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Asia in Review

Grasp the pattern, read the trend

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Dear Readers,

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

I wish you an informative read and extend special greetings to everyone who celebrates the Independence of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Guyana, and Samoa, the Republic Day of Armenia, the National Day of Croatia and the Madaraka Day of Kenya this week.

With best regards,

Henning Glaser

Editor in Chief

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

China: CCP prepares for key political meeting amid suicide rumors of senior Central Military Commission members

(ld/dql) China's Communist Party (CCP) is preparing for a crucial political gathering later this year that will focus on formulating the country's 15th five-year plan, which will guide national economic and political priorities from 2026 to 2030. President Xi Jinping announced that the party leadership is organizing the drafting of the proposal, marking the first official confirmation that this year's fourth plenary session of the Central Committee will be held to review and approve the plan before it is publicly released in March 2026.

According to state news agency Xinhua, an online public consultation on the plan's formulation began on

May 20, inviting input from citizens, officials, and academics. This move signals the early stages of policy development ahead of the plenum, which gathers over 370 members of the Communist Party's Central Committee. The exact date for the meeting has not yet been disclosed. [Xinhua, in Chinese]

Xi and other senior leaders have intensified inspection tours across the country in recent months, a pattern commonly associated with preparations for major policy announcements. Xi has visited Shanghai and the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, and Henan, where he emphasized strengthening domestic manufacturing and achieving greater economic self-reliance. Meanwhile, Premier Li Qiang visited Beijing and Fujian, urging efforts to boost domestic demand and help exporters expand into new markets. Analysts note that more informal discussions may occur at the annual summer meeting of top leaders in Beidaihe, typically held in August.

The upcoming plenum is taking place amid heightened external pressures, particularly ongoing trade and technology tensions with the United States. Earlier in May, Beijing and Washington reached a temporary agreement to suspend most tariffs for 90 days, providing a brief pause in a years-long trade dispute (see AiR No. 19, May/2025, 2).

In addition to outlining national policy, the fourth plenum is also expected to confirm personnel changes within the Central Committee. At least five full members are likely to be replaced by alternate members, the highest number of changes since 2017. Among those expected to be removed are four senior officials under investigation for corruption or misconduct: Jin Xiangjun, the governor of Shanxi province; Lan Tianli, the (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3); Admiral Miao Hua, who was suspended since October from his post as director of the Political Work Department of the Central Military Commission (CMC); and Tang Renjian, until last year the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Observers will also be watching for updates on the status of former industry minister Jin Zhuanglong and General He Weidong, 2nd ranked vice-chairman of the Central Military Commission. Jin was dismissed in February following a lengthy disappearance (see AiR No. 9, March/2025, 1), while He has not been seen publicly since March 11. Notably, his disappearance has not been commented on by the CCP. [South China Morning Post]

He Weidong and Miao, along with He Hongjun, who was appointed executive deputy director of the CMC's

Political Work Department in July last year and was reportedly taken away for investigation on April 20 (see AiR No. 18, May/2025, 1) are at the center of speculation about shifting power dynamics within the military, raising questions about Xi's position. As all three CMC officials three are considered close to Xi, his power grip in the military is under heightened scrutiny. This have been further fueled by rumors that He Weidong and He Hongjun died by suicide on May 18 and May 5, respectively. [Epoch Times, in Chinese] [Voco News]

China: Former executive of major state-owned bank arrested over corruption

(ld) Zhang Gengsheng, former vice president and party committee member of China Construction Bank (CCB), one of the "Big Four" banks in China, alongside the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC), Agricultural Bank of China (ABC), and Bank of China (BOC), has been formally arrested more than four years after his retirement. Authorities accuse him of accepting bribes and illegally issuing loans, which led to exceptionally large financial losses.

According to official announcements, Zhang illegally held shares in unlisted companies and used his position to benefit business interests. He allegedly exploited his role to assist others in securing credit lines and loan approvals at the bank, receiving large sums of illicit payments in return. [SPP, in Chinese]

Zhang, 65, had a long career at CCB and was appointed vice president of the bank's headquarters in 2013. He also served as an executive director. He came under official scrutiny in November 2024, four years after stepping down upon reaching the official retirement age of 60. In April he was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party for what authorities described as "serious violations of discipline and law". [Lianhe Zaobao, in Chinese]

His arrest comes amid an ongoing anti-corruption campaign targeting China's financial sector. At least 97 individuals in the financial industry have been investigated so far in 2024, following 101 such cases in 2023. [The Paper, in Chinese]

China: Guangxi region's major probe into illegal mining exposes widespread corruption in metal sector

(ld) Following the dismissal of Guangxi Chairman Lan Tianli on May 16 (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3), provincial authorities have launched a sweeping initiative to investigate illegal mining and heavy metal pollution spanning the past decade. This marks the first major policy move announced by the Guangxi authority since Lan's fall from power and suggests that Lan may be implicated in corruption related to the region's nonferrous metal sector.

Guangxi Party Secretary Chen Gang inspected the region's Commission for Discipline Inspection and Supervision and led a meeting on May 20 as head of a newly established provincial task force on heavy metal environmental safety, where he called for intensified efforts for "clean politics, clean government and honest cadres." [Sina, in Chinese]

Guangxi is one of China's richest regions in mineral resources, particularly aluminum and tin, and actively involved in exploring, mining, and utilizing rare earth minerals. The region is home to companies focused on high-purity rare earth products and advanced materials and has long faced serious ecological degradation due to unregulated mining, including the 2012 Longjiang River cadmium pollution incident—then the most severe environmental crisis in the region.

Despite years of remediation efforts, significant shortcomings remain in Guangxi's environmental management. On May 10–11, China's Minister of Ecology and Environment Huang Runqiu visited Guangxi to oversee pollution control efforts. Lan disappeared from public view shortly after participating in those inspections and meetings, and his dismissal was officially announced on May 16.

Observers suggest that Lan's case likely involves systemic corruption linked to the lucrative nonferrous metals sector. Demand for these materials is high both domestically and internationally, making them more valuable than coal or iron ore. Corrupt officials often assign relatives or subordinates to oversee such resources, facilitating entrenched networks of graft. [Lianhe Zaobao, in Chinese]

China: Mega canal project approved

(dql) China has officially added the construction of a 767-kilometre Jiangxi-Zhejiang Canal to its national infrastructure agenda, marking a major step in expanding the country's inland waterway network. With an estimated cost of 320 billion yuan (USD 44.4

billion), the canal is set to become the most expensive artificial waterway in China.

Part of a larger plan to connect the provinces Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang by water, the canal aims to boost economic integration between inland manufacturing hubs and coastal ports. Jiangxi, rich in rare earths and home to a growing EV sector, would gain direct access to Zhejiang's major seaports. Once completed, the canal will accommodate 1,000-ton vessels and handle up to 25 million tons of cargo annually.

The initiative is part of China's broader strategy to reduce high logistics costs—currently 14.1 percent of GDP—by shifting more freight transport from road and rail to inland waterways, which are significantly cheaper. By 2035, the government plans to expand the national inland waterway network to 25,000 kilometers. [SCMP]

China: Authorities streamline regulations on tech firms' overseas listings

(ld) China is set to establish a more efficient, transparent, and predictable regulatory framework to assist technology companies seeking to list overseas, according to Yan Bojin, Chief Risk Officer at the China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC). Speaking at a press briefing on May 22, Yan also emphasized that the regulator will also enhance oversight to ensure that funds raised through listings are directed towards companies' core business operations rather than diverted for other purposes.

The move comes as China intensifies its push for technological self-reliance amid geopolitical tensions with the United States, which has increased restrictions on Chinese tech development. Yan noted that the CSRC will focus on enabling high-quality technology firms—especially those not yet profitable—to access public markets. [Reuters]

Meanwhile, officials from China's Ministry of Science and Technology, People's Bank of China (PBOC) and National Financial Regulatory Administration (NFRA) also outlined a series of new policies aimed at strengthening the country's tech finance framework and improving access to capital for technology companies.

A new policy framework jointly released by seven central agencies sets out steps to enhance financial support for innovation, promote local-central

government coordination, and trial new models in major innovation hubs such as Beijing, Shanghai, and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA). The GBA hosts the country's most developed tech and manufacturing base in Shenzhen.

China's central bank said it will support leading private equity firms—especially those with strong track records and experience in early-stage and long-term investments—in issuing long-term bonds. The PBOC has expanded its innovation and tech upgrade loan programs from CNY 500 billion to CNY 800 billion (USD 69 billion to USD 110 billion) and lowered the interest rate from 1.75 percent to 1.5 percent.

In addition, the NFRA announced that it will soon approve a third round of insurance fund pilot programs for long-term investment in tech, totaling CNY 60 billion (USD 8.3 billion). Combined with the previous two batches, the program will channel CNY 222 billion (USD 30.9 billion) into long-term capital for the tech sector. [State Council of China, in Chinese]

China: New measures aim to curb arbitrary fines and inspections on private firms by local governments

(ld) The Ministry of Justice announced new rules requiring local governments to justify any annual increase in corporate fines exceeding 20 percent, as part of a broader campaign to curb arbitrary enforcement and profit-driven practices that hinder private enterprises. This initiative aims to address widespread issues including unjustified inspections, excessive fines, bribery, and abuse of power by local authorities—concerns frequently raised by businesses. [Ministry of Justice, China]

The initiative is aimed at eliminating practices such as "profit-driven enforcement" and "distant fishing"—terms used to describe cases where officials seek fines outside their jurisdictions for personal or departmental gain. These activities have long undermined confidence among private businesses, which are a vital component of China's efforts to revive its sluggish economy.

The campaign is focused on sectors including food and drug safety, environmental protection, urban management, and transportation—areas known for heavy enforcement activity and broad discretionary power. As of May 21, the justice ministry's enforcement platform had collected over 6,200 reports of violations across several regions, totaling around CNY 335 million

(USD 46.53 million). Nearly CNY 99 million (USD 13.76 million) has been recovered, including funds from improper fines and inspections. Provinces such as Jiangxi and Shandong have dismissed thousands of illegal or unqualified enforcement personnel, and over 1,100 cases have been referred to disciplinary or judicial bodies.

The campaign aligns with the newly implemented Private Economy Promotion Law, which came into effect on May 21. This is China's first law aimed specifically at supporting the private sector. It bans profit-driven enforcement, mandates fair and transparent regulation, and holds officials accountable for violations. It also includes provisions to promote private sector involvement in science and technology projects and protect the economic rights of private firms.

As Beijing seeks to counter slowing exports and weak domestic demand, the campaign and the new law are being closely watched by entrepreneurs and analysts for their effectiveness in restraining local government overreach and restoring business confidence. [South China Morning Post]

China: New rules to protect military-industrial facilities against espionage and sabotage issued

(dql) China has issued new regulations to strengthen the protection of its military-industrial facilities amid rising global and regional tensions. The Regulation on the Protection of Important Military Industrial Facilities, jointly issued by the State Council and the Central Military Commission, takes effect on September 15 and aims to prevent espionage, sabotage, and other threats. [State Council, China]

The regulation designates facilities involved in the research, production, testing, storage, and maintenance of key defense assets as "protected areas." These include research institutions, production and repair sites, testing grounds, archives, data centers, warehouses, and transport infrastructure such as ports and railways.

To safeguard these areas, measures will include physical barriers, boundary markers, guard posts, and restrictions on entry and activities. Unauthorized access, photography, recording, or interference—including disruptions to airspace or military radio frequencies—will be punishable by law.

Citizens are obliged to assist in protecting such facilities, and those reporting sabotage may be rewarded. [SCMP 1]

China: Fujian aircraft carrier completes eighth sea trial

(dql) China's most advanced aircraft carrier, the Fujian, is nearing commission after it completed its eighth and reportedly "intensive" sea trial, that included testing of the fifth-generation J-35 stealth fighters, designed for catapult-assisted launch, although it was not confirmed whether these jets were launched directly from the carrier. [Global Times]

The Fujian, China's third aircraft carrier and the first equipped with electromagnetic catapults, departed from the Jiangnan Shipyard in Shanghai for open waters following a maritime traffic warning. With a displacement of over 80,000 tons, it is the world's largest conventionally powered warship. Since its launch in June 2022 and the start of sea trials in May 2023, the Fujian has tested its catapult systems, with signs of limited deck operations but no confirmation of full fighter takeoff and landing trials.

Electromagnetic catapults, also used by the U.S. Navy's USS Gerald Ford, are expected to enable the launch of heavier, fully loaded aircraft more frequently. This includes fighters and fixed-wing aircraft like the KJ-600 early warning plane, as well as drones.

Separately, state media reported that the People's Liberation Army's second carrier, the Shandong, had expelled foreign aircraft carriers in the South China Sea, without identifying the countries involved. Based in Sanya since its 2019 delivery, the Shandong regularly conducts operations in the disputed waters, coinciding with foreign naval activities, including U.S. exercises. [Marine Insight] [SCMP]

China – Hong Kong: Tax audits of journalist raise press freedom concerns

(dql) According to the Hong Kong Journalists Association (HKJA) at least 20 journalists and their family members have been subjected to tax reviews by the Inland Revenue Department (IRD), resulting in demands for prepayments totaling approximately HKD 1 million (USD 127,770).

The association contended these audits lacked sufficient evidence, citing instances where the IRD made mistakes, such as misclassifying bank transfers as income or wrongly attributing business registration numbers. The association's chairperson accused the city's finance authorities of placing undue financial and administrative burdens on journalists, undermining press freedom. [SCMP] [Hong Kong Free Press]

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemned the "random tax audits" as intimidation aimed at silencing independent journalism, emphasizing that the measures mirror tactics used by authoritarian regimes and pose broader concerns about Hong Kong's reputation as a business hub. [RSF] [Hong Kong Free Press 2]

Japan: Decision on dual surnames of married couples remains elusive over disunity across political parties

(ad) A divided stance among opposition parties has reinforced the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP's) reluctance to move forward with legislation allowing married couples to use separate surnames.

On May 20, LDP leaders informed their coalition partner Komeito that passing such legislation during the current Diet session would be difficult. Although Komeito has historically supported a dual-surname system, the LDP continues to delay action, partly due to fragmented proposals from opposition parties.

In April, the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan – a centre-left party and second largest party the National Diet – proposed allowing dual surnames (see AiR No. 18, May/2025, 1), while the conservative Japan Innovation Party submitted a separate proposal to retain the single-surname system but permit the use of maiden names as common names after marriage. [The Japan Times]

LDP officials argued that adopting a dual-surname system would require extensive legal revisions, impacting around 650 laws and 2,700 Cabinet and ministerial orders. While the LDP claims it is still open to discussion, its working group on the issue has not convened since April 11.

Komeito Secretary-General Makoto Nishida acknowledged the need to consider the legal burden on local governments and mirrored the LDP's non-committal approach. Despite Komeito's earlier advocacy for dual surnames, the party has since

refrained from forming a unified stance. [The Asahi Shimbun 1]

Under current Japanese law married couples are required to share a single surname, typically that of the husband, which is increasingly seen within society as reflecting traditional patriarchal values. Advocates for allowing double surnames argue that it would promote gender equality by allowing spouses to retain their own surnames. However, conservative voices argue that maintaining a single surname requirement preserves traditional family values and societal stability. The debate over double surnames is not just a legal or bureaucratic matter but a reflection of deeper social and political ideologies regarding gender roles, family structure, and the pace of societal change in Japan. [The Asahi Shimbun 2] [The Conversation]

Japan: Ruling coalition and main opposition party reach general agreement on pension reform legislation

(ad) Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)–Komeito coalition and the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) reached a general agreement on May 26 over a revised pension reform bill, which includes a proposal to raise basic pension benefits in the future.

During a meeting among working-level officials from the three parties, the ruling coalition accepted a plan proposed by the CDP. A formal agreement is expected soon, with the aim of passing the legislation during the current Diet session.

Under the revised bills, measures to enhance the basic pension program will be triggered if the 2029 financial review shows a significant decline in benefit levels. The bills also provide for temporary relief from reductions in the employees' pension payments, as reserves from that system will be used to support the basic pension program.

The government originally intended to include these measures to ensure long-term benefit levels for all recipients but omitted them from the initial submission due to LDP concerns about the fiscal impact. Enhancing the basic pension could require an additional JPY 2 trillion (USD 14 billion) annually from the national treasury, since half of the program's funding comes from public finance. The potential burden and temporary cuts to the employees' pension system raised concerns. [Jiji Press] [The Japan News]

Japan: Farm minister sacked over controversial rice comments

(ja) Farm minister Taku Eto has resigned from his position following a controversial rice gaffe and has been replaced on May 21.

Eto faced severe backlash following a remark at a fundraising event that he receives so much rice from his supporters that he does not need to buy any, a comment deemed incredibly insensitive by consumers and lawmakers amidst the Japanese rice crisis.

Japanese consumers have been growing increasingly disillusioned with Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party due to their inability to reign in the price of rice.

Factors that continue to contribute towards the upwards pressure on rice prices include panic buying due to rumors of a mega-earthquake perpetuated in online spaces, the hospitality sector's demands for rice to fulfill the growing tourism market, and the shortage of wheat due to the Russia-Ukraine war sparking international demand for rice in its place. The incredibly hot summer of 2023 also resulted in an exceptionally poor harvest for rice farmers. [Al Jazeera]

Eto is the first member of Ishiba's cabinet – formed in November – to resign from office, with his effective dismissal coming only as Ishiba yielded to opposition pressure after initially trying to keep him as a part of his cabinet.

Opposition leaders, such as Yoshihiko Noda, leader of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, have criticized Ishiba's decision to remove Eto as "too late," asking Ishiba why he suddenly turned around and replaced Eto after initial resistance. [Kyodo News]

Eto was replaced with former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, son of former Premier Junichiro Koizumi. He confirmed the government pledges to directly sell its stockpiled rice to retailers through direct contracts at around JPY 2,000 (USD 14) per 5 kilograms. The current market price stands at JPY 4,285 per 5 kilograms. [Reuters]

The government plans to initially release 300,000 tons of rice, with more being supplied if necessary. The reserves are expected to hit retail shelves as early as June.

Koizumi also plans to publish weekly retail rice prices by region and examine distribution channels in order to create an effective and dynamic strategy towards approaching the rice crisis going forward. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Government launches new gasoline subsidy ahead of Upper House election

(ad) The government has launched a revised gasoline subsidy aimed at lowering fuel prices by JPY 10 (about USD 0.07) per liter to help alleviate consumer cost-of-living burdens.

Previously introduced in January 2022, the subsidy program supported wholesalers in maintaining gasoline prices around 185 yen per liter. The new version offers a fixed subsidy amount, regardless of current market prices, which have recently fallen below that threshold.

While no official end date has been set for the program, the government has allocated around JPY 1 trillion (USD 6.45 billion), potentially extending the subsidies through March 2026. [Kyodo News]

Coming ahead of the House of Councillors election in July, the measure is criticized as fiscally irresponsible and election-driven, with ruling party members fearing losing support among rural voters reliant on cars. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Government plans to push back fiscal consolidation target to 2025-2026

(ja) The government plans to push back its goal in reducing the deficit by one year, shifting the target from the 2025 fiscal year to sometime between 2025 and 2026.

The decision came amidst the government's growing worries that the U.S. tariffs would damage the domestic economy, which would result in reduced tax revenue and increased public spending. The government originally anticipated a JPY 4.5 trillion deficit in the primary budget balance for the current fiscal year, but this projection is to potentially be revised in anticipation for the effect of U.S. tariffs.

The government will likely discuss with the ruling coalition in June as to whether the new 2025-2026 target should be included in this year's annual basic

policy on economic and fiscal management to be compiled. [The Mainichi]

Japan: Inflation picks up in April amid scaled-back energy subsidies

(ad) Japan's core consumer prices rose 3.5 percent in April compared to a year earlier, marking the fastest increase in over two years, according to government data released on May 23.

The sharp rise was fueled by reduced government subsidies for utilities and a surge in rice prices. The core Consumer Price Index (CPI), which excludes fresh food, accelerated from March's 3.2 percent increase, with the key gauge of inflation having remained at or above the Bank of Japan's 2 percent target since April 2022.

The core-core CPI, which excludes both fresh food and energy to better reflect underlying inflation trends, rose 3.0 percent year-on-year, slightly higher than March's 2.9 percent gain. Energy prices climbed 9.3 percent, with electricity jumping 13.5 percent and city gas up 4.7 percent. Although the government had reintroduced subsidies for electricity and gas earlier this year, it scaled them back in April, contributing to the price surge.

Food prices, excluding fresh produce, jumped 7.0 percent, led by a 98.4 percent spike in rice prices—the highest in seven consecutive months—due to ongoing supply shortages. Prices for household durable goods rose 6.4 percent, driven by strong demand for air conditioners ahead of an expected hot summer. Service prices, closely watched by the BOJ as an indicator of wage-driven inflation, increased 1.3 percent, slightly down from March, partly due to government aid for high school tuition. [Kyodo News]

Japan: Government plans to target a 1 percent increase in real wages

(ad) The Japanese government has unveiled a draft of its upcoming economic and fiscal policy guidelines, set to be finalized in June. The draft includes a goal of achieving approximately 1 percent annual growth in real wages, adjusted for inflation.

The proposal was introduced during a meeting of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy on May 26, led by Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba. It emphasizes the

importance of fostering an economy driven by wage growth.

Amid ongoing global economic uncertainty fueled by U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff measures, Ishiba stressed the need to sustain the momentum of rising wages and investment. He noted that the government plans to support small and medium-sized enterprises in boosting productivity and transferring costs to prices through a five-year initiative.

Private-sector representatives on the council, in their input, labeled the U.S. tariffs as the "greatest downside risk" to Japan's economy and expressed worries that heightened uncertainty may discourage businesses from making capital investments. [Jiji Press] [Nippon.com]

Mongolia: Mongolian People's Party ends coalition, Prime Minister signals intent to resign

(fs) The Mongolian People's Party (MPP) has formally decided to withdraw from the 10-month ruling coalition, and govern independently, following its sixth party conference held on May 21.

The party cited violations of the coalition agreement by the Democratic Party, whose members participated in recent protests calling for the government's resignation. The coalition, which also includes the center-right HUN party, was established after the MPP won the 2024 general election with a slim majority, securing 68 out 128 seats in parliament. [The Washington Post]

The protests, largely driven by young citizens, were triggered by reports of lavish spending by the prime minister's son and have tapped into broader frustrations over corruption and inequality (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3).

Prime Minister Luvsannamsrai Oyun-Erdene of the MPP, who previously stated he would resign if a stable coalition could not be maintained, confirmed he might step down after meeting with coalition leaders. It is also speculated that the prime minister will call a vote of confidence in parliament this week. [Gogo] [The Guardian]

Mongolia: Government submits bill to recover illicit assets from public officials

(fs) The government submitted a draft law to the parliament on May 19 aimed at recovering illicit assets from public officials through civil litigation.

The proposed legislation, along with related bills, seeks to strengthen the legal framework for confiscating unlawfully obtained wealth and ensuring its effective management and redistribution for public benefit. [News.mn]

The bill addresses existing legal gaps concerning the definition of corruption and money laundering, the recovery and use of illicit assets, and mechanisms for holding officials accountable for damages caused to the state. It also highlights the lack of protection for whistleblowers. [Montsame]

Mongolia: Ulaanbaatar approves USD 658 million TPP-5 energy project under public-private partnership

(fs) The Citizens' Representative Khural of Ulaanbaatar approved the implementation of the long-delayed Thermal Power Plant-5 (TPP-5) Project through a public-private partnership on May 26.

First Deputy Governor Davaadalai Tumendalai presented the plan, which involves building a 300 MW power and 340 Gcal/h heat capacity plant near the existing TPP-II in Bayangol district. The project, valued at USD 658 million, will utilize environmentally friendly technology, including CFB boilers and advanced air pollution controls.

80 percent of the investment is expected to come from the private sector. Officials estimate annual revenue of USD 200 million once operational. Principal loan repayments will be deferred for three years, with full repayment within the following seven.

Construction is set for 2025-2028, marking a revival of the project first proposed 14 years ago. [Montsame]

North Korea: Failure in advance warship launch admitted

(dql) In a rare acknowledgment of a military setback, North Korean state-run Korean Central News Agency

reported that North Korea's second 5,000-ton-class destroyer was damaged during a failed launch at Chongjin shipyard on May 21. Furious at his own military and other officials, North Korea leader Kim Jong-un called the failed warship launch a "criminal act caused by absolute carelessness, irresponsibility and unscientific empiricism," and announced a ruling Workers' Party meeting in June e to address their "irresponsible errors." [KCNA 1]

The vessel became unbalanced during launch and was punctured after a cradle slipped. Satellite images confirmed the ship remains partially submerged and tilted on its side. [ABC News]

The Choe Hyon class destroyers are North Korea's newest and most advanced class of guided missile destroyers, named after the first vessel in the class, "Choe Hyon", unveiled in 2024. Choe Hyon was a prominent Korean guerrilla fighter during the Japanese colonial period and a former defense minister. The destroyer is reportedly equipped with nuclear-capable ballistic and cruise missiles and advanced radar, enhancing North Korea's maritime strike capabilities. South Korea believes Russian support may have aided its development.

A full-scale investigation into the accident, described in state media as "unpardonable criminal act," began the following day. [Rodong Sinmun]

State media reported on May 26 that a fourth official has been arrested in the context of the failed launch. Ri Hyong-son, deputy director of the Workers' Party's Munitions Industry Department and a member of the Central Military Commission, was identified as primarily responsible for the incident. In an earlier move, three officials from the Chongjin shipyard were arrested. Those detained include the chief engineer, the head of the hull-construction workshop, and a deputy administrative manager, according to state media.

Experts suggest Kim's reaction underscores the strategic importance of naval development, noting that the regime may be overextending its capabilities under intense internal pressure. [BBC] [KCNA 2] [The New York Times]

The failed launch was followed hours later by the test-firing of multiple cruise missiles, continuing North Korea's pattern of weapons testing amid heightened tensions with the U.S. and South Korea. Kim has framed the naval buildup as a response to perceived external threats and has identified the acquisition of a

nuclear-powered submarine as a future goal. [The Korea Times]

North Korea: Hybrid fighter-drone tactics in development

(fw) North Korea is developing a new combat strategy that integrates drones with its existing fighter aircraft to compensate for the limitations of its aging air force. According to the North Korean military planning, the regime is focusing on hybrid operations that combine manned jets with unmanned aircraft to enhance its overall combat capabilities.

Observers believe that this approach aims to overcome technological and operational gaps in North Korea's air power by leveraging drones for reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and potential attack missions alongside traditional fighter jets. The hybrid strategy is seen as a cost-effective way for Pyongyang to counter the superior air forces of South Korea and the United States. [Daily NK]

South Korea: Overseas voting for presidential election

(fw) As South Korea approaches its presidential election on June 3, overseas voting was held from May 20 and continued through May 25 across 118 countries. Over 258,000 Koreans living abroad are eligible to vote, making a 14 percent increase from the last election.

Overseas voter turnout reached a record-high 79.5 percent according to the National Election Commission. This marks the highest overseas turnout since absentee voting was introduced in 2012, surpassing previous presidential election rates of 71.1 percent (2012), 75.3 percent (2017), and 71.6 percent (2022). The highest overseas turnout for a general election was 62.8 percent in 2023. [Yonhap News Agency]

New polling stations have opened in Cuba, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, where embassies and consulates were newly opened between 2024 and early 2025. Additional polling stations were also added in regions with large South Korean communities and for overseas military units.

Overseas votes could be decisive, given that the previous election was won by a margin of 0.73

percentage points. A total of 44.39 million people is eligible to vote in the presidential election. [The Korea Times] [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Reform Party's Lee Jun-seok rejects conservative candidacy merger

(fw) Lee Jun-seok, the Reform Party's presidential nominee and former leader of the ruling People Power Party (PPP), has decisively rejected mounting calls to merge his candidacy with Kim Moon-soo, the PPP's official candidate. Despite growing pressure from conservative circles seeking to consolidate their vote against the main opposition Democratic Party (DP) candidate Lee Jae-myung, Lee remains committed to running an independent campaign. He has explicitly dismissed any attempts at "political engineering or backroom deals," underscoring his determination to maintain political transparency and reformist principles. [Korea JoongAng Daily]

Lee led the PPP from 2021 to 2022, seeking to modernize the party's image to attract younger voters and emphasizing generational change and political innovation. However, internal disputes led to his departure from the PPP and the establishment of the Reform Party, through which he now seeks to challenge the political status quo. [Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada]

The PPP has been advocating for a single conservative candidate to challenge main opposition Democratic Party (DP) candidate Lee Jae-myung, who currently leads in the polls.

A Realmeter poll released on May 24 DP Lee Jae-myung leading with 46.6 percent support, followed by Kim at 37.6 percent and the Lee Jun-seok at 10.4 percent. This reflects a narrowing gap since a May 11 survey, conducted before the official campaign began, which showed Lee Jae-myung at 52.1 percent, Kim at 31.1 percent, and Lee Jun-seok at 6.3 percent. [The Korea Herald]

Political analysts suggest a merger could make the race more competitive, but Lee's growing support and the potential for government reimbursement of campaign costs if he surpasses 10 percent may encourage him to stay in the race. [Maeil Business Newspaper]

South Korea: Democratic party scraps controversial court reform bills ahead of election

(dql) The Democratic Party (DP), which holds the majority in the parliament, has announced that it will withdraw two controversial bills—one allowing non-lawyers to be appointed as Supreme Court justices, and another to expand the court's bench from 14 to 100. The party's election committee instructed lawmakers Park Beom-kye and Jang Kyung-tae, who introduced the bills, to retract them.

The proposals sparked strong criticism from the ruling People Power Party, which accused the DP of trying to create a pro-Lee Jae-myung judiciary. Lee, the DP's presidential candidate, distanced himself from the bills, calling them personal initiatives. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Former President Yoon faces fifth hearing in insurrection trial

(dql) Former President Yoon Suk Yeol appeared at the Seoul Central District Court on May 26 for the fifth hearing of his insurrection trial.

Yoon faces charges of leading an insurrection and abusing his power in connection with the failed martial law attempt in December, which led to his impeachment and removal from office.

The scandal has fueled internal strife within the conservative ruling People Power Party (PPP), which Yoon left earlier this month due to concerns that his presence was hurting the party's presidential candidate, Kim Moon-soo, whose poll numbers trail those of main opposition Democratic Party candidate Lee Jae-myung.

Lee Sang-hyun, former head of the 1st Airborne Special Forces Brigade, was summoned to testify at the hearing. If convicted, Yoon faces life imprisonment or the death penalty. [Yonhap News Agency]

In a related development, police investigating the Dec. 3 insurrection case discovered that records from Yoon's secure phone were deleted on the same day a senior intelligence official testified that Yoon ordered a military-led roundup of politicians during the martial law attempt. The National Office of Investigation's special unit revealed that data from the secure phones of Yoon, former NIS deputy chief Hong Jang-won, and

former Seoul police chief Kim Bong-sik was remotely erased on December 6, three days after the failed martial law declaration.

Hong testified before the National Assembly Intelligence Committee that on December 3, Yoon instructed him to cooperate with the Defense Counterintelligence Command (DCC) to “clean house” by targeting key political figures. On the same day Hong disclosed this order, call records from Yoon’s secure phone were deleted.

On December 7, former deputy director of the president’s security team Kim Sung-hoon ordered deletion of phone records linked to other military officials, but the order was reportedly ignored. [Hankyoreh]

Meanwhile, a military court will begin the trial of Brig. Gen. Lee Sang-hyun, Maj. Gen. Park Heon-su, and five other officers on June 5 over their alleged involvement in the failed December 3 martial law attempt under former President Yoon Suk Yeol, the military announced on the same day.

All seven have been indicted and placed on compulsory leave. While Park has been suspended from his duties, the others were dismissed from their posts but remain in service, allowing for possible disciplinary action if convicted.

A separate trial is already underway for five former top commanders, including ex-martial law commander Park An-su, on related charges. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea: Final assembly of first KF-21 fighter jet begins

(dql) South Korea’s first production model of the KF-21 fighter jet has entered final assembly. Launched in 2015, the KF-21 program aims to replace the Air Force’s aging fleet of U.S.-made fighters, such as the F-5. Mass production began in July 2023, and the first aircraft is expected to be delivered in the second half of 2026.

The defense ministry confirmed the project is on schedule and expressed optimism about the jet’s export potential. In June 2023, Korea Aerospace Industries signed a KRW 1.96 trillion (USD 1.41 billion) contract with the ministry’s Defense Acquisition Program Administration to produce 20 jets by 2027.

South Korea plans to deploy 120 KF-21s by 2032. [The Korea Herald]

In a separate development, the DAPA has designated five key projects to develop semiconductor technologies for defense systems, aiming to strengthen the country's self-reliance in military chip production.

The projects include semiconductors for small satellites and module platforms for Synthetic Aperture Radar on drones and Active Electronically Scanned Array radars, according to the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA). Four of the five projects are scheduled to begin this year.

This initiative aligns with South Korea's broader effort to advance military technology while reducing dependence on foreign semiconductor supplies. In September 2023, DAPA established a dedicated unit to develop, manage, and certify defense-related semiconductors. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan: President Lai marks first year in office with global vision

(yl) On May 20, President Lai Ching-te delivered an address marking his first year in office, presenting a strategic vision of a Taiwan's position in the world system. Lai emphasized Taiwan's pivotal role in global technology, international trade, and regional security, stating that the nation must move forward "with resilience, perseverance, and enthusiasm" amid evolving geopolitical and economic challenges.

The president also pledged the establishment of a sovereign wealth fund, expansion of industrial upgrading efforts, and deeper engagement with democratic allies to strengthen Taiwan's global presence. He vowed to strengthen Taiwan's "whole-of-society defense resilience," citing ongoing coordination across ministries to propose 17 key strategies to counter national security and united front threats, and the Cabinet's allocation of a special budget of NTD 410 billion (USD 13.7 billion), including NTD 150 billion (USD 5 billion) dedicated to supporting domestic industries as part of efforts to enhance national resilience. [Taipei Times] [Taiwan News]

While Lai addressed ongoing Taiwan–US tariff negotiations and cross-party national security dialogue, he made only indirect references to China, positioning Beijing primarily as a challenge to national resilience and democratic values. [Office of the President, Taiwan]

Speaking to reporters afterward, Lai reiterated his criticism of China emphasizing that Beijing posed a threat to peace in the Taiwan Strait and asserting that those who destabilize peace are the aggressors. Despite this, he also indicated a willingness to engage in dialogue with China. [Anadolu Ajansı] [Reuters]

Chinese state media were quick to dismiss Lai's address as "[r]eckless rush to a dead end," reinforcing the long-standing criticism is that Lai's pursuit of "Taiwan independence"—whether through political narratives, military buildup, or foreign alignment—has placed the island on a path of heightened confrontation and strategic vulnerability. Lai is urged to prioritize the welfare of the population, recognize the realities of cross-Strait dynamics, and abandon provocative approaches in favor of dialogue and stability. [Global Times 1] [Global Times 2]

US observers viewed Lai's framing as a deliberate effort to focus on Taiwan's global relevance beyond cross-Strait tensions, noting, however, that Beijing remains distrustful of "separatist" Lai and is "only interested in dialogue on its own terms." [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Cuts in local grants prompts backlash from city governments

(yl/dql) The Executive Yuan, Taiwan's Cabinet, has cut NTD 63.6 billion (USD 2 billion) in general-purpose grants to local governments for the remainder of 2025, sparking criticism from several city and county leaders. The cut was made in response to a legislative mandate to reduce central government spending by approximately USD 2 billion, with the Executive Yuan choosing to preserve funds for national priorities like defense and education.

Mayors of Kaohsiung and New Taipei, the two most important cities in Taiwan, both in terms of population and strategic significance, warned the cut would undermine childcare and welfare services and criticized the lack of prior consultation. Miaoli County expressed concerns about its financial strain and urged further negotiations. [Focus Taiwan]

The main opposition party, Kuomintang (KMT) accused the government of violating the law and abuse of power with these cuts, arguing that the Executive Yuan has no authority to unilaterally adjust such funding and claiming the move was politically motivated to punish local governments.

In response, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) blamed the situation on earlier budget cuts passed by the Legislative Yuan, Taiwan' parliament, holding the KMT and the opposition Taiwan People's Party (TPP) responsible. She described the Executive Yuan and the public as victims of those cuts. KMT and TPP are commanding a majority in the parliament and worked together in the past months to push through revisions of the government's budget plans. [Taipei Times]

Taiwan: Legislature passes opposition-backed referendum proposal on nuclear plan

(yl) On May 20, Taiwan's legislature passed an opposition Taiwan People's Party (TPP)-backed proposal to hold a national referendum on whether the Maanshan Nuclear Power Plant in Pingtung County should continue operations. The vote passed 58–49, just days after the facility was shut down following the expiration of its 40-year operating license, marking the ruling Democratic Progressive Party's (DPP) goal of achieving a "nuclear-free homeland."

The Central Election Commission (CEC) approved the referendum on May 23 and scheduled the nationwide vote for August 23. The referendum will ask voters whether the Maanshan plant should continue operating upon confirmation of its safety by relevant authorities. [Focus Taiwan]

DPP legislators criticized the move as a politicized reversal of nuclear policy and raised concerns about safety and fairness, particularly as other decommissioned plants were not included in the proposal. TPP lawmakers argued that the referendum emphasizes professional assessment, energy stability, and democratic participation. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Nvidia to boost national AI infrastructure efforts with AI supercomputer construction

(yl) Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang has announced plans to support the construction of an AI factory supercomputer in Taiwan, in partnership with the National Science and Technology Council, Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), and Foxconn. The project aims to strengthen Taiwan's AI ecosystem, support its key industries, and establish

foundational infrastructure for AI research and development.

Speaking during his COMPUTEX keynote and follow-up sessions, Huang stressed the importance of Taiwan developing domestic AI capacity to serve its healthcare, manufacturing, education, and semiconductor sectors. The initiative is part of a broader push to integrate AI into Taiwan's industrial transformation and to train local talent in next-generation technologies. [Focus Taiwan]

Liu Young-way, Chairman of Taiwanese multinational electronics manufacturer Foxconn –one of the largest contract manufacturers in the world – added that the AI center would require up to 100 megawatts of power, to be built in phases starting with 20MW. The main site will be in the southern city of Kaohsiung, with other locations considered depending on electricity availability — an acknowledgment of Taiwan's tight energy landscape. [Reuters]

Taiwan: Coast guard intercepts two Chinese nationals

(lo) The Coast Guard detained two Chinese nationals on May 20 after they attempted an illegal landing near Taiwan's Kinmen County. Officials suspect the incursion may have been timed to coincide with President Lai Ching-te's first anniversary in office the same day.

The two men face charges under the Immigration Act and Cross-Strait Act and possible prison terms of up to five years. The Coast Guard noted a surge in small-craft incursions, particularly targeting outlying islands like Kinmen and Matsu. [BBC]

Similar cases have surfaced recently, including a father and son landing in Taoyuan by inflatable boat, and a man allegedly planting a Chinese flag on a Taiwanese beach before returning to Fujian. [Taipei Times 1]

In April, the Executive Yuan, Taiwan's Cabinet, approved a NTD 410 billion (USD 13.66 billion) package that includes NTD 150 billion (USD 5 billion) designated for upgrading maritime enforcement, drone capabilities, and communication systems over the next two years. [Taipei Times 2]

Meanwhile, the Mainland Affairs Council (MAC) highlighted an increased risks for Taiwanese traveling to China, citing 89 Taiwanese citizens missing or

detained in China from January 2024 to April 30, 2025, while 13 were interrogated. [Taiwan News]

Taiwan: Ruling party expels five members accused of spying for China

(lo) Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) has expelled five members accused of aiding China, citing threats to national security and party integrity. The individuals include aides to top officials such as former Foreign Minister Joseph Wu and ex-Premier You Si-kun, as well as a former Presidential Office consultant, a former party official, and a former aide to a New Taipei City councilor. [Taiwan News]

The DPP also introduced new rules requiring party officials to register and report any visits to China, Hong Kong, or Macau. The DPP controls the executive branch of the Taiwanese government, but the opposition holds a majority in the legislature. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan: Investigation into nationals with Chinese IDs widened

(dql) The Mainland Affairs Council launched a second phase of investigations to identify Taiwanese nationals holding Chinese ID cards on May 26, marking a push to crack down on China's political influence and espionage efforts in Taiwan.

The first phase of the vetting—conducted from mid-March to April 25—reviewed more than 370,000 individuals in sensitive positions, including staff at the Presidential Office, the military, and over 200 public schools.

The second phase expands the scope to local government officials and public-school teachers. Taiwan has 236,597 civil servants, 212,915 teachers, and about 215,000 active-duty military personnel.

Despite its security rationale, the campaign has faced domestic and international criticism. Beijing's Taiwan Affairs Office accused Taipei of stirring public fear and harming cross-strait exchanges. In Taiwan, the mai opposition party, the Kuomintang, questioned the legal basis for requiring affidavits from public employees and condemned the government for targeting its own citizens instead of addressing cross-strait tensions more effectively. [Taiwan News] [SCMP]

The MAC stated that the first phase focused on personnel in the military, civil service, and public education sectors, while the second phase will expand to cover a broader range of civil servants and teachers at all levels.

Approximately 12,000 former Chinese nationals now residing in Taiwan have been asked to provide proof of renouncing their Chinese household registration.

Taiwan: Light frigate construction intensified

(dql) The Ministry of National Defense has approved the Navy's request to expedite its light frigate construction project, with two prototype vessels—one air-defense and one anti-submarine frigate, each costing approximately NTD 4.52 billion (USD 150.96 million)— expected to be delivered by October 2026, possibly earlier.

Following the prototypes, the Navy plans to construct ten more frigates under a NTD 24.54 billion (USD 817 million) program that includes hulls, weapon systems, and other components.

The frigates will feature 3D phased array radars, vertical launch systems for air defense missiles, Hsiung Feng III anti-ship missiles, and shipborne drones to strengthen maritime defense. They are intended to replace the aging Chi Yang-class frigates and take over maritime security operations. [Taiwan News]

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

Bangladesh: Political divergence strains interim government as election pressure builds

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government, led by Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus, is under mounting pressure as the country's main political factions advance incompatible demands on reforms, transitional justice, and the upcoming national election. The resulting tensions have triggered visible frustration from Yunus, including suggestions that he may resign, and have complicated a political transition that initially enjoyed broad legitimacy following last year's mass uprising that ousted the Awami League of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Last week, Yunus held separate meetings with leaders of the three principal blocs—the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, and the National Citizen Party (NCP). While all three reaffirmed their support for Yunus and a peaceful political process, each outlined diverging priorities and red lines. These disagreements culminated in Yunus privately expressing disillusionment with recent developments, with several media outlets reporting that he had contemplated stepping down. [The Daily Star 1]

Amid this backdrop, Yunus convened a broader meeting with over 20 political parties and organizations on May 25. There, he described the situation as "war-like," citing both domestic and foreign attempts to destabilize the country since the Awami League was banned on May 12. He urged national unity and stressed that he would not act against the country's interest, affirming that a national election would be held between December 2025 and June 30, 2026. [The Daily Star 2]

During the earlier bilateral meeting, the BNP—the country's largest opposition party and principal adversary to the Awami League—insisted that elections must be held no later than December 2025. It

called for an immediate electoral roadmap and demanded the removal of three advisers from the interim government, alleging political bias and a breach of neutrality. While not opposed to reforms or justice initiatives, the BNP made clear it would not accept election delays based on those grounds. [The Daily Star 3] [The Daily Star 4] [The Daily Star 5] [The Daily Star 6]

Jamaat-e-Islami—a long-banned Islamist party now re-engaged in politics—backed elections between February and May 2026, but made its support conditional on visible institutional reforms and the initiation of trials for the July killings. It also called for the reconstitution of the Election Commission and warned that any poll without such measures would lack credibility. Jamaat additionally urged Yunus to avoid politicizing the military, referencing controversial proposals such as the humanitarian corridor to Myanmar and foreign management of the Chattogram port. [The Daily Star 7] [The Daily Star 8]

The NCP, a political group that emerged from the student-led uprising that brought down the Awami League government, has taken a more expansive position. It demands that the trial for the July killings begin before elections are held, and that the promised "July Charter"—a foundational reform document—be adopted. The NCP also seeks electoral reform, the reconstitution of the Election Commission, and local government elections before any national vote takes place. In addition, it has called for the formal annulment of all elections held under the previous regime, citing systemic irregularities. [The Daily Star 9] [The Daily Star 10]

Bangladesh: Top court overturns war crimes verdict as Islamist party seeks forgiveness

(lm) Bangladesh's Supreme Court has acquitted ATM Azharul Islam, a senior figure in the Islamist political party Jamaat-e-Islami, of all charges related to war crimes committed during the 1971 Liberation War. The ruling, issued on May 27, overturns the court's own earlier judgment that had upheld Azharul's conviction and death sentence. The original conviction had been handed down by the International Crimes Tribunal, a domestic war crimes court established in 2009 to prosecute individuals accused of atrocities during the 1971 conflict. The court directed authorities to release Azharul immediately if he is not held in any other case —marking the first time it has revoked such a verdict. [The Daily Star 1]

Jamaat-e-Islami, a prominent Islamist party that opposed Bangladesh's independence and has since been repeatedly linked to wartime atrocities, responded with an emergency press conference. Party chief Shafiqur Rahman issued an unprecedented public apology, asking forgiveness from anyone harmed by the actions of the party, its leaders, or supporters. Acknowledging that no party is above mistakes, he called for unconditional pardon for any pain caused, while pledging to end what he termed a "politics of vengeance" if given the chance to serve in future.

At the same time, Jamaat denounced the judicial process that led to the execution of several senior party figures over the past decade. Shafiqur Rahman accused the ruling government of conducting politically driven trials through fabricated evidence and coerced testimony, calling the tribunal process a "genocide of the justice system." He referenced the writings of S.K. Sinha, who served as the Chief Justice of Bangladesh until 2017 and later went into self-imposed exile. In his memoir, he alleged that the government pressured the judiciary and interfered in politically sensitive cases, including the war crimes tribunals. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Islamist group calls for political unity, denounces women's reform proposals

(lm) Hefazat-e-Islam, a prominent Islamist organization in Bangladesh, has called for unity among political forces involved in last year's mass uprising, warning that internal disputes are undermining national expectations for reform. During a protest on May 23, Hefazat's leadership urged factions including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat-e-Islami, and student leaders in the interim government to overcome personal grievances and avoid turning the transitional period into a power struggle.

The group also demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Women's Affairs Reform Commission and its report, which it claims contains recommendations that contradict Islamic principles. Speakers warned that any attempt to adopt these proposals would be met with organized resistance, and called for the establishment of women's inheritance rights as prescribed in Islamic law.

Hefazat reiterated its conditional support for the interim government under Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, provided that it avoids endorsing proposals they view as anti-Islamic. The group also demanded a

clear roadmap for national elections, expedited trials of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her ministers, and the withdrawal of all pending cases against its activists. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Tribunal presses first formal charges over 2024 mass uprising killings, expands arrest powers

(lm) Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has filed its first formal charges related to the July 2024 mass uprising, marking a major step in the country's evolving transitional justice framework. The tribunal indicted former Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) commissioner Habibur Rahman and seven other police officers for crimes against humanity in connection with the killing of six protesters in Dhaka's Chankharpool area on August 5, 2024.

The charges include both direct perpetration and command responsibility. According to the prosecution, some officers directly carried out the killings, while others—including Rahman—were responsible for authorizing or failing to prevent the violence. Four of the accused are currently in custody, while the remaining—including senior officials—are reportedly absconding.

Four of the accused officers are currently in custody, while the remaining four, including the former DMP chief and senior officers, are reportedly absconding. [The Daily Star 1]

This is the first case brought under the ICT's expanded jurisdiction, which was approved earlier in 2025 to include not only atrocities committed during the 1971 Liberation War but also crimes against humanity committed during the July 2024 uprising. That expansion reflected a broader mandate of the interim government to address systematic violence by state and non-state actors during the protests that led to the fall of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government.

More recently, on May 10, the interim administration further empowered the tribunal to prosecute political parties and affiliated entities deemed responsible for organized criminal activity during the 2024 events. Against this backdrop, the ICT has now amended its rules of procedure to authorize its investigation agency to arrest suspects in cases of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Previously, the agency could only recommend arrests through the regular police. [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Interim government advances civil service reform and recognizes mass uprising victims

(lm) Bangladesh's interim government has approved a set of major legal reforms aimed at strengthening institutional accountability and addressing the legacy of the 2024 mass protests that led to the fall of the government of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in early August last year. At a recent session chaired by Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, the Advisory Council passed new ordinances that both dismantle politically sensitive civil service rules and formalize support for victims of last year's uprising.

One of the most consequential decisions was the repeal of a controversial clause in the Public Service Act 2018, which had allowed the state to forcibly retire public officials after 25 years of service without cause. Widely criticized as a tool for political retaliation, the rule had enabled dozens of dismissals within the civil and police services in recent months. Its removal is seen as a key step toward restoring procedural fairness in the public sector.

In parallel, the government adopted the July Mass Uprising Martyrs' Families and Injured Citizens Welfare Ordinance, which provides official recognition and compensation to those injured or killed during the 2024 student-led protests. The measure marks the first formal acknowledgment by the state of responsibility for the protest violence that catalyzed the current transition.

The council also initiated a review of disciplinary procedures for civil servants and approved a draft agreement with the Netherlands to strengthen naval defense cooperation—signaling a broader effort to combine domestic reform with strategic international engagement. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bangladesh: Legal deadlock over mayoral swearing-in paralyzes Dhaka South City operations

(lm/ms) Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)—one of two municipal authorities governing the capital—remains effectively paralyzed as legal and political deadlock continues over the delayed swearing-in of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Ishraque Hossain as mayor. For 13 consecutive days, all

administrative and civic services at DSCC's Nagar Bhaban headquarters have been suspended, with daily sit-ins staged by Hossain's supporters and segments of the municipal workforce keeping the premises under lock and key. [The Daily Star 1]

The crisis was triggered by a March 2025 Election Tribunal ruling that annulled the 2020 DSCC mayoral election and declared Ishraque Hossain the lawful winner over the previously declared Awami League candidate. A gazette formalizing Hossain's appointment was issued by the Election Commission on April 27, but no oath has been administered to date.

The legal uncertainty deepened after a writ petition was filed earlier in May seeking to block the swearing-in and to censure the tribunal judge for alleged irregularities. The High Court dismissed the petition on May 22, effectively clearing the way for Hossain's assumption of office. In response, the Local Government Division began preparing to facilitate the oath-taking.

However, two new legal petitions have since complicated the process. On May 25, Hossain filed a fresh writ seeking a court order for his immediate swearing-in. The next day, a separate leave-to-appeal was submitted to the Appellate Division by a third party challenging the High Court's dismissal of the initial blocking petition. With the matter now sub judice in the Supreme Court, the Local Government Division announced on May 27 that it is awaiting a final verdict before proceeding with any swearing-in ceremony. [Dhaka Tribune 2] [Dhaka Tribune 3] [The Daily Star 4] [Dhaka Tribune]

Bangladesh: High Court judge removed amid broader purge of judiciary tied to mass uprising

(lm) Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman has been formally removed from his position as a judge of the High Court Division, following a recommendation from the Supreme Judicial Council. The dismissal marks the second such removal since a wave of student-led protests in October 2024 called for action against judges accused of political bias and affiliation with the previously ruling Awami League.

The removal comes weeks after the dismissal of Justice Khizir Hayat on March 18 and amid ongoing inquiries into several other judges by the Supreme Judicial Council, led by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed. A total

of twelve judges had been barred from judicial duties since October 20 last year following demonstrations demanding accountability for their alleged roles in suppressing dissent and enabling state violence.

Justice Diliruzzaman had previously led a judicial commission investigating deaths during the 2024 mass uprising. However, the interim government subsequently disbanded the commission.

Several other judges implicated in the October protests have since retired, resigned, or were not confirmed in their posts. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Supreme Court drops graft case against senior opposition party leader

(lm) Bangladesh's Supreme Court has scrapped a High Court ruling that had allowed the continuation of a corruption trial against Mirza Abbas, a senior leader of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and former housing and public works minister. The case, filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) in 2014, accused Abbas and four others of causing a loss of BDT 155.2 million (USD 1.27 million) to the state by allocating land owned by the capital development authority to a journalists' cooperative at below-market rates. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Anti-graft body urges legal action against ousted ex-prime minister over false affidavit

(lm) Bangladesh's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has formally asked the Election Commission to initiate legal action against ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for allegedly submitting false information in her asset declaration ahead of the 2008 parliamentary elections. The ACC claims her affidavit listed only 6.5 acres of agricultural land, whereas investigations revealed she owned 28.41 acres, significantly undervaluing the total asset. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Court freezes 38 bank accounts of former air force chief over corruption probe

(lm) A Dhaka court has ordered the freezing of 38 bank accounts held by retired Air Chief Marshal Shaikh Abdul Hannan, his wife, and their son, as part of a corruption investigation by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). The accounts reportedly contain a total of BDT 11.83 million (USD 97,000).

The investigation centers on allegations that Hannan abused his position in the Bangladesh Air Force to engage in bribery, irregular recruitment practices, and the accumulation of wealth beyond known income sources.

Earlier in May, the court had also ordered the freezing of six other bank accounts, the seizure of four apartments and plots in Dhaka and Narayanganj, and a travel ban on Hannan, his wife, second wife, and son.

Hannan served as Bangladesh's Chief of Air Staff until his retirement in 2024. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: New cyber ordinance repeals controversial provisions

(lm) The interim government of Bangladesh has replaced the widely criticized Cyber Security Act 2023 with a new Cyber Safeguard Ordinance, introducing stronger legal protections against digital abuse—particularly child sexual exploitation and online harassment—while repealing nine contentious sections of the previous law which had drawn repeated criticism for curbing freedom of speech and being weaponized against journalists and citizens.

All pending cases under these sections will now be withdrawn, and existing penalties will be nullified.

The ordinance restricts legal complaints to victims themselves and removes defamation as a cyber offense, curbing politically motivated misuse. It defines and criminalizes child sexual abuse material, sextortion, and revenge porn, with exemptions for legitimate law enforcement, educational, or journalistic use. Offenses committed using artificial intelligence are also covered.

Content threatening national security or inciting communal hatred may be removed with cyber tribunal approval within three days; otherwise, it must be restored. A public list of blocked content is mandatory.

Additional reforms include clearer language on hate speech, stricter regulation of online gambling, legal recognition of forensic evidence, and revised

definitions of cyber fraud. However, analysts note that terms like identity theft remain vague and should be distinguished from more serious crimes like cyberterrorism. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Court acquits journalist previously convicted in plot to kill ousted prime minister's son

(lm) A Dhaka court has acquitted veteran journalist Shafik Rehman in a high-profile case involving an alleged plot to abduct and kill Sajeeb Wazed Joy, son of ousted ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Rehman had been sentenced to seven years in prison in August 2023 but was granted bail in September after the home ministry temporarily suspended his sentence on the condition that he appeal the ruling.

The case, filed in 2015, also implicated Mahmudur Rahman, editor of the daily Amar Desh, who was acquitted earlier in February 2025. Both men had been accused by the police of masterminding the plot, and charges were formally filed in 2018. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Investigators freeze bank accounts linked to veteran journalist

(lm) Bangladesh's Criminal Investigation Department has frozen 35 bank accounts linked to veteran journalist Munni Saha, her husband, and several associated individuals and entities as part of a money laundering investigation under the Money Laundering Prevention Rules, 2019. The accounts reportedly hold over BDT 181.6 million (USD 1.49 million). According to preliminary findings, the couple allegedly used their professional positions to amass wealth through fraud and extortion. [The Daily Star]

The Anti-Corruption Commission has launched a parallel investigation into allegations of illicit wealth accumulation. Reports indicate total transactions of BDT 1.34 billion (USD 11 million) through the couple's accounts, with BDT 140 million (USD 1.15 million) frozen.

Saha, a well-known television journalist, served as chief executive editor of ATN News from 2016 until her resignation in 2023. She is noted for reporting on social and political issues, including women's rights and child protection. The case follows Saha's arrest and subsequent release in late 2024 amid political

turmoil that culminated in the ouster of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. She was among several journalists charged with crimes against humanity in connection with the mass protests.

Bangladesh: Footwear factory workers protest in Gazipur over unpaid wages

(lm) Hundreds of workers from a footwear factory staged a protest on May 25 outside their factory in Gazipur, demanding unpaid wages for April. The demonstration began after factory management extended a scheduled post-holiday reopening, citing operational delays and an electricity cutoff due to unpaid utility bills. According to local industrial police, tensions escalated when workers tried to enter the premises and were blocked by security personnel. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Central bank announces merger of weak Islamic banks under resolution ordinance

(lm) The Bangladesh Bank will initiate mergers involving several underperforming Islamic banks as part of a broader effort to stabilize the country's financial sector, Governor Ahsan H Mansur announced on May 27. Speaking at a press conference, he stated that the consolidation process will be carried out under a newly introduced bank resolution ordinance, which grants the central bank authority to manage mergers and acquisitions.

According to the governor, the targeted banks will be temporarily nationalized during the transition period to ensure depositor security and institutional continuity. He emphasized that depositors' funds will remain safe throughout the process, as the state will assume control of the affected institutions during the restructuring phase. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Over 50,000 lose jobs as USAID funding halted

(lm) Over 50,000 professionals in Bangladesh's development sector have lost their jobs following the suspension of nearly all United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded projects earlier this year. A platform representing affected

workers reported that 55 out of 59 projects were shut down after a “stop-work” order was issued by the U.S. government in January under the Trump administration.

The funding halt has also led to the loss of development assistance valued at approximately BDT 77 billion (USD 632 million). Representatives from the platform warned that the sudden cuts have triggered a deep employment and operational crisis across sectors such as health, education, and governance, which were heavily supported by the affected projects.

At a press conference in Dhaka, the group issued a six-point demand calling for formal recognition of the employment crisis, a comprehensive impact assessment, immediate dialogue with authorities, and tax relief measures for those laid off. The proposals include tax refunds for the current fiscal year and a waiver of advance income tax in the next, aimed at alleviating financial strain on thousands of displaced professionals. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Suspicious financial activity rises by 23 percent

(lm) Bangladesh has seen a significant rise in reported suspicious financial transactions during the fiscal year 2023–24, according to the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit (BFIU). The total number of reports concerning suspicious transactions and activities rose by 23 percent to 17,345, with 11,736 flagged as suspicious transaction reports and 5,609 as suspicious activity reports.

The increase, the BFIU explained, reflects greater vigilance and reporting by financial institutions, alongside expanded efforts to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The agency forwarded 114 financial intelligence reports to investigative bodies during the fiscal year, and its data-sharing with law enforcement and regulators rose by 14 percent.

BFIU Chief Officer AFM Shahinul Islam stated that the agency is collaborating with international bodies, including the Stolen Asset Recovery (StAR) Initiative—co-managed by the World Bank and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime—as well as the U.S. Department of Justice and the International Anti-Corruption Coordination Centre (IACCC). A foreign legal firm is also being engaged to assist with recovering illicit funds laundered abroad, though officials noted that the

process remains legally complex and time-intensive. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: 258 arrested in nationwide joint operations led by army

(lm) The Bangladesh Army, in coordination with law enforcement agencies, arrested 258 individuals in a weeklong series of joint security operations conducted from May 15 to 21. Those detained include murder suspects, illegal arms holders, listed terrorists, smugglers, juvenile gang members, illegal soil extractors, narcotics dealers and users, and members of fraud networks. Security forces also recovered 14 illegal firearms, 105 rounds of ammunition, narcotics, stolen mobile phones, locally made weapons, and cash. [The Daily Star]

Bangladesh: Military releases full list of 626 sheltered after last year's mass uprising

(lm) Bangladesh's armed forces have released a detailed list of 626 individuals who sought temporary shelter in army cantonments following the outbreak of political violence and unrest after the July 2024 uprising which culminated in the ouster of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in early August the same year.

Those who took refuge included 24 political leaders, five judges, 19 civil servants, 515 police officers and personnel, 51 women and children (mostly family members), and 12 individuals from public universities and other sectors. The army clarified that protection was provided without prior verification of identities due to the urgency of the situation, which was marked by widespread mob justice, arson, looting, and targeted attacks on state institutions and officials.

Most individuals left the cantonments within one or two days as conditions improved. A small number were later handed over to law enforcement agencies based on pending legal cases. The army said the matter had been formally addressed in a previous statement on August 18, 2024, and a list of 193 individuals—excluding more than 400 police personnel and one intelligence official—had already been sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs. [The Daily Star 1] [The Daily Star 2]

Bhutan: Parliament opens new session with focus on taxation, trade, and national reform

(lm) Bhutan's King formally opened the Third Session of the Fourth Parliament and the 35th Session of the National Council on May 23, launching a legislative agenda scheduled to run until early July 2025. The joint sessions will deliberate on ten bills, review three international agreements, and assess a number of key policy and audit reports. [Kuensel 1]

Among the core legislative items are seven government-sponsored bills, including the Budget Appropriation Bill for the 2025–2026 fiscal year and the Supplementary Budget Bill for 2024–2025. Major fiscal reforms are also on the table, including the Excise Tax Bill, the Income Tax Bill, and an amendment to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act. The latter follows the failed implementation of the BTN 117 million (USD 1.4 million) Bhutan Integrated Taxation System. Other bills include the Livestock Bill and the Cooperative and Farmers Groups Bill. A private member's bill seeking to amend the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act is also under review.

Parliament will additionally consider the ratification of two regional trade agreements—the Free Trade Agreement with Thailand and the BIMSTEC Maritime Transport Agreement. These treaties are viewed as part of Bhutan's broader effort to expand trade connectivity within South and Southeast Asia.

In parallel, the National Council is set to deliberate on a series of thematic review reports, covering issues such as youth substance abuse, proposed amendments to the Penal Code, and challenges facing Bhutan's tourism sector, rural insurance coverage, and forestry policies. Lawmakers have raised concerns about the limited reach of the Economic Stimulus Programme (ESP), insufficient agricultural funding, and inadequate access to rural credit. Notably, MPs have called for an increase in rural life insurance coverage from BTN 30,000 (USD 360) to between BTN 100,000 and BTN 150,000 (USD 1,200–1,800).

Joint sittings will address proposed amendments to the Marriage Act and National Assembly Act and will review national audit findings spanning from 2010 to 2023. The session will conclude with the Prime Minister's annual State of the Nation address. [Kuensel 2] [Kuensel 3]

Bhutan: Surge in financial scams prompts push for legal framework and public awareness

(lm) Bhutanese authorities are moving to establish a comprehensive legal framework to counter a growing wave of financial scams, with 235 cases reported by the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) over the past two years. These scams resulted in losses of more than BTN 11 million (approximately USD 132,000), with BTN 10 million (USD 120,000) recovered in 2024 and BTN 1 million (USD 12,000) so far in 2025, based on cases in Thimphu alone.

Under Bhutan's Consumer Protection Rules and Regulations 2015, pyramid and Ponzi schemes are illegal. The RBP reports house rental scams (52 cases), currency exchange fraud (53 cases), and fake lotteries (39 cases) as the most widespread. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Anti-corruption body warns media sector faces growing integrity risks

(lm) Bhutan's Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has raised concerns about rising vulnerabilities in the country's media sector, warning that financial dependency, weak internal governance, and external pressure are undermining journalistic independence and threatening the media's democratic function.

According to the ACC's new report, the agency received 13 complaints involving media outlets over the past five years, including cases of embezzlement and abuse of HR decisions. Two cases led to formal investigations. A key issue identified is media houses' heavy reliance on government advertising, which often comes with informal pressure and has led to instances of self-censorship. Some outlets reported losing ad revenue after critical reporting.

The report also flagged the growing use of paid content and advertorials without proper labeling, blurring lines between journalism and commercial promotion. Though not illegal, this practice risks misleading readers and inviting undue influence from corporate or political actors.

While no bribery cases were confirmed, the ACC warned that low pay, job insecurity, and poor access to official information heighten the risk of unethical practices. Weak internal controls were also noted—many outlets lack written conflict-of-interest policies or clear documentation in HR and procurement decisions.

Regulatory and civil society oversight remains uneven. BICMA reached full compliance with integrity measures by 2021–22, while others, including Bhutan Times and BBSCL, showed slower progress. Despite a 2023 protocol to improve information access, journalists still face delays obtaining public data. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: India-backed hydropower deal signed

(lm) Bhutan's state-run Druk Green Power Corporation (DGPC) and India's PTC India Limited have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly develop a new 100 to 150 megawatt (MW) hydropower project. The agreement marks the first time PTC India —a key player in India's electricity trading sector—has signed a hydropower development deal outside India.

The project will be implemented through a special-purpose vehicle and is expected to begin construction in late 2026. This initiative comes amid Bhutan's push to significantly scale up its clean energy generation capacity in response to growing domestic demand and seasonal shortages. Bhutan aims to expand its current installed capacity of roughly 2,300 MW—nearly all from hydropower—by tenfold to at least 25,000 MW by 2040. For comparison, the new project represents around 5 to 7 percent of Bhutan's present capacity.

The new joint project is also part of a broader shift in Bhutan's energy strategy, which includes diversifying sources (such as a 5,000 MW solar energy target) and opening the hydropower sector to foreign and private investment. Agreements for projects totaling over 12,000 MW have already been signed, and construction is underway on the 600 MW Kholongchhu project.

Bhutan and India have long maintained a cooperative electricity trade relationship, with Bhutan exporting hydropower to India during surplus months and importing during winter shortages. The new agreement aims to deepen this relationship while helping Bhutan address its own energy security challenges and position itself as a regional renewable energy hub. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: National debt nears USD 3.58 billion, driven by hydropower-linked external borrowing

(lm) Bhutan's national debt has risen to BTN 298.18 billion (USD 3.58 billion), amounting to 99.1 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) as of March 2025. The increase of BTN 5.44 billion (USD 65.3 million) since December 2024 was primarily attributed to higher levels of external borrowing.

External debt accounts for BTN 277.09 billion (USD 3.32 billion), or 92.1 percent of GDP, and 92.9 percent of total public debt. Of this, hydropower-related loans —largely linked to six major projects—comprise BTN 170.04 billion (USD 2.04 billion), or 61.4 percent of the external debt. The Government of India remains Bhutan's principal creditor, holding 64 percent of external debt, followed by the Asian Development Bank and the International Development Association.

Non-hydro external debt stands at BTN 107.04 billion (USD 1.29 billion), financing sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, education, and health. Domestic debt, entirely consisting of government bonds, declined to BTN 21.09 billion (USD 254 million), mainly due to the redemption of treasury bills.

Convertible currency debt totals USD 1.09 billion (BTN 93.99 billion), representing 33.9 percent of external debt. Most of Bhutan's rupee-denominated debt—BTN 183.09 billion (USD 2.2 billion)—is tied to hydropower development. The remaining rupee-based liabilities include budgetary and commercial loans, as well as a standby credit facility from the central bank.

The finance ministry reports that debt service for fiscal year 2024–25 is projected at 21.7 percent of government revenue, remaining below the 35 percent ceiling under the Public Debt Management Policy. Although public debt is high, the government assesses overall debt risk as manageable and external debt distress as moderate. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Growth forecast adjusted to 8.3 percent for 2025 as post-pandemic recovery continues

(lm) Bhutan's Ministry of Finance has revised its 2025 economic growth forecast to 8.31 percent, reflecting a continued post-pandemic recovery but marking a slight downward adjustment from earlier projections. This follows a stronger-than-expected 6.06 percent growth in 2024, supported by public revenue gains and infrastructure investment, particularly in the hydropower sector.

Industrial activity—driven by electricity and construction—remains the main growth driver, though expectations have been moderated. Services are also set to expand, led by tourism-related sectors, while agriculture will make a limited contribution.

The government anticipates growth will stabilize around 6.8 percent from 2026 onward. Challenges include a projected contraction in mining, climate-related risks, and shifting regulatory frameworks. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Economic recovery program sees slow disbursement despite major funding

(lm) Bhutan's Economic Stimulus Programme (ESP), a flagship initiative aimed at reviving the economy in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, has recorded slow progress. As of late April 2025, only BTN 1.27 billion (USD 15.2 million) out of a total BTN 9.6 billion (USD 115 million) allocated to nine key sectors had been spent. The broader ESP framework includes both fiscal and monetary support and is funded in part by India, which has disbursed BTN 7.5 billion (USD 90 million) to date.

The program targets strategic sectors such as tourism, agriculture, youth employment, and small enterprises. However, implementation has lagged. The tourism ministry, for example, spent just over one percent of its BTN 1 billion (USD 12 million) budget, while the youth employment component disbursed less than 10 percent of its allocation. Agriculture-related funding has shown more activity, but most large-scale infrastructure and enterprise projects remain in early stages.

The Desuung Skilling Programme, focused on workforce training, is the most advanced, having used nearly half its allocated BTN 2 billion (USD 24 million). Meanwhile, funding for education loans and housing schemes remains under development. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: World Bank to invest over USD 1 billion to support jobs, resilience, and infrastructure

(lm) The World Bank Group (WBG) has committed over USD 1 billion in development support to Bhutan over the next five years under a newly launched Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for 2024–2029. The

strategy marks a significant shift in the World Bank's engagement with Bhutan, with annual funding nearly 30 times higher than its previous average of USD 35 million.

The CPF focuses on three key objectives: boosting private sector investment and employment, strengthening resilience to climate and disaster risks, and modernizing infrastructure to improve regional connectivity. The initiative was launched in Thimphu alongside the Country Climate and Development Report (CCDR), which outlines the economic risks posed by climate change and the reforms needed to manage them.

A centerpiece of the new framework is the USD 300 million ACCESS Bhutan Project, signed on May 19, aimed at improving trade and transport links across Eastern South Asia. One major component is the construction of the Gelephu–Tareythang highway, which will serve as a main corridor to the planned Gelephu Mindfulness City. [Kuensel]

Bhutan: Government launches crop and livestock insurance scheme to shield farmers from losses

(lm) The Bhutanese government has approved a new National Crop and Livestock Insurance Scheme (NCLIS) to protect farmers from mounting losses due to climate change, wildlife damage, pests, and disease. The Cabinet endorsed the scheme on April 24, 2025, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MoAL) is now pursuing funding from India's project-tied assistance and other national and international sources.

The scheme stems from parliamentary resolutions and National Council recommendations calling for more robust farmer compensation mechanisms, amid rising trends of abandoned farmland (satong) and empty rural homes (goongtong). Past attempts at trust funds and endowment models failed due to inconsistent funding and coverage.

NCLIS adopts a 50:50 premium-sharing model between the government and farmers. The annual government cost is estimated at BTN 83 million (USD 996,000) for crops and BTN 1.03 billion (USD 12.4 million) for livestock. A four-year phased rollout will begin with an initial government contribution of BTN 331.37 million (USD 4 million). A pilot phase will first target key crops like paddy, maize, potatoes, and oranges, and livestock such as cattle, pigs, and poultry. [Kuensel]

India: Supreme Court reserves verdict on Waqf (Amendment) Act case

(kb) The Supreme Court of India has reserved its verdict on the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, which has ignited debate regarding the government's role in regulating waqf properties. A waqf refers to a religious endowment, typically land or property, dedicated to charitable or religious purposes under Islamic law. The Waqf (Amendment) Act seeks to regulate the management of these properties, addressing concerns about misuse and administrative inefficiencies.

The central government has defended the Act, asserting that it regulates secular and administrative aspects of waqf institutions, without interfering with religious practices. One of the key provisions of the Act prohibits certain Muslim communities from dedicating property as waqf, which the government argues is a safeguard to protect tribal lands from exploitation.

However, opponents of the Act argue that it infringes upon the rights of Muslim tribals and religious freedoms. They raise concerns that it grants the government excessive control over waqf properties. Notably, provisions like Section 3D, which could revoke waqf property status if classified as ancient monuments, and Section 3E, which prevents tribal Muslims from establishing waqfs, have raised alarm. [The Hindu]

In a related development, on May 27, the Supreme Court issued a notice to the central government and states regarding petitions challenging the 1995 Waqf Act. While hearing the writ petitions on the 2025 amendments, the court raised questions on why the 1995 Act is being contested after so long and allowed petitioners to file their responses. The outcome of these proceedings could significantly impact the governance of waqf properties and the rights of the Muslim community in India. [The Indian Express]

India: Renewable energy capacity grows three-fold in a decade

(kb) India has emerged as one of the global leaders in clean energy, with its renewable energy capacity expanding three-fold in the past decade. From March 2014 to April 2024, the country's installed renewable energy capacity grew from 75.52 gigawatts (GW) to 232 GW. As of April 2024, India surpassed Germany to

become the world's third-largest producer of wind and solar energy. To put this in perspective, 232 GW is roughly equivalent to the total energy consumption of a large country like Brazil or the entire UK's electricity consumption in a year.

The growth in India's renewable energy sector is primarily driven by solar and wind power. Solar energy capacity surged from 2.82 GW to 108 GW, while wind energy capacity increased from 21 GW to 51 GW during the same period. For comparison, the entire UK had around 25 GW of solar capacity by 2024, meaning India's solar capacity now far exceeds that of many developed nations.

The cost of solar power has decreased significantly, with tariffs dropping by 80 percent over the last decade, making solar energy more affordable and accessible. For instance, in Neemuch, the cost of solar power is now as low as USD 0.10 per unit.

To further bolster the sector, the government has set a target of reaching 100 GW of solar power capacity by 2030. The PM-Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana scheme, launched in February 2024, has already facilitated the installation of rooftop solar panels in approximately 1.2 million homes, contributing to the country's renewable energy goals. [Ministry of New and Renewable Energy] [The Times of India]

India: Police officer arrested on espionage charges amid post-conflict intelligence crackdown

(lm) India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a Central Reserve Police Force officer in Delhi on charges of spying for Pakistan, in the latest case linked to heightened security measures following the recent military confrontation between the two countries. The officer is accused of sharing classified national security information with Pakistani intelligence officers since 2023. He has been remanded in custody until June 6. [Arab News]

The arrest is part of a broader crackdown on alleged espionage activities. Indian authorities have arrested at least ten individuals this month, including a travel blogger, a student, a security guard, and a businessman. The blogger is reported to have visited Pakistan multiple times and maintained contact with a Pakistani embassy official.

These developments come in the aftermath of an April 22 militant attack on tourists in Indian-administered

Kashmir, which New Delhi blamed on Islamabad. The resulting four-day military standoff marked the most serious escalation between the nuclear-armed neighbors since 1999, culminating in a ceasefire on May 10. [AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3]

India: Security forces kill two Maoist splinter group leaders in anti-insurgency operation

(lm) Indian security forces have killed two senior members of the banned Maoist splinter group Jharkhand Jan Mukti Parishad (JJMP) in an armed encounter in Jharkhand. One suspected insurgent was injured and taken into custody, while a police officer also sustained injuries during the exchange of fire. [The Indian Express]

The JJMP is a breakaway faction of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), a banned left-wing extremist group that has waged an armed insurgency in parts of central and eastern India—particularly in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha. The Maoist movement, often referred to as the Naxalite insurgency, seeks to overthrow the Indian state through guerrilla warfare, claiming to fight for the rights of marginalized rural communities, including tribal populations.

Maldives: Twelve candidates seek seats on Supreme Court after justices' removal

(db) Applications have closed for two vacant positions on the Supreme Court bench, with a total of twelve candidates vying for the spots.

The Judicial Service Commission recently began accepting applications after two sitting Supreme Court justices, Azmiralda Zahir and Mahaz Ali Zahir, had been dismissed on May 14, 2025. The deadline for submissions was May 22, 2025, at noon. The pool of applicants includes a range of individuals with judicial experience, both past and present, as well as well-known legal experts.

The candidates who submitted their names for consideration are: Mohamed Faisal, the current Chief Judge of the High Court; Mohamed Saleem, a High Court Judge; Abdulla Hameed, a former High Court Judge; Abdul Ghani Mohamed, a former Supreme Court Justice; Ahmed Hailam, the former Chief judge of the Criminal Court; Shujau Usman, a former Chief

Judge of the High Court; Mariyam Nihayath, who previously served as a Civil Court Judge and Deputy Prosecutor General; Mohamed Raghib Ahmed, a former judge and one-time Deputy Minister in the current administration; Mohamed Waheed Ibrahim, a former Member of Parliament representing the Thulusdhoo Constituency; Aishath Fazna Ahmed, a former Assistant Prosecutor General; Mohamed Ibrahim; and Ibrahim Ali.

The Maldivian constitution stipulates that the Supreme Court should have a total of seven judges. Currently, the bench is composed of only five justices, though. [Avas]

Maldives: Former president appointed special envoy to incumbent president

(lm) On May 26, President Mohamed Muizzu appointed former President Mohamed Waheed Hassan Manik as his Special Envoy. Waheed, who served as vice president from 2008 to 2012 and later as caretaker president, has held various roles including positions in the United Nations system. The move comes as Muizzu's foreign policy has faced criticism, particularly regarding the administration's external alignments and diplomatic strategies. [The Sun]

Maldives: New anti-gang law grants sweeping powers to curb organized crime

(lm) The Maldives has enacted a new Anti-Gang Crime Act, granting law enforcement broad powers to combat gang-related crime, including warrantless arrests, property searches, and holding suspects without legal counsel for up to 48 hours. Ratified by President Mohamed Muizzu on May 25, the law replaces the previous 2010 legislation and introduces tougher penalties, including prison terms exceeding ten years and the ability to confiscate assets and impose surveillance measures such as electronic tagging.

Additional provisions aim to deter juvenile recruitment and establish systems for monitoring and rehabilitating high-risk individuals. The law also criminalizes financial support to gangs and authorizes courts to identify gang affiliations formally. It comes amid mounting public concern over rising gang activity, particularly among youth, and follows the formation of a Gang Crime Enforcement Unit in July 2024. Since

then, authorities report questioning over 31,000 individuals in identified hotspots, leading to 180 arrests and 83 prosecutions. [The Sun 1]

Despite these expanded powers, the law has drawn sharp criticism from former Home Minister Umar Naseer, who labeled it “toothless” and ineffective. Speaking on national television, he argued that the law fails to define what constitutes a “gang,” leaving enforcement in legal ambiguity. In his view, relying on courts to determine gang status undermines the law’s practical enforceability, as such determinations require investigative and intelligence-based assessments, not judicial rulings.

Umar warned that without a clear mechanism—such as a designated administrative committee to define gang status—the law lacks the firmness needed to dismantle organized crime networks. He also accused political actors and officials of continuing to shield gangs for personal or political gain, casting doubt on the government's ability to curb the influence of criminal groups. [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Smoking ban for post-2007 generation to take effect in November 2025

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has ratified amendments to the Tobacco Control Act, introducing a generational smoking ban that prohibits the sale and use of tobacco products for Maldivian citizens born on or after January 1, 2007. The law, passed by Parliament with an overwhelming majority (63–1), will come into effect on November 1, 2025.

The legislation also bans sales through unverified channels such as vending machines, online platforms, or courier services. It grants police the authority to confiscate vaping devices and e-cigarettes regardless of their usage status. This follows earlier measures by the Muizzu administration, including a blanket ban on the import, sale, and use of vapes and e-cigarettes in December 2024, as well as a significant increase in cigarette taxes that doubled prices to MVR 240 (USD 15.60) per pack. [The Sun]

Maldives: Tourism agency denies funding President Muizzu’s Liverpool trip

(db) On May 22, 2025, the Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC) officially declared that it did not allocate any funds towards President Mohamed Muizzu's recent visit to Liverpool. This assertion was made in response to a formal inquiry by the news outlet Raajje MV to the President's Office. The request sought to ascertain the financial contributions, if any, made by the MMPRC for the presidential trip.

In a written response delivered to RaajjeTV and bearing the signature of MMPRC's Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Ibrahim Shiuree, the agency confirmed that, in accordance with the Right to Information Act, no expenditures were incurred concerning Muizzu's Liverpool visit on April 10, 2025.

Despite pledges from the Maldivian government regarding transparency and open disclosure, concerns have been increasingly raised by the public. They allege that actions observed suggest an attempt to conceal information and mislead the public, even concerning seemingly routine matters.

President Muizzu had travelled to the United Kingdom on April 1 and returned to the Maldives on April 5. The Presidential Office had previously claimed that the rationale behind the Liverpool trip was to attend the launch of a collaborative promotional campaign between the MMPRC and Liverpool Football Club, operating under the brand "Visit Maldives", aimed at boosting tourism to the Maldives. [Raajje]

Maldives: State appeals acquittal of seven suspects in attempted murder of former prosecutor general

(lm) The Prosecutor General's Office of the Maldives has appealed the Criminal Court's April 14 acquittal of seven men accused of attempting to murder former Prosecutor General Hussain Shameem. The High Court confirmed receipt of the appeal, which was submitted on May 27, the final day of the 30-working-day window allowed for such cases.

Shameem was attacked with a hammer in Male' City on January 31, 2024, resulting in a fractured arm. According to the authorities, the attack was premeditated: one suspect allegedly carried out the assault, another facilitated his escape by motorbike, while others provided logistical support and surveillance.

Despite these allegations, the Criminal Court ruled that the evidence was insufficient. The key issue cited was a discrepancy between the time of the attack and the timestamp on CCTV footage submitted by the prosecution. The court determined that the prosecution had failed to account for the inconsistency, which undermined the credibility of its case. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Former immigration chief faces three criminal charges including money laundering

(lm) Former Controller General of Immigration Mohamed Shamman Waheed has been formally charged with complicity in robbery, misuse of official capacity, and money laundering. The charges, filed by the Prosecutor General's Office, stem from allegations that Shamman abused his role for personal gain, including misappropriating funds from expatriates.

If convicted, the charges carry significant prison terms: over three years for complicity in robbery, nearly two years for misuse of office, and between five and fifteen years for money laundering, alongside a fine up to five times the amount involved.

Shamman was arrested on March 21, 2025, following a broader investigation into corruption within Maldives Immigration. Authorities claim they recovered over MVR 500,000 (USD 32,500) from his home, allegedly extorted from a detained expatriate.

Four other individuals have also been charged in connection with the case. Meanwhile, Shamman's family alleges his arrest was politically motivated to prevent him from exposing corruption involving the Minister of Home Affairs. Police have denied any attempt to frame Shamman, stating there is credible evidence to proceed with prosecution. [The Sun]

Maldives: Broadcasting commission secretary general removed over non-cooperation

(lm) The Secretary General of the Maldives Broadcasting Commission (BroadCom), Mariyam Zeeniya, was removed from her position on May 26 over allegations of non-cooperation with the commission's operations. Her dismissal follows accusations of failing to comply with official decisions,

neglecting legal duties, and obstructing internal procedures.

Zeeniya had previously been suspended for three days, a move that triggered staff protests. Additional complaints included accusations of workplace intimidation, verbal misconduct toward subordinates, and lack of respect toward Commission President Safaa Shafeeq. These incidents had already prompted an internal investigation and a formal warning.

Her dismissal comes amid broader institutional tensions. On May 18, a petition was submitted to Parliament accusing BroadCom's leadership—including its president—of obstructing staff and undermining the commission's work by violating administrative norms. In response, President Safaa denied the allegations, claiming no formal grievances had been brought to the attention of commission members and asserting that leadership maintained regular communication with staff. [The Sun]

Maldives: Government commits to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050 under new climate agreement

(lm) The Maldives has signed a non-binding agreement with the Blue Planet Alliance (BPA), committing to an aspirational goal of transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy by 2050. The agreement positions the Maldives as the 12th island nation to join the BPA, a Hawaii-based climate initiative that works with governments and communities to eliminate carbon-based fuels globally by 2045.

This pledge builds on an earlier promise made by the Maldivian President at the COP28 summit to achieve 33 percent renewable energy by 2028. [The Sun]

Maldives: Government under pressure as spending under national health insurance scheme surges

(lm) Public spending on Aasandha, the Maldives' national health insurance scheme, has surged by 24 percent compared to the previous year, reaching MVR 829.4 million (USD 53.9 million) as of mid-May 2025. Despite ongoing reform efforts to control costs, Aasandha continues to exceed budget allocations and has become a growing burden on the state budget.

Last year, actual spending nearly doubled the MVR 1.9 billion (USD 123.5 million) allocation.

At the same time, frustration among the public is rising due to continued shortages of essential medicines, including for newborns and thalassemia patients. President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has attributed these shortages to medicine importers reacting to government-imposed price caps designed to curb excessive markups—some reportedly as high as 1,000 percent. He has identified breaking the influence of what he termed a "medical mafia" and overhauling Aasandha as key policy goals.

Meanwhile, a new report from the Auditor General's Office has revealed that Aasandha Company Limited incurred a loss of MVR 40 million (USD 2.6 million) related to a politically linked advance payment. The payment was made in January 2023 to a company owned by former MP Ali Hameed, who had recently defected to the then-ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) amid internal party strife. The funds were intended for a hospital project that never materialized and are now under criminal investigation by the Prosecutor General's Office. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Dismissed fisheries company chief seeks USD 42,000 compensation

(lm) The former Chief Executive Officer of the Maldives Industrial Fisheries Company (MIFCO), Dr. Vitaliy Lyubimov, has filed a claim with the Employment Tribunal seeking USD 42,000 (MVR 649,211) in compensation, alleging he was dismissed without the contractually required three-month notice period. Lyubimov, a Ukrainian national, had been appointed on December 9, 2024, but was removed less than three months later on March 3, 2025.

MIFCO has contested the tribunal's jurisdiction, arguing that the Employment Act may not apply to Lyubimov's executive position. Despite this, the tribunal accepted the case and has directed the state-owned company to respond.

The appointment of Lyubimov was part of President Mohamed Muizzu's declared effort to root out corruption at MIFCO, which has long operated at a loss. Shortly after taking office, Lyubimov warned against political interference in the company's operations and pledged to expose any such attempts. His case follows a similar claim by another foreign executive, who led the Development Bank of the Maldives. [The Sun]

Maldives: President Muizzu inaugurates airport, announces 800 development projects for 2025

(lm) President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu has officially inaugurated Muli Airport—the first airport in Meemu Atoll—marking a major infrastructure milestone for the region. The facility, initially contracted under the previous administration in 2021 for MVR 221 million (USD 14.4 million), had stalled due to budgetary constraints. Muizzu's government resumed and completed the project by injecting an additional MVR 319 million (USD 20.7 million), bringing the total cost to MVR 540 million (USD 35.1 million).

At the inauguration on May 20, President Muizzu used the occasion to announce that his administration will contract approximately 800 development projects in 2025. Of these, 390 have already been signed with state-owned enterprises, and around 300 more are expected to be finalized with private contractors in the coming weeks. Muizzu stated that many of these projects had been stalled when he took office in 2023 but are now ready to proceed. [The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives: Over 650 youths apply for new national service program within first month

(lm) The Maldives' recently launched National Service Program has received 658 applications less than a month after opening on April 20. The program, introduced by President Mohamed Muizzu, aims to train up to 1,000 recruits in its first year, though initial intake capacity will be limited due to resource constraints. Ultimately, the government aims to train 4,000 participants annually.

The initiative is designed to instill discipline, Islamic values, and patriotism among Maldivian youth while also supporting the country's security forces by preparing participants for national service in times of crisis. [The Sun]

Maldives: Police to relocate national headquarters under new development deal

(lm) The Maldives Police Service has signed an agreement with the state-owned Housing Development Corporation to construct a new national headquarters in Hulhumale', a reclaimed island developed to ease congestion in the capital, Male. The move comes as the current headquarters in central Male', in use since 1999, has become insufficient due to the police force's expansion. [avas]

Nepal: Government sharpens rhetoric ahead of May 29 royalist rally as tensions rise

(lm) Ahead of the major pro-monarchy rally on May 29—coinciding with Nepal's Republic Day—the Nepalese government has significantly ramped up its rhetoric. The rally is organized by the Joint People's Movement Committee, a coalition of royalist groups advocating for the restoration of Nepal's Hindu monarchy, and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), a right-wing nationalist political party pushing for the return of a constitutional monarchy and the establishment of a Hindu state.

Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has stirred controversy by instructing his Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) cadres to "take control" of Kathmandu on the day of the protest. This is not the first time Prime Minister Oli has made such provocative statements—he previously urged his party's youth wing to act aggressively against royalist protests in March 2025, which escalated into violent clashes, resulting in two deaths and widespread property damage. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

In addition to the prime minister's remarks, the Minister for Communication and Information Technology also issued a strong warning. He stated that while the government has allowed royalist groups to express their views against the constitution and the federal democratic republic, it will not remain passive forever. [The Kathmandu Post 3]

These developments coincide with the ongoing detention of Durga Prasai, a controversial business figure accused of inciting violence during the March 28 protest in Tinkune. Prasai, who allegedly acted as the "field commander" for the protest, faces multiple charges, including attempted murder, homicide, money laundering, and banking violations. He was arrested in India on April 10 and transferred to Kathmandu the following day. Several participants, including RPP leaders, were previously released by

court order. Prasai remains in detention as the investigation continues. [The Kathmandu Post 4]

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is investigating the violence from the Tinkune protests, and its forthcoming report is expected to address the excessive use of force by the police during the clashes. [The Kathmandu Post 5]

Nepal: Opposition blocks Parliament, demands home minister's resignation over visa scam

(rs) Nepal's federal Parliament descended into disorder on May 27 as lawmakers from the opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) and the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) disrupted proceedings, demanding the immediate resignation of Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak. They accuse him of obstructing an investigation into a large-scale visa scam at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA), which allegedly involved human trafficking under the guise of issuing visit visas.

The controversy began after the Commission for the Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) raided the Immigration Office at TIA on May 22, arresting Immigration Chief Tirtharaj Bhattarai and seizing documents. Allegations suggest a network of officials facilitated the illegal export of Nepali workers, collecting significant bribes—reportedly thousands of U.S. dollars per individual. While no formal charges have been filed against Lekhak, opposition leaders argue his continued presence in office undermines the credibility of the investigation.

The ruling Nepali Congress party has faced growing pressure as the #ResignRameshLekhak campaign gained momentum on social media. Minister Lekhak, in a statement, pledged to resign if proven guilty of any wrongdoing since taking office. However, he maintains his innocence and has expressed willingness to step down if his departure would benefit the party or the political coalition. [The Himalayan Times] [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Top bureaucrats push back against two-year ban on political appointments in civil service bill

(lm) Nepal's senior bureaucrats are opposing a new provision in the draft Civil Service Bill that would impose a two-year "cooling-off period" barring retired civil servants from political, constitutional, or diplomatic appointments. The clause, included in a version of the bill already passed by the State Affairs and Good Governance Committee of the House of Representatives, would become law once approved by both chambers and signed by the President.

On May 23, at least 21 secretaries led by Chief Secretary Ek Narayan Aryal met Speaker Devraj Ghimire and National Assembly Chair Narayan Dahal to lobby against the provision, following earlier meetings with the two political heavyweights in the ruling coalition - Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) chair and Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Critics say the rule unfairly targets civil servants and should instead be part of wider legislation regulating appointments to constitutional offices. They warn it could marginalize experienced bureaucrats in favor of civil society nominees. Others view the clause as a response to political unease over lobbying by recently retired officials.

Despite the backlash, the House committee chair has ruled out amending the bill, defending the clause as necessary to protect the neutrality of governance. He described the bill as the "constitution" of civil servants and said the provision discourages post-retirement favoritism and undue political influence.

While top officials lobbied inside Parliament, lower-level civil servants protested outside Singha Durbar, criticizing the bill for privileging senior ranks and including promotion barriers that could block career advancement for up to 20 years. Protesters argued their demands were sidelined amid high-level efforts to shape the bill's final version. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Opposition party chief remains in custody as top court rejects release in cooperative fraud case

(lm) The leadership crisis within Nepal's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), a political group advocating for democratic governance, has intensified after the Supreme Court upheld the judicial custody of party president Rabi Lamichhane in a major cooperative fraud and organized crime case. On May 23, the Supreme Court rejected a habeas corpus petition filed

by Lamichhane's spouse, confirming that he would remain in custody until a final verdict is issued by the Rupandehi District Court.

Lamichhane, a former media executive and suspended lawmaker, faces embezzlement charges related to NPR 109 million (USD 797,000) allegedly funneled into a media network he co-managed. He is also facing charges across multiple districts for embezzling over NPR 860 million (USD 6.23 million), involving several cooperatives in Nepal. While Lamichhane was previously granted bail, a High Court ruling in April reversed this decision, resulting in his re-arrest. The case involves 28 individuals, with 17 facing additional charges. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

In response to Lamichhane's ongoing detention, Yagya Mani Neupane, an RSP leader, has called for filling key party leadership positions, including vice-president and general secretary. Neupane argues that the party cannot function effectively without these positions filled, especially with the next general convention months away. However, Acting President DP Aryal and other leaders are hesitant to act quickly, fearing the risk of factionalism within the party. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Faction of socialist party led by former Maoist leader joins opposition Maoist Centre

(lm) A faction of the Nepal Socialist Party (NSP), led by former Maoist leader and Bagmati Provincial Assembly member Ganga Narayan Shrestha, has formally merged with the main opposition Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre). Shrestha, who had left the Maoist Centre in 2015, returned after a series of talks between the two sides. As part of the merger, he has been appointed central secretary of the Maoist Centre, and other members of his faction will also be given roles within the party. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Teachers demand revision of education bill, threaten larger protests

(rs) Nepal's teachers are intensifying their demands for better working conditions and a revision to the recently passed School Education Bill, warning of larger protests unless their concerns are addressed. The Nepal Teachers' Federation (NTF) has raised serious reservations about the bill, which has been approved

by a parliamentary subcommittee after extensive debate. The federation argues that the bill, as it stands, fails to protect teachers' rights and undermines their professional security.

The main point of contention is the exclusion of temporary teachers from internal competitions for teaching positions. The bill proposes that 60 percent of vacancies be filled through internal competition, with the remaining 40 percent filled via open competition. Teachers have also objected to a provision requiring a minimum of seven years of service for automatic promotion and the lack of a provision to count years of temporary service for those who later become permanent. Furthermore, the bill introduces a provision placing school teachers under local governments, which the federation believes will weaken their rights and security.

Amid these legal and policy concerns, the federation is also pressing for broader welfare improvements for teachers, including pension reforms, salary adjustments, and benefits for temporary staff. The government, however, has stated that due to financial constraints, it can only implement the nine-point agreement reached with teachers in April 2025, which includes measures like subsidized medical treatment and rural allowances for temporary teachers. However, many of the federation's broader demands are still being negotiated, and the government estimates these would cost billions of Nepali rupees. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Civil war victims reject reactivated transitional justice process over lack of consultation and trust

(lm) Nepal’s long-stalled transitional justice process was formally reactivated on May 19, when Chief Justice Prakash Man Singh Raut administered the oath of office to the newly appointed chairs of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP). However, the move has drawn strong backlash from victims of the 1996–2006 Maoist insurgency and human rights groups, who decry the appointments as politically driven and lacking in transparency.

Former high court judge Mahesh Thapa now heads the TRC, while former chief secretary Leeladevi Gadtaula leads the CIEDP. Both were appointed by the Council of Ministers based on a shortlist prepared by a committee led by former Chief Justice Om Prakash Mishra. The commissions have since called on victims

to register new complaints within a 90-day window, particularly targeting those who were unable to do so previously—such as survivors of rape and sexual violence—by offering submission through physical visits or email. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

However, victims' associations and civil society groups have rejected the process. In an open letter to Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, 39 victim organizations criticized the appointments as coercively imposed without meaningful consultation. Victim representatives also met with the United Nations Resident Coordinator to express their grievances. Some have warned of forming parallel civil commissions if the state-led process proceeds unchanged.

Survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), in particular, say the current process fails to ensure confidentiality or practical accessibility. A previously submitted batch of 794 sealed complaints by a CRSV network remains unregistered, as victims now threaten to withdraw their applications due to the commission's lack of sensitivity and engagement. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Kathmandu mayor under pressure to call long-overdue municipal executive meeting

(lm) Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah is facing mounting pressure to convene the long-delayed municipal executive meeting, with 41 out of 42 executive members—including his Deputy Mayor—urging the mayor to comply with legal obligations. The call for the meeting comes as the Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) approaches critical deadlines, including the fiscal year 2025/26 budget submission, which is legally required to be finalized by June 29.

The last executive meeting was held in December 2024, leaving a nearly six-month gap that has hindered decision-making on key infrastructure projects and policy matters. Elected representatives from various political parties, including the Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre), Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist), and the Rastriya Swatantra Party, have demanded that Mayor Shah act to resolve the impasse.

Under Nepal's Local Government Operation Act 2017, the executive is required to meet at least once a month. Without these meetings, the city's governance

and development planning have been severely disrupted. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Regional party recalls two ministers from Madhesh provincial government

(lm) The Janamat Party, a regional political force based in Nepal's Madhesh Province advocating for the rights of marginalized communities, has recalled two of its ministers – the Minister for Industry and Tourism and the Minister for Forests and Environment – from the provincial government, following a routine internal performance evaluation. The reshuffle comes after both ministers had served for one year.

The Madhesh government has been led by Chief Minister Satish Kumar Singh of the Janamat Party since June 2024. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Congress lawmakers accuse state agencies of selective prosecution

(lm) A recent parliamentary party meeting of the Nepali Congress, the single-largest party in the ruling coalition, initially convened to discuss the upcoming national budget, became a forum for vocal frustration over what lawmakers described as selective prosecution by law enforcement and anti-corruption bodies. Lawmakers expressed concern that the party, despite being the largest in the House of Representatives, is being politically sidelined and unfairly targeted in corruption and fraud investigations.

The strongest criticism centered on recent action by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), which on May 15 filed charges in the Teramocs procurement scandal—a case involving irregularities in the purchase of thermal cameras and related medical equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple Congress-linked figures were named, while others affiliated with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML), a key coalition partner, have not been charged despite also being implicated.

Lawmakers also cited inconsistencies in the handling of cooperative fraud cases, noting that figures linked to the Congress have been arrested and detained, while

others with ties to the CPN-UML were released on bail without being taken into custody.

Some MPs lamented the lack of support from party leadership during these legal challenges and raised broader concerns about Congress being treated as a junior partner in the coalition government. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Parliamentary committee refers airport corruption report to anti-graft body for action

(lm) Nepal's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has asked the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) to investigate corruption allegations in the Pokhara International Airport project, following the endorsement of a detailed subcommittee report that identified irregularities amounting to around NPR 14 billion (USD 102.2 million). The PAC formed the subcommittee in June 2024 after growing scrutiny over the project, which was inaugurated in January 2023 but remains underutilized.

The report highlighted serious issues in the construction process and tax exemptions granted to the Chinese state-owned contractor, CAMC Engineering Co. Ltd. Among other findings, it questioned the suitability of the construction site and the escalation of project costs from USD 145 million to USD 215.96 million, despite earlier feasibility studies suggesting a significantly lower cost.

While lawmakers from the Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) (Maoist Centre), Rastriya Swatantra Party, Rastriya Prajatantra Party, CPN (Unified Socialist), and some independents supported the report and its referral to the CIAA, the CPN (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML) of Prime Minister Oli opposed it. CPN-UML lawmakers claimed the findings were incomplete or politically motivated, accusing the report of targeting individuals based on personal grievances while ignoring key decision-makers behind the cost escalation. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Parliament refers land scandal to anti-graft commission amid allegations of legal violations

(lm) Nepal's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has forwarded an incomplete investigation into a controversial land acquisition case to the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), citing that the anti-graft body is already conducting a full inquiry. The case involves a 2010 land purchase by a non-profit affiliated with a well-known Indian yoga and Ayurvedic conglomerate, Patanjali Yogpeeth Nepal, which had been authorized to acquire land under ceiling exemptions for educational and medicinal purposes.

According to lawmakers, over 593 ropanis (approximately 30.2 hectares) of land were acquired in Kavre district under a Cabinet-approved exemption, but more than half of it was resold to a private firm within three months—an action they argue violates Nepal's land laws. The parliamentary subcommittee had gathered documentation from relevant ministries but suspended its inquiry after learning that the CIAA had already launched a probe.

Critics allege that the government's 2010 decision enabled misuse of land policy under the pretext of promoting Ayurveda. They further claim that high-level officials interfered in administrative appointments to facilitate the deal and failed to enforce similar scrutiny in other districts where similar exemptions were granted. The CIAA has begun summoning individuals involved in the transactions, though some have declined to appear, attributing the dealings to local representatives. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Former IT chief faces new corruption charges over inflated server procurement

(lm) Nepal's anti-corruption agency has filed new graft charges against Sunil Paudel, former executive director of the National Information Technology Centre (NITC), for allegedly manipulating a 2019 procurement process that caused losses of NPR 579 million (USD 4.23 million) to the state.

Filed at the Special Court on May 19, the case accuses Paudel and four others—including NITC officials and the CEO of Max International Pvt Ltd—of colluding to inflate prices for RISC and Hyper-Converged Infrastructure servers. The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) alleges the team bypassed public procurement norms, used flawed cost estimates, and accepted overpayments for training and warranty services already covered by supplier obligations.

A Singapore-based affiliate of Max International reportedly transferred USD 79,640 to Paudel's personal bank account in 2019, raising suspicions of kickbacks.

Paudel is already serving a nine-year prison sentence and facing fines for corruption in a separate case involving Nepal's National Payment Gateway project. In the new case, the CIAA seeks further prison time, fines, and asset recovery under multiple provisions of the 2002 Prevention of Corruption Act. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Indigenous protest groups to resume anti-cable car movement at temple

(lm) Indigenous protestors opposing the construction of a cable car to Pathibhara Temple in Taplejung have announced a renewed wave of demonstrations, vowing to internationalize their campaign. The movement—led by Limbu activists, an indigenous ethnic group native to eastern Nepal—who regard the temple's site, Mukkumlung, as a sacred ancestral heritage, accuses the government of breaking a February agreement promising high-level political dialogue.

Earlier protests in February saw road blockades across nine eastern districts and clashes with security forces that left at least 13 people injured. While the government maintains that a bureaucratic negotiation team is in place, the protestors argue that only ministerial-level talks can address their demands. Tensions escalated after groups supporting the cable car allegedly misrepresented a recent interim order by the Supreme Court—issued on April 14—mandating that the status quo be maintained until further notice. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal: Biswo Poudel appointed as new central bank governor after political stalemate

(rs) Economist Biswo Poudel has been appointed as the 18th governor of Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), ending a prolonged political deadlock over the leadership of the central bank. The Cabinet made the decision on May 20, selecting Poudel from a shortlist of three candidates recommended by a committee led by

Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Bishnu Paudel.

Poudel's appointment follows weeks of negotiation between the ruling coalition parties—the Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist)—after the post became vacant on April 7, when the tenure of former governor Maha Prasad Adhikari ended. The selection process had been stalled due to inaction by a previous recommendation committee, which led to resignations and a subsequent reconstitution of the body. [The Kathmandu Post 1] [The Kathmandu Post 2]

Nepal: Passport chief overrides technical panel's recommendations in e-passport contract

(rs) Nepal's Director General of the Department of Passports, Tirtha Raj Aryal, has overridden a technical panel's recommendations, allowing vendors that failed to meet key technical specifications to proceed to the financial bidding phase in a USD 6.4 million e-passport contract. This decision has raised concerns about transparency and compliance with Nepal's Public Procurement Act, which requires technical compliance before advancing to the financial round. [The Himalayan Times]

Pakistan: Army chief Munir promoted to field marshal as military stature surges after India conflict

(lm) Pakistan's government has promoted Army Chief General Asim Munir to the ceremonial five-star rank of field marshal, citing his "strategic brilliance and courageous leadership" during the recent military confrontation with India. Munir is only the second officer in the country's history to receive the title, after General Ayub Khan in 1965, who awarded himself the rank in 1965 while serving as both president and army chief during the Indo-Pakistani War of that year.

Analysts widely expect him to retain his role as army chief, further solidifying his already unmatched influence over government and national decision-making. [Arab News 1]

The promotion follows Pakistan's military response to an Indian airstrike on May 7, which was itself retaliation for an April 22 attack in Indian-administered

Kashmir that killed 26 civilians. Pakistan claims to have downed multiple Indian fighter jets and launched strikes on Indian military installations in a counter-operation dubbed Bunyan Marsoos ("Iron Wall"), reportedly timed to coincide with dawn prayers. Both sides reported casualties and damage before a ceasefire was reached on May 10.

To mark what officials described as a defining national moment, Munir hosted a high-level dinner in Rawalpindi for top political and military leaders, including President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. [Arab News 2]

Munir, a devout Muslim and former head of both Inter-Services Intelligence and Military Intelligence, has become Pakistan's most powerful figure. His open religious-nationalist framing of the India conflict—emphasizing Islamic identity in contrast to Hindu-majority India—has heightened his public appeal. A Gallup Pakistan survey found that 93 percent of respondents said their view of the military improved following the conflict. Public displays of support, including rallies and banners declaring Munir "our savior," have reinforced his status as a national hero.

This resurgence in military popularity marks a reversal from earlier criticism of Munir, particularly over the crackdown on former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his supporters, and alleged election manipulation. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan: Jailed ex-Prime Minister Khan calls for nationwide protest, rejecting backchannel deal speculation

(lm) Pakistan's jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan has called on his supporters to prepare for a nationwide protest movement, issuing a defiant message from prison that renews his challenge to the current government and military establishment. The statement, released via social media on May 27, emphasized peaceful resistance and ruled out any compromise, despite ongoing speculation about secret negotiations aimed at securing his release.

Khan, who was ousted in April 2022 and imprisoned in August 2023 on corruption charges, said that when all avenues are closed to a political party, peaceful protest becomes the only path forward. His Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has long accused the government and military of cracking down on opposition voices, with many of its leaders either arrested or sidelined.

The former premier explicitly rejected reports of a backchannel deal with the military, asserting that he would “rather spend my entire life behind bars than kneel before oppression.” He also warned PTI lawmakers against shifting allegiances, stating that no one was “electable” without party ideology and discipline.

While Khan did not announce a timeline for the proposed protest movement, his call raises the prospect of renewed political unrest in a country already grappling with economic challenges and tense civil-military dynamics. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly passes land reforms act amid opposition protests

(za) The Assembly of Gilgit-Baltistan, a mountainous region in northern Pakistan administered separately from the country’s provinces, recently passed the Land Reforms Act 2025 during its 36th session by a majority vote. The act abolishes the colonial-era Khalisa Sarkar system, which had designated large areas as state property, and reclassifies such lands as “common land,” granting ownership rights to local communities. The legislation also establishes the Gilgit-Baltistan Land Apportionment Board to supervise the distribution of common lands among eligible claimants.

Although the government claims the act was developed through broad stakeholder consultation, it has faced strong criticism. Opposition lawmakers walked out of the session, accusing the government of paving the way for the sale of ancestral lands to outside investors under the guise of development. Civil society groups and nationalist leaders echoed these concerns, warning that the law could trigger widespread protests in a region where land rights are closely tied to identity, autonomy, and political recognition. [DAWN] [HUM News]

Pakistan: Two new polio cases emerge as nationwide vaccination campaign targets over 45 million children

(sn) Two new cases of wild poliovirus have been confirmed in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) province, bringing the total number of infections to ten so far in 2025. The cases coincide with the launch of Pakistan’s third nationwide polio vaccination campaign of the year, aimed at immunizing over 45 million

children under the age of five. The current campaign is part of Pakistan's 2-4-6 strategy—a three-phase push between September 2024 and May 2025 designed to close immunity gaps ahead of the high transmission season.

Pakistan and Afghanistan remain the only two countries where polio is still endemic. In Pakistan, eradication efforts have repeatedly faced setbacks due to vaccine misinformation, community resistance, and attacks by militant groups on health workers and their security escorts. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Government to cancel passports and file charges against deported citizens

(lm) Pakistan's federal government announced new punitive measures on May 24 against citizens deported for illegal activities abroad, particularly following repeated complaints from Middle Eastern states about Pakistani nationals involved in begging and undocumented migration. Under the new policy, deportees will have their passports canceled, First Information Reports (FIRs) registered, and their names placed on the Passport Control List for five years.

A newly formed committee has also been tasked with tightening passport issuance procedures and addressing human smuggling networks. The move expands earlier efforts to limit illegal migration and restore Pakistan's image abroad. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Top court upholds death sentence in high-profile woman's murder case

(lm) Pakistan's Supreme Court has upheld the death penalty for Zahir Jaffer, a Pakistani-American convicted in the 2021 murder of Noor Mukadam, a 27-year-old woman and daughter of a former diplomat, whose mutilated body was discovered in an upscale neighborhood of Islamabad in July 2021. The case sparked national outrage and became one of Pakistan's most closely followed trials related to violence against women.

Jaffer was originally sentenced to death by a trial court in 2022. The Islamabad High Court later converted a separate rape conviction to a second death sentence, which the Supreme Court has now commuted to 25 years of imprisonment. The Court also acquitted him

of abduction charges. Two household staff previously sentenced to 10 years were released based on time served.

Jaffer has limited remaining legal options: a review petition with the same bench and, ultimately, a mercy appeal to the President under Article 45 of Pakistan's Constitution. Until the latter is decided, the death sentence remains suspended. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Journalist killed in Balochistan amid growing risks in separatist stronghold

(lm) A journalist was shot dead in his home by unidentified gunmen in a town in the remote Awaran district of Balochistan, early on May 24. The victim, who worked for both a national TV channel and a local newspaper, was targeted while sleeping, according to local security forces. No group has claimed responsibility, though the area is a known stronghold of separatist groups, especially the Baloch Liberation Front—a militant organization seeking independence for Balochistan from Pakistan.

The killing follows heightened tensions between Pakistan and India, with Islamabad recently accusing India of backing separatist violence in the province—a claim New Delhi denies. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Government allocates 2,000MW to bitcoin mining and AI data centers

(lm) Pakistan has allocated 2,000 megawatts of surplus electricity – equivalent to the total electricity consumption of a city the size of Islamabad – for bitcoin mining and artificial intelligence (AI) data centers in the first phase of a national digital infrastructure plan.

Led by the state-backed Pakistan Crypto Council, the initiative seeks to turn idle power capacity into a strategic economic asset by attracting foreign investment, generating revenue in U.S. dollars, and creating high-tech jobs.

The announcement follows the April launch of Pakistan's first virtual asset regulatory framework, aligned with international financial standards. Future plans include renewable-powered facilities, tax incentives for infrastructure developers, and the

establishment of fintech and innovation hubs. [Arab News]

Pakistan: IMF concludes visit as government delays budget

(lm) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has concluded a mission to Pakistan following detailed discussions on the upcoming fiscal year 2025–26 budget and broader macroeconomic reforms under the country's USD 7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The visit came shortly after the IMF approved a USD 1.02 billion disbursement to Islamabad, bringing total disbursements under the program to USD 2 billion. An additional USD 1.4 billion was earlier granted through the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF) to support climate adaptation efforts.

Despite heightened tensions with India following a deadly militant attack in Indian-administered Kashmir in April—which led to a four-day military standoff—the IMF board proceeded with the disbursement "on merit," according to Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb. He noted that India had attempted to delay the decision, calling on the IMF to review its Pakistan portfolio. New Delhi also announced plans to lobby the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to reinstate Pakistan on its grey list and oppose World Bank development funding plans targeting climate and private-sector reforms in Pakistan.

During its mission, the IMF reviewed Islamabad's fiscal strategy ahead of the Budget 2025–26, which the government has delayed to June 10 to finalize key targets. Pakistani authorities reiterated their commitment to fiscal consolidation while preserving social and priority spending. The government aims to achieve a primary surplus of 1.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the next fiscal year, with a medium-term target of 2 percent by FY2027.

Key issues discussed included expanding the tax base, improving compliance, and rationalizing spending. Structural reforms under the Memorandum for Economic and Financial Policies (MEFP) remain a priority, particularly the parliamentary approval of the FY26 budget.

The IMF also underscored the need to implement energy sector reforms to reduce costs and enhance financial sustainability, improve the investment climate, and maintain tight, data-driven monetary policy to curb inflation within the central bank's 5 to 7

percent target. Additionally, the Fund emphasized the importance of maintaining a functioning foreign exchange market and rebuilding foreign reserve buffers.

Despite the IMF's support, Pakistan's economic outlook remains fragile. Growth is projected at just 2.68 percent by June 2025, well below earlier government forecasts, underscoring continued structural vulnerabilities in the country's USD 350 billion economy. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Pakistan: Government looks to fast-track development framework with World Bank's assistance

(sn) Pakistan has sought the technical assistance of the World Bank to fast-track the implementation of the Country Partnership Framework (CPF). The World Bank endorsed the CPF in January 2025 to support Pakistan's long-term development through up to USD 20 billion in pledged lending, focusing on building human capital, enhancing climate change resistance, and promoting private sector growth.

The assistance came during a review between Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and a World Bank delegation. The meeting also provided an opportunity for Islamabad to review the World Bank's financing portfolio and strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Later in the day, the same delegation met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who expressed his gratitude for the CPF. In turn, the delegation commended Pakistan's macroeconomic performance and stabilization efforts as a model for other nations. The CPF was established in 2025 and will run for up to ten years, providing crucial structural support to Pakistan. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Private sector viewed as pivotal for economic development; economic environment shows positive signs

(sn) Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has emphasized the role of the private sector in driving economic growth and development, highlighting the need for more public-private partnerships. Pakistan has consistently reiterated these calls in the past, with the PM reaffirming to all parties the government's priority and support for the sector.

Sharif stated that the private sector's mobilization would lead to self-reliance but that the government needed to provide a conducive environment for profitable businesses to emerge. This includes a potential reduction in business costs, including measures that will facilitate access to loans and reduce electricity prices.

In addition, Sharif addressed a no-nonsense approach to tax evasion, with Pakistan trying to improve a historically low tax-to-GDP ratio in the region. The government remains active in this space, with attempts to reform the tax collection body through increased automation, which should improve collection and compliance methods. [Arab News 1]

In separate news, the national accounts committee reported 2.4 percent growth in the third quarter of the current fiscal year, revising growth prospects for the full-year GDP growth to 2.68 percent, bringing Pakistan's national economy to USD 410.96 billion.

The report comes as Pakistan's central bank considers a 100-basis-point interest rate cut following improved inflation trends. Following a brief pause in March, the central bank has continued making cuts from a record high of 22 percent, supporting growth in the national economy. In addition to the full-year GDP revision, the first and second quarters were revised to 1.37 and 1.53 percent, respectively. [Arab News 2]

The business community later shared these results after a survey by Pakistan's Overseas Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OICCI) revealed that business confidence had significantly improved among investors. This was attributed to declining inflation figures, macroeconomic stability, and an expected improvement in business conditions over the next six months.

The survey showed that the Business Confidence Index (BCI) improved by 16 percent, and the outlook for manufacturing, retail, and services showed positive signs. In the past six months, 53 percent of survey respondents reported a negative outlook, highlighting the growingly positive sentiment in Pakistan's business landscape. [Arab News 3]

Pakistan: Islamic banking assets reach milestone, account for more than 21 percent of total banking assets

(lm) Pakistan's central bank announced that Islamic banking assets have surpassed PKR 11.5 trillion (USD

40.7 billion) for the first time by the end of March 2025, now accounting for 21.1 percent of the country's total banking sector assets. Deposits under Islamic banking have also reached PKR 8.4 trillion (USD 29.7 billion), representing about 25.4 percent of total industry deposits.

The development marks significant progress toward Pakistan's goal of transitioning to a fully Shariah-compliant financial system by 2027, as mandated by a 2022 ruling of the Federal Shariat Court. The ruling directed the elimination of interest from the banking system, prompting legislative reforms, the promotion of sukuk (Islamic bonds), and a national strategy known as SBP Vision 2028. [Arab News]

Pakistan: Military blames Indian-backed militants for attacks killing children; nine militants killed in separate incident

(lm) At least eight children were killed last week in two separate attacks in Pakistan's volatile regions of Balochistan and North Waziristan. The Pakistani military has blamed both incidents on India-backed militant networks, while New Delhi has rejected the accusations as politically motivated.

In the first attack on May 21, a suicide bomber targeted a school bus carrying 46 children to an army-run school in Balochistan's Khuzdar district, killing six people, including four children, and injuring many others. Authorities have not confirmed which group carried out the bombing, but suspicion has fallen on Baloch separatist groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army.

Two days earlier, on May 19, a suspected drone strike in North Waziristan's Mir Ali tehsil killed four children from the same family and injured five others. While locals accused the Pakistani military of carrying out the strike, the army denied responsibility, attributing the incident to the banned group "Fitna Al Khwarij"—a label it uses for extremists such as the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan—and again alleged Indian sponsorship.

The surge in attacks comes just weeks after Pakistan and India reached a ceasefire on May 10 following their most serious cross-border confrontation in decades. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

In a separate incident, Pakistani security forces killed nine militants in three separate operations, claiming that they were "Indian sponsored." The operations

were conducted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) districts of Dera Ismail, Tank and Khyber. India and Pakistan continue to trade allegations of supporting cross-border militancy following the ceasefire, an allegation that both nations deny. [Arab News 3]

Sri Lanka: Ruling alliance accused of covert tactics and proxy funding to secure control of local councils

(lm) Sri Lanka's ruling National People's Power (NPP) alliance, led by Prsident Anura Kumara Dissanayake, is facing mounting allegations of covert outreach and indirect financial inducement as it seeks to consolidate control of local government bodies following the elections earlier this month. Opposition lawmakers from both the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB) and the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) have alleged that the NPP is attempting to sway elected councilors and independents through backchannel meetings and proxy funding from politically connected business figures.

A member of the SJB alleged that business figures connected to the NPP had offered financial inducements to members of independent groups in the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), where no party holds a clear majority. Five independent groups won seats in the CMC, and at least one has reportedly pledged its support to the opposition. [Daily Mirror 1]

Separately, an SLPP member of Parliament told the legislature on May 23 that NPP representatives have approached SLPP-elected councilors directly, often visiting them at their homes to avoid digital surveillance. He claimed some of these encounters have been recorded by closed-circuit cameras. [Daily Mirror 2]

These developments reflect the broader post-election struggle across Sri Lanka's 340 local government bodies. While the NPP emerged as the largest political grouping, winning a majority in 152 councils—it fell short of securing control in many key areas. In response, opposition parties including the SLPP, SJB, and United National Party (UNP) have coordinated efforts to block NPP-led administrations. Some have even floated the idea of forming "non-party councils" in contested areas as a strategy to prevent NPP dominance. [AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3]

At the same time, the SJB is facing internal strain. A senior figure in the party has called for dialogue after multiple local organizers resigned over frustration with

the party's inability to secure enough seats to accommodate their nominees. Resignations have been reported in districts such as Badulla, Nuwara Eliya, Galle, and Matale. [Daily Mirror 3]

Sri Lanka: Parliament to debate personal data protection bill on June 3

(lm) Sri Lanka's Parliament will take up the debate on the Personal Data Protection Bill on June 3, following a decision made during a recent party leaders' meeting. The bill is part of broader legislative efforts to modernize Sri Lanka's digital governance framework and establish clearer standards for handling personal data.

On the following day, June 4, Parliament will debate regulations under the Anti-Corruption Act. On June 5, the National Transport Commission (Amendment) Bill will be discussed, followed by a session dedicated to condolence votes for several recently deceased Members of Parliament. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Pre-trial set in foreign-funded sports corruption case

(lm) The Colombo High Court has scheduled a pre-trial hearing for June 27 in a criminal case involving opposition Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa, the son of former president Mahinda Rajapaksa and a prominent political figure within the party. The Attorney General has accused Rajapaksa of misappropriating LKR 70 million (USD 238,000) provided by Indian real estate company Krrish Lanka Pvt. Ltd., funds that were reportedly allocated for the development of rugby in Sri Lanka. The case is one of several high-profile corruption allegations tied to members of the former ruling family. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Constitutional Council blocks president's nominee for Auditor General, extends incumbent's term

(lm) Sri Lanka's Constitutional Council—an oversight body responsible for approving high-level appointments to independent state institutions—has rejected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's nominee for Auditor General, instead approving a six-

month extension for the current officeholder, Dharmapala Gammanpila.

The rejection came in a 5–3 vote on May 22, reportedly due to the president's choice being an external candidate rather than someone from within the Auditor General's Department. This triggered criticism from opposition lawmakers and audit sector unions, who insisted that longstanding institutional practice favors promoting from within unless no qualified candidate is available. [Daily Mirror 1]

In response to the Council's decision, the president's request to extend Gammanpila's tenure by six months was unanimously approved, ensuring continued leadership of the department while a new consensus candidate is sought. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court nullifies political victimization commission's findings against ex-Solicitor General

(lm) Sri Lanka's Supreme Court has overturned the findings and recommendations issued by the Presidential Commission on Political Victimisation (PCoI) against former Solicitor General and President's Counsel Dilrukshi Dias Wickramasinghe. The ruling, delivered on May 22 by a three-judge bench, concluded that the Commission failed to follow legal procedures required under the Commissions of Inquiry Act.

The PCoI, appointed under former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and widely known as the Upali Abeyratne Commission, had accused Wickramasinghe of misconduct. She was interdicted in 2019 and placed on compulsory leave in 2020, prompting her to challenge the legality of the Commission's findings.

The Court found that the Commission's proceedings lacked lawful basis, noting serious procedural lapses and absence of evidence supporting compliance with Sections 16 and 23 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act. As such, the adverse findings against Wickramasinghe were declared null and void. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Government pledges no land acquisitions in North and East, vows return of property

(lm) Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya has reassured residents of Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces that the government will not engage in any land acquisition and remains fully committed to restoring land ownership to rightful claimants. Her remarks came during a parliamentary discussion on May 24 addressing unresolved land issues in the historically contested regions.

The Northern and Eastern provinces were the main battlegrounds during Sri Lanka's civil war (1983–2009) and remain home to significant Tamil and Muslim populations. Large areas in these regions were seized or designated as military zones during the conflict, resulting in displacement and prolonged disputes over land rights. Restitution of land is a central issue in post-war reconciliation efforts. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Speaker appoints committee to probe opposition MP

(lm) Speaker Jagath Wickramaratne has appointed a three-member committee to investigate allegations of misconduct raised by ruling party members against opposition lawmaker Dayasiri Jayasekara of the Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB). [Daily Mirror 1]

In response, a group of opposition MPs has formally requested that the Speaker also initiate an investigation into Leader of the House Bimal Ratnayake, accusing him of undemocratic conduct during parliamentary sessions. The MPs argue that Ratnayake has failed to uphold the standards expected of his role and insist that accountability should apply evenly across party lines. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Motor traffic official among three arrested in bribery case

(lm) The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) has arrested a Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Motor Traffic, along with two others, for allegedly accepting a bribe amounting to LKR 4 million (USD 13,600). The arrests were made during a special raid carried out by CIABOC officers at the department's premises on May 23. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Former agriculture minister granted bail in fertilizer import case

(lm) A Sri Lankan court has released former Minister of Agriculture Mahindananda Aluthgamage on bail in connection with a controversial shipment of contaminated organic fertilizer. The Colombo Chief Magistrate granted bail on five sureties totaling LKR 1 million (approximately USD 3,400). The case relates to a disputed fertilizer import during Aluthgamage's tenure, which had previously raised public and legal scrutiny over agricultural procurement standards. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Bar Association condemns police attempts to breach lawyer–client confidentiality

(lm) The Bar Association of Sri Lanka (BASL) has condemned what it describes as inappropriate attempts by law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies to obtain information from attorneys about their professional duties, warning that such actions undermine legal ethics and the rule of law. The statement follows a reported incident in which the Colombo Crimes Division verbally requested an attorney to surrender his mobile phone without a court order. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: IMF board approval tied to electricity tariffs and financing assurances

(lm) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has stated that the timing of its Executive Board meeting to approve Sri Lanka's next tranche of funding—approximately USD 344 million (LKR 101.2 billion)—under the Extended Fund Facility hinges on the government's fulfillment of two key conditions. These include implementing cost-reflective electricity tariffs and ensuring that the automatic tariff adjustment mechanism functions properly.

In addition, the IMF is awaiting completion of the Financing Assurances Review, which assesses whether Sri Lanka has secured sufficient external financing commitments and made adequate progress in its ongoing debt restructuring efforts.

Although the IMF and Sri Lanka reached a staff-level agreement on the fourth review of the program on

April 25, final disbursement remains subject to Executive Board approval in the coming weeks. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Central Bank cuts policy rate amid trade concerns and subdued inflation

(lm) The Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) has reduced its Overnight Policy Rate (OPR) by 25 basis points to 7.75 percent—the first rate cut since November 2024. The OPR, which determines the interest rate at which banks borrow short-term funds from the central bank overnight, is a key tool used to influence inflation, liquidity, and credit conditions. The decision, announced after the CBSL's third monetary policy meeting of the year, surprised many analysts who had expected the rate to remain unchanged amid stabilizing inflation and improving economic activity.

According to the CBSL, the rate cut aims to steer inflation towards the five percent medium-term target amid subdued domestic inflationary pressures and rising global uncertainties. Sri Lanka's headline inflation, measured by the National Consumer Price Index, fell 0.8 percent year-on-year in April, easing from a 1.9 percent drop in March. However, inflation is expected to turn positive by the third quarter of 2025.

The decision also appears to be a pre-emptive move in response to trade-related risks following a now-suspended 44 percent reciprocal tariff imposed by the United States on Sri Lanka and other major trading partners in early April. While a 10 percent baseline tariff remains, a Sri Lankan delegation recently visited Washington to continue negotiations.

The CBSL emphasized that despite progress in tourism, remittances, and private sector credit growth, global trade disruptions could still pose challenges. Some economists, however, have cautioned that premature rate cuts could increase import demand and put pressure on the rupee, complicating efforts to meet the International Monetary Fund's target of building foreign reserves to USD 9.3 billion by 2026. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Government raises minimum monthly wage to LKR 27,000

(lm) Sri Lanka has officially increased the national minimum monthly wage for workers across all sectors to LKR 27,000 (USD 92) and the daily minimum wage to LKR 1,800 (USD 6.10), effective from April 1, 2025. The adjustment was announced via a gazette notification amending Section 3 of the National Minimum Wage of Workers Act, No. 3 of 2016.

The government has also confirmed a second phase of the wage hike: beginning January 1, 2026, the national minimum monthly wage will rise to LKR 30,000 (USD 102) and the daily wage to LKR 2,000 (USD 6.80). [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Apparel factory closure sparks political blame and concerns over investor confidence

(lm) The recent abrupt closure of a major apparel factory in the Katunayake Export Processing Zone has drawn criticism from opposition lawmakers and raised broader concerns about Sri Lanka's investment climate. Acting Labour Minister Mahinda Jayasinghe told Parliament on May 21 that the factory's management had failed to provide the legally required prior notice to the Department of Labour or consult with the government or Board of Investment (BOI) before announcing the closure on May 19. The company cited rising production costs as the reason for the shutdown.

According to the minister, out of 2,825 workers employed across four units, 1,416 employees are expected to lose their jobs. The ministry has initiated talks with the factory's management, trade unions, and the BOI, including discussions on the company's proposed compensation plan. [Daily Mirror 1]

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) parliamentarian Namal Rajapaksa blamed the government for failing to provide a stable and predictable business environment. He cited high taxes, escalating energy costs, policy inconsistencies, removal of the Simplified VAT (SVAT) scheme, and frequent trade union disruptions as key factors eroding investor confidence. Rajapaksa also criticized the National People's Power (NPP) administration for what he described as unfulfilled promises to increase foreign direct investment and accused it of failing to retain established investors. [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Critical medicine shortage amid supply chain failures

(pn) Sri Lanka is currently dealing with a pressing shortage of vital medications, which authorities attribute to delays in procurement planning during 2024. The Health and Mass Media Minister stated that while the country typical imports hundreds of drugs the country annually, by the middle of 2024, tenders had been issued for only 67 types of medicines intended for use in 2025. This resulting lag disrupted the medicine supply chain, causing gaps in the public hospital supply chain. With around 60 percent of public health system's medications being imported, this delay has had a significant ripple effect throughout the healthcare system.[the morning]

In response, government agencies have taken steps to stabilize the situation. The State Pharmaceuticals Corporation finalized procurement for 233 drugs in early 2025 and launched the tendering process for most of the 450 medicines needed in 2026. Of these, 418 are already progressing through various stages of approval. The Health Ministry is also working closely with local pharmaceutical producers and importing companies, asking them to commit to specific delivery timelines. If local suppliers are unable to meet demand, officials have stated that they will seek support from foreign governments to ensure a steady flow of critical medicines into the country. [Daily News]

Sri Lanka: Authorities scrutinize illegal employment and business activities by foreign nationals

(lm) S Sri Lankan authorities are investigating a surge in foreign nationals—mainly from Israel, India, Russia, and Ukraine—illegally operating businesses or working in the hospitality sector without proper visas. Despite regulations by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) that limit such employment to qualified roles in approved establishments, many are bypassing these rules with the help of immigration loopholes. Officials say some foreigners use digital payment methods that divert revenue away from the local economy.

The government has pledged to tighten visa controls and deport violators. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Supreme Court orders compensation for police torture victim

(dn) Sri Lanka's Supreme Court on May 23 ordered six former officers of the Thambuttegama Police to personally pay LKR 1.2 million (USD 4,080) in compensation for the arbitrary arrest and torture of a youth in 2012. The justices found that the victim, who had not participated in a protest march but was arrested and assaulted nonetheless, had suffered permanent hearing loss and multiple injuries due to the brutal treatment received in custody. Each officer must pay LKR 200,000 (USD 680) from personal funds within three months.

The Court further instructed the Attorney General to consider initiating criminal proceedings against the accused under the Convention Against Torture Act No. 22 of 1994. The judgment invoked violations of multiple constitutional protections, including the right to be free from torture, equal treatment under the law, and protection from arbitrary arrest. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka: Over 15 senior police officers transferred

(lm) The National Police Commission of Sri Lanka has approved the immediate transfer of 16 Officers-in-Charge (OICs) across various police divisions, including 12 Chief Inspectors of Police and four Inspectors. According to a statement issued by Police Headquarters on May 23, the changes are part of a routine administrative reshuffle. [Daily Mirror]

Sri Lanka: Navy ordered to stop unauthorized entry of Indian fishermen, combat drug trafficking

(lm) The Sri Lankan government has directed its navy to intensify patrols and take firm measures against the unauthorized entry of Indian fishermen into Sri Lankan waters, as well as crack down on drug trafficking activities concealed as fishing operations. The directive was issued during a recent high-level meeting between the Ministry of Fisheries and the Ministry of Defense, attended by senior officials and the Commander of the Sri Lanka Navy.

Officials emphasized that illegal fishing and narcotics smuggling are increasingly interconnected, with some

Indian fishermen allegedly using fishing as a cover for trafficking. [Daily Mirror]

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

Brunei: Economy grows 4.2 percent in 2024, outlook stable amid low inflation

(ga) Brunei's economy grew by 4.2 percent in 2024, the highest rate since 1999, driven by a rebound in both upstream and downstream oil and gas sectors, alongside steady expansion in wholesale and retail trade, air transport, and communications. Growth is projected to moderate to 2.6 percent for 2025-2026. This assessment follows the ASEAN+3 Macroeconomic Research Office (AMRO)'s Annual Consultation Visit to Brunei from April 17–23.

Headline inflation turned negative in 2024 due to declining prices in transport, communication, clothing, and footwear, and is expected to average below 1 percent through 2026, supported by lower food and energy prices. Brunei's current account remains in surplus, though projected to decline to 12.4 percent of GDP in 2025 from 14.5 percent in 2024, reflecting lower global energy prices and higher import demand in services.

The fiscal deficit is estimated to widen to 12.5 percent of GDP in FY 2024 due to weaker oil and gas revenues, with pressure expected to persist given moderate global energy prices. Risks to the outlook include potential oil production disruptions, declining energy prices, and external demand uncertainties. Long-term challenges include advancing economic diversification

and navigating global decarbonization trends. [ASEAN +3 Macroeconomic Research Office]

Brunei: Finance Ministry unveils National Development Plan for 2024-2029

(ga) Brunei has launched its 12th National Development Plan, allocating BND 4 billion (USD 3.1 billion) to fund 305 development projects over a five-year period from 2024 to 2029. According to the Ministry of Finance and Economy, the plan targets key sectors including education, healthcare, industrial development, housing, infrastructure, digitalization, and green technology.

The initiative aligns with Brunei's long-term vision and is driven by six core priorities: enhancing the education system, developing future-ready talent, fostering environmental sustainability, strengthening national resilience and citizen well-being, expanding non-oil and gas sectors, and improving public sector efficiency. [Borneo Bulletin 1] [Borneo Bulletin 2] [Xinhua]

Cambodia: Parliament enacts law to boost electricity investments

(dql) In a latest effort to strengthen Cambodia's energy infrastructure, the National Assembly approved a draft law on May 22 authorizing payment guarantees for 24 electricity investment projects. The move addresses rising energy demands projected through 2028, as outlined in the 2020–2040 Electricity Sector Master Plan and its 2024 update.

The initiative aims to prevent energy shortages anticipated from 2025 to 2028, particularly due to Cambodia's earlier commitment to phase out coal-fired power generation. The approved projects reflect a strategic pivot toward renewable and sustainable energy sources, including solar, wind, biomass, hydropower, natural gas, and energy storage.

Key investments include a series of solar power projects across multiple provinces, wind farms in Mondulkiri – the country's largest and most sparsely populated province –, a hybrid biomass and solar plant in Kampong Speu province, and a natural gas power plant in Koh Kong province. Additional developments involve new hydropower facilities and large-scale energy storage systems in several regions. [Khmer Times] [Construction & Property]

Cambodia: Environmental journalist released among civil society demands

(gm) Environmental journalist Uk Mao was released on bail on May 25 following a ten-day detention in Stung Treng province. Mao had been arrested on May 16, facing charges of incitement and public defamation after his investigations into illegal logging and land grabs in protected forests (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3). His release was met with widespread support from civil society groups, who condemned his treatment as part of a broader effort to suppress environmental reporting in Cambodia. Mao is required to comply with conditions, including regular check-ins with local police. [CPJ] [Juristnews]

Mao has faced over 15 legal complaints, many filed by provincial authorities and the Ministry of Environment, relating to his reports on deforestation linked to military-connected companies. He denied the accusations against him, asserting that he has never engaged in illegal logging or land encroachment, and has pledged to increase his efforts to protect Cambodia's forests. Mao has requested that the court drop all charges against him, reaffirming his willingness to face legal consequences if any wrongdoing can be proven. [Phnom Penh Post] [Cambodianess]

Civil society organizations, including CamboJA, CPJ, and ADHOC, have raised concerns about Mao's case, highlighting it as an example of escalating judicial harassment against journalists and environmental defenders, and part of an ongoing pattern to silence those reporting on environmental issues. Mao's detention follows a history of harassment, including a 2023 arson attack on his home and an assault in 2025, which he contends were linked to his environmental reporting. [Phnom Penh Post]

The Ministry of Information has rejected claims of journalistic repression, stating that Mao's arrest stems from personal legal disputes rather than his journalistic activities. The Ministry also criticized NGOs and press groups for politicizing the case, asserting that Mao's actions violated journalistic ethics due to his failure to obtain formal accreditation. [CamboJA news]

Cambodia: Informal economy development expanded

(gm) Cambodia's Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation (MISTI) has launched a street food hygiene pilot project in Kampong Thom province, aiming to raise awareness and onboard informal economy workers as part of a national initiative to formalize this sector. The project, unveiled on May 24 by Minister Hem Vanndy, is designed to promote public health, improve hygiene practices among street food vendors, and enhance tourism in the province. [MISTI 1]

The initiative aligns with Cambodia's National Strategy for Developing the Informal Economy, which seeks to formalize the informal sector, improve livelihoods, and integrate informal businesses into the formal economy to foster sustainable economic growth and higher productivity. [MISTI 2]

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Kampong Thom Province to provide hygiene training and certification to street food vendors. The project involves collaboration between MPTC, local authorities, and food hygiene experts, and provides a pathway for vendors to access benefits such as tax exemptions, social security, and formal financial support.

In addition, the National Strategy for Developing the Informal Economy aims to further integrate vendors into Cambodia's broader economic development framework by offering them a pathway to access government support and formalize their businesses. [Khmer Times]

Cambodia: Climate strategy launched

(gm) On May 22, Cambodia's Ministry of Environment (MoE) launched the second phase of its e-Administration system and the CHAKRA STEM App, alongside the Cambodia Climate Change Strategic Plan 2024–2033 (CCCSP), as part of the country's broader digital transformation efforts to support sustainable development.

These initiatives align with Phase 1 of the Pentagonal Strategy, the government's national development strategy, which outlines five core development priorities: human capital, infrastructure, water, energy, and digital technology.

The CCCSP also supports Cambodia's broader climate agenda, complementing national strategies like the Circular Strategy for Environment and the Long-Term Strategy for Carbon Neutrality, and will feed into

Cambodia's updated climate commitments (NDC 3.0) to be submitted to the UN by July 2025. [UNDP]

The CCCSP sets a national pathway to carbon neutrality by 2050, outlining 19 strategic interventions across mitigation, adaptation, and governance. It emphasizes cross-sector cooperation, digital innovation, and the protection of vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, while aiming to attract green finance and strengthen institutional capacity. The digital tools are expected to improve operational efficiency and environmental governance, as the e-Administration system aims to streamline internal processes and reduce bureaucratic delays.

At the launch event, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed by the MoE and the STEM Education Organisation for Cambodia to implement the CHAKRA STEM App, which supports emissions tracking, tree-planting monitoring, and waste reduction. The app is intended to foster youth engagement and support Cambodia's carbon neutrality goals through data-driven tools and public awareness initiatives. [Khmer Times 1] [Khmer Times 2] [Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia: Government dismisses allegations of state collusion in cybercrime operations

(gm) The Cambodian government has strongly denied the findings of a new report that accuses the country's ruling party of enabling a vast cyber-scam industry. The report, authored by Jacob Sims, a U.S.-based researcher affiliated with Harvard University, alleges that high-ranking Cambodian officials, including relatives of Prime Minister Hun Manet, are complicit in enabling and protecting a multibillion-dollar online fraud industry fueled by trafficking and protected by state actors. [Phnom Penh Post]

The report claims scam operations in Cambodia generate between USD 12.5 billion and USD 19 billion annually, up to 60 percent of the country's GDP, and calls for sanctions against 28 individuals, including officials linked to the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP).

The government dismissed the findings as politically motivated, unscientific, and intended to damage Cambodia's international image ahead of elections. The Ministry of Interior criticized the report's methodology and timing, and accused its author of

scapegoating a small, technologically developing country. [Khmer Times]

While officials acknowledged the presence of scam operations, they highlighted government action since 2024, including 18 raids, over 3,700 deportations, and dozens of prosecutions, and cited the creation of an inter-ministerial task force as proof of the government's commitment to action against online fraud and trafficking.

The report argues that these measures are insufficient, and echoes concerns from human rights organizations about a lack of victim screening during raids and the mischaracterization of trafficking as labor disputes. [CamboJA News] [OCCRP]

Cambodia: Government critic extradited from Russia on blackmail charges

(dql) Heng Sithy, who has accused senior Cambodian officials of corruption and involvement in online scam operations, was extradited from Russia to Cambodia on May 24 to face charges of aggravated blackmail.

Sithy was arrested in Russia on January 13 and is now under court jurisdiction in Phnom Penh, with potential penalties ranging from five to ten years in prison.

Sithy, a former Okhna and former founder and head of the Maritime Group, an investment and development conglomerate, has publicly alleged that Interior Minister Sar Sokha, National Police Commissioner-General Sar Thet, and prominent Okhna Hun To protect online criminal networks and filed a complaint with the Anti-Corruption Unit against the three government officials. [The Phnom Penh Post] [Khmer Times]

"Okhna" is an honorary title granted by the monarchy to individuals who have made significant financial contributions to the country, often through donations to government-backed projects or development initiatives. It is typically conferred on wealthy businesspeople and is seen as both a symbol of prestige and influence.

Indonesia: Constitutional Court orders government to fund both public and private elementary education

(dql) In a landmark decision, the Constitutional Court ruled on May 27 that the government is constitutionally obligated to fund elementary education at both public and private schools, reaffirming the principle of free education for all citizens. Chief Justice Suhartoyo stated that the government must cover the cost of elementary education for every child, regardless of the type of school attended.

The ruling grants a petition challenging Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, which restricted free education to public schools. The Court found this provision unconstitutional.

In the 2023/2024 academic year, public schools admitted 970,145 students, while private schools took in an additional 173,265. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: Attorney General's Office probes alleged corruption Chromebook project

(dql) The (AGO) has launched an investigation into alleged corruption in the Education Ministry's USD 615 million Chromebook procurement project, carried out between 2019 and 2023 to support school digitalization nationwide.

Thousands of Chromebooks were purchased for public schools, but many were ineffective—particularly in remote areas with poor internet connectivity. Despite prior testing revealing poor device performance, the procurement proceeded, raising suspicions of conspiracy and forced implementation.

The AGO noted that spending such a large sum on devices unsuitable for local conditions suggests possible manipulation and significant waste of state funds. The AGO is now summoning government officials and company representatives involved in the project for questioning but has not yet disclosed names.

The procurement occurred during the tenure of former Education Minister Nadiem Makarim under President Joko Widodo. [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia: Officials implicated in Corruption Eradication Commission raid dismissed

(th) Manpower Minister Yassierli confirmed on May 20 that officials who were implicated in a bribery case related to the foreign workers utilization plan have been dismissed in February and March, without specifying the exact number. [The Jakarta Post]

Foreign citizens working in Indonesia are required by law to obtain work permits from the Manpower Ministry. However, the process for obtaining these permits is rife with allegations of illegal payments and bribery involving ministry officials. The probe was first launched by KPK in July 2024, following an undisclosed public complaint. [Jakarta Globe]

They were among the eight officials who have been identified as suspects by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). Their dismissal has not caused any disruption to foreign worker services. [The Jakarta Post]

The officials were dismissed following a raid conducted at the Manpower Ministry on May 20 by the KPK in an anti-bribery investigation. [Tempo] [The Jakarta Post]

Although no exact timeline about the corrupt practices has been revealed by the KPK, it indicated that the case has been ongoing since 2019. [Jakarta Globe] [The Jakarta Post]

Indonesia: Government imposes strict sanctions on illegal imports

(th) The Indonesian government will be tackling illegal imports through the imposition of strict sanctions to protect domestic industries and consumers, in a statement released by Trade Minister Budi Santoso on May 22. These sanctions might include closure of companies, and the removal of licenses. Companies may also be banned from participating in similar activities. If the illegal goods have already been brought into the market, the goods will have to be recalled.

The sanctions are a part of the government's commitment to tackle illegal imports. Along with the abovementioned sanctions, Santoso added that the government is collaborating with other agencies to strictly monitor the problem.

The Trade Ministry is also guarding all ports and airports that have been known to serve as entry points for imports, and to prevent regulatory violations. [Antara]

Meanwhile, on May 22, the Trade Ministry seized millions of illegally imported tools and hardware products, coming from China, during an inspection at a warehouse in Banten. The products were estimated to have a value of IDR 18 billion (USD 1.1 million).

The confiscated goods were brought into Indonesia without the necessary documentation and were deemed to not be compliant with Indonesia's national safety and labeling standards. The products also did not have Indonesian compliance measures.

At a press briefing held at the warehouse, Budi stated that the case came to attention after authorities found promotional content, which featured the unapproved distribution of the goods, being circulated on TikTok.

The authorities have given warnings to the import company, as well as a chance to correct all violations by providing the required documents and paying the appropriate import duties. Failure to comply would result in the confiscation of the goods. [Jakarta Globe] [Ministry of Trade Indonesia]

Laos: Economic recovery faces challenges

(dql) According to the World Bank, Laos' economy is showing signs of recovery, but remains under strain from high debt repayments, persistent inflation, and structural challenges. [World Bank]

In 2024, the economy grew by 4.1 percent driven by increased exports in services, electricity, mining, agriculture, and manufacturing, alongside a 21 percent rise in foreign tourist arrivals due to improved regional connectivity. However, growth is projected to slow to 3.5 percent in 2025, as the country faces a peak in public debt repayments. This fiscal pressure is expected to constrain essential spending on health, education, and infrastructure.

Despite some success in slowing inflation through monetary tightening, exchange rate stabilization, and better liquidity management, inflation remains high and is projected to stay in double digits through 2025. This continues to erode household purchasing power and increase business costs, threatening long-term stability.

Improved revenue collection, supported by restored fuel excise rates and stronger tax administration, has contributed to recent fiscal gains. However, high public debt remains a major concern. Increased domestic borrowing to service this debt may crowd out credit for

the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the Lao economy. [The Laotian Times]

Malaysia: Prime minister's daughter elected vice president of People Justice Party

(tl/ga) People Justice Party (PKR) concluded its internal elections for the 2025–2028 term, with Nurul Izzah Anwar, the daughter of Prime Minister and party president Anwar Ibrahim, securing a win for the deputy president role, defeating incumbent Rafizi Ramli by a large margin. Anwar retained his position uncontested. [Free Malaysia Today 1]

Selangor Menteri Besar Amirudin Shari, Negeri Sembilan MB Aminuddin Harun, and Minister Chang Lih Kang retained their vice-president positions, joined by newcomer and Deputy Minister R. Ramanan. Amirudin received the highest votes among them.

The polls saw 251 candidates contest across leadership, youth, and women's wings. [Malay Mail]

PKR targets 40 percent youths and women candidates for 16th general election

Speaking after the party congress, Nurul Izzah announced the party's ambition to ensure at least 40 percent of its candidates in the 16th General Election (GE16) in 2028 are women and youth, encouraging to evolve and embrace diversity to face future challenges.

Moreover, she has called for the party to contest at least 13 seats in the upcoming Sabah state election, urging Anwar to negotiate with the ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition and allied parties to secure this target. The PKR is one of the founding and leading parties in Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition.

Sabah's state assembly has 73 seats, and PKR previously won only two seats in the 2020 election. With the assembly term ending on November 11, elections must be held within 60 days of dissolution. Anwar also announced that the party's political bureau will likely convene a special meeting on May 29 to coordinate preparations for the state polls. [Free Malaysia Today 2]

Nurul Izzah highlighted the importance of unity within the party post-elections, commending Minister of Home Affairs and Chief Secretary of the Pakatan Harapan (PH) Saifuddin Nasution Ismail for his

openness during his address to delegates. During PKR's National Congress, Saifuddin expressed deep concern over Rafizi Ramli's loss to Nurul Izzah in the race for PKR deputy president. He stressed that despite internal disagreements, Rafizi remains a valuable political strategist whose potential departure could significantly weaken the PKR. Saifuddin also touched on Rafizi's criticism during the campaign, particularly Rafizi's disapproval of PKR president Anwar Ibrahim's openness to newer members rising quickly thro ugh the party, which he saw as a betrayal to loyal veterans. [Malay Mail 1]

On the other hand, Anwar rejected claims of nepotism following the election of his daughter. Anwar argued that Nurul Izzah's victory was determined by grassroots support, unlike his wife Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, whom he appointed in 1998 during his imprisonment. He urged party members to reflect on the party's history and emphasized that the leadership transition was democratic. [Malay Mail 2]

Anwar rules out cabinet reshuffle in context of PKR election

Prior to the election, Anwar confirmed that the election will not lead to any Cabinet reshuffle. Speaking after a media briefing, Anwar emphasized that the party election is an internal contest among close associates and does not affect the Cabinet lineup.

While he stated there are no plans to change the Cabinet, he acknowledged that he cannot prevent any minister from resigning following the election results. This came after Economy Minister and incumbent PKR Deputy President Rafizi Ramli expressed readiness to step down from his ministerial role if he loses his party post in the upcoming polls, where he faces Nurul Izzah Anwar.

Despite speculation about Rafizi's status following recent PKR divisional elections, Anwar confirmed that Rafizi remains in the Cabinet but had taken leave to address matters related to the party polls.

Anwar further urged party members to elect leaders who can strengthen and unite the party machinery, describing the internal contest as a healthy competition rather than a sign of political instability. [New Straits Times] [Free Malaysia Today] [Bernama]

Malaysia: Anti-corruption body freezes over nearly USD 50 million in corruption probe

(tl) The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission (MACC) has frozen 100 bank accounts connected to a corporate figure, his family, and related companies, with total assets over MYR 217 million (USD 47.7 million). The investigation centers on suspected corruption tied to offshore investments managed via two Malaysian proxies, involving a Brazilian company.

The MACC confirmed that five individuals, including the corporate figure, have provided statements, with about 13 more witnesses expected to be interviewed. The investigation covers potential money laundering, breach of trust, fund misappropriation, and forgery spanning 2012 to 2021, particularly concerning salaries, bonuses, shares, branding fees, and private placements.

Authorities are scrutinizing alleged money laundering and misuse of corporate funds through complex offshore structures. Investigations span multiple jurisdictions, including Brazil, Singapore, and the Netherlands, with two separate cases opened, one under MACC Act for corruption offences and another under Anti-Money Laundering, Anti-Terrorism Financing and Proceeds of Unlawful Activities Act 2001 (AMLATFPUAA). [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Peaceful rally held in Kuala Lumpur to defend Malay rights

(tl) On May 24, a peaceful rally titled “Himpunan Melayu Berdaulat” (Sovereign Malay Rally) was held outside Sogo Kuala Lumpur, drawing hundreds of participants advocating for Malay rights, the return of Malay reserve lands, and the protection of national sovereignty. The event, organized by a coalition of NGOs, was led by Syed Hassan Syed Ali, president of Perkasa.

Chants supporting Malay identity and Islam echoed through the two-hour rally, which concluded peacefully by late afternoon. Protesters also demanded the revocation of long-term visas granted to foreign nationals. [Malay Mail]

Perkasa (Pertubuhan Pribumi Perkasa Malaysia) is a Malay nationalist non-governmental organization (NGO). Founded in 2008, the group is known for advocating Malay and Islamic interests in Malaysian public affairs.

Malaysia: Petronas and Petros strengthen collaboration under joint declaration

(tl) Malaysia's Prime Minister and Sarawak Premier signed a Joint Declaration affirming ongoing role of Petronas, the Malaysian government-owned oil and gas company under the Petroleum Development Act 1974 while recognizing Sarawak's authority through Petroleum Sarawak Bhd (Petros) as the state's gas aggregator starting March 2025.

The agreement ensures respect for both federal and state laws governing gas distribution and maintains existing liquified natural gas (LNG) sale agreements, ongoing upstream cooperation and exports. It also commits both parties to pursue expanded cooperation, including development of gas supply pipeline projects capable of delivering up to 1.2 billion standard cubic feet per day (Bscf/d) to support the Sarawak Gas Roadmap.

Furthermore, the collaboration will explore ventures in green energy, hydrogen, and power generation projects to help position Sarawak as an ASEAN energy hub. [Malay Mail 1]

Previously, the dispute between national oil company Petronas and state-owned Petroleum Sarawak Bhd (Petros) stemmed from competing claims over regulatory authority and revenue rights in the oil and gas sector. Petronas, under the federal Petroleum Development Act 1974 (PDA) has traditionally controlled Malaysia petroleum resources and makes itself the legitimate aggregator of natural gas supply. Meanwhile , Sarawak has sought greater autonomy through its own law under the Section 7A of the Oil Mining Ordinance and the Distribution of Gas Ordinance 2016. Tension escalated when Sarawak appointed its state-owned entity, Petros as the sole gas aggregator.

Petronas operations in Sarawak must seek exemption but not license

Meanwhile, Sarawak Premier Abang Johari Tun Openg clarified that while Petronas and its subsidiaries are not obligated to obtain state operating licenses, they must formally apply for exemptions to continue operations in Sarawak.

Speaking at the State Legislative Assembly, he explained that exemptions are granted through the Ministry of Utility and Telecommunication (MUT), which holds the authority to issue and waive such licensees. Although Petros has been confirmed as the state's official gas aggregator under the above joint

declaration with the federal government, Petronas as a national company, is still required to follow due process by seeking exemption from the relevant Sarawak ministry, with the MUT remaining the key licensing authority. [Malay Mail 2]

Malaysia: Government accelerates aerospace, maritime sectors to boost economic resilience

(ga) Malaysia is intensifying efforts to develop its aerospace and shipbuilding and ship repair (SBSR) industries as part of its New Industrial Master Plan (NIMP) 2030 to boost economic resilience and industrial transformation. The Malaysian Investment Development Authority (MIDA) announced that these sectors are central to positioning Malaysia as an innovation-driven economy and a strategic regional hub.

In 2024, nine aerospace projects valued at MYR 1.4 billion (USD 300 million), 71 percent from foreign investors, were approved, focusing on maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO), manufacturing, and engineering services. Additionally, five SBSR investment projects worth MYR 50.4 million (USD 10.8 million) were approved, supporting vessel construction and maritime service capabilities.

MIDA is facilitating investor efforts in technology adoption, supply chain strengthening, and industrial ecosystem development. Deputy Minister of Trade Liew Chin Tong highlighted the sectors' significance in shaping Malaysia's competitive and sustainable industrial future, while MIDA CEO Sikh Shamsul Ibrahim emphasized their role in economic diversification and global engagement. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Government commits to economic agenda for ethnic Malays and indigenous peoples

(ga) The government is committed to advancing the Bumiputera economic agenda to deliver lasting benefits for present and future generations. Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced a follow-up meeting with key stakeholders to further refine the agenda's direction and implementation.

This commitment follows a review of the "One-Year Post-KEB 2024 Retreat" presentation by Economic

Ministry Secretary-General Nor Azmie Diron.

The 2024 Bumiputera Economic Congress (KEB), held from February 29 to March 2 last year, produced over 80 resolutions focused on Bumiputera socio-economic empowerment through engagement across 10 key sectors. The government emphasizes coordinated efforts among ministries, agencies, and the private sector to reduce economic disparities between communities.

Bumiputera, meaning "sons of the soil," refers to ethnic Malays and other indigenous peoples of Malaysia. The term encompasses a broad range of groups who are granted special rights and affirmative action under Malaysia's constitution, including in areas such as education, employment, and economic participation. These policies aim to uplift Bumiputera communities and address historical socio-economic imbalances. [Bernama]

Malaysia: Labor market remains strong in Q1 2025

(ga) The national labor market remained stable in Q1 2025, with the labor force expanding to 17.23 million, supported by a steady unemployment rate of 3.1 percent, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM). This marks an increase of 458,700 people from Q1 2024, reflecting a 3.0 percent year-on-year rise in employed people to 16.70 million. The labor force participation rate also improved to 70.7 percent from 70.5 percent in the same period last year. The number of unemployed individuals decreased to 526,300.

Underemployment showed notable improvements. The number of individuals working fewer than 30 hours weekly dropped 11.1 percent year-on-year to 242,700. Time-related underemployment declined by 9.2 percent, totaling 146,900 individuals, representing 1.5 percent of the labor force.

To address digital economy demands, the government allocated MYR 20 million (USD 4.2 million) to train 5,000 Malaysians in technology-focused sectors and to enhance Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) with globally recognized certifications. [Department of Statistics Malaysia] [Bernama]

In a separate report, DOSM highlighted a continued rise in women-owned businesses. As of 2022, there were 219,015 active women-owned establishments, accounting for 20.1 percent of all registered

businesses, with an annual growth rate of 2.3 percent since 2015. Most were in the services sector (93.6 percent), particularly in wholesale and retail trade (45 percent) and food and beverage services (31.1 percent).

Women-owned SMEs, totaling 185,582 in 2022, generated MYR 89.3 billion (USD 18.75 billion) in gross output and MYR 44.3 billion (USD 9.30 billion) in value added. These businesses collectively employed over 833,000 individuals and recorded steady growth in salaries, wages, and fixed asset values. [SME & Entrepreneurship Magazine]

Malaysia: Maritime enforcement agency explores AI and technology to boost maritime security

(ga) The Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) is advancing efforts to enhance national maritime security by adopting modern technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). The initiative is part of the agency's operational reform to address growing cross-border crime challenges.

The agency plans to use AI, real-time data analytics, and intelligent monitoring systems to improve surveillance and response capabilities. While emphasizing that technology will complement human efforts, the MMEA noted that AI can aid rapid decision-making, track foreign fishing vessels, and provide early warnings to enhance field operations. [Bernama]

The Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition 2025 (LIMA'25) concluded on May 24 with a total of approximately 450,000 visitors over five days. The event featured 860 exhibitors, evenly split between local and international participants, marking an increase from the previous edition in 2023.

LIMA'25 hosted 1,400 business-to-business (B2B) and 920 business-to-government (B2G) meetings. The exhibition also showcased an expanded range of static defence assets and introduced the A.T.M.O.S Sphere, a 360-degree immersive dome highlighting advancements in aerospace, technology, maritime, and operations for sustainability. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia: Border control agency probes airport officers over illegal immigration bypass

(ga) The Malaysian Border Control and Protection Agency (AKPS) is investigating four officers at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) for allegedly facilitating the illegal passage of foreign nationals through immigration checks between January and April 2025.

The officers are suspected of involvement in "counter setting," a method where selected individuals bypass proper inspection procedures.

AKPS also reported detaining 25 individuals from Vietnam, Cambodia, India, and Indonesia during the same period for overstaying, with their entry approvals believed to have been obtained unlawfully. [Berita Harian] [Bernama]

Malaysia: Inter-ministerial agreement on long-range air defense radar development signed

(ga) The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) and the Ministry of Defence (MINDEF) have signed an agreement to jointly develop a long-range air defense radar system for the Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF).

The signing took place on May 23, during the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA'25).

According to a joint statement, the collaboration aims to strengthen Malaysia's airspace surveillance and control capabilities, particularly in the southern region of Peninsular Malaysia. The radar system will be developed using advanced communication and security technologies as part of a broader strategic initiative under a whole-of-government approach, which emphasizes inter-agency cooperation to support national defense and sovereignty. [Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission] [Utusan Malaysia] [Bernama]

Myanmar: State Administration Council pushes forward with plans for an election

(nj) The second day of the State Administration Council (SAC) government coordination meeting was held in Nay Pyi Taw on May 20, led by SAC Chairman General Min Aung Hlaing. Senior officials from various levels of

government convened to discuss national issues and reaffirmed the SAC's plans for an upcoming election.

SAC Vice Chairman and Deputy Prime Minister, General Soe Win, stated that a multiparty, democratic nationwide election would take place at the end of the year. According to General Min Aung Hlaing, the Constitution grants the National Defense and Security Council (NDSC) the final authority to declare an election. The NDSC, an 11-member council dominated by military-appointed members, is a constitutional body that oversees national security and has the power to declare states of emergency and temporarily grant executive, legislative, and judicial functions to the military. It has served as the junta's basis for legitimacy since the 2021 coup. [Myawaddy] [SAC Office]

However, the electoral process faces significant concerns. These include the dissolution of opposition parties, ongoing security issues, the potential for mass boycotts, and reliance on an October 2024 census widely viewed as inaccurate. Non-governmental organizations, including Human Rights Watch, have expressed doubts about the credibility of the elections under current conditions (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3]. [Human Rights Watch]

To date, 54 political parties have been approved by the NDSC to take part in the elections—9 at the national level and 45 at the subnational level. On May 18, Sai Aik Po, chairman of the Shan and Nationalities Democratic Party, confirmed his party's participation, stressing that voter participation will be key to challenging the Tatmadaw's rule. [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: UNHCR highlights ongoing needs of earthquake-displaced Communities

(anl) On March 28, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) issued its seventh Flash update on the earthquake response. The latest update, released on May 22, highlights ongoing challenges faced by displaced individuals, many of whom still live in temporary shelters or are frequently relocating.

Temporary accommodation sites require improved facilities and services to ensure the safety and well-being of residents—particularly children, single-headed households, and those with specific needs. Financial and other constraints continue to hinder many from rebuilding their homes or restoring their livelihoods.

UNHCR is actively assessing these needs and collaborating with key partners to identify sustainable solutions. So far, over 101,000 individuals have received assistance, and more than 111,000 have been assessed through Protection Monitoring and Assessment Tools. Ongoing assessments aim to better target aid to the most vulnerable and those with specific needs. [Mizzima] [UNHCR]

Myanmar: Detained central bank deputy governor wins humanitarian award

(anl) The detained deputy governor of Myanmar's Central Bank, Bo Bo Nge, has been awarded the 2025 Laszlo Z. Bito Award for Humanitarian Service by Bard College, where he earned his BA. According to the award committee, the honor recognizes "individuals resisting injustice, violence, and authoritarian threats," and acknowledges Bo Bo Nge's ongoing struggle as a political prisoner fighting for democracy and freedom in Myanmar.

Bo Bo Nge served as deputy governor under the National League for Democracy (NLD) government but was arrested on February 11, 2021, following the military coup. In 2022, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison under Section 55 of the Anti-Corruption Law on charges widely seen as politically motivated. The junta's Anti-Corruption Commission alleged he was responsible for the loss of millions of kyats from the government budget through his supervision of banking transactions, permits, and stamp duties, and accused him of corruption in dealings with Open Society Myanmar, a non-profit founded by U.S. billionaire George Soros.

He earned a master's degree in economics from Johns Hopkins University, specializing in financial reform, and later obtained a doctorate from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London.

Dr. Bo Bo Nge was also a member of the NLD's economic committee and was appointed deputy governor in 2017, where he played a key role in financial and economic reforms. He had previously been imprisoned by an earlier military regime for his involvement in student activism during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta leader attacks former government over dam project

(hw) Military leader, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, argued during a cabinet meeting that if the Myitsone Dam project had been pursued, Myanmar's current energy demand would not only be met but the dam's capacity would exceed existing needs.

Min Aung Hlaing placed the blame for the country's energy shortfall on previous governments during the second day of a cabinet meeting last week. He stressed that, as some areas are off-limits to further development due to security concerns, it is necessary to identify new potential sites for energy projects, particularly hydropower.

The USD 7.2 billion Myitsone Dam project was initiated in the late 2000s under the rule of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) regime, but it was later suspended by then-President Thein Sein in 2011 due to local opposition which cited the dam's social and environmental impacts.

However, in April 2023, the regime established a body to assess hydropower projects along the Irrawaddy River, widely seen as signaling the revival of the project. The body, led by the junta's deputy electricity minister and in cooperation with Chinese developer SPICYN (formerly CPI), is tasked with research, technical planning, and public relations, but has yet to publish any findings.

Min Aung Hlaing's remarks highlight the country's dire energy situation. In August 2023, the regime admitted that it was unable to meet even 50 percent of electricity demand. Today, even in Yangon, many neighborhoods now receive only eight hours of electricity per day, split into two four-hour intervals. [BBC News, in Burmese] [The Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Foreign nationals detained and extradited

(nj/anl) On May 20, the Myanmar government extradited 31 foreign nationals and detained 13 others on charges of telecommunications fraud and other criminal activities in Myawaddy. They were deported first to Thailand and then processed for extradition to their respective countries.

These recent convictions are part of a larger crackdown on online fraud operations. In April, 255 foreign nationals were repatriated. Between January 30 and May 20, the government identified a total of 9,099 foreign nationals who had entered Myanmar illegally

and formally deported 8,469 through Thailand. [Eleven Media] [Myanmar Digital News]

These publicized extraditions come as Thailand has increased pressure on the Myanmar government to tackle online fraud operations in Myawaddy, even cutting off the town's supply of Thai electricity, internet, and gas until it effectively resolves the issue (see AiR No. 20, May/2022, 3).

Junta arrests youths in coordinated raids across Yangon Region

In a separate development, the Rangoon Scout Network (RSN) and local sources reported that nearly 20 young people were arrested by junta forces during coordinated raids in three Yangon Region townships between May 16 and 19.

The crackdown is believed to have been triggered by a May 15 raid in which two underground resistance members were detained. During the operation, a young woman reportedly opened fire on soldiers before she and her partner were captured. Others fled but were later tracked down during forest searches.

The junta reportedly found identification cards in seized huts and is using them to trace local officials. Social media sources claim the three townships have been designated as “black zones.” An estimated 2,000 troops are involved in the operation, with door-to-door searches and multiple checkpoints tightening control across the area. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Latest junta airstrikes

(anl) Local resistance forces reported that a junta airstrike on Kan Sint Village, Myingyan Township, on May 19 killed four civilians. According to the Red Dragon Guerrilla Force, an anti-junta resistance group operating primarily in Myanmar's Mandalay Region, the strike hit a residential area and a nearby shop, killing two elderly residents and two middle-aged adults. Several homes were destroyed, though the number of injured remains unconfirmed and victims' identities have not yet been verified.

Resistance groups accuse the junta of deliberately targeting civilian areas, even in the absence of armed resistance, as a strategy to instill fear and weaken public support for the anti-junta movement. [Mizzima 1]

Meanwhile, the Pyin Oo Lwin District People's Defence Force (PDF) reported that the military junta launched consecutive airstrikes on Leikkya Village, Thabeikkyin Township, Mandalay Region, on May 18 and 19, killing one civilian and injuring at least five others.

Leikkya Village remains under resistance control, prompting the junta to escalate its air campaign. The PDF accused the military of deliberately targeting civilians. Resistance groups have urged locals to stay alert and build bomb shelters in anticipation of further attacks. [Mizzima 2]

Local resistance sources reported that on May 25 a junta airstrike killed at least 10 civilians including the bride due to bombing a wedding rebel control Kyunkyi village in Bago Region's Kyaukyi Township. Additionally, over 20 others were injured and seven of them are in critical condition. A resistance fighter stated there was no fighting at the time of attack and no clashes here for a long time and the bomb landed beside the building where food was being served. The fatalities or the type of bomb used in the attack could not be confirmed yet. But according to photos seen by The Irrawaddy, at least two children were killed, and the house hosting the wedding was destroyed.

Kyaukkyi Township is in territory where the Karen National Union Brigade 3 is active. Another local resistance fighter reported that We have gained control both east and west of the Sittaung River near that village, and since then there have been no clashes for nearly two years.

The attack happened as the KNU, and allied forces were launching offensives on junta positions in Karen State near the Thai border further east. [Irrawaddy]

Myanmar: Junta and militias kill farmer, burn over 40 homes in Southern Shan State

(anl) The Shan Human Rights Foundation (SHRF) reported that an elderly farmer was killed and over 40 homes were burned during attacks by junta forces and the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) militia in Southern Shan State.

The violence occurred in the second week of May in Chang Joi Village, Nyaungshwe Township, where over 200 junta and PNO troops were deployed amid intensified clashes with People's Defence Force (PDF) units near the Phekhon Township border. On May 9, troops torched more than 20 homes and arrested 54-

year-old hill farmer Loong Jing, who was later killed. Additional arson attacks on May 10 and 13 brought the total number of destroyed homes to over 40 in the once 80-household village. Most residents had fled following a prior military raid in January 2024.

Meanwhile, junta airstrikes on 12 and 13 May damaged a temple in Lin Pok Daek and homes in Jang Leik and Na Gone villages. [Mizzima]

Myanmar: Ethnic armed organization imposes travel ban on young adults in Rakhine

(anl) The United League of Arakan (ULA), the political wing of the Arakan Army (AA), has issued orders banning men aged 18–45 and women aged 18–25 from leaving Rakhine State without a valid reason. Exceptions are granted only to those with dependents suffering severe health conditions that cannot be treated locally.

The ULA has also prohibited the transportation of people out of Rakhine State for profit and barred traders from carrying unauthorized passengers.

According to the ULA, these travel restrictions are intended to protect civilians from being seized by the junta, conscripted into the military, stepping on regime landmines, or falling victim to trafficking and extortion gangs.

This comes after the ULA enacted its National Defense Emergency Provision in March, allowing the AA to conscript adults up to the age of 45 for military service. The group stated that conscription prioritizes the safety, security, and stability of the Arakan people and that the travel bans will be lifted once peace is restored in the state. [The Irrawaddy]

Since March, there have been reports of forced recruitment in areas under AA control. Local residents and human rights activists warn that unclear policies risk abuse and violate individual rights.

Critics urged the AA to clarify how the order will be enforced, its duration, and consequences for noncompliance. Similar reports of forced recruitment have also been linked to the TNLA, MNDAA, and RCSS/SSA since the 2021 coup. [DVB]

Myanmar: Ethnic armed organization confirms not harboring anti-junta groups after meeting with junta leader

(nj) On May 25, military junta leader General Min Aung Hlaing met with officials from the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA) during a visit to Kengtung, a city in eastern Shan State near the Laos border that hosts the military's Triangle Region Command.

The NDAA, also known as the Mong La Army, is an ethnic armed organization (EAO) that controls a territory known as Special Region 4, which includes the Mong La, Nanban, and Sele districts along the Myanmar–China border. The NDAA is among the few EAOs not currently engaged in armed conflict with the junta, based on a ceasefire agreement concluded with the government in 1989.

Experts suggest that during the meeting, General Min Aung Hlaing likely urged the NDAA to help prevent the cross-border flow of arms and ammunition from Laos to anti-junta EAOs operating in Shan State, such as the United Wa State Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA). However, junta-controlled media reported that the discussions focused on preparations for the upcoming December elections and plans to support infrastructure and healthcare development in the region. [Independent Mon News Agency] [The Irrawaddy]

In a latest development, on May 27, NDAA leader U Sai Pae visited the military regime in Nay Pyi Taw and announced that the NDAA would not allow any armed resistance groups or anti-junta EAOs to operate within its controlled territories.

According to media reports, the NDAA, MNDAA, and United Wa State Army are largely influenced by the Chinese government. This move is seen as further evidence of China's influence over ethnic armed organizations in northern Shan State. [Chindwin News Agency]

Philippines: Major Cabinet reshuffle spares economic team

(dnb/lm) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has begun a major Cabinet reshuffle following the loss of several administration-backed Senate candidates in the May 12 midterm elections and the breakdown of his alliance with Vice President Sara Duterte, aiming to reinvigorate his administration. While demanding the

courtesy resignations of all Cabinet secretaries, Marcos, who framed the shake-up as a “cleansing,” has retained Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin and his five-member economic team, signaling continued confidence in their stewardship of the economy.

As part of the Cabinet reshuffle, Marcos accepted the resignations of Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga, and Housing Secretary Jerry Acuzar. Manalo will become the Philippines’ permanent representative to the United Nations, a position he previously held, in support of the country’s bid for a non-permanent UN Security Council seat. He will be succeeded by Undersecretary Ma. Theresa Lazaro. [Rappler 1]

Loyzaga, who will be temporarily replaced by Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla, faced criticism for frequent overseas absences and perceived underperformance, especially during the Oriental Mindoro oil spill response. While not accused of wrongdoing, she may take on another government role in the future. Lotilla’s new leadership of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) places him at the helm ahead of the upcoming COP30 climate summit. Sharon Garin, an energy undersecretary, will temporarily head the Department of Energy. [Rappler 2]

Acuzar will be succeeded by former housing undersecretary Jose Ramon Aliling and appointed presidential adviser on Pasig River development. Bersamin said Acuzar’s failure to meet his ambitious housing targets—originally one million units annually—stemmed from obstacles beyond his control, not from inefficiency or misconduct. Aliling previously oversaw the government’s national housing and Pasig River revitalization programs.

Additionally, BIR Commissioner Romeo Lumagui Jr. and Customs Commissioner Bienvenido Rubio submitted their resignations to give the President flexibility in performance assessments. Both had led record-breaking revenue efforts, but Rubio's Bureau of Customs missed its 2024 target despite an increase over 2023.

Meanwhile, Department of Migrant Workers Secretary Hans Leo Cacdac also resigned. The department pledged continued service to overseas Filipino workers during the transition. Cacdac had succeeded Susan Ople, who passed away in 2023. [Rappler 3] [The Manila Times]

Philippines: Estranged sister of President Marcos Jr. considers Senate presidency

(lm) Senator Imee Marcos, a reelectionist senator whose term runs until 2031 and estranged sister of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., has expressed openness to running for Senate President following proposals from fellow senators. While not formally declaring her candidacy, Marcos emphasized the need for institutional reforms, regardless of who assumes the role.

Marcos pointed to recurring budget deficits and growing public debt, calling for greater transparency in the national budget process. She criticized proposals that suggested expanding presidential involvement after the submission of the National Expenditure Program, deeming them unconstitutional. Additionally, she urged the government to reprioritize spending toward food security, education, health, and support for farmers and fishermen.

Highlighting the importance of electoral and political party reforms, Marcos reiterated that the Senate's independence is nonnegotiable.

The potential race for Senate leadership comes at a sensitive time, as the 20th Congress is set to convene on July 28. The Senate will soon act as the impeachment court for Vice President Sara Duterte's trial. With 12 newly elected senators joining 12 others whose terms extend to 2028, the Senate leadership contest is shaping up to be a significant power struggle ahead of the 2028 general elections. [The Manila Times 1]

Current Senate President, Francis Escudero, has invited the House prosecution panel to present their findings to the Senate on June 2. Afterward, the Senate will reconvene as an impeachment court. However, the procedure may be complicated by the approaching end of the current Senate's term on June 30. If the impeachment trial is not concluded by then, it may be dismissed, though the new Senate could technically "revive" the case. There is also a constitutional restriction that prohibits more than one impeachment case against the same official within a year, which could further delay or block the revival of the case. [The Manila Times 2]

Philippines: Vice President Duterte leads early 2028 presidential survey as impeachment case stalls

(lm) Sara Duterte, the daughter of former President Rodrigo Duterte and current vice president since 2022, and former Vice President Leni Robredo have emerged as early frontrunners for the 2028 Philippine presidential election. In recent survey, conducted May 20–21 with 1,800 respondents nationwide, Duterte leads with 29 percent of voter preference, drawing strong support from Davao – the political home of the Duterte familiy – and Northern Mindanao. Robredo, a liberal opposition figure and vice president from 2016 to 2022, follows with 21 percent, supported primarily in Metro Manila and the Bicol Region.

Senator Christopher "Bong" Go, a longtime aide to former President Duterte, ranks third with 15 percent. Senator Raffy Tulfo, a broadcast journalist-turned-politician known for his populist style, follows with 11 percent. House Speaker Martin Romualdez, a key congressional ally of the current administration and cousin of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., stands at 6 percent.

The poll also revealed second-choice dynamics: most of Duterte's supporters (60–70 percent) would back Go if she were not in the race, while Robredo is the preferred backup for Go's base (45 percent). Among Robredo's supporters, 52 percent would choose Go as a second option.

In the early vice-presidential field, Go again leads with 36 percent, followed by incoming Senator Bam Aquino —cousin of the late President Benigno Aquino III—with 26 percent. Tulfo is a distant third with 11 percent. No other contender reached double digits. [The Manila Times 1]

Philippines: ICC proceedings against ex-President Duterte advance

(dnb) The International Criminal Court (ICC) has rejected a motion by former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's legal team seeking the disqualification of two judges from his case. The defense argued that the judges' prior involvement in authorizing the investigation into Duterte's anti-drug campaign compromised their impartiality. In a response dated May 22, the Office of the Prosecutor dismissed the claim, stating that prior procedural decisions do not amount to bias.[Inquirer.net]

The case, which focuses on alleged crimes against humanity linked to Duterte's anti-drug campaign, is currently in the pre-trial phase. A confirmation of charges hearing is scheduled for September. Duterte,

who was arrested in March and is currently held in The Hague, is participating in the proceedings via video link.

Separately, Senator Ronald “Bato” dela Rosa—who served as national police chief during the campaign—claimed that ICC investigators are currently in the Philippines to obtain affidavits from retired police officials implicating him and Duterte. He announced plans to launch a Senate inquiry and criticized the presence of ICC personnel, citing the Philippine government’s formal withdrawal from the Rome Statute in 2019. [GMA News Online]

Despite the withdrawal, the ICC maintains jurisdiction over crimes allegedly committed while the Philippines was still a member state. Official government figures put the number of deaths during the drug war at over 6,000, though human rights groups estimate the toll to be between 12,000 and 30,000.

In a parallel development, the Philippine Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) is exploring diplomatic arrangements to allow Duterte to take his oath as mayor of Davao City, following his election despite his detention. For now, Vice Mayor-elect Sebastian Duterte, the former president’s son, will temporarily assume the responsibilities of mayor in line with local succession laws. [The Manila Times]

Philippines: President Marcos Jr. to make first Supreme Court appointment

(lm) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. is set to appoint his first justice to the Supreme Court of the Philippines ahead of the upcoming retirement of Associate Justice Mario Lopez on June 7, 2025. The Judicial and Bar Council (JBC), responsible for screening candidates for top judicial positions, held public interviews with 16 applicants between May 14 and 21. The eventual appointee will be the first justice nominated under Marcos Jr., who inherits a Supreme Court largely shaped by appointments from his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte.

The shortlist includes senior justices of the Court of Appeals (CA), such as Presiding Justice Fernanda Lampas Peralta, who is also the wife of former Chief Justice Diosdado Peralta. Other prominent CA justices include Ramon Bato Jr., known for dismissing the double murder case against former police chief Panfilo Lacson, and Ramon Cruz, who concurred in the decision voiding a shutdown order against Rappler, an independent online news outlet known for its

investigative journalism. Justice Ronaldo Roberto Martin is noted for rulings on corruption and labor rights, while Maria Elisa Sempio-Diy and Myra Garcia Fernandez have also been involved in major rulings on extradition, environmental regulation, and high-profile criminal cases.

From the Sandiganbayan, the Philippines' anti-graft court handling corruption cases involving public officials, Karl Miranda—known for his votes on former governor Sajid Ampatuan's corruption convictions and prominent graft acquittals—has applied. Also applying are Court of Tax Appeals Associate Justice Maria Rowena San Pedro, and University of the Philippines College of Law Dean Darlene Marie Berberabe, a former CEO of the Pag-IBIG Fund, a government-run savings and housing program for Filipino workers.

Other candidates include Maria Concepcion Noche, a legal academic and practitioner; tax lawyer Maria Rosario Bernardo; and international law expert Manuel Antonio Teehankee, currently serving as the Philippines' permanent representative to the World Trade Organization. Supreme Court Court Administrator Raul Villanueva, a former executive judge at the Las Piñas Regional Trial Court, is also among the contenders. [Rappler 1] [Rappler 2]

Philippines: Complaints by ex-president against former interior chief and police over raid dismissed

(lm) The Department of Justice has dismissed criminal complaints filed by former president Rodrigo Duterte against former Interior Secretary Benhur Abalos and several senior Philippine National Police (PNP) officials over a June 2024 police operation at properties linked to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ (KOJC) religious group in Davao City.

Duterte, the administrator of KOJC properties and a close ally of KOJC founder Apollo Quiboloy, alleged that the police violated property rights and acted out of malice. However, the prosecution found no evidence of malicious intent and clarified that Abalos and others named in the complaint were not physically present during the operation. The resolution concluded that the force used was within legal bounds after failed attempts at peaceful entry, and that judicial orders backed the police action.

Duterte, currently detained at The Hague over crimes against humanity charges, has filed multiple civil and criminal complaints relating to the operation. His close

associate, Quiboloy, who was arrested in September 2024 after a standoff, faces multiple charges in the Philippines and is on the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation's most wanted list for alleged trafficking offenses. [Rappler]

Philippines: Ex-mayor Alice Guo charged with 62 counts of money laundering

(lm) The Department of Justice has filed 62 counts of money laundering charges against former Bamban, Tarlac mayor Alice Guo in connection with alleged transactions linked to illegal Philippine offshore gaming operations. The charges, filed before the Capas Regional Trial Court, accuse Guo of handling, transferring, and conspiring to launder illicit funds.

This case adds to a growing list of legal actions against Guo. She is already facing complaints for tax evasion, falsification of public documents, and graft, and has submitted counter-affidavits denying the charges. Authorities claim she evaded over PHP 500,000 (USD 8,500) in taxes and falsified documents related to property transactions, allegedly misrepresenting her citizenship status.

Further graft complaints involve irregular permit issuances during her mayoral term. Separate cases include a qualified trafficking charge in Pasig City, another graft complaint in Valenzuela, and a quo warranto petition challenging her eligibility for public office. A petition to cancel her birth certificate is also pending in Tarlac.

Guo, who is currently detained in Pasig City Jail, maintains that she is a Filipino citizen and acted within the bounds of her official duties. Hearings are scheduled to begin in early June. [The Manila Times]

Philippines: Privacy inquiry launched after Iloilo voters challenge electoral ID disclosure:

(jm) Following the May 12 elections, voters in Miagao, Iloilo, have flagged issues over the public display of voter lists containing full names, addresses, and photographs. The Commission on Elections (Comelec) had posted the information outside polling precincts, raising concerns that the data could be disseminated across online platforms and misused for scams, online harassment, or identity theft.

The incident has since prompted an investigation by the National Privacy Commission (NPC) into potential violations of legislation (Republic Act No. 10173) and the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Comelec defenders claim the practice follows the legal requirement of national legislation (Section 23 of Republic Act No. 4730), which mandates the public display of the final precinct list of voters. The provision from 1966 is intended to uphold transparency and allow registered voters to correct inaccuracies around the election period. [Rappler]

Philippines: Justice ministry seeks passport cancellation and extradition of Duterte ally in trafficking case

(dnb) The Philippine Department of Justice (DOJ) is seeking the cancellation of former presidential spokesperson Harry Roque's passport following a non-bailable arrest warrant issued against him for qualified human trafficking. Roque is among 50 individuals charged in connection with alleged illegal operations at the shuttered Lucky South 99 Philippine Offshore Gaming Operator (POGO) in Porac, Pampanga.

Roque, currently in the Netherlands, has applied for asylum, claiming political persecution due to his ties to the Duterte family—an assertion denied by the current administration. Justice Secretary Jesus Crispin Remulla stated that deportation can proceed only if Roque's asylum bid is denied and his passport is canceled, rendering him an undocumented foreign national.

In parallel, the DOJ is preparing a request for an Interpol red notice to facilitate Roque's provisional arrest abroad, pending extradition. Authorities maintain that Roque was given full due process and argue that the Netherlands is unlikely to shield him from prosecution for crimes considered serious under international law.[GMA News Online] [Manila Bulletin]

Philippines: TikTok removes over 1.1 million fake accounts linked to election manipulation

(jm) TikTok has disclosed the removal or prevention of over 1.1 million fake accounts that sought to influence the outcome of the Philippine midterm elections, held earlier this month. The Chinese-owned platform identified that the accounts exploited TikTok's algorithm to spread misleading political narratives via short-form video content. In addition to removing the

accounts, TikTok blocked tens of millions of fake likes and follows associated with them.

The campaign targeted TikTok's expanding youth user base in the Philippines. In April alone, TikTok dismantled three covert influence networks with thousands of followers. The platform also removed 4,000 pieces of content that violated its misinformation and election integrity policies, including AI-generated material. According to the report, 97 percent of the violating content was taken down before users reported it. [South China Morning Post] [Phil Star]

Philippines: Budget chief urges stronger push for Freedom of Information law

(jto) The Philippines Budget Secretary has called for renewed urgency in passing the long-delayed Freedom of Information (FOI) law, urging the incoming 20th Congress to prioritize the measure that has been stalled in the legislature since the 1980s. Speaking during Open Government Week, she stressed the importance of codifying the constitutional right to information. While Executive Order No. 2 (2016) has facilitated access to executive branch data, no comprehensive national law guarantees public access across all government branches.

Pangandaman pointed to over 88 local governments that have enacted FOI ordinances as evidence of grassroots support for transparency. She also highlighted the Philippines' improved global rankings in fiscal transparency and press freedom, noting the recent New Government Procurement Act as a significant anti-corruption achievement.

Currently, two FOI draft bills—one from the Department of Budget and Management and another from the Presidential Communications Office—are under consultation. Several other FOI bills, including Senate Bill No. 2880 and House Bills 1638 and 5022, are pending in Congress. President Marcos has expressed support for the FOI as a tool to combat misinformation, although recent moves to restrict access to national security-related data have raised concerns. [The Star]

Philippines: Central bank reacts to Moody's credit rating downgrade on the US

(dnb) The Philippine Central Bank is considering a reduction in its holdings of U.S. Treasury assets following Moody's downgrade of the U.S. credit outlook. Governor Eli Remolona stated that while no decision has been finalized, the downgrade is significant and under review. The U.S. dollar continues to make up around 80 percent of the Philippines' foreign reserves, which amounted to USD 104.6 billion in April. Despite the recent statements, which differ from earlier remarks in April where he noted no plans to cut Treasury holdings, analysts have pointed out that the Central Bank has been gradually diversifying its portfolio for over a decade.

Meanwhile, the Philippines' economic outlook has been downgraded, with forecasts now projecting a gross domestic product (GDP) expansion of 5 percent for 2025, below the government's target range of 6 to 8 percent. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), after a staff visit on May 22, revised its forecast for this year to 5.5 percent, with potential growth reaching 5.8 percent by 2026. However, the IMF also warned of downside risks, including global disruptions and weakened domestic demand.

The Central Bank is widely expected to cut interest rates, supported by easing inflation and a relatively strong peso. Governor Remolona has already indicated the possibility of rate reductions to stimulate domestic consumption, which has been dampened by previous tightening cycles. Both the IMF and the Central Bank emphasized that inflation is largely under control, aided by effective monetary policy and government measures to reduce food prices.

Looking to the medium term, the IMF stressed the need for more efficient government spending to ensure fiscal consolidation and support sustained economic recovery. [Bloomberg 1] [Bloomberg 2] [IMF]

Philippines: Navy commissions new frigate and showcases USVs

(dnb) At Naval Operating Base Subic, President Marcos Jr. commissioned the Philippine Navy's first guided-missile frigate, a significant step in modernizing the country's naval forces. The 3,200-ton frigate is equipped with advanced features, including vertical launch systems and an active electronically scanned array radar, making it the most advanced warship in the Philippine Navy's fleet.

This new frigate comes at a time when tensions in the South China Sea are escalating due to territorial

disputes between the Philippines and China. The Philippine Navy, previously relying on outdated warships, now gains a crucial asset that could enhance its deterrence capabilities in the region. The push for modernization began after a 2012 incident near Scarborough Shoal, which highlighted the need for stronger defense capabilities.

As part of its ongoing military modernization, the Philippines is set to receive further naval assets, including 10 warships, four frigates, and six offshore patrol vessels. The country is also planning to acquire at least two more frigates in the final phase of its modernization efforts. [USNI News 1] [USNI News 2]

Philippines: President Marcos Jr. has selected next national police chief, confirmation pending

(dnb) President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has already chosen the next chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP), according to Interior Secretary Jonvic Remulla. While the name has not yet been made public, Remulla confirmed that Marcos has identified a successor ahead of current PNP Chief Gen. Rommel Marbil's mandatory retirement on June 7. Marbil's term had previously been extended by Marcos to support preparations for the 2025 national and local elections.

Among potential candidates are high-ranking officers including Deputy Chief for Administration Lieutenant General Jose Melencio Nartatez Jr.; Chief of the Directorial Staff Lieutenant General Edgar Allan Okubo; Director of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group Major General Nicolas Torre III; and Director of the National Capital Region Police Office Major General Anthony Aberin.

Remulla also reiterated his intention to propose legislative reforms to Republic Act 6975—the law governing the DILG and the PNP—to allow for longer tenures and continuity in leadership beyond the current retirement age of 56. He argued that structural changes are necessary to ensure consistent policing priorities regardless of leadership turnover. [Inquirer.net]

Philippines: Fourteen Manila police commanders under investigation for supervisory lapses

(jm) Fourteen police commanders—holding the ranks of major and captain—in Metro Manila are under investigation for failing to properly supervise their personnel during surprise inspections carried out by the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO). The inspections, part of intensified internal monitoring efforts, uncovered violations such as unmanned assistance desks, abandoned outposts, improper deployments, and on-duty officers using mobile phones. [PhilStar]

Philippines: Manhunt intensifies for fugitive ex-police officer convicted in Korean trader's killing

(jto) Philippine authorities have intensified efforts to apprehend former police lieutenant colonel Rafael Dumlao III, who was convicted for his role in the 2016 kidnapping and killing of a South Korean businessman. Executive Secretary Lucas Bersamin, who also chairs the Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Commission (PAOCC), ordered the nationwide manhunt following meetings with officials from the Korean embassy in Manila.

Dumlao, previously acquitted by a regional court in Pampanga in 2019 and released from custody, was convicted by the Court of Appeals in June 2024. The ruling sentenced him to life imprisonment without parole for kidnapping with homicide and imposed an additional 35 years for car theft. He was ordered to pay damages totaling PHP 575,000 (approximately USD 9,775) to the victim's family.

The case caused public outrage due to the circumstances of the crime, which took place inside the Philippine National Police headquarters in Camp Crame, Quezon City. The victim was killed in his car and later cremated, with his ashes allegedly disposed of in a toilet. [Inquirer.net] [The Manila Times]

Singapore: Prime Minister Wong unveils new Cabinet

(nl) Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has announced Singapore's new Cabinet, two weeks after the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) secured its 14th consecutive electoral victory on May 3, winning 87 out of 97 seats. Analysts see the reshuffle as striking a balance between stability and renewal, reflecting Wong's approach of "no sharp turns" while solidifying

the fourth-generation leadership team while laying the groundwork for future succession.

The new Cabinet includes three coordinating ministers, 15 full ministers, two acting ministers, and a total of 40 political officeholders, up from 37 in the previous term. Gan Kim Yong will serve as the sole Deputy Prime Minister and Acting Prime Minister in Wong's absence. The three coordinating ministers—K. Shanmugam (National Security), Chan Chun Sing (Public Services), and Ong Ye Kung (Social Policies)—will form the core advisory group to the Prime Minister and mentor younger ministers. This structure replaces the traditional two-DPM model.

Several new roles reflect shifts in policy priorities. Chan Chun Sing becomes Coordinating Minister for Public Services and Minister for Defence, taking over from his previous education role. His coordinating portfolio will now focus on last-mile delivery of public services and digital transformation, rebranded from the former infrastructure portfolio. Ong Ye Kung continues as Health Minister with added responsibility for ageing policies, while Shanmugam retains the Home Affairs portfolio but passes the Law Ministry to Edwin Tong.

A notable addition is the role of Minister-in-charge of Energy and Science & Technology, assigned to Dr Tan See Leng, reflecting the government's emphasis on clean energy and tech-driven economic growth.

The reshuffle also introduces seven newly elected MPs into political office—the largest intake since 2001. Two of them, Jeffrey Siow and David Neo, have been appointed as acting ministers, while others join as ministers of state or senior parliamentary secretaries. Political observers likened the move to the 2001 appointment of the "Super Seven," signalling an urgent need to accelerate leadership development amid a shorter political runway. [Prime Minister's Office Singapore] [The Straits Times 1] [The Straits Times 2] [The Straits Times 3]

Singapore: Controversial labor chief not included in new Cabinet

(lm) Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has confirmed that labor chief Ng Chee Meng will not be part of the new Cabinet, describing it as a "temporary arrangement." Ng, who narrowly made it for a third term into Parliament in the May 3 general election, requested to focus on his responsibilities as Member of Parliament and secretary-general of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Wong emphasized the traditional

importance of having the NTUC leader in Cabinet and expressed hope that this connection will be restored soon—either with Ng or another representative. [Channel NewsAsia]

Ng had announced his intention not to join the Cabinet prior to the election, amid renewed public scrutiny. Critics revisited a 2017 Ministry of Education dialogue in which he was seen as dismissive toward educators. More recently, a photo surfaced showing Ng at a dinner with Su Haijin, a convicted money launderer involved in a major financial scandal. Ng has said he had no further contact with Su after learning of his criminal background.

Singapore: Deputy Prime Minister discusses city-states position on trade and economic challenges

(nl) During a discussion at the UBS Asian Investment Conference on May 22, Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) and Minister for Trade and Industry Gan Kim Yong emphasized that Singapore has never remained neutral on international issues and will always take a position, particularly on trade tensions between the US and China. While acknowledging the complexity of the issue, DPM Gan stated that Singapore's stance is based on its best interests, rather than siding with one country over the other. He noted that Singapore values its trade relationships with both the US and China, although finding a mutually agreeable path forward is becoming increasingly difficult.

DPM Gan highlighted the temporary relief provided by the US-China deal in May 2025, which suspended some tariffs for 90 days, but cautioned that the end of the tariff truce would usher in a "new world" for trade. He expressed concerns over the growing protectionist tendencies worldwide and the challenges this poses for global trade.

In response to these challenges, Singapore has established the Economic Resilience Taskforce, which he chairs, to help businesses and workers navigate the current economic environment. The task force, comprising various government ministers and industry representatives, will focus on investing in innovation, research and development, and creating new markets and business models.

DPM Gan also emphasized the importance of investing in Singapore's people, highlighting talent development as critical for the country's continued success. He reiterated the need for Singapore to remain nimble

and responsive to rapid changes in the global business landscape, reflecting the government's proactive approach to addressing economic challenges. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Government calls for evolution of alternative dispute resolution sector

(nl) (lm) Singapore's alternative dispute resolution (ADR) ecosystem must continue to evolve through legal innovation, international collaboration, and strategic use of technology to remain globally relevant, said the Minister of State for Law and Transport at the Alternative Dispute Resolution Conference on May 22.

He noted that Singapore has liberalized its dispute resolution regime, allowing parties to appoint mediators and arbitrators of any nationality, and emphasized the importance of remaining integrated within the global legal infrastructure. Recent reforms include a framework for fee agreements and the adoption of technological tools such as the Mediation Artificial Intelligence Assistant, which helps streamline document analysis and dispute mapping.

Legal experts at the conference noted a rise in cross-border commercial disputes and the growing use of pre-commencement mediation—where parties seek settlement before initiating litigation. Singapore remains one of the world's top four preferred arbitration venues, with the Singapore International Arbitration Centre receiving cases from 110 jurisdictions. The president of the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific added that ADR has become a vital tool for efficiently resolving disputes in times of global trade disruptions, such as those seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. [The Straits Times]

Singapore: Growth forecast for 2025 held at 0–2 percent, economy expands 3.9 percent in Q1

(nl) Singapore has maintained its 2025 GDP growth forecast at 0 to 2 percent, despite stronger-than-expected year-on-year growth of 3.9 percent in the first quarter. This marks a slowdown from 5 percent in Q4 2024. On a quarter-on-quarter basis, the economy contracted by 0.6 percent, raising the possibility of a technical recession.

Growth was driven by wholesale trade, manufacturing, and finance, partly boosted by front-loading exports ahead of U.S. tariffs. However, the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) warned that global conditions remain uncertain despite a temporary 90-day tariff truce between the U.S. and China.

A weaker second half is expected, with slowing demand set to impact manufacturing, trade-related services, and consumer-facing sectors. Non-oil domestic exports (NODX) rose 3.3 percent in Q1, and the annual forecast remains at 1 to 3 percent, though analysts expect softer growth ahead.

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) will reassess its policy stance in July, after easing monetary policy twice in response to global trade risks. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore: Government links training incentives to employment outcomes in skills reform push

(nl) Singapore is shifting its workforce development strategy to prioritize employment outcomes, launching a set of reforms that tie public training support more closely to job market needs. The measures are part of the next phase of the SkillsFuture initiative—a national program launched in 2015 to promote lifelong learning and professional upskilling across the population. Marking its 10th anniversary in 2025, SkillsFuture now delivers training to over 500,000 Singaporeans annually—roughly one-fifth of the national workforce—through more than 28,000 accredited courses.

Under the revised framework, eligible individuals will receive a SkillsFuture Credit top-up of SGD 4,000 (USD 2,960) and monthly training allowances of up to SGD 3,000 (USD 2,220), with special support for mid-career workers. A new Jobseeker Support Scheme will provide up to SGD 6,000 (USD 4,440) over six months for lower- to middle-income Singaporeans still seeking employment.

For companies, the government will overhaul the SkillsFuture Enterprise Credit into a digital wallet from mid-2026, preloading SGD 10,000 (USD 7,400) in training credits to simplify access and reduce administrative burdens. Although employer participation in training initiatives has doubled since 2015, under-investment remains a concern.

Authorities are also pushing for a tighter match between training content and real labor market

demand, encouraging course providers to collaborate more closely with industry. The government has highlighted the growing use of digital tools such as the Careers and Skills Passport—adopted by over 315,000 users since its launch in November 2024—to consolidate verified qualifications and career history. [The Straits Times 1] [The Straits Times 2]

Singapore: SME group warns some firms may enter 'life support mode'

(nl) Singapore's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are bracing for financial stress as a 90-day pause on new U.S. tariffs nears its end. The Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (ASME) has warned that some companies could be forced into "life support mode" if tariffs resume, due to rising costs and disrupted supply chains.

Some firms report up to 30 percent increases in raw material costs and a 15 percent drop in sales. Business expansion plans have been shelved in favor of securing inventory, severely tightening cash flow.

Non-bank lenders report a decline in loan applications, with SMEs hesitant to take on debt amid uncertainty. ASME is urging the Singapore government to step up support, particularly by helping firms access new markets and integrate into larger supply chains. [Channel NewsAsia]

Singapore: All neighborhood police centers to have automated equipping and armory systems by end-2027

(nl) By the end of 2027, all neighbourhood police centres (NPCs) in Singapore will implement automated equipping and armoury systems to improve efficiency in the retrieval and return of equipment and firearms.

The Singapore Police Force (SPF) has already begun rolling out Automated Equipping Systems (AES), with 30 out of 34 NPCs equipped by May 2025. These systems allow officers to quickly access gear like batons and handcuffs without waiting for a maintenance officer, saving significant time. By December 2027, all NPCs will also have Automated Armoury Systems (AAS) for firearms, which require officers to undergo both card scanning and facial recognition for added security. [Channel NewsAsia]

Thailand: Senate election shapes up to full-blown institutional standoff

(lm) Thailand's political crisis surrounding the 2024 Senate election is shaping up to be a full-blown institutional standoff, with mounting pressure from multiple directions over alleged vote rigging, institutional interference, and potential abuse of power. At the center are 55 senators under investigation by the Election Commission (EC) and the Department of Special Investigation (DSI), accused of colluding in securing Senate seats through illegal means.

A group of these senators, led by Pol Maj Gen Chattrawat Saengphet, formally petitioned the EC on May 22 to suspend its inquiry committee—specifically the "26th Inquiry Committee," a joint panel with the DSI—citing constitutional violations, breach of confidentiality, and procedural unfairness. The senators claimed the panel disclosed private information improperly and called for the entire investigative process to be scrapped, alleging undue influence and lack of neutrality. Some argued that the inquiry may have violated Section 157 of the Criminal Code related to malfeasance. [Bangkok Post 1]

Simultaneously, a group of minority senators led by Premsak Piayura and Nantana Nantavaropas is attempting to halt the May 29–30 Senate meeting, which is scheduled to appoint members to several independent state agencies. These include two Constitutional Court judges, one election commissioner, three National Anti-Corruption Commission members, and one attorney-general nominee. Critics argue that senators implicated in electoral misconduct should not have authority over such high-level appointments, warning it would compromise institutional credibility. A petition to the Senate Speaker, himself under investigation, and potentially to the Constitutional Court, is underway. [Bangkok Post 2]

In parallel, Tankhun Jitt-itsara, a former MP and Senate candidate, also petitioned the House Speaker calling for the Constitutional Court to suspend the implicated senators. House Speaker Wan Muhamad Noor Matha has said he will seek legal counsel on whether to forward the petition, adding that while such cases usually fall under Senate jurisdiction, the petition was submitted to him prompting a review of his authority in this matter. [Bangkok Post]

In a related development, Kusumalwati Sirikomut, a reserve senator and former Pheu Thai MP, has petitioned the EC to ask the Constitutional Court to dissolve the Bhumjaithai Party, the second-largest party in the governing coalition. She alleges that Chaichanok Chidchob, Bhumjaithai's secretary-general and son of party founder Newin Chidchob, orchestrated large-scale vote manipulation in Buri Ram, the party's stronghold. Kusumalwati claims that Bhumjaithai's Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Anutin Charnvirakul directed newly elected senators to sign resignation letters to ensure party loyalty. Bhumjaithai has rejected the accusations and threatened defamation lawsuits, while Anutin maintains that he prohibited party members from participating in the Senate election. [Bangkok Post 3]

Another petition seeking the dissolution of Bhumjaithai has been filed by Nathaporn Toprayoon, a former adviser to Thailand's Ombudsman's Office and a prominent figure in Thai civil society and legal activism. Nathaporn accuses Bhumjaithai of interfering in the Senate election. In response, Bhumjaithai has strongly rejected his petition, pointing to Nathaporn's involvement in a money laundering case tied to the Klongchan Credit Union Cooperative scandal. The party questioned why Nathaporn had not been indicted despite recommendations from the DSI in 2017, suggesting that Nathaporn might be used as a political tool to undermine Bhumjaithai. [Bangkok Post 4]

Amid the turmoil, individual behavior is stoking public ire. Senator Alongkot Worakee, one of the 55 under investigation, appeared before the EC on May 20 but refused to answer questions in Thai, replying only in French. The evasive performance, coupled with earlier reports of him loitering in restricted ballot areas during last year's vote, has amplified concern over the Senate's credibility. Alongkot insists investigators, not senators, are overstepping: "The DSI is just a statutory agency; I act under the constitution." [Bangkok Post 5]

Thailand: Former protest rivals unite to challenge ex-prime minister over privilege and maritime pact

(lm) Two prominent former protest leaders—Sondhi Limthongkul and Jatuporn Prompan—who once stood on opposite sides of Thailand's political divide have now joined forces in a renewed campaign against former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, widely seen as de facto leader of the ruling Pheu Thai Party. Their unexpected alliance was publicly unveiled during a joint appearance on May 25, signaling a convergence

of previously warring factions against a shared target, as both men framed their alliance as a call for national renewal grounded in public interest and institutional integrity.

Sondhi Limthongkul was a leading figure in the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD), commonly known as the "Yellow Shirts." This group emerged in the mid-2000s, advocating for royalist and nationalist ideals, and was instrumental in the 2006 protests that culminated in a military coup ousting Thaksin.

Conversely, Jatuporn Prompan was a prominent leader of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), or "Red Shirts," a movement that supported Thaksin and opposed the 2006 coup. The UDD championed populist policies and democratic reforms, often clashing with the PAD's objectives.

At the event, Sondhi and Jatuporn presented a coordinated critique of Thaksin. Sondhi focused on national sovereignty issues, particularly criticizing the 2001 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Thailand and Cambodia. This MoU, signed during Thaksin's tenure, aimed to facilitate joint development in the overlapping claims area (OCA) in the Gulf of Thailand, a region believed to be rich in natural resources. Critics, including the Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), argue that the MoU compromises Thailand's sovereignty, especially concerning areas like Koh Kut island.

Jatuporn, on the other hand, emphasized issues of legal accountability and privilege. He highlighted Thaksin's 2008 conviction for corruption and abuse of power, noting that despite an eight-year sentence, Thaksin spent his incarceration in a hospital and received a royal pardon reducing his sentence to one year. Jatuporn argued that such treatment exemplifies systemic double standards in Thailand's justice system. [Bangkok Post 1]

This newly formed alliance was downplayed by Wisut Chainarun, a prominent Pheu Thai MP, who emphasized that political realignments like this were common in the Thai political landscape. He noted that personal interests often lead to such shifts and that political differences are not insurmountable. Deputy Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul also remarked that cooperation between former rivals for the country’s benefit should be seen as a positive development. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Ex-Prime Minister Yingluck ordered to pay USD 301 million over rice scheme losses

(lm) Thailand's Supreme Administrative Court has ordered former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra, aunt of the current Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, to pay THB 10.03 billion (USD 301 million) in damages related to her administration's controversial rice-pledging scheme. This ruling overturns a 2021 lower court decision that had dismissed her liability, though it reduces the compensation from the THB 35.7 billion (USD 1.07 billion) originally sought by the Ministry of Finance.

However, the Administrative Court clarified that it does not have the authority to directly compel Yingluck to pay compensation. Instead, enforcement responsibility rests with agencies such as the Finance Ministry, which can seize assets or conduct auctions to recover the funds. [Bangkok Post 1]

The rice-pledging scheme, launched more than a decade ago, paid farmers above-market rates in a bid to raise rural incomes. But the program led to massive stockpiles, market distortions, and financial losses, especially from opaque government-to-government rice sales. The court found Yingluck partially responsible for these losses, contradicting a prior Central Administrative Court ruling that attributed the damage to corruption at the operational level rather than to Yingluck's direct involvement.

The ruling aligns with a 2017 Supreme Court conviction that sentenced Yingluck in absentia to five years in prison for dereliction of duty. Yingluck fled the country shortly before that ruling and has lived in self-imposed exile since. [Bangkok Post 2]

In a public response marking the anniversary of the 2014 military coup that ousted her government, Yingluck condemned the new ruling as "deeply unjust" and "impossible to comply with," arguing she was never directly named a defendant and had no personal role in the operational mismanagement. She defended the rice scheme as a poverty-reduction policy meant to assist over 20 million farming families and criticized the lack of accountability for the post-coup handling of leftover rice stocks, alleging quality rice was mislabeled and sold as spoiled. [Bangkok Post 3]

The ruling has drawn strong reactions from the Pheu Thai Party, which now leads the government under her niece but is widely seen as led by her brother, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. Minister to the Prime Minister's Office Chousak Sirinil, Deputy Finance

Minister Julapun Amornvivat, and Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai warned that the judgment could set a chilling precedent for policymaking by exposing political leaders to personal financial liability. They argued that such retroactive risks could deter governments from launching ambitious public programs, such as the party's digital wallet initiative.

Pheu Thai officials also indicated the party would explore remaining legal avenues to challenge the decision, including invoking Section 75 of the Administrative Court and Procedures Act, which allows new evidence to be submitted within 90 days. One likely argument is that the sale of nearly 19 million tons of rice in 2024—overseen by then-Commerce Minister Phumtham—was not considered in the court's findings. [Bangkok Post 4] [Bangkok Post 5]

Thailand: Medical council urged to provide missing files in ex-prime minister's hospital case

(lm) The Medical Council of Thailand (MCT), the country's official regulator of medical ethics and licensing, is under mounting pressure amid continued fallout from its decision to discipline three doctors who issued medical certificates that enabled former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra – widely seen as the de facto leader of the ruling Pheu Thai Party – to remain in hospital for six months instead of serving time in prison. The controversy centers on his stay from August 2023 to February 2024 in a VIP suite at Police General Hospital, which critics say lacked medical justification.

On May 8, the MCT suspended two doctors at Police General Hospital and issued a warning to a third at the Department of Corrections Hospital, finding that the physicians had exaggerated Thaksin's condition and failed to conduct proper diagnoses—actions that violated professional ethics.

More recently, the Public Health Ministry—led by Public Health Minister Somsak Thepsutin, a senior figure in the ruling Pheu Thai Party and honorary chair of the MCT—has requested additional documentation related to the council's internal proceedings. The MCT has 15 days to comply. Somsak has established a review committee to assess whether the disciplinary process followed proper legal procedure. If the minister rejects the council's decision, the matter would return to the MCT, where a two-thirds majority would be required to override him. [Bangkok Post 1]

Meanwhile, Thaksin is preparing for a Supreme Court hearing on June 13 regarding the enforcement of his prison sentence. This inquiry stems from a petition challenging the decision to allow Thaksin extended medical treatment. While the court initially rejected the petition, it decided to proceed with the investigation. Thaksin, along with other involved parties, is expected to provide explanations during the inquiry.

Amid the ongoing MCT and Supreme Court proceedings, rumors have surfaced suggesting that Thaksin might attempt to flee the country to avoid legal consequences. However, both the Pheu Thai Party and Thaksin himself have directly addressed these rumors. Thaksin reassured the public, stating he had no plans to flee and was "living well" in Thailand. [Bangkok Post 2]

To further dispel these rumors, Thaksin made a public appearance on May 27, 2025, at the Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), where he delivered a special lecture on drug suppression. However, his participation in the event has been met with criticism due to his controversial "war on drugs" campaign in 2003, which resulted in over 2,500 extrajudicial killings. Critics argue that inviting Thaksin to speak on this topic risks endorsing his violent methods. [Bangkok Post 3] [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: United Thai Nation faction weighs future amid political shifts

(lm) The United Thai Nation (UTN) Party, an ultraconservative party and member of the ruling multi-party coalition, is facing internal discussions about its political future, with deputy leader Suchart Chomklin planning talks with 20 fellow MPs to assess the party's direction. Speculation has arisen that some MPs may be lured to the Kla Tham Party, a fellow coalition member, which has been actively recruiting MPs from various parties to expand its influence in the coalition.

The UTN, originally formed to serve as a vehicle for Gen Prayut Chan-o-cha, the leader of the 2014 military coup, struggled in the 2023 election, winning only 36 seats in the 500-member House. Gen Prayut, after stepping down from the prime ministerial role, now serves as a privy councillor.

Suchart, who also holds the position of deputy commerce minister, emphasized that any discussions regarding defections would be off-limits during the

upcoming meeting of MPs scheduled for May 28-29, as he remains committed to the UTN.

Suchart noted that the personal strengths of MPs are more critical than the party affiliation and declined to indicate whether his group would consider forming a new party if they were dissatisfied with existing parties' policies.

He confirmed that he maintains good ties with Kla Tham Party chief adviser Thamanat Prompow, who recently hinted that he would be pleased to share the same ideology with Suchart's faction. However, the political environment is dynamic, with several MPs from the eastern provinces—an important electoral battleground—being sought by other parties, particularly Klatham.

The Klatham Party, which currently has 25 MPs, is aggressively pursuing former MPs from other parties, including the Bhumjaithai Party, in an effort to build a larger and more influential coalition. Political analysts suggest that Klatham's goal is to expand its power base, potentially securing more cabinet seats, while ensuring that a departure by the Bhumjaithai Party from the Pheu Thai-led coalition would not significantly impact its influence. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Thanyaburi election results delayed amid probe into legal complaints

(lm) The Election Commission of Thailand has delayed certifying the results of the recent municipal election in Thanyaburi, Pathum Thani province, citing ongoing investigations into complaints of alleged electoral law violations. While local authorities confirmed that no ballots were missing or in excess, formal complaints have halted the process.

The mayoral race is currently led by Yupayao Leenawarat, wife of former mayor Krissada Leenawarat, and their son Smitthiphat secured a municipal council seat. Despite Smitthiphat’s past conviction for reckless driving causing serious injury in a road-rage incident, both candidates succeeded—highlighting the family's continuing local political influence.

The losing candidate was backed by a powerful figure within the provincial administration, and the vote margin was reportedly narrow, intensifying scrutiny.

Separately, the Election Commission has ordered re-elections in two other wards in Pathum Thani due to

missing ballot papers. The rerun is scheduled for June 1. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government pushes ahead with casino bill despite mounting public criticism

(lm) Thailand's draft legislation to legalize casino-based entertainment complexes is set to be prioritized when Parliament reconvenes in July, with the government framing the initiative as a key driver of tourism, investment, and revenue generation. Senior government officials confirmed that the bill—postponed earlier amid public backlash—will be submitted as a top priority.

According to these officials, global operators Wynn Resorts and MGM Resorts have already expressed interest in investing in Thailand. Bangkok is seen as a prime candidate for hosting large-scale integrated resorts, with projected investments of THB 200–300 billion (approx. USD 5.7–8.5 billion) per site. The government is expected to limit the number of licenses to between three and seven, and discussions are also underway with theme park developers, VR companies, and international event organizers.

To address concerns about crime, gambling addiction, and money laundering, the government promises strict regulatory oversight. Proposed measures include full visitor registration, 24/7 surveillance, and third-party mechanisms to manage problem gambling. A debated eligibility clause may require Thai nationals to hold at least THB 50 million (USD 1.4 million) in their bank account to enter casino areas.

Nonetheless, the initiative continues to face public opposition. Critics argue that legalizing casinos could normalize high-risk behavior, facilitate criminal activity, and damage Thailand's international reputation. Some academics also question the government's outreach to investors before the bill has even passed its first reading, and cite the country's low ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index as a warning sign.

Thailand's central bank has also voiced caution, advising the government to focus on "white" industries with lower reputational risk. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Government moves to re-tighten cannabis access

(bk) Thailand's Ministry of Public Health is advancing plans to reclassify cannabis as a controlled herb and restrict its use exclusively to medical purposes, citing an apparent surge in smuggling and unregulated access. The proposed regulation—currently open for public feedback until June 5—is presented as a temporary measure ahead of a comprehensive cannabis law expected to take another two years to finalize.

Under the draft, all cannabis users—both Thai and foreign—would be required to obtain a medical certificate from a licensed physician. Dispensaries would be permitted to sell cannabis only to patients with valid prescriptions, and transactions would be limited to a 30-day dosage. All cannabis flowers would have to originate from licensed, quality-assured sources.

The move marks a shift for the ruling Pheu Thai Party, which previously pledged to re-criminalize cannabis but scaled back its stance due to coalition pressure from the pro-cannabis Bhumjaithai Party. Authorities say the new restrictions are a response to growing concerns about illicit exports. Recent seizures include 73 kilograms of cannabis intercepted at Suvarnabhumi Airport, and officials claim that over nine tons have been confiscated in the past year, with smuggling routes linked to the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, and Hong Kong.

Although cannabis was decriminalized in Thailand in 2022—making it the first Asian country to do so—there has been no comprehensive law regulating its cultivation, sale, or use. This legal gap has enabled more than 10,700 dispensaries to open across the country, particularly in tourist hubs.

The new rules, expected to be finalized in about 40 days, have drawn strong opposition from cannabis advocates and traditional medicine practitioners. Critics argue that the draft regulation was introduced without sufficient public consultation and could severely limit access for patients who rely on cannabis as an alternative treatment. They also warn that relying on modern physicians—many of whom are reluctant to prescribe cannabis—may drive users back to illegal channels. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2] [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Supreme Patriarch orders nationwide temple finance reform after major scandal

(lm) Thailand's Supreme Patriarch, the highest spiritual leader in the Thai Buddhist hierarchy, has ordered sweeping reforms to ensure transparency and accountability in temple finances, following a major THB 2 billion (USD 60 million) embezzlement scandal involving a former abbot at Wat Rai Khing in Nakhon Pathom. The decision was made in consultation with the Sangha Supreme Council, the governing body of the monastic order responsible for overseeing disciplinary and administrative matters in Thai Buddhism.

The National Office of Buddhism (NOB) announced that it will impose new nationwide regulations requiring temples to adopt standardized accounting practices, digital donation systems, and legal compliance frameworks. Additionally, the NOB will establish new divisions dedicated to temple affairs, legal supervision, and a Supreme Patriarch police unit to monitor asset management. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Government agency criticized over calendar spending and alleged misuse of welfare funds

(bk) The Social Security Office (SSO) — which manages health, retirement, and unemployment insurance for private-sector workers — is facing criticism over a planned THB 55 million (approximately USD 1.7 million) calendar printing project for 2025, which it decided to proceed with - despite opposition from the majority of contributors.

An April survey conducted by the SSO found that 62 percent of workers and 66 percent of employers opposed the initiative. Officials defended the project by citing prior budget commitments and support from younger demographics, particularly respondents aged 15 to 25, who made up nearly 38 percent of those surveyed. [Thai PBS World]

Separately, the Ministry of Labor has opened an investigation into allegations that the SSO used insured workers' contributions to purchase luxury vehicles for executive use. A member of parliament from the opposition People's Party reported that some vehicles were later donated to temples and subsequently transferred to private individuals. One case involved a

vehicle purchased in Sakon Nakhon that was donated and then passed on to a third party.

The Ministry of Labor said the donation followed formal decommissioning procedures and was requested by the temple. However, since temples are not typically allowed to transfer such assets, authorities are examining whether any legal or procedural violations occurred. [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Jailed pro-democracy activist receives human rights award

(bk) A leading Thai pro-democracy activist and lawyer, Arnon Nampa, has been awarded the 2024 Asia-Pacific Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk. He is the first Thai recipient of the Ireland-based organization's recognition, which honors individuals working under extreme personal risk. Arnon is currently serving a 22-year prison sentence for speeches made during the 2020 youth-led protests that called for reform of Thailand's monarchy, prosecuted under the country's lèse-majesté law. Despite 41 bail requests filed in 2024, Arnon remains in detention. [Bangkok Post]

Separately, a Ramkhamhaeng University law student in pretrial detention for lèse-majesté was denied permission to sit final exams. The court rejected both a request for temporary release and a proposal to conduct the exams inside the prison, while the university also denied accommodations, citing fairness. Thai Lawyers for Human Rights criticized the decisions, arguing they violate the right to education. [Thai Enquirer 1]

On May 23, the Court of Appeal increased the prison sentence of a 32-year-old former corporate employee from eight months to four years in a separate royal defamation case. He was convicted of throwing paint on a royal portrait in 2022 and sharing a photo of the act in a private LINE group. The court cited repeated similar behavior and the intent to insult the monarchy as justification for the harsher sentence. [Thai Enquirer 2]

Thailand: State budget slated for parliamentary discussion

(lm) Thailand's THB 3.78 trillion (USD 108–113.4 billion) draft Expenditure Budget Act for fiscal year 2026 will

undergo its first reading in Parliament from May 28–31, during a special session convened to scrutinize the spending plan. The budget debate will allocate 20 hours each to the government and opposition, with an additional hour reserved for House Speaker Wan Muhamad Noor Matha. A vote on the first reading is expected on May 31.

The bill marks a 0.74 percent increase over the current fiscal year's budget—one of the slowest growth rates in recent years, reflecting ongoing fiscal constraints in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The bill outlines three stages: the first reading for general approval in May, a second reading for section-by-section review, and a third reading and final enactment expected in October 2025.

Strategically, the budget is focused on six key areas: promoting social opportunities and equity (THB 942 billion), human resource development (THB 605 billion), public administration reform (THB 605 billion), national security (THB 415 billion), enhancing competitiveness (THB 394 billion), and quality growth with environmental sustainability (THB 147 billion). [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The opposition main People's Party has vowed to use the session to expose what it calls vote-oriented spending and coalition horse-trading. Opposition lawmakers accused the government of failing to address real economic vulnerabilities, including weak exports, fragile tourism recovery, and rising U.S. tariff pressures. They further alleged that certain military and police budget increases were political returns for prior support. [Bangkok Post 3]

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has dismissed these criticisms, while also defending key elements of the spending plan. [Bangkok Post 4]

Thailand: Economic strain prompts Cabinet to redirect USD 4.7 billion from digital wallet scheme

(lm) Facing a stagnating economy, weakening consumer demand, and the looming threat of U.S. tariff hikes, Thailand's government has reallocated THB 157 billion (approximately USD 4.7 billion) originally earmarked for its digital wallet scheme to a set of urgent investment and stimulus projects aimed at shoring up short-term growth. The move comes as the country braces for the possible imposition of a 36 percent tariff on exports to the U.S. beginning in July, up from the current 10 percent interim rate.

The redirected funds will be used for short-term stimulus projects targeting water infrastructure, flood prevention, transport and logistics upgrades, tourist site improvements, technology adoption for small exporters, and local development under the government's Small-Medium-Large (SML) program. Soft loans for small businesses are also included. All projects must receive final approval and be contractually committed by the end of September to maximize economic impact in the third and fourth quarters of 2025.

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra stressed that the digital wallet scheme is postponed, not canceled, but reprioritization was necessary given external economic pressures. Finance Minister Pichai Chunhavajira noted that growth projections have been revised downward, with the National Economic and Social Development Council expecting only 1.8 percent growth in 2025—down from earlier estimates of 3 to 3.5 percent. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

The shift in policy occurs against a backdrop of intensifying public concern over Thailand's economic outlook. A recent poll showed that over 83 percent of Thais believe the country is experiencing a serious economic crisis, with nearly half saying they urgently need government assistance. Support for the digital wallet handout—especially among young and working-age groups—remains strong, though more than half of respondents said they would not be angry if the program were canceled. [Bangkok Post]

The broader economy reflects these anxieties. From tourism and retail to real estate and automotive sectors, consumer spending has tightened. Housing sales are sluggish due to high rejection rates for mortgages and falling consumer confidence, while car sales are down nearly 5 percent year-on-year amid tightening credit and household debt burdens. Retail loan growth is expected to contract by 1 percent this year, with auto loans plunging 7.5 percent. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Car sales rise for first time in nearly two years despite continued production slump

(lm) Thailand's domestic car sales rose by 1 percent year-on-year in April 2025, marking the first increase in 23 months, according to the Federation of Thai Industries (FTI). The modest recovery was attributed to promotional campaigns for passenger cars—particularly electric vehicles (EVs)—during the Bangkok

International Motor Show. However, sales of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles and pickup trucks continued to decline, reflecting broader financial pressures.

Despite the rebound in sales, Thailand's automotive production and exports continued their downtrend. Total vehicle output fell 0.4 percent to 104,250 units in April, extending a 21-month streak of contraction. Pickup truck production dropped by 33 percent year-on-year, which the FTI linked to weak domestic demand and tighter credit conditions.

Auto exports fell by 6.3 percent in April after a sharper 14.9 percent fall in March. Export declines were driven by stricter environmental regulations, shifting car models, and slower demand in major overseas markets. From January to April, overall auto exports fell 14.7 percent.

The sector's challenges are compounded by Thailand's high household debt, which stood at 88.4 percent of GDP in 2024. This has made banks and car financing firms increasingly cautious, with growing concern over non-performing loans and vehicle repossessions, projected to reach THB 4.4 billion (USD 129 million) in 2025.

To support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that rely heavily on pickup trucks for daily operations, the government approved a THB 5 billion (USD 147 million) credit guarantee scheme via the Thai Credit Guarantee Corporation. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Banking loan growth to slump in Q2 and SMEs face critical crossroads

(lm) Loan growth in Thailand's banking sector is expected to slow in the second quarter of 2025, largely due to rising uncertainty surrounding global trade policies, which has led to postponed investment and spending decisions. To assess potential risks, the central bank has instructed the six domestic systemically important banks to conduct stress tests, focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and exporters to the U.S.

In the first quarter of 2025, total loans contracted by 1.3 percent year-on-year, marking the third consecutive quarterly decline, following a 0.4 percent annual drop in the previous quarter — the first annual decline since 2010. Both business and consumer loans decreased, with business loans dropping by 0.8

percent and consumer loans by 2.2 percent. Among the loan categories, auto hire-purchase loans, which are loans taken out to purchase vehicles with the vehicle serving as collateral, saw the most significant decline, falling by 10.2 percent, followed by a 5.5 percent decrease in loans to SMEs and a 1.9 percent decline in credit card loans.

Corporate lending experienced modest growth of 1.5 percent, while mortgage and personal loans increased slightly by 0.2 percent and 0.3 percent, respectively. However, the broader picture for SMEs is concerning, with SME non-performing loans (NPLs) particularly high at 7.35 percent, up from 6.88 percent. This suggests that many SMEs are struggling with financial distress, and without intervention, some may face closure or insolvency. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

As access to traditional funding sources, such as bank loans, becomes more restricted, SMEs are increasingly turning to alternative strategies like mergers and partnerships to survive. According to industry experts, this may be the only viable option for many SMEs. [Bangkok Post 3]

Moreover, the ratio of household debt to gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to have dropped to below 88 percent at the end of March, from 88.4 percent at the end of December. However, this figure excludes informal debts, such as those incurred from loan sharks and pawn shops, and still remains among the highest in Asia. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Listed companies face 6 percent earnings drop in first half amid global and domestic headwinds

(lm) Analysts expect earnings for listed Thai companies to fall by 6 percent year-on-year in the first half of 2025. Key concerns include rising operating costs, subdued private investment, and sluggish household consumption tied to high debt levels. The seasonal downturn in tourism has further compounded pressure on consumer-facing sectors. Additionally, structural weaknesses such as competition from low-cost Chinese imports and policy uncertainty have weighed on foreign direct investment.

Despite the downturn, analysts remain cautiously optimistic, pointing to resilience in defensive sectors such as telecom, power generation, healthcare, food, and retail. These industries are better positioned to maintain margins due to stable demand and falling input costs. Food producers, for example, are

benefiting from higher pork prices and lower feed costs, while beverage companies gain from cheaper sugar and aluminum. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Authorities slash Chinese tourism forecast but launch campaign to revive arrivals

(lm) Thailand has lowered its 2025 forecast for foreign tourist arrivals to 37.5 million, down from the earlier projection of 39.5 million, amid a sharp decline in visitors from China. The Bank of Thailand now expects only 5 million Chinese tourists this year—a nearly 30 percent drop from 2024 figures—citing global economic uncertainty, shifting travel behavior, and intensified Chinese domestic tourism promotion.

This downward revision comes as Chinese arrivals in Q1 underperformed, and discretionary spending on travel remains subdued due to ongoing U.S.–China trade tensions. The central bank warned that tourism revenue and average spending may not return to pre-pandemic levels in the near future. Similarly, Kasikorn Research expects foreign arrivals to fall to 34.5 million, with a 3 percent revenue drop to THB 1.62 trillion (USD 48.6 billion). From January to early May, international tourist arrivals dipped 1 percent year-on-year. [Bangkok Post 1]

In response, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has launched an aggressive marketing push to revive the Chinese market, including a large-scale familiarization event from May 29–31. The campaign will bring 500 Chinese travel agents and media representatives to survey tourist attractions in Bangkok, Pattaya, Ayutthaya, Rayong, and Nakhon Pathom. The TAT expects this event to reach 350 million Chinese consumers and generate 5,000 business deals.

This initiative complements other planned measures, such as subsidies for online travel platforms and incentives for chartered flights from secondary Chinese cities. If successful, officials believe Chinese arrivals could rebound to 6.9–8 million in 2025, well above the current worst-case projection. [Bangkok Post 2]

Thailand: Nationwide telecom outage sparks scrutiny of market concentration and regulatory weakness

(bk) A nationwide outage by Thailand's leading telecom provider, True Corporation, on May 22 disrupted mobile and internet services for millions of users, drawing public outcry and regulatory intervention. The incident has intensified scrutiny of Thailand's highly concentrated telecom sector, where recent mergers have reduced competition to just two dominant operators: True-DTAC and AIS.

The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) ordered True to revise its initial compensation offer—10 GB of data and 100 free call minutes for one day—calling it inadequate. The updated plan includes extended benefits tailored to customer types and a one-day bill discount for postpaid users. However, consumer advocates and analysts argue that compensation alone fails to address the underlying problem: a lack of meaningful competition. [Bangkok Post]

The Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) warned that the consolidation of the telecom market has degraded service quality and jeopardized Thailand's digital economy goals. A recent survey showed that over 80 percent of users experienced network issues in the past six months, with firms involved in mergers responsible for most outages. [The Nation 1] [The Nation 2] [Thai PBS, in Thai]

TDRI and other experts are urging the government to liberalize the sector by allowing greater foreign competition—especially from U.S. companies—and by enforcing international service standards, including penalties for service failures. Without such reforms, they warn, Thailand risks falling behind in infrastructure resilience and digital competitiveness. [The Nation 3]

Thailand: Rail link seen as gateway for Thai trade

(lm) The Department of Rail Transport (DRT), Thailand's government agency overseeing rail transportation, is working to enhance the efficiency of the Singapore-Kunming Rail Link (SKRL), a regional project that will bolster Thailand's position as a logistics and investment hub.

The SKRL connects eight countries, including Thailand, with three key routes: the Eastern Line (5,500 km from Singapore through Bangkok to Kunming), the Central Line (4,500 km passing through Vientiane, Bangkok, and Kunming), and the Western Line (4,760 km linking Singapore, Bangkok, and Kunming). These routes,

some of which are dual-track, will significantly improve logistical capacity and streamline regional trade. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: China-made sub deal decision looms

(lm) The Thai government is expected to decide by the end of May or early June whether to proceed with the THB 13.5 billion (USD 405 million) submarine procurement project.

The deal, signed in May 2017 under a government-to-government agreement with China Shipbuilding & Offshore International Co., was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequently put on hold due to engine issues. Originally, the submarine was to be equipped with a German-made diesel engine, but Germany refused to supply the engine as it was designated a military item under its arms embargo on China. In response, China proposed using a Chinese-made engine instead, and the Thai navy observed testing of the CHD620 marine engine in China.

More recently, Germany again reiterated that, as a member of NATO and the European Union, is unable to supply the engines due to the arms embargo.

If Thailand decides to scrap the project, it will lose approximately THB 7 to THB 8 billion (USD 210 million to USD 240 million) already paid. However, proceeding would mean accepting the Chinese-made engine. Phumtham emphasized that the decision is important for military budget planning and the navy's preparations, including setting up a submarine squadron, building a dockyard, and training staff. He further mentioned that diplomats from Pakistan, which operates the same class of Chinese-made submarines, reported no issues with the vessel's performance. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: All police aircraft grounded after two fatal crashes

(lm) Thailand's national police chief has grounded all police aircraft following two deadly crashes that resulted in the deaths of nine people. The first crash occurred on April 25 when a DHC6-400 Twin Otter crashed near Cha-am, Phetchaburi, killing all six people on board. The aircraft, a 2017 model, was undergoing a test flight after maintenance. The second crash took

place on May 24 in Prachuap Khiri Khan, when a Bell 212 police helicopter, which had been in use for about 40 years, crashed, killing three people. The helicopter had passed a safety check in April. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Deputy prime minister concludes first phase of field visits to Deep South

(lm) Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister has concluded the first phase of field visits to the country's southern border provinces, part of a broader initiative to address the region's decades-long conflict. The visits, involving consultations with local officials, security personnel, and community leaders, aim to support a more integrated approach to security, economic development, and peacebuilding.

While acknowledging preliminary progress, the deputy prime minister noted that conflicting perspectives remain and current strategies lack alignment—particularly between economic initiatives and security operations. He emphasized the urgency of restructuring coordination mechanisms, but clarified that no immediate personnel changes, such as replacing the 4th Army Region Commander, are planned.

The government is also reviewing the effectiveness of existing peace dialogue mechanisms, with further decisions expected following an upcoming visit to Malaysia. The overall message was a commitment to adapt and reform if existing approaches are found insufficient, especially in light of persistent violence and socioeconomic vulnerabilities in the region. [Bangkok Post]

Thailand: Defense Minister orders probe into missing military fuel, rejects 'evaporation' claim

(bk) Defense Minister Phumtham Wechayachai has ordered a full investigation into the disappearance of 9,000–10,000 liters of fuel from a Bangkok-based military logistics unit, dismissing claims that the missing fuel simply "evaporated."

The case centers on a suspicious gasohol purchase order from November 2023, which was issued without proper authorization from the unit commander and signed by a colonel from the Science Division rather

than the Fuel Division. The purchase order, issued under unusual urgency, is suspected to have been used to retroactively justify missing fuel. Discrepancies came to light during a leadership transition within the Fuel Division, when the new director flagged unaccounted fuel and was reportedly told it had "evaporated" -- a claim immediately dismissed by energy experts as scientifically implausible for sealed storage tanks.

Further inquiries revealed that prior to September 2023, tens of thousands of liters of fuel had been distributed without proper documentation. Despite knowledge of these irregularities, senior officers failed to initiate a formal investigation until the issue became public. [Thai Enquirer]

Thailand: Efforts to tackle heavy metal pollution from Myanmar in Kok and Sai rivers

(bk) Thailand is stepping up efforts to stop toxic wastewater -- contaminated with heavy metals from Chinese-run, unregulated mining operations in Myanmar's Shan State -- from polluting the Kok and Sai rivers. Recent laboratory tests on water samples collected by the Pollution Control Department and the Public Health Ministry from various points along these rivers, in Chiang Rai and parts of Chiang Mai, have revealed arsenic levels exceeding safety standards.

Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has assigned the Army, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and the Foreign Ministry to negotiate with Myanmar's government to halt the discharge of these pollutants. The issue will be formally raised by the Thai delegation at the upcoming Regional Border Committee (RBC) meeting, scheduled for June 17–20 in Kengtung Township, Shan State.

In the short term, the Army's engineering corps plans to dredge and dispose of contaminated sediment from the Kok River between Thanarak village and Yonglee Bridge in Muang district, Chiang Rai. Long-term measures include a proposed dam to block heavy metals from entering Thai waters. Deputy Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai tasked the Water Resources Department with designing the dam, which would also filter pollutants from water and sediment. [Thai PBS World 1] [Thai PBS World 2]

Sudden flooding from Sai river feared spreading toxic waste

Meanwhile, on May 24, severe flooding struck Mae Sai District in Chiang Rai after heavy overnight rains caused the Sai River to overflow, inundating multiple communities and triggering nighttime evacuations. Water levels rose rapidly -- breaching embankments near the First Thai-Myanmar Friendship Bridge -- and submerged homes with depths reaching up to 1 meter. Authorities warned that floodwaters are expected to carry toxic substances, including arsenic, from upstream mining areas in Myanmar, raising health concerns about waterborne diseases.

Four temporary shelters have been set up for displaced residents. Although water levels began to recede by early morning, officials warned of a possible second wave. The Friendship Bridge was briefly closed to facilitate drainage. Locals voiced frustration over slow infrastructure improvements and persistent issues caused by mud and mining-related debris, fearing the situation will persist long after the floods subside. [The Nation]

Vietnam: Government moves to limit death penalty for major crimes, including corruption, drug trafficking

(lm) Vietnam's parliament, the National Assembly, is reviewing a government proposal to abolish the death penalty for eight offenses, including subversion, espionage, large-scale corruption, drug trafficking, and the production or sale of counterfeit medicines. The measure, part of broader amendments to the Penal Code, would replace capital punishment with life imprisonment without parole. If adopted, the changes are expected to take effect on July 1.

The move marks a significant step in Vietnam's gradual alignment with international human rights norms and its efforts to facilitate cross-border judicial cooperation. Vietnamese officials have acknowledged that the continued use of the death penalty—particularly for drug and corruption-related offenses—has created barriers to extradition and legal assistance from foreign jurisdictions. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Government moves to block Telegram over alleged criminal activity and non-compliance

(cmc) Vietnam has ordered internet and telecommunications providers to block the popular

messaging app Telegram, accusing the platform of failing to comply with national regulations and refusing to cooperate in criminal investigations. The directive requires service providers to restrict Telegram's operations and report implementation measures by June 2.

Authorities claim that nearly 70 percent of Telegram's 9,600 channels and groups in Vietnam host "harmful" or illegal content, including fraud, drug trafficking, sale of user data, and the dissemination of anti-government materials. Officials allege that many Telegram groups were created by "reactionary" or opposition figures to circulate subversive content. Telegram's failure to share user data with police as part of ongoing investigations was cited as a key reason behind the blocking order.

Telegram responded that it was "surprised" by the move, stating that it had met deadlines for legal requests and was still processing the latest notification under new telecom regulations. The platform, which has close to one billion users globally, remains accessible in Vietnam for now.

The ban follows new national rules introduced last year requiring platforms to verify user identities, notify authorities before operating locally, and remove illegal content upon request. [Al Jazeera] [Reuters] [RFA]

Vietnam: Retroactive subsidy cuts for solar and wind projects spark investor backlash

(lm) Vietnam's state power utility has unilaterally cut the subsidized tariffs it previously agreed to pay several solar and wind projects, alarming foreign investors and raising fears of widespread loan defaults. A petition dated May 16, signed by 16 foreign companies, warns that the tariff reductions have forced them into breach of debt obligations due to severe cash shortages.

The affected investors claim that starting in January 2025, a subsidiary of state-owned Electricity of Vietnam (EVN) withheld portions of their payments and imposed a provisional pricing scheme not contractually agreed upon. This retroactive change undermines Vietnam's original feed-in tariff (FiT) policy, which had promised 20-year contracts at above-market rates to encourage renewable energy development.

The controversy comes as Vietnam seeks to expand its renewable energy capacity amid growing international

climate commitments. However, authorities have recently frozen or reduced some subsidies, citing regulatory violations and mounting financial losses for EVN. While EVN claims that preferential rates cannot be maintained for projects that violated rules, it has not clarified whether these rules were altered retroactively or which specific projects were in breach. [Bangkok Post]

Vietnam: Foreign investment rises sharply

(lm) Vietnam has recorded USD 13.82 billion in newly registered foreign direct investment (FDI) in the first five months of 2025, a nearly 40 percent increase from the same period in 2024. Disbursed capital reached USD 6.74 billion—its highest level in five years—highlighting sustained investor interest as global supply chains continue to shift away from China.

Key sources of new investment include Singapore (USD 1.6 billion), China (USD 1.52 billion), and Japan (USD 573 million). Most of the investment went into manufacturing and processing, accounting for over 80 percent of disbursed capital, in line with Hanoi's push to attract high-tech and export-oriented industries.

Ho Chi Minh City remains a major investment hub, currently hosting over 13,000 FDI projects. Authorities plan to add 14 new industrial zones covering more than 3,800 hectares, aiming to attract higher value-added industries.

To improve the business environment, the government is advancing reforms to streamline licensing and customs processes and to improve legal predictability for investors. It is also seeking to resolve a backlog of delayed public investment projects, worth an estimated USD 278 billion, which could have a significant multiplier effect on private investment if successfully implemented. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam: Business group calls for end to tax exemption on low-value e-commerce imports

(lm) Vietnam's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) has called on the government to end import tax exemptions for low-value goods purchased through cross-border e-commerce platforms. The proposal targets current regulations that exempt imported items worth less than VND 1 million (about USD 40)

from tax—thresholds that VCCI says give foreign goods an unfair advantage over domestic producers.

The business chamber noted that most imported e-commerce items fall below the exemption limit. In 2024 alone, more than 324 million foreign-made products were sold via Shopee—a leading Southeast Asian online marketplace headquartered in Singapore—with an average item value of less than USD 2. Meanwhile, local manufacturers are required to pay tax on imported inputs, creating what VCCI describes as a distortion of competition.

While the tax exemption was originally justified on the basis of administrative efficiency, VCCI suggested that Vietnam consider adopting simplified tax categories, as used in Canada, to apply uniform rates to broad product groups. This would reduce customs complexity while ensuring all goods, regardless of value, are subject to fair taxation. [Viet Nam News]

International Relations, Geopolitics and Security in Asia

ASEAN concludes 46th Summit with pledge to strengthened regional cooperation

(ga) The 46th ASEAN Summit, held in Kuala Lumpur on May 26-27 under Malaysia's 2025 Chairmanship, concluded with leaders reaffirming regional unity and advancing key strategic objectives. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced that ASEAN successfully met its summit goals, attributing the outcomes to strong cooperation among member

states and productive engagements with external partners. [Bernama 1]

Key highlights included formalized cooperation between ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) following earlier discussions in Riyadh in 2023. A substantive ASEAN-GCC-China Summit was also held, with China's Premier Li Qiang present to focus on sector-specific collaboration.

Anwar reiterated ASEAN's commitment to balanced engagement with major powers, stating that partnerships with China do not signify a strategic shift. He confirmed ASEAN's intent to continue dialogue with the United States, noting that a proposed U.S.-ASEAN Summit is under consideration. [Bernama 2]

Strategic planning was advanced with the adoption of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Strategic Plan under ASEAN Vision 2045. The plan outlines nine strategic goals, including addressing transnational crime, reinforcing ASEAN Centrality, promoting preventive diplomacy, and supporting a rules-based regional order.

Other priorities include ensuring Southeast Asia remains a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, upholding maritime security in the South China Sea, implementing the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and fostering an inclusive regional identity. The plan will be monitored through reviews in 2030 and 2035. [Bernama 3]

On Myanmar, ASEAN leaders issued a statement calling for an extended and expanded ceasefire. They recognized three temporary ceasefires declared by Myanmar authorities and other stakeholders and urged further de-escalation. The leaders called for safe and transparent humanitarian aid delivery and encouraged inclusive national dialogue aligned with the Five-Point Consensus.

ASEAN also welcomed international support, including from the United Nations, and committed to enhancing cooperation with external partners to address the Myanmar crisis and its regional implications, particularly regarding transnational crime. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia] [Bernama 4]

Asean and Gulf Cooperation Council trade sets to reach USD 180 billion by 2032

(tl) At the 2nd Asean-GCC Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-

Sabah, the chairman of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), announced that two-way trade between the GCC and Asean is projected to hit USD 180 billion by 2032. In 2023, trade reached over USD 130 billion, placing the GCC as Asean's seventh-largest trading partner.

The summit highlighted progress in free trade agreement (FTA) talks, with both regions aiming to enhance investment and regional supply chains. Sheikh Sabah also emphasized cooperation in green energy, including hydrogen production and low-carbon technologies, as well as collaboration in digital sectors such as AI, cybersecurity, and e-commerce.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim praised the summit as a historic opportunity for trust and collaboration between the regions. Both leaders also voiced unified support for Palestine, calling for stronger global efforts to end the war in Gaza and uphold Palestinian rights. [Free Malaysia Today]

On the other hand, Anwar announced that 10 members of the ASEAN bloc will initiate free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The decision follows a series of high-level discussions held during the 2nd ASEAN-GCC Summit in Kuala Lumpur. He recalled that the groundwork was laid at the inaugural meeting in Riyadh two years ago, which served as a starting point for identifying areas of collaboration. [Bernama]

China and ASEAN conclude talks on upgraded free trade agreement

(lm) ASEAN and China have concluded negotiations on an upgraded version of their free trade agreement, marking a major step toward deeper regional economic integration. The revised "ASEAN–China Free Trade Area 3.0" framework expands cooperation into strategic sectors such as the digital economy, green transition, and supply chain connectivity. The deal is expected to be formally signed by the end of 2025.

The announcement follows a broader ASEAN ministerial meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, where economic ministers from ASEAN and its key trading partners—China, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—agreed to accelerate regional cooperation in response to growing global uncertainty, particularly U.S. tariff hikes.

China remains ASEAN's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching USD 234 billion in the first

quarter of 2025 and USD 770.94 billion in 2024. The upgraded deal, first initiated in November 2022, aims to foster openness, mutual benefit, and tighter production and logistics integration at a time when global trade flows are being reoriented.

At the same meeting, Thailand proposed enhancing semiconductor collaboration with Japan, while ministers also committed to speeding up the implementation of the upgraded ASEAN–Australia–New Zealand Free Trade Agreement. That pact focuses on key sectors including e-commerce, renewable energy, and circular and blue economy initiatives. [Bangkok Post 1] [Bangkok Post 2]

Chinese Primier Li Qiang seeks to deepen economic ties at inaugural ASEAN-GCC-China summit

(dz) Addressing the inaugural ASEAN- Gulf Cooperation Council-China Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on May 27, Chinese Premier Li Qiang reaffirmed China's willingness deepen strategic alignment with ASEAN and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), calling on China, ASEAN, and the GCC to support one another in tackling emerging development challenges and to promote new models of international industrial and economic cooperation. He reaffirmed China's commitment to jointly advancing the Global Civilization Initiative and encouraged managing differences through mutual understanding while fostering inclusive progress across diverse civilizations. [CGTN]

Launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2023, the Global Civilization Initiative – along with the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative – reflect China's effort to reshape global governance norms and promote an alternative to Western-centric models.

Li urged the three parties to build an integrated regional market that facilitates the freer flow of resources, technologies, and talent, as well as enhanced trade and investment. Li also expressed hope for the swift conclusion of free trade agreement negotiations between China and the GCC. [Xinhua]

In bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the summit, Li assured Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah that Beijing is "ready to conclude" the long-shelved China-GCC free-trade pact and would align the Belt and Road Initiative with the Kuwait Vision 2035, fast-tracking petrochemical and green-hydrogen projects. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

The summit, the first of its kind, will become an annual leaders' track under draft terms Malaysia will circulate at a later date. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, hosting the inaugural summit, highlighted the combined economic potential of the three blocs—representing a GDP of nearly USD 25 trillion and over 2 billion people—as a foundation for greater market integration and cross-regional investment. China remains ASEAN's top trading partner, while the GCC supplies over a third of China's crude oil imports. GCC countries, meanwhile, are ASEAN's seventh-largest trading partner, with trade valued at $130.7 billion in 2023.

Anwar also clarified that ASEAN is not aligning exclusively with China, stressing its balanced engagement with both China and the U.S. based on economic pragmatism. ASEAN leaders also discussed plans to begin negotiations on a free trade area with the GCC. [AP News] [South China Morning Post]

China emerges as world's largest debt collector of developing world

(dz) A Lowy Institute study shows China to be the current world's biggest debt collector, instead of its banker. Loans issued during the 2012-18 Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI) boom period are entering repayment, thus the 75 poorest countries are to repay a record USD 22 billion to China in 2025. [Lowy Institute]

The significance is underscored by the fact that China has become a "net drain" for 60 developing countries, with 54 of 120 states now spending more on debt service to China than to the Paris Club—a group of Western bilateral lenders. Through both major BRI megaprojects and smaller initiatives, China continues to fund strategically important partners. As many of these loans mature, analysts warn that the coming years will be a "crunch time" for sovereign liquidity—and for China's diplomatic image as a self-proclaimed champion of the Global South. [Reuters] [South China Morning Post] [Bangkok Post]

Japanese prime minister, UN chief seek collaboration through Africa conference and World Expo

(ad) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres agreed on May 23

to explore ways to strengthen cooperation during upcoming global events, including an international conference on Africa and the World Expo in Osaka. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan]

In their phone conversation, Ishiba emphasized the vital role of the United Nations in addressing global issues and expressed a desire to collaborate with Guterres on reforming the organization.

Guterres reportedly expressed gratitude for Japan's continued support of U.N. initiatives. Diplomatic sources suggest Guterres may visit Japan in late August to attend the Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Yokohama and the ongoing Expo in Osaka, which continues through October. [The Mainichi]

South Korean presidential candidate promises pragmatic approach to relations with Japan

(ad) South Korean presidential frontrunner Lee Jae-myung of the main opposition Democratic Party unveiled his foreign and security policy platform on May 26, emphasizing a pragmatic, interest-based diplomatic approach and identifying Japan as a key partner.

He pledged to strengthen trilateral cooperation with Japan and the U.S., while addressing historical and territorial disputes with Japan based on principles, aiming for progress in cultural, economic, and social ties.

Marking the 60th anniversary of relations between South Korea and Japan, Lee also committed to rebuilding trust with the U.S., which he said was strained under former President Yoon Suk-yeol's martial law declaration. [Jiji Press]

Taiwan aims to strengthen joint deterrence with Japan and US against China

(ad) In a recent interview with Kyodo News and two U.S. newspapers, Taiwan's Defense Minister Wellington Koo emphasized the need for collective deterrence with Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines to counter the growing military threat from China. Highlighting the strategic importance of the first island chain—which

stretches from southern Japan through Taiwan to the Philippines—Koo called for deeper military cooperation among the countries to prevent against China's military expansion into the western Pacific.

Koo asserted that stronger defense ties, such as increased military exchanges and joint training, could raise the cost of aggression for Beijing and make a potential invasion too complex and risky. While Taiwan has not seen evidence of an imminent attack, Koo warned that China's large-scale military drills and frequent incursions into Taiwanese air and sea space could escalate into real conflict. He noted a rise in gray-zone activities—aggressive but non-combat actions—from China.

Taiwan also aims to strengthen its own defense capabilities and explore greater security cooperation with Japan, including intelligence sharing, joint exercises, and maritime law enforcement. Koo acknowledged that under President Donald Trump, the U.S. continues to prioritize the Indo-Pacific and expects allies to enhance their defense readiness. He believes the U.S. will remain committed to regional security and that both Taipei and Washington share the goal of preserving peace in the Taiwan Strait.

Japan and the Philippines, which also face territorial disputes with China, have been increasing their own defense collaboration. Despite not having formal diplomatic ties, Taiwan maintains strong unofficial relationships with Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines, all of whom recognize the need to deter China's assertiveness in the region. [Japan Today] [Daily Mirror Online]

Mongolia, ASEAN to deepen cooperation

(fs) Mongolian Minister of Foreign Affairs Battsetseg Batmunkh met with ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn during her official visit to Indonesia (see article in this edition) on May 22 to discuss strengthening ties between Mongolia and the regional bloc. [ASEAN]

Batmunkh reaffirmed Mongolia's commitment to becoming a dialogue partner and participating in the upcoming East Asia Summit, emphasizing Mongolia's interest in expanding institutional cooperation with ASEAN. Hourn expressed ASEAN's readiness to support joint research and training programs.

The East Asia Summit is a forum for strategic dialogue in the Indo-Pacific, bringing together leaders from key countries in the region to discuss political, security,

and economic challenges. It includes all the 10 ASEAN members and 8 other countries (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the United States).

Both sides highlighted their willingness to enhance collaboration in areas such as climate change, food security, digital transformation, disaster-risk management, regional connectivity, and the empowerment of women leaders. [Montsame]

Batmunkh also visited the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) in Jakarta and held talks with ERIA President Tetsuya Watanabe. She expressed interest in Mongolia joining several ERIA initiatives, including the Digital Innovation and Sustainable Economy Center and the Clean Air Research Center for Asia.

Both sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance policy research, capacity building, and technical partnerships. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia]

Founded in 2008 through a formal agreement among the leaders of 16 East Asia Summit (EAS) member countries, ERIA supports economic growth and regional dialogue among East Asian nations.

Asian Development Bank unveils 2025-2028 strategy to support Mongolia

(fs) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has launched its Country Partnership Strategy for Mongolia for 2025-2028, aimed at supporting diversified, inclusive, and sustainable growth.

The strategy focuses on promoting diversified and inclusive growth, strengthening sustainability and resilience, and advancing empowerment and opportunity. These will be supported by efforts to boost private sector engagement, climate action, governance, digital transformation, and gender equality.

ADB's initiatives aim to address Mongolia's overreliance on mineral exports by promoting macroeconomic stability, debt and resource management, state-owned enterprise reform, and development of the financial sector. It will support critical minerals mining, infrastructure development, and improved trade logistics.

Other initiatives include to focus on climate and disaster resilience, including support for agribusiness, food security, green finance, and low-carbon infrastructure in both urban and rural areas; energy reforms to advance decarbonization, an enhancement of education, health, and social protection systems; and investment in vocational training and healthcare infrastructure. [ADB]

Mongolia, EU strengthen gender equality in peacekeeping

(fs) The Mongolian Armed Forces and the European Union have jointly implemented the project Mongolian Peacekeepers as Agents for Gender Equality to promote gender-sensitive practices in international peacekeeping.

Launched in October 2024, the initiative focused on equipping Mongolian military personnel with gender mainstreaming expertise. As part of the project, 22 Mongolian service members participated in a specialized training course held in Slovenia from November 18 to 28, 2024 (see AiR No. 49, December/2024, 1).

The project aimed to deepen peacekeepers' understanding of gender issues, enhance their capacity to integrate gender perspectives into operations, and empower them as advocates for human rights. It also included a series of domestic activities, such as the Gender-sensitive Armed Forces methodological meeting and leadership training sessions for over 200 officers.

Since its first peacekeeping deployment in 2002, Mongolia has contributed over 23,000 troops to UN missions. [Montsame]

Mongolia, UN reaffirm commitment to deepen cooperation

(fs) President of Mongolia Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh met with United Nations Resident Coordinator Jaap van Hierden on May 21 to discuss strengthening cooperation between Mongolia and the UN.

Khürelsükh expressed appreciation for the UN's support of Mongolia's socio-economic development, affirming Mongolia's commitment to advancing its partnership with the UN.

Both sides agreed to align Mongolia's development strategies with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and to enhance collaboration across all levels. [Montsame]

Mongolia, IAEA to expand cooperation

(fs) State Secretary of Mongolia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs L. Munkhtushig met with Deputy Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Head of the Department of Safeguards Massimo Aparo during his working visit to Mongolia from May 25 to 27.

The two sides discussed the current state and future direction of Mongolia-IAEA cooperation, particularly regarding Mongolia's contributions to international peace and security.

Both sides agreed to expand collaboration, especially in technical assistance, human resource development, expert training, and localization of best practices. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia]

UN General Assembly holds first-ever gathering on human rights in North Korea

(dql) The UN General Assembly convened a rare high-level meeting on May 20 in New York to address systematic human rights violations in North Korea—its first-ever such session on the issue. While the UN Security Council and Human Rights Council have previously discussed North Korea's human rights record, this marks the General Assembly's inaugural high-level engagement, bringing together diplomats, international human rights experts, and North Korean escapees. [KBS]

UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Elizabeth Salmón reported that North Koreans have lived in "absolute isolation" for years, worsening widespread human rights violations such as forced labor, suppression of free expression and movement, torture, and mass disappearances.

Despite urgent humanitarian needs—nearly 12 million people are undernourished and over half lack adequate sanitation—North Korea continues to block aid access. Salmón criticized Pyongyang for prioritizing militarization over social services, stating that the regime's growing reliance on forced labor and rigid

quota systems underscores the deep link between peace, security, and human rights.

Ilze Brands Kehris, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, argued that the scale and severity of the violations, combined with the North Korean regime's failure to ensure accountability, warrant international action, including referral to the International Criminal Court. [UN]

The session also featured testimonies from two North Korean escapees who shared personal accounts of human rights abuses. [Radio Free Asia]

Pyongyang's UN representative condemned the event as a "political scheme" aimed at undermining the country's sovereignty and denounced the testimonies of two North Korean women escapees, Gyuri Kang and Eun-joo Kim, as coming from "human scum." [UCA News]

South Korea and EU strengthen cybersecurity cooperation to combat North Korea's crypto theft

(fw) South Korea and the European Union (EU) have agreed to strengthen cooperation against rising global cyberthreats, including North Korea's cryptocurrency theft, to promote a secure and open cyberspace.

On May 20, the seventh EU-Republic of Korea Cyber Dialogue was held in Seoul, led by Youn Jong-kwon, Director-General for international Security Affairs at South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Maciej Stadejek, Director for Security and Defense Policy at the European External Action Service, the EU's diplomatic service. Both sides reviewed the evolving cyber threat landscape and highlighted the necessity for joint action against cyberattacks, especially those by North Korean actors targeting digital assets. [European Union External Action]

They discussed enhancing joint efforts in cybercrime investigations through timely information sharing and cooperation, as well as supporting countries in building stronger cyber defenses. Both parties acknowledged the significance of ongoing cyber policy talks for broader cybersecurity collaboration, with representatives from key agencies participating. [The Korea Herald]

South Korea and U.S. pledge stronger trilateral security ties with Japan

(fw) On May 20, Admiral Kim Myung-soo, chairman of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and General Daniel Caine, the newly appointed chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, held their first virtual meeting. This video conference marked the beginning of their official communication since General Caine assumed his position. [Joint Chiefs of Staff, USA]

Both sides pledged to enhance trilateral security cooperation with Japan and agreed to leverage the upcoming South Korea-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Chief of Defense meeting, scheduled for July in South Korea, to further enhance joint security efforts. This initiative comes as the three nations have increased joint military exercises in response to escalating nuclear and missile threats from North Korea.

Kim and Caine emphasized the need to strengthen defense capabilities and readiness to address North Korea's advancing threats, particularly amid concerns over Pyongyang's growing military cooperation with Russia. North Korea is suspected of receiving Russian military technology in exchange for supporting Moscow's war in Ukraine. [Yonhap News Agency]

Taiwan commits to cooperation with Europe in supply chain security

(dql) During a meeting with a visiting European Parliament delegation on May 26, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung emphasized the need for a resilient, diversified supply chain, underscoring Taiwan-EU collaboration in developing sustainable, non-Chinese alternatives. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan 1, in Chinese]

He also noted Taiwan's efforts in cultural diplomacy citing the introduction of "Taiwan Cultural Year in Europe," initiative, featuring over 100 National Palace Museum artifacts displayed in the Czech Republic and France to showcase Taiwan's soft power.

The foreign ministry highlighted that the seven-day visit marks the European Parliament's second delegation to Taiwan this year. The group is scheduled to meet President Lai Ching-te and discuss bilateral ties and regional security with legislators, government agencies, civil society organizations, and think tanks.

The ministry pledged to further deepen Taiwan-EU ties and strengthen cooperation aimed at promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. [Taiwan News 1] [Taiwan News 2]

In a separate meeting, Deputy Foreign Minister Francois Wu hosted a delegation from the French National Assembly to discuss ways to deepen Taiwan-France cooperation and strengthen international supply chains for critical high-tech industries. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan 2, in Chinese]

Wu welcomed the news of Foxconn's planned investment in France to develop a semiconductor packaging and testing facility in partnership with French firms Thales and Radiall. Foxconn, Taiwan's multinational electronics manufacturer and the world's largest contract electronics maker, will invest more than USD 272 million in this project. [Reuters] [Digitimes]

The two sides witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding on intellectual property theft between Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs and France's Industrial Property Agency. The agreement aims to improve protections for companies by making it easier to prosecute trade secret and IP infringement cases. [Taiwan News 3]

For a discussion on the geopolitical imperative and potentials of Taiwan-EU cooperation in solar supply chain, see [Taiwan Insight]

US omits Taiwan mention at WHA amid WHO withdrawal plans

(yl) For the first time since 2017, the United States did not mention Taiwan in its address at the World Health Assembly (WHA), breaking precedent in its annual show of support for Taiwan's participation. In a pre-recorded speech, US Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. instead focused on announcing the US withdrawal from the WHO, citing bureaucratic inefficiency and political influence by China.

Although Taiwan was not referenced in the address, the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT) reiterated Washington's long-standing support for Taiwan's meaningful participation in international organizations. Taiwan's foreign minister also stated that the US stance remains unchanged, and that Taiwan would be the first to join any new health initiative Washington may propose.

Taiwan has not been able to attend the WHA since 2017 due to Beijing's opposition, though it participated as an observer from 2009 to 2016 under improved cross-strait relations. [Focus Taiwan]

Bangladesh says no corridor for Myanmar aid

(lm/ms) Bangladesh has categorically denied any discussions or intentions to allow a humanitarian "corridor" through its territory into Myanmar's Rakhine State, clarifying that the United Nations only requested logistical support—not people movement—for delivering aid to the conflict-hit region, where ongoing clashes between Myanmar's military and the Arakan Army have blocked most aid routes.

Speaking at a press conference on May 21, National Security Adviser Khalilur Rahman said that Dhaka's support would be conditional on the cessation of hostilities and the inclusion of Rohingya representation in Rakhine's political and administrative structures. Without those assurances, Bangladesh will not facilitate any aid delivery.

Amid escalating needs in Rakhine—where food and medical shortages have grown severe—Dhaka fears new waves of cross-border displacement. Rahman stated that Bangladesh aims to help stabilize the situation to avoid another refugee crisis and ultimately enable repatriation of Rohingya refugees already in Bangladesh.

He revealed that Myanmar has, for the first time, indicated progress on Rohingya verification, with 180,000 individuals identified as eligible for return out of 250,000 reviewed. A repatriation list has been received, and discussions are ongoing.

A conference on the Rohingya crisis is scheduled to take place at the United Nations Secretariat on September 30. [The Daily Star] [Dhaka Tribune]

Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) confirmed the first voluntary return of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar's Rakhine State between May 12 and 18, marking the first self-initiated return since the 2017 exodus. A group of 82 refugees, some of whom had fled forced recruitment in 2024, returned to reclaim farmland and restart businesses. While no signs of coercion were reported, concerns remain about the role of the Arakan Army in facilitating these returns.

Additionally, the UNHCR noted a significant drop in new arrivals into Bangladesh, potentially due to restrictions imposed by the Arakan Army, which has reportedly detained Rohingya attempting to flee. Despite these developments, the UNHCR has only received 30 percent of its USD 383.1 million appeal for 2025 and stressed the need for continued international support for humanitarian efforts in the region. [BSS News] [The Financial Express]

India and Pakistan clash at UN over Indus Waters Treaty and terror allegations

(lm) With direct military escalation paused since the May 10 ceasefire, the United Nations has become a focal battleground for India–Pakistan tensions, as both nuclear-armed rivals intensify their diplomatic confrontation. The current disputes stem from the April 22 militant attack in Indian-administered Kashmir, which killed 26 people and triggered four days of cross-border strikes before a U.S.-brokered ceasefire. Now, with large-scale hostilities suspended, the confrontation has shifted to the international stage, where India's suspension of the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) and Pakistan's allegations of Indian-backed terrorism—most recently over a school bus bombing in Balochistan—have come to dominate competing narratives over regional security, treaty rights, and political legitimacy.

At a UN Security Council Arria-formula session on May 23, India defended its decision to suspend the World Bank-mediated IWT, which governs access to major Himalayan rivers essential to Pakistan's agriculture. India argued that the treaty could not continue while Pakistan allegedly supports cross-border militancy and obstructs infrastructure projects. It declared the treaty would remain in abeyance until Islamabad takes "credible and irreversible" steps to dismantle terror networks. [The Indian Express]

Pakistan countered that India's suspension of the treaty amounts to the weaponization of water and a breach of international obligations, warning it threatens the livelihoods of more than 240 million people. Islamabad insists that the treaty remains legally binding and cannot be suspended unilaterally. Attorney General Mansoor Usman Awan confirmed that Pakistan had received India's proposals for treaty revision but stated any discussions must occur strictly within the treaty's legal framework. He warned that any unilateral dam-building or water diversion would have serious legal and political consequences. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Simultaneously, Islamabad announced plans to submit a detailed dossier to the UN accusing India of orchestrating the May 21 school bus bombing in Balochistan's Khuzdar district, which killed at least ten people, including eight children. Pakistani officials say the attack was carried out by proxies operating under the banner of Fitna Al-Hindustan (FAH), allegedly supported by India's intelligence agency R&AW. India has rejected the claim, calling it an internal Pakistani issue.

According to Pakistan's UN envoy, the forthcoming dossier will present names, linkages, and operational structures of alleged Indian proxies, framing the Khuzdar bombing as part of a broader pattern of Indian-sponsored violence. Islamabad has also criticized certain UN Security Council members for previously blocking efforts to designate Indian nationals linked to such acts. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4] [Arab News 5]

Indian top diplomat uses three-nation Europe tour to criticize Western hypocrisy on Pakistan

(lm) Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar concluded a six-day diplomatic tour to the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany from May 19 to 24, a visit shaped by heightened regional tensions following the April 22 terror attack in Indian-administered Kashmir and the subsequent four-day military escalation between India and Pakistan. Framed against this backdrop, Jaishankar used the trip to sharply criticize Western support for Pakistan's military regimes while also advancing India's strategic and economic partnerships in Europe.

In his public remarks—particularly during interviews with Danish and German outlets—Jaishankar accused European powers of decades-long complicity in enabling Pakistan's military establishment, which India holds responsible for fostering cross-border terrorism. He pointed to the paradox of democratic Europe aligning with Pakistan's dictatorships, even as Pakistan violated Indian borders and allowed terror networks to flourish. The discovery of Osama bin Laden near Pakistan's military academy in 2011 was cited as emblematic of this pattern.

Throughout the tour, Jaishankar also defended India's continued oil imports from Russia, pushing back against European criticism. He argued that Western countries had redirected global energy supplies toward themselves, pricing out many developing nations.

“What was the rest of the world supposed to do? Go without energy because Europe needs it more?” he asked. [The New Indian Express] [The Times of India]

Alongside this confrontational messaging, Jaishankar used the trip to bolster bilateral ties with the three European nations

In Germany, he met with Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul, and other senior officials. The talks focused on deepening the 25-year-old India-Germany Strategic Partnership across defense, cybersecurity, AI, green energy, and trade. Both sides also discussed fast-tracking the India–EU Free Trade Agreement and enhancing cooperation in forums like the G4, G20, BRICS, and the United Nations. [The Hindu] [INDIA TV] [The Tribune]

In Denmark, Jaishankar held talks with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, expressing gratitude for Denmark’s support in counterterrorism and reaffirming shared goals under the Green Strategic Partnership. The two sides discussed sustainable growth, clean energy, and expanding people-to-people ties. [Business Standard]

In the Netherlands, Jaishankar’s meetings centered on India’s response to terrorism, while also touching on legal, digital, and water-related cooperation. He underscored the importance of rule of law and international norms, aligning with Dutch interests in democratic governance and sustainable development.

Parallel to Jaishankar’s European outreach, India has dispatched seven all-party parliamentary delegations to 33 world capitals as part of a broader campaign to expose Pakistan’s alleged role in cross-border terrorism. Delegations recently visited Russia, Japan, and South Korea. [The Times of India] [The Hindu] [Business Standard]

Pakistan defends expulsions as UN warns of at-risk Afghans awaiting resettlement

(lm) Pakistan reaffirmed its sovereign right to control its borders on May 26, amid growing concern from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over the fate of approximately 110,000 Afghan nationals at risk of persecution if deported. The UNHCR has flagged these individuals—including journalists, activists, ethnic and religious minorities, and former government workers—as having “high-risk profiles” warranting urgent international protection.

Since launching its illegal foreign repatriation plan (IFRP) in November 2023, Pakistan has deported around 1.3 million Afghans, including many with Afghan Citizen Cards, despite UN calls for voluntary and dignified returns. The government has defended the policy as lawful and targeted, arguing that border regulation is a standard sovereign function under international law.

As of May 2025, more than 4 million Afghans remain in Pakistan, of whom approximately 600,000 arrived after the 2021 Taliban takeover. Among these, 44,000 Afghans already approved for relocation to third countries—mostly Western nations—remain stranded in Pakistan, pending departure.

UNHCR officials have urged Islamabad to halt the return of high-risk groups and to establish a mechanism that would allow temporary stays for vulnerable individuals. Pakistan maintains that it is coordinating with UN bodies to ensure protections are in place and continues to call on resettlement countries to accelerate evacuation procedures. [Arab News]

Pakistan rebuffs U.S. warning, accuses India of nuclear irresponsibility

(sn) Pakistan has rejected recent remarks by former United States National Security Adviser John Bolton, who warned that the country's nuclear arsenal might fall into the hands of terrorists or irresponsible actors. The statement, made in an interview with an Indian outlet, followed earlier calls by India's Defense Minister for Pakistan's nuclear weapons to be placed under international supervision.

In response, Islamabad accused Indian officials—particularly those associated with Hindu nationalist groups—of posing a greater threat, pointing to their aggressive rhetoric and the alleged radicalization of India's political and media spheres. Pakistan also referenced repeated incidents involving stolen or trafficked nuclear materials in India, suggesting systemic failures in its eastern neighbor's nuclear oversight.

This exchange comes in the wake of the May 10 U.S.-brokered ceasefire that ended the most intense military escalation between the two countries in years. Despite the truce, diplomatic tensions persist, with both sides invoking nuclear risks to bolster their respective narratives. [Arab News]

Pakistan's Prime Minister begins four-nation regional diplomacy tour

(sn/lm) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has begun a five-day diplomatic tour of Turkiye, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan, aimed at consolidating support from regional partners following Pakistan's recent military standoff with India. The tour reflects Islamabad's effort to both thank its diplomatic allies and broaden regional engagement on shared challenges including security, trade, and climate change.

The trip follows the most serious confrontation between India and Pakistan in years, triggered by an April 22 attack on Indian tourists in Indian-administered Kashmir, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan—a charge Islamabad denies. The hostilities escalated into missile and drone strikes between May 7 and 10, ending in a ceasefire reportedly facilitated by international mediation involving Turkiye, the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

Sharif's first stop was Turkiye, where he met President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Istanbul. The two leaders discussed enhanced cooperation in defense, energy, agriculture, IT, and infrastructure, and reaffirmed their shared interest in regional stability and counter-terrorism. Both sides agreed to accelerate efforts to achieve the target of USD 5 billion in annual bilateral trade and reviewed the implementation of decisions made during the 7th High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council held in February 2025. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2]

Sharif then traveled to Tehran on May 26 for talks with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. The two leaders emphasized the need to increase border security cooperation amid continued unrest in Pakistan's Balochistan and Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan provinces, where militant groups operate on both sides of the border. In 2024, Iran and Pakistan exchanged cross-border strikes targeting insurgents, before restoring diplomatic calm through high-level talks.

Pezeshkian called for "joint borders free from terrorist and criminal activity," urging closer security coordination. The talks also touched on reviving stalled bilateral economic projects, including the long-delayed Iran–Pakistan gas pipeline. Both leaders discussed expanded cooperation in trade, energy, culture, and regional diplomacy. [Arab News 3] [Arab News 4]

Sharif is scheduled to continue his tour with a visit to Azerbaijan before heading to Tajikistan to attend the

International Conference on Glaciers in Dushanbe on May 29–30. The summit will focus on climate change and glacial melt, a major concern for Pakistan, which is increasingly vulnerable to water insecurity due to rising temperatures and retreating Himalayan glaciers. [Arab News 5] [Arab News 6] [DAWN]

Progress continues on Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan railway link

(sn/lm) Pakistan and Uzbekistan have reaffirmed their commitment to the Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan (UAP) railway line, a USD 4.8 billion regional connectivity project designed to link Central Asia to global markets. In a call on May 25, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and his Uzbek counterpart Saidov Bakhtiyor Odilovich expressed hope that a long-awaited framework agreement for the 573-kilometer railway would be finalized soon.

The project would connect Termiz in Uzbekistan to Peshawar in Pakistan via Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif, facilitating regional trade and logistics. Islamabad views the railway as part of a broader strategy to position Pakistan as a key transit corridor for landlocked Central Asian economies. The three countries first signed an agreement for the line in 2021, and recent months have seen renewed diplomatic engagement, including a visit by Dar to Kabul in April to discuss the railway with Taliban authorities. [Arab News]

Brunei hosts Brunei Darussalam–Indonesia–Malaysia meeting to boost regional language cooperation

(ga) Brunei hosted a two-day meeting of the Brunei Darussalam–Indonesia–Malaysia (MABBIM) Language Council Secretariat, held as a preliminary session before the 2nd MABBIM Heads Forum scheduled for May 23-24. The meeting focused on strengthening regional cooperation to promote and unify efforts in advancing the Malay and Indonesian languages.

Chaired by Acting Deputy Director of Brunei's Language and Literature Bureau and Secretary of MABBIM Brunei Haireni Damit, the discussions included strategic plans and language activities supporting MABBIM's role as a regional language planning and implementation body. The meeting also

reviewed the report from the first MABBIM Secretariat Meeting previously held in Brunei.

Participants included secretaries and delegates from Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia, with speeches delivered by the secretaries of MABBIM Malaysia and Indonesia. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodian prime minister discusses regional cooperation at ASEAN Summit

(gm) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet participated in the 46th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on May 26. The summit aimed to bolster regional integration and resilience amidst global economic challenges. [Xinhua] [MFAIC]

The summit also focused on deepening ASEAN's relationships with external partners. Hun Manet participated in the 2nd ASEAN-GCC and first ASEAN-GCC-China summit, where discussions centered on enhancing economic cooperation amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics. [Bernama]

Bilateral meetings

During his meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the two leaders focused on expanding cooperation in trade, investment, cybersecurity, and the halal industry. Both emphasized the need to enhance their longstanding partnership and promote mutual prosperity through strengthened economic ties and collaborative projects. [Khmer Times] [Xinhua]

Meeting with Chinese Premier Li Qiang, the leaders reaffirmed their countries' commitment to strengthening tourism ties by expanding direct flight connections, following a surge in Chinese tourist arrivals. In the first four months of 2025, over 380,000 Chinese tourists visited Cambodia — a nearly 49 percent increase from the same period last year.

They also agreed to enhance cooperation across sectors including trade, investment, defense, education, technology, and agriculture, notably through the "Industrial Development Corridor" and the "Fish and Rice Corridor." People-to-people exchanges and tourism promotion were highlighted as key areas for further collaboration. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Hun Manet also met with Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and Lao Prime Minister Sonexay Siphandone. The leaders discussed boosting cooperation in trade, finance, infrastructure, and

tourism, and reaffirmed their commitment to the "three countries, one destination" tourism initiative, together with Laos. They also prioritized developing cross-border economic zones, improving transport connectivity, and addressing cross-border crime. [The Star] [MFAIC 2]

Indonesia urges full implementation of ASEAN Five-Point Consensus for peaceful resolution of Myanmar crisis

(mo) On May 24, during the Extended Informal Consultation on the Implementation of ASEAN's the Five-Point Consensus in Kuala Lumpur, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono reaffirmed Indonesia's commitment to promoting a peaceful resolution of the Myanmar crisis

Sugiono emphasized that bringing stability back to Myanmar depends on ASEAN unity and collective action based on consensus and solidarity. He stressed the need for the full implementation of the Five-Point Consensus in Myanmar's crisis, focusing on ending violence, expanding humanitarian aid, and ensuring an inclusive dialogue involving all stakeholders in Myanmar.

Expressing Indonesia's strong support for Malaysia's leadership as ASEAN Chair in facilitating peaceful conflict resolution, he reiterated Indonesia's readiness to contribute actively to restoring democracy and stability in Myanmar. [MOFA Indonesia]

Indonesian foreign minister highlights strategic importance of Indian Ocean at IORA Council of Ministers

(mo) On May 21, during the 24th virtual meeting of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono emphasized the crucial role of the Indian Ocean for current and future generations.

Sugiono stressed the ocean's function as a key trade route which connects over 2.5 billion people across three continents, and its rich marine biodiversity supporting millions of coastal communities. He also warned of growing challenges in the Indian Ocean region, such as climate change, rising sea levels, marine pollution, and illegal fishing, while calling for

closer cooperation and shared commitment to sustainability.

The meeting adopted the IORA Principal Guidelines on Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in the Indian Ocean, which is a joint initiative by Indonesia and France developed through multilateral workshops since 2023. The Colombo Communiqué welcomed this milestone and affirmed IORA's commitment to sustainable fisheries management. [MOFA Indonesia] [VOI Indonesia]

Founded in 1997, IORA comprises 23 member states and 12 dialogue partners. Its cooperation agenda covers maritime security, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk reduction, tourism, cultural exchange, and academic and technological cooperation. Cross-sectoral priorities include the blue economy and women's empowerment. Indonesia currently chairs the Working Group on the Blue Economy for 2023–2025.

Indonesia joins WHO western pacific region to strengthen regional health cooperation

(mo) On May 23, at the 78th World Health Assembly in Geneva, Indonesia officially transitioned from the WHO South-East Asia Region (SEAR) to the Western Pacific Region (WPR) following unanimous approval from member states. This strategic move aims to enhance Indonesia's collaboration with neighboring countries that share similar health issues and epidemiological profiles.

Secretary General of Indonesia's Health Ministry, Kunta Wibawa Dasa Nugraha, explained that Indonesia's geographic and transport links with countries in the WPR played a crucial role for this alignment decision, improving public health outcomes for the nation. The decision was influenced by lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizing the need for stronger cross-regional cooperation to manage pandemic diseases effectively.

This regional transition will allow Indonesia to expand health diplomacy, access broader health innovations, and contribute more significantly to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals related to health. Despite the move, Indonesia will maintain close cooperation with SEAR member states, ensuring continued regional health security and coordination. [Antara] [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia, Red Cross collaborate to enhance humanitarian diplomacy

(mo) On May 21, during their 2025 Annual Briefing Session held in Jakarta, the Indonesian government and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reiterated their commitment to humanitarian diplomacy

The session focused on plans to revitalize Indonesia's national committee on international humanitarian law and expand Indonesia-ICRC collaboration, including fostering tripartite partnerships. [Antara] [Indonesia National Police]

Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand sign agreement to improve border procedures

(tl) At the 46th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand signed a Framework of Cooperation (FoC) to enhance Customs, Immigration, and Quarantine (CIQ) coordination under the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT). The agreement aims to simplify border procedures, for goods and people, enhancing trade flow, logistics, and regional connectivity. This framework is expected to improve supply chain security, promote economic integration, and strengthen trade competitiveness across the subregion.

The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) is a subregional economic cooperation initiative launched in 1993 to promote development in border provinces and states of the three countries. It focuses on enhancing trade, investment, tourism, connectivity, infrastructure and institutional collaboration to create a more integrated, sustainable, and inclusive economic zone across the three countries. [Malay Mail]

ASEAN plans for increased focus on Myanmar at ASEAN Summit

(nj) As Myanmar's military junta proceeds with plans to hold elections in December, ASEAN Chairman and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has called for a more proactive approach to advancing peace in the country. Last month, he held separate talks with General Min Aung Hlaing, head of the State

Administration Council (SAC), and Mahn Winn Khaing Thann, Prime Minister of the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), describing the meetings as a step toward future dialogue between the two warring parties.

ASEAN officials have reiterated that peace must take priority over elections, which many critics view as a sham to legitimize continued military rule. In a May 21 interview, ASEAN Secretary General Kao Kim Hourn addressed violations of the ceasefire declared after the March 28 earthquake, noting that it remains unclear which side broke the agreement. He emphasized that all parties must respect the truce to enable the delivery of critical humanitarian aid. The Secretary General added that any reduction in violence or engagement between the sides would be seen as progress. [Reuters 1] [Reuters 2]

Special meetings on Myanmar were held in the lead-up to the 46th ASEAN Summit. On May 24, the Saturday before the Summit, Malaysian Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan chaired two sessions with ASEAN officials. He announced plans to visit Myanmar in June to begin the next phase of the peace plan's implementation. In a May 25 interview, ASEAN Chairman Anwar Ibrahim confirmed that ASEAN had met with all key stakeholders in Myanmar and finalized a draft plan, which will soon be presented to the military government. He also encouraged Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, and Vietnam to engage with Myanmar through diplomatic and military channels to support the ceasefire's implementation and ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid.

During their meetings at the 46th ASEAN Summit, ASEAN ministers discussed creating a permanent ASEAN envoy to Myanmar, who would serve a three-year term. Additionally, the bloc agreed to form an Informal Advisory Group on Myanmar, led by former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. On May 27, ASEAN released a statement in which member states reaffirmed their commitment to effectively implement the Five-Point Consensus, the framework for peace established after the coup in 2021. [ASEAN] [Bernama] [Malay Mail] [The Diplomat] [The Straits Times]

Despite ASEAN's traditional non-interference policy, the cross-border impact of Myanmar's crisis has prompted a shift toward greater regional involvement. Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa earlier this month said Thailand would push for expanded international engagement at the Summit, citing links between Myanmar's instability and rising transnational crimes along Thailand's border, including human trafficking and online scams. On May 22, Philippine

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. confirmed his support for ASEAN's ceasefire initiative and pledged to work closely with Malaysia to ensure continuity in ASEAN's response as he prepares to assume the chairmanship in 2026. [Manila Standard] [Reuters 3]

285 civil society groups urge Malaysia to cut ties with Myanmar junta

(anl) A total of 285 civil society organizations have urged Anwar to cut all ties with Myanmar's military junta and instead engage with the National Unity Government (NUG) and ethnic resistance groups.

In an open letter ahead of the 46th ASEAN Summit hosted by Malaysia, the groups called for Anwar to lead ASEAN in taking a stronger stance on Myanmar's crisis, which has displaced over 3.5 million people since the 2021 coup. They criticized Anwar's April meeting with junta chief Min Aung Hlaing, calling it a harmful move that followed a deadly earthquake in March. [PV]

Since then, the junta has launched at least 171 airstrikes, mostly on civilians. The CSOs demanded that no junta representatives be allowed at any ASEAN meetings and urged ASEAN to begin formal engagement with the NUG, ethnic armed groups, and civil society. [Irrawaddy]

Philippines renews calls for legally binding South China Sea code to prevent conflict in disputed waters

(jm/dnb/lm) Amid heightened tensions in the South China Sea, Philippines' President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has renewed calls for the adoption of a legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) to prevent conflict in disputed waters. Speaking at the 46th Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit in Kuala Lumpur on May 26, Marcos stressed the urgency of finalizing a CoC that would uphold maritime rights, ensure stability, and prevent miscalculations at sea. The Philippines, which will host the ASEAN Summit in 2026, aims to see the CoC concluded by that time. [Inquirer.net]

The call comes as tensions between the Philippines and China intensify following recent confrontations near Thitu Island (known locally as Pag-asa Island), a Philippine-occupied area in the Spratly Islands that hosts civilian infrastructure and military personnel. On

May 22, the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries accused the Chinese Coast Guard of using high-powered water cannons and ramming a Philippine scientific research vessel conducting routine sand sampling near Sandy Cay, close to Thitu. The attack damaged the vessel's bow and smokestack and endangered civilian crew members. [Al Jazeera] [abc news] [Rappler][LM1]

The Chinese coast guard accused the Philippine vessel of entering its waters and ignoring warnings, but made no mention of water cannon use. Beijing insists on sovereignty over nearly the entire South China Sea, a claim rejected by a 2016 international arbitral ruling that found no legal basis under international law. [The Manila Times]

Separately, on May 23, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) rejected Chinese claims that its coast guard had "allowed and supervised" a May 16 resupply mission to the BRP Sierra Madre, a World War II-era naval ship deliberately grounded by the Philippines in 1999 to assert its claim over Ayungin Shoal (also known as Second Thomas Shoal), which lies within the Philippine exclusive economic zone (EEZ). [Philippine News Agency]

Timor-Leste officially hands over translated ASEAN legal instruments

On May 21, the Vice Minister for ASEAN Affairs formally handed over a translated compilation of ASEAN legal instruments to Agio Pereira, Minister of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers. This handover is part of the implementation of Priority No. 1 of Criterion 2 of the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's full accession to ASEAN.

This step is part of Timor-Leste's Roadmap for full ASEAN accession, aimed at ensuring national institutions can understand and implement ASEAN agreements. The translations, now available in Portuguese and Tetum, cover the three pillars of ASEAN: Political-Security, Economic, and Socio-Cultural. This milestone aligns Timor-Leste's legal framework with ASEAN standards and supports the country's commitment to regional integration.[Government of Timor-Leste]

Vietnam announces UN cybercrime convention signing at UN commission in Vienna

(cmc) Vietnam has announced that it will host the signing ceremony for the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime—also known as the Hanoi Convention—on October 25–26. The announcement was made during the 34th session of the UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ34) in Vienna on May 20. Deputy Foreign Minister Le Thi Thu Hang, who led the Vietnamese delegation, stated that the event will be co-chaired by Vietnamese President Luong Cuong and UN Secretary-General António Guterres. Vietnam is extending formal invitations to heads of state from all UN member countries to attend the ceremony. [Nhan Dan Online]

The Hanoi Convention marks the first global legal instrument on crime prevention adopted by the UN in over two decades. Its goal is to establish a comprehensive legal framework for international cooperation in combating cybercrime. At the CCPCJ34 session, Vietnam also co-hosted a regional workshop with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), focusing on the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) Review Mechanism. [Vietnam Times] [Voice of Vietnam]

Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore launch regional renewable energy initiative

(lm) Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore have signed a landmark agreement to explore the export of renewable energy from Vietnam to Malaysia and Singapore via submarine power cables. The trilateral deal, signed on May 26 during the ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, marks a key step toward deeper regional energy integration and the realization of the long-standing ASEAN Power Grid vision.

The agreement brings together Malaysia's MY Energy Consortium—formed by national utility Tenaga Nasional and oil company Petronas—and a Vietnam-Singapore consortium comprising Petrovietnam Technical Services Corporation (PTSC) and Singapore-based Sembcorp Utilities. The parties will jointly assess the feasibility of transmitting electricity, particularly from Vietnam's offshore wind sector, to Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

The initial focus is on studying the technical, financial, and regulatory viability of laying submarine transmission cables to link Vietnam's renewable energy capacity with Malaysia's national grid, and potentially onward to Singapore. Provisions for energy storage and additional generation sources are also under consideration to ensure supply stability.

The three countries will coordinate closely with their respective governments to complete necessary approval processes and align policy frameworks. The deal is expected to serve as a scalable model for cross-border clean energy cooperation in Southeast Asia, offering an example of multilateral action in support of the global energy transition. [Viet Nam News]

Over 540 undocumented Bangladeshi pushed back from India as Dhaka urged to expedite verification

(lm) India has called on Bangladesh to speed up the verification of 2,369 undocumented Bangladeshi nationals currently detained in India, many of whom have completed jail terms and are awaiting deportation. New Dehli claims that the verification process has been pending since 2020 in numerous cases, preventing formal repatriation. [The Daily Star 1]

The request comes amid a surge in informal pushbacks across multiple border points, with at least 547 Bangladeshi nationals—including women and children—pushed into Bangladesh by Indian authorities since May 7.

On May 25, 19 Bangladeshis were pushed back from India through the Sonapur Majhpara border in Meherpur. They had entered India irregularly for work and were recently jailed in West Bengal before being returned. Police are processing their cases. Earlier, 21 people were pushed back through the Sylhet border, and 24 were formally repatriated at the Kurigram border after identity checks and a flag meeting between Indian and Bangladeshi border forces. [The Daily Star 2] [The Daily Star 3]

UK freezes USD 115 million in London property linked to allies of former Bangladeshi regime

(lm) The United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA) has frozen nine London properties valued at nearly GBP 90 million (USD 115 million), owned by two individuals linked to Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The freezing orders, revealed in UK court records, target Ahmed Shayan Rahman and Ahmed Shahryar Rahman—son and nephew, respectively, of former industry adviser Salman F Rahman, who was arrested in 2024 amid the student-led uprising that toppled Hasina's government.

The Rahmans' properties, purchased through offshore companies in the British Virgin Islands, Isle of Man, and Jersey, include luxury apartments in Grosvenor Square and a residence in Gresham Gardens, north London, where Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana reportedly resided. The properties were previously spotlighted in a Guardian–Transparency International investigation into UK assets held by members of Hasina's circle.

The development follows mounting calls from Bangladesh's interim government for international cooperation in recovering alleged illicit assets abroad. Arrest warrants have also been issued for other figures, including Tulip Siddiq—Hasina's niece and former UK City Minister—who denies all allegations. [The Guardian]

'Bridge to Bangladesh' initiative launched in UK to strengthen diaspora-led development

(ms) A new initiative called "Bridge to Bangladesh" was launched in London on May 24, aimed at engaging the British Bangladeshi diaspora in the country's development beyond traditional remittances. The platform, developed by Oxfam and diaspora leaders, seeks to harness the resources, skills, and influence of over 650,000 UK-based Bangladeshis to support Bangladesh's national priorities, including climate resilience, gender equality, humanitarian response, and inclusive growth.

Bangladesh's High Commissioner to the UK emphasized the power of the diaspora in shaping the country's future, noting that it has supported Bangladesh through various crises. Despite contributing over USD 1.5 billion annually in remittances, the diaspora's full potential remains underutilized due to the lack of an institutional framework in Bangladesh. [BSS News] [The Business Standard]

Bangladesh engages South Africa's Truth Commission to inform transitional justice reforms

(lm) A high-level Bangladeshi delegation has concluded a week-long learning program in South Africa aimed at drawing lessons from the country's post-apartheid transitional justice model. The visit, led by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed and Law Adviser Asif Nazrul,

included extensive engagements with former members of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), victims' groups, civil society actors, and human rights institutions.

The exchange, co-facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Commonwealth Secretariat, is part of a broader initiative to inform Bangladesh's ongoing judicial and governance reforms following the political upheaval of July 2024, which culminated in the ouster of ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in early August the same year. [The Daily Star]

Brunei and Sri Lanka explore closer economic and trade cooperation

(ga) Brunei and Sri Lanka strengthen economic ties following a courtesy visit by Sri Lanka's Non-Resident High Commissioner to Brunei Delgahadeniya Dissanayake to the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry Brunei Darussalam (NCCIBD). The meeting, attended by NCCIBD Vice President I Abdul Halim Saim and Secretary General Muhammad Fakhrullah Hamdillah, focused on expanding bilateral trade and investment opportunities.

Discussions emphasized Sri Lanka's key exports to Brunei, including ceylon tea and seafood, alongside potential collaboration in tourism, technology, and sustainable development. Both parties expressed support for increased private sector engagement and initiatives to improve cross-border business environments.

The visit was regarded as a step toward deeper cooperation with plans to explore further joint economic ventures. [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei, Bangladesh pledges stronger ties at Independence Day event

(ga) Brunei reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation with Bangladesh across multiple sectors during the celebration of its 54th Independence and National Day in Bandar Seri Begawan. High Commissioner of Bangladesh Naureen Ahsan made the statement at an event hosted by the Bangladesh High Commission, attended by Brunei's Minister of Development Muhammad Juanda Abdul Rashid as guest of honour.

The celebration included tributes to the martyrs of the 1971 Liberation War and victims of the July-August 2024 uprising. National anthems, Quranic recitations, and prayers marked the formal proceedings. The event gathered diplomats, officials, academics, defence personnel, and the Bangladeshi community, highlighting Bangladesh's development journey and fostering cultural exchange between the two nations. [Borneo Bulletin]

Brunei, Zambia to boost trade and investment cooperation

(ga) Zambian Non-Resident High Commissioner to Brunei Morecombe Mumba visited the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry Brunei Darussalam (NCCIBD) on May 17 to explore opportunities for enhancing bilateral trade and investment.

Hosted by NCCIBD leaders, the meeting focused on Zambia's key exports, including copper, cobalt, and gemstones, alongside its expanding tourism industry. Discussions also covered potential collaboration in infrastructure development, renewable energy, and cultural exchange.

NCCIBD expressed interest in strengthening business ties with Zambia, highlighting opportunities for mutual economic growth and increased private sector engagement. The visit marked a step toward long-term cooperation and improved connectivity between both countries. [Borneo Bulletin]

Cambodia signs tourism MoU with China's Jiangsu province

(dql) China's Jiangsu Provincial Administration has committed to enhancing cooperation with Cambodia's tourism sector and promoting the country's attractions to the people of Jiangsu and broader China. This pledge was made during a May 23 meeting in Phnom Penh between Jiangsu Governor Xu Kunlin and Cambodian Minister of Tourism Huot Hak, coinciding with the opening of the "Cambodia-China Tourism Year."

Both sides signed six memorandums of understanding focusing on promoting Cambodia as a tourism destination in Jiangsu, encouraging provincial investment in Cambodia's tourism industry, and

expanding direct flight connections. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia and Indonesia collaborate to tackle transnational crime

(sal) Cambodia and Indonesia have reaffirmed their commitment to deepening cooperation against transnational crime during a high-level visit by a 40-member Indonesian law enforcement delegation to Cambodia on May 20.

The delegation met with representatives of key Cambodian institutions including the National Police, the National Committee for Counter Trafficking (NCCT), and the National Authority on Combating Drugs (NACD). [Asia News Networks]

Discussions focused on joint strategies to tackle cybercrime, human trafficking, drug trafficking, and money laundering. Human trafficking was a key topic, with Cambodian officials emphasizing their efforts to address the issue, especially digital exploitation. Both countries stressed the importance of cross-border collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building.

The Indonesian ambassador underscored the urgency of implementing the 2023 MoU on transnational crime, noting the increasing number of Indonesians in Cambodia and their potential vulnerability to criminal activity. [The Phnom Penh Post]

Cambodia signs MoU with Japan to support informal economy workers

(gm) Cambodia's Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training (MLVT) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Japan International Labour Foundation (JILAF) to enhance support for workers in the informal economy. The agreement, formalized on Monday in Tokyo, aims to promote decent work and improve the livelihoods of informal sector workers through vocational training, financial management workshops, and social protection initiatives. The MoU targets workers in unregistered micro, small, and medium enterprises, domestic workers, self-employed individuals such as tuk-tuk drivers and street vendors, and others without formal employment contracts or access to basic social security benefits. [Khmer Times]

The collaboration, part of the Supporting Grass Roots Activities (SGRA) project, active since 2019, aligns with Cambodia's Pentagonal-Phase 1 Strategy and Japan's commitment to improving livelihoods for workers in unregistered micro, small, and medium enterprises, domestic workers, and others in informal sectors.

Cambodia partners with South Korean university to boost digital talent

(gm) Cambodia's Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC) has signed an MoU with South Korea's Chungbuk National University (CNNU) to enhance the country's digital workforce. The agreement, signed on May 25, 2025, provides scholarships for Cambodian students to pursue master's and doctoral degrees in AI and big data.

This partnership aims to strengthen academic exchange and research collaboration in digital technologies, focusing on AI innovation, in recognition of the importance of building a skilled talent pool to support Cambodia's digital transformation. During the MPTC's Secretary of State visit, he also met with officials from the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST) and the Korea Institute of Science and Technology Information (KISTI) to discuss future academic collaborations and research opportunities. [Khmer Times]

Cambodian People Party delegation meets Vietnamese president

(sal) During a meeting in Hanoi on May 25, Vietnamese President Luong Cuong and Men Sam An, Vice President of the ruling Cambodian People's Party, agreed to strengthen cooperation, building on past achievements and honoring long-standing friendships, while committing to implementing high-level agreements reached earlier this year. [Viet Nam News]

China accuses Taiwan's ruling party of backing cyber intrusion

(dz) Chinese authorities have accused Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) of supporting a cyberattack on an unnamed tech company, based on a preliminary investigation by Guangdong police.

In response, Taiwan's National Security Bureau dismissed the claim as disinformation, accusing China's Communist Party of spreading false narratives to obscure its own cyber activities. [Reuters]

China, Thailand pledge to deepen military cooperation

(dql) China and Thailand agreed on May 23 to deepen cooperation in joint military training. During a meeting in Beijing, Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun emphasized Beijing's commitment to strengthening collaboration in joint and personnel training. Visiting Thai Chief of Defense Forces Songwit Noonpackdee reaffirmed support for the one-China principle and expressed readiness to enhance cooperation across all areas, including the Belt and Road Initiative, according to a readout of the Chinese defense ministry. [Ministry of Defense, China] [Anadolu Ajansı]

In a separate meeting, between General Liu Zhenli, Chief of China's Joint Staff and a member of the Central Military Commission, and Songwit reached key agreements on enhancing strategic communication and deepening cooperation in joint exercises and training. The talks also covered regional and bilateral issues.

The meeting follows a series of high-level diplomatic exchanges, including recent talks between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra in February (see AiR No. 6, February/2025, 2). [SCMP]

Since Thailand's 2014 military coup, China has become the country's leading arms supplier, replacing the United States. Joint military drills, such as "Falcon Strike 2024" and recent naval exercises focused on counterterrorism and anti-submarine warfare, reflect deepening defense ties.

The Thai government is expected to decide by the end of May or early June whether to proceed with the THB 13.5 billion (USD 405 million) submarine procurement project (see article in this edition).

US bars Chinese labs from testing US electronics over security concerns

(na) The US Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted on May 22 to prohibit Chinese laboratories deemed national security risks from testing electronic

devices intended for the US market, such as smartphones, cameras and computers. The decision targets facilities with potential connections to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), including those linked to state-owned enterprises or the military, which have tested thousands of devices bound for US consumers over recent years. FCC Chair Brendan Carr stated that "these labs provide a gateway into the US telecommunications infrastructure," warning that unreliable facilities "beholden to a foreign adversary" could approve insecure equipment entering US markets. [FCC] [Reuters 1]

The regulations specifically prohibit testing by Chinese laboratories subject to control or direction from companies listed on the FCC's "Covered List," which identifies communications equipment and services as threats to US national security. Under the new rules, the FCC will remove its recognition of laboratories determined to have ties to prohibited companies. The agency estimates that approximately 75 percent of all electronics used in the United States are currently tested at facilities located within China, highlighting the significant scope of the regulatory change. [Reuters 1] [SCMP 1]

The FCC action extends previous restrictions implemented in November 2022 that banned approvals for new telecommunications equipment from Huawei and ZTE, along with surveillance equipment from several other Chinese manufacturers. The commission is also considering a proposal to expand testing prohibitions to all laboratories in China.

The Chinese Embassy in Washington DC condemned the move, stating it opposes the United States "over-stretching the concept of national security, using national apparatus and long-arm jurisdiction to bring down Chinese companies" while criticizing the politicization of trade and technological issues. [Reuters 1] [SCMP 1]

This development represents another component of Washington's broader technological containment strategy that has intensified since October 2022, when the US implemented sweeping semiconductor export controls targeting China's artificial intelligence and chip manufacturing capabilities. The testing restrictions represent continued efforts to limit Chinese access to advanced technologies, reflecting what analysts describe as a shift from targeted restrictions to more comprehensive measures aimed at reducing China's integration into critical US technology supply chains. [CSIS]

China pledges support for Chinese international students after US restricts Harvard enrollment

(na) China has vowed to support Chinese students and scholars overseas following the Trump administration's decision to revoke Harvard University's ability to enroll international students. The foreign ministry stated hat "China will firmly protect the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of Chinese students and scholars overseas," describing the US action as harmful to the US's international image and credibility. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Reuters]

The US Department of Homeland Security terminated Harvard's Student and Exchange Visitor Programme certification, citing the university's handling of Israel-Gaza protests and alleged coordination with China's Communist Party.

Chinese students comprise a significant portion of Harvard's international population, with an estimated 1,800 to 2,300 Chinese nationals studying at the university annually. Current Chinese students at Harvard face uncertainty about their status, with many expressing concerns about their ability to complete their studies. [SCMP 1] [SCMP 2]

Chinese and French presidents discuss cognac tariffs during phone talk

(na) Chinese President Xi Jinping and French President Emmanuel Macron had a phone call on May 22 focused on resolving trade tensions and enhancing bilateral cooperation. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China] [Reuters 1]

The conversation addressed China's tariffs against European Union (EU) brandy imports, which France considers retaliatory action for EU levies imposed on Chinese electric vehicle exports. The Chinese measures have significantly impacted French producers, costing the cognac industry approximately 56 million USD per month since they were implemented in October 2024. China is a major market for French cognac, with annual exports worth 1.5 billion USD. Macron expressed France's openness to Chinese investment while insisting on balanced conditions for companies in both countries. [Le Monde] [Reuters 1]

Xi described Europe as "an independent pole in a multipolar world" and expressed support for greater EU independence in global affairs. [Anadolu Ajansı]

Both presidents committed to expanding partnership beyond traditional sectors, like aerospace and nuclear energy, into newer fields including digital technology, biomedicine, and environmental initiatives. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China]

The discussion occurred as Macron prepared for his Southeast Asia diplomatic tour, which began on May 25. During his tour, Macron is working to position France and Europe as trustworthy partners, offering collaboration without political conditions amid heightened US-China competition in the region. [Reuters 2]

Chinese President Xi seeks reset of bilateral ties in phone talk with German Chancellor Merz

(dql) President Xi Jinping has called for stronger China-Germany cooperation, expressing China's readiness to open a "new chapter" in their strategic partnership amid ongoing efforts to bolster ties with European economies as a counterbalance to tensions with the United States.

In a phone call on May 23 with new German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, who was sworn in earlier this month, Xi emphasized the importance of stable bilateral relations and urged increased high-level exchanges and mutual trust. He identified traditional industries—such as automobiles, machinery, and chemicals—as well as emerging sectors like artificial intelligence as key areas for collaboration. Xi also called on Germany to maintain a fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory environment for Chinese businesses. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in Chinese] [SCMP]

According to the Chinese foreign ministry's readout, Merz affirmed the value of cooperation with China, particularly under current global conditions, and voiced support for advancing bilateral relations in a constructive and pragmatic manner. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in Chinese]

A German statement highlighted Merz's emphasis on fair competition and reciprocity and noted that the leaders discussed the Ukraine conflict and agreed to resume direct exchanges. [The Federal Government, Germany, in German] [Reuters] [Kyiv Post]

This comes as Merz used his first policy address as Chancellor to the German parliament on May 14 to state that ties with China to be "shaped by systemic rivalry and power politics" and must be recalibrated

through “strategic de-risking.” Citing China’s “growing closeness” to Russia, Merz vowed to press China “to make its contribution toward ending the war in Ukraine” and embed Berlin’s China playbook in a wider Indo-Pacific strategy that seeks a “stable, free and secure Indo-Pacific.” While acknowledging that China would remain an important partner to address global challenges, he stressed the importance of securing level-playing-field trade rules with Germany demanding for respect and reciprocity in industrial and trade policy (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3).

The call follows a recent uptick in China-Europe engagement, including Beijing’s lifting of sanctions on several European Parliament members and high-level meetings with European leaders such as the foreign ministers of Denmark (see AiR No. 20, May/2025, 3) and the Netherlands (see article below), and French President Emmanuel Macron (see article above).

Despite European concerns over China’s trade practices and stance on the Ukraine war, there is growing interest in closer ties with Beijing, partly in response to protectionist policies under U.S. President Donald Trump, who on May 23 proposed a 50 percent tariff on all imports from the European Union, citing stalled trade negotiations and accusing Brussels of being "difficult to deal with." Announcing the plan on Truth Social, Trump said the tariff would take effect on June 1, unless goods are manufactured in the United States. [euronews.] [The Conversation]

China calls on the Netherlands to ease semiconductor export control

(dql) During high-level talks in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Dutch Foreign Minister Caspar Veldkamp agreed to maintain close communication across various sectors, including the sensitive area of semiconductor technology. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China 1, in Chinese] [Government of the Netherlands]

The May 22 meeting in Beijing addressed a wide range of bilateral and global issues, with trade and technological cooperation taking center stage. A six-point consensus was reached, covering collaboration in semiconductors, agriculture, science and technology, water management, and climate action. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 2]

The agreement to continue dialogue on semiconductors reflects comes after in January, the Dutch government announced it will expand export controls on advanced semiconductor equipment

starting April 1. The new rules, aimed at curbing exports to China, build on initial restrictions introduced in 2023 under U.S. pressure. [Reuters]

Veldkamp stated in Beijing that while China consistently calls for the relaxation of semiconductor export controls, the Netherlands continues to prioritize its own "national security interests and autonomous licensing decision making." He added that semiconductors will likely be a key topic during Dutch Foreign Trade Minister Reinette Klever's visit to Beijing next month. [NL Times]

Ukraine accuses China of supplying Russian arms industry

(dz) Russia's foreign intelligence chief, Oleh Ivashchenko, has claimed that Ukraine now possesses "confirmed data" indicating that China is supplying Russia's arms industry with critical support. He cited wreckage from downed Shahed-type drones, stating that "about 80 percent of critical components" can be traced back to Chinese suppliers. According to Ivashchenko, Chinese assistance includes support in drone production, the supply of gunpowder to arms manufacturers, and the provision of other essential materials to 20 Russian military facilities.

China, however, swiftly rejected the accusations, dismissing them as "groundless political manipulation." Beijing emphasized that it "has never supplied lethal weapons to any party" and maintains strict controls over dual-use exports.

The dispute emerges as Moscow intensifies its air raids: Ukraine's air force reported that 298 drones and 69 missiles were launched overnight on Sunday—marking the largest barrage since the war began—and claimed to have downed 266 unmanned aerial vehicles. Kyiv argues that without Chinese deliveries of machine tools and chemical precursors, such a sustained tempo would be unfeasible. [Al Jazeera]

Crucially, if the Russian intelligence claims are accurate, China's image as a neutral broker could be seriously undermined, potentially straining its relations with the West amid ongoing discussions on tightening sanctions and expanding bilateral trade.

China condemns Australia's plan to reclaim Darwin Port from Chinese

company

(na) China's Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian has criticized Australia's intention to return Darwin Port to domestic ownership, arguing that Chinese company Landbridge Group should not be penalized for its investments. The comments followed Xiao's visit to the strategically located northern port last week. [Reuters] [SCMP]

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced in April 2025 that his government was developing plans to force the sale of Darwin Port from Landbridge Group on national security grounds, declaring the facility should be "in Australian hands."

The Chinese company secured a 99-year lease for the port in 2015 under a deal worth USD 506 million USD. The deal drew criticism from then-US President Barack Obama, claiming that his administration had not been consulted about Australia's arrangement with the Chinese firm. The port accommodates approximately 2,000 US Marines for six months annually and is considered critical infrastructure due to its proximity to Australian military bases. [EurAsian Times] [Reuters]

The dispute reflects broader tensions over Chinese control of strategic assets in northern Australia, particularly as Australia strengthens defense cooperation with the US. Darwin's location provides strategic significance for potential Indo-Pacific conflicts, with the port's position approximately 3,500 kilometers from the South China Sea and serving as a viable staging area for US military operations. Australian authorities have raised concerns about Chinese access to sensitive military activities, including fuel storage facilities connected to the port through pipeline infrastructure. Landbridge Group has maintained the port is not for sale and that operations continue normally. [EurAsian Times] [Reuters] [SCMP]

The ambassador's criticism occurs despite recent improvements in China-Australia relations, including Beijing's decision to lift trade restrictions on Australian exports in December 2024. However, the Darwin Port issue highlights ongoing challenges in bilateral relations, particularly regarding infrastructure investments with potential security implications in the context of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific region. [Chicago Council on Global Affairs] [SCMP]

India-Pakistan tensions remain high as military escalation gives way to war of

narratives

(kb/lm) Following the early-May ceasefire that ended the most intense India–Pakistan military exchange in decades, both nations have now entered a rhetorical phase marked by sharply divergent narratives. While Pakistan's leadership is publicly calling for dialogue and regional peace, India's ruling party has intensified hardline rhetoric ahead of national elections.

During a visit to Tehran on May 26, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated Islamabad's readiness to resume talks with India on all outstanding issues—particularly Kashmir, water sharing, terrorism, and trade—if New Delhi was "serious." Standing alongside Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Sharif emphasized that "we want peace, and we will work for peace," while also insisting Pakistan would defend itself if provoked. The offer came as part of Sharif's broader four-nation diplomatic tour of Turkiye, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan—countries viewed as supportive of Pakistan during the recent military standoff. [Arab News 1]

In contrast, Modi has ruled out any talks or trade with Pakistan, declaring on May 22 that the only matter for future discussion would be the status of Pakistan-administered Kashmir. During the same rally, he warned Pakistan to eliminate terrorism or face "his bullet," and framed India's military retaliation—Operation Sindoor—as a display of "moral strength." Modi also suspended the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty, which governs river water sharing between the two countries, and dismissed Pakistan's nuclear deterrent as meaningless. [ICCT] [India Today] [The Indian Express] [The Times of India] [Arab News 2]

Although both sides have adhered to a fragile ceasefire since May 10, reinforced by DGMO-level talks on May 10 and 12, tensions remain high. India has begun a phased drawdown of forward troop deployments, but emphasizes that Operation Sindoor is merely "paused." Pakistan, for its part, has similarly signaled a readiness to de-escalate militarily while continuing diplomatic outreach. [The Indian Express]

A recent border incident on May 23, in which Indian forces shot a man crossing from Pakistan into Gujarat, underscores the continuing volatility along the frontier. [The Guardian]

India and Canada take steps to mend strained relations

(kb) On May 25, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and newly appointed Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand held a phone conversation, marking the first official political-level contact between the two countries since Mark Carney became Canada's Prime Minister. This comes after a period of strained relations under the leadership of former Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, following the diplomatic dispute over the murder of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada in June 2023. India rejected allegations of its involvement in the murder, which it deemed politically motivated, leading to a significant downturn in bilateral ties, including the expulsion of Indian diplomats and disruptions in trade and visa services.

The phone meeting between Jaishankar and Anand was seen as a move to reset bilateral ties. The two ministers discussed the prospects of improving relations, with hopes that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be invited to the G7 summit in Canada in June 2025. Both ministers expressed their intent to strengthen economic cooperation, with a particular focus on mending trade relations and addressing shared challenges.

India and Canada are also expected to restore their High Commissioners by June 2025, further signaling efforts to improve diplomatic relations. [The Indian Express]

Indonesia and China deepen strategic partnership

(mo) On May 25, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto and visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang witnessed the signing of four memoranda of understanding (MoUs), reinforcing bilateral economic ties. These MoUs cover cooperation in finance, economic policy, industrial development, and regional collaboration.

The first MoU aims to promote bilateral transactions in local currencies through the establishment of a financial framework between Bank Indonesia and the People's Bank of China. The second MoU seeks to enhance coordination on economic development policies through increased cooperation between Indonesia's National Economic Council and China's National Development and Reform Commission. The third MoU, signed between Indonesia's Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs and China's Ministry of Commerce, focuses on strengthening industrial sector cooperation and supply chain integration. The fourth

MoU involves collaboration with China's Fujian Provincial Government, emphasizing regional development under the "Two Countries, Twin Parks" program. This initiative centers on the development of key industrial parks—Fuzhou Yuanhong Investment Zone in Fujian Province, and Bintan, Aviarna, and Badung in Indonesia—to strengthen industrial supply chains between the two countries.

Beyond the signing of these MoUs, the two sides also pledged to enhance cooperation across eight additional sectors: tourism, agricultural export facilitation, traditional medicine, public health (with a focus on tuberculosis prevention), investment cooperation, and media partnerships. [Antara 1]

On May 24, at the Indonesia–China Business Reception, Li highlighted the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations and the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference, emphasizing the Bandung Spirit's role in promoting solidarity and mutual development. He called on both nations to expand bilateral cooperation, uphold free trade principles, and resist the growing trend of unilateralism and protectionism that threatens the global economic order. [South China Morning Post]

During the reception, Li also emphasized China's robust economic growth despite external challenges, noting opportunities in expanding domestic demand, technological innovation—particularly in AI, robotics, and biopharmaceuticals—and the advancement of green and intelligent industrial transformation. He expressed China's readiness to share growth opportunities and foster a favorable investment environment for foreign enterprises, including Indonesian businesses. [The State Council of People's Republic of China]

President Prabowo reaffirmed Indonesia's commitment to deepening cooperation with China in economic development, industrial growth, the green economy, science, education, and cultural exchange. He welcomed Chinese investment in Indonesia and emphasized the importance of collaboration to maintain peace, stability, and prosperity in Asia, reinforcing the Bandung Spirit and safeguarding the interests of developing countries amid a rapidly changing global political landscape.

Li's visit also featured bilateral talks focused on advancing a code of conduct in the South China Sea and deepening strategic maritime security cooperation. [MOFA Indonesia]

Indonesia and Mongolia enhance political consultation and trade relations

(mo) On May 21, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono and Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh met in Jakarta. The meeting reinforced both countries' commitments to deepening bilateral cooperation across political dialogue, trade, and investment.

During the meeting, the ministers signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Political Consultation to institutionalize regular dialogue on shared bilateral, regional, and global interests. In addition, they also highlighted expanding trade relations between two countries, which grew 74 percent in 2024, and emphasized fostering closer ties between their chambers of commerce to unlock new business opportunities.

Moreover, in bilateral collaboration on food security, Sugiono underscored Indonesia's potential in livestock and agriculture to support food security in Mongolia. Mongolia welcomed the proposal and invited Indonesian investors to explore sectors like mining, infrastructure, and energy that remain underdeveloped domestically.

The meeting also covered the collaboration on education and cultural collaboration, including scholarships for Mongolian students under Indonesia's Developing Country Partnership (KNB) program and plans for a Mongolian Cultural Center in Tanjung Lesung.

Meanwhile, both parties reaffirmed their shared interest in strengthening people-to-people relations and capacity-building efforts. [MOFA Indonesia] [Xinhua] [VOI Indonesia]

Indonesia and Romania agree to enhance bilateral strategic cooperation

(mo), On May 21, during an official visit, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono met with Romanian Ambassador Dan Adrian Balanescu in Jakarta. The meeting reaffirmed strong political ties and a commitment to expand economic cooperation between the two countries.

The meeting emphasized opportunities to boost trade, focusing on Indonesia's palm oil and paper exports and bilateral collaboration in agricultural production. In addition, both parties also discussed defense

cooperation, and Romanian companies have already planned to participate in the Indo Defense Expo in Jakarta in June 2025.

Moreover, in the discussion of labor migration, Romania expressed interest in increasing Indonesian migrant workers in the hospitality sector. Both parties also pledged to enhance social and cultural exchanges to deepen the people-to-people relations, including increased university partnerships. [MOFA Indonesia]

Indonesia to enhance bilateral ties with Singapore

(mo) On May 25, during the 46th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto highlighted Indonesia's commitment to broadening cooperation with Singapore. In a bilateral meeting with Singaporean Prime Minister Lawrence Wong, Prabowo focused on the importance of bilateral relations between two countries and expanding strategic partnerships in the Southeast Asian region.

Prabowo pointed out the vast opportunities to deepen cooperation, especially in economic and trade sectors, reinforcing the friendly relations between the two countries. He also noted ASEAN's collective strength, which benefits member states like Indonesia and Singapore in navigating current global geopolitical and economic challenges.

In their meeting, both leaders expressed optimism about the future of Indonesia-Singapore relations, with an emphasis on exploring potential areas of cooperation to bolster the bilateral relations. [Antara]

Indonesia and Sweden push for deeper cooperation in energy and vocational education

(mo) On May 20, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono met with Swedish Ambassador Daniel Blockert in Jakarta to mark the 75th anniversary of Indonesia–Sweden diplomatic relations. The meeting reaffirmed both nations' commitment to expanding cooperation in trade, investment, and the green transition.

The two officials discussed potential collaboration in energy transmission infrastructure, healthcare, and vocational education. Sugiono also called for greater people-to-people engagement between the two

countries and stressed the importance of inclusive development and sustainable recovery in the post-pandemic era.

Sweden remains Indonesia's largest Nordic partner in key sectors, including trade, investment, and tourism. In 2024, bilateral trade reached USD 1.3 billion, which is an 18.9 percent increase from the previous year. Swedish investment in Indonesia also rose to USD 184 million during the same period.

The meeting also addressed global issues of shared concern. Both sides reiterated their support for multilateralism and rules-based international cooperation in addressing today's geopolitical and economic challenges. [MOFA Indonesia] [Tempo]

Indonesia evacuates 10 nationals from northern Yemen

(mo) On May 22, the Indonesian government successfully evacuated ten nationals, including nine students and one migrant worker, from northern Yemen amid escalating conflict. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Indonesia] [Jakarta Globe]

Indonesia and Ethiopia aim to enhance bilateral collaboration through BRICS

(mo) On May 22, Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono met with Ethiopian Ambassador Fekadu Beyene Aleka in Jakarta to discuss strengthening bilateral cooperation and BRICS collaboration. During the meeting Sugiono focused on Indonesia's determination on poverty eradication and the growing trade potential between the two countries. In 2024, bilateral trade reached USD 98 million, increasing 55 percent from the previous year. Indonesian companies are active in Ethiopia's manufacturing sectors, including household products, food, and textiles.

Both parties highlighted the importance of establishing a bilateral investment treaty to provide concrete legal ground and promote mutual investments. They also focused on increased cooperation on food and energy security, focusing on commodities such as coconut, sugarcane, seaweed, and wheat. In agricultural collaboration, Ethiopia showed interest in learning Indonesia's sugarcane cultivation technology.

The meeting also explored a potential collaboration on education and human resource development.

Indonesia invited Ethiopian civil servants to study in Indonesia through the Indonesian Aid Scholarship program to build capacity and strengthen people-to-people relations between two countries. Both countries see education as a key pillar of their growing partnership.

Finally, Sugiono and Aleka agreed to deepen their collaboration through the BRICS, ensuring Global South interests in global decision-making.

This meeting follows renewed momentum in Indonesia- Ethiopia relations after the reopening of the Ethiopian embassy in Jakarta in 2023. [MOFA Indonesia] [Antara]

Japan, US plan summit on trade relations in June

(ad) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and U.S. President Donald Trump agreed on May 23 to pursue a potential face-to-face meeting in June, likely on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Canada. [Prime Minister's Office, Japan]

Ishiba emphasized the importance of achieving a "win-win" outcome in bilateral trade relations and noted both sides agreed on strengthening cooperation, including in economic security.

While the G7 summit from June 15–17 in Kananaskis is the tentative venue for a possible summit, Ishiba said he remains open to visiting the U.S. depending on developments.

Japan continues to push for the removal of U.S. tariffs, including a 10 percent baseline duty and additional levies on steel and aluminum. A proposed 24 percent "reciprocal" tariff remains on hold, but concerns persist over the negative impact on Japan's export-driven economy. [Kyodo News 1]

The phone call came ahead of a new round of tariff negotiations in Washington. Japan's chief negotiator, Ryosei Akazawa, who departed for the talks earlier that day, reiterated regret over the tariff measures and demanded a review of these measures. [CNA]

Third round of tariff talks

After the latest round of tariff talks, held in Washington D.C., Japan and the United States have agreed to "accelerate" efforts toward a mutually beneficial trade

agreement, Tokyo announced on Monday, May 26. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [CNA]

Without disclosing further details, Akazawa stated that the U.S. is increasingly recognizing Japan's economic significance, adding that his discussions with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick were more open and substantive discussions than before. The talks covered trade issues, non-tariff barriers, and economic security, particularly supply chain resilience. [Kyodo News 2]

Tokyo seeks the full removal of these tariffs, with Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi confirming the renewed push for an agreement.

Trump backs Nippon Steel's purchase of U.S. Steel

Meanwhile, President Donald Trump on the same day of the talks announced his backing of a USD 14 billion "partnership" between Japan's Nippon Steel and U.S. Steel while stressing that the U.S. will retain control over U.S. Steel as part of the partnership, which includes up to USD 4 billion for a new steel mill. [The Guardian]

The merger is expected to create 70,000 jobs and would make the combined entity the world's third-largest steel producer by volume, behind China's Baowu Steel Group and Luxembourg's ArcelorMittal.

Though specific terms have not been disclosed, investors anticipate a deal similar to one proposed in 2023, which would eventually take U.S. Steel private and offer shareholders a cash payout. The deal has drawn significant political attention amid concerns about foreign ownership and potential job losses in Pennsylvania, where U.S. Steel is based. Former President Joe Biden had blocked the deal over national security concerns. Trump has ordered a new security review, with a decision anticipated by June 5. [Reuters] [NHK World]

Unclear gains for Japan in US LNG project

(ad) As trade negotiations between Japan and the United States intensify, a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in Alaska has emerged as a key issue, offering both strategic promise and economic uncertainty for Tokyo.

Promoted by US President Donald Trump, the Alaskan LNG initiative aims to export up to 20 million tons of gas annually to Asia starting in the 2030s. Trump has

touted the project as a way to narrow the US trade deficit and strengthen energy ties with allies like Japan. Officials from Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have been invited on May 23 to a June 2 meeting in Alaska to discuss potential cooperation on energy projects. The meeting, hosted by Interior Secretary Doug Burgum and Energy Secretary Chris Wright, will include a visit to Alaska's North Slope, home to stranded gas fields that the U.S. aims to develop for export—primarily to Asia. [Reuters]

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba confirmed that discussions on joint energy development were underway following a February summit with Trump. Japanese officials have hinted that LNG imports could be used as leverage in ongoing talks to ease US tariff pressure, particularly on automobiles and industrial goods.

Despite its geopolitical and logistical advantages—such as faster shipping times and supply diversification—Japanese energy firms are approaching the plan with caution. Industry leaders cite the estimated USD 44 billion cost of the project as a major hurdle, more than double that of typical LNG ventures. Tokyo Gas has been monitoring the project but has yet to make any commitments. Mitsubishi Corp., another early LNG importer from the US state, is focusing its resources on the LNG Canada project instead.

While Taiwan has already signed a preliminary agreement and South Korea has shown interest, Japan remains undecided. Experts warn that Alaska will need to offer competitive pricing to rival alternative US LNG projects, particularly those on the Gulf of Mexico, which are approaching final investment decisions.

Still, officials see value in reducing Japan's dependence on major suppliers like Australia and Malaysia. Currently, the US provides just 10 percent of Japan's LNG imports. [The Asahi Shimbun]

Japan to urge US to limit impact of Harvard foreign student ban

(ad) The Japanese government plans to urge the United States to reduce the potential impact on Japanese students following the Trump administration's decision to revoke Harvard University's certification to accept international students.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi, a Harvard graduate himself, said Japan is closely monitoring the situation and will respond as needed, including

through diplomatic channels. Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya added that Japan has requested more information from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo and instructed its embassy in Washington to do the same.

Harvard currently hosts 260 Japanese students among its international population from over 140 countries. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced the revocation, citing safety concerns and accusing Harvard of allowing a hostile campus environment, particularly toward Jewish students.

The move escalates tensions between the university and the Trump administration over diversity policies and campus protests. Harvard has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting its international community. [Japan Today] [Kyodo News]

Japan meets with European nations to enhance cooperation and bilateral relations

(ja) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met with the leaders of Bulgaria, Austria, and Hungary to enhance cooperation, and upgrade bilateral relations between Japan and the three European nations.

Bulgaria

Ishiba and Bulgarian president Rumen Radev held a summit meeting in Tokyo on May 20, and agreed to strengthen economic relations through initiatives such as business missions, with Japan welcoming Bulgaria's aim to be a regional innovation hub in the fields of in the fields of IT, AI and energy.

The two nations also agreed to cooperate in matters of security. Japan recognized Bulgaria as particularly important towards maintaining security in Europe, as it is a member of NATO and the EU.

Following the summit meeting, both countries signed an agreement which upgraded the status of their bilateral relationship to a "strategic partnership." [The Mainichi] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Austria

In this meeting with Austrian President Alexander van der Bellen, who was visiting Japan to participate in the National Day Event of Expo 2025 Osaka on May 21, Ishiba reaffirmed Japan's intention to strengthen bilateral cooperation with Austria in the fields of science, technology, and business, as well as its aim to

strengthen coordination with Austria in combatting what it deems as an “increasingly severe international situation.”

Van der Bellen, in turn, expressed Austria's wish to strengthen its economic ties with Japan, with both countries taking into account the impact of US tariffs on the global economy.

The two nations also agreed to develop further bilateral relations, and to coordinate closely in the international arena, particularly regarding Ukraine and East Asia. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Hungaria

Ishiba also held a meeting with Hungarian President Tamás Sulyok, who was also visiting Japan to participate in the National Day Event of Expo 2025, on May 22. Japan expressed its intention to coordinate further with Hungary to strengthen the “free and open international order based on the rule of law.” Hungary in turn stated it would like to further develop positive relations between itself and Japan.

The two countries also discussed the issues of declining birthrate and regional revitalization. They also reaffirmed their commitment to bilateral cooperation regarding the Russian Ukraine war. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Japan and Paraguay agree to further strengthen relations

(ja) Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba held a summit meeting with Paraguayan President Santiago Peña, who was visiting Japan to attend the World Expo 2025 on May 21, during which the two leaders agreed to further strengthen bilateral relations, and to enhance cooperation on international issues between Japan and Paraguay.

With regards to bilateral relations, Ishiba reaffirmed Japan’s desire to further collaborate with Paraguay to “maintain and strengthen a free and open international order based on the rule of law.” Japan has also indicated its willingness to provide a yen loan to Paraguay to financially support Paraguayan infrastructure projects. Japan has also decided to launch a program exempting Paraguayan citizens from visas for short stays in Japan. Peña expressed hopes for the further expansion of Japanese companies into the country.

Japan and Paraguay also agreed to upgrade the status of their bilateral relationship to “strategic partners.” The two nations also launched the Japan-MERCOSUR Strategic Partnership Framework in tandem with the decision, which hopes to advance talks toward deepening trade relations.

They also welcomed the cooperation between the two nations in the space sector following the “Japan-Paraguay Space Cooperation Program” launched last year.

Japan and Paraguay also discussed the East Asian situation, such as in how to deter North Korean nuclear proliferation, and the North Korean abduction of Japanese citizens. Paraguay pledged to support Japan’s position in the abduction issue, with both nations calling for North Korea’s immediate return of the Japanese citizens. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan] [Nippon]

Japan provides rescue boat and other surveillance equipment to Fiji

(ja) Japan’s government has made its first foreign military delivery under Tokyo's security aid framework launched in 2023 by providing the Fiji navy with a rescue boat, and other equipment for surveillance activities.

The delivery was made under the Official Security Assistance program (OSA), in which Japan will supply supplies and assistance to countries they believe to be “like-minded,” deepening bilateral security ties, and to ward off “unilateral attempts to shake the status quo by force.” [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

The equipment was handed over to the Republic of Fiji Military Forces Naval Division at the Handover Ceremony for OSA at the Stanley Brown Naval Base located in Suva, Fiji on May 26.

Japan plans to deliver additional items, such as additional patrol and rescue boats, to Fiji in the future. Japan also plans to provide defense equipment to Bangladesh, Djibouti, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, and the Philippines under the program. [The Mainichi] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan]

Laos, Vietnam dismantle USD 50 million transnational online gambling ring

(dql) Laos and Vietnam have dismantled a major transnational online gambling ring operating in both countries. The joint police operation, launched on May 18, targeted a high-tech criminal network accused of managing illegal betting platforms for football, baccarat, and dice games.

31 individuals were arrested, with 27 of them for organizing gambling and four for gambling. The alleged ringleader, 44-year-old Mai Anh Viet from Hanoi, is believed to have run several websites from Vientiane, Laos, where he was based.

The ring's operation reportedly processed nearly USD 50 million in bets during the first five months of 2025, with individual profits reaching hundreds of millions to billions of dong. The investigation continues in coordination with Lao authorities and border officials to ensure legal proceedings against the suspects. [readwrite]

Malaysia and China strengthen strategic ties ahead of ASEAN-GCC-China summit

(tl) Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Chinese Premier Li Qiang reaffirmed their commitment to deepen bilateral cooperation during a meeting on the sidelines of the 46th Asean Summit in Kuala Lumpur, particularly through the ASEAN-GCC-China summit. As Asean Chair for 2025, Anwar emphasized Malaysia's appreciation for China's strong support for regional collaboration.

The leaders discussed enhancing strategic partnerships in sectors such as trade, transportation, including the East Coast Rail Link, halal industry, green energy, and artificial intelligence. Anwar also acknowledged China's role in supporting Malaysia's development and highlighted the shared solidarity of the Global South. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia and Indonesia plan to establish Halal Council

(tl) Malaysia and Indonesia have agreed to jointly lead the formation of the ASEAN Halal Council this year, aiming to position the region as a global leader in the halal industry. Announced by Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi during the 46th ASEAN Summit, the council will serve as a strategic platform to

harmonize halal standards, policies, and regulations across ASEAN member states.

With the global halal market projected to reach USD 5 trillion by 2030, the initiative seeks to build a competitive and inclusive halal ecosystem that benefits nearly 700 million people in the region. Both countries will intensify cooperation in halal certification, education, research, and workforce development, while also promoting mutual recognition of halal certifications to facilitate smoother trade flows.

He also stated that this cooperation support Malaysia's broader 'Halal Diplomacy' goals and is expected to boost intra-ASEAN halal trade, solidifying the bloc's position as a trusted global halal hub. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia and Maldives commit to enhancing capacity building

(ga) Malaysia and the Maldives have committed to enhancing cooperation in capacity building, Malaysian Defence Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin announced following his meeting with Maldives Defence Minister Mohamed Ghassan Maumoon during the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition 2025 (LIMA'25).

The discussion included addressing challenges faced as maritime nations and strengthening defense ties.

LIMA'25, held in Langkawi, is Southeast Asia's largest maritime and aerospace exhibition, focusing on innovation and competitiveness in line with current technological advances. [Bernama] [Ministry of Defence Malaysia – Facebook]

Malaysia and Thailand collaborate on Golok River project to combat flooding

(tl) Malaysia is advancing its cross-border flood mitigation efforts with Thailand through the Golok River Mouth Improvement Project, aimed at reducing seasonal flooding and enhancing living conditions along the Malaysia-Thailand border. Deputy Prime Minister Fadillah Yusof emphasized that the initiative combines engineering, environmental, and policy strategies to address sediment build-up and regulate water flow in the flood-prone Sungai Golok area.

Long-standing bilateral cooperation structures, including the Joint Evaluation Team (JET), Joint

Technical Working Group (JTWG), and Joint Steering Committee (JSC), have been instrumental since 1997. Malaysia plans to dredge the river estuary and build protective structures by the end of 2025, pending final approvals from Thai authorities. A post-monsoon sediment survey is scheduled for completion in April 2025, and Malaysia has already secured funding for expanded works. Thailand has expressed full support, with coordination from its Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives.

Malaysia has announced to commit around MYR 3 billion (USD 670 million) for the Golok River Mouth improvement project. [The Star]

Trade between the two countries reached USD 25.03 billion (MYR 114.56 billion) in 2024, with Thailand ranking as Malaysia's third-largest ASEAN trading partner. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia and Vietnam boost cooperation in energy, education and regional integration

(tl) Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh oversaw the exchange of three key documents to enhance bilateral ties in energy, education, and regional cooperation.

The agreements include a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) and Vietnam Electricity (EVN) to support the ASEAN Power Grid and build strategic capabilities. Two Letters of Intent were also exchanged involving Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Vietnam's top universities, focusing on academic collaboration and regional integration.

Vietnam is Malaysia's fourth-largest trading partner in ASEAN, with bilateral trade amounting to MYR 83.11 billion (USD 19.7 billion). Malaysian investments in Vietnam have surpassed USD 13 billion across more than 700 projects. [Malay Mail]

Malaysia, Turkey plan MoU on family policy and social services

(ga) Malaysia and Turkey are working towards a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen collaboration on family policy and inclusive social services. The initiative was discussed during a meeting

between Malaysia's Women, Family and Community Development Minister Nancy Shukri and Turkish Family and Social Services Minister Mahinur Özdemir Göktaş.

Both parties addressed common social challenges such as declining birth rates and changing family structures, while exchanging best practices including Turkey's incentives for newlyweds and Malaysia's birth savings schemes. Malaysia also proposed additional cooperation on women's digital empowerment and community-based care for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. [The Republic of Türkiye Directorate of Communications] [Bernama]

Malaysia, Palestine to strengthen health sector cooperation

(ga) Malaysia and Palestine have agreed to strengthen strategic cooperation to build a fair, resilient, and humane health system based on universal values. This was discussed during a bilateral meeting between Malaysia's Health Minister Dzulkefly Ahmad and Palestinian counterpart Maged Abu Ramadan.

Key areas of cooperation include health workforce capacity development, prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and digital health transformation. The discussions were conducted in Arabic to ensure clear communication and respect cultural backgrounds.

Dzulkefly also acknowledged Palestine's success in the polio vaccination campaign using nOPV2 as an important public health milestone. He reiterated Malaysia's call at the 78th World Health Assembly for the international community to address the humanitarian and public health crisis in Gaza. [Bernama]

Maldives foreign minister visits India for second high-level meeting as both sides work to stabilize ties

(lm) Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel visited India on May 25 to attend the second meeting of the Maldives–India High-Level Core Group (HLCG), held in New Delhi on May 26. This visit, Khaleel's second in two months following his participation in the Raisina Dialogue in March, underscores ongoing efforts to

stabilize bilateral ties after early diplomatic tensions under President Mohamed Muizzu's administration.

The HLCG was established following President Muizzu's October 2024 visit to India, where he and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed on a framework for a "Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership." The first HLCG meeting took place in Male' in January 2025, laying the foundation for structured dialogue.

In New Delhi, delegations from both nations discussed cooperation in key sectors including transport and connectivity, agriculture, and fisheries. The Maldivian team included senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, and the President's Office.[The Sun 1] [The Sun 2]

Maldives and Thailand sign new health partnership

(lm) The Maldives and Thailand have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to deepen cooperation in public health, with a focus on enhancing primary healthcare delivery and regulatory capacity.

The MoU outlines key areas of collaboration, including support for the Maldives Food and Drug Authority (FDA), technical cooperation with health training institutions, joint research on health policy and systems, and the development of sustainable health promotion funding. It also provides for the exchange of experts, health data, and regulatory experience, as well as training programs, seminars, and technical support initiatives. [The Nation]

Maldives and Palestine sign agreement to boost cross-border anti-corruption cooperation

(lm) The Maldives and Palestine have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen collaboration in preventing and combating corruption. The agreement was signed on May 26 by the heads of both countries' anti-corruption bodies—Adam Shamil of the Maldives Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Dr. Raed Radwan of the Palestinian Anti-Corruption Commission (PACC). [The Sun]

Mongolia, China discuss economic cooperation

(fs) State Secretary of the Ministry of Economy and Development of Mongolia Batkhuu Idesh met with Trade and Economic Advisor at the Chinese Embassy in Mongolia Liu Jingzhi to discuss bilateral trade and economic cooperation on May 26.

Idesh provided an update on Mongolia's mining exports and emphasized the importance of continued dialogue through the Mongolia-China Intergovernmental Commission.

Both parties agreed to hold the Working Group meeting for the Commission's 17th Session in Ulaanbaatar in late June 2025. [Unuudur]

Mongolia, South Korea launch first joint engineer troops training exercise

(fs) The first independent Joint Ground Forces Engineer-Troops Training Exercise between Mongolia and South Korea is taking place from May 19 to May 30 in South Korea.

The exercise is aimed at enhancing bilateral defense cooperation and strengthening both nations' capabilities in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Participants are conducting various field engineering tasks, including the construction of a tactical road, a water crossing, a Forward Arming and Refueling Point, and security infrastructure such as access-control checkpoints and perimeter fencing. Training also includes the setup of field facilities for sanitation, water supply, and ammunition storage, as well as explosive ordnance disposal.

The exercise follows agreements made during the 2024 Ground Forces Consultative Meeting. A second joint exercise is scheduled to take place in Mongolia in September 2025. [Montsame]

Mongolia, Austria reaffirm partnership

(fs) President of Mongolia Ukhnaagiin Khürelsükh and President of the Republic of Austria Alexander Van der

Bellen held official talks in Ulaanbaatar on May 25.

The two sides agreed to continue financial cooperation on projects in infrastructure, healthcare, social development, agriculture, and water and waste management.

Austria committed to sharing its expertise in forest governance and climate-resilient forestry to combat deforestation and desertification. The countries also pledged joint research and technology exchange in mining, energy, and digitalization.

In tourism, both parties will collaborate to promote regional and winter tourism, training, and experience sharing. Scientific cooperation will be strengthened, including scholarships for Mongolian students in Austria and expanded institutional ties between scientific academies. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia]

Myanmar, China to increase cooperation to combat Myawaddy fraud operations

(nj) On May 22, Liu Ning Ning, Deputy Director-General of China's Criminal Investigation Department, met with Myanmar officials at the Myanmar–Thailand Friendship Bridge II in Myawaddy, Kayin State. He was received by the Kayin State Administration Council Chairman, the District Administrator, and the Deputy Director-General of the Immigration and Population Ministry.

The discussions focused on strengthening joint efforts to dismantle telecommunications fraud networks in the Myawaddy region, expediting the repatriation of Chinese nationals involved in such operations, and advancing the implementation of the China–Myanmar–Thailand trilateral agreement aimed at eradicating cross-border scam activity. [Eleven Media]

Myanmar and Russia sign legal cooperation agreement amid international arrest warrant

(anl) A Myanmar delegation led by Attorney-General Dr. Thida Oo signed an agreement on protecting citizens from the misuse of international legal processes during the 13th St. Petersburg International Legal Forum, held from 19 to 21 May in Russia.

Details of the agreement remain undisclosed.

The visit comes as both Myanmar and Russian leaders face international legal action—Senior General Min Aung Hlaing over the 2017 Rohingya genocide, and President Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes in Ukraine. Human rights groups warn that the agreement may be an attempt to shield both regimes from global accountability. [Mizzima]

Former Nepalese president begins China visit amid speculation over political comeback

(lm) Nepal's former President Bidya Devi Bhandari began a 10-day visit to China on May 25, leading a 14-member delegation that includes Industry Minister Damodar Bhandari and senior figures from the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist–Leninist) (CPN-UML). The trip is widely seen as politically symbolic amid speculation of Bhandari's intend to re-enter active politics through the CPN-UML of Prime Minister Oli.

Bhandari is expected to hold high-level talks with the Communist Party of China (CPC), meet International Liaison Department head Liu Jianchao, and deliver keynote speeches at forums including the Fourth Dialogue on Exchanges and Mutual Learning among Civilizations. The delegation will also tour economic and cultural sites in Beijing, Dunhuang, JiaYuguan, and Chengdu.

The visit coincides with persistent delays in Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in Nepal. On May 24, Foreign Secretary Amrit Bahadur Rai and Chinese Ambassador Cheng Song held talks to review progress under a bilateral project facilitation mechanism established in 2018. [The Kathmandu Post]

Nepal's foreign minister seeks Japanese investment, praises long-standing development support

(lm) Nepal's Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba concluded a series of high-level meetings in Tokyo last week aimed at deepening Nepal-Japan relations, expanding development cooperation, and encouraging greater Japanese investment in Nepal.

In her meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya on May 22, Deuba called for increased Japanese investment, highlighting Nepal's improving investment

climate and the government's commitment to safeguarding foreign investors. She emphasized Nepal's upcoming graduation from least developed country (LDC) status by 2026 and asked Japan to continue its economic support during the transition. Deuba also invited her Japanese counterpart to visit Nepal in 2026, which marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two countries. [The Kathmandu Post 1]

A day later, on May 23, Deuba met with Akihiko Tanaka, president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), at the agency's Tokyo headquarters. Discussions focused on infrastructure development, climate change, disaster risk reduction, and governance. Deuba expressed appreciation for JICA's assistance across multiple sectors, including Japan's support in constructing the Nagdhunga tunnel and maintaining the Sindhuli–Bardibas road. [The Kathmandu Post 2]

North Korea seeks technology transfer from Chinese firms for port upgrade

(dql) North Korea has reportedly requested technical assistance from civilian companies in Dalian, China, to modernize Nampo Port. The Ministry of Land and Maritime Transportation and Nampo Port officials initiated the request earlier this month, asking for advanced technology and operational expertise. In response, a Chinese company proposed holding working-level talks in June, with a North Korean delegation expected to visit China for technical cooperation later this year.

Since 2024, North Korea has expanded its roll-on/roll-off and oil storage capacity at Nampo but still faces technological hurdles due to low automation and outdated equipment. The current cooperation seeks to introduce automated cargo handling systems and build small-scale processing modules to boost efficiency, oil refining, and cargo throughput—key goals outlined during the Eighth Party Congress.

Although labeled as an "exchange," the arrangement resembles an unofficial technology transfer, involving access to equipment blueprints, specifications, and operational procedures. The aim is to transform Nampo into a modern port complex handling both energy and cargo.

This news comes after the North Korean Cabinet issued an internal directive to complete the technology

upgrade by the end of the year, viewing Nampo's development as critical to national trade. [Daily NK]

US intelligence threat report warns North Korea is in "strongest strategic position in decades"

(dql) The recently released 2025 Worldwide Threat Assessment report of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) concludes that nuclear-armed North Korea has enhanced its ability to sustain prolonged defensive operations on its territory.

The assessment states that the North Korean military is "almost certainly capable" of mounting an extended territorial defense, marking a significant shift from a 2021 evaluation that estimated Pyongyang could sustain such efforts for only two to three months. [Armed Services Committee, House of Representatives, USA]

While North Korea now occupies its "strongest strategic position in decades" and poses growing threats to U.S. forces and allies in Northeast Asia, its conventional forces face modernization challenges due to resource constraints.

The DIA also warned separately that North Korean nuclear missiles could potentially overwhelm U.S. homeland defense systems within a decade. In addition, the report highlights that North Korea would exploit defensive advantages such as harsh terrain and underground facilities to complicate any foreign intervention.

The reasons for the revised assessment remain unclear. The update follows recent U.S.-South Korea joint drills, including special operations training aimed at enhancing rapid infiltration and potential leadership-targeting missions in the event of conflict. [Newsweek]

The assessment also comes amid growing concerns over North Korea's evolving nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities and its deepening military ties with Russia, reinforced by a 2023 "comprehensive strategic partnership" treaty. In exchange for supporting Russia's war in Ukraine, Pyongyang is reportedly receiving Russian assistance in space, nuclear, and missile technologies, alongside military hardware such as SA-22 air defense systems and electronic warfare equipment. [Yonhap News Agency]

Ukrainian lawmakers seek designation of North Korea as aggressor state

(dql) Seven members of Ukraine's parliament have submitted a draft resolution, calling on parliament to designate North Korea as an aggressor state due to its involvement in Russia's war against Ukraine.

The resolution urges international bodies—including the United Nations, European Parliament, Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe, and NATO, among others, and national legislatures worldwide—to recognize North Korea as an aggressor for supplying weapons to Russia and directly supporting its military aggression.

The resolution cites Article 3 of UN General Assembly Resolution 3314 (1974), which defines an "act of aggression" as including the use of armed forces by one state on the territory of another without proper authorization. [Ukrainian News]

China backs Pakistan's defense stance, vows to deepen strategic partnership and joint regional response

(tj) In the wake of a four-day military confrontation between India and Pakistan, which ended in a U.S.-brokered ceasefire on May 10, China has reaffirmed its full support and made clear its alignment with Islamabad on core sovereignty concerns.

The endorsement came during a series of high-level meetings in Beijing, where Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar held in-depth talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and other senior officials, who described Pakistan as an "ironclad friend" and pledged to deepen the "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership."

The two sides also discussed plans for an upgraded phase of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC 2.0), with both governments reaffirming cooperation in trade, infrastructure, and regional connectivity under China's Belt and Road Initiative. Dar also held talks with Liu Jianchao, head of the Communist Party of China's International Department, agreeing to deepen ties between political parties in both countries.

The meetings followed Pakistan's claim of victory in the recent conflict, during which it said its Chinese-supplied J-10C fighter jets shot down six Indian aircraft, including three French-made Rafales, and successfully

targeted Indian military installations. It was the first time Chinese J-10Cs had been used in active combat, giving Beijing's weapons a rare battlefield test against Western hardware.

In parallel talks in Islamabad, Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong met Pakistan's Air Force Chief Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu. Both agreed to expand joint operational exercises, institutionalize high-level exchanges, and enhance multilateral coordination for regional threat responses. Sidhu praised China's role in Pakistan's defense modernization, highlighting the use of Chinese radar systems, drones, and air defense equipment such as the HQ-9P missile system. [Arab News 1] [Arab News 2] [DAWN]

China discusses Balochistan security with Pakistan amid ongoing attacks on its nationals

(lm) China's Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Bin held talks with a visiting delegation from Pakistan's Balochistan province on May 26, focusing on security and cooperation. The meeting follows mounting Chinese concerns over repeated attacks on its nationals working in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, where Beijing has significant interests in port infrastructure and mineral extraction.

Chinese nationals have frequently been targeted by separatist militants in the province, who oppose what they see as exploitative foreign investments. A recent flashpoint was the October 2024 bombing at Karachi airport that killed two Chinese engineers returning to a power plant project.

In response to security concerns, Beijing has increasingly pressured Islamabad to permit Chinese security personnel to directly protect the thousands of Chinese workers involved in the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and related projects. While Pakistan has resisted this demand in the past, the issue has become more urgent amid persistent attacks.

Balochistan remains a strategic and volatile region in China's Belt and Road Initiative, and the outcome of these security discussions may influence the pace and continuity of future Chinese investments. [Arab News]

Pakistan to offer U.S. companies concessions on mining sector investments

(sn) Pakistan has announced its plans to offer concessions to U.S. businesses on investments in Pakistan's mining sector. The decision is a part of negotiations with Washington over tariff rates, as Pakistan currently faces a potential 29 percent rate on exports.

Pakistan has stated that business opportunities to invest in mining projects will predominantly reside in the Balochistan province through joint ventures with local companies. The bidding process has not yet been disclosed, while concessions are expected to come in lease grants. Pakistan's Reko Diq copper and gold mining project remains one of the nation's most attractive prospects, seeking USD 2 billion in financing. The mine has an estimated potential to generate USD 70 billion in free cash flow.

Industries, including cotton and edible oils, were also labelled as an import target for Pakistan, which is currently short of supply. The U.S. introduced tariffs on Pakistan due to a USD 3 billion trade surplus with the U.S., which was suspended for 90 days for negotiations. The two nations are expected to discuss particulars in the coming weeks. [Arab News]

Pakistan, Italy reaffirm parliamentary commitment

(sn) Pakistan and Italy have reaffirmed their commitment to promoting parliamentary cooperation and have expressed their desire to increase people-to-people contacts and exchanges. The news came following a meeting between Pakistan's Senate Chairman and the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. The two parties also discussed regional developments, emphasizing Pakistan's border stability with Afghanistan. [DAWN]

Pakistan and Afghanistan agree to restore full diplomatic ties, expand China-backed economic corridor

(lm/sn) Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to upgrade diplomatic relations by appointing ambassadors to each other's capitals, following a trilateral meeting with China in Beijing on May 21. The decision signals a potential thaw in bilateral tensions

that had escalated due to cross-border militant attacks and mass deportations of Afghan nationals from Pakistan.

The talks, hosted by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and attended by Pakistani Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, also resulted in a joint commitment to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Afghanistan. CPEC is a central component of China's broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has pledged over USD 60 billion in infrastructure and energy investments in Pakistan alone.

All sides also agreed to convene the sixth Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in Kabul and pledged deeper collaboration on security and counterterrorism to promote regional stability. A similar engagement recently took place in Kabul on May 10, which was the first trilateral meeting held since 2017. [Arab News] [see AiR No. 19, May/2025, 2).

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia reaffirm ties; discuss regional tensions

(sn) Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan met on May 23 to reaffirm their countries' commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation across all sectors.

The meeting took place against the backdrop of gradually easing tensions in South Asia following a four-day military conflict between India and Pakistan, which ended in a U.S.-brokered ceasefire on May 10. During the recent conflict, Saudi Arabia had played a quiet diplomatic role, with the country's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs visiting both Islamabad and New Delhi in rapid succession. [Arab News]

Egyptian president accepts invitation to visit Pakistan

(lm) Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi has accepted an invitation for an official visit to Pakistan, according to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The announcement follows a phone call between the two leaders in which Sharif thanked El-Sisi for Egypt's proactive diplomatic role in helping mediate a ceasefire between Pakistan and India after their recent military standoff.

The call also emphasized efforts to expand bilateral trade, facilitate business exchanges, and promote private-sector cooperation. During the conversation, the two leaders also discussed the crisis in Gaza, with Sharif urging the international community to ensure timely humanitarian aid delivery. [Arab News]

Over 4,000 Filipino and U.S. troops begin 'Kamandag' military drills

(lm) The Philippine Marine Corps (PMC) and the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) launched the 2025 edition of their annual bilateral exercise "Kamandag" on May 26, with more than 4,000 personnel participating. The weeklong drills, held across Central and Northern Luzon, aim to strengthen interoperability in areas such as maritime security, coastal defense, command and control, special operations, and live-fire exercises.

"Kamandag," short for Kaagapay ng mga Mandirigma mula sa Dagat ("Partners of Warriors from the Sea"), has been conducted annually since 2016 and reflects deepening defense cooperation between the Philippines and the United States amid rising regional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. [Philippine News Agency]

Singapore Prime Minister Lawrence Wong meets former U.S. President Bill Clinton

(nl) On May 21, Singapore's Prime Minister Lawrence Wong and former US President Bill Clinton met to discuss global and regional developments. Wong thanked Clinton for his support of US-Singapore relations during his presidency, particularly highlighting their collaboration on the US-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has remained a key pillar in bilateral ties. [The Straits Times]

Singapore hosts first-ever state visit by Paraguay President

(nl) From May 23 to 24, President Santiago Peña of Paraguay visited Singapore for the first-ever state visit by a Paraguayan leader. During his visit, President Peña held discussions with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and met with Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong to discuss the

ratification of the MERCOSUR-Singapore Free Trade Agreement.

A highlight of the visit was the signing of the Singapore-Paraguay Implementation Agreement on Carbon Credits Collaboration, marking Singapore's seventh such deal. The agreement establishes a framework for generating and transferring carbon credits in alignment with the Paris Agreement, reinforcing both countries' commitment to climate goals. [Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore] [Singapore Press Centre]

South Korea warns US 'Sensitive Country' label could undermine tech cooperation

(dql) The Science and Technology Policy Institute (STEPI), a South Korean state-run think tank, has raised concerns over the U.S. Department of Energy's decision to classify South Korea as a "sensitive country" under its Sensitive and Other Designated Countries List (SCL), effective April 15. Despite Seoul's efforts to reverse the decision, South Korea now shares the list with countries such as China, India, Russia, Taiwan, and North Korea.

In a recent report, STEPI warned that the designation could hinder joint R&D in key emerging technologies, particularly in advanced nuclear fields, where collaboration with U.S. Department of Energy-affiliated institutions is vital. Even non-sensitive nuclear research may now face additional approval hurdles.

While the listing is unlikely to affect South Korean exports, STEPI noted that changes to the U.S. foreign national access program in 2022 introduced potential export-related restrictions. [The Korea Herald]

U.S. dismiss report on withdrawal of troops from South Korea

(dql) The United States Forces Korea (USFK) dismissed reports of a possible partial troop withdrawal, reaffirming Washington's strong commitment to South Korea's defense. This came in response to a *Wall Street Journal* article claiming the Trump administration was considering relocating 4,500 of the 28,500 US troops stationed in South Korea.

The report, emerging ahead of South Korea's June 3 snap presidential election, drew political reactions. Conservative candidate Kim Moon-soo of the ruling People Power Party criticized main opposition

Democratic Party front-runner Lee Jae-myung for past remarks calling USFK an “occupying force,” warning such views could jeopardize the alliance. [The Korea Herald]

Sri Lankan delegation heads to Washington for tariff negotiations

(lm) A Sri Lankan delegation is in Washington, D.C. for a second round of in-person negotiations with the United States on U.S.-imposed export tariffs affecting Sri Lankan goods. The discussions, which was scheduled to begin on May 27, follow an invitation from the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) and reflect continued efforts to strengthen bilateral trade ties.

The delegation is led by Deputy Minister of Finance and Planning Harshana Suriyapperuma and builds on a series of earlier virtual exchanges between the two countries. Ahead of the visit, Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake convened a high-level strategy meeting on May 23 to align the delegation’s approach with national economic objectives. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Sri Lanka’s President to visit Germany in June

(lm) Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake is set to embark on an official visit to Germany starting June 11, marking his fourth foreign visit since assuming office. The trip follows previous visits to India, China, the United Arab Emirates, and Vietnam.

During his visit, President Dissanayake will meet the German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. Talks are expected to focus on economic cooperation, including trade, vocational training, skilled labor migration, and investment opportunities.

Germany is also expected to raise human rights and governance issues during the visit. According to diplomatic sources, German officials plan to press the Sri Lankan government on the long-standing demand for the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), as well as progress on reconciliation and wartime accountability. These issues have been a consistent focus of Germany and other Western governments in their engagement with Sri Lanka. [Daily Mirror 1] [Daily Mirror 2]

Polish foreign minister to visit Sri Lanka for EU cooperation talks

(lm) Sri Lanka will host Polish Foreign Affairs Minister Radosław Sikorski from May 28 to 31 in an official visit conducted in the context of Poland's current presidency of the Council of the European Union, one of the key decision-making bodies of the EU. Representing the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Sikorski will engage in bilateral and EU-related discussions aimed at strengthening ties between Sri Lanka and the European Union.

The visit will include courtesy calls on President Anura Kumara Dissanayake and Prime Minister Harini Amarasuriya, as well as official talks with Foreign Minister Vijitha Herath, who also oversees foreign employment and tourism. Sikorski will be accompanied by senior representatives from both the European Union and the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. [Daily Mirror]

New Zealand reaffirms financial support commitment for Sri Lanka

(lm) During his official visit to Sri Lanka on May 26, New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Winston Peters, met with President Anura Kumara Dissanayake. Peters confirmed New Zealand's continued commitment to deepening financial support for Sri Lanka, particularly in light of the country's political stability and economic recovery after recent elections. Discussions also touched on opportunities for further cooperation in agriculture, education, and tourism.[Daily Mirror]

U.S. Indo-Pacific commander calls China's drills around Taiwan "invasion rehearsals"

(yl) U.S. Indo-Pacific Commander Admiral Samuel Paparo warned during a multilateral military gathering in Hawaii that China's recent large-scale drills around Taiwan should be seen as "rehearsals, not exercises," for a potential invasion. The comments were made during the 2025 Land Forces Pacific Symposium & Exposition Symposium, an annual international forum organized by the Association of the United States Army

(AUSA), attended by senior military officials from over 30 countries, including Taiwan.

Paparo outlined key countermeasures, including the need to neutralize People's Liberation Army (PLA) radar, missile systems, and command centers in the early stages of a potential conflict. He emphasized the strategic impact of U.S. precision-strike missiles and allied rapid-response forces operating near Taiwan. The exercises, including April's "Strait Thunder-2025A" drills by the PLA Eastern Theater Command, signal an increasingly aggressive posture from Beijing.

Meanwhile, Congressman Zach Nunn stated that an invasion of Taiwan could cause catastrophic disruptions to the global semiconductor supply chain, calling it an "economic destruction" scenario. He revealed that the U.S. maintains a "minute-by-minute" operational plan for responding to a Chinese military incursion. [The Wall Street Journal] [Focus Taiwan 1] [Taiwan News 1]

US retired admiral calls for increase of military personnel stationed in Taiwan

Retired US Navy Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery disclosed the stationing of around 500 military personnel in Taiwan, calling to double the number to 1,000 to enhance its defense capabilities amid rising threats from China. Speaking at a recent US House Select Committee on China hearing, Montgomery argued that increased personnel would match the scale of US arms sales and aid to Taiwan. The Pentagon has yet to confirm the number.

Montgomery also advocated for Taiwan to raise its defense budget to 5 percent of GDP for three reasons: to enable siege-proofing, ensure readiness alongside equipment acquisition, and align with the maximum sustainable defense spending levels of democracies. [Taiwan News 2] [SCMP]

US lawmakers introduce bill to designate Taiwan as "NATO Plus" partner for faster arms sales

U.S. lawmakers Rick Scott and Scott Perry have introduced a bill to designate Taiwan as a "NATO Plus" partner, aiming to streamline U.S. arms sales to the island. The proposed Taiwan PLUS Act would grant Taiwan the same defense privileges as key U.S. allies like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel.

The proposal coincided with a Congressional hearing where Senator Marco Rubio called for urgent reforms to the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, citing

widespread complaints over delays and inefficiencies in arms deliveries. [Focus Taiwan 2]

U.S. delegation visits Taiwan

In a latest development, a bipartisan delegation of five U.S. representatives arrived in Taiwan on May 27 for a three-day visit as part of a broader Indo-Pacific tour. During their stay, the delegation will meet with President William Lai, Vice President Hsiao Bi-khim, and Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung to discuss key issues such as Taiwan-U.S. relations, security, trade, investment, energy, and economic cooperation. [Taipei Times] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan, in Chinese]

US envoy expresses confidence in Taiwan trade talks, warns against China's coercion

(yl) Raymond Greene, director of the American Institute in Taiwan – the de-facto US embassy – expressed confidence that Taiwan and the U.S. will reach a mutually beneficial outcome in ongoing trade talks triggered by President Trump's sweeping tariff plan. Speaking in Houston during a Taiwanese investment delegation visit, Greene said discussions were "going quite smoothly" and highlighted the robustness of Taiwan–US ties across security, economic, and societal domains.

While Greene declined to provide specific details, he emphasized that Taiwan remains a key partner as Washington seeks a "fairer system" benefiting American workers without sidelining trusted allies. The Trump administration previously proposed a 32 percent tariff on Taiwanese goods, later reduced to 10 percent with a 90-day negotiation window.

On cross-strait issues, Greene reiterated U.S. opposition to unilateral changes to the status quo and coercion by China, emphasizing the importance of deterrence and continued U.S. security support under the Taiwan Relations Act. [Focus Taiwan]

Taiwan's defense support gains momentum in U.S. Congress

(lo) On May 21, Republican U.S. Congress members Rick Scott and Scott Perry introduced a bill to designate Taiwan as a "NATO Plus" partner. The status would grant Taiwan faster, easier access to U.S. arms sales,

like Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and Israel. In an earlier development, the bipartisan PORCUPINE Act was introduced to expedite arms sales to Taiwan by extending NATO Plus–equivalent benefits, without conferring formal status. [Taipei Times]

On May 20, at a U.S. Senate hearing on the State Department's upcoming budget, Secretary of State Marco Rubio stressed the need for Taiwan to strengthen its deterrence against China, stating that "to deter China militarily, the cost of invading Taiwan must be more than it is worth." He emphasized that deterrence starts with bolstering Taiwan's self-defense and called for broader regional efforts in the Indo-Pacific. [Taiwan News]

Under the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, the U.S. maintains de facto diplomatic ties with Taiwan and is committed to supporting its self-defense and resistance to coercion. The Six Assurances, given by President Reagan in 1982, reinforce this support by pledging not to end arms sales, not to consult China on such sales, and not to mediate between Taiwan and China. A bill has been introduced in Congress to codify these assurances (see Asia in Review, No. 20, May/2025, 3). [U.S. Congress]

Taiwan is the fourth-largest recipient of U.S. arms sales. In 2024, its military spending is projected at 2.1 percent of GDP. By contrast, China's army remains the world's largest military force, with over 2 million active personnel, compared to Taiwan's 169,000 in 2023. [Council on Foreign Relations]

Taiwan, Palau deepen technical cooperation

(dql) On May 24, Palau President Surangel Whipps Jr. concluded a weeklong state visit to Taiwan during which he met with Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te and witnessed the signing of agreements on technical cooperation and diplomatic personnel training.

The visit followed Lai's trip to Palau in December and Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung's business mission to the country in January. [Taiwan News] [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Taiwan]

Chinese polar vessel visits Thailand

(bk) China's Xue Long 2 polar research icebreaker docked in Thailand from May 19 to 23 as part of a high-

profile visit marking both the 70th birthday of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and 50 years of diplomatic relations between Thailand and China. The visit also spotlighted a growing scientific partnership centered on polar research.

During a ceremony on May 20, Princess Sirindhorn toured the vessel and praised the 12-year collaboration at the jointly run Sirindhorn Thailand–China Antarctic Research Laboratory, based at China's Great Wall Station.

The visit coincided with a symposium at Chulalongkorn University, where both countries reaffirmed their joint commitment to polar studies amid growing climate concerns. Thai researchers have participated in Chinese-led Arctic and Antarctic expeditions, with collaboration now expanding into oceanography, atmospheric science, and astronomy. [Thai PBS World] [Bangkok Post]

Laos and Thailand draft new masterplan on cross-border infrastructure and logistics connectivity

(lm) Thailand and Laos have agreed to draft a new master plan to enhance cross-border infrastructure and logistics connectivity, following the visit of Lao Foreign Minister Thongsavanh Phomvihane to Thailand from May 21 to 23. The plan will be coordinated through Thailand's Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (NEDA) and will prioritize land transport links and economic integration.

Key projects include the planned completion of the 5th Thai–Lao Friendship Bridge connecting Bueng Kan and Bolikhamxay by December, and an upgrade of Route 12 in Laos starting in July. Route 12 is a key regional corridor linking Thailand with Laos, Vietnam, and southern China.

The two countries will also study a 10-kilometer railway link in Vientiane to connect the Thai–Lao railway with the China–Lao high-speed line, supporting trade and tourism. Thailand additionally proposed connecting Savannakhet Airport in Laos with Mukdahan Airport in Thailand to improve air connectivity. [Bangkok Post]

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn seeks UK trade boost

(lm) Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra used her recent visit to the United Kingdom to promote Thai exports, push for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), and expand opportunities for Thai professionals abroad.

During meetings with UK-based businesses on May 23, she emphasized closer economic cooperation, particularly in agriculture, processed foods, lifestyle products, and services such as massage therapy and culinary work. Officials discussed potential trade facilitation measures and reiterated Thailand's interest in a future UK–Thailand FTA, which would reduce export barriers—especially for processed chicken—and serve as a springboard for agreements with other European nations.

As part of the government's soft power strategy, the Prime Minister also launched a rebranding of the Thai SELECT certification, which verifies the quality of Thai cuisine. She awarded the certification to 20 Thai restaurants in the UK and led a Thai food demonstration featuring miang kham, a traditional herbal snack. [Bangkok Post]

Timor-Leste, Vietnam leaders discuss enhanced bilateral cooperation at ASEAN Summit sidelines

On May 27, Prime Minister Phạm Minh Chinh of Vietnam met with Timor-Leste's Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao during the 46th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur. The discussion focused on deepening bilateral cooperation, particularly in trade, investment, agriculture, e-government, and digital transformation. Chinh encouraged Timor-Leste to create favorable conditions for Vietnamese businesses, particularly in telecommunications and oil and gas.

Prime Minister Gusmao expressed appreciation for Vietnam's support in Timor-Leste's ASEAN accession and emphasized strengthening cooperation in telecommunications, aviation, and education. Both leaders agreed to maintain high-level exchanges and implement agreements, aiming to expand economic cooperation and enhance cultural, tourism, and educational exchanges between the two countries. [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam's President reaffirms ties with Cambodia during visit by ruling party

delegation

(lm) Vietnamese President Luong Cuong hosted Men Sam An, Vice President of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP), in Hanoi on May 25 during her visit to attend the memorial service for former President Tran Duc Luong. The CPP is Cambodia's ruling political party and a long-standing ally of Vietnam's Communist Party.

The meeting underscored the traditional solidarity between Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as the trilateral relationship with Laos, especially amid regional and global uncertainty. Both sides agreed to implement agreements reached during recent high-level meetings, including those among the three countries' ruling parties. [Viet Nam News]

China-Vietnam railway developments, tourism boom, and infrastructure investments

(hn/lm) On May 21, a major Chinese infrastructure contractor, PowerChina, expressed interest in participating in Vietnam's Lao Cai-Hanoi-Hai Phong railway project, valued at VND 203.2 trillion (USD 8.37 billion). The 391 km railway, approved by Vietnam's National Assembly in February, is set to connect the Chinese border to Vietnam's northern port region, with a 27.9 km branch line. A bilateral agreement signed in April outlines Chinese technical assistance for feasibility studies.

PowerChina, one of the world's largest state-owned engineering and construction firms, has been involved in over 100 energy and infrastructure projects in Vietnam since the early 2000s. Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh welcomed this collaboration, encouraging further Chinese investment in Vietnam's transport infrastructure. He also proposed partnerships on renewable energy projects, particularly wind energy in northern Vietnam, and emphasized the importance of technology transfer, workforce training, and deeper integration of Vietnamese firms into global supply chains. [Vnexpress, in Vietnamese]

Simultaneously, China and Vietnam reopened a key passenger train route, the Hanoi-Nanning railway, after a five-year hiatus due to the pandemic. This 11.5-hour service is expected to boost tourism between the two countries. With Vietnamese citizens now eligible for visa-free entry to China as part of group tours, the reopening of this route aligns with broader efforts to

support economic recovery and deepen ties. [Bangkok Post]

Laos, Vietnam prime ministers meet to strengthen economic and political ties

(lm) At the 46th ASEAN Summit in Kuala Lumpur, the prime ministers of Vietnam and Laos met to reinforce their bilateral relationship through expanded economic integration and regional cooperation. The meeting between Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh and his Lao counterpart Sonexay Siphandone focused on translating high-level agreements into practical initiatives, particularly in infrastructure, trade, and security.

Both leaders emphasized the importance of accelerating joint transport and connectivity projects, including the Hanoi–Vientiane Expressway and the Vientiane–Vung Ang Railway. These projects are part of broader efforts to enhance supply chains, logistics, and cross-border investment between the two countries.

Security and defense coordination were also prioritized, with both governments pledging continued collaboration on maintaining public order and social stability. The two sides agreed to increase information-sharing and joint efforts in border management and law enforcement.

In addition to physical infrastructure, discussions included cooperation in digital transformation, education policy, and human resource development, areas where Vietnam has pledged technical support for Laos. [Viet Nam News]

Malaysia and Vietnam deepen strategic ties with focus on trade, security, and regional cooperation

(nl) Vietnam and Malaysia have pledged to strengthen their newly established Comprehensive Strategic Partnership through expanded cooperation in trade, security, and regional governance. Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh visited Malaysia on May 25, where he held formal talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, met the country's parliamentary leaders, and attended preparatory meetings ahead of the 46th ASEAN Summit.

During the talks, the two sides committed to finalizing a joint action plan for the 2025–2030 period and establishing regular dialogue mechanisms between government leaders. Economic cooperation was a central theme, with both countries agreeing to target bilateral trade of USD 20 billion by 2030. Vietnam also expressed readiness to provide Malaysia with a stable rice supply and called for deeper cooperation in Halal product certification, digital transformation, and green economic sectors.

Security and defense collaboration featured prominently. Both sides agreed to enhance coordination between naval, air force, and coast guard forces, to counter terrorism and transnational crime, and to prevent the use of either country's territory for hostile activities against the other. Vietnam and Malaysia also underscored the importance of maritime cooperation and agreed to establish a hotline for combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Vietnam received support for its efforts to lift the European Commission's "yellow card" warning on its seafood sector.

Several agreements were signed during the visit, including a memorandum of understanding between Vietnam Electricity and Malaysia's Tenaga Nasional Berhad, and two letters of intent on academic collaboration between Malaysian and Vietnamese national universities.

Vietnamese officials also held meetings with the speakers of Malaysia's upper and lower houses of parliament, focusing on legislative cooperation, food security, trade liberalization, and regional diplomacy. Both sides affirmed support for ASEAN centrality and agreed to coordinate closely during Malaysia's ASEAN and AIPA chairmanship in 2025, particularly on maritime issues and negotiations for a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (East Sea). [Viet Nam News] [Viet Nam News] [Viet Nam News] [Viet Nam News]

Vietnam-U.S. trade negotiations continue as Hanoi courts major American firms behind the scenes

(hn/cmc/lm) As Washington and Hanoi concluded a second round of trade negotiations on May 22, Hanoi found itself balancing formal diplomacy with behind-the-scenes efforts to reassure American economic and political interests. The talks, held in Washington between Vietnamese Trade Minister Nguyen Hong Dien and U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer,

yielded what both sides called “significant progress,” yet left key areas unresolved. Further negotiations are set for early June. At stake is the threat of a 46 percent U.S. reciprocal tariff on Vietnamese goods, which could take effect in July if no agreement is reached. [Reuters] [Viet Nam News 1]

Against this backdrop, official statements from Hanoi continued to emphasize the principle of “harmonizing benefits, sharing risks.” Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh reaffirmed Vietnam’s commitment to preserving core national interests while pursuing a balanced agreement. Yet behind this steady rhetoric, Vietnam is engaging in a parallel campaign—quietly courting leading U.S. firms in energy, digital infrastructure, and aerospace, signaling a strategic effort to anchor Vietnam more deeply within American supply chains and investment networks. [Viet Nam News 2]

Among the key engagements, SpaceX announced a USD 1.5 billion investment to roll out Starlink satellite broadband in Vietnam, focusing on remote and underserved regions. Vietnamese authorities pledged to expedite regulatory procedures for the project. Google, meanwhile, was encouraged by the Ministry of Industry and Trade to deepen localization and diversify its supply chain operations in Vietnam, with officials offering policy support and business matching assistance. In parallel, Excelerate Energy discussed the construction of liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure in Vietnam, and Hanoi signaled its willingness to lower import tariffs to incentivize further investment. Vietnam hopes such moves could help position the country as a regional LNG hub.

Talks with Lockheed Martin focused on aerospace and defense technology, with Vietnam expressing interest in launching a next-generation satellite by 2026 and participating in Lockheed’s supply chain through technology transfer and industrial cooperation. In another key development, Westinghouse Electric signed a memorandum of understanding with PetroVietnam to explore nuclear energy collaboration. The agreement, which includes investment models, technology transfer, and training, adds a U.S. dimension to Vietnam’s broader energy strategy, which recently saw renewed cooperation with Russia on the previously shelved Ninh Thuan nuclear project. [Viet Nam News 3] [Tuoitre]

Vietnam and France deepen economic and defense ties during Macron visit

(lm/hn) During a state visit to Vietnam, French President Emmanuel Macron oversaw the signing of major economic and strategic agreements aimed at strengthening France's presence in Southeast Asia and supporting Vietnam's balancing act between the United States and the European Union. The visit comes as Hanoi faces mounting pressure from Washington to increase imports of U.S. goods and avoid punitive tariffs of up to 46 percent, while European leaders warn against marginalizing EU trade interests.

The centerpiece of the visit was a new agreement between Airbus and VietJet for 20 additional A330neo aircraft, doubling a previous order. Airbus, which already supplies nearly 90 percent of Vietnam's commercial fleet, also signed a separate declaration with Vietnam on earth-observation satellites, building on the country's earlier satellite cooperation with the firm. In total, 14 agreements were signed across sectors including defense, nuclear energy, maritime transport, railways, and vaccines, amounting to EUR 9 billion (USD 10.25 billion) in commitments.

France's CMA CGM also signed a USD 600 million deal to build a deepwater container terminal with Vietnam's Saigon Newport Corporation by 2028.

Strategically, both governments emphasized expanded defense cooperation. President Macron described France as a "reliable partner" in a region marked by growing tensions in the South China Sea. Vietnamese President Luong Cuong confirmed that cooperation would include information-sharing on strategic matters, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, and defense industry development. France has conducted naval freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea and maintains military infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific.

Vietnam elevated its ties with France to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2024, placing France alongside countries such as the U.S., China, and Russia in Hanoi's highest tier of bilateral relations. Analysts note that Vietnam is seeking to diversify defense and trade partnerships, particularly as its historical reliance on Russian arms becomes less viable amid the war in Ukraine.

France's outreach coincides with concerns from EU officials that Vietnam's efforts to appease U.S. trade demands—reportedly including discussions to purchase over 250 aircraft from Boeing—could damage relations with Europe. The EU is Vietnam's largest trading partner in Southeast Asia and maintains a free trade agreement with Hanoi.

Human rights concerns were notably absent from public statements during the visit. Rights groups had urged Macron to raise Vietnam's record of political repression, particularly in light of its commitments under the EU–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement. Critics expressed disappointment that rights issues were sidelined in favor of economic and geopolitical priorities.

Macron's Vietnam stop marks the beginning of a Southeast Asia tour that will include Indonesia and Singapore, where he is expected to deliver the keynote at the Shangri-La Dialogue, the region's premier defense forum.[Channel NewsAsia] [CNBC] [The Nation] [Deutsche Welle]

Vietnam and Rwanda mark 50 years of ties, pledge closer economic and educational cooperation

(lm) Rwandan President Paul Kagame has reaffirmed his country's commitment to strengthening relations with Vietnam, emphasizing the value of their longstanding partnership. The statement came as he received Vietnamese Ambassador Vu Thanh Huyen, who will oversee ties with Rwanda from Tanzania.

The two sides marked 50 years of diplomatic relations this year and discussed expanding cooperation in trade, agriculture, and education. Ambassador Huyen proposed appointing honorary consuls to enhance engagement in the absence of resident embassies. Both countries agreed to explore practical avenues to advance bilateral cooperation. [Viet Nam News]

Announcements

Upcoming online events

28 May 2025 @ 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), The Heritage Foundation, USA

The 2025 Russell Kirk Lecture featuring Victor Davis Hanson

The Heritage Foundation will host Victor Davis Hanson for the 2025 Russell Kirk Lecture, titled “Why Borders Matter—Ancient and Modern.” A renowned historian, classicist, and commentator, Hanson will reflect on the enduring relevance of borders through historical and contemporary lenses. The lecture honors Russell Kirk, a foundational figure in American conservatism, whose work emphasized tradition, prudence, and ordered liberty. This event celebrates Kirk’s intellectual legacy by featuring prominent conservative thinkers and examining ideas central to cultural and political renewal. For more information, see [The Heritage Foundation].

29 May 2025 @ 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m. (GMT-4), Center for a New American Security, USA

Make Room Study Session | Climate and National Security

Join the Make Room study session, "Climate and National Security," on Thursday, May 29, from 12:00–1:00 PM ET. Featuring Will Rogers, Erin Sikorsky, and moderator Caroline Baxter, the event explores the evolving intersection of climate and security. Panelists will discuss career pathways in climate security, the growing relevance of climate-informed national security work, and the importance of sustained dialogue in this field. Attendees will gain insights into integrating climate perspectives into security-related roles. For more information, and to RSVP, see [CNAS].

29 May 2025 @ 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. (GMT-4), Asia Society Policy Institute, USA

New Centers of Gravity: How China and India Are Vying for Influence in the European Union

This webinar explores the evolving dynamics of EU relations with China and India, two key Asian actors.

While China remains the EU's largest trading partner, India's rising influence and democratic alignment have made it an attractive strategic alternative. Experts Philippe Le Corre and Akshay Mathur will examine whether India can replace China in EU economic and policy planning, and how Brussels is integrating India into its Indo-Pacific strategy. The discussion will be moderated by Lyle Morris of the Asia Society Policy Institute. For more information, see [Asia Society Policy Institute].

29 May 2025 @ 3:30 – 5:00 p.m. (GMT+8), East Asian Institute, Singapore

Southeast Asia–China Relations under Trump 2.0: Hedge More or Hedge No More?

This event features Prof. Kuik Cheng-Chwee, an expert in international relations from the National University of Malaysia. Also affiliated with Johns Hopkins SAIS and Carnegie China, Prof. Kuik specializes in the foreign policies of small and secondary states, Asian security, and broader international relations. Recognized among Stanford University's Top 2% Scientists in International Relations for 2023 and 2024, he brings valuable insights into Asia's strategic landscape and the role of smaller states in shaping global and regional order. For more information, see [EAI].

30 May 2025 @ 2:45 – 4:00 p.m. (GMT+8), The International Institute for Strategic Studies, Singapore

Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2025 launch

This event launches the 2025 Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment, a key publication supporting the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue. Edited by Dr Evan A. Laksmana and authored by 21 experts, the dossier examines how non-traditional factors—like industrial globalisation and domestic politics—shape Asia-Pacific security. Key topics include US foreign policy under a second Trump term, China-North Korea-Russia ties, underwater security, cyber capabilities, UAV developments, and defence-industrial partnerships. Authors will discuss their findings and engage with participants both in-person and online. For more information, see [IISS].

2 June 2025 @ 12:30 – 1:45 p.m. (GMT+2), Bruegel, Belgium

The ECB's Digital Euro and new operational framework: is there an overlap?

This event examines the European Central Bank's two key initiatives: developing a digital euro and reforming its operational framework. While typically discussed separately, the overlap between these efforts—particularly how a central bank digital currency (CBDC) might affect bank liquidity—requires closer attention. The digital euro aims to provide a unified electronic payment method across the eurozone, while the new framework will support flexible monetary policy implementation. Experts will explore recent progress and debate the implications of these intersecting reforms. For more information see [Bruegel].

3 June 2025 @ 4:00 – 4:45 p.m. (GMT+2), European Council on Foreign Relations, Germany

AI and the Rise of Great Powers

In this interactive, interview-type virtual session, we will be focusing on Jeffrey Ding's new book and the direct applicability of his findings to Europe's AI ambitions as well as to the Sino-American rivalry. From the European council on foreign relations. For more information and to register, please see [European Council on Foreign Relations].

3 June 2025 @ 8:00 – 9:30 a.m. (GMT+4), The International Institute for Strategic Studies, UK

Criminal empires: the PCC, Comando Vermelho, and Brazil's shifting security landscape

This webinar explores Brazil's evolving organised crime landscape, focusing on the Red Command (CV) and First Capital Command (PCC), two dominant prison-based criminal groups. These organisations extend far beyond drug trafficking, exerting territorial control, engaging in quasi-state governance, and driving violence across Brazil. Experts will examine the groups' growing international reach—spanning Latin America, Europe, and Africa—their links to other non-state

actors, and the diversification of their illicit economies. The discussion will also assess Brazil's security policies and their effectiveness in curbing these powerful networks. For more information, see [IISS].

Recent Book Releases

Shefali Luthra, ***Undue Burden: Life and Death Decisions in Post-Roe America***, Vintage, 368 pages, published May 20, 2025. For a review, see [Penguin Books].

Matthew A. Tattar, ***Innovation and Adaptation in War***, The MIT Press, 304 pages, published May 20, 2025. For a review, see [Penguin Books].

Timothy Snyder, ***On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century***, Crown, 128 pages, published May 20, 2025. For a review, see [Penguin Books].

Karen Hao, *Empire of AI: Dreams and Nightmares in Sam Altman's OpenAI*, Penguin Press, 496 pages, published May 20, 2025. For a review, see [Penguin Books].

David Luke, *How Africa Eats: Trade, Food Security and Climate Risks*, LSE Press, 294 pages, published April 30, 2025. For a review, see [LSE].

Calls

The **Latin American Society of International Law (LASIL)** invites paper proposals for its ***pre-conference workshop "Narratives in International Courts and Tribunals,"*** to be held online June 25, 2025. The deadline for abstract submission is April 30, 2025. For more information, see [LASIL].

Jobs and Positions

United Nations Development Programme – Ukraine is looking for a **National Consultant on Gender-Responsive Decentralization and Recovery**. The deadline for application submission is June 1, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Kenya is looking for a **Human Rights Officer (Team Leader)**. The deadline for application

submission is June 2, 2025. For more information, see [OHCHR].

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – Lesotho is looking for a **Human Rights Officer**. The deadline for application submission is June 25, 2025. For more information, see [OHCHR].

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – Ukraine is looking for a **Human Rights Officer (Tjo)**. The deadline for application submission is June 9, 2025. For more information, see [OHCHR].

United Nations Development Programme – India is looking for an **Individual Consultant (Green Economy)**. The deadline for application submission is June 9, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

United Nations Development Programme - Indonesia is looking for an **International Consultant-Specialist for Sustainable Ocean-based Economy Research**. The deadline for application submission is June 9, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

United Nations Development Programme – Singapore is looking for an **International Consultant - Specialist for Ocean Governance Research**. The deadline for application submission is June 9, 2025. For more information, see [UNDP].

Goldsmiths, University of London is looking for a **Lecturer in Law**. The deadline for application submission is June 20, 2025. For more information, see [Goldsmiths, University of London].

Birkbeck, University of London is looking for a **Research Assistant of Social Sciences**. The deadline for application submission is June 2, 2025. For more information, see [Birkbeck, University of London].

York St John University is looking for an **Associate Head for Politics, International Relations, Religion, Sociology and Criminology**. The deadline for application submission is June 8, 2025. For more information, see [York St John University].

University of Oxford is looking for a **Stipendiary Lecturership in Law**. The deadline for application submission is June 13, 2025. For more information, see [University of Oxford].

Manchester Metropolitan University is looking for a **Lecturer (Law)**. The deadline for application

submission is June 11, 2025. For more information, see [Manchester Metropolitan University].

Team:

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