aid and products entry, has brought the country's economy to a halt. The country is also experiencing a lack of money, hyperinflation, and decreased domestic food production. The UNDP projects that local food production will barely meet 20 percent of the Rakhine state's needs by March or April 2025. Internal rice output is also decreasing due to a scarcity of seeds, fertilizers, and harsh weather conditions. [AP News] [The Hindu]

Myanmar: Rice prices soar

(nf) The ongoing conflict between the Arakan Army and Myanmar government troops in Ann Town, Rakhine State, has driven up the price of rice from MMK 90,000

(USD 42.90) to 100,000 (USD 48.20) per bag to as high as MMK 270,000 (USD 128.90) to 300,000 (USD 143) per bag. This sharp increase has made food unaffordable for most residents and internally displaced people.

Due to supply routes being cut off by the conflict, tens of thousands are now relying on porridge as their primary source of food. Displaced families in the district, who were forced to flee their villages due to government troop activities, have reported that vendors affiliated with the military are hoarding rice and selling it at inflated prices, often refusing to sell in quantities smaller than a full sack. The severe shortage and soaring prices have left the town's population grappling with extreme food insecurity, while humanitarian aid remains inaccessible. [Burmese News International]

Myanmar: Activists raise concerns over junta's push for Chinese investment in agriculture

(anl) Activists advocating for farmers' rights and environmental conservation are voicing concerns over the Myanmar Junta's recent push to attract Chinese business investment in Myanmar's agricultural sector, fearing potential harm to local farmers and the environment rather than sustainable benefits.

Since the 2021 military coup, Myanmar's agriculture sector has grappled with political instability, civil conflict, and severe power shortages, making it generally unappealing to foreign investors. Despite the situation, during a meeting with Chinese business owners in Kunming on November 5, Min Aung Hlaing promoted investment opportunities in Myanmar's agriculture, highlighting the country's fertile lands that remain largely untouched by chemicals.

In response, farmers' rights activists criticized Chinese investments, citing recurring issues like land confiscation and environmental degradation. The Kachin Environmental Group (KEG) raised additional concerns about the damaging effects of Chinese tissue-banana plantations in Kachin State. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Explosions reported at Naypyitaw Airport during Min Aung Hlaing's departure for China

(anl) Local sources reported a bomb blast at Alar Airport in Naypyitaw on the morning of November 5, coinciding with the departure of Senior General Min Aung Hlaing for a visit to China. Regime-aligned Telegram channels claimed that a PVC pipe bomb was discovered near the airport's runway and parking area following the explosion. Additionally, the pro-junta Telegram channel Kyaw Soe Oo reported that two suicide drones targeting the Alar Air Force base were shot down around 8:00 am. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Ethnic forces intensify offensives

(nf) U Aung San Myint, Secretary 1 of the Karenni National Progressive Party, stated that throughout the nearly four-year-long revolution against Myanmar's military junta, immense pressure has been exerted in military, political, and diplomatic arenas. Reflecting on the 2021 People's Revolution, he noted an unprecedented level of resistance that had never been seen before. He further remarked, "The Military Council's structure, manpower, and functions have been completely dismantled," adding that the junta's downfall is inevitable with greater unity among revolutionary forces and the public.

Heavy fighting continues on multiple fronts as ethnic armed organizations gain ground. The Arakan Army (AA) has taken control of several strategic areas in Maungdaw, Gwa, Taungup, and Ann townships in Rakhine State. On November 6, the AA captured two battalion headquarters and several other outposts in Gwa after weeks of fighting to secure the region. Other key outposts in Ann and Gwa have also fallen, with the AA encircling Gwa township and cutting off the junta's access to Ann, the headquarters of the Western Command. Additional strategic sites now under AA control include the Sway Chaung and Mae Taung outposts, along with numerous light infantry and logistics battalions, further consolidating the AA's hold on the area.

Meanwhile, intense clashes have erupted in Taungup, where AA forces are reportedly close to overrunning Military Operations Command 5 and the headquarters of various Light Infantry Battalions, with junta airstrikes reportedly being carried out daily. In Maungdaw, reports suggest that the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) has cooperated with the junta to push back the AA offensive, highlighting the complex alliances within the conflict.

The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) has maintained control of strategic positions across Kachin State since an offensive in August secured Light Infantry Battalion 437 in Momauk town. Fighting has been ongoing since October 20 along a 16-kilometer stretch of road between Bhamo and Momauk, as junta forces, reinforced with four armored vehicles, attempt to reclaim the town using heavy air and artillery support. The KIA has effectively blocked the route for junta reinforcements from the 21st Military Operations Command based in Bhamo, which has been trying to advance via the Bhamo-Momauk road near Aung Myay village. Consequently, the KIA's control of Momauk has cut off eastern supply routes to Bhamo, although the junta still maintains access to Mansi in the south. Bhamo itself remains a significant military hub, housing the 21st Military Operations Command, the 88th Light Infantry Division, and various other support units critical for the defense of northern Myanmar. [Mizzima] [Irrawaddy 1] [Irrawaddy 2]

Myanmar: Inle Lake communities hit by strong winds after cyclone Ragi devastation

(anl) Local residents have reported that homes in Myanmar's Inle Lake Wetland Sanctuary in southern Shan State, already severely impacted by flooding from Cyclone Ragi, have suffered additional damage due to recent strong winds, creating an urgent need for rehabilitation support.

Strong winds and heavy rain on November 3 hit several villages in the western part of Nyaungshwe Township's Inle area, including Kan Hla Village. This resulted in the destruction of around 40 homes, forcing many residents to seek refuge in nearby houses and monasteries. The community received insufficient support during the initial flooding, and the return of harsh weather has further exacerbated their difficulties.

In response to these adverse conditions, both the SAC Administration Council's Meteorological Department and the National Unity Government's (NUG) Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management (MOHADM) issued warnings about unseasonal weather, including heavy rain and strong winds. [Mizzima]

Philippines: President Marcos signs laws creating additional court branches

(lm) On November 3, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed 11 new laws creating additional court branches across the Philippines. These include new regional trial courts and municipal trial courts in several cities, including Laguna, Zamboanga del Sur, Rizal, and Davao del Norte, among others. The measures aim to improve access to justice and streamline court processes in growing regions.

Additionally, Marcos signed laws upgrading the Basilan General Hospital to a Level III facility and establishing a Multi-species Marine Hatchery in Zamboanga del Sur to boost local aquaculture. [Asia News Network]

Philippines: Senate President Estrada sponsors bill to ban chemical weapons

(alm) Senate President Pro Tempore Jinggoy Estrada is leading the charge for Senate Bill No. 2871, known as the Chemical Weapons Prohibition Act, urging the Senate to pass the measure swiftly. The bill seeks to ban and criminalize the development, production, stockpiling, and use of chemical weapons, bringing the Philippines into full compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) that it signed in 1993.

Estrada, who chairs the Senate Committee on National Defense and Security, highlighted the urgency of the bill in light of global concerns over the misuse of chemicals for harmful purposes. Although the Philippines ratified the CWC in 1996, national legislation to enforce the treaty's objectives has been lacking, leaving the country vulnerable to chemical threats.

The proposed bill aims to establish a regulatory framework for controlling toxic chemicals, particularly dual-use substances—commonly found in everyday products like paints, ink, and cosmetics—that could be diverted for chemical weapons production. Estrada stressed that while the bill seeks to tighten regulations, it would not burden the country's thriving chemical industry, which provides jobs for over 147,000 people. Instead, it aims to streamline regulations and create coordination between agencies to ensure the industry's growth while safeguarding national security.

The bill also proposes the creation of a verification mechanism to monitor chemical industries, discourage the misuse of chemicals, and reduce the threat of

chemical terrorism. It includes stringent penalties for violations, aligning with the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 and the Strategic Trade Management Act.

Senator Alan Peter Cayetano, a longtime advocate against weapons of mass destruction, also voiced support for the bill. He endorsed the designation of the Anti-Terrorism Council (ATC) as the Philippine National Authority on the CWC to facilitate coordination with international bodies like the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and ensure the country fulfills its treaty obligations. [PNA] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: Major General Adonis Orio takes command of Stormtroopers division

(lm) Major General Adonis Ariel Orio took command of the Philippine Army's 8th Infantry Division, known as the "Stormtroopers," on November 7 in a ceremony in Catbalogan, Samar. Orio succeeds Brigadier General Perfecto P. Peñaredondo, who will return as Assistant Commander. The 8th ID, based in Samar, plays a key role in counterinsurgency operations and peacebuilding in the Eastern Visayas region. Orio previously led the 402nd Infantry Brigade, where he successfully dismantled Communist insurgent groups in the CARAGA Region. [Manila Standard]

Philippines: Typhoon Marce affects over 7,200 families countrywide

(lm) Typhoon Marce (international name Yinxing) has severely impacted the Philippines, affecting approximately 7,233 families across three regions: Ilocos, Cagayan Valley, and Cordillera. As of November 8, 3,958 families (11,476 people) have sought shelter in 186 evacuation centers, while 960 families (2,913 people) are receiving assistance outside these centers. No casualties have been reported so far, and the affected families include both displaced individuals and those who did not require evacuation.

In Cagayan Province, the typhoon's effects have been particularly severe, leaving 33,185 people grappling with its aftermath. As of November 9, 7,475 families (21,814 people) in Cagayan are staying in 126 evacuation centers. The storm impacted 12,578 families across 257 barangays in 24 towns and cities, with major flooding reported in Aparri, Tuguegarao City, Rizal, and Buguey. Power outages were

widespread, but restoration efforts are underway. [The Star] [Brigada]

Singapore: Prime Minister Wong undecided on election timing; electoral boundaries review pending

(fi) Prime Minister Lawrence Wong announced on November 8 that the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) has not yet been convened, and no decision has been made on the timing of Singapore's next General Election, which must occur by November 2025. He assured transparency, stating that updates would be made public when decisions are finalized.

At a press conference, Wong outlined preliminary themes for Budget 2025, including economic resilience, job security, support for citizens across life stages, and fostering national solidarity ahead of Singapore's 60th independence anniversary. Addressing concerns about job security and living costs, he emphasized the government's commitment to reviewing and adjusting policies based on citizens' needs.

While speculation arose that the upcoming budget might be an "election budget," Wong maintained that the focus would remain on long-term strategies such as infrastructure development, climate change adaptation, and economic transitions.

On election preparations, Wong highlighted that the People's Action Party (PAP) is actively searching for new candidates and plans to introduce a refreshed slate for the polls. Renewal of Members of Parliament remains a priority, with senior MPs stepping down to make way for new faces.

The formation of the EBRC, a prerequisite for a General Election, typically precedes polls by four months to a year, suggesting an election may be called anytime in 2025. [Channel News Asia] [New Straits Times]

Singapore: Proposed law empowers police to protect stubborn scam victims

(fi) Singapore is set to become the first country to grant police powers to restrict the bank accounts of individuals deemed at risk of being scammed, following the introduction of the Protection from Scams Bill in Parliament on November 11.

The Bill, a response to rising scam incidents, allows police to issue Restriction Orders (ROs) to banks to temporarily limit a victim's banking transactions. These restrictions would cover ATM usage, credit facilities, online transfers like PayNow, and in-person counter transactions. ROs will be issued only as a last resort, after failed attempts to convince victims they are being scammed.

Scams cost Singapore over SGD 385.6 million (USD 289.2 million) in the first half of 2024, with 86 percent of reported cases involving voluntary transfers by victims manipulated by scammers. Daily losses amount to an estimated SGD 2 million (USD 1.5 million).

The ROs, effective for up to 30 days and renewable for up to six months, will apply primarily to cases involving digital or telecommunications scams. Victims under an RO can still access funds for essential needs by applying to the police.

The Ministry of Home Affairs emphasized the necessity of the measure, citing repeated instances of victims ignoring warnings from police, banks, and family members. While some respondents in public consultations expressed concerns over the intrusiveness and potential misuse of the powers, over 90 percent supported the proposal.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Sun Xueling stressed the importance of community efforts to combat scams, alongside enhanced government measures like bank account "kill switches" and anti-scam campaigns. Further expansions of the RO's scope to cover cryptocurrency exchanges and remittance firms may be considered in the future as Singapore intensifies efforts to curtail financial scams. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Activist defies online speech law over death penalty criticism

(lm) Singaporean activist Kokila Annamalai is challenging the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA) after refusing to comply with a government order to "correct" her social media posts about the death penalty. The government accused her of spreading falsehoods, including claims about the alleged arbitrary scheduling of executions and a legal burden on accused drug traffickers.

Annamalai, who supports death row inmates and their families, described the correction order as an attempt to stifle criticism. She contended that her posts highlighted systemic issues, such as the emotional toll

on families and the presumption of guilt in drug trafficking cases, which she believes shifts the burden of proof unfairly to defendants.

The Ministry of Home Affairs defended the order, stating it aimed to counteract false claims that could undermine public confidence in institutions. The government emphasized that the correction notice does not suppress opinions but ensures readers are informed of its stance.

Annamalai's defiance of POFMA, a first in Singapore, could lead to a fine of SGD 20,000 (USD 15,000) or a 12-month prison sentence. She believes her stand is essential to fostering a "culture of dissent" and countering laws that restrict online civic rights. [The Guardian]

Singapore: Digital Edge launches Green Finance Framework for sustainable data centers

(fi) Digital Edge (Singapore) Holdings Pte. Ltd., a data center platform company, has unveiled its first Green Finance Framework, outlining criteria for securing green financing to support environmentally sustainable data center projects. The framework aligns with the company's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals, including its commitment to becoming a carbon-neutral platform by 2030.

The framework specifies four eligibility criteria for projects to qualify for green financing: energy efficiency, renewable energy, green buildings, and sustainable water and wastewater management. [Future CFO]

Thailand: House-Senate committee considers "one and a half layer" majority for referendum

(bk) The House of Representatives and the Senate are currently in discussions over the criteria for a referendum on amending the constitution. At this point, the main hurdle to a new constitution is the ongoing disagreement between the two chambers regarding referendum voting requirements. The Lower House insists that a simple majority of participating voters should be sufficient to pass a referendum on the government's plan to rewrite the constitution, while the Upper House favors a double majority

system, where at least 50 percent of eligible voters to cast ballots, and at least 50 percent of those votes must be in favor for the referendum to pass. [see AiR No. 45, November/2024, 1]

"One and a half layer" majority system now on the table

To bridge the divide, Nikorn Chamnong, secretary of the joint House-Senate committee on the referendum bill, has proposed a "one-and-a-half-layer" majority system. This compromise combines elements of both approaches: it requires 50 percent voter turnout (as in the double majority) but only a majority of those who vote must approve the measure (as in the simple majority). For example, if 60 percent of eligible voters participate and 46 percent of them vote in favor, the referendum would pass under this system, whereas the double-majority rule would have rejected it.

Nikorn emphasized the need for compromise to secure Senate support, as charter amendments require one-third of senators (67 votes). Without cooperation, he warned, future constitutional reforms could face significant resistance

Postal voting

In addition to the "one and a half layer" majority system, Nikorn proposed conducting the referendum via postal voting instead of holding physical ballot polls, suggesting that postal voting could increase voter turnout due to its convenience. Committee members, albeit requiring more input from the Thailand Post before making any decisions, expressed interest in the idea. Thailand Post and the Election Commission are scheduled to meet with the committee on November 20 to explore the proposal in more detail. [Bangkok Post] [Bangkokbiznews, in Thai]

Although no resolution was reached during the committee's November 7 meeting, members showed interest in the proposed compromise and postal voting. However, Pheu Thai's legal expert Chousak Sirinil continues to reject any deviation from a simple majority requirement, arguing it is sufficient for passing a referendum. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Charter drafting assembly to be set up with no change to royal defamation law

(msz) According to Bhumjaithai (BJT) Party secretary-general Chaichanok Chidchob, the Thai government coalition parties have agreed to set up a constitutional

drafting assembly (CDA). He added that a charter referendum, which is to be approved by the joint House-Senate committee, is key to determine whether changes are necessary and to identify the specific issues to address. Furthermore, the coalition parties have agreed not to revise Section 112 of the Criminal Code or the lese majeste law.

Meanwhile, another coalition party Chartthaipattana leader Varawut Silpa-archa said that the CDA would be inclusive and independent. Although he conceded that the charter rewrite process may not be completed before the next election in 2027, he cited the 1997 constitution or People's Charter as an example of a successful constitution, which was only completed only years after the establishment of the CDA. He added that the charter amendment process must not be rashed in order to prevent loopholes. On the other hand, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra said on November 5 that she would be willing to meet with opposition People's Party (PP) list MP Parit Wacharasindhu, who wanted to meet her to expedite the charter rewrite process. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Amnesty bills expected to be tabled in December

(lm) The ruling Pheu Thai Party plans to submit its amnesty bill to parliament on December 12, alongside proposals from other parties, including the opposition People's Party (PP), according to PM's Office Minister Chousak Sirinil. Pheu Thai's bill, currently being finalized, will exclude offences under Section 112 (lese majeste) and Section 110 of the Criminal Code.

The move follows an earlier House decision on October 14 to reject the inclusion of lese majeste in proposed amnesty provisions, with 270 MPs voting against and 152 supporting its inclusion. While Pheu Thai's coalition opposes amnesty for lese majeste offenders, the PP continues to advocate for its inclusion.

Chousak also addressed the pending referendum bill, confirming Pheu Thai's support for a simple majority requirement. If the joint MP-Senate committee fails to reach an agreement, the bill will be suspended for 180 days before it can proceed. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Thaksin faces legal scrutiny while participating in election campaigns

(lm) Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra remains at the center of multiple controversies, including allegations of preferential treatment during his detention and involvement in political campaigns for the ruling Pheu Thai Party, led by his daughter, Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra.

Thaksin is under investigation for allegedly using his influence to secure an extended stay at the Police General Hospital (PGH) following his conviction for abuse of power. Lawyer Teerayut Suwankesorn has filed a petition claiming the extended hospital stay undermined the constitutional monarchy. The Constitutional Court is set to decide by November 13 whether to accept the case for review.

The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) is also probing claims of preferential treatment. Justice Minister Tawee Sodsong confirmed that Thaksin's medical records will be shared with the NACC. Prime Minister Paetongtarn has assured full government cooperation, though she highlighted potential limitations due to data privacy laws. She reiterated her non-interference in the investigation to address concerns about a conflict of interest stemming from her dual role as prime minister and Thaksin's daughter.

Additionally, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has raised concerns about the alleged privileges afforded to Thaksin during his detention. Seri Ruam Thai Party leader Pol Gen Sereepisuth Temeeyaves, who visited Thaksin in hospital, declined to testify before a House committee, citing fears of information leaks. He suggested the NACC directly request Thaksin's medical records from Prime Minister Paetongtarn and Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai, who oversees the Royal Thai Police.

Amid these investigations, Thaksin is actively participating in Pheu Thai's campaign for Provincial Administrative Organisation (PAO) elections in Udon Thani and Surin. Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham defended Thaksin's involvement, stating it is within legal bounds. Thaksin will assist Pheu Thai candidates from November 13–14 in Udon Thani and November 19–20 in Surin, with elections scheduled for November 23 and 24.

Analysts view Thaksin's participation as part of Pheu Thai's effort to regain dominance in Udon Thani, a traditional stronghold where the party lost three of 10 seats in last year's general election. Thaksin, whose prison sentence was reduced via a royal pardon, is now a free man and legally permitted to engage in election campaigns. Deputy Secretary-General Linthiporn Warinwatchararoj reiterated this, dismissing

comparisons with former Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat, who is under a political ban but reportedly supporting the opposition People's Party (PP). [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Nationwide PAO elections set for 2025, Udon Thani contest heating up

(bk) Thailand is scheduled to hold nationwide local elections for Chief Executives of Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs) on February 1, 2025, following the expiry of incumbents' tenures on December 19, 2024, according to the Election Commission (EC). Candidate registrations for the elections will be open from December 23 to 27, 2024.

However, 29 PAOs will not be part of the February 1 vote, as they have operated or will operate on separate election schedules. Of these, 27 incumbent PAO Chiefs resigned before completing their terms, prompting premature elections, while elections for two other PAOs were canceled by an appeals court. The EC has already held elections for 18 of these PAOs and has endorsed results for 16, with elections for the remaining 11 PAOs expected soon. [The Nation] [Thai PBS, in Thai]

Fierce competition for Udon Thani PAO

Udon Thani, a strategic political and economic hub in northeastern Thailand, is set to be one of the 11 PAOs holding the premature elections. Scheduled for November 24, the election is expected to be intense, as it represents a battle between two major political forces: the ruling Pheu Thai Party (PTP), with veteran former MP Sarawut Phetphanomporn, and the opposition People's Party (PP), represented by former Udon Thani deputy PAO Chief Kanisorn Kurirang. This election is seen as a critical showdown, with both parties vying for control in a region of strategic importance. [Matichon, in Thai]

Former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, the patriarch of PTP and father of Prime Minister Paetongtarn, will visit Udon Thani on November 13-14 to support the party's candidate as part of its rallying campaign in provinces where it is fielding candidates. Transport Minister Suriya Juangroongruangkit, a core member of PTP, expressed confidence that Thaksin's return to the political stage will help galvanize the party and energize the electorate. He believes that Thaksin's strong track record from his previous administration will resonate with voters and provide a

morale boost for both the party and its supporters. Suriya emphasized that Thaksin's role will be that of a campaign assistant, helping to support the party without dominating its leadership. [Thai PBS World] [Thai Enquirer 1]

On the opposing side, former Move Forward Party leader Pita Limjaroenrat, now a visiting fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, will return to Thailand from the U.S. to join the party's efforts in Udon Thani from November 15 to 17. Pita's undeterred popularity among voters is expected to be a significant factor in countering the PTP's campaign, with both parties competing fiercely for dominance in the region. [Thai Enquirer 2]

Thailand: Poll suggests Tak Bai justice failure will impact ruling Pheu Thai Party's electoral prospects

(msz) A recent survey conducted by the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) reveals that the ruling Pheu Thai Party is perceived as the most impacted political party following the closure of the Tak Bai massacre case.

The Tak Bai incident, which took place on October 25, 2004, during the tenure of Thaksin Shinawatra—de facto leader of Pheu Thai and father of current Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra—saw violent dispersal of protesters demanding the release of detained defense volunteers. Seven protesters died at the scene, while seventy-eight others suffocated during transport in overcrowded military trucks. The case recently concluded without any defendants being held accountable, as the 20-year statute of limitations expired on October 28.

The poll, carried out in the southern provinces of Yala, Pattani, and Narathiwat, shows that fifty-five percent of respondents believe the justice failure in the Tak Bai case will most negatively affect Pheu Thai. Almost thirty percent think the issue will not significantly impact any political party, while other parties, including Prachachat and the Democrat Party, received minimal mentions.

When asked how the case might influence their voting decisions in the next general election, nearly forty percent said it would not affect their choice, while twenty-five percent indicated it would have a strong impact on their decision.

Regarding their current political preferences, fifty percent of respondents stated they had yet to find a suitable party. Around nineteen percent favored the People's Party, while support for Pheu Thai stood at less than five percent, reflecting the party's waning popularity in the region. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Parks Department submits controversial forest bills to Cabinet

(lm) The Department of National Parks, Wildlife, and Plant Conservation (DNP) has submitted two draft laws to the cabinet for approval, sparking opposition from the People's Movement for a Just Society (P-Move), which fears these measures could undermine local communities' ancestral land rights.

DNP chief Attapon Charoenchansa explained that the bills, aligned with the National Park Act and Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act, aim to protect natural resources while ensuring the rights of people living within forest zones. The drafts propose legal guarantees for residents' rights to basic infrastructure, compensation for low crop yields, and the ability to harvest trees they have planted.

Despite existing resolutions and orders acknowledging communities in forest areas, the DNP emphasized that no current law secures their rights. To address this gap, the department conducted surveys of 224 conserved forest zones covering 4.25 million rai (680,000 hectares), incorporating about 4,042 communities into the draft measures.

However, P-Move has criticized the bills for restricting farming to 20 rai (3.2 hectares) for 20 years, requiring stringent qualifications such as Thai nationality and no criminal record, and recognizing individual rights without guaranteeing community rights. The group argues this could strip locals of constitutional land-use rights and has threatened legal action against the cabinet if the bills proceed.

The DNP is pressing for the bills' adoption before their November 27 expiration, asserting that the measures underwent thorough planning and align with conservation and community needs. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Two trade representatives appointed

(lm) Umesh Pandey and Werapong Prapha have been appointed as Thailand's new Trade Representatives, as announced by the Prime Minister's Office on November 5. The appointments took immediate effect.

Werapong, who holds a Master of Science in development management from the London School of Economics, has had an extensive career, including roles at the Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI), Oxfam Thailand, and The Freedom Fund, an NGO based in London. Pandey is a former editor at the Bangkok Post and an economic adviser to the ruling Pheu Thai Party. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Prominent lawyer, wife arrested for alleged fraud and money laundering, assets seized

(lm) Prominent lawyer Sittra "Tam" Biabungkerd and his wife, Pathitta, were arrested on November 7 for alleged fraud and money laundering. The couple is accused of deceiving billionaire Jatuporn "Madame Oy" Ubonlert out of THB 71 million (USD 2.05 million) through a fake online lottery scheme. Sittra faces charges of fraud and money laundering, while Pathitta is charged with money laundering. Both deny the allegations, with Sittra claiming the money was a gift.

Authorities intercepted the couple on the Kabin Buri-Chachoengsao Highway, suspecting they were fleeing toward Cambodia. Their vehicle, containing travel bags, bedding, and documents, was seized. A search of their Bangkok home revealed luxury items, including jewelry and bags, which are under investigation. The Criminal Court denied their bail request, citing the gravity of the charges. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thai police have also seized over THB 70 million (USD 2.02 million) in assets linked to Sittra, including THB 28 million (USD 809,000) in cash, a luxury home valued at THB 43 million (USD 1.24 million), and several high-end vehicles. Additional items, such as luxury watches and contents from a large safe, remain unaccounted for.

The investigation has expanded to include cryptocurrency investments and further asset tracing in coordination with the Anti-Money Laundering Office. Both suspects are being held in custody under strict surveillance, with Sittra in Bangkok Remand Prison and Pathitta in the Central Women Correctional Institution. Police have indicated that further charges may be filed as the case progresses. [Bangkok Post 3]

Thailand: Feng Shui master arrested for alleged USD 3 million fraud

(lm) Thai police arrested feng shui master Thanawan Jiracharoenwes in Pathum Thani on November 11 on charges of public fraud and money laundering. Thanawan, who has amassed hundreds of thousands of followers on social media, is accused of defrauding 67 clients out of approximately THB 108 million (USD 3 million) by failing to deliver "auspicious objects" he had promised to help them improve their fortunes.

Among the complainants is a 77-year-old woman who claims to have lost THB 60 million (USD 1.67 million) to Thanawan. Complaints date back to 2020, with customers reporting that many orders were never fulfilled. Authorities allege Thanawan used the funds for gambling and luxury expenses, including leasing a Lamborghini for THB 1 million (USD 27,900) per month to bolster his image.

The Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) has impounded two luxury vehicles and plans to seize more of Thanawan's assets as part of the ongoing investigation. Thanawan denies all charges. His sister, Napasawan Jiracharoenwes, known as "Madam Feng Shui," has publicly distanced herself from her brother's activities, claiming their businesses are separate. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Additional pyramid scheme charges filed against The iCon Group suspects

(lm) Thailand's Department of Special Investigation (DSI) has filed additional charges of pyramid scheme violations and breaches of direct sales laws against 18 suspects affiliated with The iCon Group, including its founder and CEO, Warathaphon "Boss Paul" Waratyaworrakul. The suspects, arrested last month, are being detained at the Bangkok Remand Prison and the Central Women Correctional Institution.

DSI deputy secretary-general Wisanu Chimtrakool announced that the charges stem from the suspects' alleged involvement in fraudulent business practices, which included forming business networks that promised returns based on the recruitment of new members, a hallmark of pyramid schemes. The group reportedly operated without the necessary direct sales license, contravening the Direct Sales and Marketing Act and the Law on Loan Amounting to Public Cheating and Fraud.

The DSI's investigation, conducted in consultation with the Fiscal Policy Office and the Consumer Protection Board, concluded that the suspects had structured their business into executive teams, network leaders, and celebrities who promoted wealth to attract investors.

The suspects' lawyer refuted the allegations, asserting that The iCon Group engaged in legitimate business activities, possessed merchandise, and did not rely on funds from new recruits to pay earlier members. He added that the defense is prepared to present 3,000 witnesses and provide access to the company's back-office system to demonstrate its legitimacy.

The suspects, including Warathaphon and several high-profile celebrities, initially faced charges of public fraud and inputting false information into computer systems. These additional charges escalate the legal challenges for the group as investigations continue. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Prime Minister Paetongtarn kicks off "No Gift Policy" for ISOC integrity

(msz) In her role as director of the Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC), Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra recently signed a declaration of intent dated October 30 regarding the ISOC policy designed to foster integrity, honesty and accountability among its personnel. The "No Gift Policy" ensures that ISOC officers do not receive gifts or gratuities in exchange for their services during holidays or on other occasions to prevent conflicts of interest. The declaration stressed the ISOC's commitment to upholding national security and peace through transparent and corruption-free operations. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: OBEC probes school food, donation accusations

(lm) The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) is investigating allegations against two schools in Chachoengsao and Nakhon Ratchasima. The claims include a school serving spoiled fruits in student meals and another soliciting excessive donations from parents for a school van.

In Chachoengsao, the investigation found no evidence supporting claims of spoiled food being served.

Students interviewed confirmed they had not consumed spoiled fruits or vegetables and had not experienced any food-related illnesses. OBEC concluded that the allegations were unfounded.

In Nakhon Ratchasima, Chumphuangsuksa School was found to have collected donations voluntarily for school development, not specifically for a school van as originally claimed online. The school had distributed donation envelopes for a fundraising event. The National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC) found varying donation amounts, from THB 10 (approximately USD 0.29) to THB 1,000 (approximately USD 29), contradicting the online allegations. OBEC has ordered the school to halt further solicitation and clarify the issue with parents. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Migrants face risk of losing work and residency rights amid registration complications

(lm) Many migrant workers in Thailand are at risk of losing their right to work and remain in the country due to complications in the new registration and work permit renewal process. The deadline for registration passed on October 31, leaving hundreds of thousands of workers without legal status.

Employers and workers have expressed concerns over the complexity of the Certificate of Identity (CI) process, a mandatory step before work permit renewals can be completed. There are only seven CI centers across the country, and many workers have been forced to travel long distances to complete the process.

In some cases, workers reported paying a fee of between 3,800 and 4,000 THB (approximately USD 110-115) without receiving proper receipts. The extra costs and lack of proper oversight at these centers have left many workers frustrated. [Bangkok Post 1]

At the same time, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has endorsed the Thai government's efforts to address the issue of statelessness by granting citizenship to over 483,000 migrants and members of ethnic minorities. This move, which aligns with Thailand's commitment made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019, simplifies the process for granting legal status to long-term migrants and ethnic minorities, allowing them to self-certify their qualifications and criminal history.

According to Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, there are 825,635 people currently residing in Thailand without citizenship, with over 480,000 of them awaiting status confirmation. While the NHRC has praised the government's actions, Commissioner Wasant Paileeklee emphasized the need for safeguards to prevent potential abuse and corruption, ensuring that the initiative promotes equality and adheres to international human rights standards, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: 'Multidimensional poverty' a worry despite progress

(lm) Thailand has made significant strides in reducing poverty, halving the number of people living in poverty in just seven years, according to the 2024 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). However, many Thais continue to live in substandard conditions, particularly in rural areas, where they lack access to adequate healthcare, education, and sanitation.

The MPI, compiled by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Institute (OPHI), evaluates poverty beyond just income, considering factors like nutrition, child mortality, school attendance, housing, sanitation, safe drinking water, and electricity.

While Thailand has reduced the number of people in multidimensional poverty from 909,000 in 2012 to 352,000 in 2022, the report notes that multidimensional poverty is still about 0.5 percent higher than monetary poverty in the country. This highlights that many people who live above the poverty line still lack basic needs, such as education, healthcare, and adequate housing.

Among Southeast Asian countries, Thailand ranks the best, with a score of 0.0002 in the 2024 MPI, followed by Vietnam, Indonesia, and other countries in the region. However, regions like Narathiwat, Surin, Mae Hong Son, Uthai Thani, and Pattani reported the highest levels of multidimensional poverty in the country last year. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: National Health Security Office to investigate clinics that deny patient referrals

(lm) The National Health Security Office (NHSO) in Thailand has announced an investigation into clinics that fail to refer patients under the universal healthcare system to hospitals, a practice that may lead to legal action. The probe follows complaints from Bangkok residents who faced difficulties obtaining referral documents from clinics.

Some patients reported that clinics required an advance request for referrals, ranging from seven days to a month, and others were refused referrals despite having critical conditions beyond the clinic's capabilities. Additionally, patients faced increased financial burdens, including transportation costs and medical bills, if they sought hospital treatment without proper referrals.

The NHSO will conduct a case-by-case investigation and will consider legal charges in instances of malpractice. The office is responsible for covering treatment costs, including an 800-baht deduction for primary clinics. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: New panel to reduce school dropout rates

(lm) The Ministry of Education is establishing a committee to tackle the growing issue of high school dropout rates in Thailand. A recent survey revealed that 394,039 children aged six to 18 are missing from the country's mandatory education system. Education Minister Permpoon Chidchob announced that the Office of the Education Council (OEC) will develop a strategic plan to address this issue, with input from various organizations.

The initiative follows the approval of the project by the cabinet in May, during the Srettha Thavisin administration. The ministry has been instructed to expedite efforts to reach out to children who have dropped out or were excluded from the education system. The project also includes efforts to integrate children in juvenile detention centers and those living abroad.

The Thailand Zero Dropout campaign focuses on four main measures: identifying missing children, implementing tracking systems, offering flexible education, and collaborating with businesses to support education for working youths. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: High level of pollution detected in some areas of Bangkok

(acs) Bangkok City Hall is aiming to implement new measures to address increasing air pollution throughout the city, as many areas are experiencing dangerous levels of dust, including particularities that can threaten human health.

According to estimates, 35 areas within Bangkok have begun to suffer from hazardous levels of dust, exceeding the safe threshold. In response, City Hall has announced new safety measures for citizens, advising them to wear masks, limit their time outdoors, and monitor any new symptoms that may result from air pollution. Furthermore, efforts are being made to reduce pollution levels by improving ventilation, with threshold levels determined through collaboration between officials from AirBKK and the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: FDA designates grapes as safety

(acs) The Thai Food and Drug Administration (FDA) seized 6.93 tonnes of grapes to address rising public concern over potential chemical contamination.

After testing nearly seven tonnes of grapes, the FDA announced that all of them complied with safety standards. Consequently, the administration saw no objection to their import and domestic sale. However, the FDA's Deputy Director-General, Lertchai Lertvut, highlighted that if any future samples show chemical contamination above acceptable levels, the import of those grapes into Thailand will be prohibited. As a precaution, the FDA urged importers to comply with Thai legal and safety standards for their exports. [Bangkok Post]

Last month, the Thailand Consumer Council had tested 24 collected samples from Shine Muscat grapes. It was found that most of the samples contained chemical residues exceeding safe thresholds for human health. The Thailand Consumer Council had urged the Ministry to address this issue and take immediate action regarding the grapes. [see AiR No. 44, October/2024, 5]

Thailand: EGAT to build three new hydropower plants

(bk) The Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) plans to invest THB 90 billion (USD 2.6 billion) in the construction of three pumped-storage hydropower plants. These plants will be located at three existing dams: Chulabhorn Dam in Chaiyaphum, Vajiralongkorn Dam in Kanchanaburi, and Krathoon Dam in Nakhon Si Thammarat. Once completed, they are expected to generate a total of 2,472 megawatts.

Pumped-storage plants use renewable energy to pump water to higher reservoirs during low-demand periods and release it during peak times to generate electricity. The projects are expected to be completed by 2037, with Chulabhorn generating 801MW by 2034, Vajiralongkorn 891MW by 2036, and Krathoon 780MW by 2037.

The environmental impact assessment for the Chulabhorn project has been approved, and EGAT is awaiting final endorsements from the Energy Ministry and Cabinet. The projects promise cost-effective electricity at THB 2 (USD 0.056) per unit with zero carbon emissions during generation. [The Nation]

Thailand: Concerns mount over appointment of Kittirat Na-Ranong as Central Bank chair

(msz/bk) Former Finance Minister Kittirat Na-Ranong's appointment as chairman of the Bank of Thailand's (BOT) board of directors has sparked concerns about political interference due to his close ties to the ruling Pheu Thai Party. Critics, including 830 economists and four former BOT governors, have warned that the central bank's independence may be at risk, emphasizing the importance of impartiality in navigating Thailand's economic challenges.

The selection committee, led by former Finance Ministry permanent secretary Sathit Limpongphan, chose Kittirat over two candidates proposed by the BOT—former Energy Ministry permanent secretary Kulit Sombatsiri and Thammasat University Council president Surapon Nitikraipot. The decision followed months of delays and a five-hour meeting on November 11. The appointment now awaits Cabinet approval and formal endorsement by His Majesty the King.

Adding to the controversy, Kittirat's political prospects were recently bolstered by the Attorney-General's decision not to appeal his acquittal in a high-profile corruption case. The Supreme Court had cleared Kittirat of malfeasance in a 2011 rice sale to Indonesia,

ruling that he had delegated responsibility for the deal. Despite allegations of irregularities, including bypassing fair tender processes, the Attorney-General's decision has further strengthened Kittirat's standing.

Critics, including former central bank governors, continue to stress the need for an independent BOT chair. The selection process has drawn significant scrutiny, with calls to ensure the central bank's autonomy amid Thailand's complex economic and political landscape. [Thai PBS World] [The Nation]

Thailand: THAI creditors postpone decision on rehabilitation plan amid concerns over government appointments

(bk) The creditors' meeting for Thai Airways International (THAI), the country's flag carrier, on November 8 ended without a decision on the proposed amendment to the airline's rehabilitation plan, with discussions set to resume on November 29. This postponement followed concerns from creditors over the last-minute addition to the agenda by the Finance Ministry, proposing the appointment of two new managers for the rehabilitation plan -- Polchak Nimwatana, deputy director of the Finance Ministry's State Enterprise Policy Office, and Panya Chupanich, director of the Transport Ministry's Office of Transport and Traffic Policy and Planning. Creditors pointed out that the proposal was submitted just three days before the meeting, leaving little time for proper discussion.

More than 100 creditors, representing THB 80 billion (USD 2.3 billion) of THAI's total THB 130 billion (USD 3.8 billion) debt, attended the meeting. The meeting was intended to cover three main agenda items: reducing the par value of shares, early debt repayment, and the appointment of new managers. While the share value reduction and early debt repayment are expected to pass in the rescheduled vote, the appointment of the new managers remains a point of contention as the airline's labor union has expressed concerns that these appointments could lead to political interference and undermine THAI's independence. [The Nation 1] [Thansettakij, in Thai]

THAI labor union opposes Finance Ministry's manager appointments

On the same day, the THAI labor union staged a protest against the Finance Ministry's proposal to appoint the two government officials to the rehabilitation plan's management. The union argued

that this would increase government control and lead to political interference, particularly in decisions like aircraft procurement. Union members gathered peacefully outside the airline's headquarters, urging creditors to reject the proposal during their meeting with THAI representatives.

A union spokesperson criticized past political corruption that led to THAI's financial struggles and bankruptcy filing in 2019. They stressed that, despite challenges, THAI had seen progress under its current management and that government interference would hinder the airline's recovery. The union called for the airline's experienced employees to be trusted to manage the rehabilitation process without political exploitation. [The Nation 2]

Opposition MP Sirikanya raises red flag over potential government control of THAI

The events were set in motion by opposition MP Sirikanya Tansakun of the People's Party, who revealed on her X account on November 4 the Finance Ministry's proposal, sparking concerns over the possible expansion of government control over THAI. Sirikanya warned that this move could result in the government's de facto grip on THAI, without fully reinstating it as a state enterprise. She questioned why, and in what capacity, the Ministry of Finance is calling for the appointment of the two government officials, which would cause the government's representatives to outnumber those of the other creditors. She pointed out that while the ministry is THAI's largest shareholder, it is a minor creditor, having contributed only 10 percent of the airline's total debt -- just THB 12.8 billion (USD 374 million) of the THB 129 billion (USD 3.8 billion) total. [Thai Enquirer 1] [X (formerly, Twitter), in Thai]

THAI posts strong Q3 2024 profit growth

For the third quarter of 2024, THAI reported a remarkable sevenfold increase in net profit, reaching THB 12.48 billion (USD 365 million), compared to THB 1.55 billion (USD 45 million) in the same period of 2023. The airline plans to exit its rehabilitation process by the second quarter of 2025 and restructure its capital through a debt-to-equity conversion of up to THB 14.86 billion (USD 430 million). [Thai Enquirer 2]

Thailand: FDA launches crackdown on unsafe products in supermarkets, e-commerce sites

(bk) The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has confiscated more than 94,000 illegal Chinese products from 47 shops in Bangkok over the past three months. These products, spanning 341 categories, were found to be in violation of labeling regulations. These raids, conducted between July 31 and November 4, are part of the FDA's ongoing effort to enhance consumer protection by ensuring product safety. [Bangkok Post 1]

However, concerns continue to grow as Thailand anticipates an influx of Chinese products due to the ongoing US-China trade war. Following Donald Trump's recent victory in the US presidential election, Thai e-commerce operators are urging the government to implement measures to manage the expected increase in Chinese imports. As Chinese exporters shift away from the US, Thailand is expected to see a rise in both investment and products from China. While this could position Thailand as a stronger player in Southeast Asia's e-commerce market, there are concerns that an influx of low-priced goods could undermine local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Operators are calling for tighter regulations to safeguard product quality and ensure fair competition. [Bangkok Post 2]

In response to these concerns, leading e-commerce platforms in Thailand, including Lazada and Shopee, have agreed to collaborate with the Thai FDA to address the issue of unsafe food products. Under the new agreement, both platforms will remove unregistered and unsafe food items within 24 hours of detection. The platforms will also develop an automated system integrated with the FDA's database to improve the efficiency of detecting and removing illegal items, ensuring quicker responses to consumer safety concerns. [The Nation]

Thailand: Agencies take aim at mule accounts

(lm) The Department of Business Development (DBD) and the Central Investigation Bureau (CIB) have joined forces to combat corporate mule accounts and nominee operations used by criminals to launder illicit funds. This move comes as part of Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra's directive to address cybercrime.

The collaboration was formalized through a memorandum of understanding (MoU), aiming to crack down on the creation of corporate mule accounts, which are increasingly used to receive funds from scam victims, often connected to fraudulent call

centers. Authorities have identified over 600 corporate mule accounts linked to losses exceeding THB 680 million (USD 19.7 million).

In a related effort, the Department of Special Investigation (DSI) recently uncovered approximately THB 300 million (USD 8.7 million) in assets related to money laundering by the "Mae Mon" online gambling network, found in safety deposit boxes during a raid in Lop Buri province. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: State railway sees ‘huge promise’ in 28 land plots

(lm) The State Railway of Thailand (SRT) is banking on the commercial development of 38,500 rai (15,395 acres) of land, including 28 plots with high potential, to generate THB 20 billion (USD 570 million) in revenue over the next four years. This plan comes as SRT struggles with a loss of THB 17.8 billion (USD 520 million) last year and an accumulated debt of around THB 300 billion (USD 8.6 billion).

SRT Asset Co, a subsidiary of SRT, has taken over 12,233 land lease contracts, covering a total of 38,469 rai (15,440 acres) of land, which is not directly involved in rail operations. These non-core lands are now being considered for commercial development. Despite minimal revenue in the past, with only THB 660,000 (USD 18,800) last year, SRT Asset aims to attract private partners to invest in these plots.

The development of 28 plots, considered high-potential, will be carried out in three phases, with the first phase starting next year. The SRT expects to receive 5 percent of the net revenue generated from these development projects while maintaining ownership of the land. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Ministry to promote new project on digital economy and innovation

(acs) The Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) has announced its backing for the Thailand International Digital Business & Finance Centre (TIDC) project, a key initiative aimed at positioning Thailand as a global digital hub. The project seeks to attract investments, foster innovation, and create a digital-first ecosystem that will enhance Thailand’s economy and workforce.

The TIDC project, with support from the National Telecom Public Company Limited (NT), will serve as a next-generation business hub for digital enterprises, start-ups, and major international companies. Its focus includes cutting-edge fields like gaming, immersive experiences, FinTech, digital public services, and sector-wide digitalization. Core technologies to be deployed include Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Blockchain, Big Data Analytics, and Cloud Computing.

Aligned with Thailand's National Digital Economy and Society Development Plan (2018-2037), the initiative also aims to elevate the local workforce to global standards through collaborations with international experts and knowledge transfer. The project includes the launch of the "Digital Economy Regulatory Sandbox" (DERS), a collaborative experimental space for the public and private sectors to test and refine innovative digital solutions. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Transport Ministry to present new plan for road safety

(acs) Transport Minister Suriya Jungrungreangkit has announced a new road safety campaign targeting motorcyclists and passengers who fail to wear helmets, aiming to reduce the country's high rate of road fatalities.

Starting next year, individuals caught without helmets will be required to attend mandatory road safety training, including viewing videos about the dangers of non-compliance. To further encourage helmet use, motorcycle dealers will be required to provide two helmets with every motorcycle sold, up from the current requirement of one.

Minister Suriya cited World Health Organization data indicating that 25 per 100,000 Thais died in road accidents last year, with motorbike-related incidents being a major cause. The government aims to halve this rate to 12 per 100,000 by 2027.

Public Health Minister Somsak Thepsutin highlighted the severe toll of traffic accidents, with 18,000 deaths, over 1 million injuries, 10,000 disabilities, and economic losses of approximately THB 600 billion (USD 16.7 billion) annually. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Deputy minister defends decision on Buri Ram railway land dispute

(lm) Deputy Interior Minister Songsak Thongsri has defended a land committee's decision not to revoke land title documents for 5,083 rai (8.13 square kilometers) in Buri Ram's Khao Kradong area, despite a 2021 Supreme Court ruling that the land belongs to the State Railway of Thailand (SRT). The SRT accuses the Department of Land (DoL) of malfeasance for issuing title deeds to illegal occupants and is seeking to reclaim the land.

The committee, established under Section 61 of the Land Code, unanimously resolved not to revoke the documents, citing insufficient evidence presented by the SRT. Songsak, a member of the coalition Bhumjaithai Party, stated that the Supreme Court's ruling requires further study to determine its applicability and suggested that the SRT could challenge the decision with more substantial evidence.

Criticism has arisen over connections between some committee members and the Chidchob family, a political clan linked to the Bhumjaithai Party, which owns 179 rai (28.64 hectares) of the disputed land, including key developments like the Buriram International Circuit and a football stadium. Songsak dismissed these allegations, asserting the committee followed regulations.

Justice Minister Tawee Sodsong questioned whether the committee's decision can override the Supreme Court ruling, urging the SRT to pursue further action. The committee justified its decision by noting discrepancies between the map used in the court ruling and the one included in a 1921 royal decree on land acquisition for the northeastern rail system. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Mayor shot dead in Narathiwat, rifle linked to 24 cases

(lm) Wichet Thaithongnum, the mayor of Rueso municipality in Narathiwat, was shot dead by armed assailants at his garment factory November 7. The attack occurred at the Hand-in-Hand factory, where Wichet, also the chairman of the Narathiwat sports association, was holding a meeting. Four gunmen on two motorcycles entered the meeting room and fired at Wichet before fleeing. [Bangkok Post 1]

A rifle used in the murder has been traced to more than 20 criminal cases across southern Thailand, including several violent incidents. Forensic officers recovered 19 bullet casings at the scene, confirming that an AK-102 assault rifle was used in the shooting. The weapon was previously linked to the killings of two defense volunteers earlier this year.

Police are investigating several possible motives for the murder, including local politics, business interests, personal disputes, and security issues. Authorities suspect that the assailants were tipped off about Wichet's whereabouts, allowing them to quickly locate and kill him in front of witnesses. The gunmen remain at large. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Two Japanese men arrested for abduction and extortion

(lm) Police in Chon Buri have arrested two Japanese men accused of abducting a compatriot, extorting THB 300,000 (USD 8,700), and physically assaulting him. The suspects, alleged members of the yakuza, reportedly detained the victim in a Bangkok hotel, assaulted him, and forced him to eat feces after he paid THB 135,000 (USD 3,915), which they deemed insufficient.

The victim contacted the Japanese embassy, leading to his rescue. The suspects were apprehended at a Chon Buri resort after police tracked them using the smell of marijuana. Authorities found cannabis and THB 130,000 (USD 3,770) at the scene.

Both suspects deny involvement in the crime. One suspect claimed to have relocated to Thailand with significant funds to invest in cannabis and logistics businesses. Police are investigating their activities, including potential illegal operations. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: 2015 Erawan Shrine bombing suspect exonerated due to lack of evidence

(bk) On October 7, the Bangkok South Criminal Court acquitted Wanna Suansan of all charges related to the 2015 bomb attack at the Erawan Shrine, located in the city's main shopping district in Bangkok. The attack killed 20 people, most of them tourists.

The prosecution had alleged that Wanna was involved in renting a property and supplying chemicals to the

two suspected bombers, Yusufu Mieraili and Bilal Mohammed -- both Uyghur men. She was accused of complicity in murder, attempted murder, and possessing an illegal explosive device in connection with the blast. However, the court found no evidence to support these claims. Wanna, who was in Turkey with her husband at the time of the attack, was not present at the scene, and there were no photographs, phone records, or any other direct connection between her and the suspects. The judge stated that the evidence was insufficient to prove her involvement and exonerated her of all charges.

Despite her acquittal, the case against the two Uyghur suspects remains ongoing, with no clear resolution in sight. Mieraili and Mohammed have been on trial since 2016, but their case has been repeatedly delayed due to difficulties in finding suitable translators. More than 100 witnesses are still awaiting testimony. The bombing, which targeted the shrine frequented by ethnic Chinese visitors, occurred just weeks after Thailand repatriated 109 Uyghurs to China, where human rights groups claim the Uyghur Muslim minority faces repression. This has raised speculation that the attack was politically motivated. [Thai PBS World] [Springnews, in Thai]

Thailand: Official found stabbed to death in Pathum Thani province

(lm) A senior local official was found dead with 11 stab wounds to her neck at her home in Pathum Thani's Khlong Luang district on November 8. Her younger sister discovered the body after hearing screams earlier in the evening. There were no signs of a struggle or theft, as valuables were untouched.

Police are reviewing CCTV footage to investigate the motive, but no clear cause has been established. A post-mortem examination is underway. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste: Government aims to advance human resources in petroleum and gas sector

(mu) On November 7, the Timorese government, through the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals (MPRM), launched the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE) in Timor-Leste as part of its efforts to enhance human resources in the petroleum and gas industry. Minister Francisco Monteiro stated that this initiative

marks the first time SPE will serve as a community to bring together experts, technicians, students, and lecturers in the sector.

With over 127,000 members across 145 countries, SPE will provide a global platform for technical and practical exchange in petroleum and gas exploration and production. [Tatoli, in Indonesian]

Timor-Leste: Land and maritime borders with Indonesia national priorities, prime minister says

(mu) In a plenary session discussing the draft state revenue and expenditure budget, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão highlighted the importance of delineating Timor-Leste's land and maritime borders with Indonesia. He emphasized that this effort is not only central to the country's long-standing sovereignty claims but also crucial for legal and technical clarity regarding resources within Timor-Leste's maritime territory, particularly for the development of the nation's blue economy.

The boundary between Indonesia and Timor-Leste has a complex history, dating back to the colonial era when Portugal and the Netherlands controlled the region. The 1755 Paravicini contract, which addresses the land and maritime borders, lacks clear delineation, posing potential future conflicts. During the Prime Minister's visit to Indonesia in January, an agreement was signed to further discuss the border in the Noel Besi-Citrana Oecusse area, Timor-Leste's exclave surrounded by Indonesian territory. [Tatoli, in Indonesian]

Vietnam: Land scandal implicates senior government leaders, former minister claims

(lm) A land scandal involving a billion-dollar ecotourism project in Lam Dong province has drawn attention to alleged involvement by senior government leaders, according to Mai Tien Dung, a former minister and head of the Cabinet Office, who is facing charges of bribery and abuse of power.

The project, awarded in 2010 to Saigon Dai Ninh Company, was expected to be completed by 2018 but remains undeveloped, with the site overgrown by weeds. Investigations have implicated 10 individuals, including former Lam Dong provincial leaders. Dung

claims his actions were influenced by directives from top government leaders at the time, though specific names have not been disclosed.

The scandal has resurfaced amid Vietnam's ongoing anti-corruption campaign, known as the "blazing furnace," which has already led to the removal of former President Nguyen Xuan Phuc. During his tenure as prime minister (2016–2021), several corruption cases emerged, including the high-profile Viet A COVID-19 test kit scandal.

Communist Party General Secretary To Lam has pledged to continue the anti-corruption crackdown, which has seen the prosecution of numerous senior officials, intensifying scrutiny of Vietnam's political elite. [Radio Free Asia]

Vietnam: State Bank strengthens oversight with anti-money laundering department, stricter banking regulations

(cc/hn) The State Bank of Vietnam (SBV) is implementing significant structural reforms to enhance its regulatory framework and ensure the stability of the banking sector. Effective January 5, 2025, the SBV will establish a dedicated Department of Anti-Money Laundering, marking its transition from operating under the Banking Supervision Agency to functioning as an independent unit. This move aims to strengthen Vietnam's compliance with international anti-money laundering standards and improve measures to combat terrorist financing. [Viet Nam News 1]

Accompanying this initiative, the SBV has proposed a new set of regulations for mergers and consolidations of credit institutions. These measures, outlined in a draft circular, are designed to safeguard the rights of customers and creditors while maintaining operational stability during such processes. The regulations emphasize confidentiality prior to project approval and mandate transparency and adherence to legal provisions during asset transfers. Prohibited economic concentrations are disallowed unless exempted under competition law, and post-merger institutions must comply with safety ratios, shareholding regulations, and operational conditions. [Viet Nam News 2]

As part of its broader restructuring, the SBV will merge the Forecasting and Statistics and Monetary and Financial Stabilization departments into a single entity. Additionally, a new Department of Banking Inspection and Supervision will operate under the Banking

Supervision Agency, which will no longer handle anti-money laundering duties. [Viet Nam News 1]

These reforms align with the government's efforts to address bad debts, maintain macroeconomic stability, and uphold national financial security. Recent sector consolidations, such as the transfers of Construction Commercial Bank to Vietcombank and OceanBank to Military Bank, reflect the SBV's commitment to restructuring the banking system. [Viet Nam News 2]

Deputy Prime Minister Nguyễn Hòa Bình has further bolstered anti-money laundering efforts by amending inter-agency cooperation mechanisms, assigning new responsibilities to the Ministries of Justice, Industry and Trade, and Information and Communication. [Viet Nam News 1]

Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City police arrest man linked to multi-party advocacy group

(lm) Vietnamese authorities in Ho Chi Minh City have arrested a 29-year-old man on charges of "producing and disseminating materials opposing the Socialist Republic of Vietnam" under Article 117 of the Penal Code. The individual is accused of participating in activities connected to a so-called 'Democratic multi-party coalition,' deemed a threat to national security and political stability.

Authorities claim the suspect followed instructions from group leaders, wrote materials distorting historical facts, and insulted national leaders. He is also alleged to have sought domestic support for the coalition, which reportedly uses social media platforms for recruitment in violation of Vietnamese law.

The group's activities have been characterized by the police as an attempt to challenge Vietnam's single-party system, exploiting perceptions in the west where democracy is often associated with multi-party elections. Vietnam's government maintains that its political system, led by the Communist Party, represents a unique democratic model. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Government proposes USD 887 million for drug prevention

(lm) The Vietnamese government has proposed allocating VND 22.45 trillion (USD 887.2 million) for a National Target Program on Drug Prevention and

Control until 2030. Deputy Prime Minister Le Thanh Long highlighted the growing complexity of drug-related challenges, with addiction affecting 83.7 percent of communes nationwide.

The plan allocates VND 17.72 trillion (USD 700.2 million) from the central budget, VND 4.67 trillion (USD 184.5 million) from local budgets, and VND 50 billion (USD 1.9 million) from other sources. The program includes 20 targets focused on reducing supply, demand, and harm while improving infrastructure and resources.

Lawmakers stressed the need to reduce stigma and improve employment opportunities for rehabilitated addicts to prevent relapses and ensure the program's success. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Plans underway for emissions trading system to support carbon market development

(hn) Vietnam is set to pilot its emissions trading system (ETS) in June 2025, aiming for official operation by 2028 and integration into international carbon markets by 2030. The initiative, overseen by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), seeks to address climate change while fostering economic opportunities in carbon credit trading.

Key objectives include transitioning from high-emission to green energy sources, adopting advanced low-emission technologies, and promoting sustainable agricultural practices, such as the development of one million hectares of low-emission, high-quality rice. The ETS will initially involve 150 major emitters in sectors like iron, steel, cement, and thermal power production.

Experts stress the importance of transparency, simplified management rules, and a comprehensive legal framework to ensure the system's efficiency. The ETS is expected to encourage green investments, reduce production costs, and enhance competitiveness while generating new financial flows through carbon credit trading. Stakeholders emphasize raising awareness among businesses and society to prepare for this transformative shift. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Authorities crack down on e-commerce platforms; Temu, Shein

ordered to halt operations until compliance

(hn) Vietnam has mandated cross-border e-commerce platforms, including Shein and Temu, to cease all operations, including advertising and marketing, until they complete registration with Vietnamese authorities. The Ministry of Industry and Trade has warned that failure to comply by the end of November will result in technical measures such as blocking their apps and domains.

Deputy Trade Minister Nguyen Hoang Long stressed the urgency of compliance, citing concerns over deep discounting practices, potential counterfeit goods, and consumer protection. The Ministry of Finance is also evaluating the repeal of a tax exemption on imported goods valued up to VND 1 million (USD 40), which has often been exploited by e-commerce platforms.

The General Department of Taxation emphasized the obligation for platforms like Shein and Temu to register, self-declare, and pay taxes through Vietnam's online tax portal. Currently, 116 foreign providers have registered, contributing VND 20.174 trillion (USD 831 million) in cumulative taxes, including VND 8.6 trillion (USD 354 million) in 2024 alone—a 25.7 percent year-on-year increase.

Temu's parent company registered for taxation on September 4 but reported zero revenue in Q3/2024. The company indicated that October's revenue would be included in its Q4/2024 declaration. Authorities pledged close oversight to ensure accurate and complete tax payments.

Vietnam's e-commerce market has expanded by 18 percent in 2024, reaching USD 22 billion, making it the third-largest in Southeast Asia after Indonesia and Thailand. Platforms like Shopee, Lazada, Tiki, and Sendo also compete in this rapidly growing sector. [Vietnam.net, in Vietnamese] [Reuters]

Vietnam: High-speed rail plan presented for National Assembly review

(lm) The North-South high-speed railway project, a major infrastructure initiative, is under consideration at Vietnam's ongoing 15th National Assembly session. Initially shelved in 2010 due to funding constraints, the project has resurfaced with renewed economic confidence. If approved, the high-speed rail is expected

to significantly reshape Vietnam's transportation infrastructure, with a target completion year of 2035.

The proposed rail line will span 1,541km, connecting in Hanoi with Ho Chi Minh City, crossing 20 provinces and cities. The project will require 10,827 hectares of land, relocating approximately 120,836 people, and is estimated to cost USD 67.34 billion, fully funded through public investment.

Economic growth since 2010, coupled with reduced public debt, has improved Vietnam's financial capacity to support the initiative. However, concerns remain regarding funding feasibility, station locations, and potential impacts on short-haul flights and future airport developments.

The project's design and cost estimates are undergoing scrutiny, with calls for more realistic revenue projections and thorough feasibility studies to address potential funding shortfalls and reduce reliance on foreign loans. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Processing and manufacturing sector needs to deepen global supply chain integration

(lm) Vietnam's processing and manufacturing industry has achieved significant progress in exports, yet strengthening its position in global supply chains requires coordinated efforts from policymakers and businesses. Experts highlight several structural challenges, including a heavy reliance on imported raw materials, low localization rates, outdated technologies, and limited capacity to meet international standards.

The sector has successfully diversified its markets, reaching regions such as Africa and Eastern Europe, while transitioning from raw exports to higher-value processed goods. Despite these advancements, the dependence on foreign supplies for raw materials and components continues to inflate input costs, especially during periods of global disruptions. High logistics expenses and compliance costs for international standards further strain businesses.

To enhance competitiveness, experts emphasize the importance of targeted investments in research and development to develop domestic material sources, streamline supply chains, and adopt advanced technologies. Building a skilled workforce and improving access to updated market intelligence are also critical for achieving sustained growth.

Government efforts include financial support packages, tax incentives, and training programs designed to reduce costs and assist businesses in meeting international requirements. Additionally, trade promotion activities, such as exhibitions and forums, are essential for providing market insights and fostering connections with global partners.

A concerted approach from both policymakers and businesses will be essential to address these challenges and position Vietnam's processing and manufacturing industry as a key player in global supply chains. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Dak Lak province launches USD 19 million reforestation project to combat deforestation

(lm) Vietnam's Dak Lak Province has approved a USD 19.53 million reforestation initiative to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in the Central Highlands and south-central coastal region. Supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the project aligns with the UN's REDD+ program, which targets emissions in developing countries.

The project, set to be implemented in 15 communes across four districts, will benefit over 24,000 households. Its goals include restoring forests, promoting sustainable forest management, and developing value chains for deforestation-free agricultural products. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Military jet crashes during training, pilots rescued

(lm) A Russian-made Yakovlev Yak-130 military trainer aircraft crashed during training in Binh Dinh Province on November 6, prompting a search for its two pilots. Both pilots were successfully rescued later that evening; both are reported to be in stable condition.

The search was aided by telecom provider Viettel, which used mobile signal tracking to locate the pilots. Vietnam has traditionally relied on Russian-made military equipment but has been exploring diversified arms suppliers since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. [Bangkok Post]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

Human Rights Watch accuses China on intimidating citizens in Japan

(hs) A study of Human Rights Watch (HRW) has highlighted China's efforts to intimidate Chinese nationals in Japan involved in activities critical of the Chinese government, particularly those from Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia.

The survey, conducted between June and August 2024, involved 25 individuals engaged in peaceful protests or advocacy. These individuals reported pressure from Chinese authorities to cease their activities, with some families back home contacted by Chinese police to either stop their involvement or provide information on other activists. Threats often came through phone calls or messages on platforms like WeChat, with some individuals receiving explicit warnings that their families could face repercussions if they did not stop. Chinese embassy officials in Tokyo are said to have also pressured activists to return to China, claiming it was necessary for passport renewal. One Tibetan activist was told they could not renew their passport without returning to Tibet.

Many of those interviewed expressed fear of retaliation and opted not to report the incidents to Japanese authorities, believing Japan's police would not offer protection. Some even stopped participating in politically sensitive activities due to these threats.

HRW has called on Japan to establish a system for reporting such incidents, ensuring privacy protections, criminal investigations into potential violations of

Japanese law, and safeguards against deportation or extradition. Japan should also press China to cease its harassment of its citizens abroad and ensure compliance with international human rights standards.

The report emphasizes the growing issue of "transnational repression," where governments extend control beyond their borders to suppress dissent. This is not isolated to Japan but also occurs in the US, Germany, and the Netherlands, where similar covert operations have been uncovered and shut down. [Human Rights Watch] [Japan Forward]

China sets boundaries around Scarborough Shoal, creating dispute with the Philippines

(to) On November 10, China announced official boundaries around Scarborough Shoal, a contested area in the South China Sea. This shoal, which China took control of in 2012, is claimed by both China and the Philippines. The new boundaries set the limits of its claimed territorial waters. China stated that the move follows international law, though it disregards a 2016 ruling that rejected China's claims.

The announcement came shortly after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed laws strengthening the Philippines' claims in the South China Sea. China reacted strongly, calling the Philippines' new laws a violation of its sovereignty and promising to defend its claims. [CNN]

Japan joins multinational statement against North Korea military assistance to Russia

(hs) The foreign ministers of Japan, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the High Representative of the European Union have issued a joint statement expressing grave concerns over the deployment of North Korean troops to Russia.

The ministers condemned the expanding military cooperation between North Korea and Russia, including the unlawful transfer of ballistic missiles, and stressed that it violated multiple UN Security Council resolutions.

Japan has strongly condemned North Korea's support for Russia's aggression, calling it a dangerous escalation of the conflict that threatens peace in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific region. The statement reaffirmed Japan's commitment to supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to working with international partners to respond to these developments. [NHK]

The ministers urged North Korea to cease providing military assistance to Russia, warning of the serious consequences for international peace and security. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Japan]

UK approves fighter jet with Italy and Japan

(hs) The UK has approved the continuation of the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP) with Japan and Italy, a multibillion-pound fighter jet project that had faced uncertainty amid the Labour government's strategic defense review (SDR). Ministers agreed to proceed with GCAP at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Keir Starmer on November 5, ahead of an official announcement anticipated in the coming weeks. The decision ends months of speculation and reassures partners Italy and Japan, who had raised concerns about potential UK withdrawal due to cost considerations.

Launched to bolster defense capabilities in response to increasing threats from Russia and China, the GCAP unites Japan's F-X fighter project with the UK and Italy's Tempest initiative. The program targets the delivery of a next-generation supersonic jet by 2035, with funding support and technology development from leading defense firms, including BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce, Leonardo, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

The UK's involvement in the project is anchored by a trilateral treaty signed in December 2023 (see AiR No. 51, December/2023, 3), and it has already invested over GBP 2 billion (USD 2.56 billion) into Tempest alone. However, the full costs of GCAP remain undetermined. [The Financial Times]

North Korea faces the heat at UN human rights review

(bw) North Korea's human rights practices faced intense scrutiny during the United Nations' fourth

Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva. South Korea's delegation, led by Ambassador Yun Seong-deok, condemned North Korea's "extreme militarization" and criticized the deployment of around 10,000 North Korean troops to Ukraine, calling it a "human rights violation." South Korea also urged North Korea to address the treatment of detainees, repatriated escapees, and separated families and to repeal laws limiting freedom of expression.

Most of the countries that delivered statements at the review condemned North Korea's severe human rights violations, echoing South Korea's criticisms, particularly, regarding North Korea's military involvement in Ukraine, characterizing it as aiding Russia's illegal war of aggression.

Several nations, including Russia, China, Syria, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, voiced support for North Korea however, highlighting what they called its recent human rights improvements.

North Korea, denied all allegations, claiming it has no political prisoners and arguing that detainees are "spies and terrorists." [Korea Joongang Daily]

South Korea President Yoon and NATO Chief Rutte hold talks on countering North Korean troops in Russia

(mc) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte discussed coordinated actions to address the deployment of North Korean troops in Russia on November 6. This was already the third meeting between Yoon and Rutte in the past month, following high-level meetings of South Korean, NATO and EU officials on the issue.

South Korea shared plans to host Ukraine's special envoy to strengthen information sharing and coordinate responses. Yoon expressed his willingness to maintain close dialogue with NATO on this issue.

Secretary-General Rutte also emphasized the importance of increased cooperation between NATO, South Korea and other allies and to establish a special task force in partnership with the EU to develop security strategies. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea joins discussion on expanding DEPA membership

(bw) South Korea is advancing efforts to expand the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), collaborating with other member countries to invite new participants and shape global digital trade standards, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy announced.

Chairing a working group, South Korea is preparing for Peru's potential membership and overseeing ongoing negotiations with countries including China, Canada, Costa Rica and the UAE.

As the fourth DEPA member since May, South Korea aims to establish DEPA as a leading platform for digital trade norms, covering areas like cross-border data and AI. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan and EU resolve WTO dispute

(hs) The EU and Taiwan have reached an understanding in their World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute over Taiwan's offshore wind auctions, with Taiwan agreeing to adjust its approach to address the EU's concerns regarding the treatment of imported goods and services. This development follows an exchange of letters between Sabine Weyand, the European Commission's director-general for trade, and Taiwan's Minister of Economic Affairs, Jyh-Huei Kuo, who formalised the terms of this arrangement.

Taiwan has committed to allowing greater flexibility in the advancement of projects awarded in recent auctions, addressing past implementation issues that affected offshore wind developers, including European companies. Taiwan has also agreed to remove localization requirements in future allocation rounds, ensuring these will not be eligibility or award criteria. Considering these commitments, the EU has stated that it does not intend to pursue this matter further within the WTO, provided Taiwan follows through on the agreed changes.

The EU initiated consultations with the WTO on 26 July 2024, challenging Taiwan's local content requirements for offshore wind auctions. The EU argued that these conditions unfairly favored Taiwanese goods and services over imports, which contravened WTO non-discrimination rules. By filing the complaint, the EU aimed to uphold fair competition, protecting its companies' access to international markets. Under WTO rules, any member state can contest measures it views as discriminatory to maintain trade balance and ensure a level playing field.

The EU's wind energy sector, which generated EURO 60 billion (TWD2.04 trillion) in 2024 and employed approximately 300,000 people in 2022, is set for significant growth under the REPowerEU initiative. Introduced in May 2022 to address energy market disruptions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, REPowerEU aims to reduce reliance on Russian fossil fuels, increase clean energy production, and diversify energy sources. With these targets, the sector's employment is projected to reach 936,000 by 2030. [European Commision 1] [European Commision 2]

Bangladesh: Awami League leader files ICC complaint against interim leader Yunus

(lm) Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury, a leader of the ousted Awami League and former Mayor of Sylhet, has filed a complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Netherlands against Muhammad Yunus, the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh's interim government, and 61 others. The complaint, lodged under Article 15 of the Rome Statute, accuses Yunus and members of his cabinet, along with student leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Alliance, of genocide and crimes against humanity.

In a video statement shared on the Awami League's official Facebook page, Chowdhury alleged that from August 5 to August 8, a student-led movement resulted in the persecution of Awami League members, their affiliates, and minority communities, including Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists, as well as law enforcement personnel. The complaint claims these actions amount to brutal acts of genocide and crimes against humanity.

The submission includes 800 pages of evidence, and preparations are reportedly underway to file 15,000 additional complaints from affected individuals. The filing comes in the wake of significant political upheaval in Bangladesh. On August 5, widespread protests led to the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina after over 600 deaths in clashes. Hasina fled to India, and an interim government under Yunus was installed. [Business Standard]

Rising violence in Bangladesh against Hindus draws calls for action, religious harmony

(lm) Tensions erupted in Chittagong's Hazari Gali on November 5 after a member of Jamat-e-Islami posted derogatory remarks on social media about Hinduism and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), a prominent Hindu religious organization dedicated to spreading teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and promoting spiritual practices worldwide.

Protests by the Hindu community escalated into violent clashes, prompting security forces, including the army, to intervene. Videos showed civilians being chased and beaten, while authorities dismantled CCTV cameras and fired blank rounds to disperse the crowd. Police reported filing cases against 582 individuals and arresting 49, though Hindu leaders accused security forces of disproportionately targeting their community. [India Today] [The Times of India]

This incident is part of broader concerns about minority safety in Bangladesh following the ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August. Hindus, who make up 8 percent of the population and traditionally support Hasina's Awami League, report heightened vulnerability under the interim administration led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus. While the government condemned the attacks, Hindu leaders demand stronger protections.

India has urged Bangladesh to ensure the safety of its Hindu minority, calling for decisive action against extremist elements to curb communal tensions. Similarly, the United States stressed the need for accountability and religious freedom, urging Bangladesh to hold perpetrators of violence responsible. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

Meanwhile, calls for unity and inclusivity intensified at the Kothin Chivar Dan and Buddhist Grand Rally in Dhaka. Army Chief General Waker-Uz-Zaman emphasized the importance of fostering harmony among religious communities and pledged the Army's support for maintaining communal peace. He also announced a BDT 10 million (USD 83,000) donation to the Bangladesh Buddhist Federation and called for collaboration to preserve cultural diversity and promote education in hill districts. [Dhaka Tribune 2]

At another event in Dhaka, Bangladesh Minority Watch and the Human Rights Alliance highlighted over 1,000 recent attacks on minority-owned properties, many linked to political motives. Speakers warned that the violence undermines justice, democracy, and Bangladesh's international reputation, urging immediate government action to protect minorities and ensure accountability. [Dhaka Tribune 1]

EU pledges support for Bangladesh's interim government's reform initiatives

(lm) The European Union (EU) has committed to supporting Bangladesh's interim government in implementing reforms and tackling corruption. During a meeting with Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, EU official Paola Pampaloni assured financial and technical aid, emphasizing, "The EU is with you."

Chief Adviser Yunus highlighted Bangladesh's focus on labor rights, renewable energy, and regional power connectivity involving Nepal and India. The EU officials praised Yunus's commitment to reforms, marking it as a pivotal moment for the country.

EU Ambassador Michael Miller announced plans for a European Investment Bank vice president to visit Bangladesh in January to explore investment opportunities. [The Daily Star]

BIMSTEC Energy Centre to be established in India's Bengaluru city

(vk) The BIMSTEC Secretariat and the Indian government have signed an agreement to establish the BIMSTEC Energy Centre (BEC) in Bengaluru. The BEC will manage a regional energy database, conduct feasibility studies for intra-BIMSTEC projects, and strengthen cooperation through networking among national energy agencies. It will focus on energy security, grid interconnections, renewable energy, and energy efficiency. The center will also support capacity building, cross-border investments, and infrastructure development in the energy sector.

BIMSTEC's energy collaboration dates back to the adoption of an Action Plan in 2005. The MoU for BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection has been active since 2019, with policies on electricity transmission, trade, and tariff mechanisms currently under discussion. The initiative aims to promote green energy, enhance energy security, and foster sustainable development in the Bay of Bengal region.

BIMSTEC, which includes Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, focuses on regional cooperation across seven sectors, including energy, disaster management, and sustainable development. The BEC is expected to play a pivotal role in advancing these goals. [Bss News]

Australia raises concerns with India over allegations of targeting Sikhs in Canada

(lm/ad) Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong last week raised concerns with her Indian counterpart, S. Jaishankar, over allegations that India has been targeting Sikh activists on Canadian soil. The discussions follow recent allegations from Canadian authorities, claiming that top Indian officials, including Indian Home Minister Amit Shah, were involved in a covert operation to monitor and target Sikh separatist activists in Canada. According to Canadian authorities, Indian diplomats allegedly shared information about these activists with the Indian government, which then passed it to organized crime groups to execute violent actions, such as drive-by shootings, extortion, and even assassination attempts, against Canadian citizens advocating for Sikh separatism.

This issue has escalated tensions, particularly between Canada and India. The Canadian government, with support from the United States Justice Department, recently announced criminal charges against an Indian government employee, Vikash Yadav, who was allegedly involved in a foiled plot to kill a Sikh leader in New York City. The Justice Department has connected this case to a broader, organized campaign of politically motivated attacks against Sikh activists residing in both the U.S. and Canada.

Wong expressed solidarity with the Sikh community in Australia, assuring them that they are entitled to safety and respect. At a joint press conference with Jaishankar, she underscored Australia's support for Canada's judicial process and commitment to principles such as the rule of law and sovereignty. As part of the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance, which includes Canada, the US, Britain, and New Zealand, Australia's stance reflects a growing scrutiny of India's approach to Sikh activism abroad.

Jaishankar, however, rejected these allegations, describing Canada's monitoring of Indian diplomats as "unacceptable." In a separate statement, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned recent incidents of violence near a Hindu temple in Canada, where demonstrators supporting Sikh separatism clashed with others carrying Indian national flags. Modi labeled these incidents as cowardly attempts to intimidate diplomats and urged Canada to uphold justice.

The longstanding rift between India and Canada over Sikh separatist movements has deepened following accusations that the Indian government was linked to

the assassination of Sikh activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada last year. India has consistently denied this claim and criticizes Canada for allegedly providing a platform for separatist movements, such as the Khalistan movement, which aims to establish an independent Sikh homeland. Indian officials argue that advocating for Khalistan encourages anti-Indian sentiments and violence, while Canada maintains that such advocacy is protected under free speech laws. [Associated Press]

Amid this backdrop, India criticized Canada for banning the *Australia Today* outlet's social media accounts shortly after it aired Jaishankar's remarks on Khalistani extremism. India labeled the move hypocritical, pointing out Canada's alleged double standards on free speech while accusing it of enabling separatist movements like the Khalistan campaign. [India Today]

Bhutan, India open first integrated check post in Assam

(rsv) India and Bhutan have inaugurated their first Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Darranga, Assam, marking a significant step in enhancing bilateral trade and connectivity. The facility, launched on November 7 by Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Bhutanese Prime Minister Dasho Tshering Tobgay, is strategically located 700 meters from the border.

Spanning 14.5 acres, ICP Darranga features modern infrastructure, including office complexes, parking areas, loading and unloading zones, a weighbridge, a warehouse, and residential quarters for officials. Developed by the Land Ports Authority of India, it is equipped with inspection facilities and plant quarantine systems to streamline cross-border operations. [The Hindu]

US Indo-Pacific Deputy Commander Rudd in India, Bangladesh, Nepal

(lm) Lieutenant General Joshua M. Rudd, Deputy Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), has arrived in Kathmandu for a four-day visit. Following his engagements in India and Bangladesh, Rudd, leading a four-member delegation, will meet with senior military officials, including the Chief of the Army Staff, General Ashok Sigdel.

While the visit lacks a specific agenda, Rudd is expected to visit several military training institutions, including the Birendra Peace Operations Training Center and the Nepal Army Command and Staff College. He will also attend the 249th US Marine Corps Ball during his stay.

Rudd's visit occurs amid heightened diplomatic activity, including Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's upcoming visit to China in December. The US Embassy in Kathmandu welcomed Rudd, emphasizing the ongoing US commitment to a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific region. [The Kathmandu Post]

United Nations raises alarming concerns over Pakistan's human rights practices

(sn) The United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) has released a detailed report highlighting significant human rights issues in Pakistan, urging the government to undertake critical reforms to align its practices with international standards under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

One of the central issues raised was the use of military courts to prosecute civilians. The UNHRC called for an immediate end to such practices, criticizing military courts for their lack of independence, high conviction rates, and frequent imposition of the death penalty. The committee noted the Supreme Court of Pakistan's October 2023 ruling declaring military trials of civilians unconstitutional, though the decision remains suspended. It urged Pakistan to repeal legislation permitting these trials, release all civilians detained under military court jurisdiction, and ensure fair trial standards.

The report also shed light on broader human rights violations, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and torture. Restrictions on freedom of expression, frequent Internet shutdowns, and censorship of social media were identified as persistent threats to journalists, activists, and human rights defenders. Despite Pakistan's introduction of the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act in 2021, the committee noted ongoing threats, including torture, killings, and disappearances of media professionals, and called for accountability for perpetrators.

Additionally, the UNHRC raised alarm over escalating violence and mob attacks against minorities, including Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadis. The destruction of places of worship and the application of

blasphemy laws, which often carry the death penalty, were highlighted as particularly concerning. The committee urged Pakistan to amend its blasphemy laws to comply with international human rights standards and end the misuse of cybercrime laws to target individuals accused of blasphemy.

The UNHRC emphasized the need for Pakistan to hold accountable those responsible for violations, provide compensation to affected parties, and ensure the protection of minority groups, journalists, and activists. While the committee's recommendations are not legally binding, they serve as a significant diplomatic tool to encourage Pakistan to uphold its international human rights obligations. [ANI] [Arab News]

Pakistan states it can bridge the gap between the United States and China

(sn) Pakistan's Ambassador to Washington, Rizwan Saeed Sheikh, stated on November 7 that Pakistan could act as a bridge between the United States and China, offering a platform for dialogue amid escalating tensions between the two global powers. While Pakistan values its defence and counter-terrorism partnership with the US, its deepening economic ties with China, primarily through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), underscore its strategic alignment with Beijing.

Sheikh's remarks coincided with Pakistan reaffirming its "all-weather" friendship with China. Islamabad emphasized that Pakistan's relationship with China is "strategic and a source of stability" and would remain unaffected by global developments, including Donald Trump's election as US president.

Simultaneously, Islamabad has sought to strengthen ties with Washington. Despite challenges, such as allegations of supporting the Taliban and former Prime Minister Imran Khan's claims of US interference in his removal, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's government has prioritized rebuilding relations with the US, balancing its partnerships with both nations. [The Times Of India] [Arab News]

Pakistan requests USD 13 million from WHO for climate resilience training

(tf) Pakistan is requesting a USD 13 million grant from the World Health Organization (WHO) to enhance

climate resilience training within health systems. This demand follows a vulnerability assessment survey conducted with the support of international donors. Dr. Mehreen Mujtaba, Director of Nutrition at the Ministry of National Health Services, announced plans to introduce a National Health Adaptation Plan after a conference evaluating climate-related health risks across various provinces. The conference, titled Building Resilient Health Systems in the Wake of Climate Crisis in South Asia, emphasized the importance of climate adaptation in health planning.

Experts highlighted the health risks posed by climate change, including heat-related illnesses, vector-borne diseases, and respiratory problems exacerbated by air pollution. They advocated for a comprehensive approach to integrate climate adaptation into healthcare systems, urging collaborative efforts from governments, NGOs, and the private sector. Additionally, they called for dedicated funding to support climate-resilient health infrastructure. [DAWN]

Asian Development Bank to help Pakistan build aviation fuel facility

(lm) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a USD 86.2 million technical assistance project to develop a Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) facility in Pakistan. This project aims to convert local waste resources into a high-value, environmentally friendly fuel that can be traded globally. The SAF plant will help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create skilled jobs through technology transfer and training. The project will also improve the existing illegal gutter oil market, boosting Pakistan's role in the global SAF industry.

The facility will be developed by Bio Tech Energy (BTE) on a site adjacent to its existing biodiesel operations. The SAF production plant will have a capacity of 200 kilotons per annum (KTPA), with 85 percent of the output being SAF and the remaining 15 percent bio-naphtha. The project will expand feedstock collection across major cities, contributing to Pakistan's sustainable fuel efforts. [DAWN]

Seychelles' President Ramkalawan receives 2024 Africa Freedom Prize

(mt) Seychelles President Wavel Ramkalawan was awarded the 2024 Africa Freedom Prize by the

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Johannesburg, recognizing his leadership in advancing democracy and freedom. Reflecting on Seychelles' transition from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy, Ramkalawan emphasized the importance of sticking to principles, even in difficult times, and assured that he would accept the results of the 2025 election peacefully if he loses. [Seychelles News Agency]

Before receiving the award, President Ramkalawan engaged with the press in Johannesburg, discussing Seychelles' economic liberalization, sustainable development, and governance, noting the nation's top ranking on the Mo Ibrahim Index. He also highlighted Seychelles' leadership in tourism, environmental sustainability, and its position as Africa's leader in the UN Human Development Index.

During his visit, the President toured the Seychelles Mission in Pretoria, engaging with staff and the Seychellois community, including two students studying in the city. [SC Statehouse 1] [SC Statehouse 2]

IMF delegation to assess Sri Lanka's progress under EFF program as reserves rise by 7.9 percent in October

(lm/sf) An International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation is set to visit Sri Lanka soon for the third review under the country's Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program. Led by IMF Senior Mission Chief Peter Brewer, the team will evaluate Sri Lanka's economic policies, reform progress, and compliance with previous agreements. economic recovery efforts.

In March 2023, the IMF approved a 48-month extended arrangement under the EFF for Sri Lanka, amounting to approximately USD 3 billion. The program aims to restore macroeconomic stability and debt sustainability, safeguard financial stability, and implement structural reforms to unlock the country's growth potential. The first review was completed in December 2023, and the second in June 2024, with each review facilitating the release of subsequent loan installments.

The upcoming review is therefore critical for the release of the next installment of the IMF loan, which is vital for the country's economic recovery efforts. [Daily Mirror]

Coinciding with the IMF review, Sri Lanka's official reserves have increased by 7.9 percent in October 2024, reaching USD 6.46 billion (LKR 1.9 trillion), compared to USD 5.99 billion in September. Foreign currency reserves, the primary component, rose by 7.3 percent to USD 6.38 billion (LKR 1.89 trillion), while gold reserves increased by 5.8 percent to USD 42 million (LKR 12.6 billion). These figures include proceeds from a USD 1.4 billion swap with the People's Bank of China (PBoC), which is subject to usability conditions. [Ada Derana]

India-Russia joint bid for Sri Lanka's Mattala airport management stalls

(lm) Sri Lanka's plan to transfer the management of the China-built Mattala International Airport to an India-Russia joint venture appears to be abandoned due to legal challenges, according to a government source.

The previous administration had proposed handing over management to India's Shaurya Aeronautics Pvt Ltd and Russia's Airports of Regions. However, under the Civil Aviation Authority Act, only Airport and Aviation Services (Pvt) Ltd (AASL) is legally authorized to manage Sri Lanka's airports. The Attorney General's clearance for the draft agreement became unnecessary as the project has stalled, with the foreign companies reportedly disengaging from the process.

The source confirmed that Sri Lanka is reluctant to transfer airport management to foreign entities. A new government, expected after the upcoming general election, will evaluate alternative development models for the airport, which was constructed with Chinese financial assistance near the Hambantota Port.

The Mattala airport, known as the "world's emptiest airport," has long faced operational and financial challenges despite its strategic location adjacent to Chinese infrastructure projects. [Daily Mirror]

Brunei holds 9th AIMS Steering Committee meeting

(ga) The Ministry of Education Brunei Darussalam hosted the 9th Steering Committee Meeting of the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) program from November 6 to 7 in a hybrid format. The meeting, co-organized with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre

for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED), focused on advancing innovative mobility within the AIMS program.'

Key objectives included enhancing AIMS's roles and functions, addressing technical challenges, and exploring innovative mobility options, in line with the Southeast Asia-Europe Mobility for Sustainable Development initiative. The discussions further centered on harmonizing regional mobility systems, advancing internationalization processes, and developing resources and information to support AIMS growth.

Representatives from AIMS member countries, including Brunei, the Philippines, Cambodia, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand, participated in the meeting. [Ministry of Education Brunei Darussalam]

Cambodia to host 11th plenary session of International Parliament for Tolerance and Peace

(ma) The Cambodian National Assembly (NA) will host the 11th plenary session of the International Parliament for Tolerance and Peace (IPTP) from November 23 to 26 in Phnom Penh under the theme "In Pursuit of Peace, Reconciliation, and Tolerance." This gathering aims to culminate in the "Phnom Penh Declaration" and a "Peace Charter for Humanity and the Planet," addressing critical areas such as conflict prevention, peacebuilding, transitional justice, post-conflict reconstruction, and food security in the context of climate change. The official opening on November 24 will feature Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen, NA President Khuon Sudary, and Prime Minister Hun Manet, with Hun Sen delivering a keynote speech.

The session will include five main committee meetings focused on peace and reconciliation, international cooperation, food and environmental security, science and technology, and law and justice. Leng Penglong, Secretary-General of the National Assembly, noted that the conference will bring together international parliamentary institutions to foster peace, tolerance, and sustainable development through global cooperation. The two-day agenda will cover global disarmament, peacebuilding, and tolerance, as well as multilateralism, partnerships for collective security, and sustainable connectivity. [Khmer Times]

Mekong region urged to avoid external divisive influences

(mfr) At the eighth Greater Mekong Subregion Summit in Kunming, Yunnan province last week, Premier Li Qiang met with the leaders of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to discuss further regional cooperation. The summit focused on enhancing socioeconomic development and regional integration, with an emphasis on areas like trade, investment, agriculture, and poverty reduction.

China's four-point proposal for future cooperation includes promoting multilateralism, resisting "decoupling" and supply-chain disruptions, improving regional connectivity, and addressing transnational crime. It also stresses collaboration in science, technology, innovation, climate change, and disaster prevention.

Trade between China and the Mekong countries exceeded USD 200 billion in the first half of the year, showing a 12 percent year-on-year increase. China has remained the region's leading trading partner, highlighting the importance of continued regional cooperation.

However, the summit also acknowledged external forces seeking to disrupt this collaboration, urging regional countries to stay united in their efforts toward shared development. [Khmer Times]

Indonesia seeks to become world's largest palm oil producer by 2025

(gk) At the 20th Palm Oil Conference in Bali, Deputy Minister of Agriculture Sudaryono announced that the Ministry of Agriculture aims to make Indonesia the world's largest palm oil producer by 2025. This goal would enable Indonesia to influence global palm oil prices and strengthen its national economy. To achieve this, Sudaryono urged farmers and palm oil entrepreneurs to focus on the sector, highlighting efforts to intensify the downstream processing of palm oil, such as producing higher-value products like B50 biodiesel. B50 refers to the policy of blending 50% palm oil in Indonesia's biodiesel.

At the same conference, Indonesia welcomed the European Union's decision to delay the implementation of the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR), which mandates that commodities like beef, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, and rubber be

"deforestation-free" to enter the EU market. This delay gives Indonesia's palm oil sector more time to prepare for full compliance while addressing challenges like stagnant production, complex regulations, and shifting global trade patterns.

By August 2024, Indonesia's palm oil production reached 34.7 million tons, slightly down from the 36.2 million tons produced in 2023. The government is working to increase production and strengthen sustainable practices, with plans to expand the biodiesel program to B50 by 2026. [Antara] [Jakarta Globe]

United Nations issues urgent call for action on women's rights in Laos

(mt) The UN has expressed profound concern regarding the escalating situation of human trafficking and gender-based violence targeting women in Laos. The UN urged the Lao PDR government to prioritize the protection and empowerment of women. The UN's statement highlights a significant rise in human trafficking cases, with women as the primary victims. Additionally, the UN expressed alarm over the widespread instances of gender-based violence that continue to plague the lives of Lao women.

To effectively address these pressing issues, the UN has outlined several key areas requiring focused action such as strengthening legal frameworks, promoting women's empowerment, ensuring access to justice for victims and upholding the rule of law and supporting civil society. [Laos Post]

Laos's national socio-economic development plan discussed in talk with UN Resident Coordinator

(mt) The Ministry of Planning and Investment, led by Deputy Minister Phonevanh Outhavong and UN Resident Coordinator Bakhodir Burkhanov in Laos met with development partners on November 5 to review the content of Laos' 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2026-2030.

The discussions aimed to ensure that the plan aligns with Laos' current development challenges and can effectively address chronic economic issues, including inflation, public debt, and low productivity.

The meeting is part of preparations for the Round Table Implementation Meeting in Vientiane on November 14, which will further refine the plan's implementation strategy. [Vientiane Times]

Laos hosts international meeting on combatting illicit drug issues

(mt) The Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (LCDC), the Embassy of Japan, and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) co-hosted a High-Level Meeting in Vientiane on November 8.

The meeting was co-chaired by Lao Deputy Minister of Public Security Pol. Maj. Gen. Khamking Phouilamanivong, Japan's Ambassador to Laos Tsutomu Koizumi, and UNODC Regional Representative Masood Karimipour.

During this meeting, the LCDC, UNODC, and development partners discussed the current state of drug control efforts, reviewed progress, and identified key challenges. The session also focused on the implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan, addressing emerging issues, and reviewing drafts of the reports from both groups. [Lao News Agency]

Laos' foreign minister attends ASEAN-Korea summit

(mt) Lao Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Saleumxay Kommasith participated on November 8 in the International Conference on ASEAN-Korea Partnership, celebrating 35 years of cooperation. Saleumxay emphasized the significance of ASEAN-Korea relations, particularly the recent elevation to a comprehensive strategic partnership, and explored opportunities for deeper collaboration in trade, investment, tourism, and cultural exchange. He also met with South Korea's Foreign Minister to review joint initiatives, including support in healthcare and UXO removal, while planning celebrations for the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Laos and South Korea. [Lao News Agency]

Laos strengthens diplomatic and economic ties with Myanmar and Vietnam at regional summits in Kunming

(mt) On November 6-, during the 8th Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Summit, the 11th Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Vietnam (CLMV) Summit, and the 10th Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) Summit in Kunming, China, Prime Minister of Laos Sonexay Siphandone held bilateral discussions with Myanmar's Prime Minister, Sen. Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, and Vietnam's Prime Minister, Pham Minh Chinh.

In talks with Myanmar's Prime Minister, the two leaders expressed mutual respect for the longstanding friendship and cooperation between Laos and Myanmar. They agreed to task their Ministries of Foreign Affairs with planning commemorative events for the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2025. Additionally, both leaders identified potential areas for enhanced collaboration, particularly in cross-border trade, labor, energy, connectivity, and tourism, while also addressing regional issues of shared concern. [Lao News Agency 1]

Prime Minister Sonexay also engaged in discussions with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, where they highlighted the depth of Laos-Vietnam relations and ongoing collaboration. The leaders reviewed outcomes from recent state visits and the Lao Vietnamese Politburo Meeting, agreeing to prioritize infrastructure projects, including the Vientiane-Hanoi Expressway and partnerships in finance and energy. [Lao News Agency 2]

EU imposes sanctions on a Myanmar militia involved in online scam operations

(nf) The European Union (EU) has imposed a new round of sanctions on Myanmar, targeting a militia aligned with the military junta that is reportedly running large-scale online scam operations affecting both the population of Myanmar and citizens of neighboring countries.

The latest sanctions target three individuals and the Chit Linn Myaing (CLM) Group, a company linked to the Karen Border Guard Force (BGF), which operates along the Thai-Myanmar border in Karen State. CLM and its founder, Colonel Saw Chit Thu, have profited from scam operations in Myawaddy Township, including the notorious Shwe Kokko, which has become a hotspot for transnational crime, including online fraud, drug trafficking, and human trafficking. The area is also plagued by severe human rights abuses, including forced labor and torture. [The Diplomat]

The EU statement highlighted that CLM's activities pose a serious threat to the peace, security, and stability of Myanmar and the region. CLM is collaborating with Hong Kong-based Yatai International Holding Group on the USD 15 billion New Yatai City project in Shwe Kokko, initially based on casinos and now increasingly linked to digital scams that exploit workers in forced labor. [Karen News]

The sanctions include asset freezes, travel restrictions to the EU, and a prohibition on providing funds or economic resources to the listed individuals. With these measures, the EU has now sanctioned 106 individuals and 22 entities in Myanmar, as part of its ongoing response to human rights violations and instability following the 2021 military coup. The EU has condemned the Tatmadaw's involvement in these abuses, including torture, gender-based violence, and the persecution of civil society and ethnic minorities. [European Council of the European Union]

Philippines moves to safeguard maritime interests amid rising South China Sea tensions

(alm) Amid rising tensions in the South China Sea, the Philippines has taken significant steps to safeguard its maritime sovereignty. On November 8, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed two key maritime laws—the Philippine Maritime Zones Act (Republic Act 12064) and the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act (RA 12065)—to solidify the country's control over contested waters, particularly in the West Philippine Sea (WPS), which is part of the broader South China Sea dispute.

The new laws define the Philippines' maritime entitlements, establish designated sea lanes, and assert control over areas claimed by China, which lays an expansive claim to nearly the entire South China Sea. The Philippine Maritime Zones Act aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal ruling, which invalidated China's territorial claims in the region. It reaffirms Philippine sovereignty over its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and territorial waters, allowing the country to regulate foreign passage within its maritime zones.

In response, China condemned the legislation, accusing the Philippines of infringing on its territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. Beijing rejected the 2016 ruling and vowed to take "all necessary measures" to defend its claims, continuing its military

buildup on artificial islands within the Philippine EEZ. [Reuters]

The enactment of these laws has also raised concerns in Malaysia, particularly over the *Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes Act*, which could potentially affect Malaysia's maritime rights in areas like the Balabac Strait. However, the United States expressed strong support for the Philippines, praising the laws as consistent with international law and reinforcing the country's right to assert its sovereignty. Washington reaffirmed its commitment to defend the Philippines under the Mutual Defense Treaty in the event of armed conflict in the South China Sea. [New Straits Times]

The United States, however, expressed strong support for the Philippines, praising the new laws as a routine measure that clarifies Philippine maritime law. Washington emphasized that the laws are consistent with international law and the 2016 ruling, reinforcing the Philippines' right to assert its sovereignty. The US reiterated its commitment to defend the Philippines under the Mutual Defense Treaty in the event of armed attacks in the South China Sea, underscoring the ongoing tensions in the region. [one news]

In tandem with these legal measures, the Philippine military has been enhancing its defense capabilities. On November 6, the Philippine Navy SEALs and Marines conducted a simulated island seizure exercise at Kota Island in the disputed waters. This drill, part of the AJEX DAGIT-PA 08-2024 exercise, involved rigid-hull inflatable boats, new Acero-class fast patrol gunboats, helicopters, and air-dropped supplies. Chinese warships observed the exercise from a distance, adding to the realism of the operation. The exercise marked a shift towards defending the country's maritime territories in response to China's growing assertiveness in the region. [USNI News] [Associated Press]

As part of its broader defense modernization efforts, the Philippines also plans to acquire intermediate-range missile launchers from the United States, a move likely to escalate tensions with China. This follows the recent deployment of a Typhon missile launcher during joint military exercises in April. The acquisition is part of the Philippines' push to strengthen its defense capabilities, including other modern weapons like BrahMos anti-ship missiles. [Financial Times]

Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Manuel Romualdez expressed confidence that U.S. support for the Philippines would continue, even under a potential second term for Donald Trump. Romualdez highlighted

bipartisan backing in Washington for military cooperation, economic ties, and security commitments. Since President Marcos took office, the Philippines has increased U.S. access to military bases, from five to nine, some of which are strategically positioned facing the disputed waters of the South China Sea. These bases are receiving significant U.S. investment, including USD 128 million for infrastructure upgrades and a USD 500 million pledge for military and coast guard support.

Despite the rising tensions, Romualdez reiterated that the Philippines is committed to resolving disputes with China through peaceful diplomacy. While the Philippines continues to assert its sovereignty over its maritime territories, it is not at war with China and remains open to dialogue. Romualdez emphasized the importance of keeping the South China Sea free, peaceful, and stable, given the region's strategic significance for global trade. [Reuters]

Complaints filed against Philippine ex-president Duterte, former top cops UN human rights body

(lm/rv) The families of labor organizers and activists killed during the controversial 2021 "Bloody Sunday" police raids in the Calabarzon region have submitted a complaint to the United Nations Human Rights Committee, accusing former President Rodrigo Duterte and top police officials of violating the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The complaints, filed on November 8, call for accountability over the unlawful killings during the raids.

The families allege that the police operations were premeditated, with the goal of killing activists under the cover of legitimate law enforcement action. On March 5, 2021, Duterte allegedly ordered a crackdown on communist rebels, which the victims argue led to the violent police operations on March 7, 2021. Nine people were killed, including labor leader Manny Asuncion and activists Ana Evangelista and Ariel Evangelista. The raids, carried out under the Duterte administration's anti-insurgency policies, have drawn criticism for their brutality.

Despite efforts to seek justice in the Philippines, the families claim the government has failed to provide adequate protection and accountability. The Department of Justice dismissed murder charges against 17 police officers involved, and witnesses and survivors have faced intimidation. As a result, the families are now calling on the UNHRC to hold the

Philippines accountable for breaching its ICCPR obligations and to recommend measures to protect witnesses.

This complaint supplements ongoing investigations by the International Criminal Court (ICC) into Duterte's war on drugs. The UN body is expected to issue a resolution within six months. Additionally, the families have appealed to the Philippine House Quad Committee to expand its inquiry into extrajudicial killings to include the Bloody Sunday raids. [The Star] [GMA News Online] [The Straits Times]

Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong frets over trade friction as world awaits Trump's return

(lm) Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong expressed concern over rising global trade tensions as the world braces for Donald Trump's return to the United States presidency. Speaking at his first press conference since August, Wong addressed the potential impact of Trump's economic policies, including threats of imposing massive tariffs on foreign goods. Trump has vowed to introduce a 20 percent tariff on all imports and up to 60 percent on Chinese goods, which could disrupt global trade.

Wong emphasized that Singapore, as an open and trade-dependent economy, would be particularly vulnerable to these policies. He highlighted that trade accounts for three times Singapore's GDP, and any global trade friction could have adverse effects on the nation's economy.

Despite the concerns, Wong reaffirmed Singapore's strong bilateral ties with the US, citing their free trade agreement as a "gold standard" for such pacts. He also pointed to long-standing defense cooperation between the two nations.

However, Wong stressed that global trade disputes should be addressed through multilateral channels like the World Trade Organization (WTO), urging for a revitalization of the WTO to better manage these tensions. He acknowledged that, under the current US administration, pushing trade issues to the WTO agenda had been challenging but reiterated Singapore's commitment to pursuing this path. [The Star]

Thailand’s Prime Minister Paetongtarn pitches '3Cs' approach, emphasizes food security at Mekong summit

(lm) Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra presented a comprehensive vision for regional prosperity at the eighth Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Summit and the 10th Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (Acmecs) summit in Kunming, China. Focusing on three key pillars—connectivity, competitiveness, and community—she outlined strategies to strengthen the region’s growth through innovation, collaboration, and inclusive development.

During her plenary session at the GMS Summit, Paetongtarn emphasized the importance of connectivity in fostering regional integration. She highlighted Thailand's progress with initiatives such as the Bangkok-Vientiane international train service, the development of Laem Chabang Port, and plans to construct Lanna and Andaman airports, all aimed at enhancing the movement of goods and people across the region.

On competitiveness, Paetongtarn reiterated Thailand's commitment to digital transformation, pushing toward a cashless society through platforms like PromptPay and cross-border QR code payments. She also underscored the need for competitiveness-driven innovation to help countries thrive in the changing global economy.

In addressing the "community" aspect, the Prime Minister stressed the importance of strengthening social safety nets and ensuring inclusive development. She also reiterated Thailand’s support for the GMS Gender Strategy and called for further efforts to improve education access and social stability across the region.

In addition to the 3Cs approach, Paetongtarn placed significant emphasis on food security, a critical regional concern. She highlighted Thailand’s role in improving food security through innovation and technology, ensuring that the country can contribute to global solutions. She also called for enhanced cooperation on environmental issues, such as floods, droughts, and transboundary air pollution, which require regional collaboration and shared experiences.

The summit, attended by leaders from China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and representatives from the Asian Development Bank, provided a platform for discussions on reducing regional disparities, leveraging digital transformation,

and addressing critical challenges like disaster prevention and management. Paetongtarn expressed Thailand's interest in learning from neighboring countries to further enhance its disaster management systems, especially in light of the recent flooding in Mae Sai, Chiang Rai. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand's Prime Minister to push FTAAP deal at 30th APEC Summit

(lm) Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra will advocate for a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) at the 30th APEC Summit in Lima, Peru, from November 14 to 16. The FTAAP aims to promote sustainable growth, innovation, and inclusivity across the region. Thailand plans to leverage the FTAAP to open more trade and investment opportunities, with a focus on technology and economic growth.

At the summit, Paetongtarn will meet with business leaders, discuss trade opportunities with Peruvian and Chilean leaders, and promote people-to-people exchanges through Thai soft power. She will also meet with representatives from companies like TikTok, Microsoft, and Google. Before the summit, she will meet with Thai diplomats in Los Angeles. [Bangkok Post]

China Tourism Academy plans to boost ASEAN-China tourism with Thailand as key hub

(bk) The China Tourism Academy is developing a plan to enhance tourism between China and ASEAN, with Thailand serving as a tourism hub. Discussions were held between the academy's president and the Association of Thai Travel Agents to leverage research for the plan's development. The initiative aligns with Chinese President Xi Jinping's policy to position China as a leader in tourism, focusing on both economic growth and quality of life improvements.

The academy aims to collaborate with public and private sectors to provide accurate research for tourism development. A team of 100 researchers from China and ASEAN countries will study how to promote this collaboration. The plan is expected to benefit over 2 billion people in both regions.

Once the plan's framework is finalized, it will be proposed to the Chinese government, with an MOU

signing anticipated in 2025 during the 50th anniversary of Thailand-China relations. [The Nation]

Vietnam's Prime Minister proposes innovation-driven economic corridors at Greater Mekong summit

(hn) Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Thi Anh Xuan participated in the 8th Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Summit in Kunming, China, emphasizing the need for innovation-driven development to enhance regional connectivity and sustainability.

The summit, attended by leaders from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and China, alongside representatives from the Asian Development Bank and international organizations, reflected on three decades of regional collaboration, which has yielded significant advancements in infrastructure, energy, and telecommunications. These achievements include over 12,500 kilometers of roads, 1,000 kilometers of railways, 3,000 MW of electricity generation, and 2,600 kilometers of power transmission lines. Since 2021, the GMS has mobilized USD 133 billion for more than 500 development projects, fostering regional trade and connecting remote areas to major economic centers.

The summit's theme, "Towards a Better Community through Innovation-driven Development," underscored the importance of leveraging technological advancements for green transition, digital transformation, and improved connectivity. Chinese Premier Li Qiang highlighted innovation as a growth catalyst and announced initiatives such as multi-entry Mekong-Lancang visas to facilitate mobility within the region.

Prime Minister Xuan proposed a new framework for "new-generation economic corridors" that aligns with global trends and addresses regional demands. He advocated for corridors centered on technological innovation to address institutional and technological gaps, improve resource capacity, and enhance connectivity across multiple sectors. He stressed the need for these corridors to stimulate economic growth by fostering investments in emerging fields such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, clean energy, and digital platforms, while revitalizing traditional industries like agriculture and transportation. Moreover, he called for these corridors to prioritize environmental sustainability and inclusivity, ensuring economic growth complements climate action, disaster management, and resource preservation.

The summit concluded with the adoption of a Joint Statement and the GMS Innovation Strategy for Development 2030, as well as six additional agreements on issues such as climate and environmental protection, investment, digital trade, and gender equality. Concurrently, a forum of governors and mayors from provinces and cities along the Economic Corridor emphasized the importance of local-level collaboration to sustain regional development. [The Nation] [VnExpress] [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam's Prime Minister Chinh acknowledges UN's key role in supporting nation's development

(hn) Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chính has thanked the United Nations (UN) for its critical support in Vietnam's development, including overcoming embargoes, advancing integration, combating climate change, and disaster recovery.

In a meeting with UN Resident Coordinator Pauline Tamesis and UN representatives on November 10, Chính reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment to independence, multilateralism, and global collaboration for peace and sustainable development. He proposed further cooperation in Vietnam's strategic priorities of institutions, infrastructure, and human resources, aligning with its goals to achieve upper-middle-income status by 2030 and developed country status by 2045.

UN representatives praised Vietnam's contributions to global initiatives and pledged continued support in areas like digital transformation, climate action, energy transition, and public health, further strengthening their partnership for Vietnam's sustainable development. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam seeks increased ADB support for green, digital, and major development initiatives

(hn) Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, during a meeting with Asian Development Bank (ADB) President Masatsugu Asakawa in Kunming, China, on November 6, called for increased ADB financial support for major infrastructure projects and private sector growth. Chinh proposed larger-scale financing for initiatives in renewable energy, digital

transformation, and strategic infrastructure, while addressing challenges like erosion in the Mekong Delta.

He emphasized policies to integrate Vietnam's private sector into global supply chains with ADB's backing. Asakawa reaffirmed ADB's commitment to Vietnam's green transition, infrastructure development, and net-zero emissions goal by 2050. Both sides agreed to enhance cooperation and expedite project implementation to achieve shared development goals. [Bao Dien Tu Chinh Phu, in Vietnamese]

Bangladesh: Four BNP leaders visit China at CCP's invitation

(lm) A four-member delegation from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) departed for Beijing on November 7 at the invitation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The team, led by BNP Vice Chairman Asaduzzaman Ripon, includes Joint Secretary General Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel, Organising Secretary Anindya Islam Amit, and Media Cell member Mahmuda Habiba.

The delegation will participate in the CCP-hosted event, "Political Party Plus" Cooperation, running from November 7 to 16, which brings together political leaders from around the world. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh avoids further Adani power cuts with new payment assurances

(lm) Bangladesh has narrowly avoided further power supply cuts from India's Adani Group after providing a new USD 173 million letter of credit and assurances to clear its USD 850 million electricity bill backlog. Adani, which operates a 1,600 MW coal-fired plant in Jharkhand supplying power to Bangladesh, had earlier reduced electricity exports to 520-735 MW from its peak of 1,400-1,500 MW, citing unpaid dues.

Since July, Bangladesh has ramped up payments to Adani, including a total of USD 204 million by early November, in a bid to address the arrears. The finalized letter of credit on November 6 resolved disputes over the issuing bank and allowed electricity deliveries to continue. However, most dues remain unsettled, and penalties loom if payments are not cleared by the end of the current fiscal year in March 2025.

The payment crisis underscores broader economic difficulties for Bangladesh, exacerbated by declining foreign reserves and rising costs of imports such as coal and gas. The interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has sought financial assistance from lenders like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Asian Development Bank to stabilize the economy.

The energy crisis highlights Bangladesh's reliance on imported power, particularly from Adani, which supplies 10 percent of the country's electricity. Domestic coal-based plants, such as Matarbari and Rampal, have halved production due to coal shortages linked to dollar scarcity, while gas-based plants face reduced natural gas availability.

The government has instructed domestic plants to maintain output and is leveraging lower winter electricity demand to temporarily manage the shortfall. Additionally, Bangladesh plans to commission its first nuclear power plant in December, a USD 12.65 billion project financed with Russian assistance, to diversify its energy mix and reduce reliance on costly imports.

Adani's 2015 agreement with the previous Sheikh Hasina administration is under review by the interim government, which has criticized such contracts as opaque and potentially unfavorable. Despite calls for renegotiation, Adani has maintained a firm stance on its contractual rights, signaling its readiness to terminate the deal unilaterally if payments remain delayed.

The energy dispute reflects the broader geopolitical and economic shifts following Hasina's ousting in August. Energy Adviser Muhammad Fouzul Kabir Khan emphasized that Bangladesh would not allow any supplier to "hold us hostage," while continuing negotiations with Adani to ensure uninterrupted power supply.

While Adani has agreed to continue power deliveries for now, the crisis underscores the fragility of Bangladesh's energy and financial infrastructure. The country's heavy dependence on imported energy, coupled with strained resources, highlights the urgent need for transparent, sustainable energy policies. [Asia Business Outlook] [BBC] [Dhaka Tribune] [Financial Times]

20 Bangladeshi fishermen released by Myanmar's Arakan Army after three days in captivity

(lm) Twenty Bangladeshi fishermen and 15 boats detained by Myanmar's Arakan Army were released on November 7 and handed over to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) following negotiations. They were detained after accidentally crossing into Myanmar waters near Naikongdia while fishing in the Bay of Bengal. [Dhaka Tribune]

Japanese companies face ongoing business challenges in Bangladesh despite government change

(asa) A recent survey by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) has highlighted major challenges for Japanese companies in Bangladesh, with only 61.2 percent considering business expansion in 2023, down from 71.6 percent in 2022. Japanese companies operating in Bangladesh continue to face difficulties due to procedural complexities, even after the change of government. The survey, conducted in late September by the Japanese Commerce and Industry Association in Dhaka (JCIAD), found that taxation and customs clearance procedures, visa and work permits, financial regulations, and administrative hurdles remain pressing concerns. [The Financial Express]

Companies noted challenges in processing overseas remittances, opening LCs, and navigating lengthy bureaucratic procedures, which they claim delay business operations. Despite the growth of Japanese businesses in Bangladesh, JETRO warns that the current environment lags regional peers in efficiency. JETRO has engaged with Bangladeshi authorities, such as the National Board of Revenue and Bangladesh Bank, presenting reform proposals aimed at fostering a consistent, transparent, and efficient regulatory landscape to support foreign direct investment. The 3Cs approach—consistent policies, corruption-free governance, and competitive tax and financial systems—was proposed to enhance Bangladesh's attractiveness to Japanese investors. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh's interim leader seeks Singapore's help to recover laundered funds and lower labor costs

(lm) Bangladesh's interim leader, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has sought Singapore's cooperation in recovering billions of dollars siphoned from Bangladesh and reducing the cost of recruiting Bangladeshi migrant workers. The appeal was made

during a meeting with Singapore's Ambassador to Bangladesh, Derek Loh.

Yunus urged Singapore to assist in tracking and recovering laundered funds and proposed a collaborative framework to make migration more affordable for workers, enabling higher remittances. Ambassador Loh pledged Singapore's support and suggested digitizing Bangladesh's recruitment system to reduce exploitation and human trafficking risks.

The meeting also covered trade, investment, shipping, education, and healthcare, with Yunus highlighting Bangladesh's recent economic recovery and readiness for business. Discussions included the prospect of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and Singapore's expertise in water treatment and waste-to-energy management. Yunus requested Singapore's backing for Bangladesh's bid to become an ASEAN sectoral dialogue partner, receiving a positive response. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh's army chief meets Deputy Commander of US Indo-Pacific Command

(lm) Deputy Commander of the US Indo-Pacific Command, Lt Gen Joshua M. Rudd, led a five-member delegation to meet Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff General Waker-Uz-Zaman at the Army Headquarters in Dhaka last week. Key topics included strengthening ties between the armed forces of both nations, enhancing professional skills, and collaborating on humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HADR). During the visit, the delegation participated in a briefing on HADR, addressing the challenges and capabilities needed to manage natural disasters in the Indo-Pacific region. Discussions emphasized disaster preparedness, capacity building, and coordinated efforts for rapid recovery in times of crisis. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh calls for direct maritime link with Norway to boost trade

(vk) S Bangladesh's Shipping, Textiles, and Jute Adviser Brigadier General (Retd) Dr. M Sakhawat Hussain has proposed establishing a direct maritime communication link with Norway to reduce shipping time and costs significantly. During a meeting with Norwegian Ambassador Hakon Arald Gulbrandsen on November 10, the adviser highlighted the inefficiency of current transshipment routes, which take 40 to 45

days to reach EU countries from Chattogram port. A direct route to Norway could cut transit time to 15 days and average delivery time to less than 23 days, with notable reductions in freight costs.

The adviser emphasized the potential for a special shipping agreement between the two nations and invited Norwegian investment in Bangladesh's expanding port infrastructure. He noted Bangladesh's strategic location as a growing hub for international trade, with ongoing development at Mongla and Payra ports and the construction of a deep-sea port at Matarbari.

Ambassador Gulbrandsen welcomed the proposals, highlighting Norway's long-standing ties with Bangladesh and the interest of Norwegian companies in collaborating in shipping and other sectors. He expressed interest in projects like ship electrification, lighthouse construction, and dockyard development, citing his recent visit to Chattogram port and plans to explore other Bangladeshi ports. [Bss News]

Bangladesh's Chief Justice reaffirms commitment to rule of law, human rights in meeting with UK envoy

(lm) Bangladesh's Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed reaffirmed the judiciary's dedication to upholding the rule of law and protecting human rights during a meeting with UK High Commissioner Sarah Cooke at the Supreme Court.

The Chief Justice emphasized recent reforms aimed at institutionalizing judicial independence, including the creation of a judiciary-specific secretariat, transparent transfer and appointment policies for subordinate court judges, and an independent commission for appointing High Court judges. These initiatives, part of a comprehensive roadmap, seek to modernize Bangladesh's judiciary and strengthen governance.

Cooke commended these efforts, expressing optimism about their transformative potential for justice and governance in Bangladesh. She underscored the importance of bilateral collaboration in judicial development and reaffirmed the UK's willingness to support these reforms.

Chief Justice Ahmed highlighted the value of mutual cooperation in advancing judicial modernization and assured the full support of the judiciary in fostering these shared goals. The meeting reflected the commitment of both nations to strengthening judicial

frameworks and promoting justice and human rights in Bangladesh. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Libya eager to employ more Bangladeshi workers

(vk) Libya has expressed its willingness to hire more Bangladeshi manpower, including doctors and engineers, to support its national development efforts. Libyan Ambassador Abdulmutalib SM Saliman conveyed this interest during a meeting with Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus in Dhaka on November 10.

The ambassador acknowledged the significant contributions of Bangladeshi workers to Libya, particularly in agriculture, and highlighted opportunities for Bangladeshi students to enroll in Libyan universities. He admitted to ongoing salary issues for some Bangladeshi doctors working in Libya, attributing the delays to ongoing reforms, and assured resolution in due course.

Chief Adviser Yunus emphasized the importance of joint efforts to combat illegal migration and human trafficking, stressing the need for mutual cooperation. He also urged stronger bilateral ties to enhance trade and investment and inquired about the potential for importing oil from Libya for mutual benefit.

Ambassador Saliman proposed resuming air connectivity between the two nations and sought Bangladesh's support in this endeavor. [Bss News]

Bangladesh, Brazil engage in talks to boost bilateral trade

(asa) Bangladesh interim leader, Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, has urged Brazil to strengthen bilateral ties with his country, focusing on expanding trade and cooperation across various sectors. The call came during a meeting with Brazilian Ambassador Paulo Feres at the Chief Adviser's office in Dhaka on November 5.

Ambassador Feres highlighted the potential for unexplored areas of collaboration, emphasizing Brazil's USD 2.6 billion trade surplus with Bangladesh. Brazil currently exports sugar, soybeans, and raw cotton to Bangladesh while importing Bangladeshi garments worth around USD 300 million annually. The ambassador expressed Brazil's interest in increasing

imports from Bangladesh to create a more balanced trade relationship.

He also proposed exporting meat to Bangladesh as an additional protein source and identified green energy, education, defense, agriculture, and science as promising areas for future collaboration.

Yunus encouraged joint efforts to explore these opportunities and invited Brazil to send a delegation to Bangladesh's upcoming youth festival in January. Ambassador Feres lauded Bangladesh's commitment to the Global Alliance to Poverty and Hunger and reiterated Brazil's appreciation for the country's proactive role in the initiative. [Dhaka Tribune]

Bhutan commits to ending all forms of violence against children

(lm) At the first global ministerial conference on Ending Violence Against Children in Bogota, Colombia, Bhutan pledged to take a multisectoral approach to eliminate all forms of violence against children. Led by Education and Skills Development Minister Yeezang De Thapa, Bhutan committed to strengthening its child protection system, improving access to justice for child victims, enhancing mental health and social support services, and scaling up initiatives to prevent violence in schools.

The conference, held from November 7-8, gathered global governments to accelerate action towards achieving SDG 16.2, aimed at ending violence against children. According to Bhutan's National Health Survey 2023, over 80 percent of children aged 1-14 were subjected to some form of violent discipline. Nearly 30 percent of caregivers believed in physical punishment, reflecting cultural norms that accept such practices. The survey also highlighted that 18.3 percent of children experienced severe physical punishment.

Bhutan's government has committed to upscaling parenting programs, promoting positive parenting, and strengthening anti-bullying initiatives in schools nationwide by 2026. Reena Thapa, Chief Program Officer at the National Commission for Women and Children, emphasized the need for a coordinated approach to child protection, ensuring that the best interests of children are at the heart of all actions.

UNICEF Bhutan also voiced support for the government's commitments, noting the urgent need to address the widespread use of violence in child discipline. UNICEF pledged to assist Bhutan in ensuring

that every child grows up in a safe environment. [Kuensel]

Bhutan, Indonesia set to benefit from new economic partnership

(mt) A high-level Indonesian delegation, led by Ambassador Ina Hagniningtyas Krishnamurthi, visited Bhutan from November 3 to 6 to explore avenues for enhanced economic cooperation. The visit marked 13 years of diplomatic relations between the two nations, established on December 15, 2011, and focused on fostering stronger trade and investment ties in agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism.

During discussions with Bhutanese officials and the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Ambassador Krishnamurthi emphasized the untapped potential for collaboration. She highlighted Indonesia's USD 1.3 billion investments in India as a resource Bhutan could leverage to explore business opportunities.

In 2023, Bhutan imported goods worth BTN 248.75 million (USD 3.1 million) from Indonesia, primarily IT equipment, mechanical appliances, and textiles, while exporting minimal quantities of cordyceps. The ambassador urged Bhutanese businesses to participate in the annual Indonesian Trade Expo, a major Southeast Asian event featuring 1,500-2,000 exhibitors in sectors such as food and beverages, manufacturing, services, and technology.

The Indonesian delegation also suggested that Bhutan streamline its business regulations, including easing access to land, finance, and tax incentives, to attract foreign direct investment. They noted that shared agricultural strengths present significant opportunities for collaboration. [Kuensel]

Darranga Immigration Check Post opens to boost tourism in Eastern Bhutan

(mt) The Darranga Immigration Check Post (ICP) in Assam, India, officially opened last week, allowing international tourists to enter and exit from the eastern Bhutanese border town of Samdrupjongkhar. This new facility, which operates 24/7, is expected to enhance cross-border tourism and connectivity, facilitating travel to lesser-explored regions of Bhutan like Trashigang, Mongar, and Lhuentse. [Kuensel]

Brunei State Mufti receives courtesy visit from Malaysian Islamic officials

(ga) The State Mufti of Brunei Darussalam, Awang Abdul Aziz bin Juned, welcomed a delegation from Malaysia's Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) and the Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department on November 7.

Both parties exchange perspectives on Islamic development in their countries and discuss shared objectives for regional Islamic promotion during the meeting. [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei Syariah Judge engages in regional dialogue, signs MoU with Malaysia

(ga) The Brunei Syariah Courts took part in the 2024 Muzakarah (Meeting)of Syariah High Court Judges, a formal gathering to discuss important issues related to the application and evolution of Islamic law across different jurisdictions, in Malaysia on November 4 to strengthen collaboration and exchange knowledge among Syariah judicial bodies from both countries.

Key discussions during both countries' meetings include modern Syariah law and judicial practices, focusing on best practices, future cooperation, and strengthening ties between their jurisdictions. A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between the Brunei Syariah Courts and Malaysia's Department of Syariah Judiciary (JKSM), formalizing enhanced bilateral relations. [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei, Vietnam discuss halal industry collaboration

(ga) Brunei and Vietnam discussed potential collaboration in the halal industry during a recent meeting at the Vietnam Embassy in Brunei Darussalam. The delegation from the Veterans Association of the Royal Brunei Armed Forces (PERWIRA) met with Vietnam's Ambassador to Brunei Tran Anh Vu and Deputy Defence Attache Colonel Trinh Ke Van.

The discussions focused on promoting veteran entrepreneurs, fostering private-sector partnerships, and exploring trade and investment opportunities in

the halal sector. The PERWIRA delegation proposed the establishment of the Veterans Confederation of ASEAN Countries (VECONAC) Business Centre Veterans Association Royal Brunei Armed Forces (VARBAF) and the promotion of halal products by International Halal Trade Hub Service (IHTHS)-BRUWIRA. [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei delegation to Canada for energy transition and clean energy talks

(ga) A Brunei delegation, led by the Department of Energy at the Prime Minister's Office, is visitin Canada from November 12 to 20 for a trade mission hosted by the High Commission of Canada in Brunei Darussalam. The mission aims to foster connections with key business leaders in the energy transition, clean energy, and emerging sectors.

The delegation will explore potential partnerships in renewable technologies, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction, with a focus on sustainable energy practices. The visit aligns with Brunei's efforts to advance its sustainability initiatives and enhance trade and investment ties with Canada, marking the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia and Indonesia agree on four points to enhance tourism cooperation

(ma) Cambodia and Indonesia have agreed on four key points to further promote bilateral cooperation in the tourism sector. The agreement was reached during a meeting on November 4 between Huot Hak, Cambodian Minister of Tourism, and Santo Darmosumarto, Indonesian Ambassador to Cambodia, held at the Ministry's office in Phnom Penh.

Both parties committed to strengthening tourism cooperation in line with the existing MoU on Cambodia-Indonesia Tourism Cooperation, enhancing Muslim friendly tourism collaboration, encouraging Indonesian air operators to launch direct flights between Bali and Siem Reap, and organizing exchange visits and familiarization trips involving the private sectors of both nations to develop joint tour packages.

In 2023, approximately 5.45 million international tourists visited Cambodia, including 127,178 Indonesian tourists. In the first nine months of 2024, Cambodia welcomed about 4.29 million international

tourists, a 22.5 percent year-on-year increase, with 123,437 Indonesian tourists, up 32.9 percent. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia's exports to Canada see 30 percent rise

(mfr) Cambodia's exports to Canada surged by over 30 percent in the first nine months of 2024, reaching nearly USD 850 million, according to the General Department of Customs and Excise. This growth is a significant rebound from the same period in 2023, when exports totaled USD 648.77 million. Total bilateral trade between the two countries reached USD 895.98 million, marking a 28.2 percent increase from the previous year. Cambodia continues to enjoy a substantial trade surplus, with exports making up 94.72 percent of the trade volume.

The growth in exports is largely attributed to a rise in garment exports, spurred by a recovery in global demand for clothing, footwear, and travel goods as the world continues to recover from the pandemic. Cambodian goods benefiting from Canadian duty-free privileges include garments, travel goods, footwear, tires, and electronic components. Meanwhile, Canadian imports to Cambodia declined by 5.6 percent, amounting to USD 47.3 million.

The Cambodia Chamber of Commerce has also worked to strengthen ties with Canada by opening a representative office in Toronto to promote Cambodian products and attract Canadian investment. Cambodian exports to Canada are expected to continue growing, particularly in the garment and agricultural sectors.

In addition to the trade boost, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced plans to open an embassy in Phnom Penh, further strengthening the diplomatic and economic relationship between the two countries. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Mexican ambassador Kantha Phavi advocates for strengthening strategic ties with Cambodia

(mfr) Minister of Women's Affairs Ing Kantha Phavi met with Ilse Lilian Ferrer Silva, the Ambassador of Mexico to Cambodia, on November 7 to discuss the potential

for strategic collaboration between Cambodia and Mexico in promoting women's empowerment.

During the meeting, Ferrer Silva proposed establishing a strategic partnership, including a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to empower women through initiatives like education, with the possibility of starting this partnership in 2025.

Ing Kantha Phavi, for her part, expressed gratitude for Mexico's proposed collaboration and agreed to form a working group to explore the details of the partnership. She also suggested that Mexico consider opening an embassy in Phnom Penh, which would enhance cooperation between the two countries. Additionally, she encouraged discussions between senior leaders of both nations to address bilateral issues. [Khmer Times]

China summons Philippine ambassador to protest new maritime laws

(to) China summoned the Philippine ambassador on November 8 to express its opposition to two new maritime laws enacted by the Philippines (see article in this edition), asserting that they encroach on Chinese territorial claims in the South China Sea.

The laws, signed by Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on November 8, are designed to strengthen the Philippines' maritime claims, defining specific zones and corridors that align with the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). China, however, argues these laws infringe upon territories it claims, specifically mentioning the contested Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized the laws as a serious violation of Chinese sovereignty and urged the Philippines to avoid unilateral actions that could heighten tensions in the region. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

The Philippines contends that the legislation aligns with international norms and aims to ensure resources and navigational rights within its EEZ, which it says are protected under the rules-based international order. [Reuters]

Chinese, Indonesian presidents strengthen bilateral relations

(to/gk) Chinese President Xi Jinping hosted on November 9 Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto in Beijing. This was Prabowo's first state visit since taking office in October, showing Indonesia's commitment to its relationship with China. The two leaders discussed expanding cooperation in trade, security, and environmental projects, including furthering Belt and Road initiatives like the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway.

Prabowo stated Indonesia's support for China's positions on Taiwan and internal matters, while both countries committed to working together on global issues through platforms like the G20. After the talks, they signed agreements in areas such as water management and mineral resources. [Ministry of Foreign Relations, China]

Additionally, China and Indonesia signed USD 10 billion in deals focused on green energy, technology, and infrastructure development. Agreements include joint ventures in lithium battery production, renewable energy, and enhanced digital infrastructure. Both countries emphasized cooperation over confrontation, aiming to boost regional stability and economic growth. [Reuters 1]

Prabowo also announced that Indonesian companies will sign contracts worth over USD 10 billion with Chinese corporations. The agreements, focused on scientific collaboration, will be formalized at an event hosted by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Kadin) in Beijing. [Antara]

Despite these new agreements, Indonesia restated that it does not recognize China's claims over the South China Sea, stating that their partnership does not affect its sovereignty or territorial rights. [Reuters 2]

In a separate meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, President Prabowo expressed interest in learning from China's experience in eradicating poverty. Regarding educational cooperation, he expressed hope to send more Indonesian students to China for higher education, aiming to build a generation of young minds capable of addressing future global challenges. [Cabinet Secretariat, Indonesia]

Li, for his part, urged both sides to Li called "to strengthen the synergy of development strategies, further expand the scale of bilateral trade and investment, and explore the potential of cooperation on green minerals, photovoltaic wind power, digital economy, marine scientific research and environmental protection, to add more impetus to the

two countries' respective development." [People's Daily Online]

China and Malaysia strengthen strategic relations

(to) Chinese President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang met with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim last week as part of the latter's working visit to China from November 4-7 met with.

During Anwars meeting with Xi was on November 7, both nations urged to bolster political trust and support each other on international and regional issues. Xi furthermore emphasized that China and Malaysia are key representatives of developing Asian nations and called for a strong strategic partnership between them, particularly in opposing protectionism and promoting a fairer global economic order. [State Council 1, China] [South China Morning Post]

The meeting with Li which followed earlier talks held in Malaysia in June (see AiR No. 26, June/2024, 4), covered a broad range of topics, from trade and security to cultural exchange. Anwar expressed his appreciation for China's backing of Malaysia's participation in BRICS. Li urged both sides to advance key projects like the East Coast Rail Link and the Malaysia-China "Two Countries, Twin Parks" initiative, while exploring opportunities in emerging sectors to expand cooperation. He assured that China will enhance cultural exchanges with Malaysia, strengthen educational collaboration, simplify visa processes, and encourage increased visits, particularly among the youth, to foster mutual understanding and friendship. Li affirmed China's strong support for Malaysia as it takes on the ASEAN chairmanship next year, expressing China's readiness to collaborate with Malaysia within the China-ASEAN framework and other multilateral platforms. [State Council 2, China] The Star]

Anwar and Li also attended a ceremony where they oversaw the signing of agreements related to the Belt and Road Initiative Cooperation Plan. This plan focuses on enhancing Malaysia-China collaboration in areas like infrastructure, trade, finance, and education, aiming to create a stronger connection between the two nations. [Bernama]

As part of his trip, Anwar also attended the China International Import Expo, where Li spoke about China and Malaysia's shared goals for a bright future. He emphasized the importance of working together in

areas like technology and cultural programs, while also supporting Malaysia as it prepares to lead ASEAN next year. Anwar welcomed this support, expressing Malaysia's commitment to strengthening ties in trade, education, and other areas. [People's Daily Online] [Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia]

Xi Jinping calls for 'stable' US ties in message to Trump

(alk) Chinese President Xi Jinping has congratulated US President-elect Donald Trump on his recent election victory, calling for a "stable, healthy, and sustainable" relationship between the two countries. Xi emphasized that history shows China and the United States benefit from cooperation and suffer from confrontation. He expressed hopes for mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation, urging both countries to strengthen dialogue, manage differences, and work toward mutual benefit. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

State media called for a "pragmatic" approach to handling bilateral differences, especially as US tariff threats loom. Trump, having recaptured the White House, has proposed increased tariffs on Chinese goods, which could pose risks to China's economy, already strained by property downturns, local government debt, and weak domestic demand.

A China Daily editorial described Trump's second term as a possible "new beginning" for China-US relations, though Trump's tariffs, which are now much higher than those during his first term, may strain this possibility. [China Daily]

China is likely to face greater trade pressure following Trump's election, especially at a time when Beijing is already seeing tension growing with some of its other trade partners. [CNA] [South China Morning Post]

China expresses concern over Trump's climate plans

(to) China's top climate envoy Liu Zhenmin voiced concerns over President-elect Donald Trump's stance on climate change, speaking ahead of the COP29 summit in Azerbaijan. Trump has promised to pull the US out of the Paris Agreement once again and to focus on expanding US oil and gas production, which has

alarmed Chinese officials who worry about the potential global impact.

Liu emphasized that while countries like China are committed to multilateral climate efforts, the uncertainty surrounding US policy poses challenges. Other Chinese diplomats echoed these concerns, noting that Trump's approach could lead to increased tensions and hinder international cooperation on climate issues . [Politico]

China has furthermore issued a warning to President-elect Donald Trump over Taiwan, urging him to handle the issue "prudently" to avoid damaging China-US relations. Beijing emphasized its commitment to the "One China" principle, considering Taiwan a part of its territory, and promised to take "all necessary measures" to uphold this stance. This comes as the US recently approved a USD 2 billion arms package for Taiwan, which China strongly opposed. Trump's comments about potentially raising tariffs and imposing costs on Taiwan for US protection have further escalated tensions. [Newsweek]

China's trade surplus nears USD 1 trillion

(to) Reports showed that China is on track to reach a record trade surplus nearing USD 1 trillion by the end of the year. This growing surplus puts China in a sensitive position as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office. Trump has signaled plans for tariffs of up to 60 percent on Chinese goods, a move aimed at reducing the US trade deficit and boosting domestic manufacturing.

In October alone, China's trade surplus hit its third-largest monthly figure, reflecting a growing reliance on exports while import demand slowed because of China's economic challenges. As China's recent stimulus measures have struggled to revive consumer spending, the risk of tariffs under Trump's administration could significantly impact China's economy and its trade relations with the US. [Investopedia]

US cracking down on Chinese semiconductor firms

(alk) Washington lawmakers are scrutinizing semiconductor equipment manufacturers as the Biden administration considers tighter export controls to curb China's technological progress. On November 7,

Democratic and Republican leaders of the House select committee on China requested information from five American, Dutch, and Japanese companies about their sales and customers in China, citing national security concerns.

John Moolenaar, a Republican from Michigan, and Raja Krishnamoorthi, a Democrat from Illinois, warned that Chinese purchases of chipmaking equipment could support Russia's military and embolden Beijing in its stance toward Taiwan, while advancing critical fields like artificial intelligence. The targeted firms include US-based Applied Materials, Lam Research, and KLA, as well as Netherlands' ASML and Japan's Tokyo Electron. The companies have not yet commented. [South China Morning Post]

Separately, Huawei has asked a US court to dismiss charges related to alleged tech theft and misleading banks about its Iran business. The company argues the case lacks evidence and is part of the now-defunct "China Initiative" that critics say fostered racial profiling. Huawei denies wrongdoing, and a trial is set for January 2026. The U.S. has restricted Huawei's access to technology since 2019, citing security concerns. [Reuters]

Trump to appoint Mike Waltz as National Security Adviser

(to) President-elect Donald Trump has reportedly chosen Representative Mike Waltz as his national security adviser. Waltz, a former Green Beret and a vocal critic of China, is known for his strong stance on US foreign policy and national security issues. His appointment signals a tough approach toward China, Russia, and other key global players.

Waltz, who represents Florida, has previously served at the Pentagon and is a prominent member of Congress focused on reducing US dependency on Chinese resources. He has advocated for policies countering China's influence in Latin America and the Caribbean and has emphasized the need to protect US interests in Asia, particularly regarding Taiwan. As adviser, he will likely lead the administration's efforts on ongoing issues, including military aid to Ukraine, tensions in the Middle East, and the influence of China in the Western Hemisphere. [Newsweek]

Putin reaffirms ties with China amid deepening Russia-North Korea military cooperation

(to) Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated strong support for China, describing it as an essential ally and endorsing Beijing's stance on Taiwan. Speaking at the Valdai Discussion Club, the premier platform for dialogue on Russia's foreign and domestic policy, in Sochi, Russia, on November 7, Putin dismissed concerns over Sino-Russian cooperation, emphasizing that it does not threaten any other nations.

Putin underscored that China is following a reasonable policy in the region and criticized Taiwan for allegedly provoking an escalation similar to the Ukraine crisis in Asia.

Putin also highlighted the comprehensive partnership between Russia and China, solidified through their "no limits" agreement in 2022, and pointed to regular joint military exercises as measures to ensure both nations' security. [Reuters]

China is finding itself in a complex position as North Korea's alliance with Russia deepens, especially with North Korea has sending troops to aid Russia in Ukraine. For China, this adds uncertainty, as it has usually supported Russia indirectly but now faces a situation where North Korea's direct involvement escalates tensions both in Europe and Asia. This situation challenges China's stance as a stabilizing power in the region. [Radio Free Europe, Radio Free Liberty]

Additionally, Chinese officials worry that North Korea's support for Russia could weaken China's influence over Pyongyang. North Korea has historically relied on China for economic and political support, but its stronger relations with Russia could shift the dynamics. This situation places Beijing in a difficult spot, trying to balance its strategic goals without raising instability in the region. [The Economist] [BBC]

Analysts suggest that China's official silence on the growing military collaboration between Russia and North Korea masks underlying concerns, further complicating Beijing's delicate balancing act between its strategic alliances with Russia and North Korea and its economic ties with the U.S. and Europe. [The Guardian]

Germany arrests suspected US spy for China

(alk) Germany has arrested a US citizen, identified only as Martin D, on suspicion of offering intelligence about the US military to China while employed by US forces in Germany, according to German federal prosecutors. Authorities allege that in 2024, Martin D contacted Chinese officials to provide sensitive information.

Germany has recently heightened security in response to rising espionage concerns, especially from Russia and China. Last month, Berlin increased security checks for sensitive government and business positions, warning of greater espionage risks from Beijing.

In April, Germany arrested three individuals suspected of attempting to provide technology to boost China's navy (see AiR No. 17, April/2024, 4), and a European Union staffer was also accused of collaborating with Chinese intelligence.

In March, the US and UK accused China of cyberespionage targeting millions, including lawmakers, journalists, and defense contractors. China has dismissed these accusations as attempts to discredit the country. [Al Jazeera]

China, Italy strengthen economic and security ties

(alk) President Xi Jinping met Italian President Sergio Mattarella, who was on a state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The November 8 meeting marked the 20th anniversary of the China-Italy comprehensive strategic partnership.

Xi highlighted the need for mutual respect, cooperation, and support between the two countries. He called for enhancing exchanges in culture, education, tourism, and technology while fostering economic and trade cooperation. Xi emphasized that China values its partnership with Europe and supports strategic cooperation for mutual growth and global peace.

Mattarella praised the long-standing friendship between Italy and China, marked by historical connections like that of Marco Polo. He stressed the importance of cultural and educational exchanges, open markets, and economic cooperation as pathways to peace. Mattarella also urged China to use its global

influence to help end conflicts, including Russia's war against Ukraine and the crisis in the Middle East. He called for China's support in promoting international law, peace, and a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine.

During his visit, Mattarella advocated for more Chinese investment in Italy and the removal of trade barriers to improve market access for Italian products. He noted that trade between the two nations doubled from 2016 to 2022, reaching EUR 74 billion (USD 79 billion), but emphasized the need for a balanced trade relationship. The visit concluded with the signing of ten cooperation agreements covering culture, education, and trade.

Mattarella's visit, following Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's trip in July, underscored Italy's commitment to strengthening ties with China. Xi described the visit as a new starting point for bilateral relations and emphasized the importance of unity amid global challenges. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Euractiv] [Politico]

China, Saudi Arabia deepen economic cooperation with dollar bond and real estate joint working group

(alk) China's housing ministry has proposed forming a joint working group with Saudi Arabia to boost collaboration in housing and urban development, sharing expertise and tackling mutual challenges.

During a recent visit to Saudi Arabia, Chinese Housing Minister Ni Hong expressed China's readiness to cooperate on housing and new city construction under existing bilateral agreements. He highlighted the aim to implement the consensus between the two nations' leaders. Saudi Minister of Municipal Rural Affairs and Housing, Majed bin Abdullah Al-Hogail, welcomed deeper cooperation, citing Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative, which emphasizes economic diversification and urban development.

Zhou Rong from the Chongyang Institute noted China's reliable infrastructure capabilities and experience in megacity planning as vital for supporting Saudi Arabia's talent and construction goals. He said this collaboration could set a precedent for other Gulf countries like Qatar and the UAE.

Saudi Arabia's $500 billion NEOM project under Vision 2030 has already seen significant Chinese involvement. In May, China Railway Construction Corp completed a

NEOM tunnel project, marking the first Chinese contribution to this initiative. Zhou also mentioned potential benefits for China's role in training construction talent and establishing local material manufacturing in Saudi Arabia.

In a further sign of deepening ties, China selected Saudi Arabia for its first US dollar sovereign bond issuance in three years. The $2 billion issuance reflects growing financial links, with Saudi Arabia eager for Chinese investment to support Vision 2030. This bond sale aligns with China's strategy to secure major Saudi construction contracts and benefit from the kingdom's solar energy boom.

Saudi Arabia, despite being overtaken by Russia as China's main oil supplier, continues to sell substantial crude to China, which can be reinvested into Chinese assets. A senior banker in Beijing noted this move reinforces state-level cooperation. While foreign currency bonds are a small part of China's funding strategy, they provide an accessible option for global investors and influence pricing for other Chinese issuers.

In August, the Saudi Public Investment Fund (PIF) signed $50 billion in deals with Chinese banks to facilitate capital flow. Ewpartners, backed by Alibaba and the PIF, announced plans to establish a special economic zone in Riyadh to attract Chinese investment. China resumed international bond sales in September with a €2 billion euro-denominated bond in Paris. [Financial Times] [Global Times]

China and Australia sign avocado agreement

(to) China and Australia have strengthened their trade cooperation with a new agreement, as their avocado industries signed a memorandum of understanding on November 4. At the China International Import Expo in Shanghai, Avocados Australia and the China Chamber of Commerce of Import & Export of Foodstuffs, Native Produce & Animal By-Products formalized their intent to boost collaboration, technical exchanges, and potential market access for Australian avocados.

This latest development reflects the ongoing recalibration and stabilization of bilateral ties under Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, following years of strained relations. [East Asia Forum]

China is Australia’s largest trading partner for two-way trade, representing 26 percent of Australia’s global

goods and services trade in 2023. Trade between the two nations grew by 9.3 percent that year, reaching USD 216.5 billion.

In a significant diplomatic move, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese attended the China International Import Expo last year, marking the first visit by an Australian leader to China in seven years. [South China Morning Post]

China, India discuss efforts to restore pre-2020 relations

(lm) India and China are exploring measures to normalize ties following the border standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that began in 2020. Officials in Beijing highlighted the positive outcomes of the recent "ice-breaking meeting" between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Kazan, Russia, which marked their first in-person interaction in five years.

Both leaders have directed their respective officials to advance discussions on pending issues, including the LAC situation. While border disputes remain unresolved, Beijing emphasized that the relationship should not be solely defined by this issue. The two sides have engaged in 20 rounds of commander-level talks and achieved disengagement at specific points.

China has proposed confidence-building measures, including resuming direct flights, easing visa restrictions for Chinese nationals, lifting bans on certain mobile apps, and allowing more Indian movies in Chinese theatres. These steps are part of a broader effort to restore bilateral ties.

Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart have been tasked with finalizing the next stages of engagement, with potential meetings on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Brazil later this month. China also expressed hopes for Modi's participation in next year's Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, to be hosted in Beijing.

The recent patrol resumption along the LAC marks progress in a three-step process: disengagement, de-escalation, and de-induction of troops. However, Beijing noted the need for continued dialogue on broader issues, such as climate change, green energy transition, and artificial intelligence, areas where both countries share mutual interests. [The Indian Express]

India strengthens maritime ties with Mozambique through fast interceptor craft donation

(rsv) India has gifted two water-jet propelled Fast Interceptor Craft (FIC) to Mozambique as part of its ongoing efforts to enhance maritime security and capacity-building among Indian Ocean Region (IOR) nations. The vessels, delivered by the Indian Navy's INS Gharial, were formally handed over on November 9 in a ceremony attended by Indian High Commissioner Robert Shetkintong and Mozambique's Permanent Secretary of National Defence, Augusto Casimiro Mueio.

India previously gifted similar vessels to Mozambique in 2019 and 2022, along with training and logistical support from the Indian Coast Guard Afloat Support Team. Beyond maritime security, India has extended humanitarian and disaster relief assistance to Mozambique. In 2021, India donated over one million COVID-19 vaccine doses. Following Cyclone Idai in 2019, Indian naval ships rescued over 200 civilians, provided medical aid to 2,300 individuals, and delivered food supplies to affected areas.

Additionally, India has enhanced Mozambique's defense capabilities through other initiatives, including gifting an infantry weapons training simulator in 2023 and conducting joint Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) surveillance missions. [The Hindu] [AIR]

Indonesia and Canada discuss expediting completion of ICA-CEPA trade agreement

(mu) Coordinating Economic Affairs Minister Airlangga Hartarto met Canadian Ambassador to Indonesia and Timor-Leste Jess Dutton to discuss the acceleration of the negotiation of the trade agreement for the Indonesia-Canada Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (ICA-CEPA).

During a recent meeting, Airlangga highlighted key priorities of the Indonesian government under President Prabowo, including a focus on critical minerals, energy, and food security. He emphasized the country's efforts to leverage both new and renewable energy sources, as well as non-renewable energy, to support the national energy transition.

Airlangga also noted that Indonesia is pursuing international cooperation, particularly with countries like Canada, to enhance its energy sector. [Antara]

Indonesia and Russia complete joint navy exercise Orruda 2024

(gk/mu) Indonesian and Russian navies completed the 2024 Orruda Joint Training successfully. The joint military exercise included two phases - the harbor and the sea phase and took place from November 4-8.

For the training exercise, Indonesian Navy deployed KRI I Gusti Ngurah Rai (332) frigate ship, KRI Frans Kaisiepo (368) corvette ship, and AS565 MBe Panther anti-submarine chopper. Meanwhile, the Russian Navy deployed two corvettes, RFS Gromky (335) and RFS Aldar Tsydenzhapov (339), the RFS Rezkiy (343) frigate, and RFS Pechenga medium tanker ship. The four Russian warships docked in Surabaya, East Java, on November 4. [Antara 1]

This exercise between Indonesia and Russia is in line with President Prabowo Subianto's efforts to strengthen ties with Moscow. It has been conducted with the intent of strengthening the friendship between the two countries, besides serving as a foundation for future collaborative operations and accelerating Indonesian Navy's modernization efforts. The name "Orruda" comes from a combination of two national symbols– Russian Eagle (Orel) and the Indonesian Garuda. [Antara 2]

China and Japan strengthen green partnership

(hs) Representatives at the 17th China-Japan Comprehensive Forum on Energy Conservation and Environmental Protection in Tokyo called for deeper collaboration on green development. Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry Yoji Muto highlighted China's carbon neutrality goals by 2060 and Japan's by 2050, stressing both countries' pivotal roles in global carbon reduction. Since 2006, the forum has facilitated 457 projects, with 27 new agreements signed this year in waste-to-energy, green building, and industrial decarbonization.

Zhao Chenxin, vice-chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission, emphasized leveraging each country's industrial strengths for joint projects, while Japan's Environment Minister Keiichiro Asao noted their combined economic power and influence on climate action. China's Vice-Minister of Commerce Li Fei underscored the need for open,

inclusive green trade, opposing protectionism and advocating for mutual support in sectors like electric vehicles, photovoltaics, and lithium batteries.

Chinese Ambassador to Japan Wu Jianghao, meanwhile, warned against isolationist trade policies, underscoring the importance of a stable, inclusive international trade system for a successful global green transition. [China Daily]

Japanese defense chief visits South Korean naval ship

(hs) Japan's Defense Minister Gen Nakatani visited a naval ship the Maritime Self-Defense Force's Yokosuka base in Kanagawa Prefecture in South Korean on November 7. This marked the first time a Japanese defense minister had boarded a South Korean military vessel. The visit aimed to demonstrate and strengthen defense cooperation between Japan and South Korea, which have been improving relations in recent years.

This visit comes after a 2018 incident where a South Korean destroyer locked its radar on a Japanese surveillance plane, leading to a halt in South Korean military ship visits to Japan until the 2022 international fleet review. Following a June 2024 agreement to prevent such incidents, Nakatani's visit was rescheduled from late October, initially postponed due to North Korea's missile launch. [Japan Times]

Japan, China collaborate on Fukushima water testing

(hs) China is set to sample treated radioactive water at the Fukushima nuclear plant in early 2025. It is a step toward lifting its 2023 ban on Japanese seafood imports, according to Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry. This follows the recent collection of marine samples near the plant and is part of a safety review process agreed upon by Japan in September.

Under this scheme, a team of Chinese researchers, alongside officials from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), will collect samples of treated water before it is discharged into the sea. China's involvement is part of a commitment to verify the safety of the water, with the aim of gradually easing the seafood import ban once the tests confirm its safety.

In addition to IAEA reviews, China has insisted on independent sampling of seawater near the plant. Japan agreed to this condition, provided that the IAEA oversees the process for objectivity.

The Fukushima Daiichi plant, which was severely damaged by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, has been storing large quantities of contaminated water, which is being treated using an advanced liquid processing system (ALPS). The treated water will be released into the ocean, a decision made by Japan in 2021, but met with strong opposition from China and Russia, both calling for the plan to be halted. China initially imposed a blanket ban, labelling the water as “nuclear-contaminated.” However, the September agreement with Japan includes additional monitoring, including the sampling tests, which is a key factor in China's willingness to lift the ban.

The collaboration could be seen as part of Japan's broader efforts to ease tensions with China. Japan is not only addressing concerns over the safety of its seafood exports but also demonstrating transparency and cooperation with China. [Kyodo News]

Japan’s Prime Minister hold phone talk with US President-elect

(hs) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has congratulated U.S. President-elect Donald Trump in their first phone call, setting the stage for diplomatic engagement. Ishiba, who will attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum and the G20 summit this week and this month, plans to visit the U.S. to meet Trump in person. A long-time advocate for revising the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and exploring the idea of an "Asian NATO," Ishiba aims to strengthen Japan’s role in regional security.

The U.S.-Japan SOFA, established in 1960, has provided the legal framework for U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan. It grants U.S. forces certain legal protections and limits Japan’s jurisdiction over crimes involving American personnel. Critics argue that the agreement undermines Japan's sovereignty, particularly in Okinawa, where the concentration of U.S. bases has led to calls for revisions to give Japan greater control. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Japan]

Ishiba sees the pursuit of an "Asian NATO" as a potential solution to regional security concerns. This regional security alliance, designed to enhance military cooperation and collective defense among Asian

nations, would seek to reduce reliance on U.S. forces and address growing security challenges, particularly from China. While the concept of an "Asian NATO" has garnered interest, critics warn it could escalate tensions with China and fuel a regional arms race. There are also concerns about the willingness of prospective members to commit to such an alliance. [VOA]

Ishiba's efforts have gained support from figures like former Prime Minister Taro Aso, who has been examining Trump's likely stance on Japan's role in Asia. Noda, leader of Japan's largest opposition party, has also emphasized the importance of Japan establishing a clear relationship with Trump, especially as his "America First" policy suggests a potential shift towards isolationism.

Noda expressed concern about the U.S. possibly withdrawing from regional forums and warned that Trump may pressure Japan to increase its financial contributions for U.S. military bases, potentially straining Japan's budget and fueling public opposition to hosting foreign forces. He stressed the need for Japan to negotiate SOFA terms that reflect current security needs and to adopt a more proactive diplomatic strategy to ensure continued U.S. involvement in the region amidst growing geopolitical tensions. [Japan Times] [Reuters]

US Navy deploys aircraft to Japan

(hs) The U.S. Navy has commenced its first deployment of CMV-22 Osprey aircraft in Japan, stationing two at the Iwakuni base in Yamaguchi Prefecture on November 7, 8.

This deployment is part of a planned rollout, with additional CMV-22s expected by year-end to support the U.S. aircraft carrier George Washington, which will replace the Ronald Reagan at Yokosuka. While Marine Corps MV-22s operate from Futenma in Okinawa and Air Force CV-22s from Yokota near Tokyo, this is the first Osprey deployment by the Navy in Japan. Yamaguchi Gov.

The Ospreys, which combine helicopter-like vertical takeoff with fixed-wing flight capabilities, have faced safety concerns due to past accidents in Japan and elsewhere. [Manichini]

Nippon Steel seeks year-end approval for its U.S. Steel buyout

(sw) Nippon Steel Corp. aims to finalize its acquisition of United States Steel Corp. by the end of the year, before President-elect Donald Trump assumes office in January. Nippon Steel's Vice Chairman, Takahiro Mori, expressed confidence in closing the deal soon, despite opposition from both Trump and outgoing President Joe Biden, who have both voiced concerns about Japan's largest steelmaker purchasing an iconic American company (see AiR No. 40, October/2024, 1).

The acquisition is currently under review by the U.S. Committee on Foreign Investment, which will conclude its assessment by late December. Mori noted that the review is progressing "smoothly." However, Trump's incoming administration could potentially overturn any approval. [Kyodo News]

Japan and Poland sign agreement for nuclear energy power plant

(hs) Poland and Japan have signed a memorandum of understanding to advance nuclear energy development in Poland, marking Poland's pursuit of its first nuclear power plants. The agreement, signed in Warsaw on November 11 by Polish Minister of Industry Marzena Czarnecka and Japanese Vice Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Shinji Takeuchi, aims to leverage Japan's nuclear expertise to help Poland "build nuclear skills and competences" vital for the Polish Nuclear Power Program.

However, despite prior media speculation, the Polish ministry clarified that the deal does not involve Japan partnering in Poland's nuclear plant construction. Instead, it covers general cooperation in nuclear technology, industrial technology exchange, nuclear safety communication, and technological support, with potential collaboration on small modular reactors (SMRs) as reported by Business Insider Polska. [Ministry of Industry, Poland]

Poland's nuclear ambitions have continued under its new government, led by Donald Tusk, since December 2023, who remains committed to former government plans. The country aims to start constructing its first nuclear plant in Choczewo by 2028, a project valued at PLN 60 billion (USD 14.6 billion), with the U.S. as an international partner. Poland also has one of Europe's most coal-dependent energy sectors, producing nearly two-thirds of its electricity from coal, and both current

and past administrations have pushed for a transition to nuclear and renewables to replace coal in coming decades. [Notes From Poland]

Japan, Saudi Arabia pledge to support regional stability

(hs) Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba held phone call on November 6, during which they reaffirmed the strength of their nations' relations. They discussed efforts to deepen cooperation under the Saudi-Japanese Vision 2030, while also addressing regional developments. The leaders focused on the ongoing violence in the Middle East, stressing the need for all parties to exercise maximum restraint and enhance stability in the region, particularly regarding the ongoing Israeli attacks in Gaza.

Vision 2030 is Saudi Arabia's long-term strategic framework launched in 2016, aiming to diversify the economy, reduce dependency on oil, and foster sustainable growth. Under the guidance of King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, this roadmap focuses on empowering citizens, attracting global investment, and establishing Saudi Arabia as a leading economic and cultural hub. Through phased reforms, the vision addresses sectors like governance, infrastructure, and social development to build a modern, vibrant society that balances tradition and innovation. [Saudi Government-Vision 2030]

They agreed to collaborate closely on regional peace and security, ensuring stability in the crude oil market and expanding cooperation in clean energy and advanced technologies. [NHK] [Asharaq al-Awsat] [Prime Minister's Office - Japan]

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) worth up to JPY 7.6 trillion (USD 49.5 billion) with five major Japanese banks: Mizuho Bank, Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, MUFG Bank, Japan Bank for International Cooperation, and Nippon Export and Investment Insurance. These agreements are intended to enhance financial collaboration through capital flows in debt and equity investments. The MoUs involve PIF’s portfolio companies and Japanese corporations, reflecting PIF’s strategy to expand global finance and investment partnerships.

At the Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, PIF signed an agreement with the Hong Kong Monetary Authority to create a new investment fund targeting JPY 150

billion (USD 976 million) , focused on Hong Kong-connected businesses in sectors like manufacturing, renewables, fintech, and healthcare, particularly those interested in expanding to Saudi Arabia. This fund aims to boost job creation in high-skill sectors within Saudi Arabia and assist companies in establishing a regional Middle Eastern base.

On 6 November, PIF also announced plans to invest in Brookfield Asset Management's new Middle East fund, supporting a target of JPY 300 billion (USD 1.9 billion) to drive the Canadian firm's acquisition strategy across the Gulf. Named Brookfield Middle East Partners, the fund seeks additional investors to pursue buyouts and structured finance deals.

PIF Governor Yasir Al-Rumayyan stated that PIF intends to reduce its foreign investments to around 20 percent of its assets under management, shifting focus to domestic projects and advancements in artificial intelligence. In October, Saudi Arabia revised its FDI calculation method, doubling 2023's FDI inflow to JPY 3.8 trillion (USD 24.7 billion).

The kingdom aims for an annual FDI of JPY 15 trillion (USD 97.5 billion) by 2030, with PIF playing a central role in a broader economic development plan totaling JPY 187 trillion (USD 1.2 trillion). [AGBI]

Japan-Qatar foreign policy meeting held

(hs) The 5th Japan-Qatar Foreign Policy Dialogue was held in Tokyo on November 7, bringing together high-ranking officials from both countries, including Japan's Director-General of the Middle East and African Affairs Bureau, Qatar's Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Qatari ambassador to Japan.

Discussions centered on deepening cooperation in politics, economics, and defense as part of the "Strategic Partnership" established by Japan and Qatar's leaders the previous year. The two sides also addressed pressing regional and global issues, such as the situations in Gaza, Afghanistan, and East Asia, and emphasized the importance of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Both nations committed to working together to promote regional stability and contribute to global peace. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [Arab News]

Following this high-level dialogue, QatarEnergy President and CEO Saad Al-Kaabi, who also serves as Qatar's Minister of State for Energy Affairs, visited Japan to discuss expanding energy cooperation. Al-Kaabi met with Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade,

and Industry, Muto Yoji, and held talks with executives from major Japanese energy firms, including JERA, Mitsui, and Kansai Electric. Their discussions focused on increasing Qatar's energy exports to Japan, a key LNG importer. In 2023, Qatar exported QAR 6.6 million (USD 1.8 million) of petroleum gases and other hydrocarbons to Japan. This visit was part of a broader regional engagement, with Al-Kaabi also meeting with South Korean officials to strengthen energy partnerships. [Doha News]

Japan and South Africa hold 9th Joint Committee Meeting on Science and Technology

(hs) The 9th Japan-South Africa Joint Committee Meeting on Science and Technology took place in Pretoria on November 6.

Both sides lauded the steady progress in science and technology collaboration and reaffirmed their commitment to deepening this successful partnership under the AJ-CORE Agreement, which has been in place since August 2003. The AJ-CORE partnership between South Africa's National Research Foundation (NRF) and Japan's Science and Technology Agency (JST) supports joint research and innovation projects in science, involving researchers from South Africa, Japan, and 17 other African countries. The collaboration aims to tackle common challenges in Africa, enhance sustainable development, and contribute to the achievement of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [AJ Core]

The committee's discussions focused on exploring collaboration on an early-warning system for infectious diseases like malaria, as well as green hydrogen projects, with an emphasis on sustainable solutions. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Japan and Peru collaborate on mining technology

(hs) Japan and Peru will reportedly sign a joint statement this month to collaborate on mineral mining technology, with the goal of enhancing supply chains for critical minerals through Japanese expertise.

During the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit on this week, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba is expected to meet with Peru's President Dina

Ercilia Boluarte Zegarra, where they will discuss terms to support mineral mining projects in Peru. The agreement will focus on securing stable supplies of essential minerals, like copper and zinc, by utilising Japanese technology.

The partnership is particularly beneficial for Japan, a resource-poor nation, as it strengthens its access to minerals critical for electric vehicle batteries and renewable energy technologies. Meanwhile, Peru gains access to advanced mining technology and a roadmap for economic cooperation, security, and energy procurement, ensuring mutual support in sustainable resource development over the next decade. [Mining]

Laos-China Railway sees significant growth in passenger ridership

(mt) The Lao section of the China-Laos Railway reported a significant 44.4 percent increase in passenger numbers in the first 10 months of 2024, with a total of 3 million passengers transported. From January 1 to November 4, over 2.8 million people traveled within Laos, while 108,000 passengers used cross-border trains to China.

The surge in ridership is attributed to several factors, including Laos' ASEAN chairmanship, the Visit Laos Year 2024 campaign, and the introduction of visa-free access for Chinese visitors. In response to the growing demand, the Laos-China Railway Co., Ltd. (LCRC) has adjusted train schedules, added additional trains during peak times, and enhanced passenger services. [Lao News Agency 1]

In related news, China's services trade saw remarkable growth in 2024, with the total value reaching USD 777.3 billion USD during the first three quarters of the year, marking a 14.5 percent year-on-year increase. [Lao News Agency 2]

Lao, Cambodian authorities hold talks on border affairs

(mt) Lao and Cambodian authorities met in Siem Reap on November 7 to discuss border affairs, focusing on advancing border demarcation between the two countries. The meeting, led by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Phoxay Khaykhamphithoune, who chairs the Laos-Cambodia Technical Border

Subcommittee, resulted in an agreement to proceed with surveying 80 percent of the shared border.

The officials also adopted a joint action plan for border surveys and demarcation. Discussions included the 2025 work plan, the installation of additional border markers, and resolving disagreements over specific border locations. The meeting concluded in a friendly atmosphere, with both sides committed to continued cooperation. [Vientiane Times]

Laos' electric buses arrive for bus rapid transit system (BRT) from China

(mt) Twenty-eight electric buses have arrived in Vientiane as part of the city's new BRT system. The buses, transported from China, will begin a trial run in June 2025, with full service starting in 2026.

The BRT project is 30 percent complete, with construction focusing on widening roads for bus lanes. The system aims to ease traffic, reduce accidents, and improve air quality, with features like smartcard payments and real-time arrival information. The project is funded by international organizations, including the Asian Development Bank. [Vientiane Times]

Thai Betagro opens first animal feed factory in Laos

(mt) Thai Betagro Public Company Limited (BTG) recently opened its first animal feed factory in Laos, investing over 650 million baht in a facility with an annual production capacity of 108,000 tons. This advanced factory aims to meet local demand, improve production efficiency, and reduce reliance on imported animal feed, thus contributing to Laos' economic growth.

The factory, inaugurated with officials from the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and other stakeholders, utilizes state-of-the-art technology for efficient production and quality control. This includes systems for managing production, packaging, and raw material quality, along with environmental safeguards like dust and odor removal.

Currently operating at 70 percent capacity, the Betagro Laos Animal Feed Factory plans to reach full production by 2025, with further expansion to 144,000 tons annually by 2027. The facility supports Laos'

national goals for agro-industrial development, strengthens the local food supply chain, and provides job opportunities, aligning with the country's broader economic objectives. [Lao News Agency]

Laos and Russia launch UXO clearance project

(mt) Laos's Ministry of Defense and the Russian Embassy have launched a 2024-2025 initiative to clear unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Houaphanh Province, focusing on the heavily bombed districts of Viengxay and Sam Nuea. The project, co-chaired by Laos's Deputy Defense Minister Pasith Thiengtham and Russian Ambassador Vladimir Kalinin, targets high-priority areas for safety and development.

In Viengxay, 21.52 hectares near schools and government sites will be cleared, while Sam Nuea's operations cover 51 hectares, including agricultural and government lands.

After extensive preparations, UXO clearing began on November 11, underscoring both nations' commitment to safety and sustainable development in the region. [Laotian Times]

Malaysia and Egypt agree to upgrade ties

(dql) Egypt and Malaysia have agreed to elevate their bilateral relations to a strategic partnership, following Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's official visit to Egypt last week.

During a press conference, Anwar and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi held discussions in Cairo covering regional security, trade, and investment. They reaffirmed their commitment to promoting a ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, emphasizing the urgent need to halt violence in Gaza and Lebanon, while facilitating the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Anwar expressed Malaysia's commitment to deepening bilateral ties with Egypt, particularly in trade, investment, education, and scientific research. He condemned Israel's blockade of humanitarian aid to Gaza and called for accountability for Israel's actions, suggesting possible consequences, including UN expulsion, for its disregard of international resolutions. [AA] [Daily News Egypt]

Malaysian and Indonesian army launch joint border security operation

(ga) The Malaysian Army (TDM) and the Indonesian National Army (TNI-AD) have launched a joint operation, Operation PATKOR Series 2/2024, to enhance security and peace along the Malaysia-Indonesia border in the Ba'kelalan area, Malaysia.

The six-day operation, running from November 9 to 14, involves joint patrols along 40 border stone units to address cross-border activities threatening both countries' security and sovereignty. The operation, part of the ongoing MALINDO cooperation between the two nations, aims to strengthen defense relations and improve border force readiness. [Bernama] [Sinar Harian]

Maldives' President Muizzu criticizes Chagos Islands transfer to Mauritius, urges UK to reconsider

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has expressed disappointment over the UK's decision to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, stating that the islands are more closely linked to the Maldives. In a letter to the British government, President Muizzu argued that granting sovereignty to the Maldives would have been a preferable outcome.

The Chagos Islands, located 500 kilometers south of the Maldives, were ceded to Mauritius after decades of British control and two years of negotiations. This decision followed a 2019 advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which concluded that the islands legally belong to Mauritius. Although not legally binding, the ICJ opinion, supported by a United Nations General Assembly vote, described Britain's occupation as a violation of international law.

At the official Republic Day function, President Muizzu highlighted historical ties between the Maldives and the Chagos Islands, citing ancient Maldivian Sultanate records. He criticized the former Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) government for allegedly ceding maritime territory to Mauritius without proper parliamentary consultation, a move he described as unconstitutional.

The Chagos Archipelago includes Diego Garcia, home to a U.S. military base under a long-term lease. Following the UK's agreement, Mauritius brought a case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), which ruled on maritime boundaries

between the Maldives and Mauritius. The tribunal allocated 47,232 square kilometers of the disputed 95,000 square kilometers to the Maldives and 45,331 square kilometers to Mauritius using the equidistance formula.

Despite this ruling, opposition parties in the Maldives have accused the previous administration of "selling" national territory and pledged to recover it. President Muizzu's administration has assigned the matter to a special committee and made it a key presidential commitment. [the edition]

Maldives to open embassy in Italy to strengthen tourism and trade ties

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu announced plans to open a Maldivian embassy in Italy, marking a significant step in enhancing bilateral relations. The Italian government has approved the Maldives' request for the embassy, signaling a commitment to deepening relations between the two nations. President Muizzu also noted plans to establish embassies and high commissions in other key countries to boost trade and international cooperation.

This initiative follows the Maldives' recent opening of an embassy in Turkiye, underscoring the administration's focus on expanding its global diplomatic network. [avas.mv]

Mongolia and China strengthen strategic partnership with new cooperation agreements

(fs) Mongolian Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai and Chinese Premier Li Qiang met on November 5, in Shanghai during the 7th China International Import Expo to reinforce the Mongolia-China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

The leaders discussed efforts to increase bilateral trade to USD 20 billion, diversify economic ties, and enhance cooperation in various sectors such as environment, health, education, and renewable energy. Plans include interconnecting border ports, reducing congestion in Mongolia's capital, and advancing green and digital economic collaboration.

The leaders agreed to partner on 14 significant projects and systemic reforms, primarily in energy,

industry, and mining, drawing on China’s expertise and funding support.

Additionally, eight cooperation documents were signed, including a USD 253 million loan agreement for the Erdeneburen Hydropower Plant, which is part of a larger USD 1 billion loan for multiple infrastructure projects. Other agreements include improving Mongolia's telecommunications infrastructure, constructing a cross-border railway bridge at Gashuunsukhait-Gantsmod, and a sports complex. The accords also cover investment in green development and standardization cooperation to facilitate trade. [Montsame]

India launches Jaipur Foot Project in Mongolia

(fs) The Indian Embassy in Mongolia, in partnership with the Mongolian Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Protection, the Ministry of Health and the General Directorate of Development of People with Disabilities, has formally launched the Jaipur Foot Project at Ulaanbaatar's Prosthetic Development Center for Disabled Children.

Sponsored by India’s Ministry of External Affairs and executed by Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS), a Jaipur-based non-profit organization, this initiative provided essential prosthetic services and training.

During the project, Indian and Mongolian orthopedic and prosthetic specialists worked together to offer 645 prosthetic limbs—298 above-knee, 308 below-knee, and 39 arm prosthetics—to more than 600 individuals. Mongolian rehabilitation technicians also received training from Jaipur Foot experts. [GoGo]

Mongolian foreign minister meets Singapore ambassador

(fs) Mongolia's Foreign Minister Batmunkh Battsetseg met with Eric Teo, Singapore's non-resident Ambassador to Mongolia, on November 5.

Battsetseg highlighted the importance of enhancing ties with Southeast Asia within Mongolia's Asia-Pacific strategy and expressed confidence in the Teo´s commitment to strengthening political dialogues.

Teo affirmed his dedication to expanding bilateral cooperation and fostering regional and international collaboration, emphasizing the significance of the upcoming 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Singapore and Mongolia, scheduled for 2025. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia]

Mongolian and Azerbaijani presidents discuss expanding bilateral relations

(fs) During the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, Mongolian President Ukhnaa Khurelsukh met with Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev.

Both leaders acknowledged the positive trajectory of Mongolia-Azerbaijan relations, particularly in the political sphere, stressing the need to further develop cooperation across various areas of mutual interest. Their discussions emphasized enhancing economic collaboration, with a particular focus on increasing investments and exploring opportunities in agriculture, transportation, logistics, and education.

Additionally, the leaders discussed joint efforts to address global challenges, such as climate change and desertification. [News.mn]

Ulaanbaatar and Canada explore partnership in urban development and infrastructure

(fs) Ulaanbaatar's Governor and Mayor Khishgeegiin Nyambaatar met with Canadian Ambassador Sandra Shufani to discuss potential collaboration on infrastructure and urban development projects.

In the November 6 meeting, Nyambaatar outlined the city's plans for extensive urban improvements, including developing a high-capacity public transportation system, establishing a metro network, constructing a new ring road system, and redeveloping ger districts. These projects are expected to be funded through public-private partnerships and government support, and Ulaanbaatar is interested in leveraging Canada's expertise in these areas.

Shufani expressed Canada's willingness to support and participate in these initiatives, emphasizing Canada's

commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation with Mongolia. [GoGo]

Mongolia and Czech Republic to strengthen educational collaboration

(fs) Mongolia's Minister of Education Naranbayar Purevsuren met with Czech Ambassador to Mongolia Jan Vytopil to discuss expanding educational cooperation.

Both parties agreed to increase exchange quotas, expand Czech language education and improve guidance resources for Czech students considering studies in Mongolia.

Since a 2019 educational agreement between Mongolia and the Czech Republic, there have been short-term exchange programs for teachers, students, and researchers. Additionally, Czech language instruction began at Mongolia's National University with the Czech Embassy's support.

Approximately 13,569 Mongolians reside in the Czech Republic, with 2,178 enrolled in various educational institutions and 29 studying under Mongolia's 2024 "President's Scholar-2100" program. [Montsame]

Myanmar junta head Min Aung Hlaing requests China's help on border stability

(tl) Myanmar's junta head, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, has urged China to assist in bringing stability to the China-Myanmar shared border during his visit to Kunming, China, last week. Chinese Premier Li Qiang reaffirmed China's support for Myanmar's military leader during a sideline meeting with the embattled junta leader at the Greater Mekong Subregion Summit in Kunming on November 6-7. Li reaffirmed China's commitment to regional stability, emphasizing the importance of trade and border security, even as vital crossings remain blocked due to heightened fighting. He reassured Myanmar of China's support for "a development path suited to its national conditions," and promised continued cooperation to progress Myanmar's political reconciliation process. [Radio Free Asia][VOA]

Li emphasized China's commitment to the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor under the Belt and Road Initiative, describing it as a critical project for both countries. During the discussion, Li voiced his hope that Myanmar would safeguard the security of Chinese

workers, institutions, and projects within its borders, while also calling for further cooperation in tackling cross-border issues including online gambling and telecom fraud.

The National Unity Government has raised alarm about Min Aung Hlaing's visit to China, calling it an attempt by the military dictatorship to obtain legitimacy and financial assistance. [Development Media Group] [The Diplomat]

China's strategic mediation include supporting the Three Brotherhood Alliance, a coalition of ethnic armed groups consisting of the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, and the Arakan Army, as well as facilitating cease-fire talks between the junta and the Three Brotherhood Alliance in Kunming. Analysts believe that China's border trade restrictions have cut off vital supplies such as food and medicine, aiming to pressure armed resistance groups while securing China's regional interests. [Burma News International]

Myanmar corn industry promote traceability and sustainable system with aid form Thailand

(tl) U Aye Chan Aung, Chairman of the Myanmar Corn Industrial Association (MCIA), emphasized the importance of adopting the traceability system used by Thailand's Charoen Pokphand Group for Myanmar's corn industry. The association is working with Thai companies Charoen Pokphand Company and Bangkok Produce Public Company to enhance traceability in corn used for animal feed. This initiative aims to improve sustainability and transparency across the supply chain, from cultivation to export.

The MCIA's adoption of this innovative technology is considered a significant step forward for Myanmar and the region's long-term development, with clear economic, social, and environmental benefits. The traceability system will provide farmers with verifiable records of sustainable sourcing and products that are not linked to deforestation or forest encroachment. [The Nation][The Bangkok Post]

Indian Manipur state authorities issue 1-month deadline for refugees to return

(nf) Authorities in India's Manipur state have issued an ultimatum to thousands of Myanmar nationals, demanding they return home within a month, despite ongoing junta airstrikes that continue to target their villages. Nearly 5,000 residents from Sagaing – one of the worst-hit regions in the conflict – have sought refuge in Manipur since Myanmar's military coup in 2021.

About 3,000 of them are currently living in Kamjong and Ukhrul districts. While families with school-going children are allowed to stay until exams are completed in March 2025, the rest are being instructed to return. Rebuilding towns like Kham Pat and Myo Thit—areas controlled by opposition forces but severely damaged by junta arson attacks—represents a monumental task for the displaced population. [Radio Free Asia]

India hosts Myanmar delegation in closed-door talks on federalism and peace

(sc) India recently hosted a delegation from Myanmar's junta-led State Administration Council (SAC) and aligned political and ethnic groups for a private workshop on democracy and federalism, amid rising security concerns at the border. The closed-door event, held November 5-6 by the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), included 18 Myanmar representatives led by two lieutenant generals, featuring political party members and ethnic revolutionary organizations (EROs) allied with the junta. Anti-junta resistance groups were notably absent, as discussions focused on ending conflict and exploring paths to stability through dialogue and diplomacy, according to anonymous sources familiar with the talks. [Hindustan Times]

The meeting occurred during a turbulent period for the Myanmar junta, which faces intensified opposition, with recent battlefield losses to the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine State. The workshop reflects India's dual-track approach of engaging both the junta and, tentatively, the National Unity Government (NUG), seeking to balance regional stability with democratic principles. The External Affairs Ministry emphasized that India supports a "Myanmar-led solution" and said the session was an opportunity to discuss "India's experience in constitutionalism and federalism" with stakeholders from Myanmar society. There is speculation that similar workshops may soon include the NUG and anti-junta forces. [Ministry of External Affairs of Government of India]

North Korea conducts GPS jamming attacks affecting civilian vessels and aircraft

(mc) South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that North Korea had conducted on November 9 for the second consecutive day GPS jamming operations affecting ships and surface aircraft near the Yellow Sea.

In its statement, the Joint Chiefs of Staff condemned North Korea's actions and called for an immediate halt to the provocations. North Korea's GPS jamming operations occurred on 29 May and 2 June and had a more significant impact than the latest jamming action, when an estimated 500 planes and hundreds of ships experienced GPS problems caused by North Korean interference [Al Jazeera]

South Korea has previously complained about North Korea's GPS jamming to organizations such as the International Telecommunication Union, the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Maritime Organisation. Still, only the International Civil Aviation Organization has expressed concern by explicitly targeting North Korea. [Yonhap Agency News]

China officially invites Nepal's Prime Minister Oli to visit in December

(lm) Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is set to visit China from December 2 to 6, following an official invitation from Chinese authorities. This trip, Oli's first bilateral visit since assuming office in mid-July, will focus on advancing key agreements under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), strengthening bilateral relations, and addressing financial challenges tied to infrastructure projects.

The visit aims to address delays in implementing commitments made during prior high-level engagements, including Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2019 visit to Nepal. Central to the discussions will be the long-pending BRI implementation plan, a blueprint for advancing large-scale infrastructure projects. Among the priority initiatives are the Mugling-Pokhara and Narayanghat-Butwal road upgrades, the Tokha-Chhahare road project, and the Nepal-China cross-border railway, all of which have seen slow progress.

A significant agenda item will be Nepal's request to convert the 1.38-billion-yuan loan (NPR 25.88 billion/USD 3.22 million) used to build the Pokhara

International Airport into a grant. The airport, inaugurated in January 2023, has struggled to generate sufficient revenue, and converting the loan to a grant would alleviate financial strain while bolstering bilateral trust. Analysts highlight this as an opportunity for China to demonstrate goodwill and support for Nepal's economic recovery.

The visit will also focus on enhancing connectivity through the opening of additional border points, such as those in Mustang, Taplejung, and Sankhuwasabha, to facilitate trade and strengthen people-to-people ties. These initiatives align with Nepal's broader goals of reviving historical trade routes and promoting trilateral agreements with India and China for large-scale connectivity projects. Discussions are expected to extend to disaster resilience, sustainable infrastructure, and converting pledged Chinese commitments into actionable outcomes.

Prime Minister Oli has underscored Nepal's commitment to maintaining balanced relations with both India and China. While prioritizing ties with Beijing for this visit, Oli assured that engaging with China does not imply strained relations with India. "We aim to maintain friendly and balanced ties with both neighbors while focusing on national interests," Oli stated. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2] [The Kathmandu Post 3]

Nepal: Two Indian security chiefs to visit Kathmandu in November

(lm/dg) Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi and Director General of the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) Amrit Mohan Prasad are scheduled to visit Nepal this month amid continued bilateral engagements despite political cooling between Kathmandu and New Delhi following KP Oli's election as prime minister in July.

General Dwivedi, serving as Indian Army Chief since June, will arrive on November 20 for an official visit. During his stay, President Ramchandra Paudel will confer him the honorary rank of General of the Nepal Army, continuing a seven-decade tradition of reciprocal honors between the two nations. Dwivedi will meet President Paudel, Prime Minister Oli, and Nepal Army Chief General Ashok Sigdel, and visit key sites of bilateral military cooperation. Nepal Army, a major recipient of Indian military aid, is finalizing his itinerary.

Prior to this, SSB Chief Amrit Mohan Prasad will visit Nepal on November 15 at the invitation of Armed

Police Force (APF) Inspector General Raju Aryal. Prasad and Aryal will co-chair the eighth annual coordination meeting to discuss border management along the 1,751 km Nepal-India border. The agenda includes strengthening collaboration, curbing trans-border crimes, combating human trafficking, and enhancing citizen facilitation at border transit points.

Both visits underscore the ongoing operational ties between the two countries, focusing on security cooperation and capacity-building through joint mechanisms and intelligence sharing. [The Kathmandu Post]

Meanwhile, Nepal and India have agreed to expedite hydropower and energy cooperation following a visit by Nepalese Energy and Water Resources Minister Deepak Khadka from November 3 to 6. Key discussions included the Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project and the Arun Third hydropower project. India committed to advancing the Pancheshwar Project, while Nepal is fast-tracking land acquisition for the Arun Third Project, developed by an Indian company.

The two nations also explored electricity trade, transmission line construction, and flood control measures. India agreed to assist Nepal in providing drinking water and irrigation to hilly regions using solar panels. Additionally, India responded positively to Nepal's request to use its transmission lines to export 40 MW of electricity to Bangladesh, marking a significant step in regional energy cooperation. [The Hindu]

Nepal eases NOC requirement for migrant workers using Indian airports

(lm) Nepali migrant workers with valid foreign employment permits issued by the Department of Foreign Employment are no longer required to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) when traveling via Indian airports. Other travelers to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE, and several Middle Eastern and Russian destinations must still secure an NOC unless exempted, such as those with valid visas for Western nations, diplomatic passport holders, and minors under 16. [The Kathmandu Post]

Ukraine confirms direct involvement of North Korean troops in war

(mc/bw) Recent developments in the war in Ukraine have reportedly seen clashes between Ukrainian and North Korean troops in Russia's Kursk region, as well as reports of a large-scale Russian offensive in the same area with the involvement of North Korean forces.

Clashes between Ukrainian and Russian troops

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced on November 7 that Ukrainian troops had clashed with North Korean troops stationed in the Kursk region of Russia and that there were casualties in the clashes.

The presence of approximately 11,000 North Korean troops in the region has been significant in terms of being the first confirmation that North Korea has engaged in a conflict on European soil since the Second World War.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his readiness to negotiate with US President-elect Donald Trump on possible compromises, including territorial concessions by Ukraine, to end the war in Ukraine. [CNN]

Russia and North Korean troops set for offensive in Kursk Oblast

According to Ukrainian intelligence and US officials, Russia is reportedly planning an offensive in Ukraine's Kursk Oblast with around 50,000 troops, including North Korean soldiers. [Kyiv Independent 1] [NY Times]

The large force, built up without shifting troops from eastern Ukraine, will soon begin the assault, aiming to reclaim territory on the eastern front where Ukraine launched an unexpected incursion in August. As Russian sources saw one of its heaviest losses last month, experts speculate additional North Korean troops will be sent to replace injured and killed Russian soldier in other deficient areas along the front lines. [Kyiv Independent 2]

North Korean soldiers, deployed as light infantry and divided into assault and support units, are expected to face high risks from Ukrainian artillery and drone attacks. Recent clashes have already resulted in confirmed casualties among North Korean forces on November 7th in Kursk Oblast. [Kyiv Independent 3]

President Putin signs into law mutual defense treaty with North Korea

These developments come as Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on November 9 that he

signed into signing the mutual defense treaty with North Korea, concluded by him and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at a summit in Pyongyang in June. This treaty involves mutual assistance in the event of an armed attack on either country (see AiR No. 26, June/2024, 4).

In an earlier move, the Russian parliament ratified the treaty in the first week of November. [Reuters]

Pakistan reaffirms commitment to Chinese partnerships amid security challenges and economic strains

(tf/lm) Pakistan has reaffirmed its commitment to protecting Chinese nationals and advancing projects under the USD 65 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) despite escalating security threats and financial strains. The assurance comes amid a string of violent incidents, including the November 5 shooting of two Chinese nationals by a security guard at a Karachi garment factory and an October car bombing near Karachi's airport that killed two Chinese engineers. The latter attack, claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), highlights the persistent threat to Chinese interests in Pakistan. [Reuters]

In response, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi assured Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong that safeguarding Chinese workers and investments remains a top priority. Additional security protocols are being implemented in vulnerable regions. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also condemned the attacks, pledging justice and enhanced protection for Chinese nationals. However, Pakistan has resisted Beijing's proposal to allow Chinese security personnel on the ground, instead requesting support to strengthen intelligence and surveillance capabilities. [Geo News] [The Daily Star]

The Karachi bombing exposed significant lapses in Pakistan's security arrangements, fueling Chinese frustration over the country's failure to adhere to agreed-upon safety protocols. Investigators suspect insider involvement in the attack, which allowed a truck carrying 100 kg of explosives to breach security at the airport.

While addressing these security challenges, Pakistan and China are pushing forward with key infrastructure and economic initiatives under CPEC. During high-level discussions on November 7, Chinese Ambassador Jiang and Pakistani Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal focused on accelerating projects such as the Main Line-1

railway, the Karakoram Highway, and the Gwadar Free Zone. Both sides emphasized the need for robust mechanisms to ensure the timely execution of these initiatives, which are critical for bolstering regional connectivity and economic growth.

Ambassador Jiang expressed China's readiness to deepen cooperation in agriculture, mining, and industrial development. He also acknowledged Pakistan's efforts to enhance the security of Chinese workers and projects, despite persistent threats from separatist and militant groups. Discussions included plans for workshops to chart the second phase of CPEC, which will prioritize sustainable growth, innovation, and regional inclusivity. [Arab News]

Parallel to its commitments to CPEC, Pakistan is grappling with significant economic challenges. The government has formally requested China to reschedule USD 3.4 billion in official and guaranteed debt over two years to address a USD 5 billion external financing gap identified by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The debt, owed to China's Export-Import (Exim) Bank, includes USD 750 million maturing within the current fiscal year, making its rescheduling critical for Pakistan's financial stability and IMF certification.

This marks Pakistan's second such request following a USD 2.4 billion debt rollover in 2023. The latest request underscores Islamabad's heavy reliance on Beijing's support, which includes ongoing trade financing, commercial loans, and cash deposits essential for maintaining its foreign reserves. [The Express Tribune]

Pakistan invites South Korea to invest in port infrastructure

(lm) Pakistan's Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaiser Ahmed Shaikh has extended an invitation to South Korea to invest in the country's strategic port infrastructure, joining nations such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Denmark, and Malaysia, which have already made significant contributions. The invitation was made during a meeting with South Korean Ambassador Park Ki Jun on November 10.

The discussions focused on modernizing Pakistan's port facilities, including the deep-water Gwadar Port, to enhance trade connectivity and increase cargo handling efficiency. Highlighting the potential for bilateral cooperation, Shaikh emphasized opportunities in renewable energy, urban planning, transportation, and port modernization. He lauded the educational exchange programs between the two

countries and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to strengthening ties with South Korea.

With strategic access to the Arabian Sea, Pakistan's seaports in Karachi are crucial for international trade and provide employment to thousands. Recent initiatives have underscored Pakistan's efforts to upgrade its maritime infrastructure. In August, Danish shipping giant Maersk announced plans to invest USD 2 billion in Pakistan's port and transport infrastructure over two years. Similarly, the Abu Dhabi Ports Group has signed agreements to invest USD 250 million over the next decade, aiming to build advanced facilities in Karachi. [Arab News]

Conflicting reports operations near Pakistan-Iran border

(tf/lm) Conflicting narratives have emerged about recent operations near the Pakistan-Iran border in Sistan-Baluchistan, a region grappling with militancy and cross-border crime. Iranian authorities claimed their security forces killed 18 Afghan-Tajik militants disguised as oil tanker operators in an operation covering Rasik, Chabahar, and Parwad. However, Iran's state-run IRNA, referencing Pakistan's The Khorasan Diary, described the operation as a joint effort by Iranian and Pakistani border forces targeting smugglers in Balochistan. [DAWN]

The region continues to face significant security challenges. On November 10, Iranian security forces killed three militants and arrested nine others in Sistan-Baluchistan, following an October 26 attack by the Sunni militant group Jaish Al-Adl that killed 10 Iranian police officers. The attack prompted extensive security operations, reportedly resulting in the deaths of 15 militants. Sistan-Baluchistan, one of Iran's least developed provinces, remains a flashpoint for tensions, exacerbated by historical grievances between its predominantly Sunni population and Iran's Shiite-led government. [Arab News 1]

Adding to the instability, a militant attack in Saravan city near the Pakistani border killed five ethnic Baloch members of the Revolutionary Guard's Basij force. No group has claimed responsibility for the assault, but recent months have seen a rise in violence linked to Baloch separatists, drug smuggling networks, and extremist groups. [Arab News 2]

Pakistan, United Arab Emirates sign agreements in customs, rail, airports, and maritime sectors

(lm) Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) signed four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) on November 8, focusing on enhancing collaboration in customs, rail infrastructure, airport development, and maritime shipping. The agreements were exchanged during a meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and a UAE delegation led by Dr. Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, UAE minister of state for foreign trade, in Islamabad.

The MoUs involve Pakistan's ministries of maritime affairs, aviation, and railways, as well as the Federal Board of Revenue, partnering with Abu Dhabi Ports Group. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the agreements aim to improve digital customs controls, develop dedicated freight rail corridors, upgrade Pakistan's maritime fleet and marine services, and enhance infrastructure at international airports.

This visit by the UAE delegation comes as Pakistan seeks to strengthen trade and investment ties amid economic challenges. Earlier this year, Pakistan announced that the UAE had committed USD 10 billion to invest in key economic sectors. Saudi Arabia has also pledged USD 5 billion in investments, and both countries have been instrumental in supporting Pakistan's foreign reserves during its ongoing balance of payment crisis. Last month, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed 34 MoUs worth USD 2.8 billion. [Arab News]

UAE provides technical and material support to Pakistan in fight against smog

(tf) The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has offered Pakistan to provide material and technical assistance to lessen the effects of smog in various parts of the country. Ambassador of UAE to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi voiced his concern over the fog situation in Pakistan, especially in Punjab. By He recalled that the UAE administration had provided technical assistance to Pakistan in order to help them overcome the haze last year, while the caretaker government was in power here.

The UAE provided special aircraft for cloud seeding that helped in artificial rainmaking in some areas and provided relief to the brotherly people, he added. Ambassador Al-Zaabi said that smog has been

discomforting and it must be controlled by all possible means. He expressed satisfaction about the administration here which has been taking suitable steps to check the situation.

The UAE envoy said that he was in touch with the Pakistan government and hopefully it would take further steps to mitigate the suffering on account of smog. The UAE had helped Pakistan in cloud seeding for precipitation in December last year, in the first experiment of its kind for the South Asian country. [GEO TV]

Singapore, China leaders to hold meetings on bilateral cooperation and ink 25 MOUs to further growth

(fi/lm) Singapore and China strengthen bilateral ties through high-level meetings on November 10-11 marked by new agreements. Deputy Prime Minister Gan Kim Yong and Chinese Vice-Premier Ding Xuexiang co-chaired the 20th Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC), along with several other joint steering councils, discussing key government-to-government projects in Suzhou, Tianjin, and Chongqing. This marks the 20th anniversary of the JCBC, a platform for advancing Singapore-China cooperation. During the JCBC'S 20 anniversary Singapore and China signed 25 MoU and agreement focusing on furthering collaborations in cross-border trade, sustainability, and strategic connectivity. [The Straits Times]

The meeting covered steps to boost supply chain resilience and confirmed an upgrade to the China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (CSFTA), effective December 31, to secure trade routes. Expanded cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative will strengthen regional infrastructure and economic connections. Both sides committed to creating a Green and Digital Shipping Corridor, advancing green finance and capital markets, and supporting food security through farmed fish export protocols. Enhanced collaborations in education and culture, alongside new university and leadership programs, were also highlighted. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore]

Meanwhile, at the 7th Singapore-China Trade and Investment Forum (SCTIF), held on the sidelines of the China International Import Expo in Shanghai, 15 memorandums of understanding (MOUs) were signed, valued at over SGD 60 million (USD 45 million). These agreements cover a wide range of sectors, including cross-border trade solutions, construction technology,

education services, healthcare, and logistics. Key participants in the forum included companies like ONE Championship, Alibaba Intime Business Group, and the Jinan government. [The Business Times]

The forum saw more than 300 business leaders attending both in person and virtually, underscoring its role in facilitating trade and fostering new growth opportunities between the two countries. Kok Ping Soon, CEO of the Singapore Business Federation (SBF), emphasized the forum's importance in supporting Singaporean companies' expansion into China and vice versa, especially in ASEAN markets.

Vice-Premier Ding's visit also includes meetings with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, along with a commemorative tree-planting ceremony at the Singapore Botanic Gardens to mark the 30th anniversary of the Suzhou Industrial Park. [The Straits Times]

In a separate development, Singapore's Energy Market Authority (EMA) signed a preliminary agreement with PetroChina International Company Ltd on November 7. This partnership focuses on strengthening liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply chains, fostering market knowledge exchange, and enhancing energy security. The agreement aims to position Singapore as an Asian LNG hub while supporting its transition to a decarbonized power sector. [Reuters]

Singapore’s Prime Minister Lawrence Wong concludes introductory visit to Indonesia

(fi/gk) Singapore’s Prime Minister Lawrence Wong concluded his introductory visit to Indonesia on November 6, after engaging in comprehensive discussions with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and other senior leaders in Jakarta.

During his meeting with President Prabowo, Prime Minister Wong emphasized the significance of advancing collaboration in the green economy and food security. Both leaders highlighted ongoing projects, such as cross-border electricity interconnections, green hydrogen development in Sumatra, and solar power plant initiatives.

These efforts were recognized as transformative opportunities for sustainable development and economic growth. Prime Minister Wong described cross-border energy exports and carbon capture and

storage projects as pivotal engines for the region's future collaboration.

Food security was another key priority in the discussions. The two leaders agreed to expedite a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in food security and agricultural technology. Prime Minister Wong outlined Singapore's contributions, particularly in food technology, urban farming, and innovations to enhance crop resilience and productivity. These efforts aim to complement Indonesia's agricultural priorities while fostering mutual benefits through shared expertise and knowledge exchange.

Additionally, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to human capital development and strengthening people-to-people exchanges. They expressed optimism about the upcoming 8th Singapore-Indonesia Leaders' Retreat in 2025, which will mark the first such meeting between the two leaders and provide an opportunity to deepen bilateral collaboration further.

Regional and international issues were discussed, and both heads of state shared the same view on importance of maintaining regional and international peace and security amid complex geopolitical situations. Deep concern was expressed over situations in Palestine and Lebanon. Both supported the immediate cessation of violence, unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid and the achievement of two-state solution for Palestine and Isreal. With regards to Myanmar, both agreed to implement the five-point consensus.

Prime Minister Wong also met with Vice-President Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly Ahmad Muzani, and Speaker of the Regional Representative Council Sultan Bachtiar Najamudin. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore] [Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia] [The Business Times] [Jakarta Globe] [Antara]

Singapore Minister Maliki's working visit to Brazil and Argentina strengthens bilateral ties

(fi) Dr. Mohamad Maliki Osman, Minister in Singapore's Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Education and Foreign Affairs, recently concluded a working visit to Fortaleza, Brazil and Buenos Aires, Argentina, further strengthening ties between Singapore and these South American nations.

In Fortaleza, Minister Maliki met with Vice Governor Jade Romero and José Ricardo Montenegro Cavalcante, President of the Federation of Industries of Ceará (FIEC). Both sides expressed their commitment to enhancing cooperation in education and sustainability. Minister Maliki also visited the Pecém Port and Complex, a pivotal logistics and green hydrogen hub in Ceará.

In Buenos Aires, the Minister held discussions with Argentine Foreign Minister Gerardo Werthein, Minister of Human Capital Sandra Pettovello, and Minister of Economy Luis Caputo. The visit, marking the 50th anniversary of bilateral relations, focused on strengthening collaboration in trade, business flows, educational exchanges, and parliamentary ties. Minister Maliki also hosted a lunch for Argentine Congress members and participated in events with the Argentine Council for International Relations (CARI) and the Argentine Chamber of Commerce for Asia and the Pacific.

Additionally, he delivered a lecture on Singapore and ASEAN to students at the Universidad del Salvador. Minister Maliki concluded his visit with a tour of the Exolgan Container Terminal, part of the PSA Group. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore]

Singapore, France complete trial for protection against quantum computing attacks

(fi) The Banque de France (BdF) and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) have completed a joint trial in post-quantum cryptography (PQC) to enhance data security against quantum computing threats.

The initiative tested quantum-resistant algorithms for encrypting and signing emails while maintaining compatibility with existing standards. The trial highlighted the need for standardized application protocols, including public key infrastructure and digital certificates.

BdF and MAS plan to expand their collaboration to secure critical cross-border financial transactions, further future-proofing payment networks against evolving cybersecurity threats. [Singapore Business Review]

Autistic Australian teenager detained in Singapore due to passport alert

(fi) A 17-year-old autistic Australian boy, previously targeted in an undercover counter-terrorism operation in Australia, was detained in Singapore last month with his family due to a "red flag" on his passport. Despite being cleared of all charges in 2023, the family was held for over 30 hours before being deported back to Australia.

The boy had planned the trip to Singapore and Malaysia as part of his rehabilitation and to overcome the trauma of his prior case. However, upon arrival, the family was told the red flag would prevent entry into many countries, including Malaysia. The family, Australian citizens, endured distressing conditions during their detention, raising questions about the handling of the situation by Australian and Singaporean authorities.

Greens Senator David Shoebridge criticized Australian authorities for failing to warn the family about potential consequences of their travel. Shoebridge has since called for transparency regarding the alerts on Thomas's passport and any involvement of Australian authorities in the family's detention. Australian officials have declined to comment, deferring responsibility to Singaporean authorities. [The Guardian]

South Korea responses to North Korean missile launches live-fire drills, Hyunmoo missile launch

(jb) Following North Korea's launch of the Hwasong-19 intercontinental ballistic missile on October 31 (see AiR No. 45, November/2024, 1) as well as their launch of ballistic missiles from Sariwon in the North on November 5 (see article in this edition), South Korea conducted live-fire missile interception drills off the coast of the East Sea on November 6.

The drills involved the Air Force Missile Defense Command whose Cheongung-II and Patriot units used their air defense systems to fire air-to-surface defense missiles to simulate a counter for enemy attacks. The attack was simulated to resemble the November 5 missile launches, which used the KN-25 super-large 600-millimetre multiple rocket launchers. The drills conducted by South Korea aim to assess not only military preparedness in the event of escalation but also to send a deterrent signal to the North that they will be met with equal firepower.

South Korea has also begun preparation on an international front by joining allied nations such as Australia, Japan and the US to conduct air and naval drills. [Yonhap News Agency]

A day later, South Korea also launched a Hyunmoo-II surface-to-surface ballistic missile off its western coast into the Yellow Sea. The Joint Chiefs of Staff announced that the missile launch and live-fire drills indicated "its strong resolve to respond to any North Korean provocation as well as the capabilities and posture for precision strikes against the enemy's origin of provocation."

The military also simultaneously held anti-drone drills in the capital, Seoul, on the same day as a response to North Korean allegations about South Korean drones flying over their capital Pyongyang. [Anadolu Ajansi]

France to provide 40 patrol vessels to Philippine Coast Guard in USD 438 million aid deal

(rv) France will provide 40 patrol vessels and logistical support to the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) through a USD 438 million aid package. This assistance will quadruple the Philippine Coast Guard fleet and enhance its maritime security.

20 of the Fast Response Crafts will be constructed in France and the remaining 20 in the Philippines. French shipbuilder OCEA Shipbuilding is expected to win the acquisition project.

On top of deterring smuggling and illegal activities, the deal will ensure the enforcement of maritime sovereignty in critical marine areas for the Philippines. With a fleet of 13 ocean-going patrol vessels, the Philippines Coast Guard is strained to cover its 7,641 islands. The encounters with Chinese maritime forces have also drained the agency's resources.

As Manila's most important European partner, France joins Japan and the United States in extending its support to bolster the Philippines Coast Guard fleet. [USNI News]

French nuclear delegation to engage with Philippine leaders on energy cooperation

(lm) A delegation from the French nuclear industry will visit the Philippines this week to engage with key public and private sector leaders. The delegation will be in the country from November 12 to 15 and will participate in the Philippine International Nuclear Supply Chain Forum, hosted by the Department of Energy.

The group comprises representatives from leading French nuclear entities, including Electricité de France, Europe's largest electricity producer and distributor; the Commissariat à l'énergie atomique et aux énergies alternatives, a prominent nuclear technology research organization; and the Institute for Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety. The French National Agency for Radioactive Waste Management will also be involved.

During the forum, the delegation will highlight the key features that distinguish the French nuclear industry. France boasts the highest nuclear power share in the world, generating 72 percent of its electricity from nuclear energy with a capacity of 62 GWe. [Bilyonaryo]

South Korea and Japan pledge unified stance against military ties between North Korea and Russia

(mc) Japanese Deputy Defence Minister Koichiro Nakajima and South Korean Deputy Defence Minister Kim Seon-ho met in Seoul on November 8 to discuss the escalating military cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

During the meeting, both countries agreed to take firm steps to increase bilateral and trilateral cooperation, including with the United States, to counter the growing partnership between Russia and North Korea. They also highlighted the growing North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities in the region and underlined the importance of regional security coordination between the three countries.

The meeting follows an agreement reached between the two countries' defense ministers at the Singapore defense summit in June to regularly hold vice-ministerial talks to enhance defense cooperation to address regional threats. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korean, Laotian top diplomats hold talks on North Korean troop deployment in Ukraine

(jb) The foreign ministers of South Korea and Laos met on November 6 to discuss concerns over North Korea's deployment of troops to support Russia in the Ukraine conflict, amidst the recent launch of North Korea's Hwasong-19 ICBM into the East Sea. South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-Yul urged Laos and other ASEAN nations to pressure North Korea to de-escalate tensions and engage in denuclearization talks.

As both countries approach the 30th anniversary of their diplomatic relations next month, they aim to strengthen their partnership beyond their current agricultural focus. This includes expanding cooperation into new sectors. Notably, in October, South Korea and Laos signed three agreements focusing on climate change, economic development, and environmental protection. [Asia News Network] [Lao News Agency]

Given Laos' current role as ASEAN chair, with a theme of "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience," South Korea's appeal for support is particularly timely. However, Laos also maintains diplomatic ties with North Korea, with an embassy in Pyongyang, adding complexity to its regional diplomatic stance. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea, Brunei hold defense talks

(dql) South Korea and Brunei called for an immediate halt to military cooperation between Russia and North Korea during their inaugural defense policy dialogue, held on November 7 in Seoul. The two sides condemned North Korea's recent missile launches and its military collaboration with Russia, including sending troops to assist in Russia's war efforts in Ukraine.

They described these actions as serious violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions. The call for an end to such cooperation was made by Lee Seung-beom, South Korea's director general for international policy, and Poh Kui Choon, Brunei's deputy permanent secretary of defense.

The discussions coincided with reports of North Korean troops engaging in their first combat with Ukrainian forces, while North Korea also launched short-range ballistic missiles into the East Sea (see articles in this edition). [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korean Trade officials seek resolution in trade dispute with Vietnam

(mc) Officials from South Korea and Vietnam held a meeting on November 6 in Seoul to discuss trade disputes and enhance economic cooperation between the two countries.

The two sides held their eighth bilateral trade conciliation meeting this year and discussed ongoing trade issues, including Vietnam's anti-dumping investigation into South Korean galvanized steel sheets.

South Korean officials have called for the reduction of anti-dumping duties on South Korean goods, claiming that the impact of South Korean galvanized steel sheets to Vietnam on Vietnamese industry is low. [Yonhap News Agency]

South Korea's president orders forming of consultative body to prepare for Trump administration

(jb) An economic and security review meeting at the South Korean Presidential Office was held on November 10 to assess the impact of foreign affairs on the nation's economy and national security.

During the meeting, President Yoon Suk Yeol stated that the second Donald Trump administration would bring into focus several aspects of US-South Korean ties, primarily trade relations, which would need the cooperation of both nations to normalize. He instructed relevant ministries to create consultative bodies on finance, trade and industry to brace for the potential impacts as Trump's protectionist policies and to ensure no shocks to the South Korean industry and corporate world. [The Korea Times]

Pointing out that their two main sectors, semiconductors and automobiles, would need to remain stable with the shift in US administrations, Yoon argued that a new US foreign policy on supporting fossil fuels would boost South Korea's nascent shipbuilding industry and revive their petrochemical sector.

The consultative bodies would thereby enable cooperation and communication with the US government to ensure that both countries are on the same page regarding not only commercial ties but also their defense alliance. [Korea Joongang Daily]

South Korea, U.S. to deepen nuclear export cooperation

(bw) South Korea and the U.S. are advancing their nuclear export partnership, combining South Korea's expertise in construction and manufacturing with U.S. diplomatic and technological strengths to compete in the global nuclear market.

South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Department of Energy and Department of State initiated a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on November 5, outlining cooperation principles, with the potential to unlock billions of dollars in economic opportunities and create tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs in both countries.

This partnership signifies a deeper collaboration, starting from project bidding stages, a shift from limited previous collaborations. The partnership also aims to further Western power to challenge Russian and Chinese influence in the sector, leveraging South Korea's reliability and the U.S.'s diplomatic power. [Europa Today]

Meanwhile, South Korea's leading construction firm, Hyundai Engineering & Construction, in collaboration with Westinghouse, secured a contract with Bulgaria's energy agency for the Kozloduy plant, valued at KRW 20 trillion (USD 14.49 billion), showcasing the alliance's readiness for multibillion-dollar projects.

This follows a landmark KRW20 trillion Barakah nuclear power plant project secured in 2009 and the recent successful bid for a KRW 24 trillion nuclear power plant project in the Czech Republic in July (see AiR No. 30, July/2024, 4). Expectations are rising that the South Korea-U.S. alliance will secure additional multibillion-dollar projects in the expanding nuclear market. [Chosun]

Observers highlight South Korea's "On Time, On Budget" reputation as a significant asset, positioning the alliance to excel in a market traditionally dominated by Russia and China.

South Korea, U.S. to hold first joint space defense exercise

(mc) South Korea and the United States announced that they have agreed to hold their first table-top

exercise aimed at countering space-based threats in the first half of 2025.

The agreement was reached during regular working-level talks on space cooperation held in the US capital Washington on November 7. Under the agreement the exercise will be held annually exercise, aimed at increasing the two countries' ability to comprehensively address evolving space security issues.

It was also agreed that the South Korean military will join the US-led Joint Commercial Operations cell, which utilizes global civil space monitoring systems for enhanced space domain awareness. [Yonhap Agency News]

South Korean President Yoon meets Saudi minister to strengthen bilateral ties

(mc) South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Saudi Arabia's Minister of National Guard, Prince Abdullah bin Bandar bin Abdulaziz, met in Seoul on November 7. They held talks on strengthening diplomatic and economic ties to enhance bilateral cooperation. [Asharq Al-Awsat]

China provides financial assistance for disaster relief in Sri Lanka

(mt) China has provided financial assistance amounting to approximately USD 150,000 to Sri Lanka to help compensate for damages caused by natural disasters between January 1 and October 30, 2024. This funding has been forwarded to the Sri Lankan Treasury to support affected individuals.

In addition to this, the Department of National Budget has allocated additional provisions to the Defence Ministry for the reconstruction of homes impacted by the disasters. These provisions were necessary due to the insufficiency of funds in the 2024 national budget to fully address disaster relief needs.

Furthermore, under the Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Programme, China is expected to provide material assistance worth 1.4 million USD. These goods will be properly accounted for and distributed upon arrival. [Daily News]

More houses built in Sri Lanka under Indian grant handed over to beneficiaries

(sl) The High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka, Santosh Jha, inaugurated and handed over the Thiththavelkiwla Model Village in Monaragala to 24 beneficiary families as part of the Indian-supported Model Village Housing Project. This initiative, implemented in all 25 districts of Sri Lanka in collaboration with the Ministry of Rural and Urban Development, Housing, and Construction, provides housing facilities for 600 low-income families across the island.

The project, established under a 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between the governments of India and Sri Lanka, features one model village per district, each comprising 24 houses selected by District Housing Committees. To date, model villages have been handed over in 12 districts, including Batticaloa, Jaffna, Kandy, and Colombo. [Ada Derana]

NDU delegation pays courtesy call on Sri Lankan Defense Secretary

(sl) On November 7, a delegation from the US National Defense University (NDU), led by Admiral (retd) Harry Harris, visited the Sri Lankan Defense Secretary, Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) Sampath Thuyacontha, at the Ministry of Defense of Sri Lanka. [Ministry of Defence – Sri Lanka]

Taiwan celebrates result in Palau presidential election

(am) Taiwan's Presidential Office congratulated incumbent Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr. on his successful re-election to a second term. Whipps defeated former Palau President Tommy Remengesau.

This outcome is significant, as Whipps is considered a strong supporter of Taiwan, suggesting that Palau is likely to continue recognizing the Taipei government. [VoA]

Palau remains one of only 12 UN member states that maintains formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan reveals plan to welcome 1000 Indian workers

(am) Taiwan's Ministry of Labor has announced that the first group of Indian workers will soon arrive. It disclosed that Taiwan and India held a meeting on November 5 to discuss the introduction of Indian workers. A consensus was reached on the number of workers, target industries in Taiwan, and recruitment methods.

Tsai Meng-liang, Director-General of the Workforce Development Agency, explained that the two nations will promote an initiative to introduce Indian labor, with plans to bring in 1,000 workers for Taiwan's traditional manufacturing sector.

The initiative will be periodically reviewed to assess whether the number of workers should be increased or if other industries should be included. Ultimately, the goal is for Indian workers to be employed across the same range of industries as workers from other partner countries.

India has traditionally avoided direct hiring of migrant workers for other countries. This new agreement with Taiwan represents a shift in policy.

It is unclear when the first group of Indian workers will arrive in Taiwan but based on Japan's experience with introducing Indian migrant workers, the process may take about a year. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan's US envoy meets former Trump official

(am) On November 9, Taiwan's representative to the US, Alexander Yui, attended a lunch with former Trump administration official Robert O'Brien in Salt Lake City.

O'Brien, who served as National Security Advisor during Trump's first term, is rumored to be considering a role in the incoming administration. He is known to be a strong supporter of Taiwan, having been awarded the prestigious Order of Brilliant Star with Special Grand Cordon in March 2023. [Taiwan News 1]

The meeting is believed to be part of a broader series of discussions between foreign diplomats and figures associated with Trump, likely aimed at gaining insight into his plans for a potential second term.

Robert O'Brien in Salt Lake City. Former Republican Representative Chris Stewart also attended the lunch. [Taiwan News 2].

Thailand advances talks with Cambodia amid sovereignty concerns over overlapping claims area

(acs/lm) The Thai government is preparing to restart negotiations with Cambodia over the Overlapping Claims Area (OCA) in the Gulf of Thailand, a 27,000-square-kilometer maritime region rich in fossil energy resources. The OCA has been a point of contention since Cambodia asserted its claim in 1972, with Thailand countering the following year. The two nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2001 to facilitate joint management of the area and resolve maritime disputes.

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra announced the formation of a Joint Technical Committee (JTC) within the next two weeks to advance discussions. The JTC, which will require cabinet approval, will focus on resolving the OCA issue in line with the 2001 MoU framework. The MoU stipulates that maritime boundary negotiations and joint resource development must occur simultaneously, ensuring that both nations' interests are addressed. [Bangkok Post 1]

The MoU has faced criticism, particularly from opposition parties and nationalist groups, who fear it could compromise Thailand's sovereignty over Ko Kut, a district in Trat province. Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Phumtham Wechayachai recently visited Ko Kut to reaffirm Thai sovereignty and counter misinformation. He dismissed claims that the MoU risks territorial loss, emphasizing that Ko Kut has always been part of Thailand and remains under full Thai control. [Bangkok Post 2]

Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul also visited Ko Kut on November 11 to address public concerns and boost local confidence. Anutin reiterated that the MoU is a framework for negotiations and does not affect Thailand's sovereignty. He pledged government support to address local issues, such as water shortages, land ownership disputes, and infrastructure development. [The Nation]

The OCA dispute is significant due to its potential energy resources, which could bolster both nations' economies. However, critics, including the Thai Pakdee and Palang Pracharath parties, argue that the MoU's framework could allow Cambodia to exploit maritime

resources before official boundary demarcations are finalized. Thai Pakdee chairman Warong Dechgitvigrom has called for Cambodia to ratify the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to ensure equitable negotiations.

Foreign Affairs Minister Maris Sangiampongsa assured that any agreement resulting from the negotiations would require parliamentary approval, ensuring transparency and safeguarding Thailand's interests. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham highlighted the MoU as a practical tool for bilateral cooperation, warning that unilateral actions could strain Thai-Cambodian relations. [Bangkok Post 3]

Amid heightened attention on the OCA and Ko Kut, rumors of Thai-Cambodian military confrontations have been labeled as fake news by the Thai government. Officials, including Prime Minister Paetongtarn's advisor Jirayu Houngsub, have denied any security incidents on Ko Kut. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) reported strong tourist arrivals to the island, with no cancellations despite the controversy.

Efforts are underway to boost tourism further, with government campaigns promoting Ko Kut's natural beauty and community-based tourism. Both Phumtham and Anutin's visits emphasized maintaining confidence in the island as a peaceful and thriving destination.

The JTC, expected to include subcommittees on resource development and maritime security, will involve key ministries such as Defense, Energy, Foreign Affairs, and Finance. The Thai government has emphasized the need for mutual agreement in resolving the OCA dispute while preserving diplomatic ties with Cambodia.[Bangkok Post 1]

Malaysia's National Security Council to review Kelantan's 100-kilometer border wall proposal

(lm) Malaysia's Kelantan state has proposed constructing a 100-kilometer border wall along the Kolok River, which separates Kelantan from Thailand's Narathiwat province. The initiative aims to address cross-border issues, including smuggling, crime, and flooding, while facilitating security management. The proposal, supported by local police recommendations, will be submitted to Malaysia's federal government for approval.

Deputy Chief Minister Mohamed Fadzli Hassan highlighted the dual purpose of the wall as a security measure and a flood barrier. The Kolok River, which serves as the natural boundary between the two nations, presents challenges due to private land ownership along the border, complicating enforcement efforts.

Malaysia's Home Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail confirmed that the final decision will rest with the National Security Council, chaired by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Saifuddin emphasized Malaysia's commitment to combating illegal activities at the border, proposing additional measures such as closed-circuit cameras, fences, and drones.

This proposal follows intensified Malaysian efforts to curb smuggling, including the recent arrest of a lorry driver attempting to smuggle 13,000 kilograms of subsidized sugar worth MYR 40,000 (THB 311,000) into Thailand.

Several sections of the Malaysia-Thailand border already feature walls or fences, some built collaboratively by both nations, while others are unilateral projects. The Kolok River spans approximately 100 kilometers before flowing into the Gulf of Thailand, making the proposed wall a key component of broader regional security measures. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thai Prime Minister meets Myanmar junta chief in Kunming

(msz/tl) On November 7, Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra met with Myanmar military junta chief Sen Gen. Min Aung Hlang on the sidelines of the 8th Greater Mekong Subregion Summit in Kunming, China. Without explicitly mentioning further details other than her offer of goodwill on peace in Myanmar, the Thai premier said nothing unexpected occurred during the private meeting and that Myanmar conflict was an internal affair which it must manage. She also hinted at Thailand's support for the junta's scheduled election next year, which has been denounced by opposition groups as a sham and viewed as the military junta's attempt to legitimize its hold on power. [Reuters]

The meeting occurred against the backdrop of Paetongtarn government's ongoing preparations to host the ASEAN Troika Plus meeting on the Myanmar crisis in December coordinated by Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, and Min Aung Hlang's legitimacy deficits as

he has been barred from ASEAN summits due to a lack of progress on ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus Peace Plan. Paetongtarn had earlier stressed the futility of military solution, called for political dialogue among Myanmar's key stakeholders and ASEAN's heightened engagement with Myanmar, and hinted at Thailand's support to junta-proposed election in 2025 during the ASEAN summit in Laos in October. The ASEAN has yet to mention the junta's election plan in its official statements amidst skepticism among Myanmar domestic actors, who pointed to the fact that the main opposition groups have either refused or been barred from entering the election.

Myanmar junta has been battling against a rebellion that erupted after it seized power in a 2021 coup. The intensified fighting in Myanmar has spilled into neighboring Thailand disrupting border trade and forcing thousands of Myanmar refugees to live in camps in Thailand's Tak and Mae Hong Son province. Heavily constrained by its principles of consensus and non-interference, the ASEAN has had little power to compel or punish the junta for its refusal to end hostilities, engage with all parties whom it branded as terrorists and protest against the ASEAN's direct engagements with resistance forces like Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG). [Bangkok Post] [The Diplomat]

First Thai Korean War veteran buried in South Korea

(bk) Command Sergeant Major (CSM) Rod Asanapan has become the first Thai veteran of the Korean War to be interred in South Korea. On November 11, he was laid to rest at the United Nations Memorial Cemetery in Busan, accompanied by his daughter and granddaughter.

CSM Rod served as a nurse with Thailand's contingent in the Korean War from November 1952 to October 1953, participating in key battles, including those in Sangju and the Pyongyang offensive. Awarded the Victory Medal by the Thai government for his service, he passed away on June 14, 2023. Honoring his family's wishes, he is now the first Thai soldier interred among 2,328 veterans from 22 nations at the cemetery in Busan.

Thailand contributed 6,326 troops to the conflict, with 136 deaths and 1,139 injuries, making it the fifth country to join UN forces in the Korean War. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand confirms stable ties with United States amid anticipated election transition

(acs) Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa reaffirmed that Thailand's relationship with the United States will remain strong, regardless of the US presidential election outcome.

Speaking in Bangkok, Maris highlighted Thailand's focus on balanced international partnerships under Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra's administration, ensuring fair and stable ties with global partners. Maris emphasized that any shifts in Thailand's diplomatic strategy would rely on open dialogue and collaboration across government, private, and citizen-led initiatives.

US Ambassador Robert F. Godec echoed these sentiments, assuring that the long-standing 190-year bilateral relationship would endure, irrespective of election results. Godec noted that while policies might differ under a new administration, the core partnership in trade, investment, security, and education would remain robust.

In contrast, the main opposition People's Party noted potential impacts of heightened US-China tensions under a Trump presidency, including challenges to Thai exports and opportunities for increased foreign investment. The party also expressed concerns over Trump's limited focus on climate change, urging Thailand to enhance global partnerships to address climate resilience effectively. [Bangkok Post]

Tourists recruited for Cannabis smuggling to United Kingdom in exchange for free holidays

(acs) Thai and British authorities are cracking down on smuggling networks that recruit Britons via Telegram, offering free holidays in Thailand in exchange for smuggling cannabis to the United Kingdom.

Pol Lt Gen Phanurat Lukboon of the ONCB revealed that British officials reported a significant rise in cannabis seizures this year, linked to networks sourcing cannabis in Thailand. Recent raids in Bangkok uncovered 36 kilograms of cannabis and mailing materials disguised as pillows. Two foreign suspects were arrested.

Thailand legalized cannabis in 2022, but authorities are intensifying efforts to combat illegal exportation as smuggling activities grow. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand-Italy agricultural cooperation deal in progress

(lm) Thailand and Italy are finalizing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on agricultural cooperation to enhance production, trade, and investment. Agriculture Minister Narumon Pinyosinwat met with Italy's Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida, who expressed support for the Thailand-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and assistance in improving Thailand's sanitary and phytosanitary measures and sustainable food systems.

Thailand's exports to Italy from January to September 2024 totaled THB 11.88 billion (USD 344.52 million), an increase of THB 3.32 billion (USD 96.28 million) compared to last year. Key exports included pet food, frozen squid, natural and smoked rubber, rice, and processed fish.

Discussions also explored knowledge exchange between Thai silk producers and Italian fashion designers to promote soft power initiatives, with Italy's expertise in fashion highlighted as a valuable resource. [Bangkok Post]

Conflicts in the Middle East boosts Thailand's canned tuna exports

(hrs) The Ministry of Commerce has reported that the Middle East conflicts, including the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict, has boosted Thailand's canned tuna exports to the Middle East this year.

The Director of the Trade Policy and Strategy Office (TPSO) under the ministry's Department of Foreign Trade, Mr. Poonpong Naiyanapakorn, reported that Thai canned tuna exports to the Middle East has increased by 20.73% during the first nine months of 2024, reaching 65.98 billion baht. He attributes this increase to the Israel-Gaza conflict, which has boosted food demand in the region. [Thai PBS World]

Indonesian, Timorese Police agrees to cooperate on transnational crimes

(mu) The East Nusa Tenggara Regional Police in Indonesia has established a cooperation agreement with the Timor-Leste Police to jointly combat transnational crime in the border region. Given the complex social, economic, and security dynamics between the two countries, the collaboration aims to develop strategic measures and strengthen synergy between the police forces. The focus will be on addressing various threats, including smuggling, human trafficking, and other criminal activities that may arise in the border area. [Antara, in Indonesian]

Vietnam Prime minister's visit to China underscores strengthened ties

(lm) Vietnamese Prime Minister Vo Thi Anh Xuan's visit to China from November 5-8 highlighted efforts to bolster Vietnam-China relations and enhance regional cooperation. The trip coincided with the 8th Greater Mekong Sub-region Summit, the 10th Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy Summit, and the 11th Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Vietnam Cooperation Summit.

During the visit, Xuan emphasized Vietnam's comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with China, established in 2008, which has seen steady growth in political, economic, and cultural domains. Bilateral trade reached USD 171.9 billion in 2023, with USD 148.6 billion recorded in the first nine months of 2024. China remains Vietnam's largest trading partner, while Vietnam ranks as China's top ASEAN trade partner.

A key focus of the visit was fostering local-to-local cooperation, particularly with Yunnan province and Chongqing city. In Kunming, Xuan met with Wang Ning, Secretary of the Yunnan Provincial Party Committee, to discuss enhancing trade, infrastructure, and disaster management. Xuan proposed raising Vietnam-Yunnan trade turnover to USD 5 billion and positioning Yunnan and Lao Cai as trade hubs connecting China with ASEAN. She also highlighted potential in piloting a smart border gate model and improving cross-border flood management.

Wang supported these initiatives, emphasizing Yunnan's interest in green energy, agriculture, tourism, and advanced manufacturing. The leaders reaffirmed the importance of adhering to bilateral agreements and commemorating the Vietnam-China border treaty.

Similarly, Chongqing, Vietnam's largest trading partner in western China, holds opportunities in high-tech

industries, green transition, and tourism. Trade between Chongqing and Vietnam reached USD 3.03 billion in the first seven months of 2024, reflecting strong economic ties. [Viet Nam News 1] [Viet Nam News 2]

Laos, Vietnam top officials hold online talks

(lm) Vietnamese State President Luong Cuong and Lao Party General Secretary and President Thongloun Sisoulith held online talks on November 8, reaffirming their commitment to strengthening the special solidarity and comprehensive cooperation between Vietnam and Laos.

Thongloun congratulated Cuong on his election and expressed confidence in Vietnam's continued development under his leadership. He thanked Vietnam for its support, particularly during Laos' chairmanship of ASEAN and AIPA in 2024. Cuong, in turn, pledged to work closely with Lao leaders to advance bilateral ties and address challenges in key projects for sustainable economic collaboration.

The leaders agreed to implement high-level agreements, prepare for the upcoming Vietnam-Laos Inter-Governmental Committee session, and promote public awareness of their historic relationship. They also pledged mutual support at global and regional forums.

Thongloun invited Cuong and his spouse for a state visit to Laos, which Cuong accepted, suggesting arrangements through diplomatic channels. [Viet Nam News]

Taiwanese companies expand investments in Vietnam

(lm) Taiwan's Far Eastern Polytex Vietnam and Ability Electronics Technology Vietnam have announced significant investments in Vietnam, bolstering the country's industrial and export sectors.

Far Eastern Polytex Vietnam increased its total investment in Binh Duong province to USD 1.54 billion with its third-phase project approved in December 2023. The company, Vietnam's largest foreign investor in Binh Duong, produces fibers, dyed apparel, and super fibers for vehicle components. Local authorities pledged to assist with administrative and electricity

challenges. In the first 10 months of 2024, Binh Duong attracted USD 1.69 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI), ranking sixth nationwide.

Meanwhile, Ability Electronics Technology Vietnam inaugurated a USD 15 million factory in Vinh Phuc province on November 8, 2024. The plant, covering 1.5 hectares, will produce cameras, lenses, and optical devices, exporting primarily to Japan and the United States. It is expected to employ 500 workers and contribute USD 712,170 annually to the provincial budget. Vinh Phuc recorded USD 204.2 million in FDI during the same period.

Vietnam's FDI totaled USD 27.26 billion in the first 10 months of 2024, supporting the country's industrial growth and strengthening its global supply chain role. [The Investor 1] [The Investor 2]

ietnam's Vice President visits Sweden

(hn) Vietnam's Vice President Vo Thi Anh Xuan visited Sweden from November 10 to 13 to mark 55 years of diplomatic relations and promote cooperation between the two countries. In talks with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson, Xuan reaffirmed Vietnam's commitment to strengthening ties, particularly in trade, investment, renewable energy, and digital transformation. Kristersson praised Vietnam's socio-economic progress and expressed Sweden's readiness to deepen collaboration in sustainable development.

Bilateral trade reached $1.3 billion in 2023, with Sweden as Vietnam's largest Northern European partner. The visit included the Vietnam-Sweden Business Roundtable, where a new maritime route connecting Vung Tau and Gothenburg Ports was announced, expected to boost economic ties.

The trip concluded with the signing of two agreements on cooperation in energy and infrastructure. Xuan also invited Kristersson to visit Vietnam, signaling continued efforts to elevate the partnership. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to peaceful solutions to global challenges based on the UN Charter and international law. [Viet Nam News 1] [Viet Nam News 2]

Vietnam, Chile strengthen comprehensive partnership during President Cuong's visit

(lm/hn) Vietnamese State President Luong Cuong and Chilean President Gabriel Boric Font discussed advancing bilateral relations during Cuong's official visit to Chile from November 9-11. This marks the first visit by a Vietnamese State President in 15 years, coinciding with the 55th anniversary of the historic meeting between President Ho Chi Minh and Salvador Allende.

The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to deepening the comprehensive partnership, emphasizing cooperation in trade, agriculture, renewable energy, education, tourism, defense, and security. Chile values its relationship with Vietnam as part of its Asia-Pacific strategy and highlighted the 10th anniversary of their bilateral free trade agreement and their mutual membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

Both Presidents applauded growing economic ties, with Chile ranking as Vietnam's fourth-largest trading partner in Latin America, and Vietnam leading among Chile's ASEAN trading partners. They also welcomed the establishment of a Vietnamese defense attaché office in Chile to bolster defense cooperation.

The leaders pledged to enhance collaboration at international forums, including the United Nations and APEC, and emphasized resolving disputes in the East Sea through peaceful means under international law, particularly the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

The visit concluded with the signing of a joint statement, a memorandum on defense cooperation, and agreements in agriculture, culture, and trade promotion. President Cuong extended an invitation for President Boric to visit Vietnam, which was accepted. [Viet Nam News] [Voice of Vietnam 1] [Voice of Vietnam 2]

President Cuong's visit to Chile is part of a broader Latin American outreach that includes a visit to Peru from November 12-16 for the 2024 APEC Economic Leaders' Week in Lima. Vietnam and Peru, which established diplomatic relations in 1994, have strengthened their partnership through growing trade and investment, with Vietnam's investments in Peru surpassing USD 1 billion, primarily through Viettel Group and Petrovietnam. [The Investor]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

13 November 2024 @ 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. (GMT -5), Wilson Center, USA

Trendlines and Transformations in African Democratic Governance: Lessons for 21st-Century US-Africa Relations

At this webcast African researchers and thought leaders will share insights on democratic governance trends across Africa and the emerging opportunities and challenges these trends pose to US-Africa relations. The event will focus on the question of how citizen participation and civic engagement demands are shaping governance in different ways across the continent. For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

13 November 2024 @ 9:00-10:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Civil Society and Environmental Politics in the Middle East and North Africa

This webcast will explore civil society groups' potential to advance environmental action and stability in contexts of weak governance and unresponsive politics in the region. For more information, see [CSIS].

13 November 2024 @ 10:00-11:15 a.m. (GMT +8), ISEAS, Singapore

Myanmar's 2024 Census: Lurching Towards Elections?

Amid ongoing fighting, Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) regime conducted a census from 1 to 15 October 2024. This webinar will present and discuss preliminary research findings the census. For more information, visit [ISEAS].

14 November 2024 @ 3:00-4:00 p.m. (GMT +8), ISEAS, Singapore

(Mis)Reading Thai Politics through a Great Power Lens

This webinar will examine the relationship between domestic political leanings in Thailand and support for either the US or China. For more information, visit [ISEAS].

14 November 2024 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT -5), Wilson Center, USA

Surviving and Thriving: Ukraine's Economy During and After the War

At this webcast will address the following question on Ukraine's current state of Ukraine's economy: With the war continuing to inflict damage on Ukraine's industry, agriculture, and infrastructure, how sustainable is the current model? What are the critical factors for Ukraine's economic success after the war? How will the EU accession process mitigate and assist Ukraine's post-war economic transition? For more information, visit [Wilson Center].

14 November 2024 @ 4:00-5:15 p.m. - :00 p.m. (GMT -5), Atlantic Council, USA

Putting AI to work for national security

This online event will discuss the future of AI in the national security and defense sector. Among the questions addressed are: How should the advent of AI change how governments acquire software and hardware solutions? Companies are at the cutting edge of these capabilities, employing artificial intelligence to integrate complexity and accelerate development. How might these developments change the structure of the industry which serves national security? Looking ahead, what are the signposts of change we should be watching for to recognize the advances of these

technologies and their impact on national security? For more information, visit [Atlantic Council].

14 November 2024 @ 3:00-4:00 p.m. (GMT +1), Chatham House, UK

Is there an end to the Central Bank of Libya crisis?

This online panel will provide answers to crucial question on Libya's Central Banks' politics, including: What challenges will the new Central Bank BL leadership face? Can we expect significant changes for Libya's economic governance? What are the implications for the balance of power between Libya's rival power centers? For more information, visit [Chatham House].

15 November 2024 @ 10:00-11:00 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Countering China and Russia: The Hidden Advantages of Women, Peace, and Security

At this webcast experts will address the question of how Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) can be better utilized to achieve U.S. strategic objectives? They will also identify mechanisms for enhancing collaboration with partner nations and strengthen U.S. deterrence posture through better integrating gender perspectives and WPS principles into U.S. strategy. For more information, see [CSIS].

15 November 2024 @ 10:30 - 11:45 a.m., (GMT-5), Brookings, USA

Reproductive rights and justice: The post-election landscape

This webinar will explore post-US election key issues and challenges for restoring reproductive rights and providing access to reproductive healthcare for all individuals and communities. For more information, visit [Brookings].

18 November 2024 @ 12:00 - 1:15 p.m., (GMT-5), Belfer Center, USA

Developments in U.S. Climate Policy

This hybrid seminar will provide insight into recent developments in U.S. climate policy. For more information, visit [Belfer Center].

19 November 2024 @ 9:30-10:30 a.m. (GMT-5), Center for Strategic and International Studies, USA

Does Chinese Industrial Policy Work?: A Big Data China Event

At this webcast experts discuss industrial policy in China today and its implications for the Chinese economy, global trade, and how policymakers in other countries should respond. For more information, see [CSIS].

Books

Adrienne Russell, *Homeland Insecurity: The Mediated Climate: How Journalists, Big Tech, and Activists Are Vying for Our Future*, Columbia University Press, 258 pages, published 8 Aug, 2023. For a review, see [LSE].

Shami Chakrabarti, *Human Rights: The Case for the Defence*, Allen Lane, 272 pages, published 2 May 2024. For a review, see [LSE].

Éric Monnet, *Balance of Power: Central Banks and the Fate of Democracies*, University of Chicago Press, 264 pages, published April 29, 2024. For a review, see [LSE].

Michael Kimmage, *Collisions: The Origins of the War in Ukraine and the New Global Instability,* Oxford University Press, 296 pages, published Apr 5, 2024. For a review, see [Foreign Affairs]

Bartle Bull*, Land Between the Rivers: A 5000-Year History of Iraq*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 576 pages, published September 10, 2024. For a review, see [ARB]

Ece Temelkuran*, How to Lose a Country: The 7 Steps from Democracy to Fascism*, Canongate Canons, 304 pages, published 0 Oct. 2024. For a review, see [Guardian]

oseph O'Connor*, The Ghosts of Rome: Book 2 in The Rome Escape Line Trilogy*, Europa Editions, 402 pages, published February 4, 2025. For a review, see [Guardian]

Calls

The **Faculty of Law at Otego University** invites paper proposals for its ***"Charting the Future of Private Law in Aotearoa New Zealand Symposium,"*** to be held on February 10, 2025. The deadline for abstract submission is December 1, 2024. For more information, see [University of Otego].

University of Villanova School of Law invites paper proposals for its symposium ***"Islamic and Jewish Law in the Modern Economy,"*** to be held on May 5-6, 2025. The deadline for abstract submission is December 1, 2024. For more information, see [Calling All Papers].

The **John L. Weinberg Center for Corporate Governance** and the **Department of Finance at the Lerner College of Business & Economics, at the University of Delaware**, invites paper proposals for the ***2025 University of Delaware Weinberg Center Corporate Governance Symposium and John L. Weinberg/IRRCi Research Paper Award Competition***, to be held on March 14, 2025. The deadline for abstract submission is November 22, 2024. For more information, see [University of Delaware].

Jobs and Positions

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** for IC/UNDP/UNODC/083/2024 to be based in Indonesia. Applications are accepted until November 22, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking a **National Specialist for Coordination and Development of UNDP-GEF Document** to be based in Vietnam. Applications are accepted until November 22, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **IC Electrical Engineer (Solar System)** under UNDP-IC-2024-374 to be based in Pakistan. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** for a **Rapid Assessment of Cooperatives and Agri-enterprises** under RE-BID UNDP/PN/53/2024 to be based in Nepal. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** to conduct a **Study on the Impact of 2024 Floods on Vulnerable Populations** under UNDP/PN/57/2024 to be based in Nepal. Applications are accepted until November 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** for an **Assessment of Using Blended Learning** under UNDP-ZWE-01033 to be based in Zimbabwe. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking a **Project Associate (NPSA-6)** for the **Strengthening Capacities and Systems for Effective Public Finance Management Project and GEF8 Umbrella Programme** to design a national Biodiversity Finance Plan to be based in Chisinau, Moldova. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** for **Programa de Capacitación** under CONSULTORÍA INDIVIDUAL UNDP-ECU-0549 to be based in Ecuador. Applications are accepted until November 18, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking a **National Consultant – Desktop Publication and Design** to be based in Bangladesh. Applications are accepted until November 20, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** for **Asist. Téc. Movilización Recursos PIPs Siembra y Cosecha de Agua** under UNDP-PER-00617 to be based in Peru. Applications are accepted until November 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant** for **Asist. Téc. Movilización Recursos PIPs Siembra y Cosecha de Agua** under UNDP-PER-00613 to be based in Peru.

Applications are accepted until November 19, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking a **National Consultant for Feasibility & Opportunities** for UNDP to be based in Samoa. Applications are accepted until November 21, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant: Advisor on Water Resources** under UNDP-IC-2024-372 to be based in Pakistan. Applications are accepted until November 20, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking an **Individual Consultant: Advisor on Climate and Disaster Risk Financing** under UNDP-IC-2024-371 to be based in Pakistan. Applications are accepted until November 20, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is seeking a **UN House Receptionist** to be based in Chisinau, Moldova. Applications are accepted until November 18, 2024. More information is provided at [UNDP].

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** is seeking an Assistant **FAO Representative (Programme)** to be based in Kathmandu, Nepa. Applications are accepted until November 28, 2024. More information is provided at [FAO].

Team:

Ainesh Dey (ad), Ally Koh (alk), Alexandre Cayrouse (axc), Alperen Cennetkuşu (acs), Anlin Martin (alm), Anna Chong (ac), Aung Naing Lin (anl), Axel Melkonian (am), Aye Moe Pwint Phyu, Ayesha Abrar (asa), Busawan Kachonnarongvanish (bk), Chow Song Chee (cc), Dashania Elvira Gregory (dg), Devish De Silva (ds), Duc Quang Ly (dql), Felice Valeria Thessalonica (ft), Felix Serna Calvo (fs), Fitri Aulia Ikhsani (fi), Geo Dzakwan Arshali (ga), Gowthami Kunchihithlu (gk), Helene Skaff (hs), *Henning Glaser (hg), Herosha Shanmugam (hrs), Hoa Khanh Ngo (hn), Ji Fang (jf), Junaid Amjad (ja), Jyotsna Badrinarayanan (jb), Lucas Meier (lm), Mahnoor Tariq (mt), Melih Çolak (mc), Mohammad Rizwan Ali (mra), Muhammad Anugrah Utama (mu), Muhammad Farhan Yaumil Ramadhan (mfr), Muhammad Syammakh Daffa Alghazali (ma), Myat Sandar Zaw (msz), Nicholas Fenech*

(nf), Oliver Cubbin (oc), Rishi Shrivastava (rs), Riya de los Reyes (rr), Robishan Subba (rs), Sike Chan (sc), Simon Welfonder (sw), Sofiia Lysko (sl), Stephen Kai (sk), Steven Naaman (sn), Tehreem Fatima (tf), Thomas van Oeveren (to), Thurein Lynn (tl), Tomwit Jarnson (tj), Venus Phuangkom, Volkan Kayhan (vk), Wai Yan Phyo Naing (wn)

We would greatly appreciate your feedback! Please send any feedback you have regarding this newsletter to: info@cpg-online.de

Also, don't forget to Like CPG on Facebook, and browse our *website* for other updates and news!

German-Southeast Asian Center of Excellence for Public Policy and Good Governance - CPG
Room 207, Faculty of Law, Thammasat University, 2 Prachan Road, Bangkok 10200, Thailand

www.cpg-online.de
www.facebook.com/cpgtu

Preferences | Unsubscribe